

Message from the Chairman of Kent County Council



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August Update

A regular event for the Chairman is the weekly, sometimes twice-weekly, Citizenship Ceremony. This is always held at the Archbishop's Palace, near the old bridge in Maidstone. The building dates from the mid-1300s and is part of an enclave of antiquity centred on the parish church of Maidstone, All Saints. Citizenship Ceremonies are carried out in a rather grand room, heavily timbered, and dominated by a Tudor fireplace and a picture of HM The Queen.

Twenty five new citizens, who have endured agonies of process with the Home Office, are awarded their certificates of Citizenship after either swearing or affirming that they will honour and give allegiance to the monarch. I, representing the County Council, will give a speech of elegant rolling phrases that mean almost nothing, but which I hope convey my heartfelt congratulations. There will be an address by one of the county's Deputy Lieutenants, acting on behalf of the Queen. I make it part of my role to speak to as many of the new citizens as I can before the ceremony. I am invariably surprised at how long many of them have been in the UK and have established families, homes and businesses. Invariably, again, they are delightful people and will add very positively to the stock of the nation.

The Ceremony involves each new Citizen being photographed with the Chairman and the Deputy Lieutenant. At the end, all, including the audience of relatives and many babies, stand to sing the national anthem in a key too high for any man who is not a counter-tenor.

The formalities concluded, all go back to the waiting room for tea and home-made cake before staggering out into the open air, British. We natural-born Brits take for granted something that so many others see as a grail.

It is always a pleasure to be at a Citizenship Ceremony. Most of the new Citizens wear their very best clothes and bring their extended families to what is a pivotal occasion in their lives. I invariably feel highly privileged at being allowed to be there. At a recent ceremony the editor of Kent Life accompanied me and there will be an article about it in a forthcoming issue.

I welcome visitors in the Edwardian Chairman's Suite on the ground floor of Sessions House. It contains much antique furniture and I am always surprised, when I arrive for the day, that I don't need to light the gas lamps and also that no-one will appear during the day to polish the silver, put coal on the fire or wind the clocks. Among the treasure there is some silverware from the officer's mess of the No. 500 (County of Kent) Squadron of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. 500 Squadron was created at Manston in 1931 and had a wide variety of roles and homes during the Second World War, was disbanded in 1946 and almost immediately re-established, being finally disbanded in 1958 at West Malling, along with all other auxiliary squadrons. I wonder how the mess silver finished up in the Chairman's Suite in County Hall. History lurks round every corner in Sessions House and almost all of it has been forgotten. I am sure there are ghosts. If you see one, please let me know.

I have visits to successful Kent companies planned for September and will report on them in future editions of this update.

August is a quiet month for Members and probably for officers too. Most of you will be going on leave; I hope you enjoy your well-earned rest.