



**PRESS RELEASE**

28 Fitzroy Square  
London W1T 6DD

E-mail: [ann.flintham@magistrates-association.org.uk](mailto:ann.flintham@magistrates-association.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 7387 6099

Fax: 020 7383 4020

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**It is 1361: the town crier arrives in Ludlow with news of a statute creating justices of the peace to bring back law and order**

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On 25 January 2011 the Magistrates' Association is celebrating 650 years of the office of the Justice of the Peace by recreating the proclamation of the 1361 statute. This provided the firm foundation of the office of JPs or magistrates as they are more commonly called today. A town crier will read the statute at 12.30 pm in the Market Square in Ludlow.

Over 650 years the magistracy has evolved, taking on a wide variety of responsibilities and adopting and adapting as society has changed. Today there are over 29,500 magistrates delivering justice by dealing with low level offences of a huge variety in adult and youth criminal courts, as well as dealing with some civil matters such as helping to resolve difficulties in family circumstances. Compared to 650 years ago when the number of JPs, collectively known as the bench, was very small and restricted to male members of the aristocracy, benches of today are 50/50 male and female, broadly representative of black and ethnic minorities and magistrates come from all walks of life representing their communities. Unlike the majority of our predecessors the magistracy today is well trained and although they still give their time to sit in court voluntarily are regularly appraised to ensure their performance in court is 'professional' to ensure justice is delivered efficiently and effectively as far as they are able.

Sentencing powers have varied throughout the centuries and have included hanging and the power to sentence transportation to North America and the Caribbean in the 1600s, as well as whipping and imposing fines. Today magistrates are able to impose a custodial sentence of a maximum 6 months and have a range of community sentences as well as fines and discharges available to them.

The history of the Justice of the Peace is a fascinating tale and today in 2011, the magistracy is undergoing more change but despite some misgivings we will as always get on with the job in hand, as we all swear an oath on appointment:

*I will well and truly serve our Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth the Second, in the office of Justice of the Peace and I will do right to all manner of people after the laws and usages of the realm without fear or favour, affection or ill-will.*

January 2011

END

Further information Ann Flintham, Communications Director 020 7387 6099/ 07812 038889

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