

My Lord and Chancellor

Jennifer Coombs was High Sheriff of Dorset in 2015/16, serving as The Queen's representative for law and order in the county. During her time in office, Jennifer worked with the penal system in the area and promoted the work of various charities.

Jennifer had never expected to represent the county in such a key ceremonial position; she had actually wanted to be an actress from the age of 8, and left drama school at 19 determined to follow her dreams. Her first position was as understudy at Stratford-upon-Avon, and she undertook any position she could – including assistant stage managerial roles – until she landed her first lead part in the West End aged 21. Theatre and TV success followed, with a five year stint in the 1980's sitcom "That's My Boy" with Molly Sugden.

Jennifer retired from acting in her 30s, and became an ambassador and latterly Board Member for the political magazine, 'Prospect'. Her drive, passion and optimism were called upon when she suffered a double tragedy. Her beloved husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2003 and she nursed him at home for 11 years. In 2010 her youngest son, Adam, was on a gap year in India when he decided to experiment with drugs. He died, leaving Jennifer alone to support her eldest son Jack, whilst continuing to care for her husband, who sadly passed away in 2014.

Jennifer and her son Jack have since devoted their time to helping children in India, and they have since financed and built a school where Adam taught during his gap year. Jack decided to swim the English Channel in memory of his brother and to raise money for the Alzheimer's Society.

Most people would have deferred their term as High Sheriff given the emotional upheaval of recent years, but Jennifer was determined to fulfil her role and carry out her duties for Dorset. She is now taking a short break to travel – recently having visited Africa to learn about indigenous bush people, and sailed from the Falklands to South Georgia - before she enters the next chapter in her life.

My Lord and Chancellor, I have the honour to present Jennifer Coombs, and I ask you to confer upon her the degree of Doctor of Arts, *honoris causa*.