



Tony Judge

## Outrage in Constable's county

When I heard that Suffolk Constabulary was dealing with a serial murderer my first thought was; here we go again. Another small and predominantly rural force was confronted with the nightmare that every chief constable dreads. What's more, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary's annual league tables put Suffolk down among the dead men when assessing its performance in key operational areas. Next door, Cambridgeshire is only just recovering from the nightmare of Soham.

The media horde that poured into Ipswich appeared to think that the country coppers would be out of their depth. This emerged clearly in the patronising questioning of the Jacqui Cheer, assistant chief constable of the force, who gave as good as she got when praising the competence and dedication of the investigating officers. It is only at such times of real crisis, that we see the value of good public relations, and in this regard Suffolk didn't put a foot in anyone's mouth. Ms Cheer also insisted, to my surprise, that the scale of the inquiry was not affecting the resilience of response and neighbourhood policing.

The local people, although shocked and in many cases frightened, showed more confidence in their police force than HM Inspector of Constabulary had done. Their response to police appeals for information indicated that they wanted to help, not denigrate, the police efforts. There was little public enthusiasm for former Home Secretary Charles Clarke's aborted plans for policing East Anglia. Anyone aware of the hatred between supporters of Ipswich Town and Norwich City knows that some shotgun marriages of local forces are not made in heaven. That said, Suffolk Constabulary, having learned the lessons of Soham, welcomed the specialist expertise of almost every force in the UK. This showed how far such investigations, assisted by IT and other technology, have moved on from the Yorkshire Ripper fiasco.

This dark episode has revealed an aspect of contemporary Suffolk that owes nothing to Benjamin Britten or the idyllic images John Constable painted of his home county. As a nation, we have cause for shame when it comes to the twin curses of drugs and prostitution. Hardly a town is without its red light area and a thriving drugs' trade. Police activity is condemned by those who see every "sex worker" as a victim, yet care nothing for underpowered families who have to tolerate the disgusting detritus of the "oldest profession" on their doorsteps and in their backyards.

There have been some notable police successes against racketeers who smuggle women into Britain as virtual slaves, but the notion of state controlled brothels is not seen by most politicians as a vote catcher. It takes a Peter Sutcliffe or the death of a pathetic young addict to stir, albeit briefly, media and political concern. In Queen Victoria's reign the Whitechapel murders caused outrage over social conditions, and stirred philanthropists and local government into remedial action. Will Ipswich in 2006 do the same? No chance.

Tony Judge has been involved with the *Police* Federation for 50 years. He was the youngest police officer on the Joint Central Committee and founded *Police* magazine in 1968.