

## THE PRIVATE PROSECUTIONS SOCIETIES

**D**uring the eighteenth century, the system of bringing criminals to justice in law courts was getting more and more haphazard because of the deterioration of the parish constable system. If the offender was caught (and it was a big 'if'), then the victim had to pursue his own claim through the courts, because there was no official body to do it for them. This meant that the injured person had to pay all the court costs, which then, as they are nowadays, were absolutely horrendously exorbitant (today, a top flight barrister would charge well over £1,000 *per day* to appear in court). So it was in this climate that the private prosecutions, or felons' associations, evolved.

Contrary to received and popular opinion, these associations were not private police forces, but were groups of prosperous people pooling their money so as to combat those exorbitant court costs. Each association member paid an annual subscription which went into a central fund. Three basic services were offered, first to circulate reward notices for the return of the property or for information; secondly, to pay any ensuing court costs from the central fund; and thirdly, to provide a rudimentary insurance system by contributing towards the replacement value of the property if it had not been recovered.

And of course, the associations only provided their services to their own members - in other words, those who had something worth losing in the first place, and who could afford the annual subscription. This, therefore, made them totally out of reach of the average common working man, and as such, the associations were never very efficient as crime fighting institutions, or as deterrents against crime. So as soon as the organised police forces started appearing in the early nineteenth century, firstly in London and then in the provinces, and which provided criminal prosecutions before the court which cost the victim nothing, then the associations declined quite quickly.

Surprisingly enough, however, thirty-three associations are still in existence today nationally, but these are now predominantly dining clubs, where the Annual General Meeting lasts for ten minutes, and the dinner afterwards lasts for five hours.

### The nationally *surviving* Associations for the Prosecutions of Felons with dates of establishment

- 1781 Wellingborough Association for the Prosecution of Felons and Others
- 1783 Salt Hill Society for the Protection of Property against Damage, Theft and Trespass (Slough)
- 1783 Colchester Association for the Protection of Property and the Prosecution of Housebreakers and Thieves
- 1783 Loughborough Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1784 Tanworth-in-Arden Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1784 Norton Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1784 Hathersage Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1786 Baslow and District Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1788 Dale Abbey Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- pre 1790 Berkswell Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1792 Nottinghamshire New Friendly Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1792 Hanley (formerly Hanley and Shelton) Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1796 Arundel Society for Prosecution of Felons, Thieves etc
- 1803 Lincoln and Lincolnshire Association for the Protection of Property and Indemnity against Loss by Theft
- 1810 Higham Ferrers Association for the Prosecution of Felons
- 1812 Holmesfield Associaion for the Prosecution of Felons

- 1812 Eyam and Stoney Middleton Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1813 Ambleside Protection Bond
  - 1814 Holmfirth Prosecution Society
  - 1815 Wentworth General Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1816 Weekly, Warkton, Kettering and District Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1818 Cranford Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1818 Rowell and District Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1819 Neithrop Association for the Protection of Persons and Property
  - 1820 Weardale Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1821 Newmarket Association for the Prevention of Crime and the Apprehension and Prosecution of Felons, etc
  - 1822 Bulwell and District Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1822 Glazedale and Lealholm Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1823 Burslem Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1825 Shepshed Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1826 Gretton Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1832 Knowle Association for the Prosecution of Offenders
  - 1832 Leamington Priors Association for the Prosecution of Felons
  - 1854 Coundon Association for the Prosecution of Felons
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## THE SLOUCH HAT

**P**C Charles Rowland of the Devon Constabulary wearing the 'slouch hat'. In the jingoism surrounding the victory in the Boer War, some police forces adopted the South African-style slouch hat in honour of the British Army in South Africa.

This fashion only lasted a few months during 1900 and 1901, before the realisation came that this type of head-gear was entirely unsuitable for police officers, or more to the point, the British climate.

