

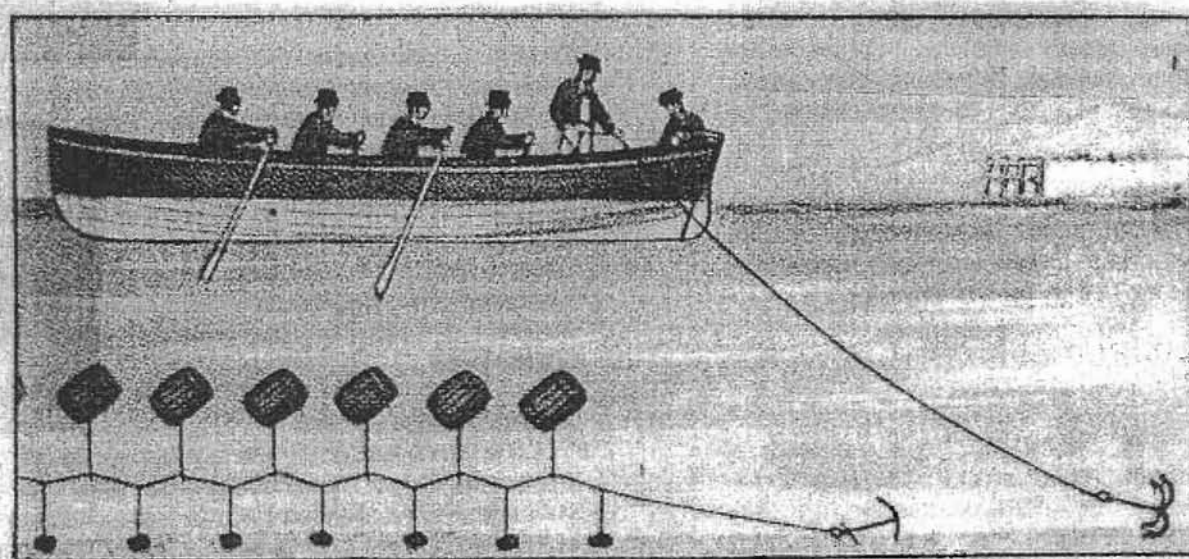
# Customs & Excise History Network

Newsletter No. 10



April 2001

## Contraband County – Sussex Smuggling in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cont'd from Newsletter No. 9)



A patrol of the Royal Naval Coast Blockade searching the seabed for casks with a 'creeping iron'

Formed in 1817, the Coast Blockade along the Sussex coast was divided into three administrative Divisions, each of these being sub-divided into four districts. The Eastern Division of the Sussex Blockade extended from Camber watch house to Langley Fort near Eastbourne, while the Central Division ran from Tower No. 71, Eastbourne to Shoreham. When the Blockade was eventually extended along the whole length of the Sussex coast, the Western Division stretched from Shoreham to the boundary with Hampshire.

Each district was under the command of a junior Lieutenant, and consisted of a party of about ten men, each of which had roughly a mile of coastline to patrol. Not a great distance, one might say, but imagine the conditions in which the men often had to work. They were divided into two watches, causing them to be out six hours each during the night. Much of their patrol beat comprised wild and dangerous countryside, with stretches of high vertical cliffs. Revenue men, (no matter to which service they belonged), and all that they represented, were almost universally hated. On dark stormy nights the dangers were sufficient without the constant threat of abuse of physical violence

Blockade sailors were well-armed, carrying a cutlass and a brace of pistols; at night they also added a musket and bayonet. In these early days there was no separate 'preventive' uniform, so the Blockade wore clothing in the naval style of the day, adapted for their own use: 'worsted stockings, stout shoes that cover above the ankles, flannel drawers, thick blue trousers made on purpose and supplied gratuitously to the men, flannel waistcoat next the skin, over their shirts a stout woollen Guernsey jacket, a common blue jacket and over that supplied as the trousers are a stout blue pea jacket reaching below the knees and worsted gloves'.

Many of the men wore extra clothing during spells of very cold weather, but any man who still suffered badly was supposed to be removed to the watch house until he recovered. In the summer the men wore straw hats with white trousers and frocks. Higher ranks wore the naval uniform and were less heavily armed, usually relying on a sword alone for protection. Blue flares were carried by all patrols and were frequently used to summon assistance.

# Royal Naval Coast Blockade for the Prevention of Smuggling cont'd.

The carrying of weapons was necessary, given the circumstances and the risks involved. It did, on many occasions, save the lives of the Blockade men, but it must also have been an encouragement to the smugglers to equip themselves similarly. The arming of the force did nothing to improve its image with the local population, as it attested by the comment that the men 'went about their work in a rough, bull-dog sort of fashion. They went out heavily armed, and were not slow in using their arms. I have been informed by credible persons that if they wanted to enter a house in which they suspected any smuggler was concealed, they would unceremoniously smash open the door with the butt-ends of their muskets, and when inside would bundle women and children, bed and all, on the floor'.

In view of the brutality of many smugglers, one can hardly be surprised that the men of the Blockade sometimes conducted their 'enquiries' with a certain lack of finesse and chivalry.

## The Final Years

In March of 1829 Captain Mingaye received a memorandum from the Admiralty instructing him to release some of his men for service on the *Melville*, as this vessel's own men were being released to guard the Jersey oyster fisheries. One of the advantages of the Coast Blockade had been that men were available at short notice for a variety of purposes. In 1827, for example, sailors had been taken away from the Navarino campaign. In September 1829 another request came for men, for the *Melville* again, this time for the Mediterranean service. Two hundred men were shipped off to Portsmouth in *Hyperion's* tenders, and from thence to the sunnier climes of Malta. In the same month *Ramillies* was taken away for urgent repairs and never again performed Blockade duties, being replaced in the Downs by the *Talavera*. *Ramillies* was eventually broken up in 1850.

A Treasury note of 31 January 1831 instructed that no further officers or men were to be appointed to the Coast Blockade. A week later an announcement appeared in the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* to the effect that it was the government's intention to do away with the Blockade, and that the Commanding Officer of the Engineering Department on the coast had received instructions to make an immediate survey of all the towers and other premises occupied by the men and to report upon their state of repair. Enquiry was to be made regarding their market value, condition and letting potential, with a view to possible use by soldiers.

The last Coast Blockade station was relieved on 8 June, 1831. After a turbulent and patchy fourteen years the Blockade, father of the modern Coastguard, sank into the annals of smuggling lore, a curious testament to its enthusiastic, idealistic and largely unsung creator, Captain William McCulloch, R.N.

(Mark Bullen's book, £3.95, can be purchased from him. Tel. No. 0117 900 200).

## SNUFF – The Stuff of History

'Snuff; a preparation of powdered tobacco for inhaling through the nostrils' (O.E.D). Used earlier in Scotland and Ireland, snuff taking became fashionable in England in the mid-1600s.

A Customs duty of 5% ad valorem was imposed in 1660 on imported snuff. This tax became an Excise duty in 1819 at 6s. per pound and snuff manufacturers and dealers were put under Excise survey. In 1925 the tax was reconverted into a Customs duty at 4s. per pound.

**Gilbert Denton** writes:-

'In London's West End during the 1950s and 60s there were three tobacconists that held Tobacco Manufacturers Licences so that they could claim drawback of duty on exports. One of these was Fribourg and Treyer in the Haymarket, a firm established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It had a bow-fronted shop window and an atmosphere of long established wealth and privilege. The Officers' examinations of drawback packings took place in the basement. I remember a large stone bath that was always referred to as the Roman bath. Royal Warrants were displayed on the wall – I think one of them was by appointment to the Duke of Brunswick.

In 1830 the Board of Excise received the following letter:- 'To The Honourable Board of Excise – The Pages of the late King having received the stock of snuff which belonged to His Late Majesty humbly beg a permit to transfer the same into the stock of Fribourg and Treyer of the Haymarket. The quantity is about 100 lbs. of British Rappee'.

Notes. 1) The present rate of duty on snuff is £58.17 per kilo; 2) Fribourg and Treyer have moved from the Haymarket and the premises now contain a travel agent; 3) The King was George IV; 4) Rappee is coarse ground snuff; 5) The letter is at the PRO, Kew; 6) The little indentation at the base of the thumb is called in French 'le sac de tabac' from the practice of sprinkling a portion of snuff there to sniff it; and 7) Reputedly, the fashion of coloured handkerchiefs began because snuff stained white ones.

## From Liverpool Custom House to Westminster LVO (1949-1987)

**Ron Timmons** has written a 40 page recollection\* of his service in the department. His CV was outlined in Newsletter No.9. One episode from his career, he remembers as follows:-

'In 1980 the Training Centre at Southend was running a series of courses for Senior Officers who had a number of staff to manage. The management course was one of the strangest courses I have ever attended. Before attending, together with two other Senior Officers from West End LVO we were briefed by Ron Shepherd (A/C) as to what to expect. Rumours had it that Senior Officers at earlier courses had attempted suicide and other outlandish stories abounded. The course got off to an unusual start because while the remainder of the class, about twelve in number, all sat about on the first morning, the two instructors who we'd identified sat amongst us and said nothing. The first morning session was opened by ourselves, by introducing ourselves to one another by the customary pen-picture description of who we were, where we worked etc...This passed over smoothly enough until it was found that most of those attending were at present engaged on VAT and centred on our own experiences. This was alright until one of the class members suddenly broke down and said he was not working on VAT but came from a Headquarters division, and he felt he was being ignored in the discussions and conversation. Was he a plant? From the first day until the last, most of the pupils felt that the so-called instructors were hell-bent on disrupting any conversation, by setting one member of the class against the others. If a member said anything that might be controversial, one of the instructors would put words into another members mouth as to why it had been said. If there was one thing learnt on this course it was to show how easy it was to set one person against another. This was even expounded upon on racist grounds as one of the class members was of Asian origin.

One of the exercises was a 'character assassination' lesson. We were asked voluntarily to list the other eleven members of the class in order of preference as to who best we would like to work with, leading downwards to the least likely person, and give your reasons. We then had to decide what we should do with our comments. Should we throw them all into the hat and not disclose who had written what about who, or should we be open and read out our own comments about one another? This is one easy way of setting one against another, but the obvious reason for the exercise was to show what type of image we projected to others. This exercise was carried out after only being together in the classroom for less than two days. At the

end of the first week the antagonism came to ahead when one of the class members walled out and went off into he town. The instructors did nothing, and the remainder of the class decided that we would far rather prefer if the instructors absented themselves from any further participation in the course, and they retired to their own offices. In the afternoon the absent class member returned to the centre having found the instructors were no longer there. After two days we decided that the impasse could only be broken by calling in the Senior Principal of the training centre and give the instructors a chance to state their case and why they were trying to conduct a course on the lines they were taking. This seemed to clear the air a little. During the second week of the course, the Officer who had done 'walk-about' was tackled by one of the instructors for failing to pay attention during a discussion. His reply was that he was teaching himself shorthand, and this was more beneficial to him than the course he was attending. Shortly after this, it was decided to drop this type of course from the syllabus of the Training Centre.

\*For a copy of his script, Ron can be contacted on tel. no. 020 8540 2650

*I too attended one of these courses and it occurred to me that the spirit of Robert Burns (1759-1796), one time Excise Officer, might have hovered over us. He wrote, 'O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see oursel's as others see us! / It wad frae mony a blunder free us, / And foolish notion. (To a Louse). JP.*

### Bookmakers 2 Chancellors 0 ?

In his recent Budget, the Chancellor announced that the Betting Duty (introduced in 1966) would be abolished from January 1 2002 and replaced by a 15% tax on bookmakers' gross profit. This change was forced by offshore companies offering tax-free betting to punters. The FT had the headline 'Bookmakers glee at duty abolition'.

The first Betting Duty was introduced by Winston Churchill in 1926. 'Then there were problems over bad debts, accumulator bets and the difficulty of checking bets made by telephone'.\* In 1929 the Government admitted that the Duty had failed and it was repealed. Phillip Snowden, the Labour Chancellor and one-time Revenue Assistant 2<sup>nd</sup> Class employed in the Excise, said in April 1929, 'any tax which can be evaded easily is doomed'.

\*Graham Smith - *Something To Declare*

## News from HM Customs & Excise National Museum, Liverpool

Collecting and documenting programme continues. Objects have been surveyed in Kendal, Immingham, Maidstone, Southend and Halifax. A new documentation post started in March, to help with the care of the collection.

High profile temporary exhibition is nearing completion for HM Customs & Excise Board Suite, in the Chairman's Office.

Halizones ship model (Waterguard training aid) has received conservation work, and is now on display in the Museum.

Research scoping project now complete, and a programme of oral history is planned for 2001/2.

New marketing campaign being launched.

Staff changes, Julia Bryan (Education Officer) has been awarded promotion, and leaves the Museum shortly. Billy Corrigan (Admin.Assistant) is leaving in May to tour Australia for a year.

The Membership of the C&E History Network is now 123.

There was a print error in Newsletter No. 9. Entertainments Duty was introduced in 1916 not 1946.

## Of Ships and Carts and Pricking Notes

Pricking Note – a Customs form used in the Port of London in connection with the export of bonded or drawback goods. It was so called because the goods were tallied into the ship by pricking a hole in the Note for each package counted into the ship. It was discontinued in 1898.

Dandy Note – a Customs form used in the Port of London to advise the Officer at the exporting ship's side of the delivery of goods from warehouse for shipment; so called from the Latin 'dando'; being the Collector's authority to the Locker (a Customs Officer employed in locking and unlocking bonded warehouses) to give the goods to the carman\* for conveyance from the warehouse to the ship; discontinued in 1896.

Source: McCoy's Dictionary of Customs & Excise 1938 edition.

\*Geoff Berry recollects that in the decade or so after WW2 goods travelled from bond to ship with a 'cart note'.

### Possible items for future Newsletters

A typical Purchase Tax visit – *Roger Hards*  
Customs action in the Colonies against book piracies – *Angus Fraser*

The scandal of imports from France during the Seven Years' War

The Customs presence in London Dockland –  
A pictorial history 1860-1930

What is happening to documents and books in the Museum and the Department.

**The London Docklands Museum opens in September 2001. One of its Curators has written to me as follows, 'The Museum will occupy five floors of the late Georgian Warehouse No. 1 at West India Quay, London. As part of their research for the exhibition galleries, Curators at the Museum are keen to hear from anyone who has memories of Customs and Excise work along the Thames. If retired staff have vivid recollections of the Second World War or post war decade in and around the Docks and be willing to share them with us, please contact Ms.Oriel Williams on Tel.020 7515 1162.' JP**

The Network, formed in 1996 with the support of the HM Customs & Excise National Museum in Liverpool, is an informal organisation, providing an open forum for anyone with an interest in the history of Customs & Excise.

The Network aims to be a mechanism for preserving and exchanging information about the history of the work of the Department for researchers and others with a general interest in Customs & Excise, and to support the work of the Museum in collecting and preserving objects, photographs, ephemera and related information (recollections especially welcome) for the benefit of people today and in the future.

The Editors aim to produce two Newsletters a year and a full membership list once a year.

Eventually, Newsletters will be bound, given an ISBN and go to the C&E National Museum and the British Library.

Any back number can be obtained by sending an SAE plus a second-class stamp to John Pink at his address below.

*If you are not on the Newsletter's mailing list and would like to be, please drop a line to:-*

**Karen Bradbury, Curator, HM Customs & Excise National Museum, Albert Dock, Liverpool, L3 4AQ.**

*If you have an E-mail address it can be included with your other membership details.*

*If you have an item for the Newsletter, please send it to the Newsletter's co-editor:-*

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