

# *NITON SMUGGLERS*

(The Story That Has Yet To Be Told)



## ***A Smugglers Song***

Five and twenty ponies,  
Trotting through the dark -  
Brandy for the Parson, 'Baccy for the Clerk.  
Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie -  
Watch the wall my darling while the Gentlemen go by

Produced by Niton & Whitwell Parish Council

## INTRODUCTION

The southern side of the Isle of Wight is fringed with treacherous rock platforms, notably Rocken End, south of Niton, and the risk of a wreck was not something the master of a revenue cutter contemplated with pleasure. Any smuggler who knew a way through the rocks, and was prepared to ride out ferocious southwesterly winds that batter this part of the coast was unlikely to be followed too far. There seem to have been no large smuggling gangs on the island, although some families, such as the Wheelers, Willis and Snuddens, whose descendants still live in the Niton area, were heavily involved, and the free trade enjoyed the support of many locals. This may be because many of them despised rule from the mainland; until the end of the 13th century the Wight had been an independent principality, and export of smuggled wool was already taking place. Little wonder that islanders were so disrespectful of the



customs authorities! According to a local record, in the 1830s most of Niton village was involved in smuggling - either as active participants in running goods, buying them from homeward-bound ships in the Channel, or as “sleeping partners” or financiers for the cross-Channel enterprise. The trade was sophisticated, involving 50-ton Wherries, sailing at night and running the gauntlet of Revenue cutters and gun brigs which patrolled the Channel. Niton was so strategic in the illicit trade that it had its own coastguard station and lookout building. Smugglers and coastguards all along the coast engaged in a dangerous war of attrition; often the poorly-paid coastguards were bought into the trade. For a quaint 1950s representation of the ways of storing and handling large barrels of liquor on board smuggling ships, see the murals in the barn at the Buddle Inn.

NB. An example of a 40 ton sea going Wherry which would sail to Cherbourg or Barfleur, the two main smuggling supply centres in France. Cask or kegs would be tied together with markers attached in the event that the cargo needed to be ditched before a Revenue cutter crew boarded and searched the vessel.

## SITES OF INTEREST

**1. St John the Baptist Church.** It was well known that churches, graveyards and other hallowed areas held no spiritual significance for smugglers. Many empty tombs and special places in the churches were often used to hide contraband. Indeed, local vicars probably kept their own spirits up by looking the other way! A late night close encounter near the church is recorded in 1808 between the Revenue Men and a group of smugglers, led by a Mr Mussel of Niton. The smugglers, seeing a warning light in the small window of Herveys Cottage on Church Street, crept around the north side of the church and slid back the top of an empty mausoleum. They climbed quietly



The Cheek Mausoleum

inside, drawing the slab back over them. There they stayed while Revenue patrols, apparently previously alerted, searched fruitlessly for them, before eventually giving up. The smugglers, unsure that the patrols had gone, remained inside the tomb until dawn. Hoping the coast was clear, they pulled back the slab and started to clamber out – just as the hapless sexton, Mr Long, arrived for

Matins. Horrorstruck at what he took to be the dead rising from the tomb, he fled, proclaiming the arrival of the Day of Judgement, and praying loudly for forgiveness. It took villagers some time - and perhaps some Dutch courage – to calm him down. Local legend has it that the mausoleum used and erected to the memory of a member of the Cheek family, is linked via a tunnel to Niton Manor. Sadly the actual tunnel cannot be found.

## 2. Hervey's Cottage. Thought to be one of the oldest in Niton, and recorded in the

Domesday Book, the cottage was a farm in the middle ages until it was incorporated within the Niton Manor Estate. In 1603 its occupants, the Snuddens, were heavily involved in smuggling. Ralph Snudden's first wife was Alice Harvey, and it is likely the cottage was named Hervey's through a collegial misspelling. It was leased by the Lord of Manor, Lord Edgecombe, to the Willis family (1757-1815), also keen supporters of the illegal import of good French liquor. On smuggling nights, a light would be placed in the window if any Revenue Men were sighted.



In 1815 the Willis family had to move to Puckwell Cottage when, Jeremiah, a smuggler and prisoner in France, was declared bankrupt.

## 3. Richard Russell, Master Butcher, Niton.

On Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1875. Mr William Hale, chief boatman at the Coast Guard Station, St. Catherine's Point, said that on the afternoon of Saturday the 29<sup>th</sup> March, as they were searching each house in Niton for smuggled spirits, he found four sack covered tubs concealed in a ditch within the defendant's garden. Three of the tubs were full of brandy and one empty.

He did not see the defendant at the time he found the tubs, but he sent Mr Russell's son for his father. The garden is attached to the house and is about 50 yards in length, and the ditch at the lower part of the garden is filled with water. When the defendant came he claimed the sacks as his, but said that the tubs did not belong to him. Mr Herod, the chief officer, corroborated the evidence of Mr Hale, and handed the defendant into the custody of Constable Thorn. P.C. Thorn stated in court that at about half past three o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March the defendant was placed in his custody in the presence of his wife, and charged with being in possession of smuggled goods. When questioned, the defendant said "Oh, it's a pretty thing to say I've got brandy in my garden," where upon his wife said "I begged you not to have anything to do with the stuff. I told you what would happen." Defendant's only reply was a grunt. On testing the tubs they were found to be 47 7/10<sup>th</sup> overproof. The tubs contained nine gallons of brandy, which were equal to 13 gallons proof. The defendant was fined £100 and 30s costs, and should he default, he would serve six months imprisonment at Winchester.

**NB. Niton Master Butchers.** The Village Butchers Shop closed in 2004 and is now the now the internationally recognised Tregears' Pottery. A visitor to the Potters will note the 19th Century hand made hooks and rails in the ceiling used to hang game and meat.

4. **Richard Hillier**, Elm Cottage, Niton, (now part of St Annes, on the Blackgang Rd) was also charged with concealing and being in unlawful possession of foreign spirits liable to duty.- Mr John Herod having found the casks of spirit in Richard Russell's garden, heard the sound of glass and looked over the neighbouring hedge where he saw James Hillier burying bottled spirits in the garden. A boy handed the bottles from a basket to the defendant, who placed them in the earth. Mr Herod immediately jumped over the hedge, clapped the defendant on the shoulder, and said "What are you doing, old fellow?" He took the defendant into his house, and Mr Hillier handed over three jars containing four gallons of brandy. The defendant was fined £100 and £1 10s costs.

**NB. Elm Cottage.** Now called St Annes on the Blackgang Rd to the west of Niton Surgery. Originally a large 3 floored semi detached house with Elm Cottage being the western most and occupied by Mr Hillier while the eastern part was occupied by Richard Russell and his large family.

## **PUBLIC HOUSES.**

The village boasted as many as seven pubs when smuggling was at its height. Only The White Lion and The Buddle survive today, but back then hostelries included The Star, now a private home, and The Goose (on what is now Barrack Shute), which became a school, and then a family home. The Star's location, close to the Churchyard and the White Lion, suggests it was almost certainly the beneficiary of illegal imports. Another pub, dating back to at least 1871, was The Vine at Bierley

which closed in 1931 and is now a private house called Vine Cottage. There are rumours of two more pubs - or Pop Shops as many unlicensed places were often called - the Cat and Rabbit and the Blue Lion, but no records have been found. It is remarkable that in 1801 Niton, a village of 52 families, managed to keep seven pubs going – some connection surely, to the thriving smuggling trade.

Local legend has it that the small hamlet to the north of Niton named Bierly acquired its name due to the tendency of funerals heading to Niton to stop and allow the horses pulling the bier containing the coffin to rest after the steep climb. Meanwhile the accompanying friends and families took the opportunity to seek refreshment at the bar in the Vine. Thus the hamlet became known as where the "Bier Lay," in time shortened to Bierly!

**5. The Star Inn** . The Star dates from at least 1615. On July 15, 1837, the innkeeper James Hillier, was sent to Winchester gaol for six months, for non-payment of a £25 fine, after being found guilty of "harbouring" by the Island magistrates. Recent renovations at The Star have failed to substantiate the rumour that it had a secret second cellar, with access behind a large fixed piece of furniture.



**6. The White Lion.** In the 1830's, the landlord, Thomas Morris, used to board homeward bound ships to buy tea, brandy, tobacco, silks and gloves, and thereby avoid paying any duty. Back at the pub, the more precious items would be sold to the gentry, while the casks went down to the cellar. But in September 1842 the landlord's luck eventually ran out, and he followed a long line of Niton smuggling miscreants to Winchester Gaol. At around this time, the White Lion's ostler, a young lad called Mark Norman recalled often carrying small 4 gallon kegs of brandy by night to a cottage near Shide, avoiding a customs post at Rookley (now The Chequers Inn).



Each dodgy trek earned him supper, a bed for the night and five shillings, the equivalent of three days' labouring wages.

**7, The Goose.** Sadly little is known of The Goose, (also known as The Naked Lady due to a display of a wrecked ship's bowsprit), but its size suggests it was an Inn supplying a comfortable bed for visitors, and not just a public house. Its position at the top of the mule trail between Niton and the Undercliff would have made it a useful hidey-hole as well as a customer for “imported” spirits. Following its Last Orders as a public house, it was used as the HQ for the local Volunteer Companies and serviced up to 2 Companies of volunteers, one of 66 all ranks and the other of 50. (In time the various different village volunteers through the UK amalgamated to form units until in 1908 they evolved into the Territorial Force and then, in 1920, the Territorial Army). Thereafter, the building became a private school, which in turn, closed when the headmistress, Mrs Brinham, retired in the 1950s. It is now to be found as a private house at the top of the chute and called St Catherines' Hall.



**8, The Buddle.** The Buddle started as a successful unlicensed drinking house in around 1550, and didn't acquire a licence until 1859! It has always been closely linked to tales of smuggling; and may well have been at the forefront of mainland visitor, poet Sydney Dobell's mind, when he observed, back in 1860: “The whole population here are smugglers. Everyone has an ostensible occupation, but no one gets his money by it, or cares to work in it. Here are fishermen who never fish, but always have pockets full of money, and farmers whose farming consists of ploughing deep by night, and whose daily time is spent standing like herons on lookout posts.” Mr Dobell was not enamoured by the locals, adding: “Nearly the whole village lives in masquerade, even to the names of the villagers. Hardly a man is known by his surname ..... and everything suggests the abnormal sort of bandit or clan life of the place.” But that aside, apart from its “duty-free shopping” past, the



BUDDLE INN, NITON, I.W.

Buddle was notorious for its special drinks, including the renowned “egg flip”. It consisted of a quart or two of ale mixed with a dozen beaten eggs and half a pint of brandy all heated over a stove and served hot. The flip part of its name probably refers to its effect upon the drinker! When served cold and without the eggs, it was renamed “the Dog’s Nose”, but it still retained its rapid effect upon the drinker.

**9. Castlehaven.** Castlehaven once housed a small military outpost of volunteers, watching for French invaders during the Napoleonic Wars. The site has long gone,

but the detachment would have been men with local knowledge who probably used their skills for other off-duty endeavours! The harbour was originally built for off-loading coal for use in the local community, and the connecting bridgeway, though steep, would have been a useful track for the discreet movement at night of other materials. In the early 19th century, two of the Willis brothers of Niton



found themselves on either side of the law, when one became a Mounted Customs Officer while the other, Jeremiah, was a smuggler. Late one night a Customs patrol stumbled upon a group of smugglers near the harbour. Anxious not to kill his brother, but still to be seen to do his duty, the Revenue Man fired his pistol into the air, dutifully missing Jeremiah. The smugglers then scattered - allowing all sides to preserve their honour and their dignity. Shortly after this event Jeremiah was captured by the French and held prisoner in Cherbourg and his family made penniless until his eventual release and return home to Niton. As a result of their penniless state, the family had to leave Herveys and move into cheaper accommodation in what is now Puckwell Cottage on Puckwell Lane.

#### **10. St Catherine's Coast Guard Station.**

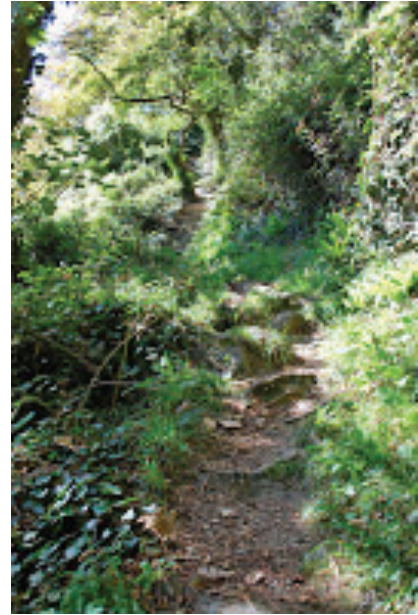
Now just a lighthouse, but in the 19th Century also a Coast Guard station. The Station boat was often deployed to seek out suspicious vessels. Early on Friday, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1876, the station's chief boatman, George French, had his attention drawn to a small fishing boat, sailing westwards. He and three others boarded it, and found the sole crewman lying drunk on the deck. The vessel was in a dangerous position, having struck some rocks off Puckaster. Mr French took the man into



custody, but when the prisoner sobered up, he defiantly declared he did not give a

\*\*\*\* as the casks were alright, (having been safely hidden offshore!). Newport County Bench fined the man £14 15s 5d, despite the absence of the casks.

**11. Smugglers Cave.** A hard climb up the steep footpath NT36 from the Old Blackgang Rd to the top of the Gore Cliff, leads past a manmade cave, dug to hide contraband. Smugglers would throw a line from the cliff top, to pull the kegs either up to the cave, or right to the top, depending on the local security situation. In 1876, William Creeth, plumber and glazier, of Niton, was charged with being in unlawful possession of foreign spirits liable to duty, and fined a total of £100. It is thought Creeth's contraband may have been found by the Revenue men inside this cave.



(Please note the path is not accessible except to mountain goats and those with fit legs, good balance and poise!)

**The Royal Sandrock Hotel.** Originally built as a private residence in the latter half of the 18th Century, it became a hotel in the early 19th century, and later a very popular Coaching Inn which was then turned into a very successful Spa by Newport surgeon Mr Waterworth. It adopted the term Royal in 1833 – a year after Princess Victoria's visit. A tunnel certainly existed under the hotel, and rumour suggested it led to what is now the Enchanted Manor. Other famous guests included Rudyard Kipling and Marconi. Unfortunately, the source of the Spa water was lost due to small local landslips. The hotel's popularity then waned, but it continued until the 1970s. The building burnt down in October, 1984 and the cellars and tunnel entrance were filled in with a large part of the rubble and the area has now been completely redeveloped.



**12. Coach Halt.** Just past the Sandrock Road junction with the Old Blackgang Road are the remains of a Coach Halt, a covered shelter for the Royal Sandrock's hotel guests. Nearby, Rock Cottage, which was part of the hotel estate, was also accommodation for the Ostlers to the Hotel as well as a storeroom where legal and



hidden illegal goods could be safely held. Thus by night the halt doubled as a loading point for contraband hauled up from Castlehaven and then onto larger covered or camouflaged wagons for onward distribution. Even by day, kegs, tobacco and such would have been hidden in compartments around the passenger coach before the passengers re-boarded and some "Ladies" had been known to secrete contraband in the folds of their voluminous petticoats – relying on the fact that the Revenue Men would not look there!



**13. Cripple Path.** Before the road from Niton to the Undercliff was built in the mid-19th Century, access was either on the mule pack path (now Barrack Shute) or via the Cripple Path. In 1675 Niton hosted a royal visitor, when Charles II, on his way to the mainland from France, was forced by the weather to anchor off the Island. Church records show the King came ashore at Puckaster Cove on 1<sup>st</sup> July, and walked along the Cripple Path (NT27) to dine with the Rev Thomas Collinson in Niton Rectory, where he stayed two nights until better weather allowed him to resume his journey to reclaim his throne. The event was also described in a local song as recorded in "The Isle of Wight Ballads" -



And then, turning to old Collinson,  
He said, how he full and well knew  
That his deeds of faith and loyalty  
Had been neither small or few,

Of devoted service to his King  
Would he add one further proof?  
Would he receive him as his guest  
Under the rectory roof.

Not a Chart topper I suggest!

**14. The Modern Day** Even modern smugglers have landed in Niton. In 2000 heavy weather forced drug smugglers to land at Castlehaven, while on their way to a private beach house at Orchard Bay, near St Lawrence, with 879lb of cocaine, worth £90m. They were caught after a large operation by Customs & Excise and the National

Crime Squad. Local reports say a man in a wet suit, carrying flippers, found in nearby woods, insisted, in a heavy French accent, that he was “looking for squirrels”! At Snaresbrook Crown Court, members of the gang were later jailed for up to 26 years. This event aside, the true smuggling days of Niton stopped in the 1860s when import duty was lowered and gaol sentences increased. A last big raid by the Customs Officers in the 1850s was so unpopular with the increasingly gentrified population, that social pressure was applied, especially by wives who were often directly affected by the absence of a working husband, languishing in gaol. The tradition was, in effect, finished by the 1890s.

## SUMMARY

Please enjoy our local history, and if you visit the sites, please keep dogs under control and take your litter home with you, along with your memories. Most of the sites are easily accessible and dogs are welcome in both pubs. Please note that the Smugglers Cave (No 11) cannot be approached in a wheelchair. The Smugglers Trail is almost 4.5 miles around, and involves some steep inclines. Sturdy footwear and appropriate clothing is recommended, especially in the event of wet weather.

### *A Smugglers Song*

IF you wake at midnight, and hear a horse's feet,  
Don't go drawing back the blind, or looking in the street,  
Them that ask no questions isn't told a lie.  
Watch the wall my darling while the Gentlemen go by.  
Five and twenty ponies,  
Trotting through the dark -  
Brandy for the Parson, 'Baccy for the Clerk.  
Laces for a lady; letters for a spy,  
Watch the wall my darling while the Gentlemen go by!

Running round the woodlump if you chance to find  
Little barrels, roped and tarred, all full of brandy-wine,  
Don't you shout to come and look, nor use 'em for your play.  
Put the brushwood back again - and they'll be gone next day !

If you see the stable-door setting open wide;  
If you see a tired horse lying down inside;  
If your mother mends a coat cut about and tore;  
If the lining's wet and warm - don't you ask no more !

If you meet King George's men, dressed in blue and red,  
You be careful what you say, and mindful what is said.  
If they call you " pretty maid," and chuck you 'neath the chin,  
Don't you tell where no one is, nor yet where no one's been !

Knocks and footsteps round the house - whistles after dark -  
You've no call for running out till the house-dogs bark.  
*Trusty's* here, and *Pincher's* here, and see how dumb they lie  
*They* don't fret to follow when the Gentlemen go by !

'If You do as you've been told, 'likely there's a chance,  
You'll be give a dainty doll, all the way from France,  
With a cap of Valenciennes, and a velvet hood -  
A present from the Gentlemen, along 'o being good !  
Five and twenty ponies,  
Trotting through the dark -  
Brandy for the Parson, 'Baccy for the Clerk.  
Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie  
Watch the wall my darling while the Gentlemen go by !

## Notes

1. **The Preventative Waterguard.** Formed in 1809 as the "Preventive Waterguard" (also known as the Preventive Boat Service) to combat smuggling, the 'Waterguard' was an independent arm of revenue enforcement and complemented the " riding officers" and the offshore revenue cutters. The " riding officers " were stationed along the south coast of England patrolled area designated area of shore on horseback, while the offshore revenue cutters or Preventative Boats were manned by the Water Guard (all of whom were directed by both the Board of Customs and the Board of Excise). The term remained extant until the formation of the UK Border Force in 2008. It is well known that the poor pay awarded to the Riding Officers in the early to mid nineteenth century was often supplemented by the occasional back hander from their local smuggling gang and it wasn't until the end of the century that pay and conditions improved. Mr James Snudden was not included in this crime and paid dearly for his integrity.

2. **ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.** Custom-House, London, 20 February 1805 Whereas it has been represented to the Commissioners of his Majesty's Customs, that on Thursday Evening, the 31<sup>st</sup> January last (1804), James Snudden, an Officer of Customs at the Port of Cowes, as he was protecting a cart hired to convey to the Custom-House Warehouse, fifteen Casks of prohibited Spirits, then lately

before seized by Officers of the Customs, on the south side of the Isle of Wight, was attacked in the road, within half a mile of Newport, by three men unknown, armed with large sticks, who had secreted themselves in a hedge, one of whom beat the said James Snudden violently about the head, and drove his horse on which he was mounted at a distance from the said cart, during which the said two other men forcibly rescued and took out of the said Cart five Casks of the said Spirits, and carried away the same. The Commissioners of his Majesty's Customs, in order to bring to justice the Persons concerned in the assault and obstruction of the said Officer in the execution of his duty are hereby pleased to offer a Reward of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS to any Person or Persons, who shall discover; and apprehend or cause to be discovered and apprehended, any one or more of the said offenders, to be paid by the Receiver General of his Majesty's Customs on conviction.

**3 London Gazette – 18 June 1814** BY order of the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors; James Snudden, late of Newport, Isle of Wight, in the county of Hants, in the service of His Majesty's Customs, and now a prisoner in the borough gaol of Newport, Isle of Wight; in the county of Hants, will be examined before the Justices of the Peace for the said borough, either at a General Session of the Peace, or an Adjournment of a General Session of the Peace, which shall be first holden for the said borough, after the expiration of twenty days at least from the day of the insertion hereof, for the purpose of determining whether the said James Snudden is entitled to the benefit of the Act for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors; and all Creditors of the said James Snudden are required to attend accordingly; if they shall think fit.—The petition and schedule of the said James Snudden are filed in the office of the said Court.

**4 Hampshire Telegraph – 22 September 1817** On Saturday, the 13<sup>th</sup> inst., Mr. Dickson, Sitter of the Preventive Boat stationed at St. Lawrence, crept upon 68 casks of Geneva (Dutch Gin), at Puckcaster Cove, and delivered the same at Southampton. – And on Friday the 19<sup>th</sup> inst., Mr. Snudden, Riding Officer, brought to Cowes a small seizure of four casks found in a hedge at Shanklin.

**6 Hampshire Telegraph – 29 December 1817** On the 17<sup>th</sup> inst. Mr. Snudden, Riding Officer, seized at Shanklin, 11 casks of spirit, and lodged them in the Warehouse at Cowes. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, Mr. Dixon, Sitter of the St. Lawrence Boat, seized, at Bonchurch, 76 casks of spirit, which he delivered to the Excise Office at Newport. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Messrs. Snudden and Robey, Riding Officers, seized 42 casks of spirit, at Dunnose, which they deposited in the Warehouse at Cowes. Same day, Mr. Jeatt, Sitter of the preventive-boat at Bembridge, seized nine casks near Shanklin, and delivered them to the Excise Office at Newport.

**NB: James Snudden: Bn.1778 Dd.1822** In 1791 he became a Coast Waiter or otherwise a shore based Customs Official responsible for taking prisoners to the magistrate. His first adventure has already been recorded in that in 1804 he was attacked by three unknown men while guarding a cart full of Brandy kegs being taken

to court. This was the start of many of his troubles which saw him rise in the Revenue world only to crash in the financial world. Due to initially mishandling his finances and a failure of the Customs & Excise to properly reward him, he was declared a debtor in March 1814 and only cleared his debts in 1815. He returned to work as a Riding Officer and by 1818 he had seized a two oared boat, 337 casks of illicit spirits plus several smugglers. After this successful period he remained unpaid and still awaited his promised promotion to Riding Officer First Class and was required to beg for his share of his "Seizure Awards" of £32 10s 10d. In January 1822 he captured two notorious smugglers, James More and John Stocks in the process of plundering a wreck. Shortly after their successful prosecution he received written threats to his life and he wrote to his superiors asking that a reward to advertised for the capture of the authors. Later that year, 1822, aged only 44, James Snudden died after a short illness leaving his wife and eight children destitute. In 1834 it is recorded in the Parish of Newchurch "List of Paupers" that she sought help, aged 63years - the lot of a Riding Officer and his family was not an easy one.

**7 Hampshire Telegraph – 9 February 1876. SERIOUS CASE OF SMUGGLING AT NITON.** At Newport County Bench on Saturday before Sir H.P. Gordon, F. Pittis Esq., F. Vulliamy and H. Waterworth Esqs. William Creeth, plumber and glazier, of 'Bier Lay', Niton, was charged with concealing and being in unlawful possession of foreign spirits liable to duty.- Mr. Beverly, of Portsmouth, instructed by Mr. W.H. Holmes, collector of Customs for the Isle of Wight, appeared for the Board of Inland Revenue.- Mr. Holmes said that on Saturday last he went to the defendant's house in Niton, where he saw him, and told him his position, and that he had been given to understand he had some foreign spirits in his possession. The defendant admitted he had some. He requested him to show him where the spirits were. He followed him through his shop into the garden and into an outhouse situated at the further end of the garden, when he produced a key and unlocked the door. On asking the defendant where the spirits were kept, he pointed to a bin, in which, on being opened he found a tub of brandy. By the side of the bin he found another tub of brandy. Each tub contained just over three gallons of brandy, or altogether just over six gallons and 8-10<sup>th</sup> of a gallon. One tub contained three gallons of white brandy 48 over proof, and the other tub contained dark brandy 18 under proof. Taking, therefore, both tubs, there were nearly seven gallons of proof brandy. After marking both tubs with the broad-arrow, he left the defendant in charge of one of his men and went in search of a policeman, who accompanied him to the defendant's house, and there he gave the latter into custody. He asked the defendant where he obtained the tubs and what he paid for them. The defendant said he had given 45s for them. All the spirits found in the defendant's house were liable to duty, as nothing less than 20 gallons was allowed to be imported. Witness squeezed salt water out of the ropes attached to the tubs.- The defendant pleaded guilty, and was fined £100 and £1 10s costs, or in default six months imprisonment.

**NB** Mr Creeth ran a successful business employing 3 men and one boy to support his family of 9 children. Born in Shorewell, Isle of Wight, England in about 1820 to James Creeth and Elizabeth Edwards, William Creeth married Elizabeth Bright and had 13 children. He passed away on 15 Dec 1879 in Niton.

8. **SMUGGLING.** David Cotton, mariner, Brixton (now called Brighstone), who was remanded last Saturday on a charge of smuggling, was again brought up in custody charged with being found in possession of a stray warp used for smuggling purposes.- Mr. Robert Henderson, Collector of Customs prosecuted, and Mr. Douglas Ford appeared for the prisoner.- George French, chief boatman of the coastguard station. St Catherine's said that early on the morning of Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October, his attention was called to a small fishing boat sailing towards the east. He ordered a boat to be launched, and on getting alongside the vessel, he, with three others, went on board, where they found the stray warp\* which was lying partly on deck and partly in the hold of the vessel. The prisoner, who was the only man on board, was lying drunk on the deck. The vessel was in a dangerous position, having struck rocks off Puckaster, it was then filling with water and shortly afterwards it became a total wreck. The stray warp, which has 78 stops\*, was such as was used for sinking and raising tubs, and it appeared to have been recently used, as it was wet. He ordered the prisoner to be taken into custody and had him carried from the vessel into the Coast Guard boat. When the prisoner became sober he said he did not care a -----, as the tubs were alright. The wreck was subsequently examined and in it was found the stone with a rope round it, which he now produced (in court as evidence), and which was such as was used for the purpose of sinking ropes and tubs. The prisoner told him the John Chambers, of Yarmouth, was in the vessel with him before it struck. The two boards produced in court were part of the wreck, and on one of them are painted the words, in white, "The Cloud of Cowes"- The witness underwent a severe cross-examination as to the use of the stray warp, particularly as to whether it could be used for trawling.- John Petty, boatman, who had accompanied the last witness on board, in giving corroborative evidence, said the rope in question was devised for running goods, such as tubs, and was not fitted for fishing, as there were too many stops upon it, and too closely placed.- Thomas Hunter, chief officer of the Coast Guard, East Cowes, and John Hayman, chief boatman of the Coast Guard Station, deposed as to the use of the rope.- The former stated he had frequently seen such ropes as the one in question on board smuggling vessels.- Mr Ford, after addressing the Bench on behalf of his client, called George Barton, fisherman, of Portsmouth, who said he had 35 years experience as a fisherman, and had found during that period ropes with stops, similar to the one now shown to him in use among fishermen when fishing on stony ground, he had made use of ropes having from 40 to 50 stops on them.- In reply to the Chairman, he said he could not say the stops on his rope were as close as those on the rope produced.- The Chairman said the Magistrates were bound to convict the prisoner. Although he was liable to a penalty of £100, he would only be fined £10 and £4 15s 5d costs, in all £14 15s 5d.

**\*NB Stray Warps:** The 'stray warp' refers to the practice used by smugglers of having a "spare rope" with a weight on one end and a marker at the other so should they be intercepted at sea they could tie the warp to their illegal cargo and drop it overboard to be recovered later. The Revenue developed a trawl and would often drag the trawl along the sea bed in an attempt to raise any contraband. As a result, the smugglers used to sail over as much rocky seabed as possible and thereby prevent the Revenue trawl from finding their goods. Other local records from the list of Customs Prosecutions:

a. **14th July 1756** William Rolf of Niton was found to have concealed 5 gallons of French brandy in a garden hedge

b. **26 April 1823** (Information lodged.) James Hawkins, of Niton found on board a Smuggling Vessel which carries a penalty of £100 was Acquitted, because he was not found or taken on board the Vessel.

c. **5th Dec 1829** William Stone of Whitwell guilty of Harboursing and concealing 4 Gallons of Brandy found on his premises 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1828. He was convicted and sentenced to the full Penalty of £100. NB The Defendant did not appear to answer the Summons against him served on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> Dec. Consequently a Levy Warrant was issued against his Goods & Chattels, to be served by Lieut. Neary of St Lawrence Station.d. **14th Oct 1836** Wm Haynes of Whitwell was found guilty of Plundering the Wreck of the Clarendon and fined £5 or two months in Gaol.

e. **17th Feb 1848** Thomas Morris Landlord of the White Lion, Niton) was convicted of smuggling 3 gallons of Geneva (Dutch Gin) at Niton and fined £100, and in default was committed to Winchester gaol until the fine was paid.

f. **26th Feb 1848** Thomas Cotton was found to be guilty of carrying 3 tubs of Spirits in Niton Parish and fined £100 and for non-payment committed to the Common Gaol at Newport.

g. **Hampshire Telegraph – 29 January 1873** Adolphus Newnham, stonemason, of a cottage in Niton, was charged with being in unlawful possession of a piece of whalebone, of the value of 1s, being part of the wreck of the *Valid*, of Ardrossan. Mr John Pepper, chief officer of the Coastguard- station, Blackgang, said that on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst. he saw the defendant going along the shore, and as he did not stop when called to do so, he fired a pistol, which caused him to stop, and on getting up to him, he found him in possession of the whalebone, which weighed ½ lb.- The defendant pleaded guilty, and was ordered to pay 1s, the value of the whalebone, 20s fine, and 7s 6s costs, in all £1, 8s. 6d. Louis Hale, of Whitwell, who was also found in possession of a piece of wreck at Chale, on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst. was ordered to pay 6d, the value of the article, a fine of 1s and 7s 6d costs

**h. Sandrock Hotel & Rock Cottage.** Hotel was initially built as a private residence in the latter half of the 18th Century with Rock Cottage following between 1812 and 1814 as a store and later as a Tap room as Sandrock House changed to become a Coaching Inn and Spa. Rumour has it that the Hotel and Cottage were once linked via a tunnel, but no sign of such a link exists today. In the early to mid 19th Century, the Hotel was a popular Spa and its guests included Princess Victoria and later Rudyard Kipling and Marconi. Unfortunately the continuous (and continuing) small land slides in the area led to the loss of the source of the Spa water spring and the Hotel started to lose its main attraction but struggled through until the 1970s until it finally burnt down in peculiar circumstances in October 1984. The Whittington family lived at Rock Cottage from 1841 until 1902, and were all variously employed at the Hotel and at the cottage which later housed a telephone switchboard for the hotel. Mr Waterworth and his family are buried at Chale and a memorial is on the inside wall of the church.

**“The Great Smuggler”.** (Page 342 The Undercliff by JL Whitehead.) Known for his exploits as a smuggler, Ralph Stone of Niton was renowned for his numerous exciting adventures. His tact, energy and judgement, along with his ubiquitous White Hat and loose velveteen coat and wainscot and affable manner made him local hero. He did, despite his reputation and wonderful seamanship, lose his ships at least twice and spent some time as a guest of Her Majesty in Winchester Gaol. However, when he eventually died he left his heirs considerable property, all garnered from his illicit trade. Sadly and despite his fame, little more is know about the man - perhaps some interested reader may know something? If so, answers to the Niton and Whitwell Parish Council. Thanks



# NITON SMUGGLERS



### **Norman as illicit liquor carrier**

During my residence in Niton I became acquainted with two brothers whose mother, a widow, lived in a row of cottages near Newport called the oyster shell houses, and kept a grog shop. It was patronised by all sorts and conditions of men, and women as well, especially on market days — men who had probably been on the drink in Newport for days together. As I was often out of employment my friends asked me if I would carry a keg of brandy, or sometimes two, to the aforementioned place, to which I made no objection though I knew there was considerable risk of being caught. The bargain was that I was to receive five shillings for one keg, seven and sixpence for two, and a supper and a glass of grog in each case, besides a bed and breakfast. My first trial took place on a very dark night. I went to a cottage in the lane leading up to St. Catherine's Down where I was supplied with a keg which I carried by the sling on one shoulder, and with a stout stick thrust through the loop which bound around the keg, thus distributing the burden equally on both shoulders. It was near ten when I started and as dark and dull as one could wish. I kept along the road close to the hedges and met but one or two persons who could not see what I had on my back. The greatest danger was the chance of meeting the exciseman, one of whom was stationed at Rookley. I had got beyond Rookley and was descending a long and steep incline called Sandy Way which is a rather deep cutting between high banks on each side, overtopped by trees and bushes. About halfway down the incline my attention was attracted by the distant sound of a horse's feet. He was coming towards me at full trot. To avoid the rider seeing me I leant back into a dark spot on the side of the road with the keg on my back, but in such a position as to be able to divest myself of it if close pressed, intending to make for a gate close by and so across the fields where I knew he could not follow me, as I should soon be lost in the darkness. The nearer the horseman approached the more my anxiety increased. At length he came opposite to where I stood, and neither looked to the right nor the left passing me at a good rate of speed, his body well forward in the saddle. Congratulating myself on my escape, if it was the exciseman, I pursued my journey. I now began to perspire and my mouth was parched with thirst which I assuaged when I reached Blackwater at a little stream which ran across the road. At length I reached Shide, which was the end of my journey of nearly nine miles. According to instructions I turned off the footpath and deposited the keg under a hedge and walked on to the cottage. I threw up some gravel to the windows, when a head and shoulders appeared, the head enveloped in an enormous white frilled nightcap. Mr. P. opened the door and I passed into the house. He struck a light by the aid of flint steel and burnt rag called tinder. A piece of thin wood pointed at the end and dipped in brimstone was applied to the burning tinder and a light was procured by its being applied to a tallow candle. I went into the field and brought in the keg which I handed over to Mrs. P. who had a hiding place for it in the garden. I had my supper washed down with ale, wound up with a stiff glass of grog, went to bed and slept the sleep of the just. I had a breakfast the next morning, received my fee of five shillings, and went on my way rejoicing in the idea that I had earned more in one night than I should have done at labouring in three or four days.



It was king Henry VIII who ordered Parish Guns to be placed in Churches in parishes along the English Channel coast following the reformation, as he feared that the Catholic Churches from the Continent would attack his new Church of England. This also happened in the Channel Islands whose churches were each also supplied with several Parish Guns. In the Chale Burial records, it is recorded that the Chale Gun was sent to one of the Worsley family at Appuldurcombe, but no record exists of the fate of Niton Gun after it was last seen 1904.