

All in all, if any readers get the chance to see this Force when holidaying in Cyprus, it is a worthwhile exercise. The Officers are universally friendly and it is fair to say very proud of their history and their job. Indeed, many are 2nd or 3rd generation British Police Officers.

The Security Force Police

Though descended from the pre 1960 Force, it must be mentioned that a pre 1960 Force also continues to function on the Island, guarding the British bases. This was formed in 1952 as the War Department Auxiliary Constabulary to guard Army Depots and was, then, made up of local veterans of the Cyprus Regiment who had served to defend Cyprus during World War Two. The Force was, subsequently, commanded by Officers of the UK's War Department Constabulary (now the Ministry of Defence Police) until local ranks took over command in the 1970s. The name has been changed, by then, to Army Depot Police, although they were, indeed remain, locally employed civilians. After taking over perimeter security at RAF bases, however, the term "Army" was

no longer accurate and they were renamed "Security Force Police". There are, also, now 3rd generation officers amongst their ranks and their loyal service over the last 53 years has been unsung but unstinting.

I hope this has filled in a gap by identification of our existing real Colonial Forces, the only ones we have left and, comparatively, nearer than one would have thought. However, rather than be embarrassed, I would urge readers to be impressed with both these Forces. Both effective and efficient in their respective duties, and more importantly, both happily able to rely on local personnel to deliver such a service, which shows eloquently that the locals remain friendly, Colony or no Colony!



THE GENTLEMEN RIDE BY

Roy Ingleton

*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 asks 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,
And watch the wall my darling, while the Gentlemen ride by!*

Rudyard Kipling: *A Smuggler's Song*



A view of the Kentish coastline as frequented by smugglers

An unwise traveller, walking or riding in the vicinity of Kingsgate on the Isle of Thanet in the early hours of a cold, foggy morning in March 1769 might, if he were

very unfortunate, have stumbled upon a band of men standing or crouching on the cliff top, looking out over the so-called Botany Bay. Unfortunate, because this was

the ruthless Callis Court Gang of smugglers, feared throughout Thanet and beyond and any stranger would automatically be assumed to be on the side of the Revenue men and his life would almost certainly be forfeit.

A signal light shone from the sea, answered by the light of another lantern, carefully and cunningly masked, shining seawards from the shore. The coast was clear and the armed lugger Lark drew closer to the shore where it dropped anchor. A small boat drew away, heavily laden with all manner of contraband; lace, tea, gin, brandy, tobacco and many other heavily taxed items. The crew of six drew the boat up onto the shingle and were met by their shore-based colleagues, leading a team of pack horses. The transfer of the goods from boat to horseback was quickly and efficiently accomplished, evidence of considerable experience, and the last packages were being secured when a loud voice cried out, 'Halt! In the name of the King I command you to halt!' The Excise patrol, tipped off by an informer had been lying in wait.

But the smugglers were not going to surrender easily and a fierce fight broke out between the two parties. The still night air was shattered by the clash of cutlasses, the reports of muskets and pistols and the cries of the wounded, some of whom had been mortally injured.

The leader of the gang, Joss Snelling, together with four of his men, made good their escape through an opening in the cliff and made their way to the top, only to be confronted by a lone officer. Without hesitation, the unfortunate man was gunned down while the smugglers made good their escape.

The battle over, the Excise men escorted eight prisoners to the nearby Captain Digby Inn, carrying their mortally wounded comrade with them. He was the only fatality among the King's men, although several had been wounded. The smugglers were less fortunate as, apart from the eight prisoners, ten of their comrades were lying dead in the surf. Perhaps these were the lucky ones, since the prisoners were tried, convicted and sentenced to death and ultimately hanged on Gallows Field, Sandwich.

There was no evidence to convict the gang's leader, twenty-eight year old Joss Snelling, although several of the Excise men thought they had recognized him at the scene. Snelling had lost most of his gang but, within a year, he had formed another nearly twice the size. He continued to operate in the area for a number of years, earning the nickname 'The Broadstairs Smuggler'. In 1829 the now elderly Joss Snelling was presented to the future Queen Victoria as 'the famous Broadstairs smuggler' and went on to live to the ripe old age of ninety-six, a good age by any standard but an exceptional one for someone who was for so long involved in the dangerous and ruthless pastime of smuggling.

Joss Snelling's story is but one of many associated with smuggling in Kent and Sussex. With around three-

quarters of the county surrounded by sea and given its closeness to the continent of Europe, it is not surprising that Kent was (and perhaps still is!) a favoured place for smuggling. The heyday for this activity was in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when smuggling was a regular sideline for local sailors and fishermen. Soon large gangs were almost permanently engaged in bringing contraband goods into England and making a very handsome living by it.

The development of this illicit trade was fostered by a number of disparate factors, all of which were connected with the economic and political climate of the times. For some time England had been waging a war against Napoleonic France which had so depleted the nation's coffers that the country was close to bankruptcy. The already large number of people living in abject poverty was increasing daily as potential employers lacked the funds to take on more staff. The situation of agricultural workers was such that they took to participating in the notorious 'Swing' riots, destroying crops, hayricks, buildings and machinery. And the commitment of so many troops and seamen to the wars meant that few could be spared to police the English Channel and the Kentish coastline, giving virtually free rein to those who dared make the crossing and become involved in this nefarious activity.

Although often romanticised in literature and folklore, smugglers could, as we have seen, often become violent and vicious. Such were the numbers involved on both sides that the conflicts between them and the authorities could, at times, be accurately described as battles. Apart from the Battle of Botany Bay, notable incidents included the 'battles' of Lydd (1721), Stonecrouch (1733), Sandwich Bay (1746), Goudhurst (1747), Whitstable (1780), Sandgate (1820), Hampton and Brookland (both 1821).

Apart from Joss Snelling, there were a number of notable characters engaged in this illegal trade, such as Richard Joy, the 'Kentish Giant', reputed to stand over seven feet tall and weighing in at well over twenty stone. A farm labourer from Whitstable, he was caught smuggling and avoided the death penalty by being pressed into the Navy where he was renowned for carrying a loaded cannon across the ship's deck for a wager. It took six men to replace it. Joy eventually returned to his old tricks and was drowned on another smuggling run at the age of sixty-seven.

Another character was Samuel Jackson – 'Slippery Sam' – who, born in 1730, very soon embarked on a life of crime, including involvement in smuggling, like his father before him. He was obviously quite successful as, at the age of twenty, he purchased the freehold of a farmhouse under which he stored his illicit goods in a maze of tunnels. The house still exists and is known, not surprisingly as 'Slippery Sam's' and has been used in recent years as a restaurant.

Sam's nickname came about as a result of a daring escape he made from the old Maidstone Gaol by stripping and covering his body in axle grease, enabling him to slip through a small window opening. His career was short-lived, however, as in 1760 he was hanged for shooting and killing a Revenue officer and his body was hung in a gibbet as a warning to others.

In 1745 Deal was already infamous as a centre for smuggling. One contemporary writer, Fanny Burney, penned, *There are said to be in the town of Deal, not less than two hundred young men and sea-faring people, who are known to have no visible way of getting a living, but by the infamous trade of smuggling... This smuggling has converted those employed in it, first from honest, industrious fishermen, to lazy, drunken and profligate smugglers.*

Such was the notoriety of the town that, in 1781, a military operation involving nine hundred infantrymen and a hundred cavalry descended on the town but this had only limited success as the townsfolk were expecting them and had spirited the contraband goods away. Three years later, a further military expedition burned all the town's fishing boats as retribution for their owners' illicit activities.

Much as tax evasion today is not regarded by many to be a real crime, since the only loser is seen to be the government, so smuggling was widely accepted and exploited by the people in Kentish coastal towns and villages, not to mention many of the professional classes and nobility at that time. The Member of Parliament for the City of Canterbury, Sir Thomas Hardress KC, was known as the 'Smugglers' Friend' because of the large number of smugglers he successfully defended in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. There have also been suggestions that Sir Edward Knatchbull (1781-1849), magistrate and pillar of Kent society, may have had associations with the smugglers as many of his decisions seemed to favour them, enabling them to escape the death penalty. His intervention prevented the body of Cephas Quedsted (see below) being hung in chains at Brookland and instead quietly buried in Aldington. His apparent leniency towards so-called 'Swing Rioters' also aroused adverse comments from many, including Sir Robert Peel, the Home Secretary.

Perhaps the most famous of the early smuggling bands was the so-called Hawkhurst Gang which had its base at the Oak and Ivy pub in that town, on the edge of the Romney Marshes. The concept of a 'gang' was a rather vague one as there was probably only a handful of more-or-less permanent smugglers, the remainder being made up from a wide circle of willing helpers. It has been reported that the Hawkhurst Gang could call upon the services of some five hundred men for a particular operation.

Two separate incidents marked the end of this gang: the power and influence of the gang in the nearby village of Goudhurst provoked a great deal of resentment and a

former soldier, George Sturt, formed a militia group to defend the village and keep the smugglers out. A fierce battle ensued in which the smugglers were repulsed, leaving three of their number dead. The second event was the callous and brutal murder of a Customs officer and a prosecution witness he was escorting. The general public was so horrified by this killing and by the viciousness and general unlawfulness of the gang that information was leaked to the authorities and the leaders of the gang were arrested and executed in 1747, their bodies being hung in chains at various places in the county where they were well-known.

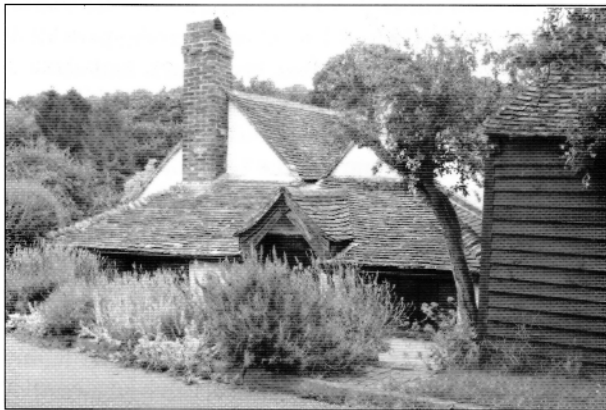
However, although their activities were either ignored (by people 'turning their faces to the wall') or actively encouraged, the major smuggling gangs were quite ruthless and would not hesitate to kill any revenue officer or trooper who stood in their way. With groups of around 250 smugglers and their helpers unloading the contraband, the revenue officers, even with the support of a squadron of dragoons, were at a great disadvantage against such a determined mob. It was not until after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1816 that the government had enough money, ships and manpower to really wage war on this activity and between 1817 and 1831, the Royal Navy provided a blockade force of 1,480 armed men, stationed at various points along the coast between Sheerness and West Sussex, supported by galleys and cutters which patrolled the English Channel. With such a force opposing them, the smugglers had themselves to become more organised, more ruthless if they were to succeed. The golden days of the part-time, amateur smuggler were over and large, semi-professional bands began to be formed.



The Walnut Tree Inn, Aldington, place of resort for the Aldington Gang

One highly successful and dangerous gang which emerged was known as the Aldington Gang, which was based in the Walnut Tree Inn in the village of Aldington and worked the coast between Rye and Dover in the 1820s. Its leader was a strong and intelligent man by the name of George Ransley who came from a well-known family of criminals. Much of George Ransley's success

may be put down to his highly developed organisational skills and an almost military discipline which he demanded of his followers. While one section of the gang speedily unloaded the cargo, another section stood guard with muskets and cutlasses. Once the contraband was stowed on the carts or packhorses, the escort would follow the procession to protect its rear. A policy of never leaving a wounded smuggler to be captured and interrogated ensured both the loyalty of the men and the secrecy of the casualties involved. The proceeds from the contraband would pay for a doctor (who knew better than to ask too many questions) and provide some financial support for the family of any wounded member of the gang.



The 'Bourne Tap' today

Of course, the smugglers never described themselves as such; George Ransley was ostensibly a farmer who also ran an illicit drinking house where some of the smuggled liquor could be sampled. His simple house, which is still standing and occupied, was known as the Bourne Tap and brought him in a very handsome income.

The Aldington Gang first came to the notice of the authorities in November 1820 when a galley laden to the gunwales with contraband spirits and tobacco, came ashore at Sandgate. A crowd of some 250 men was awaiting its arrival, already formed into three groups, one to unload the cargo and two to act as their protectors. Not surprisingly, such a large gathering did not escape the notice of members of the blockade force, two of whom challenged the smugglers and were promptly attacked and badly wounded for their pains.

The noise attracted two other naval men, one of whom was quickly captured by the mob while the other bravely fired into the crowd and brandished his cutlass, despite being wounded in the leg. Such efforts, whilst supremely courageous, did little to deter the crowd which swiftly made off with the cargo. The captured man was released the next day.

A couple of months later, another illicit landing was made at Camber Sands, between Rye in Sussex and Lydd in Kent. Once more over two hundred men were involved but this time they were intercepted by a strong

government force which chased them across the marshes to Brookland. A fierce battle ensued, later to be described in local folklore as the 'Battle of Brookland,' in which five men (four smugglers and one blockade man) died and more than twenty were wounded. Two of the smugglers were detained, one of whom declared he was merely an innocent bystander and was acquitted. The other prisoner was one Cephas Qusted who was alleged to have been one of the ringleaders. During the melee on the beach, Qusted handed a musket to a young man standing beside him, assuming he was one of the gang and told him to 'blow an officer's brains out.' But the man was in fact a Royal Navy midshipman who gratefully took the weapon and promptly turned it on Qusted and arrested him. Despite a rigorous interrogation, he refused to 'grass' on his colleagues and turn Kings Evidence and so was convicted and hanged on 4 July 1821. Although often brutal and vicious, the Aldington Gang evidently had a rather black sense of humour as was demonstrated when a captured officer was blindfolded and cast off a cliff top. With his legs dangling over the edge, the poor man managed to cling on to a few tufts of grass to save himself from falling to what he believed would be certain death but eventually his fingers tired and he released his hold - to fall all of six inches onto the beach below!

The success of the Aldington Gang, like any other, depended on the support and goodwill of the local populace but some members grew to believe themselves beyond any law and engaged in housebreaking and burglary and other crimes against the local inhabitants and their support dwindled away. With a large price on the heads of the ringleaders, it was only a matter of time before someone would wreak their revenge and inform the authorities. And so, when a popular local naval quartermaster was killed by the gang, and another wounded on the beach at Dover, the large reward offered was claimed by several informants.

The information received proved invaluable and one night in October 1826, a substantial group of blockade men, accompanied by two Bow Street Runners, surrounded George Ransley's house at the Bourne Tap. The guard dogs were quickly disposed of and Ransley was arrested, still in his nightshirt, and a further seven smugglers were apprehended.

Still working on the information received, within a few weeks a total of nineteen had been arrested and were tried at the Maidstone Assizes for a number of serious, capital crimes. Found guilty, all were sentenced to death but, thanks to the intervention of their astute lawyer, they were reprieved and transported to Australia instead. George Ransley's knowledge of farming stood him in good stead and in due course he was granted a ticket of leave and permitted to send for his wife and family. It is understood that he went on to live to a ripe old age in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

This prosecution signalled the end of the Aldington

Gang, the reputation of which was later enhanced by the publication of the *Adventures of Dr Syn* by Russell Thorndyke.

Dover was another favoured landing place for smuggled goods and in 1820 a revenue officer known as Billy 'Hellfire' Lilburn, on the Excise cutter 'Lively,' caught a galley with eleven Folkestone and Sandgate smugglers off Dover. The facts were fully described in the Kentish Gazette on 30 May 1820:- ... *ten of them being found fit for the navy, the whole were committed to Dover gaol until the ten could be removed to some of His Majesty's receiving ships. ... from the vast influx of ill-looking men [it was thought] that a rescue would be attempted and every precaution was taken ... to guard against it by having a body of constables, the seamen belonging to the preventive service and a detachment of military, drawn up both inside and out-side the gaol.*

The time of removal was 12 o'clock, but two hours before that a large body had collected together which continued increasing every minute and ... several hundreds were collected in front and at every avenue leading to the gaol, with every disposition to riot and rescue.

The Mayor and another magistrate attended the scene and gave the constables strict instructions to keep the peace and to the seamen and soldiers not to charge 'unless absolutely driven to do so.' The newspaper report continues.

The door of the prison was opened and the smugglers just on the point of being brought out when a general shout was set up by the crowd of 'Liberty for ever!' and a number of stones and brickbats were thrown at them.

Things became so serious that the Mayor directed that the removal of the prisoners be suspended for the time being which was a prudent move.

The mob being foiled in their attempt to rescue the prisoners proceeded to further acts of violence and, notwithstanding that the Riot Act was twice read from the gaol window by the Mayor, commenced an attack on the gaol with crowbars, pick-axes, hammers, saws, etc., unroofed the top and threw part of the side wall down and not only released the whole of the 11 smugglers but several other prisoners confined in the gaol under sentence; and they succeeded in getting them clear off, the imposing number of the mob intimidated the peace officers and others from acting. One of the persons most active in the riot was taken and placed in a chaise with two constables, to be conveyed to St Augustine's Gaol at Canterbury; but a mob collected at the end of the town, stopped the chaise, dragged the rioter and constables out and notwithstanding the former was hand-cuffed to the

latter, the mob threw the constables to the ground, and severing the hand-cuff with a cold chisel, released the rioter. After the release of the smugglers, who all belong to Folkestone, the crowd dispersed and the town remained tranquil.

A few days later, the following notice appeared in the Kentish Gazette:

Friday, June 2nd 1820

DOVER

WHEREAS on FRIDAY last, the 26th May, a very numerous lawless and desperate GANG of SMUGGLERS, disguised in round Frocks, as Countrymen, and armed with Bludgeons, and many of them with concealed Fire-arms, assembled round His Majesty's Gaol at Dover, and having provided themselves with pick-axes, crow bars, and other implements, proceeded in a most daring and tumultuous manner, feloniously to BREAK and ENTER the back part of the GAOL, and released therefrom, [there followed a list of names], eleven Smugglers, all Natives or Inhabitants of Folkestone, who were confined in the said Gaol – Whoever will give information to Sir Thomas MANTELL, Mayor of Dover, so that any one or more of the person or persons guilty of the said daring outrage and felony may be brought to justice, shall receive a reward of **ONE HUNDRED POUNDS**

And whoever will apprehend and bring to His Majesty's Gaol at Dover, any of the eleven Smugglers thus lawlessly released, shall receive a reward of FIFTY POUNDS for every Smuggler so apprehended and brought to Gaol
By order of the Mayor and Justices,

The gaol was so badly damaged a new one had to be built.

A similar, albeit smaller-scale riot occurred in Folkestone, also in 1820, when a blockade man by the name of John Kelty arrested a smuggler in possession of a tub of spirits and took him to the nearby watch house. Before he could arrange for the prisoner to be removed to more secure accommodation, an armed mob broke in, injured Kelty and released the prisoner.

These events, together with the smashing of the Aldington and Hawkhurst Gangs, effectively marked the end of large scale smuggling in South-east England.

This article is an edited version of a chapter in Roy Ingleton's forthcoming book, Kent Murders and Mayhem, published by Pen & Sword Books.