

A SMUGGLER'S ACCOUNT BOOK By JOHN BRAMBER

*"The fire-flash shines from Reculver cliff,
And the answering light burns blue in the skiff,
And thus they stand, that smuggling band,
Some in the water and some on the sand,
Ready those contraband goods to land:
The night is dark, they are silent and still—
At the head of the party is Smuggler Bill!"*

THUS wrote Thomas Ingoldsby more than a century ago, and it is difficult to withhold a certain sneaking admiration for these daring and reckless fellows. One can picture the silent ride to the coast on moonless nights; the signal from their lantern on the beach; the answering signal light from their boat at sea; the hurried landing of the tubs of spirits; the wild gallop of the smugglers with tubs slung across their horses; sometimes their discovery by Excisemen; a chase and a fight.

Thomas Ingoldsby made an attractive figure of "Smuggler Bill," but who will celebrate in song modern smugglers who convey contraband goods by aeroplane, or conceal them beneath their garments?

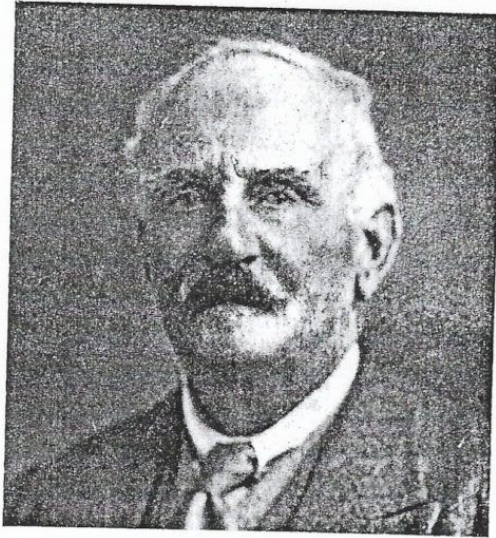
There exists an interesting link with Sussex smugglers of bygone days in the form of an account book kept by a smuggler named George Gillham during the years 1825-7; it is a treasured possession of his great-grandson, Mr George Gillham (now in his 82nd year) of Little Common, near Bexhill.

This George Gillham of old time was a member of a gang operating in the neighbourhood of Little Common, where he resided, and the entries in his book throw considerable light upon their unlawful proceedings.

The following names of members of the gang appear in the book—"Toms Messeg, Willm Vitler, Willm Savig, Willm Britt, Toms Smith, Willm Winham, John Farmer, Saml Beeching, Josh Curtis, A. Beney, James Sinding, Hennery Stubardfield, Toms Millers, Willm Miller, Geo Gillham Senr., Richd Gillham, John Gillham, Toms Gillham, James Gillham, Geo Gillham, Junr."

These names frequently occur, and the amounts paid to them individually range from 2/- to 17/6.

Mr Gillham tells me that the Gillhams above named—Richard, John, Thomas, James and Geo Gillham, junr.—were sons of George Gillham, senr., and that several members of the gang were known by nick-names; George Gillham, senr. was "Smack," and his son, Tom, "Peckham," and three brothers named Bennett, who were also members, were known respectively as



Mr. George Gillham

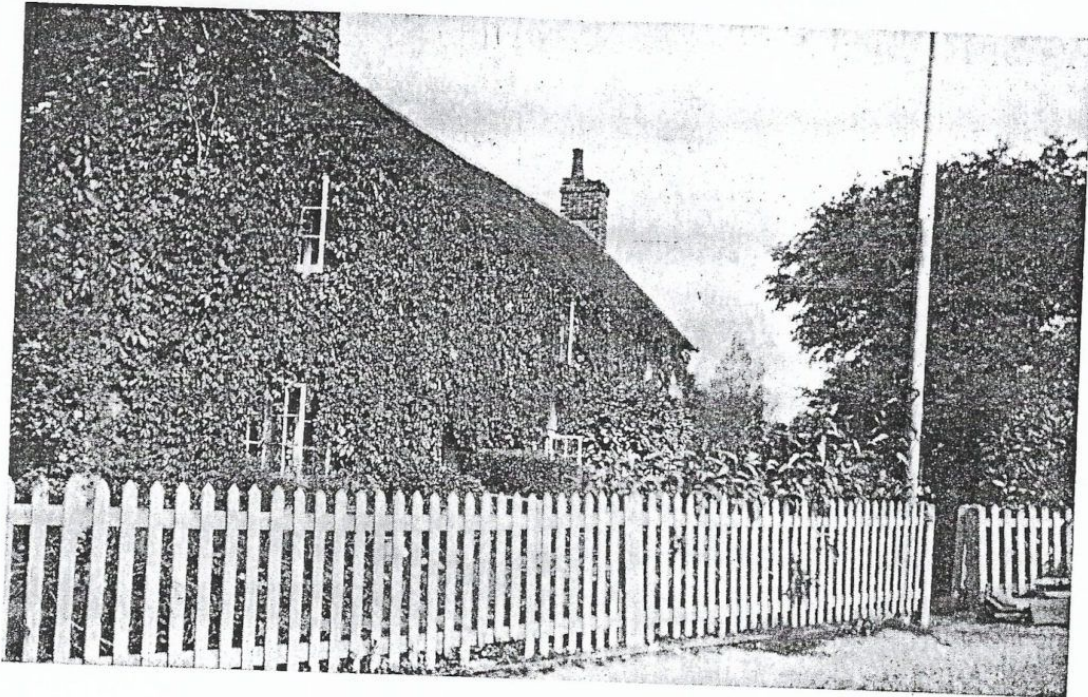
"Ducky," "Sham," and "Harlequin," and another member named Shoemaker was called "Boathook."

The lawful occupation of "Smack" was that of a builder, and "Ducky," when he discontinued cheating the revenue, acted as sexton at Little Common church. He died in 1877.

It appears by the account book that the gang possessed two boats, referred to as "The Long Boat," and "The Princess Charlott," and some of the following entries refer to their "voiges.":

	£	s.	d.
To the Wite Rock		3	0
To the Bay		3	0
To the Markstone		10	6
To the Old Sluices		10	6
Paid to the men at see	14	0	0
To the man in the Bay		3	0
Shoos for the man		6	0
To working of five Mis Nights		17	6
To Night Working	1	1	0
John Gillham to sending to Hooe and Expences	1	0	0
To Pevnesey time		1	9
Time lost and money spent	3	9	0
Richd Gillham to sea 4 times once across to France	-	-	-
A Night at the Havenmouth	-	-	-
Dew to me	4	4	9
The Poundeg & frait on the sackont voig		11	-
The third Voig paid for Working of to at 3/6		7	0
The 4 Voig Poundeg for 4 tubs at 8/6	1	14	0
Disburstments on the Last Voig	4	17	0

*Smack
Bram
Circade
Manufacture*



PEACH COTTAGE, LITTLE COMMON

From an old photograph

The words "Mis Nights" have no reference to the fair sex, but simply record the prosaic fact that the awaited cargoes did not arrive.

The following entries refer to the purchasers of the contraband goods:—

	£	s.	d.
Arthur Winborn paid the Poundeg for 5 tubs at 8/6	2	2	6
John Gillham to at £1 8s.	2	16	0
6 to Henry Rich	18	18	0
2 to Mr Cat	6	6	0
2 to Richd Tomas	6	6	0
6 to Mr Smith	18	17	6
1 to Mr Dawe	3	3	6
1 to Toms Jarvis	3	3	0
2 to Saml Beeching	6	6	0
4 to Sinden at £3 5s. 6d.	13	2	0

There is an entry to the effect that on the 19th December, 1825, Toms Jarvis paid "three of Darking one pounds Noats." Mr Gillham has one of this Bank's "Noats"; it is dated "the 12th day of May, 1823," and is payable "here or at Messrs Gill, Thomas & Co., 42 Lombard Street, London." It is signed:

"For R. Piper & Son, G. Dewdney, & T. Piper
Thos Piper."

Presumably "Darking" was Dorking.

When the use of firearms, both by the Excisemen (also known as Preventive Officers) and

the smugglers, became general, the gang was disbanded, and their boat the "Princess Charlott," having served its purpose, was broken up and sold piecemeal. The names of several of the gang appear as purchasers of firewood, "rop," posts, planks, "beems," etc., and there is a note that "Geo Gillham owes to Comperney for copper, £5 12s. 6d."

Mr Gillham, who well remembers several of this gang, some of whom lived to a ripe old age, furnished me with the following additional interesting particulars, which he heard from their own lips.

"Peckham," who lived with his father, "Smack," observing some Excisemen approaching their cottage in search of him, made a judicious bolt by the back door, wandered about the country for days, and did not return until he deemed it safe to do so.

Beside the front door of this cottage stood two box trees in tubs; beneath them were other large tubs in which smuggled goods were concealed.

The cottage in question (now called Peach Cottage) is at Little Common, and is still in the occupation of members of the Gillham family.

The box trees referred to can be seen in the accompanying photo.

Once "Sham" was to have met other members of the gang on a dark night at Willow Tot, Pevensy Bay, but unfortunately ran into a company of Excisemen. He was arrested, and imprisoned in Horsham jail, but was treated with great indulgence, and sometimes allowed out on errands, from which he always faithfully returned.

Upon another occasion members of the gang were imprisoned in one of the Martello Towers, but by removing mortar from between the bricks managed to escape—all except one whose figure was too rotund to enable him to squeeze through the aperture they had made.

Another incident related to Mr Gillham by the smugglers themselves tells of the escape of one of them from a Martello Tower by means of a rope which his wife had taken to him concealed in a so-called pie. The rope, however, was too short by about 20 ft. and the drop occasioned him a "middlin" jar!

The Excisemen once captured a number of tubs of spirits and engaged Samuel Beeching, a local farmer, to convey the captured cargo to Hastings. This worthy, or unworthy, man combined smuggling with agricultural pursuits, and so successfully plied the two officers appointed to accompany him with strong drink that they fell asleep in the wagon, which was stopped near an inn at Bulverhithe. There the tubs were thrown into a field by James Gillham, and afterwards retrieved by the innkeeper.

Doubtless the two officers believed in the old adage "Silence is golden," for nothing more was heard of the affair.

Wives of the smugglers sometimes aided and abetted their husbands, and one of them successfully concealed some tubs beneath her chair by means of her voluminous skirts. The fact that they were not discovered does not say much for the perspicacity of the searchers.

Of course there is a tragic side to the romance of the old smuggling days, and occasionally these lawless men tortured and murdered the unfortunate Excisemen.

There was at Sidley a very desperate gang, and one man was killed in a fight there. Mr Gillham was acquainted with one member of that gang whose reputation was such that he was known as "Old Dreadful."

The history of the Little Common gang also has a tragic page. They had bribed an Exciseman to allow them to land a cargo, but he

was the first to attempt to seize the boat as it neared the beach; whereupon they dragged him into the boat, rowed out to sea, murdered him, and threw the body overboard. When the body was washed ashore the money paid as a bribe was found in his pockets.

Attached to the account book from which extracts have been given is a book containing entries for groceries supplied to the George Gillham ("Smack") already referred to, and it may be of interest to note some of the prices paid in the year 1818 and thereabout, and the educational attainments of tradesmen in those far-off days. A few entries will suffice.

Mr G. Gillham, Dr. to R. Stride.	£	s.	d.
2 oz. Tea at 7/-	10½
½ lb. yello sope at 1/-	6
½ lb. Tracle	3
1 lb Sugar	9
1 lb. Butter	1 2
1 lb. Candles	1 0
3 lbs. 8 ozs. Cheese	2 5
6 lbs. 4 ozs. Bacon	5 2
2 ozs. Pepper	5½
Lf. Bread	1½
½ pint Vinegar	2½
½ pt. Oatmale	2½
1 lb. Lard	1 1
½ Gall. Flour	1 0
1 Gall. Salt	2 6
½ pt. Shoe oil	6
1 lb. Raisons	6

The price of tea was rather stiff, but the prices of "Oatmale," "Tracle," etc., seem fairly moderate.

TO MAY

I used to love April, but she was so cold,
I'm weaving a garland for May;
To have a new friend need not banish the old,
But now she has danced right away.

Shy April as Lady-in-waiting was right,
While May wears the smile of a Queen,
One fitfully charmed us with yellow and white,
The other wears purple and green.

Her hyacinth mantle invites our desire,
Her tulips soft breezes will kiss,
Deep bluebells all gather that side to admire,
Bright irises cluster on this.

Now lilac is waiting to carry her glove,
Anemones gather her train,
I'm meaning to ride over clouds with my love,
Next year you will see us again.

KATHERINE BEARN.