

GEORGE CULHAM - 'THE NOTED SMUGGLER'

The article on Maritime History in the Victoria County History of Suffolk tells us that 'During the eighteenth century smuggling was a regular industry in Suffolk, success in which must have compensated the inhabitants living near the coast for many a bad fishing season'. It goes on to explain that there were well-organised smuggling associations based in the continental ports, Ostend, Dunkirk, Flushing and Calais, which master-minded the business. The remote and unfrequented Suffolk coast was a favoured landing place because it was less well guarded than the coasts of Essex, Kent and Sussex. Once the contraband had been brought ashore, the work of transporting it inland was eagerly undertaken by poorly paid farm labourers who would sometimes work in large gangs of up to 40 or 50 men. The smugglers would pay them a guinea (£1 1s) a day whereas their wages were 1s 6d a day for working the land¹.

In 1785 Richard Chaplin of Sudbourne placed a notice in the *Ipswich Journal* declaring that he had, 'some time back, declined the branch of smuggling'. Richard went on to become a prosperous farmer, and his story may be read in the Orford & District Local History Bulletin 8, pp 7-9, 'The Making of a Gentleman'. George Culham of Orford's story is a less happy one.

A report in the *Ipswich Journal* of 22 May 1784, often quoted in books on smuggling, says that about thirty villains attacked a party of twelve Excise men [customs officers] near Easton intending to recover goods seized a short while before. A bloody engagement took place during which men on both sides were wounded, and the smugglers were put to flight. The latter were supposed to be led by 'the noted George Cullum of Brandeston'.

A Suffolk man's death on the outskirts of London

The George Culham 'of Orford', who made his will on 4 August 1797, is probably the same man. However he described himself as a farmer and declared he was 'sound in mind, though not of body' as he lay in a bed at the *Bird-in-Hand* in Stratford, Essex (now east London). He appointed his 'beloved wife Lydia' and Mr. Edward Rush of Little Stonham executors and guardians of his son George, aged nine years. They were to arrange the boy's education and, when he came of age, he would inherit. Thereafter he should pay his widowed mother £30 annually from the rents arising from his father's estate. Rush was left £20 for his trouble in undertaking the 'arduous' matter of the executorship. The money was well earned, as will be seen.

Edward Rush got to work immediately but it was more than a year before he could submit, to the probate authorities at Norwich, an incomplete account of the affairs of the deceased.

First he arranged a London undertaker to transport the body to Copdock, from whence it was taken by hearse and chaise to Orford for burial on 9 August. The burial register records that George was aged forty. Even before the undertaker could begin, a bill had to be paid 'for damage sustained' at the Stratford inn. Perhaps George had died as a result of a violent incident.

Property in Orford

Rush fulfilled his executorship as far as he could, placing an advertisement in the *Ipswich Journal* in September 1797, asking for debtors and creditors of George Culham to pay or claim accordingly. He had to consult with Lydia Culham, involving journeys to Easton and Orford, and he also journeyed to London. The following November he was again in Orford 'to settle when to have a sale at *Havergate Island*'. An inventory of the contents of Culham's dwelling house in Orford was straightforward, and came to a little over £100. The building comprised kitchen, wash house and small room, with chambers above each, a cellar and garret. Outdoors were three mares, three colts, a large open boat and a mast, all valued at £64 16s 0d. The auction of the contents, by Robert Osborne, took place on 11 October at the house.