

Another George Culham was living on the island in the early years of the nineteenth century, and may have been there since 1797. It has not been possible to find any relationship between the two, but they are likely to have been related. This George fared badly like his namesake, his household furniture, farming equipment and stock being auctioned on instructions from the Sheriff of Suffolk in October 1807. It is unclear whether he was the George who died in December 1807, aged 77, and was buried in Orford churchyard, or his son, also George. Most likely it was the latter, since two years later the son was in Ipswich Gaol, an insolvent debtor. Described as '*formerly of Havergate Island*' it is clear that this had been the location of his farm. Farming must have been a cover for illegal activities. He had only a cow and a calf, a sow and pigs, although there were crops of hay, wheat, oats and beans too. His cart mares, geldings, wagon and Dutch carts would all double as means of transporting smuggled goods as well as farm produce. He was discharged in July 1809, thanks to an Act of Parliament of that year.

The island, tithed free and extra-parochial, was offered for renting en bloc or in lots, in 1813. There were 275 acres of marshland and saltings, the latter to be enclosed by the landlord, along with other improvements. The Land Agent operated from Southampton Row, London⁵. It seems likely that the improvements were intended to make it more profitable as a farm and thus remove the attraction to smugglers.

One of the two younger George Culhams was a hero to local people when he saved the lives of a number of Orford men on 31 January 1791. During a fishing dispute with men from Brightlingsea, when boats from Orford went to challenge a dozen intruders at the lower end of Havergate Island, one of the Brightlingsea vessels rammed a local boat and sank it. George, who was in the Orford boat, jumped into a little boat being towed, cut it away and saved all the men, who otherwise might have drowned⁶.

If we are to believe Richard Cobbold's '*The History of Margaret Catchpole*', written fifty years after the events described, the villain John Luff was wounded on Orford Ness and died in bed in the house on Havergate Island. The '*Red House*', as it was called in the novel, was occupied by a shepherd who acted as a lookout and signaller for the smugglers. It is entirely possible that George Culham could have placed one of his gang there, masquerading as a shepherd, or that a genuine shepherd was more than happy to assist the smugglers. A light, intended in the story to mislead the smugglers, was placed '*in the window upstairs*'. The house faced southeast towards the open sea, so the window in question could have been the little roof light to be seen in the photograph above.



Cases containing 'raw spirits' on Orford Beach sketched by Emmeline Rope 100 years after George Culham's exploits. *Orford Museum*

Vic Harrup

Notes

1. M Oppenheim, 'Maritime History', *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Suffolk*, Constable & Co Ltd, 1907, Vol II, pp 235-237.
2. An armed vessel, privately owned, with a commission from the government authorising it to be used against