

Daphne Road, Orford

by Vic Harrup

When I wrote a Bulletin article about the smuggler George Culham in 2009 I did not make the connection between one of Culham's vessels, the *Daphne*, and the road so-named. Not long after the start of the French Revolution of 1789, the Republic stepped up its privateering, which had existed for a long time, to try and cripple trade between the continent and Britain. Their corsairs attacked and captured British merchant ships for their cargoes. Granted *lettres de marque* by the authorities they could show they were not pirates but operating legally. In response some East Anglian shipowners armed their vessels with cannon and likewise obtained letters of marque to enable them to legally capture enemy craft and claim prize money from the Admiralty. A Norwich tobacconist, Phineas Jacobs, joined the Orford farmer George Culham (spelled Cullum in Admiralty documents) in this enterprise, and their captain was Thomas Abbott. He obtained his Letter of Marque in November 1795, for the *Daphne*, which was a cutter of 32 tons, carrying 4 carronades (later 4 brass two pounder cannons and 2 iron three pounders) and with a crew of 20 men.

It was the occupation of Holland by the French in 1794, that explains why two Dutch 'doggers' taking cod and fish oil from Iceland to Rotterdam, were seized by the crew of the *Daphne* the following year and sent to Orford. In January 1796 another Dutch vessel, the *Clarissa*, was taken and one of the *Daphne*'s crew, Robert Thatcher revealed the whole story in a sworn statement at the Mansion House, in London, on 24th July 1797, just before George Culham met his fate. Although the case continued for another two years most of the 'evidence' for the defence that followed was influenced by bribes offered by the remaining owner of the *Daphne*.

Thatcher said he was a mariner from Woodbridge and was engaged by Captain Abbott and George Culham, 'one of the owners', to go on board the ship. Sailing from Orford to Hamburg, the crew of the *Daphne* discharged six bales of India goods, picked up in London, at Barthrop's Hard, on the lower part of Orford Haven. The bales were taken away in carts by Amos Goodwin of Framsdon, Phineas Jacobs, tobacconist, of Norwich and Jeremiah Culham, tailor, of Orford. The *Daphne* continued to Hamburg and took on 5 tons of tobacco 'sand', 10 bales of leaf tobacco, a box of Strasbourg snuff and 6 ankers of Geneva (gin). On 12th January 1796, they captured the *Clarissa*, captained by Simmonds, on its way to Amsterdam from Surinam. Crew members on board were exchanged with three on the *Daphne* and the latter proceeded to Ramsholt Dock where the tobacco and snuff were taken away in carts by George Culham, Jeremiah Culham and Phineas Jacobs.

It is clear that Jacobs and Culham were smugglers as well as 'law-abiding patriots', so they were not awarded prize money for the *Clarissa*. Their exploits became famous nationally in 1799 when the court ruled in the case of the *Clarissa* and another captured ship, the *Circe*, perhaps explaining why a road in the town was named after the vessel, although Daphne Cottage was probably named first. Culham had died at the Bird-in-Hand in Stratford, Essex, and wrote his will there on 4th August 1797 'sound in mind, but not in body'. He was aged 40, and either fell from the top of a coach (Admiralty records), or from some other violent incident. Thus he escaped arrest when the cases of *Clarissa* and *Circe* came to the Admiralty Court. However, Jacobs was found guilty of smuggling goods stolen from the two merchantmen, lost the *Daphne* and its captured cargo and was bankrupted by a fine.

It appears from notes written by the executor of his will, Edward Rush, who was bequeathed £20 for his trouble in undertaking this 'arduous' matter, that Culham rented two properties, one in Orford and another on Havergate Island. He was also having a 'new house' built at the time of his death. In the Ipswich Journal of 18th November 1797 was notice of an auction