

This might be regarded as brazen cheek, but it shows how respectable smuggling was at that time. What might be called free trade was a protest against import duties by the middle classes, such as farmers and small tradesmen. Smuggling was a business and involved most people, especially in coastal communities. We know from his diary that Parson Woodforde in Norfolk was not above receiving smuggled goods, and it appears from William Goodwin's diary that tea and spirits were virtually unobtainable in country areas through legal channels. In other passages he reveals himself as a virtuous gentleman, and humane in relation to, for example, the suffering caused by the slave trade and warfare. He also believed that the National Debt, hugely increased during the previous hundred years, must be tackled. Perhaps therefore he abjured buying smuggled goods.

What, though, can we conclude from the newspaper advertisement? Richard Chaplin firstly thanks those who helped him in his smuggling activities and those who turned a blind eye to what he did, for rewards, no doubt in kind. Then he offers for sale the two carts, carrying 80 and 40 tubs respectively, which he had previously used for smuggled spirits. Using the quantities noted by William Goodwin it appears these are especially large carts. Goodwin reckoned the carts he saw carried 30 tubs, each tub holding four gallons. Nearer the coast, before they were distributed into smaller wagons, carts could carry heavier weights especially along sandy lanes and across heaths. Inland on heavy clay, lighter vehicles might be required. Richard's carts do not appear to be suitable for farm work since he recommends them to malsters, ashmen or, of course, smugglers. He is also selling horse equipment and the vault sounds like a place to hide contraband, perhaps out on the marshes.

The sale is at a property that is not his dwelling place, although he is the owner. We know that he became the owner of Cowton Farm. The Court Book for Iken Manor reveals that Richard, described as a yeoman, acquired the copyhold of Colting Marsh, along with several others in April 1787, so he may have owned the freehold of Cowton Farm and its farm lands as early as this. The house stands remote from the village, near the parish boundary, on one of the routes to the marshes and the ferry across to Aldeburgh. The marsh was spelt Cowltine in the sixteenth century, when it was bequeathed in a will. He certainly owned Cowton Farm with its 117 acres by 1813 when Isaac Johnson drew a plan of it for him.



Cowton House, a secluded and sheltered property on the edge of the marshes.  
*Photo Jane Allen*

The present house is L-shaped, the older part being of red brick and the newer of white, below a slate roof. This implies some improvements and the census records suggest these took place between 1841 and 1851. At the former date the house was occupied by a farmer, his wife and two farm servants, but 10 years later Richard's son James Chaplin himself was resident. With him were his wife, four children, a nurse and a visitor, two house servants and a farm labourer, eleven in all.