

THE 1821 BATTLE OF MARSH BAY. THE NORTH KENT GANG VERSUS 'THE LAW'.  
BY MICK TWYMAN, EXTRA RESEARCH BY ALF BEECHING.

Nothing stirs the imagination and perhaps the blood quite so much as tales of the smugglers who haunted our shores in centuries past. But whilst it is certain that many clever and daring escapades were carried out by these 'gentlemen', there can also be no doubt that despite their apparent success in flouting the law of the land, they ruled the roost by a reign of terror and brutality against any who had the temerity to oppose them. There can also be not the slightest dispute that many of high rank in the social scale whose position dictated that they should have been not only law-abiding but enforcing that law, were actively supporting the freebooting trade at local and county level and encouraging the lower levels of society in abetting and covering the 'gentlemen's' activities. Without this widespread involvement across the whole span of the community, it is inconceivable that the freebooters could have operated so efficiently for so long, and the activities of some of the great and good of our local society in the matter we are about to look at left a lot to be desired, posing an awful lot of questions unanswered to this day.

The event in question took place on the small hours of Sunday, 2nd September, 1821 at Marsh Bay, Westgate. Now known as St. Mildred's Bay, this was a remote and wild and woolly place in 1821. Now, with a stout sea wall and buildings all around, it is perhaps difficult for many to realise just what a low-lying and secluded location this once was, but a few old photographs which I was privileged to see in the albums of the late George Brown showed clearly that the Marsh Bay of the mid-19th century lived up to its name. The details of this story as recounted over the years have varied wildly and been confusing as a result, with estimates of as many as 55 to 100 smugglers involved, but careful sifting of contemporary accounts leads me to believe that there were 60, of whom 15 were well armed to act as a guard against any intervention by the Coast Blockade Service. It might be pertinent here to say a few words about the Coast Blockade. Established in 1817 as a measure of the desperation of the Admiralty to try to stem the illicit trade so rampant around the coastlines of Kent and Sussex, the Coast Blockade swelled to around 2,900 men before it was disbanded in April, 1831. It employed brutal methods to combat those of the smugglers, but it was so successful that its domain of Kent and Sussex was considered a 'no-go' area for the fledgeling Coast Guard Service when it was established in 1821. The Coast Blockade was staffed by Royal Navy officers and Petty Officers from the reserve list, most of whom existed in a kind of limbo on half pay and who were only too pleased to have a position and money in their pockets again. The men under their command were a rough, brutal bunch, consisting mostly of the labouring classes who were given only very basic lessons in seamanship on signing up for their 3 year term of service. But their real purpose was, of course, to crack the skulls of smugglers and mostly on dry land. Despised by all and sundry, the Coast Blockade was nonetheless a resounding success story in achieving its aim - the almost virtual destruction of the smuggling trade.

The story of the Marsh Bay incident began on Friday, 31st August when a party of some 30 or more men made their way from Canterbury down the Stour Valley to Thanet. They then dispersed,

having been briefed by their leader to muster again on the Saturday night on the hill above Minster, where weapons were issued before the party made its way over the fields to Dent-de-Lion Farm, beside the ruins of the old gatehouse. Here they were instructed by their leader, one very shady and mysterious 'gentleman' known as Stephen Lawrence, that after the landing of the contraband at Westgate it was to be brought there to be hidden before distribution. The party, now swollen to around 60 strong, then set out in the darkness of that late Saturday night to Marsh Bay to await the arrival of the vessel which was 'running' the illicit cargo. It might be thought that a party of 30 men wandering about in the Stour Valley in broad daylight would have attracted the attention of the authorities, but this only strengthens the conviction that nobody 'wanted' to see them, employing a tactic mooted in that old smuggling rhyme to, "Face the wall, my darling, while the 'gentlemen' go by!", a very wise move in such circumstances. The leader of the gang, Stephen Lawrence, was a shadowy figure of great notoriety, even the spelling of his surname seemed to cause confusion as he was known in Margate as 'Laurence'. But disregarding his surname it was the soubriquet of 'Carver' Lawrence (which he had no doubt richly earned for himself in the criminal fraternity) which tells us clearly that he was fast and free with a blade - a nice piece of work indeed! And he seemed to lead a charmed life as far as the 'law' was concerned. In April he had been involved in the landing of a cargo at Herne Bay, almost directly in front of the old 'Ship Inn'. During an ensuing fight with the Coast Blockade who interrupted proceedings, the armed guard of the freebooters shot and killed Midshipman Snow. Although poor Snow had been murdered and Bow Street Runners caught 6 of the miscreants, their trial was considered to have no chance of success in Kent (what more proof of corruption could there be?) and it was transferred to the Old Bailey. Despite a cast-iron case, the prosecution failed and the men were set free. How 'Carver' Lawrence must have laughed as he wasn't even charged. Who was protecting him?

All went well at Marsh Bay as the smugglers waited in the darkness of a 'hazy' night, as one witness described it, for the glimmer of light from the sea which told them the cargo had arrived and would soon be run into the inlet of the Bay. The smugglers must have thought that the darkness and mist would protect them, but bad fortune struck in the form of a seaman of the Coast Blockade who saw the boat making for the shore. He at once informed his officer, Lieutenant Carr, of H.M.S.'SEVERN', a frigate and local guardship base of the Coast Blockade. He at once proceeded to the Bay where he and his 4 men challenged the smugglers as they were in the process of carrying the casks of contraband spirit up from the foreshore. Carr stated later that as he advanced towards the smugglers he fired his pistol as a signal to those others of the Coast Blockade who might be abroad in the vicinity that he and his small patrol needed assistance. He would also have been aware that Lieutenant Barton of the Blockade lived at a house not too far away and could reasonably have expected speedy assistance from him also, but the firing of the shot lost the element of surprise for the grossly outnumbered Blockade men, and fierce fighting immediately erupted. Even the duration of this fight is disputed with some accounts stating that it went on for half an hour, but logic would dictate that it is highly unlikely that it would have lasted



BLOCKADE MEN AND SMUGGLERS IN A FIGHT.

more than 10 or 15 minutes given the overwhelming numbers of the smuggler's party.

As luck would have it, Lieutenant Carr had split his small party of men into 2 groups and was thereby able to bring upon the smugglers enfilade fire from both flanks, a competent tactical move which undoubtedly caused panic in the ranks of those engaged in carrying the tubs of Brandy and Gin up from the shore. It would also have made the freebooters unsure of the number of Coast Blockade men who opposed them. What ensued on that dark foreshore seems to have been a confused mayhem during which the superior marksmanship of the Blockade men prevailed in driving the smugglers from their task, abandoning some of their cargo in the process. But the cost to the 5 Blockade men was high, with 3 of their number wounded - 2 of them seriously. It had only been the wild shooting of the smugglers which spared the lives of their opponents, their intent was plain with wild cries of, "Kill them, kill them!" ringing in the darkness. During the action Lieutenant Carr engaged in hand to hand combat with his cutlass, but was severely wounded when it was wrenched from his grasp and used on him. He suffered severe lacerations to his head, but recovered sufficiently well to rejoin the action shortly after, which is amazing given a later assessment of his injuries. Seaman Thomas Cook was also in the thick of things with his cutlass and had felled 2 of the smugglers before he was surrounded by a group armed with muskets. They were ordered by their leader to, "Fire at him, fire!", and Cook recounted how he had a miraculous escape from death as he felt the balls whistle by him. He returned their fire and was struck a blow on the shoulder, which caused him to put some distance between himself and his assailants. But he was soon surrounded again and the leader of the gang approached him, looking him in the face. Cook stated that he recognised the man as somebody he knew, one James Taylor, a Margate man. Cook said to him, "Taylor, I know you!", to which the other man replied, "You do, do you?" before running away, shouting once more to the gang to, "Fire at him!". Cook stated that fire they did, 3 or 4 volleys before one ball struck him in the hip, felling him. The gang stole Cook's cutlass as they fled from the beach. It was Cook's mistaken identifying of Taylor which set in train a whole series of events which turned out very badly for Taylor as we shall see. A third member of the Blockade, Quartermaster John Brimm, received a minor flesh wound from a gunshot during the action.

As soon as the fighting was over, reinforcements arrived on the spot, as did Lieutenant Barton. What they found was some 15 tubs of spirit lying about and weapons and broken weapons littering the beach. It was noted that the musket cartridges found were of the double-ball type and designed to inflict maximum damage. There can be no doubt that the little party of Lieutenant Washington Carr's Blockade men were lucky to be alive. As it was, the surgeon who was called to treat the injured Blockade men, Joseph Dallaway, found that Carr had suffered a cut which had almost severed his Temporal Artery, while the musket ball which had felled Cook had lodged next to his Spine after passing through his hip. The Surgeon extracted the ball with great skill and

difficulty during the course of what was a very dangerous operation at that time.

But it was obvious from the amount of blood present on the foreshore that Carr's brave little party had given a good account of themselves and had inflicted serious harm on some of the smuggler's party. With wounded smugglers to seek the task of tracking them down would be easier. Margate was buzzing with excitement as the flashes of the gunfire at Marsh Bay had been visible in the town, and the noise had carried perfectly as well due to the calm, misty conditions. Cook had told Lieutenant Barton of his certainty that he had recognised James Taylor as the leader of the gang, and Barton promptly obtained a Magistrate's Warrant for his arrest. There was not the slightest problem in finding Taylor as he was arrested at his house in Covell's Row, off the High Street. He was dragged off to be handed over into the custody of Mr. John Boys, a well-known local solicitor and Clerk



ARMED TO THE TEETH, THE SMUGGLER'S ENEMY.

to the Margate Magistrate's Bench. It is at this point in the tale that things seem to have started to get a little confused, and one is led to conjecture that outside influences were at work.

According to John Boys he interviewed Taylor in isolation with no witness present (totally against the law and Boys would have known that), the result of which was a statement by Taylor that Cook was mistaken to have identified him as the leader of the gang at Marsh Bay as he had been fast asleep in bed at home at the time. According to Boys at the later trial, this statement was neither read back to Taylor or signed by him, another clear breach of the law by a man who knew better. As if that wasn't bad enough, rumours circulated amongst the public that Taylor had turned King's Evidence and supplied the names of accomplices, and this was reported in the press. It would seem that somebody was whipping up resentment locally, and I can't help feeling that perhaps 'Carver' Lawrence was involved. In any case, it worked well. John Boys became the object of attention for the anger of the mob during the ensuing months, with posters appearing in the streets of Margate proclaiming him 'an informer and hunter after blood money'. He also found himself the victim of physical assault one dark night and his house was regularly pelted with stones, the smashing of his windows seeming to be the town's most popular sport on winter evenings, and the mob even got into his garden and destroyed his fruit trees. And yet the Magistrate who had signed the Warrant for Taylor's arrest, none other than the Reverend Frederick Baylay, the Vicar of St. John's, seems to have remained unmolested by events, which confirms the view that the campaign against Boys was being orchestrated.

But the Admiralty were determined to round up those who had opposed the Coast Blockade at Marsh Bay, probably still seething over the incident at Herne Bay and believing that the same people were involved. To assist the Margate Constable, John Carthew, in his duties a concerted effort was made by all of the authorities, including assistance from the Bow Street Runners once more, to apprehend those responsible. The operation met with some success, although given the large number of smugglers involved in the operation the grand total of 19 arrested and taken to Maidstone Gaol to await their arraignment for trial seems a little on the low side. And once again, the name of 'Carver' Lawrence was not on the list of those apprehended, despite affidavits from those in custody that he had been the leader of the gang, both before and on the foreshore at Marsh Bay, and the one who had paid the gang's rank and file tub carriers their wages of 9 shillings apiece. Despite the fact that Lawrence was obviously under the protection of some in high places and still enjoying freedom, the Admiralty had enough of the smugglers languishing in jail to serve the purpose of scapegoats with which to set an example at the trial. That took place at the Maidstone Spring Assizes on 22nd March, 1822 before Mr. Baron Wood.

In the meantime, events had taken another twist for the hapless James Taylor. Knowing that a charge of taking part in an armed affray with the Coast Blockade carried the high probability of a death sentence, he now changed his story of being home in bed at the time of the Marsh Bay incident, to one of being involved elsewhere in another smuggling adventure. To us today it might seem strange that smuggling, although for long such a thorn in the Government's side and a substantial loss to the Exchequer, was only classed as a 'misdemeanour' if the participants were not carrying arms in its prosecution. Taylor's tale, for which he produced witnesses and affidavits, was that at the time in question he and 3 accomplices, Robert Harman, Charles Winch and James Saunders were busily engaged in a little smuggling operation of their own at Hubbard's bathing house at Margate Harbour, over 2 miles from Marsh Bay, and this was corroborated by a 4th person, John Jones. Taylor's excuse for the change of story was that he had been frightened to tell the truth initially because he would have been forced to implicate his partners in crime by telling exactly where he was between midnight and 3 o'clock on that fateful Sunday morning. He had obviously been between a rock and a hard place when first arrested by Lieutenant Barton and questioned by Boys, but his initial story and belated change of heart was to cost him dear.

The Kentish Gazette summary of the trial before Mr. Baron Wood started thus:- "Daniel Baker, John Ramsay alias Buffington, Francis Garden, Joseph Clements, Daniel Fagg, Joseph Gilbert, John Gill, Stephen Gummer, John Hagle alias Fagg, John Meredith, Thomas Mount, Edward Rolfe, James Rolfe, Henry Smith, Thomas Stokes, James Taylor, Charles White, John Wilsden and Thomas Woollett, being in custody; together with Stephen Lawrence, Henry Lemar, John Mills and John Pollard not in custody; were indicted under the Statute 62, Geo III, for having on the 2nd September last, with others unknown, feloniously assembled together, armed with firearms and other offensive weapons, in the Parish of St. John the Baptist, in the Isle of Thanet, in order to be aiding and assisting in the illegal landing and carrying away uncustomed goods, and for having maliciously shot and wounded, and aided and assisted others, who did maliciously shoot and

wound, Washington Carr, Thomas Cook and John Brimm, in the execution of their duty on the Coast Blockade service - Thomas Hay Webster was included in this indictment, but the Grand Jury found against him not a true bill". Attorneys for the prosecution were Mr. Gurney and Mr. Knox, whilst Mr. Adolphus, Mr. Walford and Mr. Ryland were engaged to represent James Taylor only.

The fact that the vast body of the defendants do not appear to have been legally represented is not too difficult to understand. Most of them had cheerfully admitted to being present at Marsh Bay and to the fact that they didn't consider smuggling to be wrong. The only objection made by those who had been armed - a capital offence in any case - was that they had fired less at the Blockade party than was alleged! A rather limp defence given the circumstances of the case. But given the social condition of the working classes at that time when a working man's wages had been reduced to less than the cost of feeding his family and himself, it is not difficult to see why the easy and substantial sums of ready cash to be had from smuggling proved such a lure, and we today with our lifestyle cannot pass judgement on the motivation of such poor men. But what about Taylor? Here was a 'poor man' who could afford 3 Attorneys to defend him! Who was paying his bill and why? As it happens, the tale of James Taylor was to take yet another twist as events unfolded. For my part, I have come to believe that he was 'sacrificed' by 'Carver' Lawrence and those other shadowy wealthy figures at the top of the North Kent Gang in order to divert attention away from themselves. It might well also be the fact that Taylor knew just a little too much about them for their own good and had to be not only discredited but removed from the stage. If that was the case, as I strongly suspect, then the ploy worked extremely well!

The trial lasted just a day, starting at 9 o'clock in the morning and finishing at half past 6. The evidence heard described how some of the smugglers had been wounded and how they had made good their escape from Dent-de-Lion as waiting carts took away their haul of spirit tubs. It is interesting to note that those who had been in the armed guard of the smugglers received 13 shillings to the 9 of the tub carriers. Oaths were made that 'Carver' Lawrence had been present throughout and actually gave the smock of one man a dusting of chalk to hide bloodstains on it before he made off. But without fail, everyone of the defendants swore that Taylor had not been present at any time during the landing. That might have been thought enough to clear him, but Coast Blockade man Cook stuck to his story that James Taylor was the man he had seen on the foreshore at Marsh Bay. With the exception of Taylor who denied the charge against him vehemently, the rest of the gang (rather surprisingly given the fact that they had 'sung like canaries' and expressed no remorse) pleaded not guilty to the charges against them. The Jury took just 5 minutes to find all of the prisoners guilty, but added a rider that they hoped the Judge would be lenient in his sentencing as the men of the Jury thought there was a definite distinction of culpability between those who had carried arms and those who had carried tubs. Mr. Baron Wood promised to consider that point, and then promptly put on his black cap and sentenced them all to death by hanging! He did however intimate that the Crown might commute those sentences.

Poor old Taylor! There he was expecting justice and now he faced a jig at a rope's end instead! But why was no notice taken of the cast-iron case in his defence that all of the smugglers (who had been only too happy to incriminate each other) had sworn that he was not one of their gang, and why had his 3 high-powered Attorneys not mounted an aggressive case in his defence, as somebody had engaged them to do? With hindsight we now know, and it makes me even more certain that something was going on behind the scenes to get Taylor out of the way. Documents at the Whitfield Archive confirm that Taylor's Attorney, Mr. Adolphus, had simply handed the Brief over to his junior partner, Mr. Walford who then passed it to the office junior, Mr. Ryland, who admitted at the trial that he hadn't bothered to read it at all! It is simply beyond belief that this, like the attacks on Mr. Boys and his house, was not orchestrated by someone powerful. Any honest person paying for Taylor's defence would have demanded their money back. Who was pulling the strings? I am convinced that Lawrence was involved somehow, and hadn't his powerful mentors saved him from prosecution over the incident? Identified by members of his gang who had 'fingered' him as their leader and indicted in Court as a wanted fugitive, it transpired that he had been detained by the authorities but set free before the trial. Who doubts just how far the tentacles of corruption spread in smuggling matters and the civil administration of not only Margate but Kent itself? Small wonder some of the defendants at the trial expressed the fervent wish that 'Carver' Lawrence, the man who had brought them into trouble, was standing with them.

For the condemned men there ensued a nervous wait to see if there was to be mercy. In the end it transpired that for 4, Daniel Fagg, John Meredith, Edward Rolfe and John Wilsden there would be none. The Crown was to exact its awful due and they were to hang by the neck until dead. For the

other 15 the sentence was commuted to transportation to Van Diemen's land, with the term of punishment there varying between 7 and 15 years. Great anticipation of a reprieve for the 4 was encouraged by petitions and public feeling, but it was not to be and they would face the rope's end. John Gill, sentenced to transportation for his part in the affair died of illness in prison whilst awaiting transfer to the hulks at Portsmouth for incarceration until the arrival of the vessel which would transport he and his fellow smugglers to Van Diemen's Land.

On Monday, 22nd April 1822 the ghastly circus that accompanied public executions in those days got under way, the Kentish Gazette of the next day describing it thus:- "Yesterday morning, pursuant to their sentences at the last Assizes for this county, the five following unfortunate malefactors suffered the extreme penalty of the law, on Penenden Heath, viz. - John Bell, for burglary in the house of Dr. Forster Pigott, at Mereworth; Daniel Fagg, John Wilsden, Edward Rolfe and John Meredith, for assembling with fire-arms, and assisting in illegal landing of uncustomed goods, on the 2nd of September last, at Marsh Bay, near Margate, when Mr. Washington Carr, and Thomas Cook, a seaman of the Coast Blockade were wounded. - They were conveyed from the gaol soon after eleven o'clock in the forenoon, in the accustomed manner, to the place of execution, where they all conducted themselves with great fortitude and resignation. Bell first addressed the surrounding spectators, warning, young men especially, to avoid the company of abandoned females, by whom he said he had been deluded and betrayed into his present awful situation. The others severally spoke with much firmness; Fagg said that he took the 9s. for his night's service for the sake of his wife and family, and did not consider it wrong to be engaged in smuggling; Wilsden solemnly asserted that he had no fire-arms in his possession, Rolfe said that the witness who deposed that he had fired five times had sworn falsely, as he fired only twice; and Meredith declared that he did not fire at any of the blockade men. All, however, declared their cheerful forgiveness of their prosecutors, and hoped that God would do the same. The Executioner having made the necessary preparations, they were launched into eternity, and after hanging the usual time, their bodies were cut down and those of the four latter delivered to their relatives, who were waiting with a wagon near the place of execution....". The bodies were returned to Canterbury for burial in a patch of unconsecrated ground in the yard of St. Mildred's Church. All 4 swore on the gallows that James Taylor was unknown to them and innocent.

So, the following July saw the malefactors of Marsh Bay put on board the transport vessel 'ARAB' at Portsmouth to begin their long journey to the other side of the world, and with them was James Taylor. It is very strange that a man who swore that he was elsewhere during the Marsh Bay incident and who produced witnesses and affidavits to back that, a man who had many respectable and influential people of Margate appear in Court to give him flawless character for honesty, sobriety and industry, and a man who had been double-crossed by his Attorneys should find himself in such a position, but there he was. Was he as innocent as he seems to have been? On his own admission he was a smuggler, but then so were many more who still walked the streets of Margate - and some of those in high office. But we shall never know for sure. One thing is certain though, the records tell us that he behaved himself impeccably during the voyage to Hobart, where 'ARAB' arrived in November, but was given 50 lashes during the following August for embezzlement and a further charge was laid against him shortly afterwards, in December, that he had neglected his duty. So perhaps the dark side of his nature was showing itself on the other side of the world. I wonder what those upright citizens of Margate who had portrayed him as a saintly figure in Court would have made of that?

It might be thought that this would be the end of the tale, but no. On 28th June, 1824 a poster was circulated in Margate requesting Francis Cobb, the town's Cinque Ports Deputy, to call a public meeting to discuss the case of Taylor, with a view to obtaining him a free pardon. It is interesting to note that this poster refers to him having been transported for life, when other accounts state 15 years. The meeting was called and took place on 30th June. Apart from running through the accounts of events leading up to the trial, it makes some interesting observations about the Judge, Mr. Baron Wood. Apparently, he had not been satisfied with the verdict of the Jury in the case of James Taylor and had thought him innocent of the charge against him. He had in fact recommended him to the King for a free pardon. However, the Secretary of State now said that the Judge had made that recommendation, but had changed his mind after receiving certain privy information from Mr. Peel of the Bow Street Runners. What that information was nobody knows for sure, but I think I might have an inkling. Just before his untimely death, I travelled on the train up to Canterbury with David Scurrall, a gentleman for whom I have a lot of respect, and we discussed Taylor's case. David told me that he had once seen a document in the collection of

Mrs. Phyllis Cobb which confirmed that Francis Cobb had also been privy to that very confidential



'KING' FRANCIS COBB THE 2ND.

information which had been passed to Mr. Baron Wood by Robert Peel in connection with the charge against James Taylor. Now, Francis Cobb was easily the most powerful man in Margate, and not for nothing were his father, himself and his son known by all and sundry as 'King Francis the 1st, 2nd and 3rd'. It is quite clear that whatever Robert Peel's secret intelligence regarding Taylor had been (and it is highly probable that it had been obtained by Peel's Bow Street Runners during their investigations into the North Kent Gang), Cobb had chosen not to involve himself in the campaign to obtain a pardon for Taylor until the necessary number of Margate's Burgesses had approached him in his role as Deputy to call a public meeting, as he was bound by custom to so do. Surely, that tells us that Cobb did not believe Taylor to be as innocent as others thought he might be, and that his signature was only accompanying the petition for a pardon due to his involvement as the Cinque Ports Deputy, or was there another reason?

At the public meeting a most startling disclosure was made. As well as the dying depositions of the hanged men that Taylor was innocent as far as the incident at

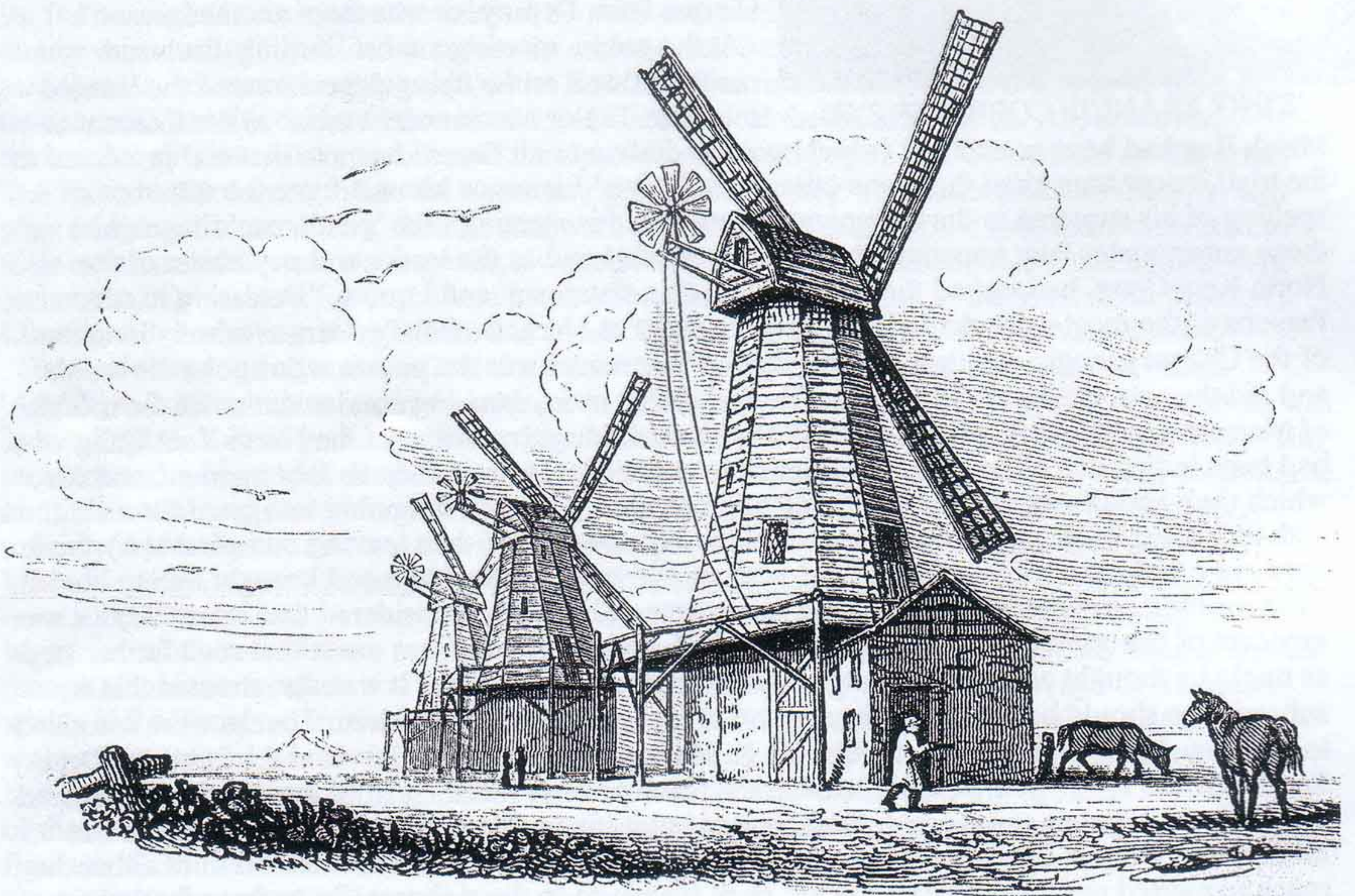
Marsh Bay had been concerned (which was in addition to all the evidence to that end presented at the trial) it now transpired that none other than 'Carver' Laurence himself (note the different spelling of his surname in the documents relating to this meeting), the 'gentleman' fingered by those unfortunates later transported to Van Diemen's Land as the leader and paymaster of the North Kent Gang, had visited the town and made a statement, and I quote, "Declaring to several Persons of the most respectable Rank and Character at Margate, that Taylor was wholly innocent of the Charge brought against him, and that he (Laurence) was the person who spoke the words, and did the acts, attributed by Cook to Taylor". What more damning condemnation of the morals of Margate's leaders could be asked for? Here was the fugitive leader of the North Kent Gang who had been indicted in Court as a wanted man in connection with the Marsh Bay incident, and for which rank and file members of his gang had been hung, simply swanning into town for a chat with its leaders of the 'most respectable rank and character' and then leaving unmolested by those very same 'enforcers of the King's Law' who should have arrested him and brought him to book!

The meeting closed with the following statements - That it was considered that James Taylor was innocent of the crime for which he was punished, and the request was made that such farther steps as might be thought advisable should be taken to secure his pardon. It was also mooted that a subscription should be raised for the support of Taylor's wife and children. Thanks were extended to J.P. Powell, the High Sheriff of Kent, to R. Martin, M.P., to Daniel Jarvis and, of course, Deputy Francis Cobb. It was also mooted that that the resolutions proceeding from the meeting be entered into both the London and Kentish newspapers, but it seems that nothing resulted from this last-ditch effort. Despite intensive efforts over many years, no trace has ever been found of either the much requested pardon of James Taylor, or of his return to these shores. So perhaps that secret information of Robert Peel was just as damning to Taylor in 1824 as it had been during the trial at Maidstone 2 years previously.

And what of the other players in this saga? 'King Francis Cobb II' died in 1831. According to legend, 'Carver' Lawrence continued with his life of crime totally unmolested by the Margate authorities, following his calling of a carpenter by day and a smuggler by night. Unmolested that is until 1836 and the reputed firing by the smugglers of the most westerly of Gouger's 3 windmills, which stood in a field roughly behind where today's Woolworth shop is in Northdown Road. In those days it was a requirement that all fires should be attended by the Revenue Men, and it was thought that the firing of the mill was a ruse to draw them away from the foreshore to enable the landing of a large cargo of contraband. It must have worked too, for Gouger found himself the owner of a bag of smuggler's gold as compensation. But he was angry and offered a reward of £100 for information, a reward which was increased by local inhabitants to £500 the next month. Whether it was a case of the old order changing or whether people had just become fed-up with

the destructive antics of the smugglers we cannot tell. But suffice it to say that shortly afterwards, 'Carver' Lawrence found himself convicted of smuggling and was transported, following in the tracks so many years before of his accomplices from Marsh Bay. I like to think that those who had protected Lawrence (and sacrificed Taylor) were no longer on the scene. A new order had arisen in Margate which saw its duty and did it as far as 'Carver' was concerned, and not before time either as he had a lot of blood on his hands, as had those high in the social scale who supported and protected him. He didn't go quietly, according to legend, but loudly threatening to expose his erstwhile smuggling mentors and accomplices should he ever be fortunate enough to return to these shores. But, just as in the case of James Taylor, history is silent in that respect and we must presume that they both ended their days by dying in bed on the other side of the world.

As will have been seen in this story, the poor people saw nothing wrong in a bit of smuggling. To them it was bread and butter to keep from starving, and are there any of us who could hold our hands up with any kind of conviction and deny that we would not have done exactly the same? I certainly can't. To me the ones who should have shouldered the blame were those local bigwigs who employed men like 'Carver' Lawrence, those rich and pampered beings who benefitted most from the efforts of the working-class smuggler whilst pretending to be the upholders of the Law, a Law to which many rank and file smugglers lost their lives to sentences handed down by those same well-breeched hypocrites who administered it in the name of the King!



Margate Mills.

The three windmills of Daniel Gouger, as depicted in this charming engraving by George Bonner from Kidd's Steamboat Companion of 1830. It was the mill in the foreground which was the target of the fire set by the smuggling accomplices of 'Carver' Lawrence, if not by himself, and it was this fire which led to his long-overdue fall from grace in Margate.

To close, I have often been asked why the expression 'turned off' is used in reports of hangings in centuries past. The answer is quite simple in that the gallows of those time usually consisted of 2 upright posts with a crossbar, from which were suspended as many nooses as there were condemned men. At the appointed time, the executioner helped the prisoner up a ladder to his noose, adjusted it round his neck and then simply 'turned him off' the ladder, or 'launched him into eternity' as the account of the Marsh Bay executions described it. No quick death by falling through a trap, and the last man up had already borne the torment of watching those who had preceded him die slowly and agonisingly. A sad and brutal reflection of those long gone times!