

KENT SMUGGLERS' PUBS

Reprint

Terry Townsend

The figure of the smuggler has provided material for innumerable fictional tales of intrigue and high adventure. In reality the law-makers, who first imposed duties on exported and imported goods, unwittingly created a climate in the country for the establishment of serious organised crime. From the moment taxes were imposed they were evaded and so began the delicious deception of smuggling.

As the centuries progressed smuggling grew to massive proportions. People from every walk of life became involved in financing, transporting, hiding and marketing contraband goods. It has been estimated that from 1700 to around 1850 a quarter of the country's import/export trade was illegal. Smuggling flourished because the majority of people did not consider it a crime. It provided a life-line for those living in poverty and an opportunity to get back at an unjust and unfair society.

Because of its proximity to France and its large number of suitable landing places, Kent became established as the main gateway for contraband. In many cases the local inn became the smugglers' centre of operations where plots were hatched, arrangements made and runs commissioned. The smugglers' pub served as a meeting place, recruitment centre, secret storage facility, distribution depot and valued customer.

This guide will lead you to a significant number of authentic smugglers' pubs distributed throughout Kent. These wonderful old buildings with their low-beamed ceilings, flag stone floors, inglenook fire-places and secret hiding places are where you can get a real feel for the desperate days of the free traders. The events which actually occurred during the heyday of smuggling provide us with stories every bit as wild as those that can be imagined.



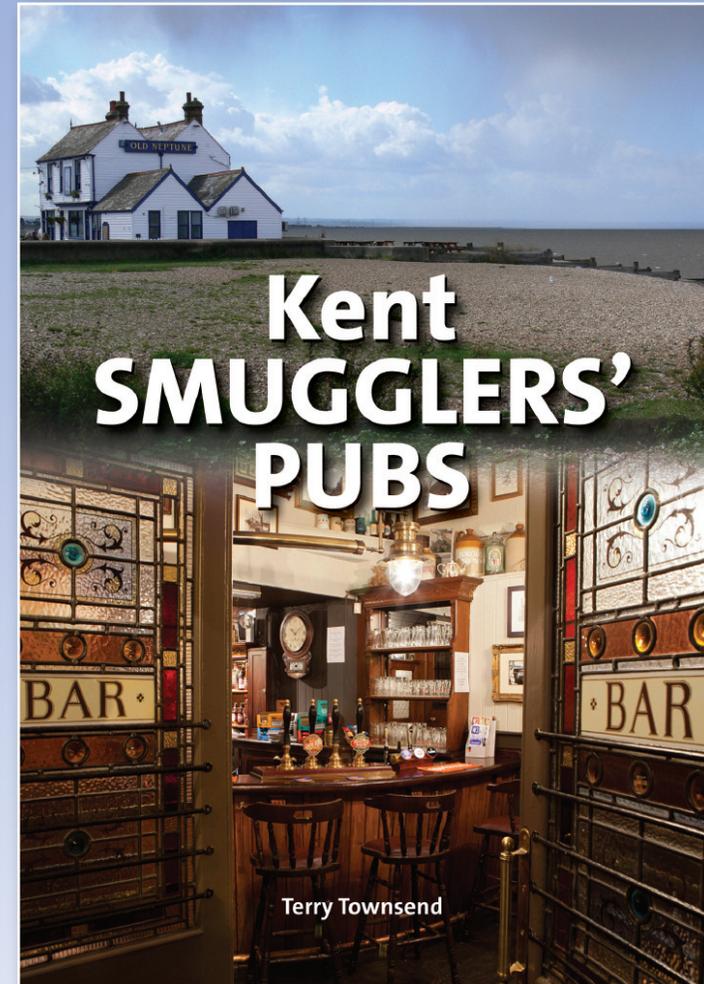
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Retired graphic designer Terry Townsend spent most of his working life in Kent. He became immersed in the history of the county and has written numerous articles for county magazines. Terry now lives in Dorset with his wife Carol and their cat Smudge.

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Above: The Ship Inn, Conyer. This former baker's shop and blacksmiths became a pub in 1802.

Left: The Ship Inn, Dymchurch. A faithful replica of a gibbet hangs from a tree in the pub garden.

Example of a double-page spread.



Above: The White Horse, Dover. The original building on this spot was erected in 1365 as accommodation for the Churchwarden of neighbouring St James.



Right: The Bear Inn, Faversham. Walking down the side corridor which connects the rooms is like walking back in history.



The Neptune Inn, Whitstable. The wonky Old Neptune Inn, standing directly on the beach with no sea defences has more than once been knocked down in violent storms and re-built using the same timbers.

KENT SMUGGLERS' PUBS

Deal

The King's Head & Channel View Guest House
www.kingsheaddeal.co.uk/index.html bookings@kingsheaddeal.co.uk
 01304 368194

For a while, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the small fishing town of Deal grew to become the busiest port in England and the foremost smuggling town in the world. Ownership of the boats used for smuggling was dominated by the landlords of the seafaring inns who financed the illicit trade. Every pub was a smugglers' pub.

Graham Skiles, pictured behind the bar, became mine host in 1980 and continues to run the pub with his wife and son.

Although never strictly a gang, the boatmen of Deal became legendary for their seamanship and for their shallow draft luggers and 40ft long galleys that held as many as 30 oarsmen. With the occasional additional boost from a small sail they could make the trip across to France in less than five hours.

Until very recently miles of Deal beach resembled an untidy boatyard covered in oil, with old frame mounted diesel engines and hawsers to pull the vessels ashore, it's tidy now but I miss the old scene.

CHANNEL PORTS

The King's Head is rightly famous for its award winning floral displays that adorn the front of the building throughout summer.

The tiny cellar is accessed from inside the bar. The restricted space suggests it may be a small remnant of what was once a much larger storage area.

This handsome three-storey Georgian inn stands just across the road from the promenade and shares its seafront terrace with the Port Arms.

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