

EAST SUSSEX SMUGGLERS' PUBS

Terry Townsend

For 150 years, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, East Sussex was in the forefront of smuggling due to its pivotal position between the merchant suppliers of Northern France and London customers eager for untaxed luxuries such as brandy, tea and tobacco.

The men landing contraband on Sussex beaches had two initial aims. The first to avoid detection, the second to move the merchandise swiftly inland to half way hiding places at farms, churches and pubs. Secrecy during these operations was facilitated by the threat of violence towards would-be informers and judicious bribing of legal authorities encouraging them to turn a blind eye.

In many cases the local inn became the smugglers' centre of operations where plots were hatched, arrangements agreed and runs commissioned. The smugglers' pub served as a meeting place, recruitment centre, distribution depot and valued customer. This was nowhere more so than in the incomparable smuggling town of Rye, riddled with linking tunnels and secret storage places.

Terry Townsend, who has written extensively on this subject, has identified a significant number of authentic Smugglers' pubs distributed throughout East Sussex. These wonderful old buildings with their low-beamed ceilings, flagstone floors and inglenook fireplaces evoke a genuine sense of the desperate days of free traders. The events actually occurring during the smuggling heyday provide stories every bit as wild as any to be imagined.

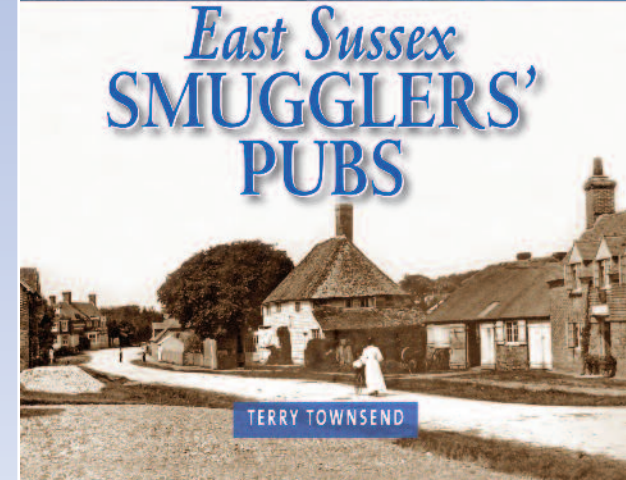
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Townsend has written extensively about English life in the eighteenth century including books on smuggling, the Bristol slave trade and the life of Jane Austen. He lives in the West Country with his wife Carol and their cat Smudge. Terry is currently researching Smugglers' Pubs of East Devon.

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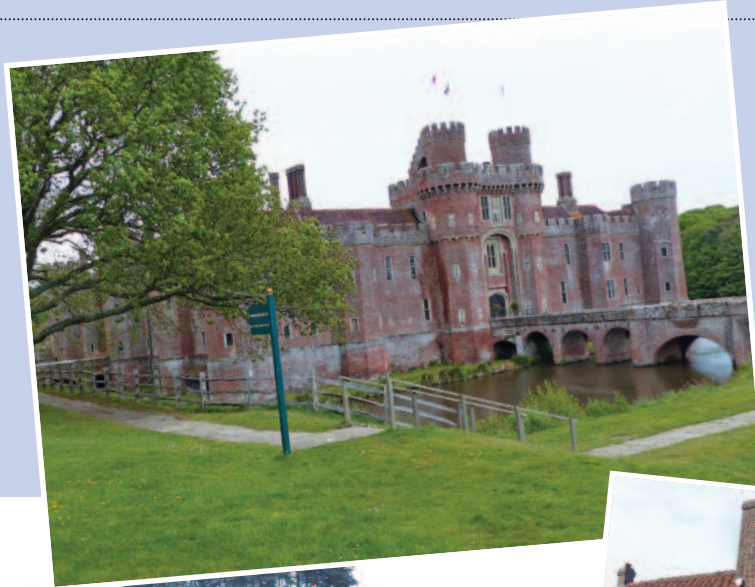


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Contraband was stored in Herstmonceux Castle ruins.

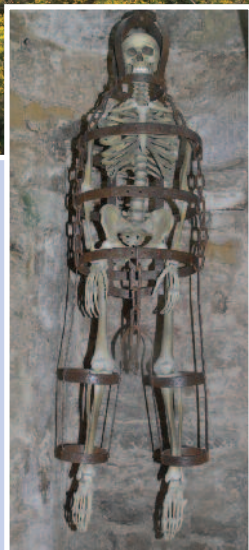


Above: Fairlight Cove was a favourite landing spot where carts could be taken down to the beach.



Left: This old tile-hung local is tucked away down a lane off the high street in the heart of Burwash.

Below: Dating from 1420, The Mermaid, is one of the best known inns in southeast England.



These authentic gibbet irons are on display in Ypres Tower Museum which formerly served as a prison where smugglers were frequently incarcerated.

Left: Free traders temporarily stashed contraband in concealed areas near forest clumps such as this one seen from 'Smugglers picnic stop' car park.



Example of a double-page spread.

