

## **SMUGGLING IN THORNHAM AND HUNSTANTON**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries smuggling was rife along the coasts of Norfolk. The villages, remote beaches and coastal creeks witnessed the most dramatic scenes of illegal activity and violent confrontations between the agencies of law enforcement and the smugglers.

By the 1780s the conflict had become an unequal one as the gangs of smugglers became larger, wealthier, more organised and better equipped with firearms and fast sailing ships. The Government forces were massively out-numbered to the extent that large areas of the coast were controlled by lawless bands organised by the ruthless smuggling barons.

One such smuggling baron was William Kemball, a native of King's Lynn. Born in 1752, he was the eldest of four sons, of the family of a minor borough official. His father, also called William Kemball, was a sergeant-at-mace who amongst other duties, officiated at the town's law courts at the Guildhall. The young William Kemball's upbringing was relatively comfortable and his education adequate. As a boy he developed a fascination for the sea going vessels he saw in the busy port and his first experience of the open sea was aboard a merchant vessel, exporting corn to Europe. The return journey was to make a lasting impression on the boy who soon learned the significance of the intoxicating cargo stores below the water level in place of ballast. This first taste of intrigue, cunning, adventure and profit remained with him for the rest of his life.

Kemball was typical of the fiercely independent breed of courageous and unscrupulous sea-farers. He quickly assessed the economics of the smuggling business and recognised that vast profits were to be made by illegally importing commodities which were subject to high levels of tax. He also recognised that there were large numbers of willing, impoverished, landless labourers living in the Norfolk coastal villages, whose services could be bought for little and whose support would be unfailing. Kemball's favourite landing places for his cargoes were the beaches of Old Hunstanton, Thornham and Titchwell which had the advantages of being remote and a significant distance from the Custom Houses and Excise offices in King's Lynn and Wells-next-the-Sea.

By his early twenties he had gained the respect of his fellow crew members and was regularly employed as first mate and pilot aboard smuggling vessels importing illegal cargoes from Dunkirk and Flushing to the Lincolnshire and Norfolk coasts. Smuggling had been kind to Kemball, his progress had generally been smooth, rapid and very profitable. By the time he was twenty five he owned his own ship in partnership with another Lynn smuggler, Thomas Franklyn. At the age of 32 he was part of an elite community of smugglers living as part-time residents of Dunkirk, where he rented an expensive house and lived very comfortably.

Thomas Franklyn on the other hand, was born into poverty and squalor in King's Lynn's North End. He was uneducated and remained illiterate even as an adult, unable to write his own name. His first employment was as a labourer in the warehouse of a King's Lynn merchant who traded in animal skins imported from America and the Arctic. At the same time he became involved in the smuggling trade, undertaking deliveries of small quantities of smuggled tea to households in King's Lynn, to support his modest wages. From these small beginnings was to blossom an extensive distribution network under his personal control. A gift for organisational detail together with an intimidating physical presence guaranteed him a meteoric rise in the smuggling business.

At the peak of his career in the early 1780s, he employed hundreds of part-time carriers recruited in the North West Norfolk coastal villages. He claimed to have on his payroll the names of two hundred men in each of the Old Hunstanton, Holme and Thornham villages. Although this would have involved almost every able-bodied man from the labouring classes, it was not an idle boast. These men earned good wages from Franklyn which bought food for hungry mouths. Although the Enclosure Act had not yet been passed by Parliament, gradual erosion of smallholdings had left the rural population without arable land, grazing meadows and common rights.

Thomas Franklyn was not unduly concerned with this; he was simply an opportunist who took full advantage of their situation. He was able to recruit a readily available and ever willing army to land, protect and transport the increasing quantities of smuggled goods imported from France.

The partnership between Kemball and Franklyn was ideal. Kemball loved the sea; he knew and understood the currents, channels and creeks. In fact he spent most of his time at sea. Franklyn on the other hand was a land lubber and was easily sea-sick. At the height of their activities in the early 1780s, an average of two thousand gallons of Geneva (gin), rum and brandy, together with one thousand pounds weight of tea were being landed weekly on the unguarded beaches between Old Hunstanton and the west Harbour at Thornham. Smuggling on such a scale provided one night's work each week for most of Franklyn's supporters. In addition the stronger members of his local army were engaged a further two nights a week transporting the contraband on the long trek inland.

The significant feature of this work was the high rate of remuneration. Not surprising then that the local landowners bemoaned the effects when they found the men reluctant to work on the land. Those who were recruited by the landowners demanded higher wages or were the old and infirm, overlooked by Franklyn. The landowners complained to Parliament however at the same time, they were not averse to buying cut-price goods from the smugglers.

Bringing the contraband from the continent was hazardous as Kemball had to avoid the hostile attention of the English Navy, English Customs cutters and the stateless pirate ships who would attack any vessel that sailed the seas. Given the frequency of Kemball's trips it says much for his seamanship that he was apprehended at sea with a full cargo only twice.

Still, the most dangerous stage was the actual landing of the cargo on the beach. Weather conditions were difficult to forecast, contact between ship and shore was vital. Sufficient men, horses, carts and landing equipment had to be there on a specific beach at the appropriate time to unload the contraband, transport it to the nearest village and secrete it in secure hiding places without attracting the attentions of the authorities on land or at sea. Often a full cargo would be landed at two or more beaches to reduce the risk of capture.

The landings were mostly conducted at night. In winter especially, it was a task for men of great courage and even greater muscular strength. The physical act of beaching the heavy rowing boats, lifting pairs of rope-slung barrels over the shoulders of the 'tub' carriers and of loading the teams of mules and horses with bulging oil skin bags in the quickest time with hands numbed by the bone-chilling wind and water defies the imagination.

The 'tubmen' were the elite of Franklyn's army and were the highest paid. They were required to carry two kegs, one on the chest and one on the back, a load of roughly six stones in weight, at a

brisk pace over difficult terrain. They were accompanied by the teams of mules and pack-horses which were lead by the reins. The whole convoy was flanked by 'batmen' who were armed with large wooden clubs, pistols and sabres.

Curious places were chosen for the temporary concealment of the contraband. Franklyn had access to barns, out-houses, hayricks, pig sties, cattle sheds, burial vaults, church towers and vestries. The final stage of transporting the goods inland and selling it to a dealer took place as soon as possible after that. Storing large quantities of illegally imported goods for any length of time was considered too risky because of the frequency of Customs or Excise raiding excursions, so their removal usually took place the following evening. Only small quantities were left to satisfy the needs of local ale-house keepers, the wealthier gentry and the clergy.

Although Franklyn had a number of inland routes, he favoured the Peddars Way. Not only did this provide a direct link from the coast to his dealers near Thetford, it had a relatively fast and firm track for his convoy. Even in winter the track was mainly dry underfoot on account of its chalky subsoil and its course was direct, bypassing towns and villages. There could be as many as three hundred in the well armed convoy; no-one would intervene least of all the Customs or Excise Officers who would have needed two to three entire troops of dragoons to even contemplate a confrontation. The bargaining with the dealers was carried out in great secrecy and Frankly had a numerate clerk always present at the handover of the goods to ensure that the calculations were correct and that they were paid in full in hard cash.

Following the financial settlement, Franklyn would ride back to the coast. His followers returned usually by foot, leading the pack animals and empty wagons back along the same route. Each village that had taken part in the landings and transportation would stage a 'pay night' when those involved would receive their wages. At the King's Head in Thornham, the White Horse in Holme and the Wheatsheaf in Heacham, Franklyn personally supervised the pay-off.

### **West Norfolk 1779 - 1783**

In 1779 when Franklyn's success and profits were reaching their peak, the arrival of Robert Bliss at the Excise Office in Wells did not immediately affect him.

Robert Bliss was based at Winchester when he received a letter offering him promotion to the position of 'Superintendent of Excise at the port of Wells juxta mare, Norfolk at a salary of one hundred guineas per annum, in recognition of exemplary service over a period of ten years'. Bliss was ambitious and had worked hard for his promotion. He would be responsible for a district containing miles of coastline from Old Hunstanton to Stiffkey. Smuggling was on the increase along this particular stretch of coast and Bliss anticipated lots of opportunities for pocketing large rewards in prize money. It was the practice at that time for Excise Officers to be rewarded with a percentage of the value of the goods that they seized on behalf of the Government.

The Excise Board were confident that they had appointed the right man for the job. Robert Bliss was single, therefore able to work at all hours of the day and night and was at 32, a physically powerful man. He took up his appointment in May 1779 and it seems that his reputation had gone before him as shortly after arriving at Wells he received the following letter –

“BLISS As you have begun to blunder and deprive us of our property we will now begin with you and your followers for your blood. We are determined to have you or any that belong to you by night or by day sooner or later you plundering rascal. We can have two hundred men to join us any day we please. As such we bid you defiance and determined we are to have at you for by God we will have your lives.

These are from

‘Free Englishmen’ “

Bliss was well aware of the popular belief that Excise and Customs Officers represented the forces of tyranny and that their powers of search had led to accusations of harassment and infringement of civil liberty. He was also aware that the title of ‘Free Englishmen’ was nothing more than a romanticised euphemism for marauding malcontents. Some Excise Officers had undeniably on occasions, acted in an overzealous manner in carrying out their statutory powers. On the other hand the smugglers had a well-earned reputation for extreme and sadistic violence.

Robert Bliss had three Excise Officers reporting to him; William Spencer with five years experience in the Wells area and two relative newcomers, Thomas Abbott and John Banham. Spencer was able to provide Bliss with the names of the high-ranking smugglers along with information about the beaches and creeks most favoured for landing contraband. Two names were prominent – William Kemball and Thomas Franklyn both of King’s Lynn. They were joint owners of an impressive smuggling lugger and partners in a well organised business. Kemball, the seaman, had had the lugger built to his specifications and it was a fast craft easily able to out run the majority of Coastguard and Navy vessels. Franklyn the organiser had recruited a vast army of ‘troops’ from the village inns such as the Cutter at Old Hunstanton, the Whitehorse at Holme and the King’s Head, Red Cow and Chequers at Thornham.

Robert Bliss was warned that although considerable sums of prize money were to be had, there would be violent opposition from Franklyn. He was further advised against any attempts to enter these lawless villages unless accompanied by a large detachment of cavalry soldiers from a Dragoon Regiment.

Acting on that advice, Bliss contacted the Captain of the troop of Dragoons which were billeted in Holt and requested that the entire troop of 33 officers and men, was transferred to Wells. The Captain refused saying that his regiment was essentially a heavy cavalry force with sturdy, slow moving horses. What Bliss required, he suggested, was a light Dragoon Regiment which was faster and more nimble for chasing smugglers over rough countryside and muddy creeks. The nearest such regiment was in Bury St Edmunds and Bliss strongly suspected that the Captain wanted to remain in Holt with warm accommodation in the Feathers Inn. Wells on the other hand was damp, dismal and smelt of rotting fish.

Bliss was anxious to confront the smuggling problem as soon as possible so he wrote a letter to the Secretary of State at the War Office in London, outlining the situation and requesting a local military presence. Replies to his many letters throughout 1779 repeated the same message that owing to the war in America, troops were in short supply. Any that were available had been sent to Kent and Sussex where the problems with smugglers were much greater. Undaunted he persisted with his

requests to the War Office and was eventually rewarded for his efforts at the beginning of 1780. Dragoons were billeted in Fakenham, Holt, Walsingham and Burnham Market.

As the months passed Bliss began to exert his influence. With the help of various Dragoon Regiments series of armed incursions into Franklyn's territory began to produce spectacular results. All the raids led by Bliss occurred during the stage of temporary concealment in the villages. By the year 1782 Franklyn was losing unsustainable quantities of goods and profits not only to Bliss' raids but also those of the Excise Superintendant at King's Lynn.

The tide of fortune had clearly turned and pressure was mounting from within his own organisation. Kemball was becoming impatient with the increasing losses incurred by his partner; Franklyn's own loyal villagers were also seeing their earnings decline. Franklyn's response was predictable. He determined to meet the threat to his livelihood by confrontation. He was no stranger to such tactics.

In July 1781 in King's Lynn, he assaulted and seriously injured three Customs employees, William Slater, Thomas Huggins and John Burch in separate incidents at the port. When Franklyn appeared at the Quarter Sessions for the attack on Slater, he was charged with 'beating, assaulting, wounding and ill-treating' his adversary 'so that his life was greatly despaired of'. The attacks on Huggins and Burch were similarly severe. Franklyn was fined one shilling for each offence, scarcely designed to deter him from future offences. On the contrary, at the Quarter Sessions in October 1782 he was convicted of assault on Thomas Gibson, another Customs Officer and was fined sixpence. In December 1782 Franklyn threatened and 'put to flight' William Turner the Excise Superintendant at King's Lynn who had singlehandedly seized a quantity of roasted coffee from two of Franklyn's henchmen.

If Franklyn hoped by these methods to intimidate Robert Bliss he was mistaken. Bliss was without doubt the most accomplished officer on the Norfolk coast and it must be assumed that he had his own number of well-informed spies. The raid on Old Hunstanton village on Christmas Eve 1782 was typical of Bliss' strategy, planning and execution. There had been major landings of brandy, gin and tea on the beaches of Old Hunstanton and Heacham on the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> December and a significant proportion had been hidden in the lower section of the west tower of St Mary's Church awaiting transportation inland on Christmas night.

Bliss decided to surround and attack the church during the yuletide service when the entire village population would be there. He further calculated that in the presence of the entire Le Strange family, one member of which was on the County Assizes Grand Jury, at least two local Justices of the Peace, the Vicar and other local gentry, he would not be opposed by Franklyn and his supporters. Outside the church were cavalry of the 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Light Dragoons, Bliss and two of his Excise Officers. They dismounted and entered the church and reached the door to the west tower. Bliss beckoned to two dragoons carrying lanterns to lead the way up the staircase. Everyone watched as a seemingly exhaustible quantity of wooden barrels and oilskin bags were passed through the doorway, across the nave from dragoon to dragoon to wagons in the lane outside. The goods were removed to Wells Excise Office.

Franklyn was present in the congregation but was powerless to intervene. He returned to his lodgings at the King's Head in Thornham and there he and his two henchmen Charles Bunkey and

Philip Summers conceived an elaborate plot to punish Bliss by luring him into a one-sided physical confrontation with Franklyn's army in Thornham village. Within days the plot unfolded.

## **Encounter in Thornham Village**

Following the Christmas Eve seizure, Robert Bliss had returned to his lodgings at the Green Dragon in Wells. On the evening of the 26<sup>th</sup> December he was handed a letter. He recognised it as coming from one of his informers who was waiting outside for him. They met and Bliss was told that large quantities of contraband were being stored in the houses and backyards of two Thornham villagers, William Overton and William Southgate. In addition, Bliss was informed that Franklyn, his henchmen Bunkey and Summers together with many of the local smugglers would be in King's Lynn to celebrate the New Year and the wedding of Franklyn's sister therefore were he to raid Thornham on New Year's Eve he would be virtually unopposed.

Bliss returned to the inn informed the Dragoon Officers that he would require their help. They gathered on the morning of December 31<sup>st</sup> 1782 in the stable yard of the Fleece Inn, Wells. They were one Corporal and six soldiers of the 11<sup>th</sup> Light Dragoon Regiment, Bliss' three Excise Officers Abbott, Spencer and Banham. Their route took them past the northern perimeter fence of Holkham Park, through the Burnhams, Overy, Ulph and Westgate where they stopped at the Pitt Arms for refreshments. They then travelled over the heathland of Burnham Deepdale Downs and Brancaster Common to Brancaster village, through Titchwell and eventually to the eastern outskirts of Thornham.

Bliss led his troops to the Old Harbour and to the cottage of William Overton as he had been informed and knocked on the door. To his surprise, William Overton turned out to be a well to do man of around 70 years of age, not at all what he was expecting. Although Overton lived near the cottages of known smugglers, when the Dragoons had made a search of his outbuildings and easily found 18 oilskin bags of tea, Overton's reaction of horror and genuine surprise, Bliss began to have his doubts. Not a man to fool easily, Bliss was convinced Overton was innocent and the smuggled goods had been deliberately planted without his knowledge. Although he considered returning to Wells in view of the suspicious nature of the information he'd received, Bliss decided to continue to his next target, the premises of William Southgate at the western end of the village. It was a fateful decision that he would regret.

As his troop approached the Red Cow the situation changed. Up till then there the village had been quiet with very few people about but as they passed the inn, a host of faces peered out at them and it was clear that Bliss and his party was expected. When they passed the Chequers, again hostile faces looked out at them while outside, dismounted riders watched silently. The hostile reception continued as Bliss led his men into Churchgate. Outside the King's Head alehouse, a group of men had gathered armed with wooden clubs, whips and pitchforks. More sinister was the group of horsemen wearing masks who displayed pairs of pistols in their belts. At this point Bliss realised he had ridden into a trap.

The village army from the Red Cow, Chequers and King's Head joined forces behind him to seal off any escape from Churchgate. With little option, Bliss led his men towards the church pond and into the narrow lane leading to William Southgate's premises followed by the armed rabble. As he passed the junction with Otter Lane he saw more of the rabble was blocking his escape route back to the

main village street and directly ahead of him another band of men waited to confront him. He had fallen into the carefully formulated trap planned by Franklyn. Contrary to the information Bliss had received, neither Franklyn, his henchmen nor any of his supporters were absent from the village.

Bliss' cavalry had been split into two groups by the heaving mass of villagers. Directly in front of Southgate's cottage, Bliss, his Excise Officers and two Dragoons had been pushed back into a tight group and were surrounded by a large mob all baying for blood. At some distance from the cottage as smaller group of the pitchfork army had surrounded the remaining Dragoons. Franklyn rode up and confronted Bliss saying 'What? You six have you come to rob us? We shall murder you all.' (Later Dragoon Sergeant Bontell testified that these were the precise words used by Franklyn). At that moment Franklyn grabbed the reins of Bliss' horse and struck him an horrendous blow to the side of his face with a heavy bludgeon. Bliss slumped forward but as he struggled to sit up, the end of a lead loaded whip wrapped itself around his head and bit deeply into his eye socket. Franklyn continued to savagely beat his enemy with repeated blows. The beatings would have continued until death had not Sergeant Botell intervened, drew his sabre, took hold of the reins of Bliss's horse and rode a direct course of escape through the ranks of the enemy. Encouraged by this, the rest of the Excise Men and Dragoons drawing their own weapons, followed in swift pursuit. The village army fell back. Heads, limbs and chests of many of the villagers were lacerated as the fleeing column slashed at them with their sabres.

Franklyn and five of his men gave chase through the lanes of Thornham and on to the outskirts of Burnham Westgate. Where the road widened, Sergeant Botell was able to organise his men into an attack formation. A line of six Dragoons turned and faced the enemy. On Botell's command, they raised their firearms and simultaneously fired a volley of warning shots at their pursuers who turned tail and retreated to Thornham.

Bliss had suffered a severe loss of blood and was slumped in the saddle and held there by one of his men. His life hung by a thread and urgent medical attention was needed if his life was to be saved. The excise party halted in front of surgeon Thomas Rand's house in Burnham Westgate. He was carried into the surgeon's house by four dragoons. The prognosis was not good. Should he survive, the beating's he had received would leave Bliss permanently blind in one eye and the sight of the other impaired. With such sombre news the Excise party returned wearily to Wells.

Here were no celebrations in Thornham either as the seriousness of what had happened began to sink in. Many of the villagers who had got caught up in the excitement were now badly wounded and would never work again. Added to that, the threat of reprisals from the Authorities terrified them. Robert Bliss' second in command William Spencer, returned to Wells from Burnham Westgate after a meeting with bliss to report that letters had already been despatched by riders to the Sheriff of Norfolk requesting a signed warrant for the arrest of Thomas Franklyn and to the Excise headquarters in London demanding that a resident peace-keeping military force be sent to Thornham.

The Smuggling Act of 1746 was far reaching and stipulated that the wounding of a Customs or Excise Officer in the executions of his duty was punishable by death. In addition alehouse keepers who entertained smugglers on their premises were to be fined £100 and their licenses forfeited. Sections of the Act encouraged smugglers to turn King's evidence. Anyone who came forward with

information leading to the arrest and conviction of a colleague would be given a free pardon for his past crimes together with a handsome reward.

If the purpose of this inducement was to undermine the spirit of the close knit communities, it succeeded in Thornham. Speculation, rumour and hysteria engulfed the entire population; within days the situation deteriorated so much that the War Office ordered a detachment of 20 men and horses of the 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Light Dragoons, quartered in King's Lynn, to take up billets in the immediate Thornham area. On the same day, another troop of the same Regiment stationed in Bury St Edmunds, despatched an Officer and 16 men to Thornham where they were to 'remain until further notice to assist officers of the Revenue to apprehend smugglers.

As the column of 16 mounted Dragoons led by an officer, rode into the village, other elements arrived in their wake. The Sheriff of Norfolk sent two of his bailiffs armed with arrest warrants while a contingent of the feared and despised Naval Press Gang arrived. Anyone involved in the New Year's Eve attack, providing that sworn statements to their involvement were obtained, were to be arrested. The Press Gang's orders were less complicated. Any able bodied male between the ages of 18 and 40 whose direct involvement was difficult to prove, was to be forcibly apprehended, taken to King's Lynn and pressed into active service on one of His Majesty's naval vessals.

All the customary recruiting grounds of the Press Gangs, the harbour and ale houses were deserted. So too were the streets and men hid in outhouses, barns and cattle sheds or indeed any of the traditional hiding places for contraband. For the villagers it was a harrowing time. All smuggling activity stopped. An unknown number of men were taken by force to a life of brutality aboard navy warships. Ten men, fringe members of Franklyn's army were arrested by the Sheriff's bailiffs, taken to Norwich and imprisoned in the County Gaol at the Castle to await trial at the Lent Assizes in Thetford.

Meanwhile Franklyn remained a free man, losing himself in the warren of streets of the North End of King's Lynn. Franklyn's behaviour suggests that he believed himself to be immune from serious legal retribution. However the Sheriff of Norfolk had selected a Thomas Allen, Peace Officer as a special bailiff to serve Franklyn with an arrest warrant and to take him into custody. To assist him, Allen had recruited three members of the Port of King's Lynn Press Gang.

On the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> January 1783, Franklyn attended the wedding of a distant Kinsman. In the evening, Allen and his men waited in the shadows and saw Franklyn leave an alehouse. The Peace Officer and his men surprised Franklyn but he lashed out at them with such force that they wer knocked to the ground. Meanwhile Franklyn called loudly for help from his friends in the neighbourhood. Beaten off Allen called on the support of the West Norfolk Militia. Their combined forces arrived outside Franklyn's house off Hogman's Lane around 10 o'clock at night. Allen and Braddock, a newly recruited Press Gang officer, entered Franklyn's house. A door opened and Allen found Franklyn inside. Typically Franklyn responded by picking up a loaded blunderbuss and fired at Allen and Braddock who threw themselves on the floor. At the sound of the shot, the militia who were waiting outside, opened fire causing chaos and wounding innocent bystanders. However after a brief struggle, Franklyn was arrested, clapped in irons and removed to the town gaol. He was later transferred to Norwich Castle to await trial at the Lent Assizes.



Franklyn wasted no time briefing a solicitor and bribing witnesses who would be prepared to commit perjury for money; so many came forward at his trial that it lasted seven hours. For the prosecution only Abbott, Spencer and Botell testified, crucially, Bliss was still too unwell to attend. In the end the jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty and Franklyn went free. The authorities, having failed to get a conviction, succeeded in squeezing Franklyn financially by serving a succession of Exchequer writs. Franklyn's business empire was completely dismantled and he was reduced to dabbling in small-time smuggling around the port of King's Lynn.

The Dragoons were withdrawn at the end of January 1783 to the relief of the Thornham villagers and around the same time, the ten Thornham men were released without charge on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

Robert Bliss suffered both physical and mental problems and was unable to return to work. At first his employers were sympathetic but as time went on became less so. In August 1783 he formally requested a transfer from Wells which was agreed. He returned to work in the new position of Supervisor of the Chelsea District, a position which was potentially dangerous in view of the considerable volume of smuggling traffic which would have passed through the district from the West Sussex and Hampshire coasts to inner London. It seems however that Bliss was disinclined to carry the fight to the enemy and in 1786 official warnings were issued to him and his career in the Excise came to an end the following year. He was dismissed from the service without a pension or compensation for the injuries he sustained and without recognition for his past achievements.

In the aftermath, a Commission of Enquiry into all aspects of the smuggling 'business' was instigated by the then Prime Minister, Lord Shelbourne. Among the 'outrages' examined was the 'Battle of Thornham' As a result the remote Norfolk coastline containing the villages of Thornham, Holme and Hunstanton, all of which had gained a reputation for lawlessness, was routinely targeted throughout the remainder of the 1780s by officers of the Army, Navy, Customs and Excise.

However it took more than that to frighten off the smugglers. In November 1783, a huge consignment of brandy and Geneva was landed from a smuggling cutter on the beach between Holme and Thornham. William Turner, Excise Superintendant, King's Lynn, recovered 125 of the landed half-anker casks secreted in Hunstanton and Thornham and conveyed them to his Excise Office. A substantial quantity remained at large until Turner, supported only by Christopher Strangman and Excise Officer based at Snettisham, raided the premises of William Hutchinson who lived in a small cottage next to the Red House in Thornham. While in the process of removing casks from an underground vault behind the cottage Turner and Strangman were surrounded, threatened and assaulted by Hutchinson and four of his associates. All five had been members of Franklyn's village army and demonstrated that they had lost none of their aggressive spirit and old habits. Within minutes an armed mob had arrived from the King's Head however further assaults were averted by the arrival of Samuel Rennett the well respected Customs Riding Officer, based in Thornham together with Henry Benton a farmer and merchant from the Red House.

Meanwhile Franklyn's partner William Kemball was still active. On the morning of Friday 24<sup>th</sup> September 1784 his boat, the Lively set sail from Dunkirk for the Norfolk coast. The Lively had been expertly constructed to provide great speed and she was more than a match for the ships of the Custom's Board and the Royal Navy. In addition the Lively's crew were expert sailors, brought up to the sea and smuggling from an early age and their knowledge of the sand-banks, shoals and inlets of

the Norfolk coast was second to none. Amongst the crew were Andrew Gunton, Kemball's second in command, and Thomas Williams who had been press ganged into serving seven years in the Royal Navy in the American War of Independence before being discharged and joining Kemball in the summer of 1784. The Lively arrived off the coast in the late afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> and anchored off the Burnham Flats.

At 10 o'clock that night, a gang of twenty men assembled on the beach to the west of the new harbour channel at Thornham, and awaited a signal from the Lively. In charge was Perry Smith who had organised the local men to unload the contraband goods on to the beach and arranged the transport of these goods to temporary hiding places. He was also on the lookout for the Revenue Men and the Dragoons who supported them. When the all-clear signal flashed, Kemball's longboat was put out to land the first consignment. On the beach anxious hands unloaded the casks of brandy and gin and loaded them and the large oil-skin bags of tea onto the backs of the waiting horses. Within minutes the cargo was on its way to the cellar of a Thornham farm house. However Kemball had received a warning signal from one of his lookouts that the Revenue Officers were dangerously close, so he abandoned further landings and returned to Burnham Flats.