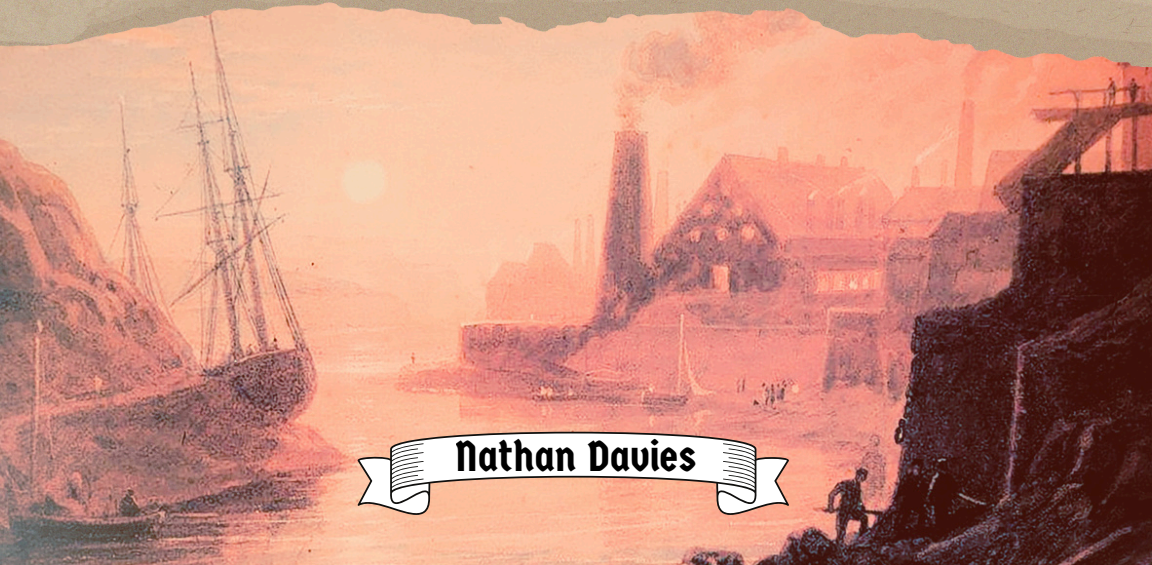
A General History of

Smuggling and Piracy in Gower



Nathan Davies

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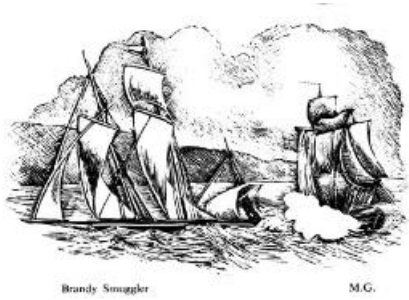


Michael Gibbs, *Brandy Smuggler, 1973,* sketch on paper in *Gower,* volume 24

BY NATHAN DAVIES

Online Series: https://smuggler.wales/

Contents

Chapter One: A Brief History of Smuggling and Piracy in South Wales

During the early modern period, smuggling was one of the most organised and widespread criminal activities in Wales. Despite this, smuggling remains an understudied aspect of crime and justice in the eighteenth-century. James Sharpe argued that "little serious research on smuggling has been done" and this is reflected in the literature on the subject. Beyond this, the public itself is rarely educated on this rich subject.

> "Wherever there may be a sea, there are pirates in it" – An ancient Greek Proverb.

The story of sea related crimes in South Wales predated the heyday of smuggling in the 1700s by centuries. In 2002, workmen digging the foundations for an arts centre on the banks of the Usk in Newport discovered the remains of a 15th Century ship. Experts claimed it was

possibly a Portuguese ship that had been captured by pirates. They suggested these pirates could have been under the command of the Earl of Warwick (1428-1471), who owned vast tracts of land in Newport. Two centuries earlier, there is a record of a Genoese ship being captured off Tenby by a gang of pirates who smuggled the goods, which included two barrels of gold, onto land.

David Jordan, *An artistic impression of how the Newport Medieval ship may have looked*, Newport Museums and Heritage Service

In 1556, the inhabitants of South Wales had implored Elizabeth I to help them stop pirate attacks and curb the smuggling of illicit goods onto land. She issued a proclamation that every captured pirate or smuggler was to be hanged on the cliffs above the sea as a lesson and a

warning. It would seem like this proclamation made little difference as in 1578 a ship from the English navy was sent to South Wales to capture pirates attacking ships in the Bristol Channel. The ship, known as *the Flying Hart*, was itself attacked by pirates off the coast of Newport.

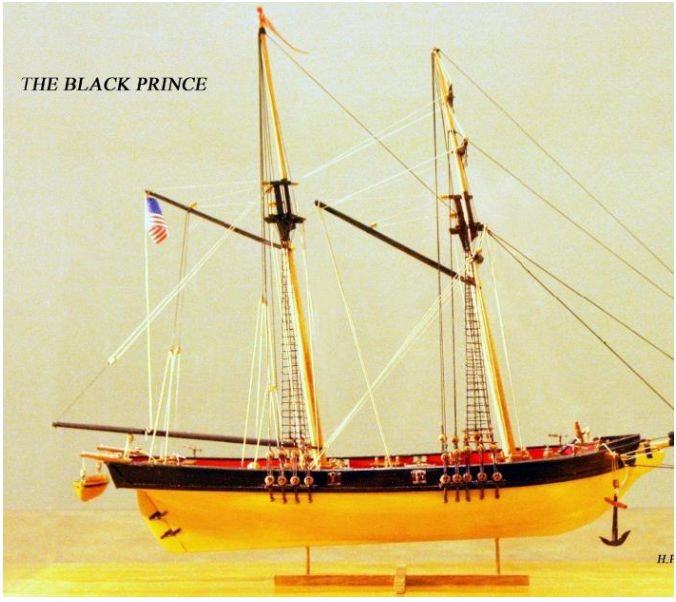
By the middle of the 16th Century, Tenby had become a hotbed of pirate activity. In the 1530s, around 15 pirates, including Captain John du Laerquerec, were caught when they came ashore for supplies. The rest of the crew witnessed their capture and sent three boats full of armed men to try rescue them. They ultimately failed and all of them stood trial for piracy. In 1546, pirates under the command of Richard Vaughan captured the Spanish ship, *Sancta Maria de Leusa*, smuggled the cargo ashore and sold it in the county. In 1555, pirates captured a Breton ship and brought it into Tenby Bay, but were arrested by Sir John Wogan, Sheriff of Pembrokeshire. Rather than return the cargo to its owner, Wogan took the goods and sold them. The Breton owner, John le Barthicke, brought Wogan to the Privy Council in London where the sheriff of Pembrokeshire had to pay compensation.

Caldey Island was also a stronghold for pirates and smugglers. The Crown Records of 1562 state that smugglers received sheep and other goods “sometimes without leave of the owners”. It added that Fishguard was

“a great resort and succour of all pirates…” It has been claimed that pirates often stole and ate horses which the inhabitants of Caldey used to till the land instead of oxen.

Piracy would remain common along the South Wales coast into the 17th Century. Sir Thomas Button of Dyffryn was appointed Admiral of the King’s Navy on the seas between Wales and Ireland and spent a number of years chasing pirates. During this period, pirates from France, Spain and Turkey attacked ships sailing along the South Wales coast, often seeking refuge off the Penarth headland.

On occasion, pirates would also threaten ports along the coast. In one instance, pirates threatened to attack Fishguard in 1779. The crew of the American privateers on a vessel named the *Black Prince*, captured a local ship outside the harbour and threatened to fire on the town unless a ransom of £1000 was paid by the locals. The inhabitants of Fishguard refused and so the pirates fired their cannon towards the town, hitting a number of buildings. The marks that the shot left could be seen on the wall of one hotel until the 20th Century. An armed ship crewed by a gang of smugglers fired on the pirate ship, forcing it to leave the area. After this incident, eight cannons were placed in the fort to protect Fishguard.

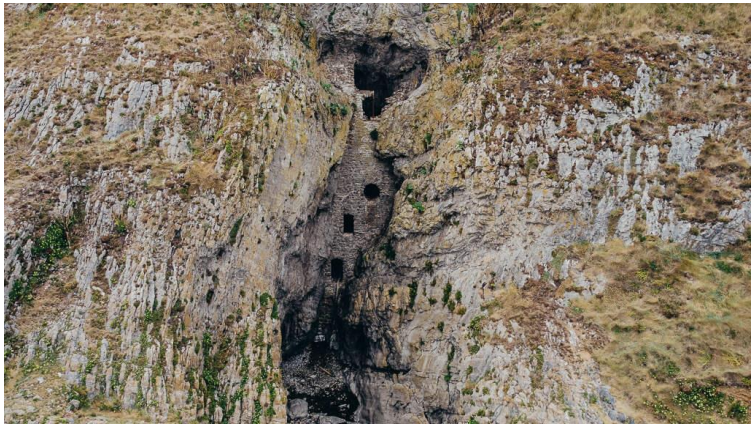


Henry Dillemuth, *Model of the Black Prince* (A Revolutionary War Privateering Vessel), Iona College

> "The country is filled with energetic and enterprising men, rendered desperate by being reduced from affluence to poverty through the vicissitudes of the times. They will give an impulse to smuggling unknown to the country heretofore" – John C. Calhoun.

While piracy along the Welsh coast began to decrease in frequency throughout the 18th Century, Smuggling remained a prominent crime. During this period, smuggling was one of the most organised and widespread criminal activities in Wales and the rest of the British Isles. Often many people engaged in the activity from various

locations, moving a variety of goods throughout Wales. Gower was a particular hotbed for smugglers, with Lucas Family of Port Eynon being especially known for this trade on the peninsula. There were many isolated creeks, caves and beaches on the peninsula, and being located next to Swansea, one of Wales' primary ports, it became a crucial location for smugglers in South Wales.



Culver's Hole, Port Eynon, possibly used by Lucas Family, photograph, National Trust

Brandy Cove on the southern coast of Gower was frequently used by smugglers. As this bay was sheltered, transport inland was virtually invisible through the wooded Bishopston valley. Above the valley, farms such as Highway were used as staging posts by smugglers like William Arthur of Great Highway Farm and John Griffiths of Little Highway Farm. The entrance to an old lead mine by the beach was blown up by revenue officers to prevent

smugglers hiding contraband in the shaft before transporting it to local farms.

Brandy Cove, nearby Bishopston, frequently used by smugglers, photograph, National Trust

The revenue officers complained that they lacked the resources to tackle smuggling. According to a 1730 report, “The smugglers are grown very insolent and obstruct our officers in execution of their duty … the master and the mariners of the ship Galloway … came up on deck with pistols and drawn cutlasses and refused them to rummage.” One method the smugglers had of preventing the chief customs officer in Swansea from discovering their contraband was making sure he was called up for jury service in the local court on the day they were unloading in

the harbour. As he was otherwise engaged, it was easier for smugglers to complete their business unevaded. This is a clear indication that smuggling was supported in the local community, even by those in the amongst the higher echelons of society.

Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, there were several instances along the South Wales coast of revenue ships being wrecked and revenue officers injured. The area around Swansea was particularly infamous for brutal clashes between revenue officers and smugglers. In January 1788, revenue officers searching for a notorious smuggler came across 50 men with “iron bars, pokers, large knives, whips and other weapons.” As the revenue officers were completely outmanned, they could not serve a warrant on the smugglers and had to request military assistance. Despite being peacetime, the reply from the War Office was “the condition of the forces at this time is such that it was not possible to send troops to South Wales.”

Old Rectory, Rhosilli, smugglers used nearby stream to hide contraband, photograph, National Trust

The revenue officers continued to be outsmarted by smugglers who resorted to new and creative ways to hide their contraband. A hiding place was found in the bed of a small river behind the Old Rectory in Rhosilli, Gower. The only way of accessing it was to change the course of the river itself. Even if the revenue officers were successful in seizing illegal contraband, it was difficult to transport them safely to a customs house. In April 1803, a revenue officer named Frankie Bevan seized over 400 four-gallon casks of whiskey in Pennard in Gower. They were loaded onto wagons and escorted to Swansea, but during the journey, around 200 drunk men and women began harassing the officers. While the convoy was accompanied by up to fifty members of the local militia to ensure its safety, not all the casks of whiskey made it to the final destination.

Clearly, there is much history hidden beneath the sands of the Welsh coasts ready to be uncovered.

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Chapter Two: What is Smuggling? What is Piracy?

What is Smuggling? Smuggling in its simplest form is the illicit movement of goods into or out of a country. It was one of the most organised and widespread criminal activities in Wales and the rest of the British Isles during the 18th Century. Often many people engaged in the activity from various locations, moving a variety of goods throughout England and Wales. Smugglers (or smyglwyr in Welsh) were often creative in the ways they carried illicit goods as different types of goods needed specific methods of transport and various regions developed their own smuggling customs based on geographical location and cultural conditions.

Smugglers situated in the west and north of the country would easily manipulate import and export regulations by moving goods from Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. While those in the southern and eastern regions engaged in illicit trade with merchants in Holland and France. While the types of goods varied, Welsh smugglers favoured tobacco, tea and alcohol, particularly gin and brandy. They also moved luxury items such as lace, silk, and linen. Smugglers tended to be members of working class such as

mariners and labourers who supplemented their exploitative wages with the proceeds from illicit free trade.

George Morland, *Smugglers Unloading Contraband*, 1794, oil on Canvas, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

For example, the infamous William Hawkin Arthur from Pennard in Gower was the leader of a large gang of smugglers that operated in the Bristol Channel. He lived in Great Highway Farm which he used to store and hide illegal contraband. One of Arthur's ships called The Cornwall, was constantly stationed at Devon. It was a pilot boar of about 20 tons which was used to meet larger ships which had reached the Bristol Channel and take illicit goods from them before heading into port.

The Cornwall had been caught several times with illegal contraband onboard, but every time the captain had a sufficient excuse and was released. This changed in 1783, when The Cornwall was caught with a large amount of gin and tea on board. The ship and goods were seized by the revenue men. Arthur subsequently wrote to the revenue service asking them to release his ship as the tea and gin had been placed on board without the knowledge of the captain or himself. The revenue service refused Arthur's request and The Cornwall was sawn into three sections and sold to pay costs and provide a reward for the revenue men.

What is piracy? The legal definition of piracy is "to seize goods illegally at sea." Some sources claim that Wales has produced more pirates per mile of coastline than any other country in Europe. Many pirates during the 17th and 18th centuries were of Welsh decent. The infamous Captain Henry Morgan and Bartholomew 'Black Bart' Roberts were amongst the foremost pirates to sail the seas during the Golden Age of Piracy.

Benjamin Cole, *Captain Bartholomew Roberts, pirate, at Whydah*, circa. 1724, wood craving, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

The Welsh word for pirate is môr-leidr which means sea-thief but there are several other terms such as privateer and buccaneer that are often associated with piracy. At times, it is difficult to differentiate these terms, but they do have some distinctions. A privateer (or preifatwr in Welsh) was somebody who attacked an enemy country's ships with the approval of their state. For much of British history, the English Monarchy and Parliament would grant certain individuals with immunity from prosecution if they attacked enemy ships, usually the Spanish. Privateers were given letters of marque from the Crown which gave them written permission to attack enemy ships. Quite often, someone would start out as a privateer during wartime but as the English Crown's allegiances changed or when peace

was declared, the privateers would find themselves classed as pirates.

This happened to the infamous Captain Henry Morgan had enjoyed the support of the Crown to attack Spanish ships in the Caribbean, but as he and his men ventured across the Panama isthmus to attack Panama City, England and Spain began peace negotiations. As a result, Henry Morgan was summoned to London where he was charged with piracy to appease the Spanish ambassador.

Alexandre Exquemelin*, Welsh buccaneer Henry Morgan from Piratas de la America,* 1681, sketch on paper, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

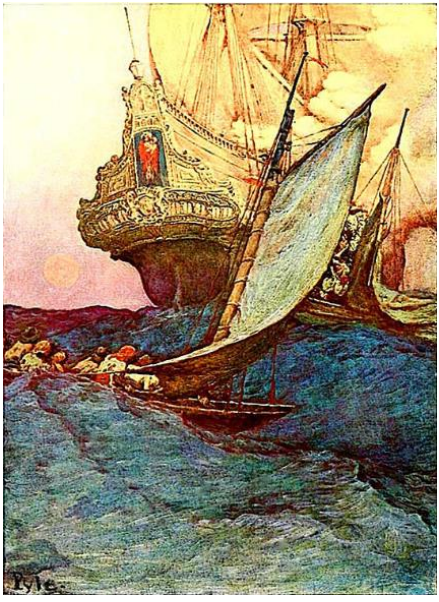
What about buccaneers? This is a term that was used primarily in the Caribbean during the Golden Age of Piracy, and as such has no Welsh equivalent. By 1640, the island Hispaniola was a haven for pirates operating in the Caribbean. Wild pigs and cattle roamed the island since they had been left there by Spanish settlers who realised quickly that the island was insufficient to raise cattle. Many of the inhabitants of Hispaniola turned to piracy so they could make a living by plundering Spanish ships who were passing through the Caribbean bringing gold, silver and other goods from the New World. Once ex-soldiers settled the land in Hispaniola, they started to hunt the animals that had been left to run wild on the island. The natives' method of preserving meat was to dry it slowly over the fire, to produce boucan, and this was picked up by the ex-soldiers who slowly became known as buccaneers. As the buccaneers followed the other natives into piracy, the term became associated with anybody committing sea-based crimes in the Caribbean.

Before the 17th Century, there was only one name for sea plunderers and that was 'pirate' or 'pyrate'. One of the earliest references to pirates in Welsh history comes from one of the heroic poems Brut y Tywysogion, which mentions that Rhys ap Tewdwr received the help of Irish and Scottish pirates to reclaim Deheubarth in South Wales:

… y rodes rys ap Tewdwr swllt yr herwlo[n]gwyr

y sgottyeid or gwyddyl adathoed yn borth ydaw …

The word ‘pirate’ comes from the Latin word pirata, which derives from the Greek word peirates, from peirein, meaning to attack. There were many reasons why people resorted to piracy. Particularly, economic conditions during the Age of Sail (1400s-1900s) determined an individuals’ aspirations of piracy. The poor conditions aboard English merchant ships and the Royal Navy motivated many people into a life of piracy or smuggling to make ends meet or carve out a better life for themselves and their families.



Howard Pyle, *Pirates approach a treasure ship*, 1921, painting on canvas, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

This was the case for John Callis, a 16th Century pirate who operated in South Wales, between Cardiff and Haverfordwest and became known as “the most dangerous pyrate in the realm”. Callis first sailed as an officer in the Royal Navy under Sir John Berkeley but soon turned to a piratical career that lasted decades. Eventually, he was captured in 1576 after mounting pressure from neighbouring nations forced the English government to take action. He was hanged in Newport later that year. During his time as a pirate, he would often smuggle his prizes into the villages of Laugharne and Carew in Milford Haven, only a few miles south of Little Newcastle, where he would sell his illegal contraband.

John Callis is an example of someone who was both a pirate and a smuggler. While there are clear differences between a pirate and a smuggler, the terms are not mutually exclusive. Very often, pirates would have to smuggle their plundered prizes onto land so they could sell it and make a profit, while a few smugglers acquired their illegal contraband by seizing it illegally at sea. Of course, only a minority of people involved in smuggling resorted to piracy, but there are enough examples of individuals doing both for these terms to be interrelated. For instance, John Lucas of Port Eynon was infamously both a smuggler and at times a pirate. He was given the Salt House in Port Eynon by his father and proceeded to fortify it and use it as a base of operations for his illegal activities. He also

repaired the nearby Culver's Hole making it "…both inaccessible save for a passage thereunto through the clift …" It was said that Lucas:

> "… secured ye pirates and ye French smugglers and rifled ye wrecked ships and forced mariners to serve him".

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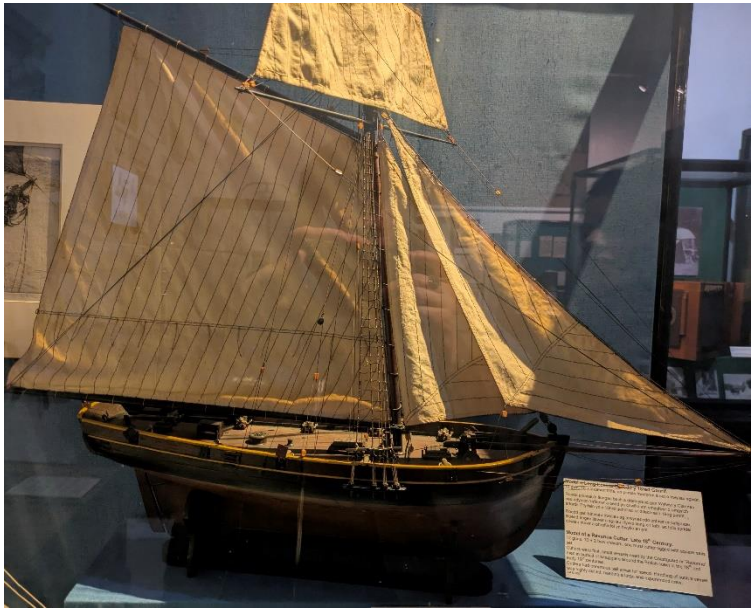
Chapter Three: Smugglers and the Law - The Story of the Revenue Service

The revenue service was initially established in the 13th Century when taxes were imposed on certain goods. Over the years, the service was extended as custom houses were built in ports where the Tax Collector and other officials operated and illegal contraband was stored. By the 18th Century, the government was losing substantial sums of money to smuggling gangs throughout the country. As such, a service was established to police the coast and catch smugglers at sea.

> "They came on duty at dusk and went to bed at dawn. Every night they were assembled in the watchroom, armed with pistol and cutlass or with musket or bayonet … no man was given his instructions until he reported for duty and he was forbidden to communicate with his family after he received them … the guard was inspected twice a night to see if it was alert and

watchful" – The routine duties of a revenue officer during the 18th Century.

In 1800, the revenue service had 40 ships carrying a total of 200 cannons and crews comprising some 700 men. They were expected to sail the coasts, particularly at night and during bad weather, as these were the times that smugglers operated. Quite often, smugglers were able to bribe revenue officers who would happily turn a blind eye to illegal activities for financial compensation or a cask of brandy or tea.



Model of a Revenue Cutter, late 18th Century, Swansea Museum

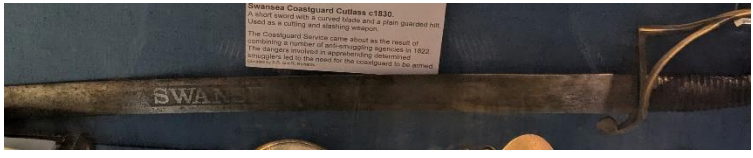
Revenue officers received a modest wage for their services but this was supplemented with rewards for results, specifically, any untaxed goods they seized would be sold and the proceeds shared between the revenue officers and the ship's owner, after the government had received its half share, known as the 'King's Share'. Most of the ships used by the revenue service were privately owned and hired by the Customs Board.

Traditionally, revenue officers wore red shirts and blue trousers, while the captains and the mate wore a long blue coat with brass buttons, the button holes being embroidered with silver thread and a cocked hat with a cockade. Each officer was armed with a cutlass and a pistol.

A riding officer (Customs & Excise), circa 18th century, woodcut, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Alongside the revenue officers at seas, the service also had officers patrolling the coasts on horseback, the riding officers. These were established in 1698 and were stationed along the coast, up to ten miles apart depending of the terrain and the amount of smuggling in the area. The chief riding officer would be responsible for six officers who searched the coasts for smugglers on beaches or hidden in coves.

In 1745, an act was passed allowing the owner of any ship loitering within five miles of the coast or in a navigable estuary to be brought before a magistrate's court, and if they could not explain their presence sufficiently, would be sentenced to a month's hard labour. From 1746 onwards, anyone injuring or killing a revenue officer would be sentenced to death, and anybody found guilty had a choice between paying a fine, going to prison or being enlisted in the navy.



Swansea Coastguard Cutlass, c.1830, Swansea Museum

Local authorities could also be fined. A county could be fined £200 if illegal goods were found within its boundaries. If a revenue officer was attacked in the county,

the local authorities would have to pay a fine of £40, and if an officer was killed, the fine was £100. However, if the smuggler responsible was caught within six months the fine would be revoked.

Of course, revenue officers had restrictions and rules about how to conduct themselves. If they seized a ship and were unable to find goods on board, the owner could claim compensation. To pursue a ship without being certain of its illegal intent would not help to further an officer's career. Also, the revenue cutter could not stop a ship outside territorial waters without good cause. Otherwise, they could be accused of piracy, a defence often used by smugglers. Therefore, the revenue officers had to be sure of their exact location when seizing a ship.

> "When a ship is seized, the officer should take special care to immediately note the depth as well as the distance from land to two points on the shore at the exact time the ship was seized and that in the presence of two or more officers …" – Instructions to revenue cutter captains issued in 1832.

Some coastlines were monitored better than others. Throughout the late 18th Century, the revenue service only employed three men to guard the extensive coast of

Gower. This is likely the reason smuggling was commonplace during the period. Smuggling gangs often outnumbered the revenue officers. They would often have to request reinforcements from the government, but it could take weeks for the government to respond and send troops into the area. Smuggling gangs would often take advantage of these conditions. If they were tipped off about the revenue officers' intentions, the smugglers could remove and hide their contraband in another location. For example, William Hawkins Arthur and John Griffiths would often get informed about the revenue service calling on the government for reinforcements and prepared for their arrival.

As the illegal trade grew, the more people took part in it. On occasion there were gangs of several hundred men involved in some local authorities. Sometimes, smugglers were confident enough to land the goods in broad daylight, and they would often attack revenue cutters. As such, the work of the revenue officer was extremely dangerous. In a report published by the revenue service in 1736, it was said that 250 revenue men had been attacked or injured since Christmas 1723, and that six had been killed.

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Chapter Four: The Lucas Family and the Pirates of Port Eynon

The Lucas family are mostly remembered for romanticised legends of smuggling and piracy. While they have become most notorious family in Gower known for smuggling, much of their story has become folklore which developed since the 18th Century from the pages of Archaeologia Cambrensis to pamphlets located in tourist shops throughout the Gower.

> "… he secured ye pirates and ye French smugglers and rifled ye wrecked ships and forced mariners to serve him" – Lucas Annotation no.1, circa 1830

Tales of John Lucas, pirate, smuggler and outlaw, and his various descendants have been handed down through generations of Gower folklore, but are their stories true? Or, are they just rumours and hearsay that have developed into glamorised legends?

John Lucas was likely born around 1510, the eldest son of David Lucas of Reynoldston. He was given Salt House in Port Eynon which seven generations of Lucases lived before it was destroyed in a storm. He fortified Salt House and used it as a headquarters for his illegal activities. Lucas proceeded to start a partnership with two other men from the area, George Eynon and Robert Scurlage, and together they controlled the smuggling gangs that worked along the Gower Coast and became known as 'the Pirates of Port Eynon'. John Lucas garnered the reputation as some kind of Robin Hood character, as the whole of Gower took advantage of the illegal contraband that he brought ashore in Port Eynon. Smugglers were often generous to the local population in order to ensure their co-operation.

Salt House, Port Eynon, photograph, National Trust

At the far end of Port Eynon is the location of Kulverd Hole or Culver's Hole, a cove surrounded by a sixty-foot wall with lookout slits. John Lucas fortified this area and used it to store arms and hide contraband. Some sources claim there was a secret tunnel that connected to Salt House, but this tunnel has never been discovered so could just be hearsay or a local legend. John Lucas would remove his fortifications from Salt House and Culver's Hole later in life as he gave up smuggling.

He was followed in the smuggling trade by numerous members of his family. A ship belonging to one of his descendants, also named John Lucas, got into difficulties on the Nash Sands, but before he had time to unload his illegal goods, another band of smugglers, accompanied by wreckers, emptied the ship. Lucas rushed off to the house of a local squire who was the leader of this particular group and demanded that his goods be returned. Not only did he persuade the squire to release his contraband but also found himself a wife, the squire's daughter.

Culver ‘s Hole, Port Eynon, photograph, National Trust

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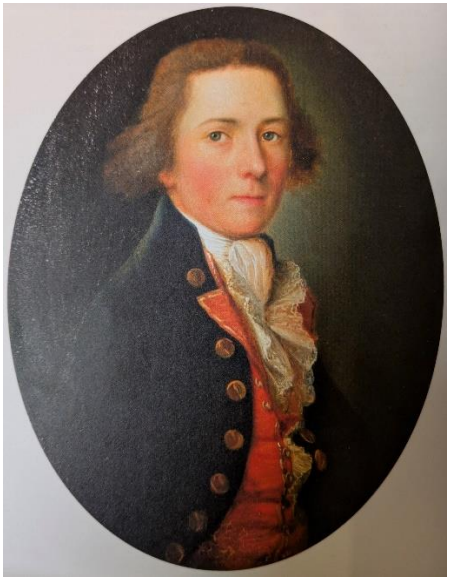
According to legends, the last John Lucas associated with smuggling died of fright in 1803, as he witnessed Salt House being destroyed in a huge storm. It was said that the cellars of Salt House were so big that you could drive a horse and cart down them. Also, that the final cargo of wines and silk from France was no never distributed before the death of the last John Lucas. If this is true, then the illegal contraband would still be in the cellars but they have never been discovered, with many people searching for them and countless excavations of the area.



John Lucas the younger, circa. 1788, painting, found in: Robert Lucas, *Supplement to a Gower Family*, (Lewes: Book Guild Limited, 1986).

Salt House allegedly was linked to the old family home Stouthall via an undiscovered tunnel. Once again, nothing has been found at Stouthall to indicate these tunnels are not a myth. Moreover, Stouthall is remarkable for how unremarkable it is for the home of an infamous smuggling family.

While Stouthall is unremarkable, one of the family's other houses was the Great House at Horton had some interesting additions that allude to the Lucases smuggling heritage. In 1986, when the owner was undertaking renovation work, he found loopholes for muskets in the wall. It is also alleged that the staircase was made of timber from a ship that was wrecked off Gower's coast.

Stouthall, c. 1840, sketch on paper, found in: Robert Lucas, Supplement to a Gower Family, (Lewes: Book Guild Limited, 1986).

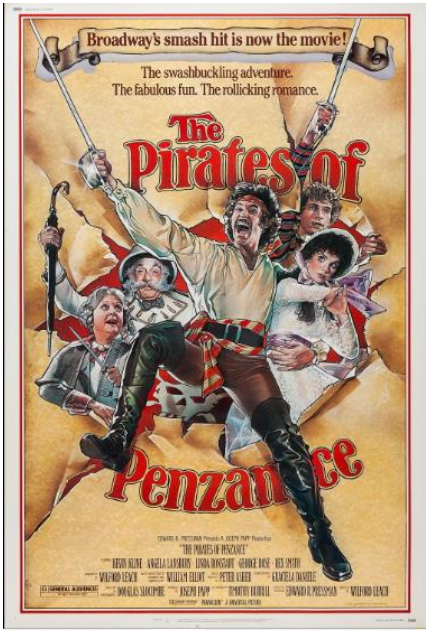
While these aspects of the Great House are interesting and might suggest their involvement in the smuggling trade, it is not any indication the Lucas clan conducted actions of piracy. While many of the Lucases openly contributed to the smuggling of illegal contraband into Gower, there is a question about whether the Lucas clan had resorted to piracy.

Nearly all the information on the Lucas Family from the 15th Century to 1826 can be traced back to a single source, a document known as the Lucas Annotation no.1. It purported to be a commentary on the pedigree and family tree of Port Eynon's branch of the Lucas family. The Annotation was compiled by Reverend Dr. J. H. Spry during the 1830s in connection with a family lawsuit over ownership of property. While at first few people questioned the authenticity of the Annotation, overtime it came under more scrutiny.

Robert Lucas, a solicitor by profession and descendent of the Lucas Family, returned from England to Gower in the 1970s and began researching his family's history. As chairman of the Gower Society, he contributed many articles about his family's heritage. At first, he took the Annotation seriously, but overtime, Robert Lucas realised the genealogy did not fit and had doubts over the pirates of Port Eynon's existence.

Michael Gibbs found evidence that John Lucas might not have owned Salt House, instead it was occupied by a Mrs. Gribble and the building was merely a place where sea-water was evaporated for its salt. Robert Lucas wrote, "… the Salthouse story is a work of fiction" and went onto conclude "… while John may have consorted with pirates it is much more probable that he was, like the other Lucases of those times, no more than a busy farmer".

Robert Lucas's reappraisal dismissed the Annotation as a hoax that was likely created by Reverend William Lucas Collins, a clergyman that resided in Gower. Reagardless, the 'pirates of Port Eynon' had already infiltrated Gower folklore and been immortalised in books, pamphlets and websites.



Pirates of Penzance, 1983, movie poster, a musical by Gilbert and Sullivan.

The stories of the Lucas Family have even influenced works of fiction. Apparently, the composers Gilbert and Sullivan based their opera The Pirates of Penzance, on John Lucas and his alleged connection with smuggling goods on the Cornish coast, near Penzance. The Lucas Family's folklore also appeared in Kingsley Ross Hill's novel Nan's Nan and the Pirates of Port Eynon which is a part of his award-winning Gower Peninsula Series. While the legends surrounding the Lucas Family might be far from reality, nothing beats a satisfactory myth.

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Chapter Five: William Hawkin Arthur and the Smugglers of Brandy Cove

William Hawkin Arthur was one of the most renowned smugglers in Gower throughout the 18th Century. He famously operated out of Great Highway Farm in Pennard, alongside his criminal associate, John Griffiths, who lived in the neighbouring Little Highway Farm.

> "… the most daring smuggler in Glamorgan during the eighteenth century" – The Swansea Tax Collector, 1788.

Both these farmhouses were used to store illegal contraband. In 1786, a dozen revenue officers attacked Great Highway Farm, but Arthur was informed of their plan and was ready for them with "… a Body of desperate fellows … amounted to One hundred". After a fierce fight, the revenue men were forced to retreat. Raids on the farm would continue with two more taking place in 1788 alone.

The Highway farms were a strange choice as a base of operations for smuggling as it was near Swansea and could be easily accessed by revenue officers. This is perhaps the reason why these farmhouses were raided so often. In 1804, both farmhouses were raided and illegal goods were found in the cellars. According to the Swansea tax officer, "these farms were supplied many years with foreign spirits and other uncustomed goods to a vast amount." In the process of guarding the illegal contraband, a mob appeared at the farms and started a fight with the revenue officers. During the struggle seventeen casks of brandy disappeared.

Michael Gibbs, *Smugglers, 1973,* sketch on paper in *Gower,* volume 24

A similar story is told in Gower about a revenue officer who found a cask of brandy hidden in the attic of one of the Highway farms. He sent for more men to help him while he kept watch on the cask. Downstairs, the

smugglers started shouting and singing which masked the sound of a hole being drilled through the ceiling and into the cask. The brandy was strategically emptied into a tub downstairs. While there is no evidence this story is true, it shows that folklore had formed around William Hawkin Arthur and the smugglers of Highway Farm.

Brandy Cove, Gower, photograph, National Trust

According to local legends, the illegal contraband was landed at Brandy Cove before hauled by pack-horses through Bishopston Valley. Overtime, Brandy Cove was used less as Pwll Du beach became the primary location for the smugglers to land their illegal goods as it was situated closer to the Highway farms. The illegal contraband was taken down the aptly named Smuggler's Lane to the Highway farms to be stored. For many years, Smuggler's Lane was overgrown and virtually impassable, but it has now been cleared and can be safety negotiated by foot. The lane is between tall banks which hides it from the surrounding fields.

Pwll Du Beach, Gower photograph, National Trust

As the revenue service only employed three men to guard the extensive coasts of Gower for much of the 18th Century, it is understandable how smuggling was commonplace. Even when the revenue service was able to deploy more officers, Arthur was usually ready. On one occasion in 1786, Arthur was informed that the Customs at Swansea were aware of his illegal activities. Fourteen revenue men surrounded Great Highway Farm only to find It completely deserted. When an officer knocked at the door, a sleepy voice refused them entry and denied all knowledge of illegal contraband. Suddenly, a gang of fifty masked men attacked the revenue officers. They were armed with pokers, iron bars, long knives, bricks and other weaponry. The unarmed revenue officers were quickly overpowered and forced to retreat.

Michael Gibbs, *Smugglers with pack-horse and illegal contraband*, 1973, sketch on paper in Gower, volume 24

Tales of Arthur's ruthlessness against men of the law gave him a feared reputation amongst revenue officers. In 1788, they requested a navy ship to be permanently at Penarth and for sixty soldiers to help them take Barry Island, where Arthur had also had a base of operations. During that year, the revenue men raided Barry Island twice. Finally in 1791, Arthur was driven from Barry Island with the help of sixty armed dragoons.

Smugglers Cove Adventure Golf Course, Barry Island based on the tales of William Hawkin Arthur in the area

One of Arthur's ships was named the *Cornwall*, a pilot boat which was stationed at Ilfracombe in Devon. Pilot boatswere used by smugglers to meet larger ships that had reached the Bristol Channel and guide them safely to port while taking the opportunity to offload any illegal contraband before they landed. The *Cornwall* had been caught several times with illegal goods on board, but every time the captain had a sufficient excuse and was released.

Samuel Walters, *Number 3 pilot schooner 'The Duke',* 1853, painting on canvas, the Merseyside Maritime Museum's collections of maritime art

In 1783, the Cornwall was captured with gin and tea found onboard. The revenue officers seized both the ship and the goods which caused Arthur to subsequently write to the revenue service. He asked the revenue service to release his ship as the brandy and tea had been placed on board without the knowledge of the captain or himself. According to Peter Fosse, the Ilfracombe Tax Collector, the Cornwall had been used "in an illicit trade between the island of Lundy and the coasts of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Wales in the Bristol Channel". He added that there was "great reason to think that the seizure of tea and brandy made by the officers here in the month of November last came out of the said boat, as she lay at anchor near the place where the seizure was made". The revenue service refused Arthur's submission and the

Cornwall was sawn into three sections and sold to pay costs and provide a reward for the revenue officers.

Port Arthur, Loushunk'ou, China, 1948, photograph, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Allegedly, the Arthur family moved to Ynystawe, between Clydach and Morriston, where they built a large house called Cwmdwr. One of William Hawkin Arthur's descendants became vice-admiral in the Royal Navy. Vice-admiral William Arthur is famous for surveying the harbour at modern day Loushunk'ou, China. As such, English-language diplomatic, news, and historical writings call it Port Arthur.

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Chapter Six: The Stote Family and the Violent Reality of Smuggling

During the late 18th Century and early 19th century, Rhossili became a hotspot for smuggling. The gently curving beach was a natural Gower landing spot. By 1805, there were various clashes on the sands and it seemed the revenue service could not curb the illicit activity. While in June 1805, revenue officers seized 115 kegs, it was only three months earlier when their comrades were attacked and beaten by a smuggling gang. One of which was locked up in cottage in Middleton owned by the smuggler, William Stote.

The Stote family were the most prominent Rhossili smugglers during this period. William Stote was an innkeeper who had already spent three months of 1805 jailed in Carmarthen for releasing impounded horses from a farmyard in Pitton. The horses were seized at Rhossili sands by Officer George Beynon of the revenue service. He and his fellow officers attacked the smugglers who fled leaving behind hundreds of casks containing illicit spirits and wine which littered the beach. It would seem that

William Stote had released the impounded horses to transport illegal contraband from Rhossili beach.

Entrance to the county gaol in Carmarthen, 1950, photograph, Cadw

A popular story but likely fictional one concerns two revenue officers who asked Mrs. Stote for stabling for their horses. She realized that they had probably come to search for a cargo of run spirits that were concealed nearby, so she delayed them with a drink. When they commented that the spirits were too strong, she topped up their glasses from the kettle on the stove. This, however, also contained spirits, and the revenue officers soon fell asleep. At this point Mrs. Stote was able to raise the alarm, and the hidden contraband was dispersed.

English School, *Customs men raiding a smugglers den,* circa. 1820, painting on canvas, Private Collection; Peter Newark Pictures

While a lot of the stories surrounding William Stote and his wife are likely fabricated, they provide an insight into the violent reality of smuggling during the 18th Century. Too often, the smuggler of legend is harmless, when in fact they were frequently violent criminals. At the height of smuggling during the 1800s, violence was an essential part of the trade. Without aggression, the smugglers could not have secured the resources or the labour needed to move cargo inland. Without violence, or at least the threat of it, the smugglers could not have kept revenue officers at bay or silenced any witnesses to their criminal activities.

Coastguard Canon, c.1800, National Waterfront Museum, Swansea

The verifiable accounts of William Stote such as his jail sentence in 1805 showed that violence and conflict was commonplace for smugglers. Moreover, these tales served as a warning to potential revenue officers who lived in the local community. Threats of violence could ensure that they were too terrified to act against the smugglers. Of course, smugglers did not have a monopoly on violence. Far from the jocular revenue officers who were sent to sleep by Mrs. Stote's cocktail of illicit alcohol, real revenue officers were often known to use excessive violence when pursuing smugglers. Both sides were often in bloody conflict.

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Chapter Seven: The Mansel Family and the Popular Support for Smuggling in Gower

Smugglers depended on popular support from the local community. During the 18th century, many merchants in Gower either worked directly with smugglers or dealt in smuggled goods. Many taverns throughout Gower sold smuggled alcohol to patrons who turned a blind eye such as Beaufort Inn in Pwll Du where the landlord was said to have made a convenient arrangement with the local smugglers. Even the church was involved in smuggling. Not only did clergymen turn a blind eye to their activities and bought their brandy, but the goods were sometimes hidden in church buildings and cemeteries, especially in chest tombs.

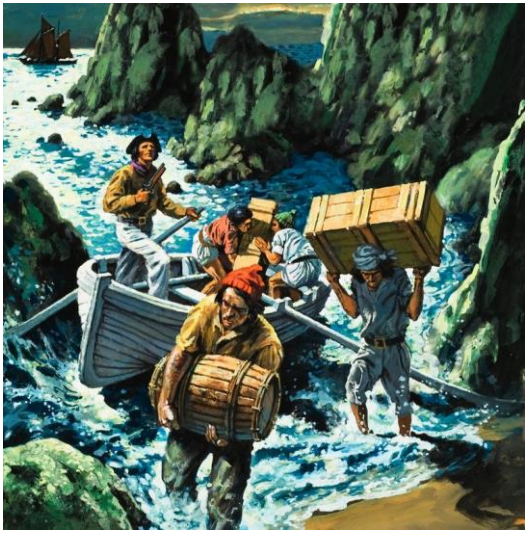
This support for smugglers was not just a Gower phenomenon, but a prominent attitude amongst many coastal communities throughout Britain. For example, in 1743 John Wesley preached in Cornwall against smuggling, calling it “a detestable practice” and was pelted with eggs and stones. Farmers and their workers along the Gower

coast would help to land the goods, supplying horses and carts for transportation and a safe store. These farmers were often rewarded with a portion of the contraband, not only for their help but also as a bribe to stay quiet. During his exploration of Gower, C. D. Morgan encountered many stories farmers trafficking prohibited articles. The only one Morgan recorded into his diary was about a farmer known as Mr. Webb, “a merry jovial old gent, who delighted in a little fun, and loved a joke dearly”.

Donald MacLeod, *Mounts Bay Smugglers,* painting on canvas, personal collection, Donald MacLeod Maritime Art

According to Morgan, another old man named John Smith was invited by Mr. Webb to his farm house where they drank illicit Cognac smuggled into Gower from Geneva. Allegedly, the Cognac was so strong that John Smith, his wife and his maid went home and collapsed on the floor. Morgan claimed “for three days and three nights they lay

there helpless". Aside from this story, there does not seem to be any source of Mr. Webb's existence. Local parish records do list a few Mr. Webbs that lived in Gower during the early 19th century when Morgan visited Gower, but without a first name or any other details, it is impossible to find out which Mr. Webb is one in question. As this was just a story Morgan had heard from the locals, it is possible that it is entirely fictional or the names of the person's involved were changed to protect their identities. While Morgan's account is flawed, it is just one tale of many throughout Gower showing their direct interaction with smugglers and smuggled goods. In other words, smuggling was a part of everyday life during the 18th and 19th centuries.



English School, *Cornish Smuggling Scene,* circa. 1820, painting on canvas, Private Collection, Bridgeman Images

Smugglers in Gower also received support from the gentry. The Mansel family were known by the local community to directly assist smugglers in Rhossili. In the 14th century, the Mansel family established residences throughout the Gower peninsula, such as Oxwich and Penrice, and became powerful landowners in the region. Their influence peaked with Sir Rhys Mansel, who purchased Margam Abbey in the middle of the 16th Century. Not long after the Mansel family purchased Margam Abby, they were involved in a violent episode. In 1557, a storm blew a French merchant vessel on to the rocks at Oxwich Point. As England was at war with France, the ship was looted and the French sailors were locked up. The Mansel family benefitted greatly from this episode, taking cargo of raisins, figs, almonds, wool and a few of the ship's timbers and fittings. The Mansel family did not only turn a blind eye to wrecking, they directly benefitted from it.

According to local sources, there is a two-mile tunnel from Rhossili Bay to an old farmhouse owned by the Mansell family called Old Henllys. During the early 18th Century, Old Henllys was owned by Edward Mansel, an unpopular character known colloquially as "the Captain". He gained a reputation for smuggling and even piracy. Edward is featured in a tale known as the "ghost chariot" or "spectre chariot", in which he is driving desperately across Rhossili sands. Locals believe he had raided a Spanish galleon and stole a lot of silver which he hid back at Old Henllys. At Old

Henllys, Edward kept bloodhounds to deter trespassers and trained a large boar to attack anyone who used the nearby footpath. Locals believed he did this to keep people away from contraband that had been smuggled from Rhossili Bay. While the Mansel's tunnel has never been found, local legends about the Mansel family persisted.

Old Henllys, Llanddewi, Gower, photograph, National Trust

While these stories could be entirely fictional, they show that landowners in Gower benefitted from the revenue that smugglers brought into the community. Locally powerful and influential families such as the Mansels, the Lucases, the Eynons, the Arthurs and the Stotes were all linked to the smuggling trade in some way. The number of legends surrounding these families demonstrated not only the public support of smuggling but also that the activity was normalised throughout the communities of Gower.

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Chapter Eight: John Griffiths and the End of Smuggling in Gower

John Griffiths of Pennard is most famous for his association with William Hawkin Arthur, acting as his second in command over the smugglers of Brandy Cove. Griffiths based his operations out of Little Highway Farm which was situated next to Arthur's Great Highway Farm in Pennard and together they controlled smuggling in the area.

In the nave of Pennard Church there are three tablets, one of which is in memory of John Griffiths, who died in 1780, aged 54. The Griffiths family is mentioned in parish documents as early as the 15th Century. Just as William Hawkin Arthur took over the family business, John Griffith's son of the same name continued his father's role.

Little Highway Farm, Pennard, Gower, photograph, National Trust

It is said that Griffiths and his son oversaw the landing of illegal contraband at Brandy Cove and Pwll Du beach before transporting the goods by pack-horses up Bishopston Valley, then along Smugglers Lane to the Highway farms. Once the contraband had been transported to the Highway farms, they were stored and hidden until it was sold into the local community.

Griffiths and his son possibly enjoyed forty years of profitable trading before any serious attempt to curb their activities. The local inhabitants of Pennard turned a blind eye to the smugglers of Brandy Cove, with many of them being directly involved in the trade. It is said that every horse from the surrounding farms were used to create a procession of pack-horses carrying goods down Smuggler's Lane. Local drinkers at the Ship bar were regularly served illicit spirits that had been landed at Brandy Cove or Pwll

Du beach. As the smugglers at Highway became the most notorious in the Gower, only the revenue service was unaware of their activities.

George Morland, *Smugglers*, 1792, oil on Canvas, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

After many years of unhindered trade, the revenue service finally caught wind of smuggling in Gower and started a series of raids on the Highway farms starting in 1788. It took until 1804 for the revenue officers to successfully raid the Highway farms and find contraband at the properties. At Little Highway Farm, the revenue officers found casks littering containing illicit spirits littering the land and many pack-horses. 420 casks of spirits amounting to nearly 3,000 gallons were seized at the Highway farms and was one of the biggest raids in the history of Gower. However, not all the casks arrived at the Swansea Custom House as nearly 200 local residents attacked the revenue officers.

> "… some of them were much intoxicated, very clamorous and threatening they be allowed to drink" – Custom Officer Beaven, 1804

This seizure marked the end of the smugglers of Brandy Cove. Arthur's gang broke apart over the next year and became disorganised smaller gangs that could be easily dealt with by the authorities. In 1805, Custom Officer George Beynon stationed at Rhossili Bay surprised a gang of smugglers landing goods. The smugglers were able to escape but they left behind over 100 casks of brand, Gineva and wine. Then in 1807, a large seizure was made at Middleton. 30 kegs of brandy and over £1,200 worth of tobacco was found in a haystack. The tables had finally turned on the smugglers, and the revenue service was taking control of Gower's coastline.

James Harris Junior (1847-1925), Three sailing vessels in choppy seas off Gower Coast, oil on canvas, c.1900s, Swansea Museum

While the Arthur family moved away from Pennard, the Griffiths family remained on Little Highway Farm and stayed in the Gower until the modern day. Today, a descendent of John Griffiths, Walter Griffiths, lives in Bishopston whose father, Samuel Griffiths, was a councillor of long standing and a former church warden. During an interview with the local press, Samual Griffiths seemed complacent over his families ties to smuggling in the 18th Century stating, "any of our forebears who lived in Pwll Du or High Pennard at that time would have been similarly implicated".

> "… his Hanoverian Majesty lacked for nothing, whereas Pennard folk in those days lost a lot of sleep in order to add a little excitement and comfort to an existence all too drab and dreary" – Samual Griffiths

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Chapter Nine: The Press Gang in Gower

On 20th October 1803, John Collins the Rector of Oxwich witnessed a rarely recorded event in Gower's history. An armed vessel came into the bay belonging to a privateer from Liverpool, alarming the residents. The next evening, a press gang came to Oxwich taking many residents on board the vessel against their will before sailing towards the west. It was actions such as these that made Press Gangs hated throughout Gower.

Impressment, colloquially the "press gang", is a type of conscription of people into a military force via intimidation and physical coercion, conducted by an organized group. During the Age of Sail, the Navy, the Coastguard and even state-sanctioned privateers would send their crews into ports to find "eligible men of seafaring habits between the ages of 18 and 55 years".

'The Neglected Tar': a press gang seizing a seaman, circa 1800, caricature, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Throughout the feudal era, all men were expected to protect the realm when called upon. As such, impressment was a common practice in the armies and ships of mediaeval Europe. Ideas about individual liberty and the state's restricted power started to emerge in England in the early 17th century, and by the time the Civil War broke out in 1642, the practice of impressment of soldiers had already been outlawed. However, the navy was deemed too valuable by Parliament to grant sailors the same privileges. The same conclusion was reached by succeeding administrations despite more upheavals and growing pressure from the public against impressment as a practice.

The importance of Britain's fleet increased as it became a global power. The number of ships that needed to be

manned increased dramatically as a result of the demands made on it to safeguard trade and the colonies. Despite the British public's widespread belief in liberty, impressment persisted since all other options were unsuccessful. As a result, everyone detested the press, as it was frequently abbreviated. Even the authorities were hostile; the Admiralty believed the entire process was ineffective, local council members frequently refused to ratify press warrants, and juries and judges repeatedly cleared men on trial for murder because they had rightfully resisted press gangs' invasion of their personal freedoms. In Gower, a cave near Llanmadoc that no longer exists named Nottle Tor was used by locals to hide from Press Gangs.

Kate Morton, *Scene 3: Press Ganged William Davidson was press ganged at sea twice,* circa. 1800, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Despite the lack of support from the public, impressment endured until it was outlawed in 1815. During that time,

the Coastguard also started to impress local sailors. Revenue Officers often had crews made up of impressed men. While this was a form of involuntary conscription, the impressed sailors were treated and paid as ordinary sailors but endured harsh conditions such as disease and the threat of severe punishment for disobedience or desertion.

Not only did impressed men live in life threatening environments but the process of conscription was often a violent process. There is a local legend from Pwll Duof a press gang of twelve men who unsuccessfully tried to impress John Voss of Nicholaston Hall and his neighbour John Smith in Oxwich. Voss and Smith violently resisted the press gang who were forced back to the ship Caesar. After this event, the Caesar set sail but terrible weather conditions in the Bristol Channel forced them to turn back. As Mumbles did not have a lighthouse at this time, the crew of the Caesar mistook Pwll Du Head for Mumbles Head. When the Caesar crashed into the rocks, the captain, the mate and some sailors were able to escape but did not alert anybody to the ship's destruction. As such, the bodies of sixty-eight men were found abroad the wrecked Caesar the next morning. Most of these men were impressed sailors, conscripted on board against their wills. According to local legend, the area of the wreckage was named "Caesar's Hole" and the sixty-eight impressed men were buried beneath Pwll Du Head in an area known as "Grave's End".

Grave's End, Pwll Du, Gower, photograph, National Trust

As this is a local legend in Gower, it is possible that C. D. Morgan could have been resighting a fictional story. There is no hard evidence of Caesar's existence and its wreckage at Pwll Du has never been identified. The bodies of the sixty-eight impressed men have never been recovered and their existence is shrouded in mystery as no names were ever given. Even if this story is completely fictional, it demonstrates that the local communities in Gower feared impressment. According Heather Holt, there was game children played during her upbringing called "hiding from the press-men" which had been passed down orally for generations. This means that the legend has an enduring legacy in Pwll Du.

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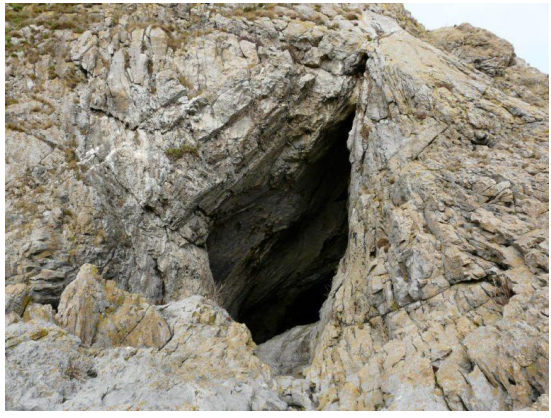
Chapter Ten: The Mystery of the Red Lady of Paviland

The discovery of the "Red Lady of Paviland" in 1823 made Goat's Hole, one of the Paviland Caves, one of the most well-known archaeological sites in Europe. Reverend William Buckland from the University of Oxford discovered a red skeleton in Goat's Hole that he initially identified as the remains of a tax collector who had been murdered by smugglers before cycling through many other strange theories for their origins.



Goat's Hole, Paviland Cave, Rhossili, Gower, photograph, National Trust

In 1822, Buckland received a gift that included a basket full of animal bones and the tusk and head of a mammoth. Lady Mary Cole of Penrice Castle, Gower, had sent the discoveries from Paviland Cave. Buckland was so intrigued

by the package he decided to excavate the region. Goat's Hole is a limestone cave that is usually cut off by the tide for most of the year. Buckland visited the Gower coast in December when the tide was at their lowest. This meant, he could immediately excavate the region.

The Red Lady of Paviland on Display, photograph, University of Oxford's Museum of Natural History

Within a short period, Buckland discovered an intact grave of ochre-stained human bones without a skull and artefacts. Upon excavation, ivory items such as rings and rods, a clutch of periwinkle shells, and carved flints were discovered surrounding the remains. They were taken by Buckland back to Oxford.

When first inspecting the red skeleton, Buckland theorised that it was the remains of a 'murdered person' and most likely belonged to a Custom's Officer who had been murdered by smugglers. He came to this conclusion because the Paviland Caves were often used by smugglers to hide contraband. Hound's Hole was an infamous cave nearby Goat's Hole that has been said to "many a time filled with kegs of brandy". However, Buckland soon moved on from this theory, believing the bones to were the remains of a woman.

Hound's Hole, Paviland West Cave, Rhossili, Gower, CBHC

Based on his knowledge of Welsh customs, Buckland posited that the remains belonged to a witch as there was a "blade bone of mutton" alongside the skeleton. He claimed this bone blade was used as a conjuring tool. This theory also did not last long. The presence ivory jewellery led Buckland to contend that bones belonged to a "painted

prostitute". This prostitute allegedly used the shell beads present at the site as a means of gambling. Buckland also theorised that the rings were made from Roman elephant ivory. He argued that the prostitute must have been killed during the biblical flood when she was trying to seek shelter from the rising tides in the Paviland Caves. He preferred this theory as it fitted his religious worldview, but it was also incorrect.

In 2008, radiocarbon-dating techniques conclusively showed these bones belonged to a male, aged 25–30, who stood about 173cm in height buried around 33,000 years ago. During this period, Paviland would have been situated on a cliff overlooking a grassy plain at least 60 miles inland. Mammoths, woolly rhinoceros, huge deer, bison, and reindeer would have all been abundant in the landscape. Even with this discovery, there is still much debate around the identity of the young Palaeolithic man. The leading theory is that he was a Palaeolithic hunter, but some have argued that he could have been some kind of shaman or spiritual figure.

The Red Lady of Paviland on Display, photograph, University of Oxford's Museum of Natural History

Currently, the hyena jaw bones are displayed at Swansea Museum, while an ivory staff is stored at St. Fagans National Museum of History in Cardiff, but the red skeleton remains on display at the University of Oxford's Museum of Natural History. There has been much debate around returning the red skeleton to Wales to be displayed under the name "Welsh Elgin marbles". Despite this, the red skeleton remains in Oxford where they are well maintained.

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Chapter Eleven: Wreckers of the Gower Coast

Wrecking is the practice of taking valuables from a shipwreck which has run aground close to shore. Wrecking was another part of Gower's smuggling trade, as goods that were washed ashore from a wrecked ship were regarded as common property. The prevailing south-westerly winds of the Bristol Channel collide with the Gower Coast which in stormy weather caused ships to run ashore. There are tales of professional wreckers with lanterns luring mariners on to the rocks. As such, wrecks were part of the local economy and always played a part in community life.

J. M. W. Turner, *Wreckers - Coast of Northumberland, with a Steam-Boat Assisting a Ship off Shore,* 1833, painting on canvas, Yale Center for British Art

> "Oh Lord, let there not be wrecks. But since we know there must be wrecks, let them be here, not Rhossili" – A popular prayer in Port Eynon

While serious wrecks are infrequent in the modern era, they were common throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Rhossili Bay had the most frequent wrecks on the Gower coast. Facing the south-westerly winds of the Bristol Channel, with a three-and-a-half-mile long shore-line between rocks at either end, Rhossili Bay was uniquely challenging for sailors not to run aground. Towards the northern end of the bay, a piece of lobsided machinery can be seen at low tide. This site is the remains of the City of Bristol, a paddle-driver steamer which ran aground in 1840. Villagers had come on to the beach and were able to hear "the cries of the unfortunate persons" aboard the City of Bristol. As lifejackets had not been invented yet, only two men survived. The ship's cargo of several hundred pigs, fifteen bullocks, some barrels of grain and 120 flitches of bacon littered Rhossili Bay. The local community cleared the beach within hours before any Revenue Men appeared from Swansea.

"City of Bristol" wreck, Rhossili, Gower, photograph, National Trust

A similar situation happened in 1887, when the Helvetia was taken by heavy winds from Mumbles to the coast of Rhossili. The local community looted the vessel, leaving only the hull behind. Sometime later, a local entrepreneur bought the wreck from Swansea Customs because he knew it had a valuable copper keel, but the hull had settled into the sand. It was impossible to remove the copper and had to be left in the hull. Today the half-buried ribs of the Helvetia's wooden hull can still be seen at low tide.

Near the Helvetia was another wreck which had famously contributed to the local economy more than once, but unfortunately, the details are lacking. The wreck supposedly contained treasure consisting of silver dollars, half-dollars, and pieces of eight. They were all found in a specific region of Rhossili Bay and are assumed to have been laying there for 300 years. This is based assumption that this treasure belonged to a Spanish vessel which was

wrecked in Rhossili in the mid-17th Century. In 1807, the Rhossili treasure got into the newspapers, with a second-hand account in the Cambrian. The article claimed a local had discovered “a cask of iron wire” and approximately 5kgs in weight of Spanish dollars and half-dollars dated 1625. It was theorised that these “formed part of the cargo of a rich Spanish vessel from South America called the Scandaroon galley, which was wrecked on that part of the coast upwards of a century since.” When the Cambrian followed up this report in 1834, they gave a more exciting account of what happened in 1807. Sand had “drifted very unusually,” and “part of the wreck, in a very decayed state, became visible, and a great quantity of dollars, with some iron and pewter, was then dug up from some depth in the sand.” Many in the local community were “much enriched,” but “the spot where the vessel struck being open at four hours ebb tide, and the sand having returned to its old quarters, the money-hunters were obliged to desist in their attempt.”

“Helvetia” wreck, Rhossili, Gower, photograph, National Trust

Of course, Rhossili was not the only bay that had frequent wrecks on the Gower coast. In Pwll Du, ships would run aground on the rocks in the shallow bay and were often looted by the locals. By the time customs were notified in Swansea, the wreck would have been stripped and the cargo was removed to safe hiding places. For example, a timber ship was wrecked off the coast of Pwll Du loaded with floor joists, soon covering the bay with this valuable cargo. Within hours, the beach was completely cleared and the coastguards were unable to find much of the cargo. Before long, new wooden sheds and poultry houses appeared in the gardens throughout Pennard. According to local legend, the floors of the Beaufort Inn and the Ship cottage were repaired with the same timber stolen from the wrecked ship. The Beaufort Inn had a long history of association with smuggling gangs in the area, helping them hide and store contraband. The roof timbers of the Beaufort Inn had quarter inch holes, that could only have been made by a marine borer, so when the inn was first built in the 1830s, timber from a wreck was likely used.

While wrecking in Gower has mostly subsided in the modern era, some in the community still engage in it from time to time. In her book, Heather Holt recounted that "wrecking continues to be one of my favourite pastimes. You never know what you're going to find."

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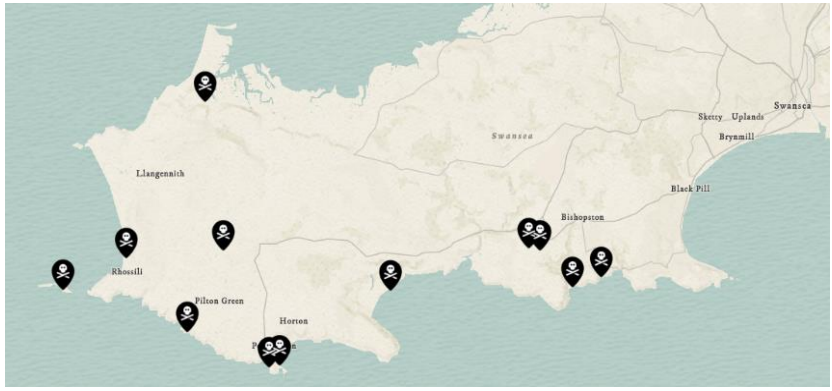
Chapter Twelve: Searching for Smugglers - Infamous Places for Smuggling in Gower

To take a closer look at the infamous locations from Gower's history of smuggling visit: https://smuggler.wales/searching-for-smugglers/



Map of the Points of Interest across Gower for smuggling

Brandy Cove, Bishopston, Swansea SA3 3DT

A concealed cove located between Caswell and Pwll Du Beach which was frequently used by smugglers from Pennard under the command of William Hawkin Arthur. The cove itself is concealed by rocks and often deserted which gave smugglers a perfect place to bring contraband onto land.

Pwll Du Bay, Southgate, Swansea SA3 2AU

Central on the south coast of Gower, Pwll Du headland guided smuggling boats to the bay at its foot. The 300-foot-high headland also provided a very convenient vantage point for keeping an eye on the opposition. The house behind the pebble bank was once the Beaufort Inn: the landlord here was said to have made a convenient arrangement with the local smugglers. A cottage on the cliff path west of the beach named the Ship was also used by smugglers, though it is now in ruins.

Smuggler's Lane, Pennard, Swansea SA3 2AD

Located near Pwll Du Beach, this path leads straight to the Highway farms which were owned by the notorious smugglers William Hawkin Arthur and John Griffiths. For many years, Smuggler's Lane was overgrown and virtually impassable, but it has now been cleared and can be safety negotiated by foot. The lane is between tall banks which hides it from the surrounding fields.

Great Highway and Little Highway Farms, Pennard, Swansea SA3 2AD

In the second half of the 18th century the gang was run by William Arthur of Great Highway Farm, and John Griffiths of Little Highway. The farms at Highway were used as staging posts, and as headquarters for the smuggling company. William Arthur had been described as “the most daring smuggler in Glamorgan during the 18th century,” and at one stage he ruled Barry Island almost as a kingdom. The farms at Highway still exist, some 400 yards west of the crossroads at Pennard.

Oxwich Bay, Gower, Swansea SA3 1LS

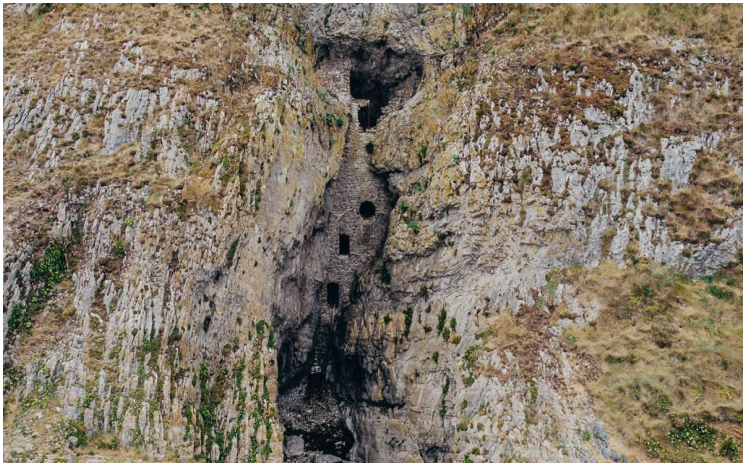
Smugglers landed many of their cargoes at Oxwich Bay. Several instances of smuggling have been recorded by the revenue service and locals. In 1794, smugglers were chased into Oxwich Bay and captured by the Speedwell cutter. 16 smugglers escaped onto Oxwich Sands, leaving behind some casks of illicit gin. The locals proceeded to get drunk from the gin with somebody even dying from the amount of alcohol they consumed.

Salt House, Port Eynon SA3 1NN

The ruins of a home that once held salt can be found south of Port Eynon. It is Wales's last remaining example of a salt house. The structure is believed to have been constructed around the middle of the 16th century. Salt House has long been associated with the Lucas family who fortified it and used it as a headquarters for smuggling activities.

Culver's Hole, Port Eynon SA3 1NN

At the far end of Port Eynon is the location of Culver's Hole, a cove surrounded by a sixty-foot wall with lookout slits. Nobody knows why it was built, but the structure appears to have been used as a dovecote. It is said that John Lucas fortified this area and used it to store arms and hide contraband. Some sources claim there was a secret tunnel that connected to Salt House, but this tunnel has never been discovered so could just be hearsay or a local legend.



Paviland Caves, Unnamed Road, Swansea SA3 1PE

The Paviland Caves are located on the coast between Port Eynon and Rhossili and were used by smugglers to hide contraband throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Particularly, Hound's Hole is known locally as a smuggler's hideout, but there is no physical evidence for this tale. A remarkable discovery was made in Goat's Cave named "Red Lady of Paviland" in 1823. At first, these human remains were wrongly identified as belonging to a tax collector who had been murdered by smugglers.

Smuggler's Cave, Worm’s Head, Rhossili, Swansea, SA3 1PR

Just off the coast of Rhossili Bay lays Worm’s Head, one of Gower’s most famous landmarks. This headland’s name was derived from an Old English Word ‘wyrm’ as it resembles a sea serpent. Local legends say that smugglers often use one of the many caves located on Worm’s Head to hide contraband known colloquially as Smuggler’s Cave. While the precise location of the cave has never been discovered, stories of its existence persist.

Old Rectory, Rhossili, Swansea SA3 1PL

The Old Rectory was built in the 1800s and stands as the only building in Rhossili Bay that offers panoramic views of the bay and Worm's Head. A hiding place was found in the bed of a small river behind the Old Rectory which was used by smugglers to hide contraband. The only way of accessing it was to change the course of the river itself.

Old Henllys Farm, Unnamed Road, Swansea SA3 1BD

The Old Henllys was owned by the Mansel family and has long been associated with the smuggling trade. During the early 18th Century, Old Henllys was owned by Edward Mansel, an unpopular character known colloquially as “the Captain”. He gained a reputation for smuggling and even piracy. According to local legend, he smuggled contraband from Rhossili Bay through a tunnel that linked the bay to Old Henllys

Brandy House, Llangennith, Llanmadoc and Cheriton SA3 1DB

While the majority of smuggling in Gower was on the southern coast, occasionally smugglers would visit the Northern coast. Built for smuggling purposes at the end of the 18th century, Brandy House overlooked the western end of Landimore marsh. But since its position is currently unknown, the entrance to the enormous cellars that are said to be beneath the house must have been securely disguised.

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The Gower peninsula has a long and storied history with smuggling and piracy throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. With an abundance of caves, isolated coves and beaches, Gower's landscape was uniquely suited for smuggling and inevitably became a hotbed of smuggler activity. This book is a collection of online articles dedicated to uncovering and documenting Gower's illicit smuggling trade.