

Changing Fingal

Rush and Loughshinny Smugglers in the 18th Century



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Loughshinny & Rush Historical Society

Introduction

Smuggling is probably as old as the first tax or regulation on trade. Customs duties are said to have originated in the thirteenth century, but they were a hit and miss basis and not centralised. In the fourteenth century there is evidence for the appointment of *Custom Collectors and Controllers, Receivers of Customs, Searchers, Packers and Gougers!*

The Commissioners of Revenue in Ireland was established in 1662 while an Act of Excise (also 1662) applied an import excise to drugs, hemp, flax, tobacco, silks and salts and levied beer, aquavit and strong waters. The Board of Customs was created in 1671 with custom officers being employed and stationed in coastal towns as well as the main ports. The Board of Excise was created in 1683

and finally in 1901 the Boards of Customs and Excise were merged to form HMCE (His Majesty's Customs and Excise). Because of the cost to the exchequer of the major wars, (in which England and France were mostly engaged), between 1689 and 1783, England levied very high customs duties on goods coming from France in particular, but elsewhere as well.



The Custom House, Dublin, 1792 by James Malton. www.wikiart.org/en/james-malton/the-custom-house-dublin

The Nine Years war (1688-1697) saw England involved in a coalition against French expansionism in Europe and America. Extensive fighting took place in Scotland and Ireland, including the Battle of the Boyne where King James II with Dutch and French troops were defeated). The wars in north America including Queen Anne's War (1702-13) that was part of a broader war of Spanish Succession that involved England and King George's War (1744-48) took a heavy toll on the British colonies, culminating in the loss of the colonies with the American War of Independence (1775-1783). Ironically it was Britain seeking to raise taxes and regulation that led to the American

Revolution. All these conflicts and unrest throughout the 18th century resulted in high duties on imports as Britain sought to recoup money. There was also (as seen through legal imports) a rise in the demand for tobacco, spirits and tea. Both these factors led inevitably to smuggling which was carried out on a great scale with tea, tobacco, spices, silks and spirits being smuggled into Britain and Ireland in quantities exceeding those brought in legitimately, with great loss to the Exchequer. The losses from Ireland were said to be about £20,000 a year and from England and Scotland about together £50,000, which was a large sum of money in those days.



A Prospect of the Custom House (1707), and Essex Bridge, Dublin, Nathaniel Parr <https://flickr.com/commons/>

ISLE OF MAN

The History of the Isle of Man in the Manx Archives states that:

'During the last twenty years of the seventeenth century and early part of the eighteenth, the rapid increase of Manx trade, was mainly caused by the large consignments of foreign goods into Manx ports, not to any extent, for the consumption of the residents, but to smuggle them into the United Kingdom, from the adjacent ports of which the Isle of Man lay at a convenient distance.'

The Isle of Man was privately owned by Earl Derby in the 1680s and not part of the United Kingdom. The ruler was known as the Lord of Mann. The island's feudal rights date back to the fifteenth century. It had a very low tax system and a free trade policy but never the less many of its citizens took advantage of the loophole in the payment of English Custom Taxes. 'Excise Duty Drawback' refers to a refund of duties on imported goods that are subsequently exported or destroyed. While not explicitly defined as related to the Isle of Man the concept of drawback applied similarly. Even today

the concept applies, if goods are imported into the Isle of Man and then exported, the duties and taxes paid in the UK are eligible for a drawback. The aim is to make exports more competitive.

The merchants, business people and trades people in the Isle of Man took advantage of the drawback and imported the goods for storage into the large warehouses which were built in the Isle of Man. The residents got cheaper goods and also the smuggling business took off with dozens of small boats smuggling the goods back into Britain, Ireland and elsewhere without paying any customs or duties.

The smuggling started with their own small boats in the Isle of Man delivering goods into smaller ports in England but soon spread with English, Irish and Scottish boats smuggling too. The town of Peel on the west coast of the Isle of Man was mostly used for smuggling to ports on east and north coasts of Ireland which are an easy short distance from the Isle of Man. As Dublin was the second city of the Empire, there was a ready market nearby. The ports of Douglas and Ramsey on



the east side of the Isle of Man were used to smuggle goods into England and Scotland.

In Ireland smuggling took place mostly into harbours, from Newhaven (near Balbriggan) to as far south as Dun Laoghaire but especially from Rush where nearly all the male population

were fishermen and very skilled seamen who had the experience of travelling many miles at sea in small open boats for line fishing of ling, cod and herring. At the time there was a downturn in fishing in the Irish Sea, and more money could be made smuggling and Rush was within easy reach of the Isle of Man.

WHERRIES

The boats the Irish smugglers used were wherries. These were specially designed small wooden boats with shallow draught; schooner rigged for speed but with lower masts and sails. They were also supplied with four oars and were very easily manoeuvred.

Most of the wherries were built in local areas along the east coast. In Rush the boatyard was on the high ground close to the harbour and the sails were probably made in Skerries where there was a thriving sailmaking business.

There was a customs officer serving in Rush from 1674 but just one of a few customs officers stationed in the towns and villages along the east coast. These were not very popular and often found it very difficult to get accommodation with the local people as they were not well paid. There were no coastguard stations at this stage, but the custom officers still had to keep watch for boats coming in and out. At times they could be induced to turn a blind eye. As so few were being brought to justice the Government then



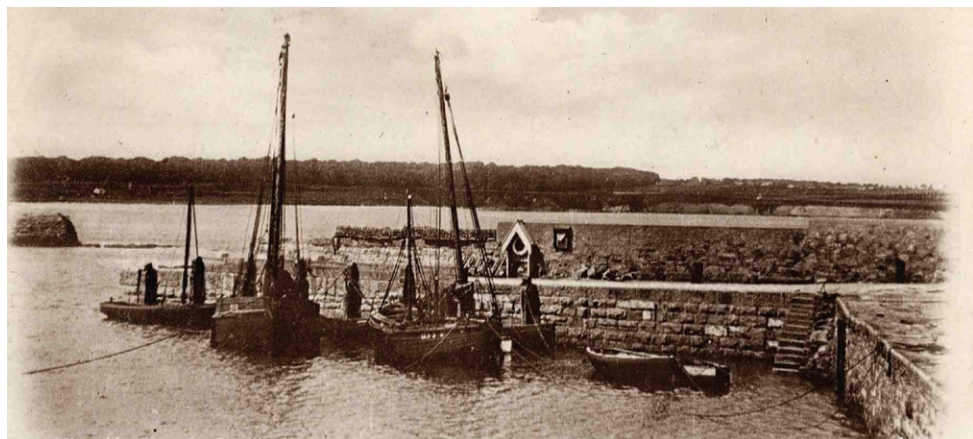
supplied frigates and barges at sea to try to intercept the smugglers.

The trouble was that as Britain did not govern the Isle of Man there was a three-league sea limit around the island that their ships could not enter. Because of the lower sails on the wherries the custom ships often did not notice them until after they, themselves, had been spotted in advance by the wherries and even if they were all becalmed by fog or bad weather the wherries, with their oars, could easily row away to safety. Likewise Rush had a very narrow harbour that wherries could enter, but the barges of the crown could not. The Rush men had whittled the journey down to a fine art of about 6 or 7 hours for the return journey with people on the shore available and ready to

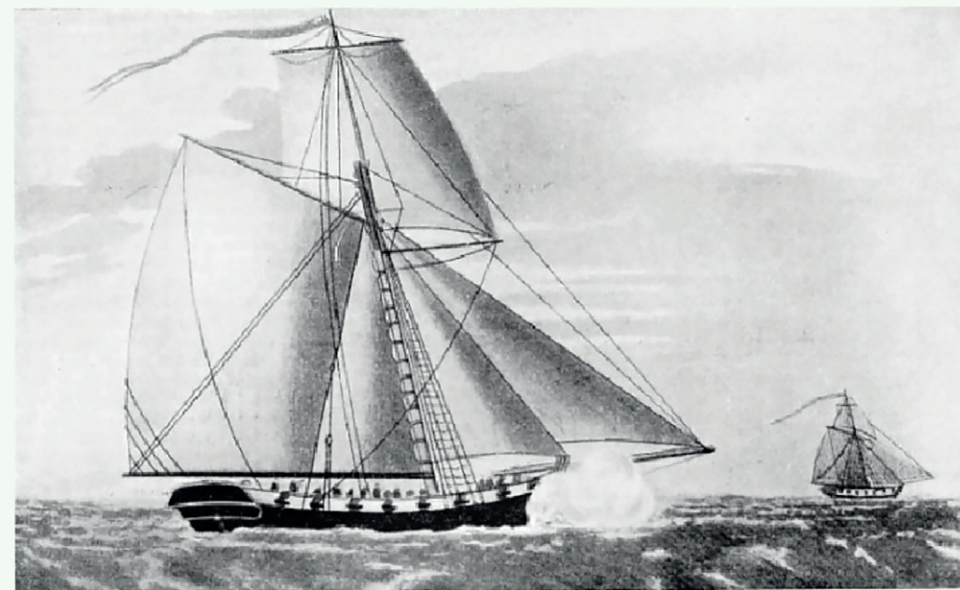
load the boats in Peel, empty the boats at Rush and hide the goods or load the carts and horses for the Dublin journey. As the large custom boats could not enter many of the small shallow Irish harbours the government replaced the frigates and barges with cutters and sloops.

By the mid-18th century the situation had become so serious that the commissioners noted: *"seven Rush wherries had lately sailed thence for this coast with large cargoes of tobacco and brandy. The said information setting forth that the tobacco trade & c. is brisker than ever it was known"*.

By December 1747 there were so many complaints the commissioners decided to appoint Daniel Ivie as an extra custom officer in Rush.



Rush Harbour in the 19th century. Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies & Archives



A REVENUE CUTTER in full chase of a smuggler. This illustration is reproduced from an aquatint in colours after T. Soutter, published in 1794 and now preserved in the famous Macpherson Collection at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. The revenue cutter is called the *Greyhound*.

Shipping Wonders of the World www.shippingwondersoftheworld.com/smugglers.html

CONFLICT

There were numerous violent incidences between smugglers and custom officers and boatmen throughout this period. By 1749 the local officers asked to be furnished with arms as they were subject to frequent assaults. They were refused but an additional officer was appointed from outside the service. Unfortunately it wasn't long before he 'had run the danger of his life from a cruel beating he had received when on duty'.

In 1724 it was reported that goods were to be seen at Loughshinny

brought in by William Tanner, Paul Tanner, James Donnellan, John Rooney, John Travers and Michael Gough. The investigating customs officers found only a parcel of rotten leaf tobacco at a barn door around midnight; the principal cargo having been carried off. Donnellan was heard to say that if any of the King's Officers would pretend to seize any goods which he had he would shoot them like a dog. The violent nature of the smuggling industry was again illustrated in 1734 when the customs men



Rush Coastguard Station, originally built in 1821. Courtesy of Fingal Local Studies & Archives

working on a tip off about a run of goods to the Isle of Man intercepted the boat of Edmond Bird off Lambay. Bird called on them to board him and then opened fire with a blunderbuss. His majesty's bargemen fired a swivel gun at Bird who was shot through the heart. Six bales of East India handkerchiefs, fifteen anchors of brandy and four casks of tea were found aboard.

There continued to be violent clashes. Described in Pue's *Occurrences* on Saturday 5th July 1740, as follows;

'Same day (Thursday last) a large quality of tobacco was seized by one of his majesty's officers at Rush, which was afterwards rescued from him by a great number of people who beat and wounded him in a barbarous manner'.

An incident in 1821 involving upwards of 300 men armed with muskets pistols, pikes and pitchforks was recorded at Loughshinny where it appears the smugglers had intended to disarm the crews of Rush and Loughshinny (Appendix 2). In time, the custom officers were

replaced by Preventive Water Guards, some of which were based at Drumanagh Martello Tower in the 1820s. Finally the Coastguards came with Coastguard Stations built in most of the towns and villages along the east coast of Ireland. In the beginning, if smugglers were caught, their goods were confiscated, the men were jailed and their boats taken to the Custom House in Dublin to be destroyed or sold off.

This also had little effect and threats of being banished to the colonies or pressed into the Navy for seven years, if caught smuggling, did not work either, (the Custom House was on the south side of the Liffey nearer Dublin port at that time). In the end, it was decided that the only thing that might solve the problem was if the English Commissioners of Customs took the strong step of appointing a customs officer to act for them in the Isle of Man.

Earl Derby, who owned the Island, was very indignant at this, protesting that "there was never any just grounds for such an information" and he remarked that "If the customs-house officers at the small ports in England do their

duties what occasion can there be for sending such an officer to the Isle of Man". In consequence of this remonstrance and of a promise from the Earl to be more diligent in watching smuggling, the officer was instructed merely to report on what took place. Nevertheless, orders were given that a customs office was to be kept at Castle Rushen in the Isle of Man, that 'searchers' were to be employed "to take diligent care that no goods were to be landed before they receive entry from this office and that storehouses were to be built in every port". This still did not solve the problem, and smuggling took place on an even larger scale.

It was then suggested to replace the bigger custom boats with smaller wherry-like boats, but with crews of about ten men with six oars in order to catch the smugglers at sea. However, this did not come about and because of the great loss to the Crown of not only the custom tax but the cost of the boats and crews at sea and the lawyers and judges and jails if smugglers were caught, it was finally agreed that the only way to solve the problem would be to revest the ownership of the Isle of Man into the British Crown.



James Stanley, 10th Earl of Derby, by Hamlet Winstanley c. 1725 (Creative Commons 4.0; public domain)

EARL DERBY

Earl Derby (the Stanley family) had owned the feudal rights of the Isle of Man since the 15th century but after the 10th Earl, James Stanley, died in 1736 without a male heir, the Isle of Man was inherited by his heir general, the second Duke of Atholl, James Murray, whose mother, Charlotte Murray, Duchess of Atholl, who was the sister of James Stanley who had died and she had already entered into an earlier contract in 1726 to sell the feudal rights over the island to the Kingdom of Great Britain.

The Isle of Man Purchase Act (also known as the Act of Revestment) came into force by the granting of Royal Assent on 10th May 1765 and the payment of £70,000 to the Atholls. This was not a popular decision in the Isle of Man and the act was passed in some secrecy. George Moore, Speaker of the House of Keys led resistance. He lived at Peel and had always gained some profit from smuggling. Members of his family are said to have worked on the farm at Hayestown House in Rush where smuggled goods were hidden as the wife of the proprietor was also a relative. Also, the Lord of Mann had always charged 2% on the profits of the 'drawback'. The smuggling gradually ceased over the next few years after the Isle of Man Purchase Act was passed when all the smuggled goods in the warehouses were disposed of.

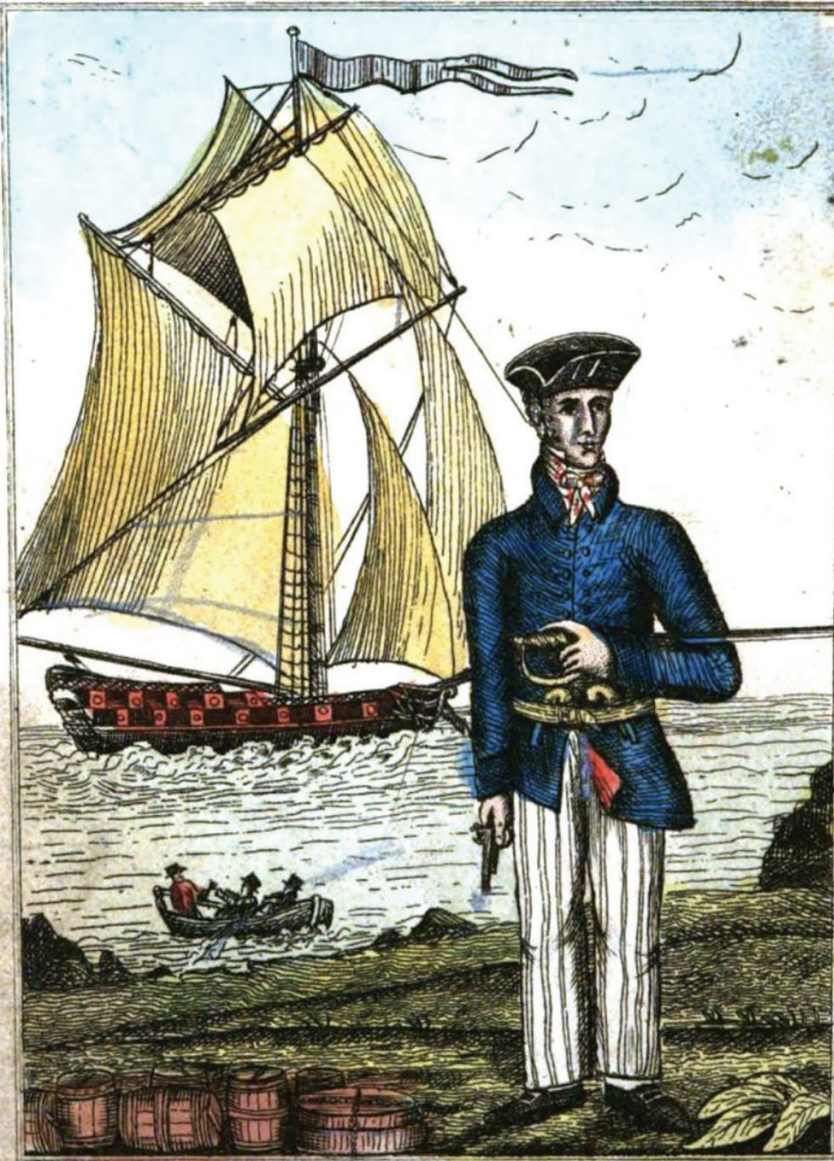
RETURN TO FISHING

Earl Derby (the Stanley family) had owned the feudal rights of the Isle of Man To encourage a return to fishing the government offered payment of £1 a ton for fish caught as a bounty to the fishermen and there are records of 14 boats from the Rush area were still receiving the payment in 1784. Duty on tea fell from 1/9d to 6d and the duty on other goods was also reduced.

The Chancery Courts on the Isle of Man bring to light a number of Rush and Loughshinny men's names who were involved in smuggling; Hore, Sweetman, Doyle, Connor, Field, Kane, Dunn, Harford, Grumley, Rickard, Farren, Rigg, Russell, Stanley, Oram, Ryan, Murphy, Wilde and Dowling. Many of their descendants still live in Rush today

In the 1760s it is recorded that John Creenan, Thomas Knight, Chris. Stanley, Stephen Rickard, as well as the Connors, Fields and Farrens got bigger vessels and broader markets. These lengthened their ships and sailed carrying goods to the continent – Nantes, Lorient, Roscoff, Dunkirk etc. They sailed in fleet numbers and were excellent seamen.

FAMOUS RUSH SMUGGLERS



JACK the BACHELOR.

Engraved for R. Grace's Edition?

By the 1780s some smugglers emerged in Rush, now as privateers, using French or Irish boats under French or American colours. John Connor, known as Jack the Bachelor, reputed to be a Robin Hood type of character, was a smuggler who was born in Wexford. His family settled in Rush when he was 12, although he reputedly made three voyages to the Isle of Man by the time he was 15, when he began to trade for himself. He died in 1772 and is buried in Kenure Graveyard. *The Life and Adventure of John Connor, commonly called Jack the Bachelor*; the Famous Irish Bucker was published in 1821.

*"I'm Jack the Bachelor,
a flashy roving blade,
And my whole delight
is in the Smuggling Trade"*

Verse on John Connor's grave;

Alas he's gone the generous and the brave
Whose bounteous hand to every object gave.
Friend to the stranger and the distressed
These most he honoured and most possessed
To paint his many virtues all must say
Requires the pen of Milton, Pope or Gray
But they like him are fallen away to dust.



Jack the Bachelor's house, Rush

FAMOUS RUSH SMUGGLERS



Luke Ryan (1750-89) was born on the Kenure estate, the son of Michael (a farmer) and his wife Mary and attended school in Skerries, before starting work in boatyards.

A privateer and smuggler who was tried (and reprieved) for piracy four times, Luke Ryan was also commissioned by Benjamin Franklin (who was at that time Ambassador to France), to capture English sailors in the Irish Sea, to swap for American prisoners who were being held in English jails and prison ships. Ryan didn't take many prisoners but turned to piracy terrorizing the shipping in the Irish Sea. He was captured off

Scotland and eventually brought to the Old Bailey in London where he was sentenced to death for treason and piracy. The French government intervened on his behalf, and he got a reprieve. His fortune was confiscated; he was eventually released but jailed again for non-payment of a debt to doctors for inoculating his family against smallpox. He died a pauper in prison in 1789.



CONCLUSIONS

With the advent of the Napoleonic wars, duties were lowered again but smuggling increased with a new group headed by John Doyle, John Murphy and Nicholas Morris. Then from about 1830 smuggling declined and legitimate trading took over. By 1846 there were 30 boat owners in Rush and more than 400 fishermen and boatmen. Common names are Kelly, Cannon, Sweetman, Balfe, Plunkett, Kean, Walsh, Carey, Guilsenan, Maguire, St. Lawrence, Thorne, Leonard, Hore and Knight. Then, towards the end of the century, as well as fishing, market-gardening started in Rush on a large scale, supplying the Dublin market with all types of vegetables, especially early potatoes grown in the rich sandy soil of the area. This business still continues today.

SOURCES:

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<https://www.dib.ie/biography/ryan-luke-a10112>

APPENDIX 1

Reference: Correspondence from Custom and Excise Admin Papers, National Archives Dublin detailing smuggling in Loughshinny

1821. Preventive Water Guard foil smugglers.

To Comptroller General. Preventive Water Guard. Dublin. 27th.November 1821.

Sir, I beg to acquaint you that Mr.Harris, Chief Officer of the Preventive Station at Rush and six of his men being out on duty at Loughshinney in company with the Chief Boatman and five of the crew of the Station at Skerries on the night of the 23rd. at 9 pm. He discovered a smuggling cutter in the bay at 11pm. Burnt a blue light and fired three carbines as a signal for the remainder of the Rush and Skerries crew to join him. At midnight upwards of 300 men, armed with muskets, pistols, pikes and pitchforks came down for the purpose of forcing a landing. At 2 am. the fieldpiece was brought to Loughshinney from Skerries by Lt. Smith, Chief Officer and a party of men when the smugglers dispersed in all directions at 3am.

Two large boats apparently laden put off from the cutter and came close to the shore but finding all the smugglers and cars had left the beach they immediately returned on board and after unloading the boats they got underweigh and put to sea.

Richard Williams, Commissioned Boatman and Henry Gilmore, an extra man at the Preventive Station, Rush, were surrounded and disarmed by nearly 100 men on Rogerstown Strand at 9pm. And it appears to have been the intention of the smugglers to disarm both the Rush and Loughshinney crews. Thomas Randal, Chief Boatman at Skerries was knocked down and disarmed at Kirkeen Cross, near Loughshinney. The smugglers I am informed succeeded in landing some tobacco but I believe a very small quantity.

As they appeared determined to force a landing if possible, I beg leave to recommend that 8 additional extra men may be employed in this district, viz. 3 at Skerries, 3 at Rush and 2 at Portrane.

(signed) Thomas Blake.

APPENDIX 1 - Continued

Guard named Michael Griffin was taken prisoner and confined in a house at Loughshinney, as were also Williams and Gilmore the detached men alluded to in Mr. Blakes report, that the Chief Boatman at Skerries was also sent prisoner to the same house by the Smugglers and his arms taken from him when the Water Guard were attacked by two or three hundred armed men, yet so far were the main body of the Water Guard from allowing themselves to be surrounded, that they forced their way through the mass, one man fired at a Smuggler who made a thrust of a bayonet at him, and another if the Water Guard men wounded a Smuggler with his Bayonet, that the Water Guard did not evince any want of courage, but having left Loughshinney to join a reinforcement expected from Skerries. A small landing was effected during their absence but that on their return they prevented further landing from the Smugglers boats and the Parties on shore with their empty cars and horses dispersed.

I have the honor to be Sir your most obedient Humble Servant. C.J.Allen Maclean.

To The Rt. Hon. Charles Grant.

APPENDIX 2

Reference: Coastguards of Yesteryear, Atholl Papers, Isle of Man. (Reply from Dublin re smuggling from Isle of Man, 20 Oct 1764)

[Reply from Dublin re smuggling from Isle of Man, 1764]

May it please your Lordships

In obedience to your Lordships commands signified by Mr Whately's letter of the 11th day of May last, we have made strict enquiry into the smuggling trade carried on between the Isle of Man and this Kingdom. The result whereof we are now to report to your Lordships.

It is un-necessary to describe to your Lordships the situation of the Isle of Man, futher than to observe that it is near enough to this Kingdom to answer all the smugglers purposes, enabling them to keep up a constant and speedy intelligence, allowing them by the shortness of the passage to execute their schemes at the precise times which their associates have to apprise them of, and to take all advantages of wind and weather.

This situation, and the circumstances of the Government of the Isle of Man, afford a refuge to bankrupts, fugitives from this Kingdom, who resort there in such numbers as to make a considerable part of the inhabitants of the Island. Many of these men have established a correspondence here, who having been in trade and knowing exactly the extent of the Irish Laws, are prepared to manage their contraband traffic with advantage, and frequently to baffle the endeavours of the Revenue Officers appointed to guard the coast of this Kingdom.

The contraband trade from the Isle of Man is carried on almost entirely by Wherries built at Rush, a fishing town within sixteen miles of this city; they are prime sailors, and several of them have at late been purchased by the Isle of man smugglers for the purpose of running goods on the coast of Scotland. Within a few years they have increased the dimensions of their wherries, that although they are quite open boats, they have sailed round the north coast, and have landed their cargoes in the most western parts of this Kingdom.

All possible care hath been taken here to destroy this pernicious trade, as far as the power of the legislature of this Kingdom can extend. No boat can sail to the Isle of man from the coast between Wexford and Londonderry without first taking out a permit, by which means notice is given of the sailing of each smuggling wherry. All vessels with exciseable goods from that Island belonging to any port or person residing in this Kingdom are forfeited with their cargoes, if discovered to be within three leagues of the Irish shore ; And all contracts with the Isle of man for exciseable goods are declared void. as occasion pointed out we have tried variety of expedients; We have as far as prudence allows, gone to a great expence in establishing cruizing barges at sea, and guards upon the shores, which have been of considerable service, and although they have not put a stop to the smuggling from that Island, yet they have checked it considerably, and prevented an encrease of it.

We are satisfied that the revenues of this Kingdom do suffer very considerably by the smuggling from the Isle of man, but to what amount it is impossible for us to ascertain. The value of the goods from thence. seized on this coast, generally amounts one year with another to about ten thousand pounds.

APPENDIX 2 - Continued

The goods imported into the Isle of Man in the greatest quantities, are coarse teas from Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway; brandy, wine and tobacco from France, rum from the West Indies; and debentured tobacco from Great Britain. Beside these, are imported there in smaller quantities, China silk, arrack and other East India goods, coffee, geneva and juniper berries. The Liverpool merchants also import from Holland to the Isle of Man and lodge in stores which they have provided there, gunpowder, fire arms, toys, and East India goods for their African trade. ^{+ SALT}

This is the result of the best enquiries we have been able to make, which we humbly submit to your Lordships consideration, and are with the greatest respect

Your Lordship's most obedient and most humble servants

Jn Ponsonby
John Bourke
A Trevor
Ben Burton
Newtown

Custom House Dublin 20th October 1764

**Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall**
Fingal County
Council



Ceangal

Clár den **Chomhairle Oidhreachta**
A **Heritage Council** programme