

ROUNDAABOUT VERWOOD

PAST and PRESENT

Eastworth Farmhouse & Verwood Smugglers!



The present Eastworth Farmhouse, which dates from around the 18th century was also the "Heathpoult Inn" and it is believed that around this period smugglers hid their contraband beneath the floorboards in times of need from the local Cranborne Excise Officers. The small attic window under each eave would have provided a good lookout point. There were doubtless many willing local participants in the trade in times when a night's work, albeit risky, could earn more than a week's wage.

Only one Verwood smuggler is known by name. He was a desperate character known as "Dan of Verwood", whom we now know to have been Daniel Simms, one of ten children of William Simms the then miller at Romford and who seems to have attained the status of folk hero in the village.

On one occasion when Dan was "industriously cutting turves on the Common" the Cranborne Exciseman, on information received, searched Dan's house which stood to the rear of where the Methodist Church and Town Council

Office now are and found, secreted in an underground cell, eleven kegs of liquor which he then carried off to his house in Cranborne. On being told of this, Dan unperturbed, rode straight to Cranborne, went into the Fleur de Lys and sat quietly down in the chimney corner with his pipe and glass until inevitably someone came bounding in with the news.

Having ascertained where the kegs were lodged, Dan then recruited some friends or 'business partners' and, after sending a local man ahead to mark the Exciseman's house with chalk to prevent any mistakes in the darkness, proceeded to beat in the door with a sledgehammer whilst another stood in the street with a horse pistol threatening to "blow out the brains of the Exciseman or any other person who offered to resist them!" Once the goods were loaded onto their carts they galloped away with armed outriders. There were no further repercussions from the Excise Service but provided a prime object for gossip in the local pubs and Inns.

Dan was never captured and survived until 1826 when he met an untimely end at the age of 66, being dragged in his stirrup by his horse. His unmarried son Daniel, a wheelwright, lived in his house with old Dan's widowed sister and when it was sold, 50 or 60 guns were found in it, relics of old Dan's trade.

Eastworth farmhouse is still easily identifiable at the road junction with the ancient oak trees although most of the farm buildings have since been replaced.

