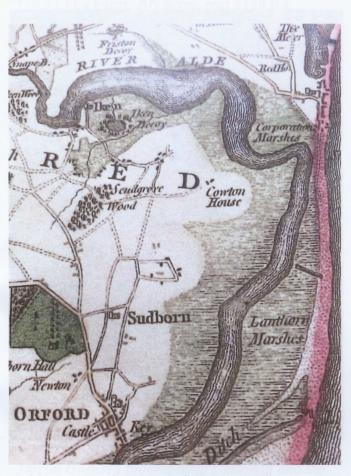
CONTINUING THE HISTORY OF COWTON HOUSE, SUDBOURNE

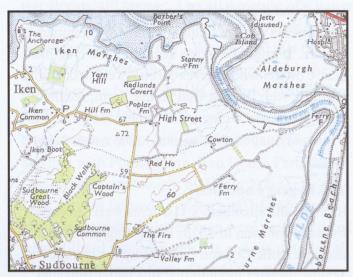
Smugglers, sportsmen, farmers, families and unanswered questions

by Simon Barrow

Twelve years ago, in the spring of 2007, Issue 6 of the Orford & District Local History Bulletin contained a memorable article by Vic Harrup about a previous owner of Cowton, Richard Chaplin (1751-1832). Chaplin had a distinctive occupation when, as a young man, he became a successful smuggler of brandy. However, due to a reduction in excise duty and increased vigilance by the Revenue men, Richard, then aged 34, decided to give up the trade and - which may seem surprising to us today - announced the news in the Ipswich Journal of August 1785. Three years later he married Elizabeth Ablit in Sudbourne church. Vic's research showed that Richard Chaplin was a successful smuggler and that he owned a large dairy farm during the Napoleonic Wars. His personal estate exceeded £7,000 (worth over a million today).



Hodskinson map of 1787. © Suffolk Record Office.



Routes from the west converged at the ferry crossing to Aldeburgh. Detail of 1962 One-Inch Sheet 208.

Map © Ordanance Survey

Historical evidence

The first thing to confess here is how wrong I was to think that Cowton was originally two 17th-century side by side cottages on to which somebody in the late 18th century had added a Georgian front and called it Cowton House. The lengths of the beams and former position of the door on the west side show that it was a substantial farmhouse. Like other farmhouses nearby, such as Firs Farm, Valley Farm, Crag Farm and Raydon Hall, it was built on somewhat higher ground, but close to the marsh for the good grazing and access to water.

'Cowton House' is marked on Hodskinson's map of 1783 and on his update of 1787. Surveyor Joseph Hodskinson worked for William Faden, geographer to George III. He names no other buildings between Snape and Orford, apart from Sudbourne Hall. So what, other than its isolation, made it stand out? It was close to two parallel routes from the west which converged on the hard used by the ferry to Aldeburgh and the Slaughden anchorage. A nearer hard lies next to Chapmans Creek, and is today known as such