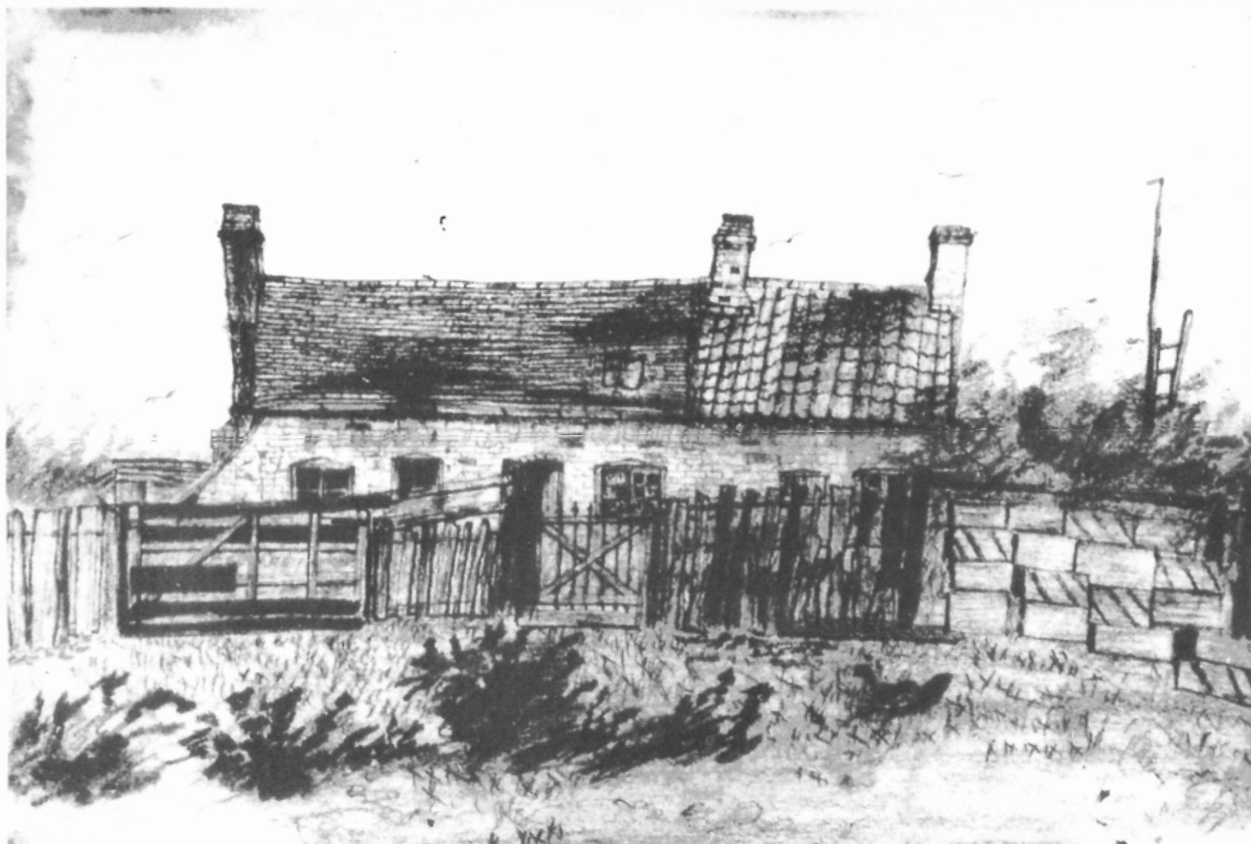


SKETCHBOOK

Vic Harrup explains the story behind Miss Hilda Fiske's 1893 drawing of the cottage that once stood on Havergate Island



There was only one dwelling on Havergate Island in the 18th century and the cottage was described by two botanists, Charles Sutton and William Kirby, who visited the island in August 1787 (*Journey to the Edge*, Iter Litorale, Bulletin number 13). They declared it to be 'solitary, desolate and miserable'. Thomas Rust lived there then, and married Susanna Syer of Woodbridge in 1786, where their two children were baptised. Whether he was involved in smuggling before his marriage, which seems likely given the many associations between the island and the illegal trade around this time, is not known.

Someone who attended the auction of the island in November 1918 wrote £3250 and the name E.F. Wilson on a copy of the particulars of the sale. The buyer was Edward Freeman Wilson who was listed as sole owner in Kelly's Directory of 1922. The population in 1911 had been three and the Rateable Value was £174. The island was being sold following the death of George Fiske of Bramford who had been the owner since 1878. The unnamed previous owner had acquired the island in May 1825. White's Directory of 1892 recorded that the house was occupied by Robert Brinkley, farm bailiff, and the Rateable Value was then £160. When Kelly's Directory was printed in 1937 the last Census had been in 1931, when there was nobody living on the island. Subsequently the RSPB purchased the island in 1947 for £900.

Some idea of what the island was like for at least 150 years before 1931 can be gleaned from the auction particulars of 1918. It contained 178 acres of marsh, 67 acres of saltings and the river walls comprised a further 22 acres. The grass marshes were 'well adapted' for colts and cattle, and the saltings offered good feeding grounds for sheep in the summer. There was access from the mainland by boat via landing stages using a barge for the transportation of cattle. Letters could be delivered – notice being given to the marshman, William Brinkley, by the hoisting of a red flag on a pole. William lived in the brick and tiled cottage which had six rooms and he could obtain water from two artesian wells, 200 and 170 feet deep. There was a barn, cattle shed and yard with other outbuildings. For the benefit of the owner the sporting facilities provided excellent fishing, yachting and boating. Partridges and hares abounded and the island was a breeding place for duck, tern, redshank, plover and other sea and shore birds, with good wild fowl shooting available in the winter.