

## SAUNDERSFOOT AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

At its November meeting the Society welcomed Robert Evans whose illustrated lecture was entitled 'Smuggling at Pwlldu.'

Pwlldu lies on the southern coast of the Gower peninsular a little to the west of Caswell. It comprises a small sandy bay, through which the Bishops Wood stream meanders to the sea, and is protected on the landward side by a steep pebble bank. Behind the bank lie two houses which were beer houses in the past – the Ship and the Beaufort. In the eighteenth century the Gower had little in the way of access roads and most travel and trade was by sea.

From around 1770 Pwlldu began to develop a reputation for the landing and distribution of smuggled goods, in particular soap and salt from Ireland and wine, brandy and tobacco from France. Brandy for the parson, baccy for the clerk no doubt. The busy shipping lanes of the Bristol Channel provided excellent cover and contraband would have been landed in Pwlldu Bay before being quickly moved inland along dedicated paths, apparently to two farms, Great and Little Highway and then distributed. And moved silently under the cover of darkness, with the pack animals sporting padded hooves.

This lucrative though dangerous trade gradually came to an end during the Napoleonic wars. Fears of attack, and of invasion, led to the formation of a maritime force, the Sea Fencibles, to patrol the Channel but whose activities greatly disrupted the smugglers' supply lines.

Smuggling in the eighteenth century gave way in the nineteenth to the quarrying and export of limestone which found a ready market in the agricultural areas, particularly in the south-west of England, and no doubt the Ship and the Beaufort were able to slake thirsts through the supply of small beer. Boats would beach in the Bay on the ebb tide and fully laden put to sea on a subsequent high tide.

Our speaker was warmly thanked by Mrs Rosemary Hayes for an entertaining foray into the lively history of one small bay on the Gower.

Members are reminded that the Society's Christmas Party takes place at the Gower Hotel on Wednesday, 13 December from 7.00.