

The Smugglers

Virtually everyone in the Parish of Dundonald was linked to the 18th century smuggling trade. This was highly organised by David Dunlop so that the Loans Smuggling Company was the most successful in Scotland.



Before 1765, tea, brandy, wine, rum and tobacco were purchased in the Isle of Man and shipped to the Troon by wherry. Later in the century these goods came directly from Europe.

About 16 small boats were kept

permanently on the beach to unload

the illicit cargo. This was a lucrative trade; the value of one cargo seized by the revenue officers was £2,000 - £120,000 at today's prices.



When a wherry was expected, news spread from house to house and local men, with up to 500 horses, would assemble on the beach ready to carry the contraband inland as speedily as possible.

One route was through Dundonald Glen.

Fullarton House (1745 - 1966)



The Revenue Officers

The customs and excise officers, based at Ayr and Irvine, endeavoured to put a stop to this trade. The smugglers had obtained a lease of the pasture land at the Troon from the Fullarton family and this gave them control of the beach and surrounding area.

The Collectors of Customs at Ayr believed that the only way to prevent the smuggling was to lodge a squad of officers and soldiers at the Temple on Troon Point. The Fullartons declined these requests because they were loath to lose the high rents paid by the smugglers.



Despite the intricate lookout system, informers often forewarned the revenue officers of an intended smuggling run. Even when supported by the local dragoons, the officers would be outmanoeuvred by the smugglers. Sometimes they were attacked and tied up by the women folk after a seizure had been made. The officers were only released once the goods had been carried away safely.

The Main Men



David Dunlop was the miller at Schulloch Mill, at the crossroads of Loans. He married the daughter of John Dickie, who had founded the Loans smuggling company in 1740s. Now the smugglers were known as David Dunlop & Co. The company traded successfully for over 40 years. David died in 1804 aged 65 and is buried in Dundonald churchyard.

William Stuart lived at Collemann. Before 1765 he visited the Isle of Man regularly, tasting brandy and rum to ensure that it was a suitable quality for the Loans smugglers. In 1774 he sent 20 hogsheds of tobacco from Ayr to Bergen in Norway where it was re-packaged ready for the wherry journey to Troon. Two years later he was recommended to a Glasgow tobacco merchant as 'a very good man'!

Troon & Firth of Clyde

