

THE INVASION OF HORSTED KEYNES WHICH NEVER TOOK PLACE

It is 1801. Napoleon, after his brilliant victories in Italy and Germany, has made peace with all his enemies except Britain. Fearing an invasion, the government orders the Lords Lieutenant of the South Coast Counties to find out what resources each parish had for resistance and what people and animals should be evacuated to districts further from the coast.

Horsted Keynes, as did others, replied in detail to the inquiry. It had no men in the Yeomanry or volunteer infantry, or even any men possessing arms, but on the other hand no aliens or Quakers either. Seventy seven men between the ages of 15 and 50 were capable of military service, as well as thirty six over that age. By far the greater proportion of boys and girls over seven, women and old men, declared they were capable of dispersing themselves without help, but people from the village had been appointed to shepherd the little children, the nursing mothers, the infirm and the very old. Others were appointed to arrange the evacuation of the 107 cows, 216 young cattle and colts, 375 sheep, 283 hogs and pigs and unnumbered 'other livestock'. There were 38 wagons and 68 carts to cope with this migration, as well as 74 draught oxen, 110 dray horses and nine riding horses.

Millers were ordered by the Lord Lieutenant to stay in their mills and provide sacks of flour every day, but there was no Miller at Horsted Keynes in 1801, though Lindfield parish Anthony Harland, miller of 'Cockease' had to supply four and John Stevens, miller of 'E Maskells' two daily sacks. But if we had no working mill, Lindfield had no barges to offer to the county effort, while Horsted Keynes had two, each of 16 tons though neither was decked. One was owned by Edward Tester, who was also her master; the master of the other was Nathaniel Coppard, her owners Thos. Hill & Co. Both usually traded along the Ouse between Newhaven and Freshfield Wharf.

All these detailed preparations came to nothing, for Napoleon made peace in 1802 with Britain instead of trying to invade. Probably only the stout-hearted boys and girls over seven who were 'capable of removing themselves' as the schedule has it, were disappointed.