

## The Goodwin Sands Education Project

### Saints or Sinners?

Before lifeboat stations were built along the coast opposite the Goodwin Sands in the mid 1800's, sailors on ships in distress in The Downs and aground on the Goodwin Sands relied for rescue on the eagle eyes of boatmen watching through telescopes from the beach. These boatmen were often considered either 'saints or sinners.' On the one hand, they would launch their boats in atrocious weather to rescue people but on the other hand, they were also sometimes more interested in plundering cargo from the sinking ships than in saving lives.

There was fierce competition between the different groups of boatmen on the beach to reach a shipwreck first and they were given nicknames like the 'Deal Pirates, Dover Sharks and Ramsgate Snatchers'. They sound like names of local football teams!

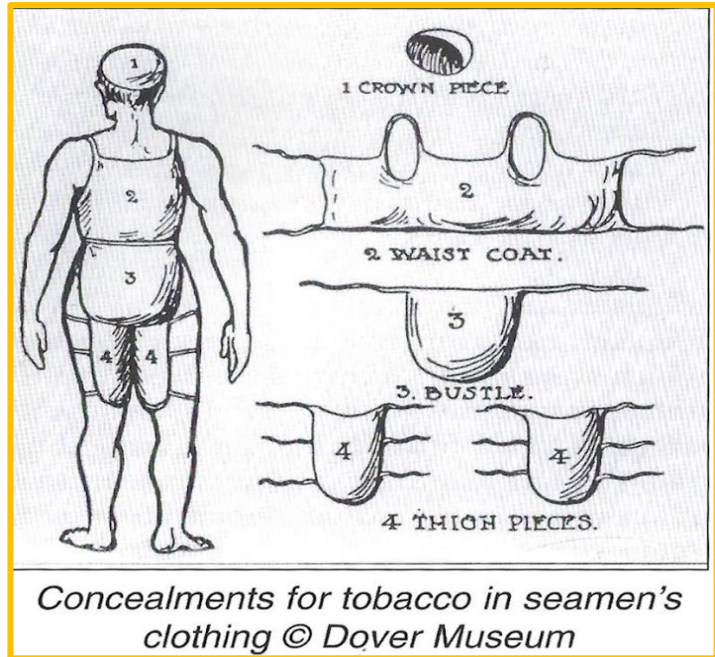
These boatmen scraped a living from the sea - fishing, ferrying supplies to the ships waiting in The Downs and piloting them around the treacherous Sands. They also swept the seabed for lost anchors and chains, reselling them to ships' captains at inflated prices which made them rather unpopular. These activities came under the strange name of 'hovelling' pronounced 'huv'ling'.



Another activity in which the Deal boatmen took part was smuggling which was at its height from the mid 1600s to the early 1800s. This was because heavy taxes were imposed on imported luxury goods such as coffee, chocolate, spirits, tea, tobacco and ladies fashion items of ribbons, lace, silk, and kid gloves.

The proximity to France combined with stretches of empty shingle beaches made Deal an ideal location for smuggling.

The smuggling was often run by the landlords of the seafront pubs and many of the houses were joined by secret walkways across the roofs with hidden rooms in between in which to hide smuggled goods. The boats often had hollowed out masts and false keels for concealing contraband (illegal goods) and the men themselves sometimes wore big coats with lots of hidden pockets sewn into them which could be filled with tea or tobacco.



Smuggling ended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by which time eight lifeboat stations had been established along the East Kent coast to guard the waters around the Goodwin Sands. This meant that at least one lifeboat could be launched irrespective of wind and tide. These lifeboat men were so brave they were known as "Heroes of the Goodwin Sands". This picture shows three of the most

well-known lifeboat coxswains (skippers) - from left to right - James Laming of Kingsdown, Richard Roberts of North Deal and John Mackin of Walmer.



## Activity

1. What would you name your group of boatmen? Eg. *Goodwin Go-Getters*
2. Find evidence from the text, and use your own opinions to complete the table considering both sides of the argument: do you think the Deal boatmen were Saints or Sinners?
3. Then, write down your final opinion. You could debate this as a class.

Saints	Sinners

Ultimately, I believe that the Deal boatmen were .....

because.....

