

James Stallard was born in St Helens in about 1796. As a young man he was apprenticed to Pilot Beazley who was known as 'Old Razza Beazley', but soon after his service ended, he entered into the business of smuggling. In those days smuggling was thought by many to be an honourable profession, as long as one managed to escape detection of the authorities and from the commencement to the end of his career as a smuggler James Stallard evaded or outran all the revenue cutters.

In order to be a successful contrabandist an intimate knowledge of the coast was essential and Stallard possessed this knowledge to a remarkable degree. His first small but swift vessel was named The Fox, it was once chased by a King's cutter, the commander of which was sure he could make an arrest, but the crafty smuggler hoisted up a keg of brandy on the mast, ran his vessel near a dangerous reef of rocks, tacked, and soon left his pursuers miles astern.

The Fox was once seized in harbour, but as no positive proof of any illicit traffic could be produced the authorities had to give her up.

Stallard had a still swifter vessel named The Sun, which he was induced to sell to Mr Green, a large ship owner for a considerable sum of money with which he purchased The Gem, also a swift sailing yacht.

As the old Revenue sailing cutters were superseded by steam vessels that Stallard knew he would not be able to outrun he wisely determined to retire from his illegal activities, and for a while he contented himself with an income from letting his yacht to gentlemen fond of cruising.

The discovery of gold in Australia gave a fresh impetus to the restless mind of the old captain and together with his eldest son he determined on a voyage in The Gem to Australia. They entered into an agreement with a man named Capel, well known in Ryde, to convey him to the distant colony. The venture proved to be an unsuccessful one for Stallard whose son was struck down by fever in Melbourne, where he died, and he was compelled to dispose of The Gem for considerably less than it was worth in England.

On his return to the Island James Stallard lived at number 9 Hill Street, next to the public house, called "The Gem". The pub was commonly known as The Undertakers' Arms because of its close proximity to the Cemetery and Ellery's the stone masons.

Stallard was a frequent customer at the pub, being only next door, and would often spin a yarn about his former days when good French brandy was 'cheap'. No amount of reasoning could persuade him that there was anything wrong with smuggling or that any damage was caused to the community by evading the tax upon spirits. He argued that if the Government needed money, they should find something else to tax. Although he was sometimes funny and agreeable, James Stallard was by no means a pleasant man, he was often close and disagreeable and, as the infirmities of old age came upon him, he became somewhat churlish. Some of this could probably have been the fact that he was deaf, and caused the frustrating problem of communicating.

Stallard had been a widower for a few months, but just before his 75th birthday he took a young wife. The union was, apparently, not an entirely happy one and a few days before his death the old man pitched the young woman out of a window but whether drunk or mad at the time was never discovered.

When Stallard died a few days later there was an inquest into his death, and, at the request of Stallard's son, the young wife did not attend. Stallard had made a will in favour of the young woman and the son thought that his death may have been brought about by means not entirely fair. The Coroner heard that Stallard and his wife occupied separate apartments, and that early in the morning of 7th June 1872 the old man had been found by his wife lying on the floor of his room quite dead. After a long enquiry, the jury came to the conclusion that death was caused by apoplexy and a verdict to that effect was recorded.

*Source: Some of the text above has been taken from the Ryde Ventilator 8 June 1872, by Kevin Mitchell. RSHG have researched and added a few points that we know to be correct, but we cannot guarantee the total accuracy of the report.*