

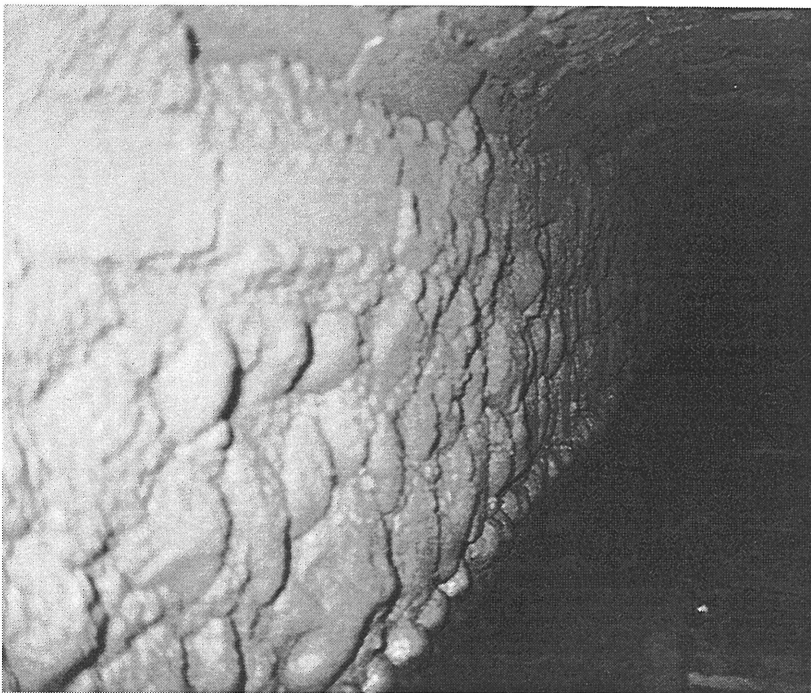
TUNNEL DISCOVERED AT BLAKENEY !

By John Wright

Many coastal villages, including Blakeney, are riddled with smugglers' tunnels – so it is said. Yet the evidence is hard to come by: so many seem to have been lost, filled up or bricked in. So it was with considerable interest that the author responded to an invitation to look at a tunnel that had just been discovered on the Low quay at Blakeney. Could this be a genuine tunnel at last? Read on!

On 14th February 1996, the author heard that a hole being dug on the Low Quay at Blakeney had broken into a hitherto unknown tunnel. Early the following morning, kitted out with old clothes, camera, torch and tape, your correspondent arrived on the scene to find that there was indeed a hole large enough to admit a person of average proportions. The hole had been caused by the removal of one of the posts separating the 'Red House Land' from the public highway in order to replace it with a new one. The post had come up leaving a void below.

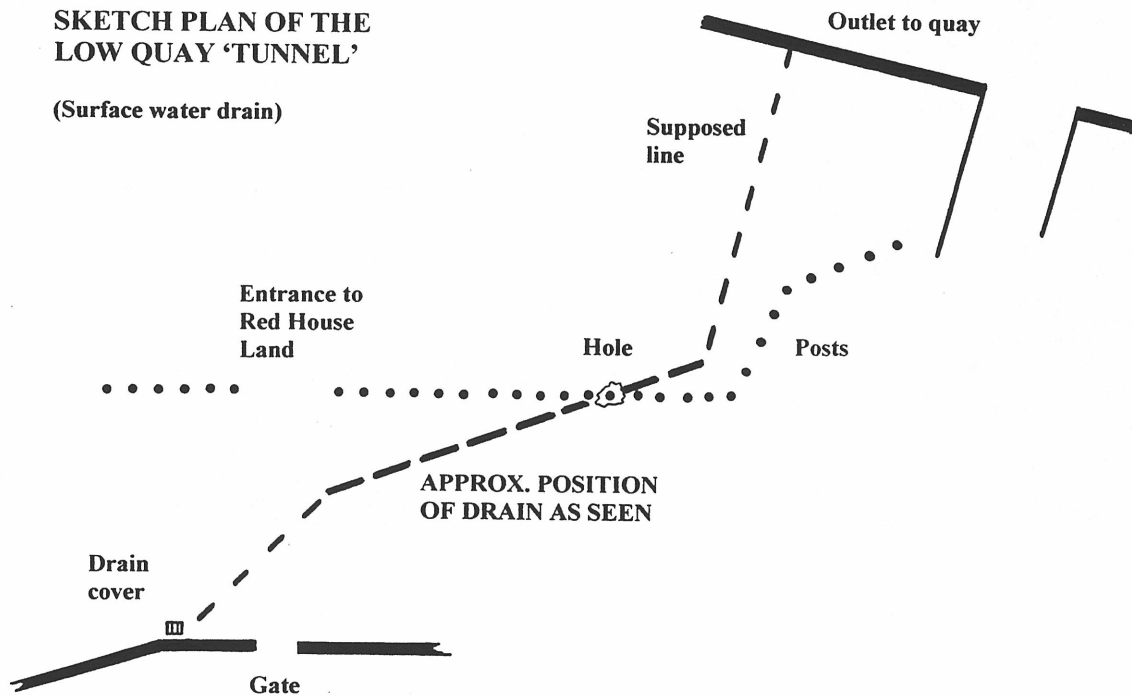
Your intrepid explorer eased himself into the depths with a camera to record possibly the first ever photographic evidence of the unsuspected tunnel. The photo shows that the tunnel had an arched brick roof, walls built with cobble flints, roughly coursed, and a floor paved with large pammments.



Unfortunately, as readers may have deduced by now, the tunnel proved to be of Lilliputian proportions: only 24 inches high and 18 inches wide, accommodating in its width two nine-by-nine inch pammments, blue-grey in colour and clean but with a slightly irregular surface. No deposits were visible on the floor in either direction.

In one direction, the tunnel extended about 16 yards towards the south-west before turning more to the south. In the opposite direction it appeared to run about six yards to the north-east before the slight downward slope steepened just before a turn towards the north. At this point it seemed clear that the tunnel would have to be reclassified as a drain or sewer – but was it still active or had it already passed into the realms of uncharted history?

Plotting the apparent course of the drain on a sketch plan of the immediate vicinity produced the first clue to its function. The 'landward' end of the drain headed off in the general direction of a drain cover on the opposite side of the road, while the 'seaward' end made for the tidal channel at the Low Quay. This realization compelled the deflation of the find from smugglers' tunnel to surface water drain.



Yet other questions remained. It was clearly not a modern drain, so how old was it and what was its original purpose? A more pressing question from the contractor, however, was what was he to do about it? If it was an old drain it could perhaps be filled in; if it were an active one the breach would need to be repaired.

It was at this point that a local resident arrived to explain that the erstwhile tunnel was indeed the drain which took surface water from Westgate into the channel – as Anglian Water had confirmed a few years before by means of a tracer dye. And in origin it was very likely to have been constructed to take effluent from the former farm (now represented by Old Garden Cottage) under the road and into the channel.

When was it built? It was suggested that the drain might be dated by the pammments but in the circumstances it did not really seem worthwhile bringing in a pammment expert to look into the hole, nor did it seem advisable to extract a pammment from the floor. There was no local hearsay on the matter and the drain looked Victorian, perhaps older. So, on the basis of collective ignorance, a date of 1750 to 1850 was suggested. The matter was finally brought to a close by the contractor re-roofing the cavity with the help of a thick metal plate and, who knows, perhaps a folk memory of a tunnel under the Low Quay will emerge in times to come.



The Chairman of the Parish Council about to look into the matter



The tunnel - the view is the same in either direction