

- Witness Statement of John Raise
- From the trial of the Hawkhurst Gang
- The Old Bailey, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1749

**Court:** Look at the prisoners. Do you know either of them?

**Raise:** I know them all.

**Q:** Give us an account of what you know about it.

**Raise:** I was not at their first meeting. The first time I was with them about it was in Chaulton Forest, belonging to the Duke of Richmond: There was only Richard Perin of the prisoners there then. We set our hands to a piece of paper to go and break open Pool Custom-house, and take out the goods. It was Edmund Richards that set all our names down; this was about three or four days before we went to Pool, we had no arms with us at that time. The Monday after we met at Rowland's Castle; they were all there, except Kingsmill and Fairall; they were armed, when they met, with blunderbushes, carbines, and pistols; some lived thereabouts, and some towards Chichester. So we met there to set out all together: When we came to the forest of Bare, joining to Horn-dean, the Hawkhurst gang had got a little horse, which carried their arms; we went in company till we came to Lindust; there we lay all day on Tuesday, then all the prisoners were there: Then we set out for Pool in the glimpse of the evening, and we came to Pool about eleven at night.

**Q:** Were all the prisoners arm'd?

**Raise:** To the best of my knowledge all the prisoners were armed; we sent two men to see if all things were clear for us to go to work, in breaking the Ware-house, &c. The men were Thomas Willis and Thomas Stringer; Thomas Willis came to us, and said, there was a large Sloop lay up against the Key; she'll plant her guns to the Custom-house door, and tear us to pieces, so it cannot be done. We were turning our horses to go back. Kingsmill, and Fairall, and the rest of their countrymen, said, if you will not do it, we will go and do it ourselves. This was the Hawkhurst gang; John and Richard Mills were with them: We call them the East-country people; they were fetched to help break the Custom-house, &c. Thomas Stringer came to us, and said, the tide was low, and that vessel could not bring her guns to bear to fire upon us. Then we all went forward to Pool: We rid down a little back lane on the left side the Town, and came to the sea-side. There we quitted our horses, Richard Perrin

and Thomas Lillewhite staid there to look after them. We went forward, and, going along, we met a lad, a fisherman going to fish, we kept him a prisoner: When we came to the Custom-house, we broke open the door; there were two men who lay in the under part of it, we took them prisoners too; then we broke open the door of the inside; and, when we found where the tea was, we took it away: There was about thirty seven hundred , three quarters. We brought it to the horses, and slung it with the slings, and loaded our horses with it; the horses were, as near as I can guess, two or three hundred yards off the Custom-house. We sackt it in what we call horse-sacks to load; the five prisoners at the bar were there. Then we went to a place called Fording-bridge, there we breakfasted, and fed our horses. There were thirty one horses, and thirty men of us; the odd horse was for the East-country men to carry their arms .