

## Deryk's Drinking Room

Deryk, the owner of the drinking room at number ten French Street, was standing behind the high table where the beer barrel was hoisted and looked around appreciatively. Who would have thought that he would come this far when he left his country after a scuffle at his Pa's brewery? What a hot-tempered lad he was! Remembering home and his old man's brewery, a bit of nostalgia swept across him. Skills he learned there helped him to start up this drinking room. As people in Southampton started favouring his beer over their ale, Deryk Egbert became Deryk Berebrewer. New country, new name, new life! For all these, he had to pay 6d per annum, but it did not worry him because it offset benefits. Rubbing his hands together he said to himself, "What's more I'm one of the gunners to the God House Tower. And fired volleys to entertain the His Majesty the King!" His rejoicing was understandable because a few days ago, he bought the long-abandoned ale house that located adjacent to this drinking room to provide lodging and food to his customers.

The raucous laughter of the sailors, who were throwing the dice near the fireplace, thundered through the hop reeked air in the room. Seated at the table before him, William and Jacobs were discussing about their betters before going to them. Edward, a widower, seated alone at the far corner of the room was muttering to Deryk's cat. Men working at the South wall building site were debating about a possible French invasion. All of them were enjoying his beer before winding down after a hard day's work.

Engrossed in the surroundings, Deryk did not see Henry, who had come up to him, until he addressed him.

"Oy!" His beer bloated lower lip hanging down dangerously, Henry yelled, "You're cheating on us! Th...this jug is ss...smaller. You've... served le...less beer for me."

“I’ve been serving beer in that jug for years and you have been drinking from that jug even yesterday,” replied Deryk.

“Paah! Ale pot in Golden Lion is... larger,” shouted Henry, pounding his jug on the table. Some beer spilled on the table, and his red eyes glared at Deryk.

“I didn’t ask you to come here. If it’s better, you go there,” snarled Deryk whose nostrils began to flap and breathing became rasping.

“You... alien!” pointing his finger at Deryk, he screamed. “Oy...D’ you think... you’re above the law...be... because you’re a gu...gunner?” Then he threw the beer jug at Deryk’s face. Meeting his robust brow, the earthenware jug smashed into pieces splashing beer around his face, and blood started to ooze just above his right eye. Deryk pitched forward and grabbed Henry by the collar of his frock coat, bracing up himself for a scuffle when he remembered that already he had been to the Mayor’s Court twice and his dreams about business expansion, so, he released his grip.