

Peter the gunner

All he wanted was to be able to have a quiet pint with his mates. But life kept getting in the way: between making gunpowder, practising the fife in preparation for the muster, running the glazier business, being the mayor's official translator, and keeping an eye on his younger brother, he barely had an hour he could call his own. It was a fine thing to follow your Dad into the town's official gunners – and no-one would sniff at receiving an annual salary. Besides, a man in uniform striding along to the armoury attracted admiring glances from all the lasses. Oh, it was a grand life, but a constantly busy one.

To be sure, it was a great honour to wear the town's livery: but even that took up his time, for the tailor wanted fittings, and he swore the dog had his thumb on the tape when his measurements were taken, as this jacket was exceedingly tight. He shifted uncomfortably, then swore and undid the popping buttons. His brother Thomas shook his head: 'Taking the Lord's name in vain is a sin, you know?' Peter retaliated with an epithet that did their mother no credit.

Running the glazier trade – that was a fine thing, too. He dealt with the wealthy merchants, who were able to afford his skills – and who were apt to seal a bargain with a toast in their favoured red wine. Good enough stuff, he conceded, but Peter was descended from a long line of Flemish beer brewers, and his taste ran to a pewter tankard brimming with the scent of hops.

Peter looked over the supply of shot: surely that was enough for this week? If he left off work soon, he'd have time to stop at the alehouse. That was when the brilliant solution occurred to him: if he ran his own drinking parlour, he could have a pint any time he was not on duty. Thomas remonstrated like his doubting namesake: 'But you'd have to take the time to get the licences, and find staff to run the alehouse – and they'd have to be trustworthy, or they'll drink all your profit.'

What nonsense – he was so esteemed in the town that no-one would bother him!

And it was a fine alehouse, and his mates were happy to come and spend their time off work keeping him company, and buying his brew. And perhaps he did start to drink a bit more freely, and maybe it wasn't such a good idea to tell the licensing officials where to stick their busybody noses ... but it was uncalled for to lose his place with the gunners. Though, to look on the bright side, he could hand back that jacket the weaselly tailor had cut too small.