



### **Three Men Conversing (Bristol 1810)**

By Helen Spisak

1810 – Bristol: Within a small, smoke filled tavern near the harbour wall, I was seated at a meagre and heavily scraped wooden table. I was weighing up the three men in front of me, whilst doing so I was also happily enjoying a surprisingly good ale.

The slim-built man seated at my table was called Clem. He had a natty hat set at a jaunty angle and had tried very badly to mimic a dandy cravat but with his confident air he was managing to pull-off the affect somewhat. His fellow seated companion was a more robust and angular featured man called Jed who was displaying a languid demeanour and sporting a large hat and prominent nose to match. Their third companion, who Clem was taking great joy in the fact that there were no more chairs left for the fellow to sit on, shrugged, gave me a stare with a sly grin and started to methodically refill his common clay pipe, the same of which Jed also had and who started speaking to me first in a low deep voice.

“Well let’s get down to business then squire. Tom here said you were a posh cove looking for some kegs. How many?” Jed had nodded over his shoulder to the standing companion to acknowledge Tom. I leaned in nearer and confidently replied. “I want half your stock, but I want to try the nectar first.” He gave me a steady stare, but it was Clem who got up and then whispered in Tom’s ear.

Tom scurried off to the door at the side of the tavern and quickly returned with a small metal cup and passed it eagerly to me. The French brandy ‘nectar’ warmed the inside of my chest like a mother’s hug. They saw my enjoyment and stood up.

We all shook hands and as we were walking to the side door. I knew I would never taste that nectar again and suddenly felt an urge to tell them of the 20 custom and excise officers currently surrounding the tavern.