

Sea Songs of the Isle of Wight and Solent

Sing along to the recordings me salty friends.

Atherfield Ledge (St Catherine's)

Wild sweeps the wrack from the gates of the West, loud roars the rage of the sea
Bitter the edge of the Atherfield ledge from the which God keeps us free!
White gleam the teeth of the surges high and glisten the rocks for their toll;
Black race the clouds o'er the face of the sky like fiends in pursuit of a soul.
Go, all who have kin on the sea this night and pray on your bended knee
That while you sleep, the good Lord will keep those who sail on this storm-swept sea.

Chorus:

*Go, all who have kin on the sea this night and pray on your bended knee
That while you sleep, the good Lord will keep, those who sail on this storm-swept sea.*

The 'Bon Venture' of the Abbot of Quarr is home from the land of France
Deep lade with cloth and the good red wine that makes the red blood dance.
The leadsman checks the knotted line that guides the helmsman's hand,
The look-out's beard is stiff with rime as he strains his eyes for land.
'I cannot the narrowing coast descry, nor the Abbey's beacon see.
Christ's body! We've missed the Needle's eye and there's broken water a-lee. Ch.

Now, lady of Whitwell, be our aid - we vow thee an altar light.
Good Nicholas, saint of shipmen bold, preserve us all this night.
But the pitiless wind and the treacherous tide hold the good ship in their sway;
In vain the anchor is cast - it drags. She strikes ere break of day.
And it's, oh! The crashing of timbers rent, by the grim rocks' savage edge
And it's, ah! The shrieks of drowning men
(who for want of a light must perish this night) (tune as line above)
By the cursed Atherfield ledge. Ch.

Cherbourg to Wight

From Bembridge town to Freshwater Bay
The smugglers plied their trade
The back of the Wight was where they say
The liquor and goods were laid.

Chorus:

*We'll go down among the Needle Rocks
And put them all ashore O
Back again to Cherbourg
And take in some more O.*

At Luccombe Chine under the cliff
Were the homes of the fishermen O
The soft sandstone was easy to work
For to make the smugglers' den O. Ch.

Old Charlie was a tough old salt
With his brothers all three they dug below
To make a cave under the front room floor
Their illicit tubs to stow O. Ch.

Crafty Old Hannah, Old Charlie's wife
Her ills one starry night did feign
Writhing and groaning all in her chair
Sipping raw brandy to ease her pain. Ch.

The smell of her brandy seemed to fill the room
Disguising the haul in the cellar below
Old Hannah continued to rock and to moan
With the trap door under her chair O. Ch.

The excise men soon arrived
In search of contraband O
On seeing Hannah in so much pain
They left them all alone O. Ch.

Crossing the Bar (Tennyson)

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again for home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark:

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

Dark Eyed Sailor

It's of a hand...some young lady fair,
Was walking out... for to take the air;
She met a sailor... upon her way,
So I paid attention, *so I paid attention,*
To hear what she did say.

The sailor said... "Why roam alone?
The night is coming... and the day near gone."
She cried while tears... from her eyes did fall
"It's a dark eyed sailor, *"it's a dark eyed sailor*
That will be my downfall.

It's two long years... since he left the land,
I took a gold ring... from off my hand
We broke the token... here's a part with me,
And the other's rolling, *and the other's rolling*
At the bottom of the sea."

He answered. "Drive... him from your mind,
Some other sailor... as good you'll find;
Love turns aside... and soon cold does grow,
As a winter's morning, *as a winter's morning*
When fields are clothed with snow."

These words did Phoebe's... sad heart inflame;
She said, "On me... you shall play no game,"
She drew a dagger... and then did cry,
"For my dark-eyed sailor, *"for my dark-eyed sailor*
I lived and I will die.

His coal-black eye.. and his curling hair,
And pleasant tongue..., did my heart ensnare;
Genteel he was... and no rake like you,
To advise a maiden, *to advise a maiden*
To slight the jacket blue.

"But still," said Phoebe... "I will ne'er disdain
A tarry sailor... but will treat the same"
So drink his health... here's a piece of coin
But my dark eyed sailor, but my dark eyed sailor
Still claims this heart of mine."

Then half of the ring... young William show,
She seemed distracted... between joy and woe,
"Oh, welcome William... I have lands and gold
For my dark-eyed sailor, *for my dark-eyed sailor,*
So handsome, true and bold."

Then in a village... down by the sea,
They joined in wedlock... and well agree.
All maids be true... when your love's away,
For a cloudy morning, *for a cloudy morning*
Oft brings a shining day.

Dibdin's Tom Bowling

Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowling

The darling of our crew-ew;

No more he'll hear the tempest howling

For death has broached him to.

His form was of the manliest beauty his heart was kind and so-offt;

Faithful below he did his duty and now he's gone a-lo-offt

And now he's gone a-loft.

Tom never from his word departed

His virtues were so rare-are:

His friends were many and true hearted

His Poll was kind and fair;

And then he'd sing so blithe and jolly ah many's the time and o-offt;

But mirth is turned to melancholy for Tom is gone a-lo-offt

For Tom is gone a-loft.

Yet shall poor Tom find pleasant weather

When he who all comma-and

Shall give to call life's crew together

The word to pipe all hands:

Thus death who kings and tars despatches in vain Tom's life hath do-offed

For tho' his body's under hatches his soul is gone a-lo-offt

His soul is gone a-loft.

Heart of Oak

Come cheer up my lads, 'tis to glory we steer,

To add something more to this wonderful year;

To honour we call you not press you like slaves,

For who are so free as the sons of the waves?

Chorus:

Heart of oak are our ships, jolly tars are our men,

We always are ready; Steady, boys, steady!

We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again.

We ne'er see our foes but we wish them to stay,

They never see us but they wish us away;

If they run, why we follow, and run them ashore,

For if they won't fight us we cannot do more. Ch.

They swear they'll invade us, these terrible foes,

They frighten our women, our children and beaus,

But should their flat bottoms in darkness get o'er,

Still Britons they'll find to receive them on shore. Ch.

We'll still make them fear and we'll still make them flee

And drub them on shore, as we've drubbed them at sea;

Then cheer up, my lads! with one heart let us sing:

Our soldiers, our sailors, our statesmen our King. Ch.

Man O' War

'Twas down in yonder meadows I carelessly did stray,
Where I beheld a lady fair with some young sailor gay;
Says he, 'My lovely Susan, I soon must leave the shore
To cross the briny ocean in a British man o' war.'

Chorus:

Man of war, oh man of war, man of war, oh man of war.

Then Susan fell to weeping: 'Oh sailor,' she did say,
'How can you be so venturesome, and throw yourself away?
For when that I am twenty-one I shall receive my store, -
Jolly sailor do not venture in a British man o' war.' Ch.

'Oh Susan, lovely Susan, the truth to you I'll tell,
The British flag's insulted, and England knows it well;
I may be crowned with laurels, so like a jolly tar
I'll face the walls of China in a British man o' war.' Ch.

'But Susan, lovely Susan, the time will quickly pass,
So come down to the ferry house and take a parting glass;
My shipmates they are waiting to row me from the shore,
And sail for England's glory in a British man o' war.' Ch.

The sailor took his handkerchief and cut it fair in two,
Saying, 'Susan keep one half for me, I'll do the same for you;
The bullets may surround me, and the cannons loudly roar,
But I'll fight for fame and Susan in a British man o' war.' Ch.

A few more words together, her love let go her hand,
His shipmates launched their boat and rowed so merrily from land,
The sailor waved his handkerchief when far away from shore,
Pretty Susan blessed her sailor in a British man o' war. Ch.

The Mermaid

'Twas Friday morning when we set sail
And our ship not far from land
When there we spied a fair pretty mermaid
With a comb and a glass in her hand

Chorus:

Oh, the raging seas did roar

And the stormy winds did blow

While we poor sailor were all up aloft

And the land lubbers lying down below

And the land lubbers lying down below.

Then up spoke the captain of our gallant ship,
And a mariner good was he
'I have married a wife in fair Portsmouth town,
And this night a widow she will be!' Ch.

Then up spoke the cabin boy of our gallant
And a brave little boy was he
“I’ve a father and a mother in old Ryde town
And this night they will both weep for me.” Ch.

Then up spoke a seaman of our gallant ship,
And a well spoken man was he
!For the want of a long boat we shall all be drowned,
And shall sink to the bottom of the sea.” Ch.

The three times round went our gallant ship
And down like stone sank she,
The moon shone bright and the stars gave their light
But they were all at the bottom of the sea. (except me) Ch.

My Billy Boy

Where have you been all the day *my Billy boy?*
Where have you been all the day *pretty Billy tell me?*
I have been all the day, courting a lady gay
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

Is she fit to be thy love *my Billy boy?*
Is she fit to be thy love *pretty Billy tell me?*
She’s as fit to be my love, as my hand is for my glove
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she make chockdog cheese *my Billy boy?*
Can she make chockdog cheese *pretty Billy tell me?*
She can make chockdog cheese, as hard as any you please
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she bake a Brighstone doughnut *my Billy Boy?*
Can she bake a Brighstone doughnut *pretty Billy tell me?*
She can bake a Brighstone doughnut, and fill your cider cup
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

How old may she be *my Billy boy?*
How old may she be *pretty Billy tell me?*
Twice six twice seven, twice twenty and eleven
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she row a boat ashore *my Billy boy?*
Can she row a boat ashore *pretty Billy tell me?*
She can row a boat ashore, and close her own back door
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she fetch St Helen’s water *my Billy boy?*
Can she fetch St Helen’s water *pretty Billy tell me?*
She can fetch St Helen’s water, it is as sweet as beer in pewter
She’s a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she make that Island brew *my Billy boy?*
Can she make that Island brew *pretty Billy tell me?*
She can make that Island brew, and tasty Shrove cakes too
She's a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she make a Vectis pie *my Billy boy?*
Can she make a Vectis pie *pretty Billy tell me?*
She make a Vectis pie, till it makes the preachers cry
She's a young thing just come from her mammy.

More Verses

Can she make Wight lobster and asparagus pie *my Billy boy?*
Can she make Wight lobster and asparagus pie *pretty Billy tell me?*
She can make Wight lobster and asparagus pie, yes and make any young man sigh
She's a young thing just come from her mammy.

Did she bid you to come in *my Billy boy?*
Did she bid you to come in *pretty Billy tell me?*
Yes, she bade me to come in, there's a dimple in her chin
She's a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she make plum bird's nests *my Billy boy?*
Can she make plum bird's nests *pretty Billy tell me?*
Yes, she can make them nests, they will put hairs upon your chest
She's a young thing just come from her mammy.

Can she make Forest House pudden *my Billy boy?*
Can she make Forest House pudden *pretty Billy tell me?*
Yes, she can them puddens but I know she shoulden
She's a young thing just come from her mammy.

Nancy Lee

Of all the wives as ever you know, O O
Yeo ho! (lads ho!) yeo ho! (lads ho!)
There's none like Nancy Lee, I trow, O O
Yeo ho! lads ho! yeo ho!
See, there she stands an' waves her hands upon the quay,
And every day when I'm away she'll watch for me,
And whisper low, when tempests blow, for Jack at sea,
Yeo ho! lads ho! yeo ho!

Chorus:

*The sailor's wife the sailor's star shall be,
Yeo ho! we go across the sea;
The sailor's wife the sailor's star shall be,
The sailor's wife his star shall be.*

The harbor's past, the breezes blow, O O
Yeo ho! (lads ho!) yeo ho! (lads ho!)
'Tis long ere we come back I know, O O
Yeo ho! lads ho! yeo ho!
But true and bright from morn till night my home will be,
And all so neat, an' snug an' sweet, for Jack at sea.
And Nancy's face to bless the place an' welcome me,
Yeo ho! lads ho! yeo ho! Ch.

The bo's'n pipes the watch below, O O
Yeo ho! (lads ho!) yeo ho! (lads ho!)
Then here's a health afore we go, O O
Yeo ho! lads ho! yeo ho!
A long, long life to my sweet wife and mates at sea,
And keep our bones from Davy Jones wherever we be,
And may you meet a mate as sweet as Nancy Lee,
Yeo ho! lads ho! yeo ho! Ch.

The Men of Wight

Bright gleam the waters encircling our home,
Sparkling with sunshine, crested with foam.
Proud rise our cliffs in their towering height,
Clothed like a maid in their mantle of white.
True is our boast, as our annals can show,
Never has Wight man been worsted by foe.

Chorus:

*Men of Wight, march in your might,
Men of Wight, march in your might,
Hearts will beat high when you strike for the right.*

Snug lie our homesteads, unfearful of foes,
Enbowered in myrtle and fuchsia and rose.
Sweet are our maidens and sturdy our sons,
Fresh as the mead where the rivulet runs,
Isle of our fathers, fertile and free,
'Unwinnable Isle' of the narrowing sea. Ch.

Should foes ever threaten us, call ye to mind
When the flag of the enemy was flung to the wind,
How the Island men answered with weapon and shield
And sternly refused at the battle to yield,
But died in their harness - as Englishmen should -
With face to the foe by that fatal dark wood. Ch.

March in good order, men of the Wight,
Sons of the fathers who kept honour bright,
Shoulder to shoulder, brother and son,
Yeoman and craftsman, every one,
Raising the strain of the Islanders' song
Lustily as you go marching along. Ch.

The Old Miser

**Tis of an old miser in Portsmouth did dwell
He had but one daughter whom a sailor loved well.
And when the old miser was out of the way
She was always with her sailor by night and by day.
*She was always with her sailor by night and by day.***

**Soon as the old miser he heard of the news
Straightway to the captain he immediately goes,
Crying, "Captain, bold captain, I have good news to tell,
I have got a young sailor for a bargain to sell." x2**

**"So what will you give me?" this old man did say
"I'll give you ten guineas and take him away.
I'll send him a sailing right over the main
He shall never come to England to plague you again". x2**

**Now when this young damsel she heard of the news
Away to the captain she hastily goes,
Saying, "Captain, bold captain, I have bad news to tell,
You have got my young sailor for a transport to sell." x2**

**She out of her pocket pulled handfuls of gold
And down on the deck the guineas they rolled,
Saying, "Captain, bold captain, all this I'll give you,
For my jolly young sailor, my right and my due." x2**

**"Oh no," said the Captain, "that never can be,
For only last night he was sold unto me.
I will send him a sailing right over the main;
He will never come to England to court you again." x2**

**"Bad luck to my father wherever he be
I feel in my own heart he has ruined me.
I'll away to my couch and then lay myself down,
And day and night long for my sailor I'll mourn." x2**

Rat of Wight (Gilbert Lee)

**Twass off Penzance in mid July
The Spanish fleet we did descry,
Up Channel eastward standing;
Then up and spake our skipper bold,
Small matter what we've got in hold;
George Carey must the news be told
To guard him 'gainst their landing.**

Chorus:

***A health! A health to Gilbert Lee,
A worthy son of Wight is he,
Who steered the Rat to Newport quay, And brought us timely warning.***

Slack off the sheets, the tiller bind,
We'll run, my lads, before the wind
And give him timely warning.
The Rat of Wight well found is she,
And I'm her Captain Gilbert Lee,
And we must be at Newport quay
Before tomorrow's dawning. Ch.

So east before the wind we went,
With every stitch of canvas bent
And every rope a-straining.
By Looe and Plymouth Hoe we sped,
Past Portland's Bill - the shipmen's dread -
Until we opened Alban's head
As daylight was a-waning. Ch.

The beacons fare from hill to hill,
Red harbingers of coming ill,
The southern coast alarming.
To work, to work, on fosse and wall,
Apprentice stout and yeoman tall,
And show the world, whate'er befall,
The Wight is up and arming. Ch.

Work, Wight men, work, come foul come fair,
The hum of war is in the air;
The Spanish hive is swarming.
Go tell the lads in feu and fee
The message brought by Gilbert Lee,
The Great Armada's put to sea
And ye must all be arming. Ch.

The Sailor's Return

'Twas on a wintry evening, the weather it was wet,
Upon the slope of Portsdown Hill a damsel there I met;
I overheard her wailing and sorrowing complain,
All for her absent sailor who ploughed the raging main.

I stepped up to the damsel, and put her in surprise,
I saw she did not know me - I being in disguise,
Said I, "My charming creature, my joy and heart's delight,
Wherever are you travelling this dark and stormy night?"

"The road, kind sir, to Portsmouth, if you will kindly show
Unto a maid distracted, for there I want to go,
I am searching for a young man and Johnny is his name,
And in the fleet at Portsmouth I am told he does remain.

If he was here this night, he would shield me from all harm,
But he is on the ocean in his naval uniform
And with brave Admiral Hawke he will all his foes destroy,
Like the roving kings of, who fought in the wars of Troy.”

“It is six weeks or better since your true love left the shore,
He’s cruising on the ocean where the raging billows roar,
He went to sail the ocean for honour and for gain,
But I hear that he was shipwrecked upon the coast of Spain.”

When she heard this dreadful news she fell into despair,
She fell to wringing of her hands and tearing of her hair.
“Since he is gone and left me, no man on earth I’ll take
But in some lonely valley I will wander for his sake.”

My heart was full, her anguish no longer could I see,
I clasped her in my arms and said, “Look Jenny, look at me!
I am your faithful Johnny, I am neither drowned nor slain!
And now we’ve met so happily, we’ll never part again.”

Throw out the Lifeline

Throw out the lifeline across the dark wave
There is a brother whom someone should save
Somebody's brother, Oh who then will dare?
To throw out the life line his peril to share?
Chorus:

*Throw out the lifeline, throw out the life line
Someone is drifting away, away
Throw out the lifeline, throw out the life line
Someone is sinking today.*

Throw out the lifeline with hand quick and strong
Why do you tarry me brother so long?
See he is sinking, Oh hasten today
And out with the lifeboat, away then away. Ch

Throw out the lifeline to danger-fraught men
Sinking in anguish where you've never been
Winds of temptation and billows of woe
Will soon hurl them out where the dark waters flow. Ch

Soon will the season of rescue be o'er
Soon will they drift to eternity's shore
Haste then, my brother, no time for delay
But throw out the lifeline and save them today. Ch.