

‘And then the sea began to rise, and the wind did stronger blow’
(W. Delf, Poem in memory of seafarers lost in the gales of 1889)

ODES TO THE SEAFARING LIFE

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Told in a Coble

LOST WITH ALL HANDS.

“**L**OST, with all hands at sea.”
The Christmas sun shines down
On the headlands that frown o’er the harbour wide,
On the cottages, thick on the long quay side,
On the roofs of the busy town.

“Lost, with all hands at sea.”
The dread words sound like a wail,
The song of the waits, and the clash of the bells,
Ring like death-bed dirges, or funeral knells,
In the pauses of the gale.

Never a home so poor
But it brightens for good Yule Tide,
Never a heart too sad or too lone,
But the Holy Christmas mirth ’twill own,
And his welcome will provide.

Where the sea-coal fire leaps,
On the fisherman’s quiet hearth,
The Yule log lies, for his hand to heave,
When he hastes to his bride on Christmas Eve,
In the flush of his strength and mirth.

High on the little shelf
The tall Yule candle stands,
For the ship is due, ere the Christmas night,
And it waits to be duly set alight
By the coming father’s hands.

Long has the widow spared
Her pittance for warmth and bread,
That her sailor boy, when he home returns,
May joy, that her fire so brightly burns,
Her board is so amply spread.

And other Poems.

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The sharp reef moans and moans,
The foam on the sand lies hoar ;
The “ sea-dog ” flickers across the sky,
The north wind whistles shrill and high,
’Mid the breakers’ ominous roar.

Out on the great pier-head
The grey-haired sailors stand,
While the black clouds pile away in the west,
And the spray flies free from the billows’ crest,
Ere they dash on the hollow sand.

Never a sail to be seen,
On the long grim tossing swell ;
Only drifting wreckage of canvas and spar,
That sweep with the waves o’er the harbour bar,
Their terrible tale to tell.

Did a vision of Christmas pass
Before the drowning eyes,
When ’mid rent of rigging and crash of mast,
The brave ship, smote by the mighty blast,
Went down ’neath the pitiless skies ?

No Christmas joy I ween
On the rock-bound coast may be.
Put token and custom of Yule away,
While widows and orphans weep and pray
For the “ hands lost out at sea.”

Poem taken from ‘Told in a Coble and other Poems’, by Susan K. Philips, 1884 [L.821]

Trawler crew on board vessel
early 20th cent. [C DIYK/1]



Fact: The winter months were the most dangerous time for trawlers to be at sea, with December being the month in which the most disasters occurred on average (in the period 1835-1987)

Nowadays it can be hard to imagine the experiences of those who relied on the sea to survive in a time before modern technology and employment rights made seafaring relatively safe.

IN MEMORIAM

OF THE

POOR FISHERMEN

WHO LOST THEIR

LIVES

ETON (Steamer)

JOHN WINTRINGHAM

SEA SEARCHER

SIR FRED. ROBERTS

BRITISH WORKMAN

KITTEN

HAROLD

ADVENTURE (Hull)

OLIVE BRANCH (Hull)

IN THE

DREADFUL GALE

FROM

GRIMSBY AND HULL,

FEB. 8 & 9, 1889.

Methinks I see some little crafts spreading their sails a-lee
As down the Humber they did glide bound to the North-
ern sea;
Methinks I see on each small craft a crew with hearts
so brave,
Going to earn their daily bread upon the restless wave.

Methinks I see them as they left the land all far behind,
Casting the lead into the deep their fishing grounds to find
Methinks I see them on the deck working with a will,
To shoot their net into the deep either for good or ill.

Methinks I see them shoot their trawl upon the Thurs-
day night,
And saw the watch upon the deck, and everything was
right;
Methinks I see them yet again when daylight did appear,
All hauds working with a will getting off their gear.

Methinks I see the net on board and fish so fresh and
gay,
And all were busily engaged clearing them away;
Methinks I see them put away into the ice below.
And then the sea began to rise, and the wind did
stronger blow.

Methinks I heard the skipper say, "My lads, we'll
shorten sail,

As the sky to all appearance looks like an approaching
gale";
Methinks I see them yet again, and all on board was
right, [lights burning bright.
With sails close reef'd, the deck cleared up, and side-

Methinks I see them yet again, the midnight hour was
passed,
Their little craft was battling there with the fiery blast;
Methinks I heard the skipper say, "Cheer up, my lads,
be brave, [alone can save,"
We'll trust in Him who rules the deep, in Him who

Methinks I read the thoughts of them who now are
called away, [away;
They were thinking of their loved ones dear many miles
Thinking of a wife and children dear, and aged parents too
Who no more will see them here again in this world
below.

Great God, Thou sees each sorrowing heart, the widow
in distress, [fatherless;
Thou knows the little children dear, who now are
Comfort and cheer them here below, and lead them by
Thy hand, [in the promised land.
And at last may they meet with their loved ones dear

ETON (Steamer)	KITTEN.	JOHN WIN- TRINGHAM.	BRITISH WORKMAN.	OLIVE BRANCH.	ADVENTURE.
C. Dickinson, S	C. Brown, S	R. Hall, S	E. G. Smith, S	J. Stephenson, S	Thomas Owen, S
W. Betts	R. Johnson	H. Carter	R. Norris	G. Wildes	M. Westmorland
W. Grimmer	B. Freeman	F. Bellamy	J. Roberts	F. Barrett	J. Hawkins
F. Haigh	J. Inward	J. Lee	C. W. Thickett	J. Cawes	T. Maulkinson
W. Kemp		J. Nash	R. Tollady	J. Kelley	W. Jones
A. Faulkner		Jackson	W. Nurse		W. Agnes
F. Sparks		Miles			H. Briggs
H. Forrester		Green			T. Spenceley
		Squires			

Sold by the Author, W. DELF, Fisherman Grimsby

Poem in memory of those lost in storms, written by W. Delf, 1889 [L.821]

DESCRIPTION OF THE STORM. 15

The waves were foaming, loud the billows roar,
And dash tremendous on the trembling shore.
All hands were call'd, quick on the deck they run,
We scarce could muster ere the gale begun;
Then all employ'd, each to their station go,
Most up aloft, but some must stay below
To pay out cable, and to keep it clear,
Likewise to mind she did not break her shear;
To hand main-topsail then we made a shift,
But found, when we came down, the ship adrift:
When veering out, too rash the captain spoke,
To bring her up, and then the cable broke;
Although we let another anchor go,
We drove on board another ship we saw,
Which struck our quarter, stove in all abaft,
Likewise companion broke, main boom and gaff.
How to get clear it all our art defies,
We heard the women's dreadful shrieks and cries.
We hail'd the other ship, they could not hear,
Their captain tried to get his vessel clear;
He veer'd out cable, this was death to him,
It tore him round the windlass limb from limb:
O what confusion, terror and dismay!
Then we got clear, and sheer'd the other way;
Our anchor held, and we brought up again,
But 'twas not long that there we could remain.
I went below the passengers to cheer,
And just had told them that they need not fear,
I heard them cry on deck, "Now save us Lord!
"Another ship is coming straight on board."

Extract from 'The Sailor, A Poem', by Edward Anderson, 1828 [L.821]

Fact: The 1880s witnessed the biggest recorded losses of trawlers of any decade between the 1830s and the 1900s

The 19th century is awash with accounts of sea voyages and poems lamenting a romantically tragic way of life at sea.

Such accounts and poems were published for commercial purposes, to entertain the public, and to raise funds to help the victims of shipwrecks and storms.

These records help us to understand what it must have been like to be from a seafaring family during this dangerous era.

SUFFERINGS OF A SHIP'S CREW.

William Armstrong, the only survivor of the crew of the barque Kitty, of Newcastle, in 1859, and others sailed from Newcastle in the Kitty with a cargo to Hudson's Bay. Mr. Alexander Elles was the commander. The voyage was boisterous. In August, the ship was enveloped in a fog off Cape Resolution, and then she was surrounded by huge icebergs, from which escape seemed to be hopeless. Two boats were got out, and as much provision as could be put into them was stowed away; and one under the command of the captain, the other under that of Armstrong (the mate), left the ship's side just as the berg closed upon the ill-fated vessel and crushed her into pieces. She then went down. The boats managed to get out through an opening, but only to find themselves in a "field of ice," consisting of floating masses, the pieces which sailed continually by threatening destruction at every moment. They could not however reach the open sea; and in the meantime, such was the cold, that frost bite began to appear. Such remedies as they had within reach were applied, but they were useless, for the poor sufferers gradually became worse, and dropped off one after another. The survivors performed the sorrowful duty of consigning their comrades to the deep, thinking as they did so that perhaps the next would be one of themselves. The crew worked willingly, and as constantly as their physical infirmities would permit them. Day after day did they work on, hoping that their efforts would be successful, or that some welcome sail would heave in sight and rescue them from their unfortunate situation; but none appeared. At last the boats separated in a fog, and the captain's boat was never heard of again.

Extract from 'The Sea and the Sailor', by J. Brumby, 1861 [L.820]

After arriving home from Iceland Saturday morning, I was married at 11AM, Holy Trinity Church, 2 June. My house was all ready, everything in. Well, we had a do at Mother in Laws; tea and a sing song and a drink, a few friends. Finished up at 2AM Sunday morning and leaving home again for sea Monday morning at 6AM. In those times, there were no honeymoons.

Extract from an account written by a Hull trawlerman, 1890s [C DIWK/2/4]

Fact: In the period 1835-1987, 900 trawlers registered in Hull were wrecked or lost at sea

Hunger was now added to their other miseries. The survivors were gradually sinking under their privations. Several became raving maniacs. They could not recognise their companions; while scenes which they had witnessed at home in their family circles were repeated over and over again—in their imagination they beheld their sisters, mothers, or wives, as the case might be, and endeavoured to clasp them, and soon died in the most fearful agonies. Two or three besides Armstrong only remained when the welcome cry of "Land!" was raised, and the men strained their eyes and asked one another could it be real? It was at length reached, but too late for some of them. The ecstasy of such a discovery, after being sixty-two days in an open boat and suffering such privations in a polar region, was too much for them, and all, with the exception of Armstrong, as they reached the long wished-for land, sank to the ground exhausted, and died. Thus the whole of the crew, with the exception of one, had died; and it is no wonder that he dropped upon his knees and returned thanks to his God that he had been spared. Having obtained a little rest, he wandered along the shore, and was so fortunate as to fall in with some Esquimaux on a hunting expedition. They conducted him to their huts, and there kept him for a considerable time until he had recruited his strength. They then brought him to a place where some Moravian missionaries were residing who forwarded him to St. John's.

MY FATHER'S AT THE HELM.

A certain vessel being overtaken in a storm, the passengers were all much alarmed, and in great fear of being drowned, except one fine interesting boy,

'The Orphan's Hymn', by a sailor's daughter, 1900 [C DSSF/1/2/5/33]

PORT OF HULL SOCIETY'S Sailors' Orphan Intsitution.

THE ORPHAN'S HYMN.

TUNE—*Home, Sweet Home.*

OH! where is the guide of my infantine years?

The father who left me enveloped in tears;

The ocean's false surges induced him to roam,

Far away from his child—far, far from his home.

Home! home! sweet, sweet home!

No more will my father enliven his home.

Heard you the wild tempest so awfully deep?

E'en now I imagine I hear it, and weep:

The tempest tore from me a father so dear,

And left me an orphan most destitute here.

Home! home! sweet, sweet home!

And wrench'd me from all the endearments of home.

Great, God, now behold me with pitying eye,

Look on my distress, give ear to my cry;

Provide me a home, where I may be taught

The way of salvation which Jesus has wrought.

Home! home! sweet, sweet home!

Oh, yes; may I soon find a much-loved home.

There many on Orphan protection shall find,

Oh! you who have children, to us pray be kind,

And stretch out your hands, provide us a home,

Lest we should be left o'er the wide world to roam.

Home! home! sweet, sweet home!

And oh! may we all find in heaven our home.

By a Sailor's Daughter.

FRANCIS OLIVER, PRINTER, DOCK-ST., HULL.