

Long Drag Shanty

"...The custom of 'burying the dead horse', observed in many sailing ships, was the occasion on which the first month's sea service had been completed, and the seaman, having worked his advance of one month's pay, felt himself free of debt. His creditor, tailor or boarding-house master, who had cashed his "month's advance note," was living in affluence on the proceeds while he, the seaman, was the 'horse' supporting the creditor in indulgence!

...The crowd aboard would stage a celebration. A hatch or grating, on which a dummy figure clothed in discarded rags or attire was placed, would be dragged aft by all hands, to exaggerated lusty pulls - that moved the grating no more than an inch or two at each affected strain. On completion of the exploit, the grating and its burden hauled aft to the cabin door, it was expected that a further payment in the shape of a bottle or two would be tendered by the master." David Bone, Capstan Bars.

Hugill says this was followed by 'tricing the effigy up to the main yard-arm, and firing a blue flare at the same time as a seaman on the yard cut the gantline to allow the horse to drop into the drink'. Cecil Sharp collected from John Short 1914. Roud 513.

A poor old man came riding by
And they say so and we hope so
They say old man your horse will die
Poor old man

And if he dies we'll tan his hide
And if he don't we'll ride him again

One month this rotten life we've led
While you lay on your feather bed

But now your month is up old turk
Get up you swine and look for work!

Get up you swine and look for graft
Me and the crew will drag you aft

We'll drag you aft to the cabin door
Here's hopin' that we'll see you no more

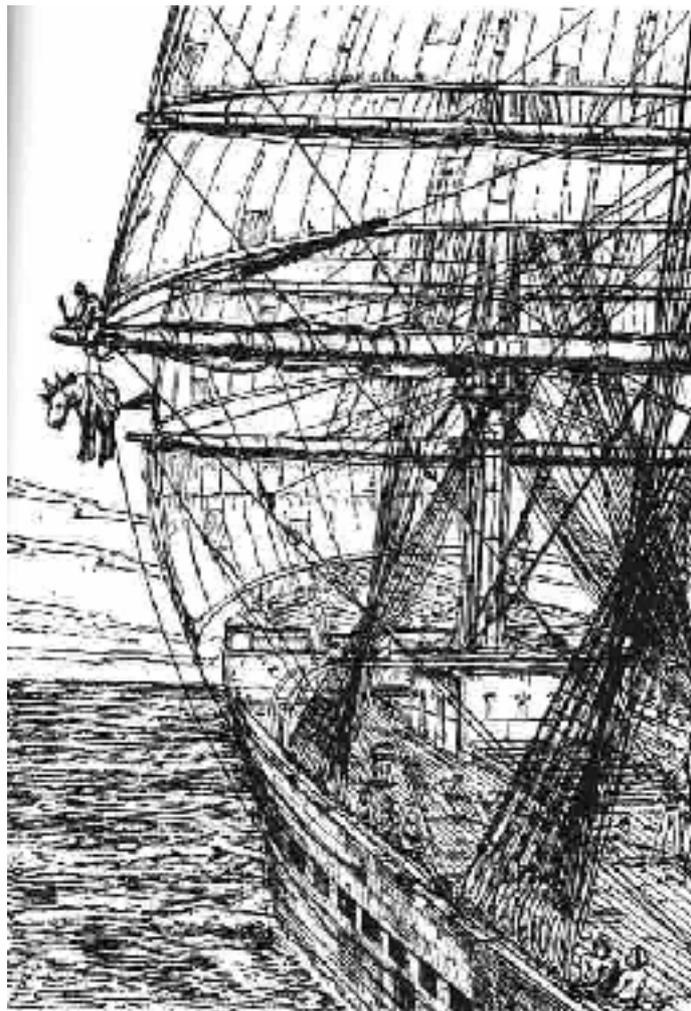
<more>

He's dead as a nail in the lamp room door
He's dead as a nail that son of a whore

We'll hoist him up to the main yard arm
High aloft to the main yard arm

We'll drop him off in the bottom of the sea
Right down deep in the bottom of the sea

The waves will make him roll and roll
Where the sharks'll have his body
and the devil take his soul



Copyright 1994 Bronwen Hugill