

The Rosabella

"The Rosabella" is a maritime folk song from the 1860s, it is not a shanty and is not listed in Hugill or other primary shanty collections. It was collected by Cecil Sharp from John Short of Watchet in 1914. Sharp published 47 of Short's shanties - but not this one which is in Sharp's manuscript. Tom Brown included it in his book about Short: A Sailor's Life with words and tune somewhat different from our version. Hugill is (probably correctly) uncomplimentary about the accuracy of Short's memory for words. Roud 13252.

Ann Street is named in the words collected from Short. This was a street (now Albert Gardens) near the London docks, which was populated by thieves and prostitutes according to Booth's poverty survey¹⁰ from 1898.

One early morning in the month of May
One early morning in the month of May
I thought I heard our captain say
"The Rosabella will sail today"

Chorus

*O, we're going on board the Rosabella
we're going on board the Rosabella
We're going on board right down to the board
The saucy Rosabella*

[Farewell ye ladies of London town]
We hate to leave but we're going on down
Aboard the Rosabella

[Pretty Nancy she is my love true]
She could handle this bully crew
Aboard the Rosabella

[Nancy brought whisky for all the crew]
She wanted to see which man would do
Aboard the Rosabella

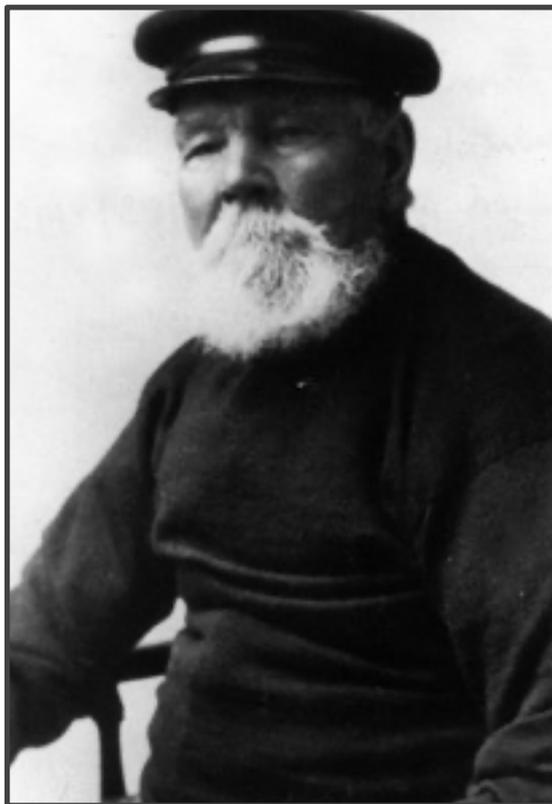
[Them Ann Street girls do make me grieve]
They spent me money and made me leave
Aboard the Rosabella <more>

¹⁰ <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/records/booth-b-350-p-161>

[Oh, Big Maria's no good for me]
She took me money sent me to sea
Aboard the Rosabella

[She's a deep-water ship with a deep-water crew]
You can hug the coast but we're damned if we do
Aboard the Rosabella

[To round Cape Horn takes many a day]
Around Cape Horn is a mighty long way
Aboard the Rosabella



John Short (Yankee Jack)

Watchet's famous sailor and shantyman (1839 – 1933) affectionately nicknamed 'Yankee Jack' after his exploits during the American Civil War, went to sea in 1853 at the age of 14.