

Spanish Ladies

A traditional British naval forebitter, describing a voyage from Spain to The Downs from the viewpoint of ratings of the Royal Navy. There are many variants, this from Hugill. It was used as a homeward bound capstan shanty on commercial vessels. There are two tunes: a slower melodic one (used in the film Master and Commander) and a fast boisterous one which we sing. Roud 687.

The shank painter is a strong short rope or chain by which the shank of an anchor is held fast to a ship's side when not in use. The cat stopper fastens the cat (top end of the anchor) to the cathead. Clew-garnets are attachment points for furling ropes on the lower corners (clews) of square sails. Tacks and sheets are ropes used to spread the sails - these are let go when furling. Deep soundings were an aid to navigation: in this case to confirm a safe position south of the Scilly Isles.

Farewell and adieu to you fair Spanish ladies
Farewell and adieu to you ladies of Spain
For we just received orders to sail for old England
We hope very shortly to see you again

Chorus

*We'll rant and we'll roar like true British sailors
We'll rant and we'll rave all across the salt seas
Until we strike soundings in the Channel of Old England
From Ushant to Scilly is thirty five leagues*

We hove our ship to with the wind at sou'west boys
We hove our ship to for to take soundings clear
In fifty-five fathoms with a fine sandy bottom
We filled our main tops'l up channel to steer

The first land we made was the point called the Dodman
Next Rame Head off Plymouth, Start Portland and Wight
We sailed then by Beachy by Fairlight and Dungeness
Then bore straight away for the South Foreland Light

Now the signal was made for the Grand Fleet to anchor
And all in The Downs that night for to lie
Let go your shank painters let go your cat stoppers
Haul up your clew garnets let tacks and sheets fly <more>

Let every man here drink up his full bumper
Let every man here drink up his full bowl
And let us be jolly and drown melancholy
Drink a health to each jovial and true-hearted soul

<Alt. final verse if in female company>

Let everyone here drink up their full bumper
Let everyone here drink up their full bowl
And let us be jolly and drown melancholy
Drink a health to each jovial and true-hearted soul

