

1. Oh Billy Riley, Mr Billy Riley
Oh Billy Riley oh
Billy Riley, Mr Billy Riley.
Oh Billy Riley oh.
2. Oh Billy Riley was a dancing master
Oh Billy Riley oh
Billy Riley was a dancing master
Oh Billy Riley oh.
3. Oh Billy Riley shipped aboard a drogher
Oh Billy Riley oh
Billy Riley shipped aboard a drogher
Oh Billy Riley oh.
4. Oh Billy Riley sailed to Antigua
Oh Billy Riley oh
Billy Riley sailed to Antigua
Oh Billy Riley oh
5. Oh Mrs Riley didn't like sailors
Oh Billy Riley oh

- Mrs Riley didn't like sailors
Oh Billy Riley oh
6. Oh Billy Riley had a lovely daughter
Oh Billy Riley oh
Billy Riley had a lovely daughter
Oh Billy Riley oh
 7. Oh Missie Riley, pretty Missie Riley
Oh Billy Riley oh
Missie Riley, pretty Missie Riley
Oh Billy Riley oh.
 8. Oh Mrs Riley Screw er up so cheer'ly
Oh Billy Riley oh
Mrs Riley Screw er up so cheer'ly
Oh Billy Riley oh
 9. Oh Mr Billy Riley
Oh Billy Riley oh
Mr Billy Riley
Oh Billy Riley oh.

Notes

Halyard and **Capstan** shanty, also **Forebitter**

We'll hear Jim **Mageean** on CD: **Sorrows Away**,

A.L. **Lloyd**, 1957, CD **Blow Boys Blow**. wrote:

A fierce song, made to fit the rhythm of fast pulling and quick breathing. A 'drogher' was a ship in the West Indies sugar trade (etymology 17th century Dutch, so I'm told). The sail would need to be light, or the occasion desperate, for men to haul at the halyards to the beat of such a fast song as Bill Riley.

Hugill, Stan, 1994, **Shanties from the Seven Seas** wrote:

Billy Riley probably started life as a cotton-hoosiers' song, but at sea it was used at halyards. According to **CF Smith** it was known in Green's Blackwall ships about the 1850's.

The verses are mainly impromptu, about Little Jackie Riley, Missie Riley, Billy Riley's other occupations.

Miss **Colcord** [says] it has a different refrain for each stanza, using Missus Riley, Missy Riley etc for Billy Riley.

C F Smith gives the refrain as Old Billy Riley O.

Sharp has one pull in the refrains on the last O.

Notes on the Words

Dancing master - derogatory reference perhaps to a cushy job he had before he became a captain.

Drogher - small freight boat used in the West Indies to deliver sugar and rum to the merchantmen - or a vessel for transporting lumber or cotton or other goods to the coast.

Screw him up - tighten up. It may come from the use of Jack Screws, which were employed to stow cargo as tightly as possible below decks - usually cotton bales, but other bulky stuff as well.

Cheer'ly - quickly, with a will.

Could this be the Riley family?



1904, *Home again*, or *The sailor boy's return*, from *Vivilore: The Pathway to Mental and Physical Perfection* via [wikimedia commons](#)