

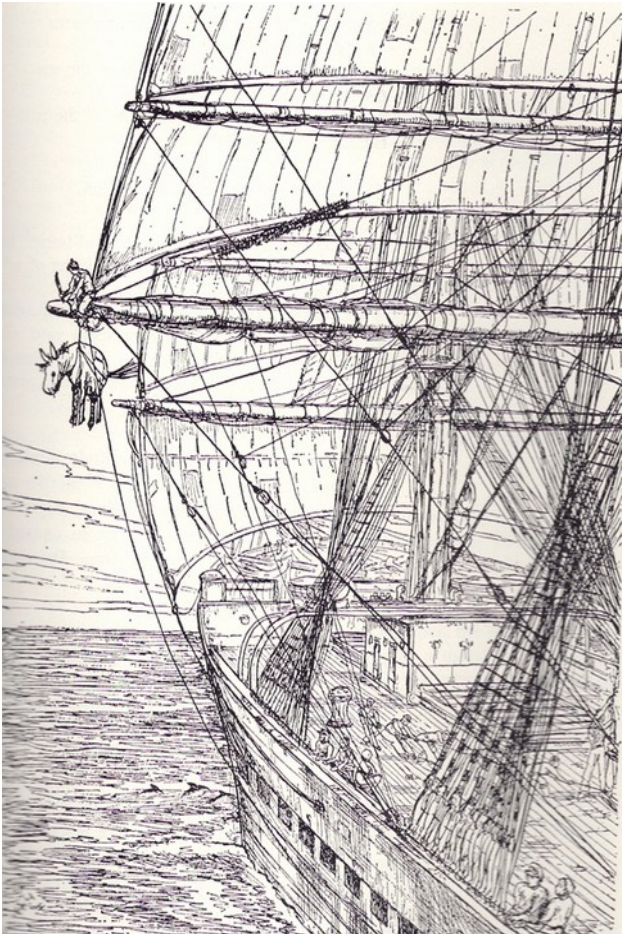
Dead Horse Shanty (Poor Old Man)

1. A poor old man came (a)riding by
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
And we said "Old man, your horse may die"
Oh, poor old man.
□
2. And if he dies we'll tan his hide,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
But if he lives we'll ride him again.
Oh, poor old man.
3. For a month a rotten life we've led,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
While you've lain in your feather bed.
Oh, poor old man.
4. But now that month is up, old Turk,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
Get up, you swine, and look for work.
Oh, poor old man!
5. Get up, you swine, and look for graft,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
While we lays on, and yanks you aft.
Oh, poor old man!
- 6 And after work and sore abuse,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!

We'll salt you down for sailor's use.
Oh, poor old man!

[And if you think that this ain't true -
Just look in the cask and you'll find it's you.]

7. He's dead as a nail in the lamp-room door,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
And he won't come hazing us no more.
Oh, poor old man!
8. We'll hoist him up to the main yardarm,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
And drop him down to the bottom of the sea.
Oh, poor old man.
9. We'll sink him down with a long, long roll,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
Where the sharks'll have his body, and the
devil have his soul!
Oh, poor old man.
10. I thought I heard the Old Man say,
And we say so! And we hope so
Just one more pull, lads, then belay!
Oh, poor old man.



*Hugill, Stan, 1961,
The Ceremony of the Dead Horse, from
Shanties from the Seven Seas*

No horses have been harmed in the singing of this shanty.

Notes

Originally consecrated *only* for the **Ceremony of the Dead Horse** (see below).

In later days, when the ceremony fell into disuse, it was used as a **halyard** shanty.

Other names: Dead horse, Poor old Horse, Poor old Man.

About the words

The words above were collected - and sung - by **Hugill**.

The first refrain can use different personal pronouns.

The second refrain can be: Poor old Horse, Poor old Man, Poor old Joe and possibly others.

In any case they refer to the same person(s) - the boarding master(s)!

Hear **Hoy Shanty Crew** sing verses 1,1,2,?,2,7, 8,?,9,10 at youtu.be/CaTdW3x1O6g

The ceremony of the Dead Horse

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

"The ceremony of the dead horse was to celebrate the crew **earning their pay**, since their first month's wages had been drawn in advance when they had signed on, and normally found their way into the pockets of the boarding masters.

"It took place at the end of the first month out. It mainly consisted of dragging a canvas horse, stuffed with shavings and a few holy stones, along the deck, followed by tricing the effigy up to the main yard-arm and firing a flare at the same time as a seaman on the yard cut the gantline to allow the "horse" to "drop into the drink".

"The "horse" was hoisted up onto the main yard-arm to the Dead Horse Shanty.

"In days gone by it was a spectacular effort, particularly in the emigrant ships. One of the best descriptions is given in **Reminiscences of Travel in Australia, America, and Egypt**, by R **Tangye** (London, 1884)."

Peterman, Greg, 1993 onwards, Goatlocker.org, [Navy terms and trivia](#) says:

When a seaman was booked on a ship, he was customarily advanced a month's wages, if needed, to pay off his boarding house debt. While paying back the ship's master, he worked for nothing but salt horse the first several weeks aboard.

Salt horse was the staple diet of early sailors and it wasn't exactly tasty cuisine. Consisting of a low quality beef that had been heavily salted, the salt horse was tough to chew and even harder to digest,

When the debt had been repaid, the **salt horse** was said to be **dead** and it was a time for great celebration among the crew. Usually, an effigy of a horse was constructed from odds and ends, set afire and then cast afloat to the cheers and hilarity of the ex-debtors.

According to **Wikipedia**:

Sailors were able to get **an advance** against their pay for an upcoming voyage to allow them to purchase clothes and equipment.

The advance wasn't paid directly to the sailor because he could simply abscond with the money. Instead, those to whom money was owed could claim it directly from the ship's captain.

An enterprising **boarding master** or **crimp**, already dealing with a seaman, could supplement his income by supplying goods and services to the seaman at an inflated price, and collecting the debt from the sailor's captain.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghaiing#Background

"**Contemplator**", www.contemplator.com/sea/deadhors.html says:

"The **dead horse metaphor** is from the practice of horse-trading. When a deal was made there was no going back, even if the horse died right after the deal was struck. So you could be paying for something that was never any use."

The Dead horse ceremony is also mentioned at <http://forum.woodenboat.com/showthread.php?109593-Charles-W-Morgan-Restoration-A-Volunteer-s-Perspective-1/page17>