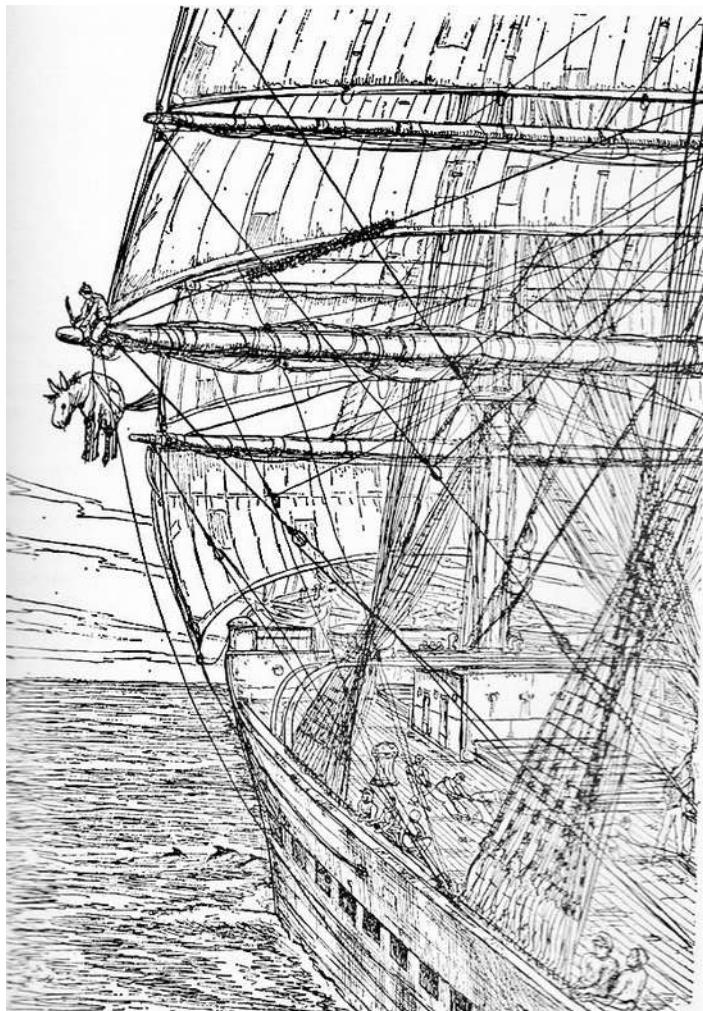


Dead Horse Shanty (Poor Old Man)

1. A poor old man came riding by
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
A poor old man came riding by
Oh, poor old man.
2. We say "Old man, your horse will die"
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
And we say "Old man, your horse will die"
Oh, poor old man.
□
3. Well if he dies we'll tan his hide,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
But if he don't we'll ride him again.
Oh, poor old man.
4. One month a rotten life we've led,
And we say so! and we 'ope so!
While you've lain on your feather bed.
Oh, poor old man.
5. But now your 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!
6. 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.
7. And if you think that this ain't true -
Just look in the cask and you'll find it's you!
8. We'll haul 'im off to the cabin door,
And we hopes we'll never see 'im no more.
9. We'll haul him up to the main yardarm (x2)
10. Drop 'im down to the bottom of the sea.
11. We'll drop him down into some dark hole,
Where the sharks'll have his body, and
the devil have his soul.
12. I thought I heard the Old Man say,
And we say so! And we hope so
Just one more pull and then belay!
Oh, poor old man.

Portsmouth Shantymen sing this at
<https://portsmouthshantymen.bandcamp.com/track/dead-horse-shanty>



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

The horse here is shown suspended from the main yardarm.

But 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.

Portsmouth Shantymen sing this on Bandcamp:
<https://portsmouthshantymen.bandcamp.com/track/dead-horse-shanty>

where you can download the track or even the whole CD (Hangin' Round the Yard)

About the words

The words above were collected - and sung - by shantyman and song collector **Stan Hugill**.

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

In any case they all refer to the same person - the boarding master (see my [SigningOn.pdf](#) file for more information)

Verse 6, "After work and sore abuse" is taken from the chant "[Salt Horse](#)".

The cask in verse 7 is the cask containing the salted beef (the dead horse!).

"Old Man" in the last verse is different - it refers to the ship's mate in charge of the watch.

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>