

1. Oh you western ocean labourers,
I'd have you all beware:
When you're on board of a packet ship,
no dungaree jumpers wear,
But keep a big monkey jacket
always at your command,
And think of the cold nor'westers on
the banks of Newfoundland.

**We'll rub her round and scrub her round
with holystone and sand,
And we'll say farewell to the Virgin Rocks
on the Banks of Newfoundland.**

2. As I lay on me bunk one night,
a-dreaming all alone,
I dreamt I was in Liverpool
way up in Marylebone
With my true love beside me
and a jug of ale in hand,
But I woke quite broken-hearted on
the Banks of Newfoundland.

**We'll rub her round and scrub her round
with holystone and sand,
And we'll say farewell to the Virgin Rocks
on the Banks of Newfoundland.**

3. We had one Lynch from Ballynahinch,
Jim Murphy and Mick Moore;
I tell you well, they suffered like hell
on the way to Baltimore.
For they pawned their gear in Liverpool,
sailed as they did stand -
Not thinkin' o' cold nor'westers on
the Banks of Newfoundland.

**We'll rub her round and scrub her round
with holystone and sand,
And we'll say farewell to the Virgin Rocks
on the Banks of Newfoundland.**

4. We had one female passenger,
Bridget Reilly was her name.
To her I promised marriage
and on me she had a claim.
She tore up her flannel petticoats
to make mittens for our hands
For she could not see us sea boys freeze
on the banks of Newfoundland.

**We'll rub her round and scrub her round
with holystone and sand,
And we'll say farewell to the Virgin Rocks**

on the Banks of Newfoundland.

5. And now we're off The Hook, me boys,
and the ground's all covered in snow
The tugboat will take our hawser,
and for New York we will tow.
And when we arrive at the Blackball dock,
the boys and girls will stand;
We'll bid adieu to the packet ships
and the Banks of Newfoundland.

**We'll rub her round and scrub her round
with holystone and sand
And say farewell to the Virgin Rocks
on the Banks of Newfoundland.**

As sung by [Sheafknot](#) on CD *Introducing Sheafknot*.

Some other verses:

The mate jumped up on the capstan head
and loudly he did roar:
Come rattle her in, me lively lads,
we're bound for America's shore.
Wipe the blood off the dead man's face
And haul or you'll be damned -
There blow some cold nor'westers
on the Banks of Newf'n'land.

5. So now it's reef and reef, me boys,
with the canvas frozen hard
And it's haul and pass, every mother's son,
on a ninety-foot tops'l yard.
Never mind your boots and breeches,
but haul or you'll be damned!
For there blow some cold nor'westers
on the Banks of Newf'n'land.

Last verse:
So now we're off the Hook me boys,
And the land is white with snow;
And soon we'll see the pay table
And we'll spend the night below.
And on the docks, come down in flocks,
Those pretty girls will stand
Saying: It's snugger with me than it is at sea
on the Banks of Newfoundland".

Alternative chorus:
**We'll scrape her and we'll scrub her
with holy stone and sand,
For there blow some cold nor'westers on
the banks of Newf'n'land.**

Do have a listen to Sean Dagher's version at <https://youtu.be/MlpBoLBkkVI>. He talks about the Banks first and the singing starts 1m38s in - with interesting images.

My own notes are the next page here.

Notes

A forebitter and a **capstan** shanty, written in 1820 by Francis Forbes.

Alternative Titles: The Banks of Newfoundland, The banks o' Newf'n'land.

Other versions are around, I prefer one which ends each verse exactly the same, a song by A.L (Bert) Lloyd but it can only be traced back to 1954.

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

An old friend, Scottie of Port Adelaide, who never shipped in steam in all his long career, told me he heard *The banks o' Newf'n'land* when young, sung at the capstan, with all the twiddles and quavers that seamen of the old school would adopt this type of song with.

Nearly all the forebitters and many capstan songs were sung in this fashion by the older seamen.

Notes on words and places

Western Ocean - the North Atlantic

With holystone and sand - sailors sprinkle the deck with sand and water, place the stone atop it, and scrub back and forth with the stone. The scattered sand scrapes away any dirt on the deck, smooths down any pitch which has worked its way up from the

seams on deck, and removes the top layer of wood from the deck. Typically every morning.

Holystone - use of it brings a man to his knees, as if in prayer.

Banks of Newfoundland - sandbanks off the coast of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Canada (see map). A rich **fishing ground**, especially for cod.

Rattle her in - bring in the anchor, the chains rattle.

shake her out - shake out newly-released sails

reef and reef - reduce sail area by folding, rolling or tying up part of the sails.

haul and pass - pull on a rope and reeve through, take round, move or transfer it?

The Hook - [Sandy Hook](#), a 6-mile narrow peninsula enclosing the southern entrance to New York Bay.

Hawser - a thick rope used for securing alongside or towing a ship, usually 4½" or thicker.

Blackball Dock - belonging to the famous **Blackball Line**, which ran passenger clipper ships between New York and Liverpool, 1816-1876. See [TheShips List - BlackBall Line](#).

Dead man - sometimes called dead-eye, part of the ship's rigging. See <https://njscuba.net/artifacts-shipwrecks/objects/deadeyes-blocks/>

Treeman, 2006,
Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

Basemap from [planiglobe.com](#),
via [wikimedia commons](#).

Showing:

- * the island of Newfoundland,
- * the isles of Nova Scotia,
- * gulf of St Lawrence,
- * the cold Labrador Current,
- * the warm Gulf Stream,
- * the shallow Grand Banks

