

1, Whiskey is the life of man,  
Always was since time began.

**Whiskey-o, Johnny-o**  
**John rise me up from down below**  
**Whiskey, whiskey, whiskey-o**  
**Up aloft this yard must go**  
**John rise 'er up from down below**

2. I'm just up from the world below,  
For that is where the cocks do crow.

**Whiskey-o, Johnny-o**  
**John rise me up from down below**  
**Whiskey, whiskey, whiskey-o**  
**Up aloft this yard must go**  
**John rise 'er up from down below**

3. I'm the ghost of Bertie Binns,  
Sent down to hell for my terrible sins.

4. My only home is down below,  
They've let me out for an hour or so.

5. I'm just up from a southern shore,  
For that is where the fires do roar.

6. An' when the cocks begin to crow  
It's time for me to roll and go.

7. I'll tell ya boys, it's hot in Hell  
And I should know the place damn well!

8. Now this bleeding sail is set,  
Back to my hole I'll have to get.

9. One more haul the crew do roar  
Then get back to your southern shore.

**Whiskey-o, Johnny-o**  
**John rise me up from down below**  
**Whiskey, whiskey, whiskey-o**  
**Up aloft this yard must go**  
**John rise 'er up from down below**

The **Harris Siblings** sing this (after four and half minutes) at [https://youtu.be/ezC\\_YzjfKAM?t=270](https://youtu.be/ezC_YzjfKAM?t=270)

The **Hastings Shanty Singers'** popular version at <https://youtu.be/-3-2IMiYTLC> has verses about handling a ship. My notes on this version say:

**Trice her up -**

a) haul up (the yard) and secure it.  
b) lift or haul something out of the way by means of a tricing line.  
(from Middle Dutch trisen "hoist," from trise "pulley," of unknown origin.)



**Sheave** - the wheel in a block over which a rope is rove.

### Notes:

Hugill: a **Stamp-'n'-Go** shanty

Doerflinger: a **pulling & walk-away** halyard shanty

**Other names:** John rise me up, Rise 'er up from down below, Rise me up from down below, Whisky is the life of man, Whisky-O, Whisky O Johnnie O.

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

"This stamp-'n'- go song singing of whisky was very popular in Yankee ships with coloured crews, so my informant Harding told me. According to **Harding** The tune is a Jamaican work-song taken to sea by West Indian seamen and altered to suit their needs.

"**Doerflinger**, says it used to be sung by **Captain J P Barker** of the ship **Tusitala**, and he in turn learnt it from an American Negro called "Lemon" Curtis.

"... two pulls would be taken on the rope (at "**Whisky O, Johnny O**") prior to the crowd stamping away with it. At the end of the chorus the group would be shifted and another two pulls given before stamping away again. If this was so then it was the only shanty ever used in this fashion."

**William Main Doerflinger**, in ***Songs of the Sailor and Lumbermen***: writes:

"This shanty combined the functions of a regular halyard shanty and a so-called walk-away song. In hoisting the topgallantsails to this shanty, the men would first take tow 'drags' on the rope, then 'walk away' with it. The pulls came on Whiskey O, Johnny O while the rest of the chorus was sung as the men stamped along the deck gripping the halyard. Then the slack was held while the crowd returned, got a new grip and repeated the performance.

### Notes on the words:

**Yard** - horizontal wooden spar for attaching and extending sails, also hoisting flags, lights etc.

**Bertie Binns** - these words have a connection with a Victorian ditty that Stan Hugill's father used to sing:

I'm the ghost of John, James, Christopher,  
Benjamin, **Binns**.  
I was cut down right in the midst of me sins.