

And it's...

**Three score and ten, boys and men,
were lost from Grimsby town.
From Yarmouth down to Scarborough
many hundreds more were drowned.
Our herring craft, our trawlers,
our fishing smacks as well,
They long defied the bitter night
and battled with the swell.**

1. Methinks I see a host of craft
spreading their sails a-lee,
As down the Humber they do glide
all bound for the Northern Sea.
Methinks I see on each small craft
a crew with a heart so brave
Going out to earn their daily bread,
upon the restless wave.
2. Methinks I see them yet again
as they leave the land behind,
Casting their nets into the sea,
the herring shoals to find.
Methinks I see them yet again
and all on board's all right,
With the nets close rigged, decks cleared up,
and the sidelights burning bright.
3. October's night brought such a sight,
'twas never seen before:
There was masts and yards and broken spars
and they washed up on the shore.
There was many a heart of sorrow,
there was many a heart so brave.
There was many a fine and hearty lad
did find a watery grave.

We'll sing with the [Sheringham Shantymen](#) from their CD *Plumbing the Depths*, 2006.

Notes

[AuntieShanty](#) writes on her web site at <https://www.auntieshanty.org/songs/three-score-and-ten/> -

Three Score and Ten is a broadside ballad commemorating a tragic storm off Grimsby and Hull in February 1889. With 9 vessels sunk and many men losing their lives, it remains one of the greatest disasters in the history of the towns. The song was composed by local fisherman William **Delf** to raise money for the affected families.

From the **Hull Times**, 2 March 1889:

"As day after day passes and no tidings arrive of the missing Grimsby smacks, it is beginning to be

realised that the gale of the 9th ult. will prove one of the most disastrous to the Grimsby fishing trade on record. altogether nearly a dozen fishing vessels, carrying between 60 and 70 hands, are missing. Most of the vessels were provisioned for eight or nine days, and many of them have been out for over a month. Of the safety of seven of them all hope has now been abandoned."

Louis **Killen**, on CD sleeve notes, wrote: [This song] first published as a poem in a Grimsby newspaper after the great storm... was found 70 years later being sung by fishermen in Robin Hood's Bay ...and printed in ***Songs of the Ridings***.

Roy **Palmer** wrote in *The Oxford Book of Sea Songs* and its expanded edition *Boxing the Compass*:

"In memoriam of the poor Fishermen who lost their lives in the Dreadful Gale from Grimsby and Hull, Feb. 8&9, 1889" is the title of a broadside produced by a Grimsby [or Whitby] fisherman, William **Delf** to raise funds for the bereaved families.

It lists nine lost vessels, the last two from Hull: Eton, John Wintringham, Sea Searcher, Sir Fred. Roberts, British Workman, Kitten, Harold, Adventure, and Olive Branch. In addition the names of some of the lost sailors are given, and there is a poem in eight stanzas. This passed into oral tradition, and in so doing lost six verses and acquired a new one (the last, in which an error of date occurs), together with a chorus and a tune. The oral version was noted from a master mariner, Mr J. Pearson of Filey, in 1957.

Notes on the words

From Yarmouth down to Scarborough - The prevailing winds, currents and tidal streams of the East coast of Britain mean that North is the "Downhill" direction, usually running with the wind on the port quarter, whilst going South meant beating into the wind. Hence amongst the sea farers the reference was always to going "down to the North". [Pete M, [Mudcat.org](#)]

Fishing smack - a traditional 19th century fishing boat. See [wikipedia article](#) ... and the image below



Faroes Stamp 1984, depicting the Faroese smack "Westward Ho!", built in Grimsby 1884 from [Postverk Føroya - Philatelic Office](#) via Wikimedia

'**The Oxford Book of Local Verses**', gives:

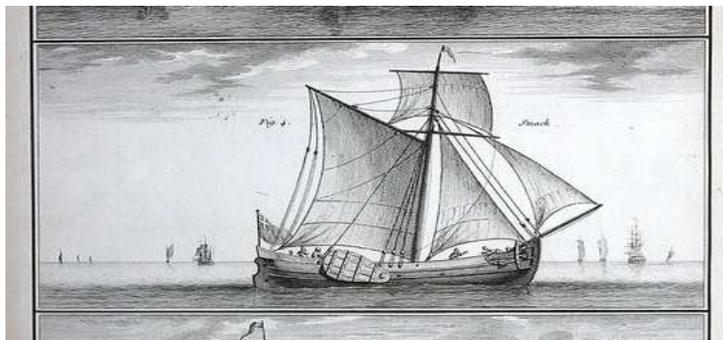
'A Ballad in Memory of the Fishermen from Hull and Grimsby who lost their lives in the Gale of 8 and 9 February 1889' by W. Delf, a Grimsby fisherman.

1. Methinks I see some little craft
spreading their sails a-lee
As down the Humber they did glide
bound in the Northern sea;
Methinks I see on each small craft
a crew with hearts so brave,
Going to earn their daily bread
upon the restless wave.
2. Methinks I see them as they left the land all
far behind,
Casting the lead into the deep,
their fishing grounds to find;
methinks I see them on the deck
working with a will,
To shoot their net into the deep
for either good or ill.
3. Methinks I see them shoot their trawl
upon the Thursday night,
And saw the watch upon the deck,
and everything was right;
methinks I see them yet again
when daylight did appear,
All hands working with a will,
getting off their gear.
4. Methinks I see the net on board
and fish so fresh and gay,
And all were busily engaged
clearing them away;
Methinks I see them put away
into the ice below,
And then the sea began to rise,

and the wind did stronger blow.

5. Methinks I heard the skipper say,
"My lads, we'll shorten sail,
As the sky to all appearance looks like an
approaching gale."
Methinks I see them yet again,
and all on board was right,
With sails close reef'd, the deck cleared up,
and sidelights burning bright.
6. Methinks I see them yet again,
the midnight hour was passed [sic];
Their little craft was battl-ing
there with the fiery blast;
Methinks I heard the skipper say,
"Cheer up, my lads, be brave.
We'll trust in Him who rules the deep,
in Him who alone can save."
7. Methinks I read the thoughts of them
who now are called away;
They were thinking of their loved ones dear
many miles away;
Thinking of wife and children dear,
and aged parents too,
Who no more will see them here
again in this world below.
8. Great God, Thou sees each sorrowing heart,
the widow in distress,
Thou knows the little children dear,
who now are fatherless;
Comfort and cheer them here below,
and lead them by Thy hand,
And may they meet their loved ones dear,
in the promised land.

The notes say: "Supplied by F.R. **Whitmarsh** of Grimsby from the original broadsheet as sold by the author."



From **Various Fishing Boats**

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