



KelticDead Music

Stories, Tunes and Songs in the Traditions of our Celtic Dead

To the Four Ayrts to Guide Us, and
For the Four Winds to Get Us There!

The mission of the **KelticDead Music** initiative is to find tunes and songs from around the world that have Celtic, Folk, World, Americana, and Seafaring origins, and arrange them into simple sheet music formats for folk musicians to use and share. In addition, the KDM initiative provides the in-depth stories with possible lyrics for a more complete music-education experience.

*All the selections and sheet music content provided in the **KelticDead Music** initiative are from traditional, made-public, made-public with credits, or cited credits where applicable. This material content is from various internet sources and the personal interpretations of the subject is provided by **Patrick O-Shaun Young, KelticDead Music**. All graphics are either public domain or cited where applicable. Validation and verification are left up to the reader.*

Rolling Down to Old Maui

Also Called Rolling Down to Old Mohee

Sea Shanties were important for men working on sailing ships, such as hauling rope, setting sails, lifting anchors, working the bilge pumps, and many other manual tasks. A “Chantee” or “Shanty” which is derived from French, meaning “to sing,” typically started with one man with a good voice to be heard above the sea noises, and to set the pace for the work to be done, while the other men joined in with the song and rhythm as they performed the work itself. Work songs are also used by road crews, on by railroad workers or used in the military.



This particular song and melody evolved from a shanty in a collection by Gale Huntington, who found the song from the log of an American whaling ship (also called a “packet ship”) named the Atkins Adams out of New Bedford. The log insert was written in 1855 as “Rolling Down to Old Mohee.”

As more folk musicians sang versions of the tune, the name of the song evolved in the 1960s to be “Rolling Down to Old Maui” or just “Old Maui.” Typically, the song is sung as acapella with no instruments involved. The KelticDead Music initiative has arranged the song to have instrumentation.

Work was hard to find in the mid 1850s

The Potato Blight (1845-1847) caused the Great Famine (an Gorta Mór) in Ireland, and millions of poor Irish and Scots began to flood into the English seaport of Liverpool to live, to work, or if possible, to emigrate. This blight also affected other parts of the world as well.

Work was hard to find, and many had to take jobs out to sea to work on whaling ships which harvested the blubber from “right whales” to provide “clean burning” oil for lighting purposes, especially before camphor oil or later, petroleum-based oils.

Rolling Down to Old Maui

Although the words of the sea shanty have been found in records going back to the mid 19th century, there is some dispute about the accuracy and provenance of the melody. The words of "Rolling Down to Old Mohee" have been found in a copybook of a sailor called George Piper, who was on a whaling ship between 1866 and 1872. As mentioned, other references describe the version found on the Atkins Adams packet ship in 1855.

The song has been performed and recorded by several singers and bands including "The Dreadnoughts," "David Coffin," "Kimber's Men," "Todd Rundgren," "Don Sineti," "Stan Rogers," "The Longest Johns," "Jon Boden," and of course, the "KelticDead Music initiative."

The closest version to the one used by the KelticDead Musicians comes from Stanley Allison Rogers (November 29, 1949 to June 2, 1983) from Hamilton, Ohio. Stanley died in a fire aboard Air Canada Flight 797 on the ground at the Greater Cincinnati Airport at the age of 33.

The Whale Oil Industry

The manufacture of textiles made of wool increased in the 1700s, and right whale oil was widely used to clean wool before it was spun. In addition, the Industrial Revolution needed lubricants for machinery, and the growing urbanization increased the demand for lamp fuel, primarily used in street lighting. London was the best lit city in the world at that time, with 5000 street lamps by the 1740s. The building industry also used whale oil as an ingredient in paint, varnish and putty. All of these applications increase the demand for whale oil and led to a rise in price.



Photo of Stan Rogers (November 29, 1949 to June 2, 1983).

Scottish ports were well placed to participate in the growth of the fleet. They were closer to the northern whaling grounds and could send more whalers to the Arctic than could English ports. The Scottish ports involved in the trade, in order of importance, were, Leith, Dunbar, Barrowstoness, Dundee, Aberdeen, Montrose, Glasgow, Anstruther, Greenock, Kirkcaldy and Alloa. However, London still remained the most important port which dispatched 71% of British whalers in 1753.

There were setbacks along the way. A war in Europe in 1756 had some northern whalers put into press gangs, and a fall in the price of oil starting at that time also saw shipowners leave the trade. The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) also contributed to profit losses. However, when peace came in 1783, the British economy (as well as a renewed demand for whale oil) returned. The British also increased their whaling to the South Seas in the years that followed, and the song has a focus on whaling in those seas.



"Whaling ships Diana and Anne in the Arctic," James H. Wheldon (1830-1895)

Seeking out Sperm Whales

Sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) are the largest of toothed whales, with enormous square-shaped heads and the biggest brains of any animal on Earth. These deep-divers are known for hunting giant squid and other prey as deep as 1.9 miles (3 kilometers) below the ocean surface. Male sperm whales can reach up to 59 feet (18 meters) long and weigh up to 62.8 tons (57 metric tons). Females are smaller and max out at 36 feet (11 m) long, and weigh up to 16.5 tons (15 metric tons), according to the wildlife charity Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC).

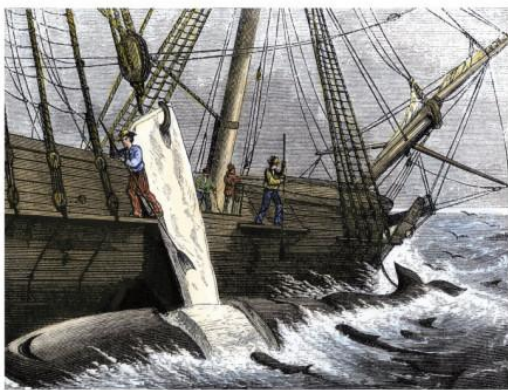
Rolling Down to Old Maui

Sperm whales are the only living species in the genus *Physeter* and are more closely related to dolphins than to baleen whales, such as blue whales. The name sperm whale comes from early whalers who mistook the waxy oil found in the spermaceti organ in a sperm whale's head for semen, according to the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).



A sperm whale's head makes up about one-third of its entire body length. The whales have a distinctive, narrow lower jaw that contains all of their teeth. Sperm whale teeth are cone-shaped and can be up to 7.9 inches (20 centimeters) long and weigh 2.2 pounds (1 kilogram) each, according to the B.C. Cetacean Sightings Network, a research and conservation program in Canada.

Whale hunting is now banned in most countries, and the commercial trade has largely ceased. However, the sperm whale population has yet to recover from whaling and they remain vulnerable to extinction, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



Rolling Down to Old Maui

Adapted from Stan Rogers' variant

A hard, tough life, full of toil and strife
We whale-men undergo.
We don't give a damn,
When the day is done
How hard the winds do blow.

We're homeward bound
from the Arctic ground
With a good ship, taunt and free,
we don't give a damn
When we drink our rum
With the girls of Old Maui

Chorus
Rolling down to Old Maui, me boys
Rolling down to Old Maui
For we're homeward bound
from the Arctic ground
Rolling down to Old Maui

Once more we sail with a northerly gale
Through the ice and wind and rain.
Them native maids - them tropical glades,
We soon shall see again.
Six hellish months have pas-sed away
On the cold Kamchat-ka Sea,
But now we're bound from the Arctic ground
Rolling down to Old Maui.

Chorus

Once more we sail with a southerly gale
Towards our own island home.
Our mainmast sprung, - our whaling done,
And we ain't got far to roam.
Our stuns'l boom is carried away
What care we for that sound?
For a living gale is after us,
Thank God, we're homeward bound.

Chorus

How soft the breeze through
those island trees,
Now that ice is far astern.
Them native maids, in tropical glades
Is a-waiting - our return.
Their soft brown eyes are looking out
Hoping some fine day to see
Our baggy sails runnin' 'fore the gales
Rolling down to Old Maui.



Old Maui

Old Mohee

Arrangement by KelticDead Music

Seafaring

from the log of the Packet Ship, Adkins Adams, 1858



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUUmDthZ2d0>

Shaun Young arranged the sheet music, and adjusted the lyrics of the song to play with the arrangement. He uses an Irish-Tuned, Low Octave Bouzouki to set the rhythm and beat, a Kerry Mezzo C whistle, a bodhran, as well as voice parts.



Shaun Young

Earnie Taft featured Fiddle and Mandolin.

Alan Beck provided the guitar.

For this and other "KDM Story Broadside" visit
<https://kelticdeadmusic.org/story-broadside/>



Earnie Taft

For Bios of the KDM Volunteers visit
<https://kelticdeadmusic.org/Friends/>



Alan Beck

KelticDead Music Initiative

is a private, on-line music-education initiative. All the music projects are recorded with live, acoustic instruments and performed in accordance with simplified sheet music arranged in eight bar formats (whenever possible) in accordance with the guidelines that are within the Celtic music traditions. For more music videos and stories visit ...

<https://KelticDeadMusic.org>