

## Sailing Days

These recordings were made in the lounge of a small boarding house in Stan's home village of Aberdovey, during an informal session as part of a celebration of Stan's 85th birthday, in the company of his friends and regular chorus: Stormalong John' from Liverpool.

Stan's death a few months later deprived us not only of a great character, raconteur, researcher and academic, but also of a fine traditional singer and the last authentic shantyman.

Born in 1906 at Hoylake in the Wirral, where his melodeon playing father was coast-guard, Stan inherited from his seafaring grandfather the texts of the shanties he had noted down, forming the starting point of the collection that Stan subsequently made. Stan's formal education ceased at 14, though he never stopped learning, teaching himself at least nine languages, and writing or compiling numerous books and articles, including of course 'Shanties of the Seven Seas': the shantyman's bible.

His first ship, a steamer, was wrecked, whereupon Stan vowed to transfer to sail! His voyage on the 'Gustav' made him a Cape Homer for the first time, and a passage on the Liverpool-registered 'Garthpool' in 1929 became his first as a shantyman. The man for the job being the one confident enough to do it, and able to gain the respect of his shipmates. The 'Garthpool' was a very leaky ship, and Stan's rendition, at the pumps, of 'Fire down below', shortly before the ship was wrecked, gave him the honour of being the last man to sing a shanty in action on a British vessel. After World War 2, during which Stan had been a POW. (Leading his German captors a merry dance!) he became bosun of the Outward Bound Sea School at Aberdovey. Here he started on his monumental collection 'Shanties of the Seven Seas', followed by 'Sailortown', being an account of life ashore around the world, from the viewpoint of the common sailor.

During the 1960's and 1970's Stan became involved in the British folk scene, appearing and leading workshops at EFOSS festivals, and visiting folk song clubs, in the process making a couple of now deleted LP records.

Everywhere he went Stan commanded respect and affection, looking every inch the old salt - twinkling eyes, grey beard, pigtail, ear-ring, trusty briar, striped shirt and 'North Atlantic Roll' as he walked. His great skill as a storyteller and communicator, allied to his superb singing style, incorporating Negro-like 'hitches' or 'yelps', made him a major figure. He was always willing to pass on his knowledge, often chiding those he considered to be straying from authenticity, whilst encouraging those who showed genuine potential and interest.

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Shanties and  
Sea Songs of  
the Mersey  
Shantyman

Stan Hugill  
with Stormalong John

