

# Ratcliffe Highway

*Verse*

C

As I was a walk - ing down Rat - cliffe High

G7

way A flash look - ing pack - et I chanced for to

C

see I hailed her in Eng - lish, she answ - ered me

G7

clear I'm from the Blue Anch - or bound for the Black

C *Chorus* C F

Bear. Sing too rel eye ad - die, sing too rel - eye

C G7 C

ay. Sing too rel - eye ad - die, sing too rel - eye ay.

1. As I was a walking down Ratcliffe Highway  
A flash looking packet I chanced for to see  
I hailed her in English, she answered me clear  
I'm from the Blue Anchor bound for the Black Bear.

## Chorus

Sing too rel-eye addie, sing too rel-eye ay.  
Sing too rel-eye addie, sing too rel-eye ay.

2. She had up her colors, her masthead was low.  
She was round in the counter and bluff in the bow.  
She was blowing along with the wind blowing free.  
She clewed up her courses and waited for me.

## Chorus

3. I tipped up my flipper, I took her in tow  
And yardarm to yardarm away we did go.  
She lowered her topsail, t'gansail and all.  
Her lily-white hand on my reef-tackle fall.

## Chorus

4. I said, "My fair maiden, it's time to give o'er  
For twixt wind and water you've run me ashore.  
My shot locker's empty, my powder's all spent  
I can't fire a shot for it's choked round the vent."  
Chorus
5. Here's luck to the girl with the black curly locks.  
Here's luck to the girl who run Jack on the rocks.  
Here's luck to the doctor who eased all his pain.  
He's squared his mainyards, he's a-cruising again.  
Chorus

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Ratcliffe Highway, in Stepney, was one of the most notorious thoroughfares of early 19<sup>th</sup> century London. It was an area of sailors' lodgings (and of the young, and not so young, ladies who preyed on the sailors' earnings) and today is lost beneath more modern buildings. Running along the Lower and Upper Pool it was a place where sailor Jack could find all the excitement he required. Dives, dens, pimps and whores were ready to supply his needs and help him forget his last trip. Then, when his money was all gone, crimps (shanghai merchants) could always find him a ship and get him to sea again. According to the Victorian writer Henry Mayhew it was, "a reservoir of dirt, drunkenness and drabs".

At least three London printers – Pitts, Catnach and Edwards – issued broadsides of the song prior to 1830, under the title "Rolling Down Wapping". Several English Edwardian collectors noted the song and Jimmy Knights had his version from Charlie 'Didles' Baldry, an uncle of Jim Baldry who recorded the song for the BBC in 1953.

A version was collected from Mrs. Howard, Kings' Lynn, Norfolk in 1905 by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Mrs. Howard's text is supplemented from an unpublished version collected in Sussex in 1954 and from a broadside by Catnach.

It is included in the **Roud Folk Song Index** as #598.

It was printed in Hugill's **Shanties from the Seven Seas** (1987).