

*Today is Merchant Navy Day. There was a crammed-to-the doors service at Liverpool Parish Church today (St Nicholas, at the Pier Head). A personal message was presented from HM The Queen. The Blue Funnel Association was represented. A few weeks ago I was greatly honoured by Captain Mike Feltham of The Anchorage Club to be asked to produce a verse for the occasion, which Mike recited today. My instructions were to produce "something light, including the whole crew if possible." I had in mind Johnny Rowan of ss Jason when I wrote the following result:-*

*THE LAMPTRIMMER SHOWS HIS WIFE AROUND HIS SHIP*

Do you see the skein of sail-twine which is hanging on the pin?  
Do you recognise the smell of Stockholm tar?  
We are at the fore-peak locker. Let me show you round within,  
It's my private cubby-hole, beyond the Bar.

Do you see the tub of tallow? Do you smell the linseed oil?  
(This is nothing like the boudoir of a wench.)  
Do you see the brand-new mooring-rope in burlap, in its coil?  
Do you see the palm and needle on the bench?

D'you see the bag of cotton-waste for painting pipes and rails -  
Old bunting as the best of Brasso-rags?  
Do you see the bolt of canvas which might serve for patching sails?  
Those clever clips are Inglefields, for flags:

There's colza for the breaking seas; there's lacing for the boats,  
There's halyard-stuff and tackle-stuff as well.  
I keep this ship as well as any other thing which floats.  
With sennett-work – a lanyard for the bell.

And here are meths and turpentine and stuff for mixing paint:  
And copal, as a special type of varnish:  
You'll like the matt and gloss, my dear, a scruffy ship we ain't:  
Like you, my love, this ship don't stand no tarnish!

Do you see the caustic soda which is used for scrubbing decks,  
With brooms of wire? – That is how sailors do it.  
Or, harder still with holystones - far harder work than sex,  
Though you might think that there is nothing to it!

I'll take you to the bridge, my dear, to see the awning -spars,  
And gratings, where the Captain stands in splendour.  
A martinet at sea, he is, and in all dockside bars,  
And good at bouncing on and off the fender.

And now we're in the engine-room and far beneath the water;  
In noise and heat where shipmates earn their corn;  
But look, the place is spick and span and kept throughout as oughter,  
Although they never see the light of dawn.

The galley is the heart of all, where Cook will ride the range.  
Three times a day he'll feed us, as he must.  
He'll manage, on his own, to find a menu of some change,  
By haute cuisine or basic bread and crust.

All must be done, my Maggie May, before we cross The Line;  
And presentation to the Neptune King:  
At his noble Court of Scallywags and sacrificial wine;  
Before we might then be allowed to sing:

"Oh, Margaret Marie, my love, my darling Maiden Scouse,  
I dream of you when I am far away:  
I know that you'll be true, my love, and you will keep my house,  
And pray with me on Merchant Navy Day."

BY - 2012