

# Wellerman (Traditional “Sea Song” Ballad) (Am)

[Wellerman](#) by The Longest Johns (2018) – [Wellerman](#) by Nathan Evans (2022)

4/4 Time

## Intro

F C E7 Am  
~~One day, when the tonguin' is done, we'll take our leave and go.~~

Am Dm Am  
There once was a ship that put to sea, and the name of the ship was the *Billy of Tea*.

Am C E7 Am  
The winds blew hard, her bow dipped down. Oh blow, my bully boys, blow (*Hup!*)

## Chorus

F C Dm Am  
Soon may the Wellerman come to bring us sugar and tea and rum.

F C E7 Am  
One day, when the tonguin' is done, we'll take our leave and go.

Am Dm Am  
She had not been two weeks from shore when down on her a right whale bore.

Am C E7 Am  
The captain called “all hands” and swore he'd take that whale in tow (*Hup!*) **Chorus**

Am Dm Am  
Before the boat had hit the water, the whale's tail came up and caught her.

Am C E7 Am  
All hands to the side, har-pooned and fought her when she dived down below (*Hup!*) **Chorus**

Am Dm Am  
No line was cut, no whale was freed; the Captain's mind was not of greed

Am C E7 Am  
But he belonged to the whaleman's creed; she took the ship in tow (*Hup!*) **Chorus**

Am Dm Am  
For forty days, or even more, the line went slack, then tight once more.

Am C E7 Am  
All boats were lost (there were only four) but still that whale did go (*Hup!*) **Chorus**

Am Dm Am  
As far as I've heard, the fight's still on; the line's not cut and the whale's not gone.

Am C E7 Am  
The Wellerman makes his regular call to encourage the Captain, crew, and all. **Chorus (2x)**

## Outro (*Ritard.*)

E7 G Am  
Take- our - leave - and – Gooooooooo-oh!

For a “cups” rhythm see [Wellerman Cups Practice Video](#).

## Notes:

For lyrics, the melody line, and an explanation of the lyrics, see [Soon May The Wellerman Come](#) (Anon., c. 1860-1870), New Zealand Folk Song; the sheet music is reproduced below. The song is also known as “The Wellerman.” For the general background of the song, see [Wellerman](#), Wikipedia.

New Zealand–based music teacher and folk music compiler Neil Colquhoun claimed to have collected the song around 1966 from one F. R. Woods. Woods, who was in his 80s at the time, had said that he heard the song from his uncle. First known publication was in 1973 when “Soon May the Wellerman Come” was included in Colquhoun's book, *New Zealand Folksongs: Songs of a Young Country*. Since then there have been more than 20 known recordings. In addition to the two at the top of the song sheet, here are two additional recordings at YouTube:

- [Wellerman](#) by Amadeus Electric Quartet
- [The Wellerman](#) by The Irish Rovers

The history of whaling in New Zealand stretches from the late eighteenth century to 1965. In 1831, the British-born Weller brothers Edward, George and Joseph, who had immigrated to Sydney in 1829, founded a whaling station at Otakou near modern Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand. The sailors who worked on their ships became known as “Weller men.”

Properly speaking, this is a ballad of the ‘sea song’ variety, not a ‘sea shanty’ *per se*. For the difference, see at Wikipedia [Ballad](#) and [Sea Shanty](#) (with an *excellent* listing of resources under “External Links”). Numerous collections of sea shanties have been published; a dozen or so have been reproduced on the website [Music and More](#) under the heading “Seasonal & Special Collections and Web Pages.”

Am D add G Am

There was a ship that put to sea, The name of the ship was the Bil-ly of Tea. The

wind blew up, her bow dipped down, O blow, my bul-ly boys, blow.

F C Dm Am

Soon may the Well-er-man come, And bring us sug-ar, tea and rum.

F C E Am

One day, when the tongu-in' is done, We'll take our leave and go.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Soon May the Wellerman Come'. It consists of four staves of music in 4/4 time, with lyrics written below the notes. Chord symbols (Am, D add G, F, C, Dm, E) are placed above or below the notes to indicate the accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'There was a ship that put to sea, The name of the ship was the Bil-ly of Tea. The wind blew up, her bow dipped down, O blow, my bul-ly boys, blow. Soon may the Well-er-man come, And bring us sug-ar, tea and rum. One day, when the tongu-in' is done, We'll take our leave and go.'

One song in our collection that is described as a “walk away” shanty is [Drunken Sailor](#).