

Wellerman (Traditional “Sea Song” Ballad) - 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. For a “cups” rhythm see [Wellerman Cups Practice Video](#).

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.”

The image shows a musical score for the song "Soon May the Wellerman Come" in 4/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music with lyrics underneath. 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." The score includes chord markings above the notes: Am, D add G, Am, F, C, Dm, Am, F, C, E, Am.

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