Salt Horse (The Sailor's Grace)

1. Salt horse, salt horse, we'd have you know
That to the galley you must go.
The cook, without a sign of grief,
Will boil you down and call you Beef.

And we poor sailors standing near
Must eat you though you look so queer.

Salt horse, salt horse, what brought you here?

2. Salt horse, salt horse, both near and far,
You're food for every hard-worked tar.
In strongest brine you have been sunk,
Until you're hard and coarse as junk.
To eat such poor and wretched fare
Would whiten any black man's hair.

Salt horse, salt horse, what brought you here?

3. Salt horse, salt horse, what brought you here?
After carrying sand for many a year
From Bantry Bay to Ballywhack,
Where you fell down and broke your back.

And after years of such abuse
They salt you down for sailors' use!

Salt horse, salt horse, what brought you here?

Listen and watch **Hulton Clint** sing this at
youtu.be/FfI8PaF1lpc ▶

Dod, Francis (WW1), *A Cook in the Galley, HM Trawler Mackenzie*,
from collections of the Imperial War Museums

Notes

The Sailor's Grace is a **chant** rather than a shanty.

Alternative titles: Salt horse, Sailor's Grace

Hugill, Stan, 1994, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*:

Many of the [words] were taken from a "chant" commonly know as the *Sailor's Grace*, as it was recited or sung when the first barrel of "salt horse" (salt beef or pork) was opened on the outward passage.

A leading hand would solemnly chant or sing the above staves while many of the hands would come in on the dirge-like "Salt Horse, salt horse, what brought you here?"

Salt horse - salted beef, usually, or pork, also called salt junk, was the staff of life in the days of sail. It was stowed in a harness-cask "the **horse in its harness**".

Dried in the sun, it was possible for it to become as hard as teak and without smell; many a seaman in days gone by has carved a model ship from it.

Notes on the Words

Bantry Bay and Ballywhack are replaced by different places in an American version.

Junk - old condemned rope