

TRANSCRIPTION

Duncan Williamson sings Ewan MacColl's song "The Shoals of Herring"

ScottishVoicesProj.0426

[This performance was recorded at a ceilidh hosted by John Niles in the city of St. Andrews, Fife, in the summer of 1986. A number of guests knew this song, which was composed and made famous by the British folksinger Ewan MacColl, and they needed no persuasion to sing along, harmonizing on the last words of each stanza in an impromptu manner.

In his spoken introduction to the song, not transcribed here, Williamson speaks of the dangers and hardships of working in the herring fleets in former years in Scotland. "People went off to sail, and you probably never would see them again anymore."]

- 1 Oh we left our home-ground on the month of June
 To the Canny Fields-O¹ we went sailin
 I was cabin boy on a sailin lugger
 We were searching for the shoals of herring.
- 2 For the nights are dark and the nights are cold
 And the treatment takes some bearin
 You could go to sleep standing on your feet
 But you'd be dreamin of the shoals of herring.
- 3 Oh we faced the squalls and the broken bands
 And the treatment took some bearin
 They are little kindness and the kicks are many
 When you're searchin for the shoals of herring.
- 4 When you're up on deck, you're a fisherman
 You can swear, show a manly faring
 Or you might go to sleep standing on your feet
 But you'll be dreamin of the shoals of herring.
- 5 For the nights are dark and the nights are cold
 And the treatment takes some bearin
 You'll take your turn and watch with the other fellows
 But you'll be dreamin of the shoals of herring.
- 6 For the nights are dark and the nights are cold
 And the treatment takes some bearin
 You might go to sleep standing on your feet

¹ Canny Fields: other versions of the song speak of "Canny Shiels." This may be a transformation of the nickname Canny Shields, a reference to the neighboring towns of North Shields and South Shields at Tyneside, North East England.

But you'll be dreaming of the shoals of herring.

7 I've sailed a million miles
 We've caught ten million fishes
 When we were searching fir the shoals of herring.

All: [*Applause, words of approval.*]