

## FAREWELL TO THE CLAN LINE

(Ron Baxter)

Tune: Ross Campbell

When I think on the years that I spent a'sailing,  
Thoughts of past times they drift back to me;  
The dangers, the joys, the mayhem, the boredom,  
The tears and the laughter, the sky and the sea.

Chorus:-

But these times are long gone and so are the vessels;  
The House Flag's been lowered for the very last time.  
It's "Farewell" to Hector's and Union Castle,  
To King and Bowater's and to the Clan Line.

For I've seen the sun rise o'er Mauritius in glory,  
The Southern Cross 'gainst a black velvet sky;  
I have sailed under the Mighty Hunter,  
Seen golden sunsets off Ascension's Isle.

I've drifted for days with engine breakdowns,  
Was nearly washed over in a gale in Biscay;  
But I've roared, sung and drunk in mansions and shanties,  
And once I was rolled in a dive in Marseilles,

I've tramped with crude from the Black Sea to the Baltic,  
Run shiploads of apples from Tasmania's strand;  
Oft to the Cape with general cargo,  
Or newsprint for Charleston from Newfoundland.

I've seen sperm whale sounding, the albatross soaring,  
Both the Auroras and Saint Elmo's fire;  
The sun and moon's halos, flying fish gliding,  
And I have heard dolphins sing like a choir.

NOTE (RB):- After ten years at sea, I came ashore. Within four years, Clan Line had ceased to exist. Along with scores of other famous lines it fell victim to containerisation, rising costs and unfair competition from "brass plate" companies flying flags of convenience.

NOTE (RJC):- This was used to close Red Duster's show "Farewell to the Clan Line". It's on the CD of the show, and also on a compilation album ("Blood on the Ice") that Ron put together of recordings of his songs by various artists. A few years ago the Lancaster Easter Maritime Festival produced a limited-edition CD of Festival guests. This was Red Duster's contribution. At last Easter's Glasson Maritime Festival we had the pleasure of hearing the song sung by festival guests Bitter End.

I've heard people comment after hearing the song "Did he really see all those things? And how could you be happy with life ashore after a life like that?" Well, that was the point of the show. That kind of life at sea was available to thousands of men on hundreds of ships in the fifties and through the sixties, when Britain still considered itself to be very much a maritime nation. But changes in trading and transport methods have led to the British Merchant Fleet being reduced to a shadow of its former self. Even the ro-ro ferries that go from Fleetwood to Larne are registered in Bermuda. Their officers are still British, but the crews have been variously Spanish, Polish and whatever East European nation is flavour of the month with the company accountants.

In the face of these changes, it's not just the individual that's affected. Our place in the world has radically altered. We are still very much dependent on goods and services coming in from abroad, but I feel that our impression of all these things is much more blurred than it was when a guy down the street could come wasking back from a voyage with his bag on his shoulder, carrying strange objects and tales from distant lands. We all lost something with these changes, not just the guys whose jobs disappeared.

Ross