

Slips and hards
Mudbanks and floodgates
Cocklers, ketches, trawlers and dredgers
At Swale Ness, Mary's Hole, Chalk Wharf and Horse Shoal;
Passing ships navigating channels and offloading cargoes
While teams of Turnstones twitch for insects on tidelines.

HUNKY DORY, RUBY FORTY
SCODAN, SKEETWELL, Y.KNOT, DONK;
SIR HENDRIK, MISS MUFFET
HURRICANE, HARVEY JAYNE
And GWENDOLINE.

SEA TRACTOR at Pump Wharf
JACK TAR in the Creek
MEDWAY LEADER passing Chetney Marshes
And SHEPPEY II and III at the Quay.

LIZ ANN in the scrubbing berth
HOBBIT in the harbour yard
AMITY overwintering on woodblocks
And SEXBURGA trundled on a trailer down the Hard.

A Black Ship slips down the Creek
A fire launch speeds up the Swale
The Harbour Controller patrols the moorings
And beachcombing Stone-turners sift through ridges of dead vegetation.

Trot boats and pier ports
Masts struck on barges and spud legs on SAMPSON;
A new mizzen boom is made for the WHITE MOTH
And a shipwright shapes trunnels for the TRITON.

Car-carriers loom over Lappel Bank
With PORGY perceived through the Abbott Lab Gap;
A container ship shape is made out in the mist,
And a careful watch kept for the VIGILANT.

Pebble-pushers prod rocks, shove shells, flick sprigs and lever weed;
A tug ties up at Rushenden
A coaster heads for Hull
A bulk carrier leaves for Barking Creek
And a tanker anchors at the Tongue.

LADY MARY to Grovehurst Jetty
WILSON TEES down Saltpan Reach
SVITZER VICTORY manoeuvring in the Medway
ELEANOR in training at the All Tide Landing.

LADY CLARA loops Long Point's length
AQUILION sets out for Faversham
A rowing gig turns at Coal Washer Wharf
And a Bennett's Barge arrives at Ridham.

Coasters and carriers deliver gravel to Grain,
Gypsum to Kemsley and coal to Kingsnorth;
Sacks of raked whiteweed, for fishtanks and fake ferneries
Are unloaded in Queenborough Creek
And Ebb-peckers pick through piles of tidings and tug at tangles of algae.

A warning call from the Go-away Bird startles the shore and shocks the flocks up,
in black and white patterns -

BIRKA SHIPPER bears for the North Sea
EVER STRONG to the English Channel
CELTIC FORESTER rounds the coast of Brittany
SCOT MARINER cuts through the Sound of Mull.

HYUNDAI SPLENDOR makes the Strait of Gibraltar,
EVER SMART, the Mediterranean;
AL SAHLA enters the Suez Canal
And WASHINGTON EXPRESS arrives at Charleston.

There's WARBER in the Baltic
ELBE HIGHWAY at St Petersburg
ALTAMIRA EXPRESS across the Atlantic
KATHERINE BORCHARD through the Bay of Biscay.

VENUS SPIRIT passes Freetown
UNION PLUTO heads for Flushing
The CITY OF LONDON from Rotherham to Rotterdam
And HANSA CLOPPENBURG between Thamesport and Hamburg

With Tangle-pickers pecking at stranded bands of bladder wrack,
Dashing at wave ebbs to dabble in freshly-left debris.

Cutters Dock, Smugglers' Gut, Black Stakes and Pottery Bay
Upturned tenders, shut-down chandlers
And shops treading water in winter;
A single seal at Loden Hope
A 'For Sale' sign on a sloop
The lengthy low tides make a long wait for leaving,
And there's a dash in the dusk to haul up on the Hard before dark.
There's rumbles and hums under wild *whoops* and *weeps* of waders out late;
Land lighting up, masthead lights slipping by
And a floodlit gas ship, glowing from over the bay.

There's racks stowed with rowboats and anchors on land
With FREEBIRD awaiting water
REDEEMER requiring salvaging
EXPLORER and PLUNGER meant for adventure
And WINTERWOOD, awaiting spring.

BIRKA SHIPPER docks back at Chatham with paper from Sweden
A fixed fishing trawler is restored to Whitstable
And the TWO SUNS berths at dusk with dabs, sprats, pouting and whiting.

There's a race of spray past the Isle of Grain
And a wave from a friendly tender;
Rowers set out in the snow off the slip
And seawater swamps the mudflats in minutes.

The Come-back Birds again return,
edged back in, by the tide -
till virtually surfing as they skitter off strandings
and balance
on weed-weighted wavelets.