The Escape of Old John Webb

The Escape of Old John Webb

There were nine to guard the British ranks,
And five to guard the town about
And two to stand at either hand
And one to let old Tenor out.
There was eighty weight of good Spanish iron
Between his neckbone and his knee
But Billy took Johnny under his arm
And lugged him away right artfully.

cho: And Billy broke locks and Billy broke bolts
And Billy broke all that he came nigh,
Until he came to the dungeon door
And that he broke right manfully.

They mounted their horse and away did ride
(And who but they rode gallantly)
Until they came to the river bank
And there they alighted most merrily.
And then they called for a room to dance
(And who but they danced merrily)
And the best dancer among them all
Was old John Webb, who was just set free.

Recorded by Burl Ives.
Note: According to Ives, this is part of a 20-verse broadside about a jailbreak in Salem, Mass. in 1730. If true, someone co-opted a 16th Century Scottish border ballad, and made it fit. RG
Child #187 and/or
Child #188