

The Cutty Wren

*Collected from an Adderbury shepherd by A.L. Lloyd
—set to a version of the tune, "Green Bushes"*

$\text{♩} = 60$

Oh where are you — go - ing, said Mil - der to — Moul - der. Oh

3 we may not — tell you, said Fes - tel to Fose. We're off

5 to the woods, — said John the Red Nose. — We're

6 off to the — woods, — said John the Red Nose.

Oh where are you going, said Milder to Moulder.
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose.
We're off to the woods, said John the Red Nose.
We're off to the woods, said John the Red Nose.

And what will you do there, said Milder to Moulder.
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose.
We'll hunt the Cutty wren, said John the Red Nose.
We'll hunt the Cutty wren, said John the Red Nose.

And how will you shoot her, said Milder to Moulder.
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose.
With bows and with arrows, said John the Red Nose.
With bows and with arrows, said John the Red Nose.

Oh that will not do, said Milder to Moulder.
Oh what will you do then, said Festel to Fose
Big guns and big cannon, said John the Red Nose.
Big guns and big cannon, said John the Red Nose.

And how will you carry her, said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose
On four strong men's shoulders, said John the Red Nose.
On four strong men's shoulders, said John the Red Nose.

But that will not do, said Milder to Moulder
Oh what will do then, said Festel to Fose
In a big horse and wagon, said John the Red Nose.
In a big horse and wagon, said John the Red Nose.

And how will you cut her up, said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose.
With knives and with forks, said John the Red Nose.
With knives and with forks, said John the Red Nose.

But that will not do, said Milder to Moulder
Oh what will you do then, said Festel to Fose
Hatchets and cleavers, said John the Red Nose.
Hatchets and cleavers, said John the Red Nose.

Oh how will you cook her, said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose.
In pots and in pans, said John the Red Nose
In pots and in pans, said John the Red Nose

Oh but that will not do, said Milder to Moulder
Oh what will you do then, said Festel to Fose
In a bloody great brass cauldron, said John the Red Nose.
In a bloody great brass cauldron, said John the Red Nose.

Oh who'll get the spare ribs, said Milder to Moulder
Oh we may not tell you, said Festel to Fose.
We'll give 'em all to the poor, said John the Red Nose.
We'll give 'em all to the poor, said John the Red Nose.

The well-known Cutty wren or Hunting the wren is often thought of as an amiable nursery piece, yet when it was recorded from an old shepherd of Adderbury West, near Banbury, he banged the floor with his stick on the accented notes and stamped violently at the end of the verses, saying that to stamp was the right way and reminded of old times. What memories of ancient defiance are preserved in this kind of performance it would be hard to say, but we know that the wren-hunting song was attached to a pagan midwinter ritual of the kind that Church and authority fulminated vainly against – particularly in the rebellious period at the end of the Middle Ages when adherence to the forms of the Old Religion was taken to be evidence of subversion, and its partisans were violently persecuted in consequence. (Lloyd, England 90f)

Tune is a version of "Green Bushes " from Sharp's book, "English Folk Songs".

There is a Manx legend that during the Irish rebellion, when English soldiers and Manx Fencibles were in Ireland, the noise made by the wren on the end of a drum woke a sleeping sentry and thus saved them from being taken unawares; this was the reason for hunting the wren on St. Stephen's Day.