

The Morris in Stanton Harcourt

1: Location

Stanton Harcourt (Oxon.) is a small village dating from a Bronze Age settlement six miles west of Oxford, and more significantly (in Morris terms) 2 miles south of Eynsham, a scene of more intense historical Morris activity. The village is noted as the home of the Harcourt family at the Manor from 12th - 18th C., and now back in residence after a couple of centuries in Nuneham Courtney. The Harcourts are the only surviving family of the Norman Conquest in Oxfordshire and received the manor from King Stephen. The tower in the Manor is known as 'Pope's Tower' after Alexander Pope, who translated 'The Iliad' there in 1718, and The Great Kitchen built in 1380 still stands receiving regular use.

The Norman church contains the tomb of Robert Harcourt, Henry Tudor's standard-bearer at Bosworth Field (1485), and the remains of the standard hang above his tomb. The village has a feel of feudal England about it, but the accessible history of Morris dancing in the area principally concerns the hamlet of Sutton to the north of the manorial estate, where George Goodlake was master of the local hostelry.

2: Morris History

Our knowledge of historical Morris activity in Stanton comes from two documents viz. Percy Manning's account in 'Folklore' (Seasons) 11, (1) and a manuscript dated ca. 1920 ascribed to Arthur Williams (2). Manning was an Oxfordshire folklorist who amongst other things, encouraged the revival of the Morris in Headington which was the team seen by Sharp in 1899. What followed became history.

Manning paid a retired geologist/fossil collector Thomas Carter as a researcher to go to Stanton (there is an account of an expenses claim from Carter for 1s 2d for the train fare from Oxford). Carter wrote to Manning ca. 1897 reporting that he had retrieved the 'whittle' of 'Bob' (sic.) Potter (actually John) the legendary Stanton Harcourt Morris musician. Although Potter had died by this time, Carter had located his daughter living at Tumbledown Dick's in Cumnor.

John Potter (b. 1813) was of local fame as a Morris musician, and known principally for his pipe and tabor ('whittle n' dub) playing around Oxfordshire. He was described as a whittle player who 'could almost make un speak' (3) having acquired his instrument from 'Barber' Brooks of the Dragon Inn, Bampton. The whittle was made by Robert Brooks before 1820 and had the holes marked with the notes. Potter played whittle for many Morrises including Stanton Harcourt, Standlake, Bampton, Witney, Cogges, Leafield; Clanfield; Oxford and Faringdon (4). He was also reported (in 1895) as having played for the Ducklington Morris around 1865 (5).

John Potter was born and lived in the hamlet of Sutton. He is variously described as a carrier/carpenter/labourer/etc. In later life he played the fiddle and there is a photograph of him playing for the sweeps Jack-in-the-Green at Balliol College, in 1886 on May Day (6). He was not interviewed by Carter and died at his home in St. Ebbe's, Oxford on March 8th 1892, having moved into the city when he was 69. He was buried in the churchyard at Stanton. From his age we might assume the Morris was active in Stanton ca. 1835.

Carter did interview an old Stanton Harcourt dancer, Joseph Goodlake (b. 1836) when he was 63 (? This would have been 1899 but the letter suggests March 1901). Joseph was the son of George Goodlake of Sutton whose career from labourer (1818), baker (1830), shopkeeper (1836) to publican (1842) reveals a man set on improving his social status. He also had 14 children (8 girls and 6 boys) and since Joseph had brothers within \pm 5 years of his age they could also have conceivably been in the Stanton/Sutton team. This would place the active dancing period around the 1850's but the eldest brother William, could have been dancing ca. 1838. Joseph Goodlake, described as a shepherd/farm worker, moved to Yarnton where he died from cirrhosis of the liver in July 1901 just 4 months after Carter's interview (7).

No evidence has appeared to suggest Morris activity either before this period or after it. Furthermore no Stanton Harcourt set is ever referred to in the many inter-village competitions that prevailed during the 19th C (8). There are two unusual features about the descriptions of the dances in Manning (which are not extensive!). Firstly, the dances all feature an inward facing Distinctive Figure and this has been extrapolated to exclusively inward facing Common Figures. This may however be entirely interpretational.

Secondly, five of the dances listed involve sticks, which is highly unusual in a region dominated by handkerchief-only traditions (Ducklington, Bampton, Eynsham and Abingdon). Sticks appeared to have made no general inroads into this area when they started to be incorporated into Morris dancing from the late 18th C.

Bearing the above in mind along with the vigorous Morris activity in surrounding villages this may be a case for applying Keith Chandler's arguments for the commercial motivation of the 19th C. Morris (9). Were the Stanton dances contrived in mid century without any local historical derivation as part of an entertainment centred on a public house in Sutton? (See also John Forrest on this point (10)) A contrivance of this sort would then seek to produce something more contrasting with surrounding styles. From general Morris evolutionary features we might expect any older Stanton Harcourt dances to use handkerchiefs but the only notation for a handkerchief dance *per se* (non hand clapping) comes from the Williams manuscript. (See Appendix B)

3: Dance Notation

The Manning/Carter manuscript is reproduced **in total** in Appendix A. The scope for 'interpretation' is clearly apparent.

Roy Dommett (RD) held instructionals during the 1970's on his interpretation of the above information. This teaching was incorporated into the IWMM's repertoire at that time by Joe Marns and largely remains that way although there have been developments in the hand clapping, variations to the Black Joke interpretation and stamping during some of the sticking seems to have developed naturally.

Goodlake's account to Carter/Manning listed ten dances for which he only described the Distinctive Figure or 'chorus' for seven. These were five stick dances and two clap dances. A read of Appendix A will reveal the gap filled by RD. RD says (13) that his reconstruction was based on the chorus descriptions plus a verbose description of the 'Nutting Girl' (A Nutting We Will Go), in the Williams manuscript. However, Annex B describes the failure to locate this manuscript and inconsistencies arising from the information associated with it. Suffice it to say there must have been errors in either names or dates!

Although the sparseness of the notes would permit other interpretations, IWMM have largely adhered to RD's work of the late 1960's early 70's period. Why not? (seemed the logical argument). Some evolution has occurred through the 'nips and tucks' of some 30 years of dancing.

Thus all dances commence with an inward facing set and follow the 'once to yourself' (OY) with a 'dance in position' (DP). Other **Common Figures** are 'advance meet and retire' (AMR) across the set, 'cross over' (CO belly to belly, rt. shoulders going, left return), 'back to back' (BB), 'half hey' (HH, roll back, middles moving quickly, come in facing and back into position). All dances finish with 'whole rounds' (WR), opening out into a large circle ending with 4 large capers in. Sets need to be fairly compact.

Stepping is typically left foot start, 2 double steps (ds), 2 single steps (ss) (or back steps (bs)), step/jump (sj). Handkerchiefs (Hks) are tied to little fingers for all dances (necessary for clapping). When not clapping, the handkerchiefs run across the palm exiting between thumb and forefinger. The arms are normally held out at the end of bar 6 of the music, come in, out, in and up (above head) on the 4 accented beats of the last 2 bars. The arms remain up to be brought down forcefully for the next figure. Handkerchief dances in particular should have vigorous arm movements. On the final 4 capers dances should meet in the centre, hands knuckle to knuckle.

Less vigour is used with sticks (21" long) since as the set is fairly compact neat stick positions are needed to avoid injury!

The dances are:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Constant Billy (Clap dance) | 7. Morris Off (IWMM) |
| 2. Bean Planting (Stick) | 8. Brighton Camp (Stick) |
| 3. The Clock (Clap dance) | 9. Princess Royal (Clap dance) |
| 4. Nightingale (Stick) | 10. A Nutting we will go/Nutting Girl (Hks) |
| 5. Jockey to the Fair (Hks) | 11. Maid of the Mill (IWMM) |
| 6. Greensleeves (Stick) | 12. Black Joke (Stick) |

1. Constant Billy - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF clapping sequence is interpreted as 'together right, together left, together behind; together across '. This is followed by a HH and repeat of clapping plus HH return. Hks hang free during the clapping.

2. Bean Planting - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF is only 4 bars; first corners dib, tap and shoot across (from the spot - no stepping forward), followed by second corners, middles and finally all with partners. Straight into next CF

3. The Clock - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF is clapping both hands across to partners, right hands clap across, clap own hands together. This is followed by both hands across, left hands across, both hands together. This sequence is repeated followed by a HH and a full repeat.

4. Nightingale - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF is odds capering off the left foot to strike evens sticks held overhead thrice followed by a HH and a repeat with evens striking odds. The sticks move up and down with stamping in time.

5. Jockey to the Fair - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF is first corners facing 4 x ss, 1 ds to a half gypsy with opposite corner, 1 ds on the spot and 2 bs to opposite's place with hand movements. Followed by second corners and middles doing the same.

6. Greensleeves - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

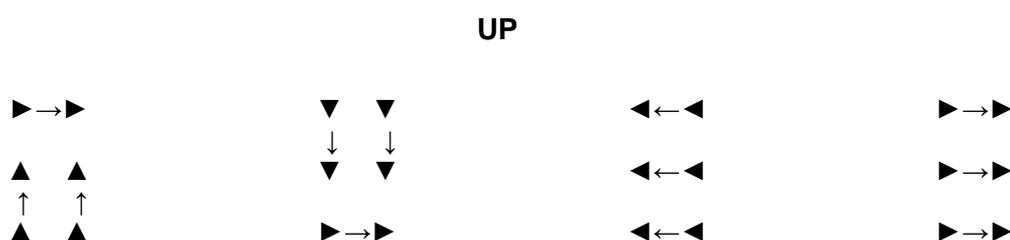
DF is all strike the ground with tips thrice, odds strike evens sticks held at chest height thrice. Repeat with evens striking odds similarly, followed by a HH and full repeat.

7. Morris Off - Sequence OY DP AMR CO BB WR back to position WR and off

Two lines facing for as many as will. Come into dance on last two bars with hand movements. Sequence is DP, AMR, CO, BB (all A music) turning left to WR on the B music and 4 pc's in. The dancers normally take 4 steps back whilst the music continues, they come into the dance again with hand movements and double step out of the arena in a serpentine manner.

8. Brighton Camp - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

The DF is striking sticks held overhead in sequence. All dances keep turning to the right and the sticks are raised and lowered with stamping. The facing and striking direction is shown below.



The receiving men at the head of the ▶ hold the stick with both hands above their head **only raising it for the strike**. The striking men at the tail of the ▶ hold the stick by the butt with the right hand. During the striking the men do a marching on the spot step with their feet on beats 1 & 3 of the bar always turning to the right by a quarter or half turn. This sequence is followed by a HH and a repeat sticking with 1 & 2 taking the striking positions of 5 & 6. Odds turn out for the HH; evens go the easy way but 4 has to do a quarter turn back

9. Princess Royal- Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF is clap hands across thrice, right across thrice, left across thrice, together thrice and straight into the next figure (i.e. NO HEY), only B music being used from this point. The WR hence uses the last 8 bars of B music as 6ds and 4 large pcs.

10. A Nutting We Will Go/Nutting Girl - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

DF is a vigorous 4 x ss facing up (lots of body movement), left foot over first, followed by a HH always danced as a hey UP. The bottom pair does a full turn out despite the way they are facing. Repeat ss facing up. A useful processional. Dance CFs as static set moving forward rapidly on the side step.

11. Maid of the Mill- Sequence OY DP DF CO DF BB DF WR

Circular set around maid or fool. DP is 4 x ss facing fool and in with 2 x ds and 2 bs to place. Repeat. No AMR. The CO is a 'belly to belly' with fool spiralling round to opposite place and then repeating the move to return. The BB is done as a standard set, 3 & 4 going left of the fool.

12. Black Joke - Sequence OY DP DF AMR DF CO DF BB DF WR

The only dance to come in striking, odds hitting evens sticks at chest height, then reverse and then repeat whilst capering. This is repeated at the end of each CF. After 1st half of CO evens become odds. DF is odds strike evens stick at chest height thrice, on the 4th beat sticks are just pushed forward. This is repeated with evens striking and a HH follows (intro sticking at end of HH). Full repeat and HH. The WR is only 4 ds and 4 pcs in.

4: The Music

Assuming Potter played; the music would have been pipe & tabor and possibly fiddle later. Manning gave no tunes and those used are from Williams' notes or other traditions. Music for Greensleeves, Black Joke, Bean Planting, Princess Royal, and Nutting Girl were noted by RD from the Williams ms. and are published in Bacon.

The music we have used for the other dances comes from different sources, slightly modified to fit these dances. e.g. Brighton Camp (Adderbury tune), Constant Billy (Sherborne tune), Clock (My Grandfather's Clock in 4/4), Maid of the Mill (Benfield's 1909 tune), and Morris Off to Portsmouth.

Musical Notation

Constant Billy

$\text{♩} = 100$

Accordion

6

11

Accord.

Bean Planting

$\text{♩} = 100$

Accordion

7

9

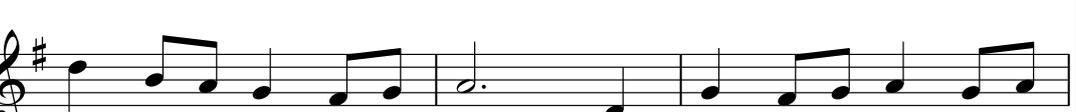
Accord.

CLOCK

$\text{♩} = 80$

Accordion 

5 

9 

12 

The Nightingale

$\text{♩} = 100$

Accordion 

6 

10 

Jockie to the Fair

♩. = 100

Accordion

7

Accord.

11

Accord.

15

Accord.

Greensleeves

♩. = 100

Accordion

5

Accord.

10

Accord.

14

Accord.

PORTSMOUTH

♩ = 80

Accordion



5

Accord.

9

Accord.

13

Accord.

15

Accord.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for the piece 'PORTSMOUTH'. It consists of five staves of music, each labeled 'Accord.' or 'Accordion'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. A tempo marking of '♩ = 80' is placed above the first staff. The first staff is labeled 'Accordion' and contains measures 1 through 15. The subsequent four staves are labeled 'Accord.' and are numbered 5, 9, 13, and 15 respectively, indicating the starting measure for each system. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and a final double bar line at the end of the fifth staff.

BRIGHTON CAMP

♩ = 80

Accordion



5

Accord.

9

Accord.

13

Accord.

15

Accord.

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for the piece 'BRIGHTON CAMP'. It consists of five staves of music, each labeled 'Accord.' or 'Accordion'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. A tempo marking of '♩ = 80' is placed above the first staff. The first staff is labeled 'Accordion' and contains measures 1 through 15. The subsequent four staves are labeled 'Accord.' and are numbered 5, 9, 13, and 15 respectively, indicating the starting measure for each system. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and a final double bar line at the end of the fifth staff.

Princess Royal

♩ = 80

Accord. { 

5 

9 

13 

17 

19 

THE NUTTING GIRL

♩ = 80

Accordion

5

9

13

17

21

24

Accord.

The Maid of the Mill

♩ = 100

Accordion 

6
Accord. 

9
Accord. 

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for 'The Maid of the Mill'. It features three staves of music in G major and 6/8 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 100. The first staff is labeled 'Accordion' and contains the main melody. The second and third staves are labeled 'Accord.' and contain accompaniment. The second staff begins at measure 6 and the third at measure 9. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

The Black Joke

♩ = 100

Accordion 

5
Accord. 

9
Accord. 

13
Accord. 

15
Accord. 

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for 'The Black Joke'. It features five staves of music in G major and 6/8 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 100. The first staff is labeled 'Accordion' and contains the main melody. The subsequent four staves are labeled 'Accord.' and contain accompaniment. The second staff begins at measure 5, the third at measure 9, the fourth at measure 13, and the fifth at measure 15. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

5: References

1. P. Manning, Folklore, (Seasons). 11, MS Top. axon. d200, p238
2. A. Williams, axon. 1920
3. Ref 1, p73
4. Ref 1, p174
5. Ref. 1, p237
6. Oxfordshire County Libraries 13.1 Jack-in-the-Green outside Balliol College 1886.
7. Woodstock District Register 1901 No. 248
8. K. Chandler, 'Ribbons, Bells & Squeeking Fiddles', Hisarlik Press, 1993, p89
9. K. Chandler, 'Ribbons, Bells & Squeeking Fiddles', Hisarlik Press, 1993, p195
10. J. Forrest, The History of Morris Dancing, James Clarke & Co. Ltd, Cambridge, 1999
11. I. Williams, 'English Folk Song & Dance', Longmans, 1935
12. E. Williams, Private Communication, 1995
13. R. Dommett, 'The Traditions Stylised', Private Communication, 1990
14. K.Chandler, Musicians in 19th C. Southern England
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Note

In the course of the above inquiries I received helpful advice from Mike Heaney, Keith Chandler, Roy Dommett, Frank Purslow, Malcolm Taylor, George Frampton, Roy Judge and others, for which many thanks.

Sem Seaborne
Stanton Harcourt Foreman
IWMM

Appendix A

The Manning/Carter Manuscript

Percy Manning Folklore (Seasons) 11; MS Top. Oxon d200, page 238. The manuscript resides in Duke Humfrey's Library, The Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

The following were the dances formerly danced at Stanton Harcourt.

1. '**Black Joke**': The dancers on one side hold out their sticks in both hands at arms length breast high to be struck by the dancer opposite. This is repeated thrice.
2. '**Princess Royal**': A clap-dance; each man claps both hands against those of his opposite, palm to palm, thrice; then he claps his own hands together.
3. '**The Nightingale**': The dancers on one side spring into the air and strike the sticks of their opposites held overhead at arms length thrice.
4. '**Bean Planting**': The dancers knock their sticks on the ground and then thrust them out with both hands shoulder high as if shooting at their opposites.
5. '**Greensleeves**': Each man taps the ground with his stick thrice and then those on one side raise their sticks in both hands breast high to be struck by their opposites.
6. '**Clock**': A clap-dance; both hands of each side struck palm to palm against both hands of opposites, then both own hands together.
7. '**Brighton Camp**': Both sides hold sticks in both hands over head at arms length; then the outer men in each side strike the stick of their middles man in turn; then the sticks are held up again for the opposite man to strike.
8. '**Constant Billy**': A clap-dance.
9. '**A Nutting We Will Go**':
10. '**Jockey to the Fair**':

The dancers always danced with white handkerchiefs tied to their little finger.

Appendix B

The Williams Manuscript

This is described in Bacon as attributable to Arthur Williams, Oxford, c. 1920. RD believed he was a friend of Clive Carey and his existence was pointed out by Frank Purslow who indexed Carey's papers in the VW Library. RD saw the Williams papers when in the possession of his daughter ca. 1965. In the few hours available RD copied down the information on Stanton Harcourt and Ascott-under- Wychwood but not other historical information contained in the notes on Bampton for example. In 1990 RD's recollection was that Williams was an Oxford University man and a copy of the manuscript was with one of the Oxford colleges. He also thought that Williams had pursued the Manning/Carter contacts.

The Carey manuscripts in the VWL reveal no specific references to an Arthur Williams and in a subsequent conversation with RD he also thought this was probably incorrect. Michael Heaney has searched the Oxford libraries in vain. Frank Purslow's recollection is in pointing out Iolo Aneurin Williams to RD who was indeed a friend of Carey and who had two daughters and a son. Iolo Williams, Clive Carey and Frederick Keel started collecting folk songs during vacation when up at Cambridge (not Oxford) together and corresponded (1912 - 1913) on the subject. I. Williams who later became Hon. Secretary of the EFS, noted songs and poems, he did not write down the tunes. He published a book in 1935, 'English Folk Song & Dance' (11) which contained 18 pages on Morris dances but with no references to Stanton Harcourt and this section was probably co-authored.

I. Williams had no special interest in Morris dancing and the three books of notes he left after he died contain no dance information. The manuscript seen by RD contained 8 tunes as well as dance notation and Carey's papers do contain other musical notations incorrectly ascribed to Ursula Williams (Iolo's sister). Iolo's son Edward confirms that although Ursula played the violin she did not write this music which in fact is the work of Juliet Williams (no relation) another friend of Carey (12)

Juliet Williams was also a friend of Mary Neal and had a particular interest in the Morris. She corresponded with Carey on the subject and was collecting with him in Bampton in 1912/13. The correspondence refers to many interviews with old dancers and she was well known in Bampton having photographed the side dancing in Reading in 1914.

Having eliminated other possible Williams such as Alfred Williams I feel that the evidence points strongly towards Juliet as the author of the manuscript referred to, however further work is required to locate it and resolve the confusion.

There is one important conclusion from this inquiry. If Williams went in pursuit of the Manning contacts, whom did she find? Both Potter and Goodlake were long dead and any Goodlake contemporary would be approaching 80 years old - not impossible but of reduced likelihood. Hence if the Williams manuscript contains Stanton material the source is unknown.

From RD's notes (13) the Williams manuscript gave a verbose description of the Nutting Girl (but the upward facing side step and half hey conflicts with the inward facing Distinctive Figures of all the Manning descriptions). Other points were: no jump half way through dance facing; cross-overs are right shoulders going - left coming back; advance to face not side by side; hey up for both halves; rounds open out large before caper in; back step danced in line facing with hands at side almost touching; first part of Princess Royal is played once and from then *ad lib*. Nutting Girl is assumed to be Manning's dance 'A Nutting We Will Go'

Appendix C

John Potter of Stanton Harcourt (14)

John Potter was one of the notable folk musicians of the 19thC. He was born in 1813 the second child of William & Elizabeth Potter of Stanton Harcourt. Although his father moved around as an agricultural labourer, he was resident in SH from JP's birth. They lived in Ducklington End, Sutton (the west end of the hamlet). Four doors away were the Goodlake family (a grocery at this time) and we can safely assume JP was well acquainted with them. He would have been 23 when Joseph was born but closer in age to his eldest brother William (b1818).

John married Alice Mitchell of Wytham and resided in Sutton where he was a shopkeeper and carrier for 30 years. His regular service took him to Oxford on Wednesdays and Saturdays; Witney on Thursdays and Abingdon (1867 - 1875) on Mondays. This was an all weather service and despite being a strong man, he felt the cold and was known to drink to fortify himself against the cold weather.

We can estimate that he was active in the Morris from about 1830 and accompanied at least 10 separate teams. He was known all around the area and although contemporary accounts variously refer to 'Ted' and 'Bob' Potter (and sometimes from Ducklington), they were all talking about John Potter. He is on record as playing for sets in Stanton Harcourt, Standlake, Bampton (1856 - 1859), Witney, Eynsham, Cogges, Leafield, Clanfield, Faringdon, Ducklington and various activities in Oxford.

He initially played pipe and tabor, and was later well known as a fiddler but accounts suggest that he also played 2 other instruments and kept a book of tunes indicating that he may have played with a village band. His pipe was made by Robert 'Barber' Brooks (later landlord of the Dragon Inn) of Bampton before 1820. After Potter's death it was taken from his daughter by Manning and found it's way back to Billy 'Jinky' Wells in Bampton. By all accounts Potter produced some fine results from it.

In 1878 Alice died and JP moved to St. Ebbe's, in the heart of Oxford. He would have been 68 and probably resigned to no longer wishing to brave the weather with his carrier service. Thomas Goodlake, another of Joseph's brothers, and twenty years younger than Potter lived close by. From this time Potter worked (sometimes irregularly) as a carpenter at the Wharves by the Oxford canal and played his fiddle in the city pubs such as the 'Balloon' in Queen Street.

He stayed at different locations in the city and at one (Lamb & Flag Yard) lived close to the Hathaway family who revived the Sweeps ancient May Day' Jack-in-the-Green' custom in Oxford. Potter appears in the photograph of this event taken by Henry Taunt in 1886, and was certainly still involved in 1888.

In March of 1892 he had been working at the Wharf in Park End St. when he became ill and couldn't stand. He was taken home by 4 men on a trolley. They let him into his house; he locked the door behind him and died whilst preparing to go to bed. He was found 2 days later by his Son-in-Law Maxy Mitchell. His home was described as 'neglected' but he had plenty of food. He was noted to have been playing in the 'Balloon' only the previous Saturday. The Coroner's verdict was that John Potter had died from exhaustion due to old age.

Despite his travels he lived his entire life within a 15 mile radius of Sutton.