

Ephraim Potter, 6949, *Merchantman* and 9631, *Colonial* Researched by Marcia Watson

Baptism	14 March 1830, St John the Baptist with Foxhall, Brightwell, Suffolk
Parents	Thomas Potter and Hannah
Parent's marriage	
Siblings	Abraham (~1818), Lydia (1826), Solomon (1833), Alfrez/Alfred (1836)
Wife	
Married	
Children	

The first record of Ephraim is at the Essex Quarter Sessions in October 1849:

Abraham Potter, 26, and Ephraim Potter, 20, labourers, were found guilty of stealing two bushels of potatoes, the property of Wm Baker, at West Tilbury. Abraham was sentenced to three months hard labour, and Ephraim to two months hard labour.¹

West Tilbury is about 2km from Chadwell where they were living in 1851.

On the census in 1851, living at Chadwell St Mary, Essex:

Hannah Potter, head, widow, 58, nurse, born Thundersley, Essex

Abraham Potter, son, unmarried, 26, born Brightwell, Suffolk

Ephraim Potter, son, unmarried, 20, born Hunston, Suffolk

Solomon Potter, son, unmarried, 18, born Brightwell, Suffolk

The family is recorded at the bottom of the page, and the youngest son is missing.

At some stage, the family moved across the Thames River to Gravesend, perhaps before 1854, when Ephraim committed his next crime in Kent.

Abraham Potter, 36, and Ephraim Potter, 24, brothers, were indicted for stealing a skid-chain, value 6s, the property of Thomas Latter at Mereworth on 3 January 1854.

Mrs Sampson, living nearby, heard a noise of iron rattling on the 3 January and then saw one of the prisoners, Ephraim come out of Mr Latter's lodge with the chain. It was bright moonlight at the time. She told her husband, Jesse Sampson, and he went with a lodger on the road to Watlingbury and overtook the two prisoners. Abraham said he knew nothing of it. He took hold of Ephraim, and Abraham went to the side of the hedge and dropped something, which was afterwards found by the lodger to be the chain. Abraham would not go back willingly but was taken nevertheless. Ephraim ran away and was caught the next morning by a constable. Ephraim said at the close of the case that his brother had nothing to do with it, and he hoped he would not be punished. Both were found guilty and sentenced to two months hard labour.²

Then in 1858, all the brothers, Abraham, Alfred, Solomon and Ephraim Potter, were committed for trial on a charge of stealing three bushels of wheat, value 10s, the property of Mr John Tilden, Northfleet, on 11 April 1858.³

At the beginning of the year, all the prisoners worked for Tilden, but in April, only Ephraim was employed by him at a thrashing machine. On 11 April, a person named Langford saw some sacks

¹ Chelmsford Chronicle, 26 October 1849, p4

² Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, 28 March 1854, p5

³ South Eastern Gazette, 20 April 1858, p6

containing wheat in a chalk cave on the farm. He told Mr Turvill (bailiff to Tilden) when he discovered about three bushels had been taken from the thrashing machine. The chalk cave was watched, and the next morning Turvill saw Solomon at the hole, and Alfred came out, saying he had been in to get some weeds. The two were taken into custody; the wheat was still in the cave but had been moved. Inquiries were made, and it was found the two prisoners had previously been dealing in wheat. On 12 April, constable Clanish went to Abraham's house at Gravesend, one in the row called Arthur Cottages. He found Ephraim and Abraham, and on examining the outbuilding from which Abraham had just returned, he found about 1½ bushels of wheat. When the constable attempted to take them into custody, Ephraim attacked him with a poker, and with the aid of some women and Abraham, he managed to escape. He was apprehended on 14 April in a wood at Northfleet, but not without considerable resistance.

Turvill deposed that the wheat in the cave and that found at Abraham's place corresponded exactly with that belonging to his master.

The three prisoners each cross-examined every witness with the same three questions.

"Do you know the nature of the oath?"

"Have you asked God, with all the affections of your heart, to tell the truth in all unrighteousness?"

"Are you a deputed witness?"

The last question puzzled the Court for some time, but it was at length explained that the term meant one "who couldn't swear nothing at all."

In summing up, his Lordship said only the evidence against Solomon was his having been seen near the pit, and he would not put his case to the jury.

The other three were found guilty of feloniously receiving wheat, and two previous convictions were proved against Abraham, and one each against Ephraim and Alfred.

His Lordship considered the case against Ephraim was the most aggravated, as he was a servant of Tilden, and had violently assaulted a constable.

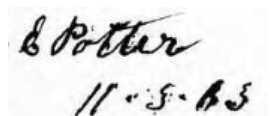
Ephraim received 10 years penal servitude; Abraham, seven years; and Alfred, five years.⁴

Ephraim was committed at Rochester on 16 April 1858 and convicted of stealing 3 bushels of uncleaned wheat on 1 July 1858 at Maidstone Adjoined General Quarter Sessions. He was aged 30, single, could read and write imperfectly, and was a farm labourer. Ephraim spent one month four days at Maidstone G, and nine months 19 days at Millbank Prison, where his conduct was good. He was sent to Portsmouth Prison on 23 May 1859. The register records that his mother was Hannah Potter, who lived at Arthur Cottages, Gravesend. Ephraim boarded *Sir John Lawrence* for public works in Bermuda on 17 November 1859.⁵

When the six monthly return was taken in June 1862 at Bermuda, Ephraim was in hospital.

Unfortunately, it does not record why or for how long he was there. On 2 December 1862, he left Boaz Island on the *Merchantman* for the voyage to Western Australia, arriving on 14 February 1863.

He took with him a book, which he signed for on arrival in Western Australia.



⁴ Kentish Mercury, 10 July 1858, p8

⁵ TNA, PCOM2/108

He was described as:

6949. Ephraim Potter, 33, 5'6¾", with brown hair, blue eyes, a round face, dark complexion, stout build, no marks, a labourer and single.

On 22 October 1866, Ephraim was destitute in Guildford and received one month in prison. Halfway through his sentence, he received 12 days on bread and water for an unspecified misdemeanour.

It was not long before he was in trouble again. At the Supreme Court, on 3 July 1867: Ephraim Potter, was charged with having forged an order for the payment of money; a second count charged the uttering. The prisoner was undefended. William W. Hoops testified that on 26 February, the prisoner came into Mr Monger's store at York and asked for a pair of boots. I showed him ten or a dozen pairs; he tried some on, found one pair to fit him, and tendered me the order produced on the counter in payment, and while I was reading it, he ran away with the boots.

John F. Hancock testified that he never wrote or signed the order produced in Court, nor had he authorised it being written.

The prisoner made a rambling statement for his defence but made no direct denial of the charge. He was found guilty and sentenced to 5 years penal servitude.

After the sentence was passed, Ephraim told the Court he had received the order from his master, Mr Samuel Taylor. The Court directed Mr Taylor to be called, and on being so, he denied having given the prisoner the order. His Honor said the prisoner deserved five years to be added to his sentence.⁶

9631 Ephraim Potter, C.P. 6949, convicted 3 July 1867 at the Supreme Court, Perth, of forging and uttering a money order at York. He was sentenced to 5 years penal servitude. Ephraim was 37, single, could read and write, a labourer and Protestant. He was at several places around Perth until he absconded on 19 January 1869 from Cantonment Hill but was soon captured and sentenced to one month in irons with the first seven days on bread and water. On 2 February 1869 he was admitted to the Asylum and discharged 4 July 1870.

On 17 February 1871, he was admitted to the prison hospital. He is listed under "names of prisoners under treatment for mental disorders, real or feigned". He was there until 28 June 1871, when he was transferred to the Asylum. On 30 September 1872, he was sent back to the prison and discharged the following day; his sentence had expired. Presumably, he was sent back to the Asylum, and there is no record of him until 1909.⁷

Ephraim died on 28 December 1909, aged 79, at Claremont Mental Hospital and is buried in Karrakatta Cemetery.

Over 20 years after Ephraim was in York, there was an unclaimed letter for him at York Post Office in 1889.⁸ Then, in 1915, unclaimed money was transferred to the "Depositor's Unclaimed Fund" in the Savings Bank. Ephraim had 7d in an account in York.⁹

⁶ The Perth Gazette and West Australian Times (WA : 1864 - 1874), 5 Jul 1867, p3

⁷ Ephraim was entitled to be discharged on 3 July 1872; however, due to his behaviour and absconding, he did not receive his Certificate of Freedom until 2 October 1872.

⁸ Eastern Districts Chronicle (York, WA: 1877 - 1927), 14 September 1889, p5

His brothers:

Alfred was visited by his brother and sister in February 1859 while in Portsmouth Prison before he left on 12 July 1859 for Gibraltar. He was received back at Millbank Prison, from Gibraltar Invalid Prison on 17 October 1860.

This man was transferred to this Hospital (Bethlem) from Millbank having been received there from Gibraltar. It is a case of dementia; he is perfectly useless and does nothing for himself, except to eat and drink what is place before him. He stands in one particular corner of the ward perfectly inert, he has never spoken. He sometimes tears at his clothes. He is not actually dirty though he is very untidy and allows his saliva to dribble from his mouth. He is quite fat and takes food well.

There was no change in his condition from January 1861 until he is sent to Broadmoor in February 1864. He remained at Broadmoor until November 1867, when he was transferred to the Kent Asylum; there was still no change in his condition in October 1868.

Abraham was sent to Gibraltar in December 1860 and sent back to Millbank Prison in October 1863. He was released on License the following month.

⁹ Eastern Districts Chronicle (York, WA : 1877 - 1927), 5 March 1915, p4