“There were giants in the land then”. So was the retrospective allusive reference to Brooke Foss Westcott in the period after his death. Westcott was one of the most formidable biblical scholars, theologians, missioners and Christian socialists of the Victorian period. When master at Harrow and then Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge he produced a stream of books that dragged English-language biblical scholarship into the critical period. With Joseph Barber Lightfoot and Fenton J.A. Hort, he forged a powerful caucus within English academic life — they were labelled the “Cambridge Triumvirate”. They became the prime movers behind the fracture of the hold of the King James Version through their cajoling of the Revised Version translation of the Christian bible into existence — the ‘ultimate desacralisation of ‘bible English”, as Joss Marsh distills it.  

The scholar became mitred in 1890 and defied all predictions about dusty intellectuals managing the demands of the fourth most important see in England. Lord Salisbury resisted his appointment as bishop of Durham to the last, fearing his socialist tendencies but Westcott rapidly established himself as the Christian ideologue of that peculiar late Victorian combination of imperial pride and social awareness. His articulation and promotion of the cooperative and education movements in the context of the coal miners in the County of Durham and of a distinct defence of Christian mission as England’s authentication of its Empire meant that in the final decade of his life he was etched into newspaper and magazine, repeatedly listed in “Men of our Times” and regularly called to address union meetings and missionary conferences. His life spanned the Victorian period. His death in the same year as Queen Victoria marked the end not merely of a political period but an ecclesial one as well. Pilgrimages to his works and his sacred sites in Cambridge and Durham continue to this day. He is remembered.

Henry Westcott, the third of Westcott’s seven sons, and one of six to enter the Westcott dynasty of holy orders, is not remembered. His schooling was far from auspicious — a younger brother surged ahead of him and he appears to have finished his schooling under the direct hand of his father before heading to Pembroke College almost at the age of 20. The direct hand of his father was required many times after as well. He could not settle into a curacy, complaining that he could not work under three successive rectors; finally his father made him his own “Domestic Chaplain” at Auckland Palace, the princely home for the Bishop of Durham. But Henry excelled at sport and from Marlborough College days until well into his forties he was involved in almost every sporting option open to a would-be English gentleman. He became much-admired and much-loved around Auckland for the formation of football and cycling clubs, the organization of cricket and tennis matches on the turf of the spacious parklands at the episcopal home.

The death of his father ushered in the standard Victorian typology of dealing with the death of a great man: the eldest son stepped into the overall organisation of affairs from the funeral service to the execution of the will; a standardised formula was generated in the press — the last hours, the family gathered, the servants grieving, the

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christian texts and prayers, the peaceful passing, the national recognition from great to small; the (three) daughters fulfilling exemplary domestic roles in tending the dying, organising the house, ushering the grandchildren; the funeral and memorial services were lavishly and minutely reported with details of the liturgies, lengthy lists of dignitaries in attendance, a final cadenza of the depth of loss and passing of a great age unlikely to be repeated; the obligatory filial hagiography that promoted the values esteemed by the age — the learning, the harmonious family life, the lifting of the reputation of the name, the symbiotic blend of self-improvement and national contribution, religious devotion, the breadth of influence, the lamented and universally recognised death, the legacy.

However this may have served the individual needs of family members and close friends, Henry Westcott organised his own method of coming to terms with his father’s death — he cycled and trained round England visiting the places where his father’s influence had been most concentrated. In significant measure, both Henry and we are indebted to that influence for any record of this alternative to the familiar Victorian pattern for mourning. Westcott bequeathed a small fortune to each of his children, having left a will valued at over £50,000. The costs of being out of work and touring could easily be met. And, during their conjoined period at Bishop Auckland, the bishop-father, in an effort to bring some stability and discipline into his son’s life, had strongly encouraged the use of a diary, wherein would be recorded the day’s activities, the books read, the monies spent. It was a resource not merely for personal reflection but for record-checking when the bishop and his chaplain formally met for consultation and planning. Henry’s diaries for 1900 and 1901 — the last two years of the bishop’s life — have survived in the holdings of family descendants, as have Henry’s photograph albums for the same period.

This paper seeks to explore how one forgotten, Victorian-formed individual sought to deal privately with the death of his publicly esteemed father. Through the journey that takes us through County Durham, Peterborough, Cambridge, Harrow, Bristol, and London we discover the conjunction of athleticism and mortality, place and people, pilgrimage and passages, religion and leisure, photography and memorialisation, discipline and dissipation, networks and mourning. It provides a counterpoint to the accent on death in Victorian England as a time of national readjustment by arguing that the particular method of dealing with a significant death carved by Henry Westcott for himself was novel, cathartic and yet constantly interacting with and informed by the legacy of a range of Victorian values — a legacy that is both reinforced in Henry through the death of his famous father and also subtly interrogated and eroded as Henry peddles through the complexities of disentanglement from the paterfamilias.

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