

WESTACOTT OF FIELD END FARM

by Karen Spink

Golden Wedding at Eastcote

'On Thursday last, Councillor Westacott and his good wife Mary celebrated their golden wedding. A large circle of relatives attended at the farm, including their six children and eight of their grand children; in all about thirty sat at a festive lunch and expressed their good wishes and showered presents upon the happy pair. Mr and Mrs Westacott were married at Landkey near Barnstaple, Devon, their native place, by the Rev. John Russell, who in his day had christened them, and married their fathers and mothers.'

The Middlesex and Bucks Advertiser, Friday 17 October 1914.

John and Mary Westacott came to Eastcote in 1901. They lived at Field End Farm with their three daughters, Helena, Annie and Bessie. Local accounts portray him as a colourful and friendly character. According to Mr G.A. Joce, who lived at 4 Field End Villas, he was a burly man, with a powerful voice that could *'summon his dogs from two fields away'*. Joce recalled that *'coming home on a summer's evening [from Eastcote Halt] 'Westacotts' usually provided something of interest'*.

John Westacott looks less than burly in his golden wedding photo (Fig. 1), cigarette poised in one hand, and his wife Mary hanging on his other arm. But then, at this date, he would have been in his early seventies. He was 58 when he first came to Eastcote and one wonders how much the local residents knew about the early life of this enterprising man from Devon.

John was born in 1843, the eldest son of Mr William Westacott of West Coombe, Swimbridge, Devon. In his youth he had sailed in the *Suffolk* for Melbourne, Australia, a journey that took four months. He spent a year prospecting for gold in Bendigo, the largest and richest goldfield in Australia. He then embarked on a further voyage of 21 days to New Zealand where, along with some 50000 pioneers, he tried his luck in the goldfields of Otago.

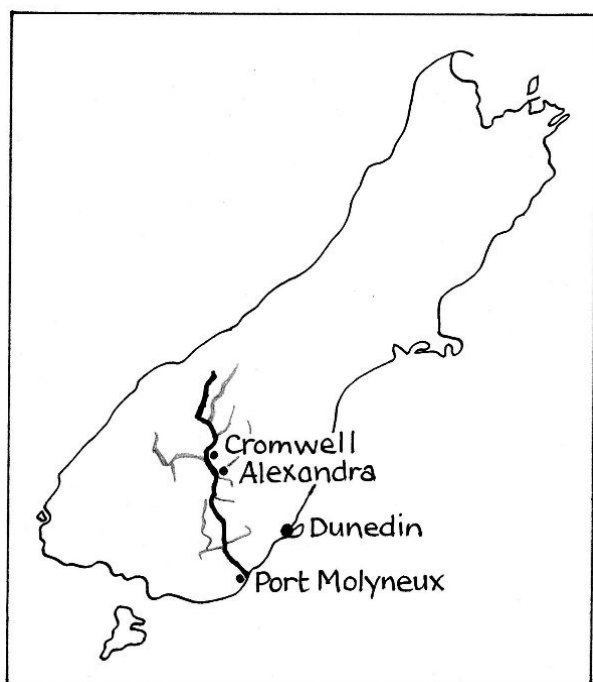


Middlesex & Bucks Advertiser

Fig. 1 – Mr and Mrs Westacott, 1914

Most likely he would have arrived at Port Molyneux, on the mouth of the Clutha River, just south of Balclutha. He worked his way up the Clutha, trying his luck on the Waitahuna, Tuapeka and Teviot tributaries, followed by the Manuherikia near Alexandra, and going as far as Cromwell and the Carrick Ranges (Fig. 2).

'On reaching.. the Manuherikia,' The Advertiser reported, *'the party paid 10 shillings for four to be carried across on horseback, and they were landed on shingle, little thinking that only 6 feet below their feet, three weeks later, £5000 worth of gold was extracted. The party then started on the Molyneux [now the Clutha], and made £30 per man per day.'*



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Fig. 2 - South Island of New Zealand showing the Clutha River and its tributaries

The rivulets in the mountains that severe winter were frozen up which made the river very low. But this was of short duration; and warmer weather coming on. In one night the water rose 20 feet, and came down like a foaming wall. The river has never been so low since, and undoubtedly there are large quantities of gold there now. They then went in the Carrick Ranges and had varied luck up and down with perpetual snow around. They had 10 inches of snow on Christmas Day [1863], their mid-summer, and there were many distressing cases of frost-bitten men. Food was very dear – butter and bacon 4s 6d per lb, as it had to be carted and packed at a cost of £200 per ton. Mr Westacott never paid less than 1s 6d per lb in the lower lands for mutton, and now there are 40 million sheep.

'New Zealand is, in Mr Westacott's opinion, a suitable home for any Englishman, being grassy and well watered, and if he carries the gold-digger's motto, "Nil desperandum" (never despair), he will be bound to succeed.'

Whatever his success, Westacott returned to Devon in 1864 to marry Mary Vickery, the eldest daughter of Mr Richard Vickery of Bradwick, Landkey, Devon. They were married in October by 'Parson Russell' at Landkey (a few miles south-east of Barnstaple), an area that had been home to

Westacotts since the 1500s. They had three sons and three daughters. John Westacott became tenant farmer under four successive Dukes of Bedford in north Devon, until in 1896 the then Duke of Bedford sold his Devon estates. Westacott moved with his wife and family to Trumpers Farm, Osterley, Middlesex, on land owned by the Earl of Jersey. The 1901 census shows him living at Warren Farm in the parish of Norwood with his wife Mary, his son, Walter, and two daughters, Annie and Bessie, with three live-in male servants.

Not long afterwards, he moved to Field End Farm, Eastcote. In December 1901, Westacott received planning permission to make minor alterations to the farm. Then in 1907, his premises having been deemed satisfactory by the council Medical Officer and Inspector, his name was placed on the Register of Dairies, Cowsheds and Milkshops.

Field End Farm with over 200 acres was leased from Ralph Hawtry Deane, owner of Eastcote House Estate. From here, Westacott ran a large dairy business which according to C.W. Benson was one of the first in the area to deliver milk in bottles rather than the traditional cans. Opposite the farmhouse, where Eastcote War Memorial now stands, was a large pond where the cattle used to drink (Fig. 3). Here passers-by and early London commuters using Eastcote Halt, opened in 1906, would often be greeted by a gaggle of noisy geese. This picturesque spot, though prone to flooding, was a favourite venue for Mr Egerton Hine, Harrow School art master and his drawing class. Westacott also kept pigs and sheep (Fig. 4) while much of the land was farmed for hay.

Picturesque it may have been, but in 1911 Field End Farm was described as being in poor condition. It comprised four bedrooms, kitchen and scullery, with two other rooms. Although it was connected to the water supply, desirable for an efficient dairy, the farm was still not connected to a mains sewer. The outbuildings, the cowhouse, barns, stable and cart shelter were described as much dilapidated, some almost beyond repair (Fig. 5).



Billy Boot

Fig. 3 - Field End Farm barn and pond



Hillingdon Local Studies

Fig. 4 - Field End Farm, c.1910

Not one it would seem for a quiet life, after his arrival in Eastcote Westacott was quick to involve himself in local affairs. This included helping in the organisation of the festivities to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII in August 1902. In 1904, now in his sixties, he was elected councillor for the new Ruislip-Northwood Urban District Council (RNUDC) with the fifth-highest number of votes of the nine elected. He served on various sub-committees – Highways and Fire Brigade, Ratings, Public Health and the new Ruislip School committee – and was vice-chairman of the council for several years. In 1905 he was appointed Overseer of the Poor, and from 1907 was a trustee of Ruislip Cottage Allotments Charity.

So it is something of a surprise to learn that, in 1912, the council Medical and Sanitary Inspector found that a wooden shed was being used for human habitation. This was a contravention of the bylaws and must have been something of an embarrassment, given Westacott's standing on the council. On the agenda of the RNUDC AGM on the 16 April 1912 was an order directing that *'a building or shed shall be closed and the use thereof for human habitation prohibited, unless Mr Westacott attends before the council and shows*

sufficient cause why such building shall not be declared unfit for human habitation'.

Westacott made a statement, but the Minutes do not report what he said. He obviously did not convince the Council for they ordered that the shed be closed. Nevertheless, this unfortunate incident did not prevent Westacott, at that same AGM, being voted vice-chairman and on to the Public Health Committee.

Three months later, this same Public Health Committee found that the yard at the back of the cowsheds at Field End Farm was in *'very bad condition, it being so uneven that the water cannot drain away'*. A notice was served on John Westacott calling on him to pave the yard around the cowsheds with impervious material.

John was now nearly 70 years old. Was it getting too much for him? Did he have a repairing lease or was the landlord expected to maintain the buildings? Many of the properties owned by R.H. Deane at this date were in poor condition, which might suggest that he was not that good a landlord when it came to the upkeep of his buildings, many of which, like Field End Farm, were some 300 years old.



RNELHS

Fig. 5 - Field End Farm barn, c.1910

On a happier note, Mr F.M. Elgood, chairman of the RNUDC, in October 1914 offered 'Hearty congratulations on the occasion of the Golden Wedding of John Westacott'. But sadly, Westacott's health was failing and in May 1915 it was resolved that 'the sympathy of the council be tendered to Mr Westacott in his illness'. What this illness was is not known, but he was sufficiently recovered later that year to resume his council duties as vice-chairman and on various committees, and as one of the Overseers of the Poor. In June 1916 he was reappointed Trustee of Ruislip Cottage Allotments Charity for a term of twelve years – a term he did not complete.

Westacott died on the 1 July 1917, aged 74. The acting chairman (Mr W.P. Edwards) of RNUDC resolved that 'the Council desire to express their heartfelt sympathy with the widow and family of the late Mr John Westacott (the Vice-Chairman of the Council) in their bereavement and to place on record their appreciation of his services to the district as a member of the Council for the last 13 years'.

He was buried at St Martin's, Ruislip in the churchyard extension. In his will he left £1740.17s to his sons, John and Walter, described as farmers, and his youngest daughter Bessie. His wife Mary continued to live at Field End Farm, along with their three daughters who were running the farm, until her death in 1929 aged 86 years. They are all buried with John at St Martin's.

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