

**SACRED TO THE MEMORY:
HAIR JEWELRY, *MEMENTO MORI*,
AND THE DEATH OF JOHN SUMMERFIELD**

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William Summerfield died on September 19, 1825, at the age of 55 of dysentery. Just a few months earlier, on June 13, 1825, his son John, the once future leader of the Methodist Episcopal Church, had died after a long illness at the age of 27. Ellen Blackstock, William's eldest daughter and John's eldest sister, was stricken with grief at yet another loss in her family. To display her losses and carry the memory of her father and brother with her throughout the rest of her life, she entwined locks of their hair into a beautiful piece of jewelry (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1—John and William Summerfield hair jewelry (front). Image courtesy of Drew University Methodist Archives, Madison, NJ.

This item, fashioned into a necklace and worn by Ellen, carried with it a brief inscription to honor the two dead men who would be forever intertwined in the small, delicate jewelry case (Fig. 2 on p. 22):

In Memory Of
Wm Summerfield
Died
Sep^r. 19th 1825 AE 55
& of his Son the Rev^d.
John Summerfield
Died
15th June 1825 AE 27

The necklace is housed at the United Methodist Archives and History Center on the campus of Drew University. It is part of an archival collection of material related to the life and service of John Summerfield and was originally collected by the Summerfield and Blackstock families.¹ The jewelry exists not only as a memorial to the lives of both John Summerfield and his father, but also as a totem of sorts for the Summerfield family, in particular John's sister Ellen Blackstock, née Summerfield.



Fig. 2—Inscription on back of Summerfield hair jewelry. Image courtesy of Drew University Methodist Archives, Madison, NJ.

This article explores the role that these types of totemic objects served in the first part of the nineteenth century and how the hair jewelry of John and William Summerfield stands as an exemplar of both the medieval use

¹ John Summerfield Collection, Methodist Collection—Drew University, Madison, New Jersey. As described in the collection Finding Aid: The Summerfield Papers consists of numerous letters in various categories. There is general correspondence consisting of letters to friends in Ireland (1807–1825), letters to family (1816–1825), and letters to his father (1822–1824). The collection also includes Summerfield's ordination certificate signed by Bishop William McKendree. There are numerous manuscript commentaries, notes on the Bible, as well as manuscript sermons. Also, located within the collection is a partial manuscript diary and journal from 1818 to 1819 as well as 1824 records some of his work. There are also miscellaneous papers from Summerfield's brother-in-law, James Blackstock, including his account book and notes about John Summerfield's father, William Summerfield.

of human fragments as religious relics and the use of hair, in particular, as a form of *memento mori* during the Victorian Period. In many ways, this simple locket filled with intertwined hair bridges the gap between relic and memorial, essentially filling two different roles at a single instance. As will be explored below, parts of the human body, particularly hair, have long been used as a physical connector between the living and the dead. From single strands to locks to woven crafts, human hair jewelry has long been a symbol of loss, love, and remembrance. There is a note of poesy in such objects; as if the items themselves were somehow still alive in their rituals of grief, mourning, and remembrance. The Summerfield locket is no different: a way to honor and remember; a way to keep the dead alive.

English Roots and Irish Ends

John Summerfield was born in Preston, England, in 1798, the son of William and Amelia Summerfield. He was one of nine children, six of whom lived to adulthood, and the eldest son. William Summerfield was a preacher in the local Wesleyan Society and named his son John in honor of the founder of the society, John Wesley. From birth, John was destined (at least by his father's wishes) for a life in the ministry and an active role in what would become the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. In many ways this destiny was fulfilled and, while cut far too short to be fully realized, the early successes that John Summerfield achieved were evident from an early age. Indeed, his whole life seems to have been ahead of schedule, from his own schooling to his early days as a young preacher to the heights of stardom within the church to his untimely death—things always seemed to come early for John Summerfield.

Summerfield's youth, which is discussed in rather hagiographic terms in two nineteenth-century biographies,² seems to reveal that the destiny his father foresaw was an accurate one. He was a precocious child, having been sent to school at five years old and quickly deemed "the best reader" in the classroom. His intellect and behavior raised him in the eyes of teachers and other adults as "an example for the other children to imitate." Even with this elevated status, John was "not in the slightest degree a spoiled child" and, in fact, the fawning over him "appeared to have no bad effect upon him" at all.³ Indeed, young John seemed to not only do no wrong, but from an early age served as a moral compass for his siblings. According to John Holland, whose *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. John Summerfield, A.M.* (1829) was the first biographical study of the young Summerfield, six-year-old John had the following advice for his older sister when she became upset

² These biographies were John Holland's *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. John Summerfield, A.M.* (first published in 1829) and William M. Willett's *A New Life of Summerfield* (first published in 1857). These two works stand as the only full-length biographical studies of John Summerfield and his short life. Both proved quite popular in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, with Holland's text being printed in at least 10 separate editions.

³ John Holland, *Memoirs of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. John Summerfield, A.M.*, 3rd ed. (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1830), 20.

at being sent away with her brother to a Methodist school twenty miles from their home:

Ellen, I really am astonished at you; you know that our father sent us here for our good; but if you fret and grieve so, you will make yourself ill; and then you won't be able to learn any thing. And think how sorry my mother would feel, and how disappointed she would be, if she were to know. You ought to be more of a woman; besides, Mrs. Campbell would be displeased, should she see you.⁴

Such was, supposedly, the erudite and devout life of young John Summerfield, according to his biographers. He had a strong aptitude for learning and seemed to soak up knowledge and lessons like a sponge, with great moments of self-reflection and consideration even at a young age.

His dedication to learning and education was not limited to his role as a student. In fact, according to Holland, when Summerfield was only 11 or 12 years old, he opened his own school in an attempt to earn money to counter his father's "embarrassments" that "were extremely distressing" to the family and its finances:

. . . a thought struck the intelligent lad, that it was possible for him so to redeem a portion of his time, as to enable him to open a night school. With him, even at this early age, to devise and to execute were the same: the attempt was made; the school was opened; and many young men, twice as old as himself, presented themselves, so that he had soon more applications than he could receive. The school was continued until his removal to Liverpool, when he parted with his pupils, amid their sincere regrets.⁵

The proceeds from this adolescent-run school were given to John's mother to help with the family expenses. In 1810 or 1811, Summerfield left the school behind to travel with his mother, Amelia, to Liverpool, where she was sent by doctors "for the benefit of the sea air" to help her recover from an illness.⁶ He stayed with his mother for four months before she died. He was only 13 years old.

His mother's untimely death, coupled with an ever-increasing focus on religious doctrine and theological study, seemed to imprint on John's mind and he "often dwelt upon the subject" of her death—and death in general.⁷ This focus was witnessed by his sister, Ellen, during a sleepwalking incident when John was about 15 years of age. John wandered into his sister's bedroom, fully asleep and acting quite restless and uttering agitated noises. The next morning, John described to his sister that "it was a terrifying dream! [W]hen I made that noise, and exhibited that struggle, I thought Satan had laid hold upon me." Within the dream, John witnessed a crowd of people worshipping Satan and bowing down before him. John would not follow or "bend the knee" to the Devil, but found a way out via "a narrow and winding stairway, the ascent of which was very high and steep" which allowed him to

⁴ Holland, *Memoirs*, 21.

⁵ Holland, *Memoirs*, 24.

⁶ Holland, *Memoirs*, 25.

⁷ Holland, *Memoirs*, 25.

barely escape from Satan's clutches and awaken.⁸ In response to this dream, and other influences, Summerfield began to read more theological texts and sought out speakers and preachers in Liverpool to address his growing focus on religious study. He seemed at this time, as throughout his life, to "possess the experience of a person advanced in life" even though he was not yet 15 years old.⁹

Following the death of his wife, William Summerfield decided to move his family from Liverpool to Dublin. They arrived in Ireland near the end of 1812, with John's earlier childhood successes seemingly left behind in England. From 1813 to 1817 his biographers "have but little to say of Mr. Summerfield that is favorable" and his life during this time is described as one of dissipation.¹⁰ He took to a group of friends who spent their time "at the theatre, the billiard room, or the card table," with this last being his greatest tempter:

This infatuating species of vice so captivated his mind, that by practice, he became quite an adept, and was led on by degrees, to emulate the more adventurous by playing a *high game*. It may well be conceived that these irregularities were sources of indescribable anguish to his father and family, who frequently labored under the most dreadful apprehensions, not knowing where such things might end.¹¹

Indeed, his conduct as a son was "refractory and perverse" and even included the pilfering of the family silver.¹² This latter fact was dismissed by Holland not as thievery but as the actions of a helpful Samaritan: John having come across a destitute man and, sensing his need for money, stole "silver spoons laid upon the dinner table . . . together with what tea spoons he could collect" and presented them to the distressed individual who happened to be a man "by whom [John's] father had lost considerable sums of money."¹³

One must wonder whether this great act was not so much one of charity, but perhaps the paying off of debts (either his father's or even his own gambling losses). The biographical sources are seemingly unclear about the realities of John's gambling debts, though Willett characterizes him as being "addicted" to gambling. As part of this addiction, John would travel to London to spend "his time in sin and folly; not returning till he was forced to do so, when, like the prodigal in the gospel, his money was all spent."¹⁴

In a new environment (Dublin), enveloped by feelings of grief for his mother, and lacking the educational structure and guidance that he had in England, Summerfield more easily slipped into a life of games and gambling. At 14 years old, no matter how intellectually or spiritually "advanced" he was for his age, perhaps John succumbed to the most common of teenage influences: peer pressure. From 1812 until 1817, John was "wholly left to

⁸ Holland, *Memoirs*, 26.

⁹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 28

¹⁰ William M. Willett, *A New Life of Summerfield* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), 11.

¹¹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 30.

¹² Willett, *New Life*, 12.

¹³ Holland, *Memoirs*, 29.

¹⁴ Willett, *New Life*, 12.

himself,” had little or no supervision, and was caught in “the dreadful bondage of sin and Satan.”¹⁵ This being the very thing most feared in his walking nightmare from his days in Liverpool.

This bondage was not eternal, however. By 1817, as Summerfield entered his nineteenth year of age, he was “brought to reflect seriously on his past life, and on the conduct he was then pursuing.”¹⁶ This moment of self-reflection seemed to be like a thunderbolt strike: near instantaneous and quite powerful, “at once signal and scriptural” in nature.¹⁷ An outcome of this self-reflection and inner criticism was his realization of how his behavior had affected his family, particularly his father. It was on the streets of Dublin, where he wandered sadly in reflection on his wasted life and “felt himself a reprobate before God” that he was “accosted by a pious man¹⁸ . . . who, with the tact of a Methodist, and the simplicity of a saint, ascertained his state, and endeavoured to comfort him.”¹⁹ This interaction led to an invitation to a prayer meeting, which Summerfield quickly agreed to and later “that very night found peace to his soul.”²⁰

So there on the streets of Dublin, where he saw his childhood of grace and intellect end and his youth of sin and reprobation begin, John Summerfield also saw the end of this wasted life and the beginning of a new life, an adult life that fulfilled his father’s greatest hopes, a life of religious service. Willett summarized that “his son that was dead was alive; he that was lost was found”—found, in the end, in Dublin, the same place he’d been lost.

“Sentimental Cuts”

As John Summerfield was losing (and then finding) himself in Dublin, the creation of mourning jewelry was beginning its move towards great popularity and widespread practice in England. The modern use of hair as “a permanent *memento mori*” dates back to the seventeenth century in England.²¹ At that time, hair jewelry was produced almost entirely for “an exclusive, elite clientele and represented the social status of the dead” and those who wore the jewelry.²² It was not until the eighteenth century that hair jewelry became more common and widespread in England, moving out of its elite, upper-class confines. Christiane Holm refers to this era as “the sentimental period” and points to the fact that mourning jewelry, in general, became more commercialized and commercially available in the late eighteenth and

¹⁵ Willett, *New Life*, 12.

¹⁶ Holland, *Memoirs*, 43.

¹⁷ Holland, *Memoirs*, 42.

¹⁸ This “pious man” was identified by Willett as William Haughton, a former member of the “Hellfire Club” and noted sinner who had recently been converted himself (see Willett, *New Life*, pp. 15–16).

¹⁹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 43.

²⁰ Holland, *Memoirs*, 44.

²¹ Christiane Holm, “Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.1 (2004): 139.

²² Holm, “Sentimental Cuts,” 139.



Fig. 3—Locket with hair cutting and photograph. Image courtesy of Drew University Special Collections, Madison, NJ.

early nineteenth century.²³

The popularity of mourning jewelry, and hair jewelry in particular, was rather short-lived. Deborah Lutz points to the close of the nineteenth century as the end of the “death culture” that supported the production and wearing of hair jewelry. At this point, Lutz argues, it was no longer “common practice to hold onto the remains of the dead” or to keep locks of hair to be worn as jewelry. These relics became far less common as “the death of the other . . . became less of a shared experience among a community” and things such as human remains (hair, body parts, etc.) were decreasing in meaning, importance, and value.²⁴ By the early twentieth century, such things as hair jewelry had seen their day of popularity and wide-spread usage.

For a period of nearly 200 years, between the elite creation of hair jewelry in the seventeenth century and the death of death remnants in the early twentieth century, England witnessed the regular and popular use of mourning jewelry. It was during this time that John Summerfield and his father died, and their memories were preserved and honored in the popular form of hair jewelry. Mourning jewelry at this time, Holm points out, was defined not by its economic status but “by its intimate and emotional value” for the wearer. It moved from being focused on “the mourned and their fame but instead the mourners and their mourning.”²⁵ The following brief exploration of hair jewelry is helpful to understand this shift in emotion and sentiment.

First, a bit about the hair itself. Earlier uses of hair in mourning jewelry of the seventeenth century were primarily simple, single locks held within pieces of jewelry such as a locket (see Fig. 3 above). This use of hair was rather separate from the jewelry itself, making it more of a holder or case than an integrated piece of mourning. The hair, not the case that held it, was the object of memory and sentimentality. In the eighteenth century, the materiality shifted as “new techniques were developed to convert the fine material into artificial forms” that are sometimes not even recognizable as hair. This “culminated in the hair-industry of the nineteenth century” when

²³ Holm, “Sentimental Cuts,” 139.

²⁴ Deborah Lutz, “The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011): 127.

²⁵ Holm, “Sentimental Cuts,” 139.

forms of hair were placed into bracelets, necklaces, rings, watch fobs, and even cufflinks (see Figs. 4–6). This form of hair jewelry had an interesting social construction: allowing the wearer to wear their mourning jewelry and human remnants in an intimate manner that is rather hidden in plain sight. The Summerfield hair jewelry is a perfect example of what Holm refers to as an “exhibited secret.”²⁶ The jewelry (Fig. 1) is not immediately recognizable as being made with human hair, let alone hair from two different individuals.



Fig. 4—Ring hair jewelry. Image courtesy of Drew University Special Collections, Madison, NJ.



Fig. 5—Watch fob hair jewelry with red cameo. Image courtesy of Drew University Special Collections, Madison, NJ.

²⁶ Holm, “Sentimental Cuts,” 140.



Fig. 6—Cuff links hair jewelry. Image courtesy of Drew University Special Collections, Madison, NJ.

Hair jewelry, whether in the form of simple locks or disguised artistry, is created first by separating the hair from the body, what Holm rightly calls the sentimental cut:

Before hair becomes raw material for remembrance it must be cut off the body. But the very moment of the cutting gives the hair a new status. The separated hair can last forever whereas the body will not. Moreover the separated hair will no longer grow, it embodies as materialized time an epoch that is absolutely past. Its temporal semantics privileged and still privilege the hair cut in the *rites de passage*. The cut edge of the hair in the material medium of remembrance marks the act of remembrance as the very moment when its natural status was transformed into a cultural status, and when the present presence of the body is anticipated as a future absence.²⁷

The cut hair is both a symbol of the loss and an extension of the life of the one lost. While the physical body is buried, burned, or otherwise disposed, the hair fragment is kept as a memorial that is “alive” long past the age of the mourned and their mourners.

In nineteenth-century England, the interest in these relics became “like other death rites, increasingly secular, personal, and private” in nature. Hair jewelry became part of plot devices in novels and tended to take on “its own narrative qualities” both in fiction and in reality.²⁸ Looking at the Summerfield hair jewelry, for example, clearly shows a story being told. The hair itself brings the “reader” into the story with its mysterious and curious aspect. This curiosity is furthered by reading the “story” on the back. An uninformed reader, who knows nothing about John or William Summerfield, will still be captivated by the brief and somewhat mysterious tale told in the back inscription. Who are these Summerfields? Why did one die so young? They died relatively close to one another, were their deaths connected somehow? Who was this jewelry made for? These questions, and myriad others, come to mind when first encountering the jewelry and its inscription.

These questions, and the stories that arise from them, are part of nineteenth-century death culture in England, according to Deborah Lutz. The “resurgence in relic culture” speaks to a “desire to see death as not permanent, in that material remains might be proof that the loved one still exists somewhere, somehow.” Just as the young John Summerfield spoke of reuniting with his mother in heaven and seeing her in his dreams, his sister’s

²⁷ Holm, “Sentimental Cuts,” 140.

²⁸ Lutz, “Dead Still Among Us,” 128.

wearing of the hair jewelry established a connection between her living self and her deceased brother and father. At the same time, Lutz argues, this increased connection to relic culture represents a “willingness . . . to dwell in and with the moment of loss itself.”²⁹ In the case of John Summerfield, this moment of loss was rather long in coming. He was sickly for many years before succumbing, a subject that both his biographers and John himself address openly and clearly in their writings. Willett describes Summerfield’s final year as “but a lingering passage to the grave” and one that shows “the bodily weakness of this man of God during this year of unceasing effort.”³⁰ Holland’s description of the illness in even more palpable terms: “During this last sickness, such was the violence of the disease, and the consequent effect of the anodynes which were necessarily administered, that he had but few lucid intervals.”³¹

For Ellen, who was by her brother’s side at his last, watching him suffer for so long must have been both difficult and taxing. Her role as nursemaid (in addition to beloved sister) may have been almost something of a distraction from the extraordinary grief that she surely felt. For, at the same instance that her brother was on death’s door, her father was also ill and being tended by Amelia, another of the Summerfield daughters. Among John’s last efforts, in fact, was to call for his sisters:

About five o’clock on the evening preceding his death, he called out in a surprisingly audible voice for his sisters, each by name—“Anne;” being told that she was not there, he called “Amelia”—she was also absent, attending her afflicted father; he then called “Ellen,” his eldest sister, who was present. She took him by the hand, and reminded him of the necessary absence of his sisters: he replied, “Well—tell *Amelia*—tell *Anne*—tell *them*—ALL’S PERFECTION.”³²

Ellen went to visit her father shortly after this exchange, returning late that evening to deliver a message from father to son. That was the final conversation she had with her brother. Three months later, her father also died. Ellen, like her sisters, felt that the losses compounded one another. These losses were, perhaps, somewhat eased by having a piece of both men with her in the form of the hair jewelry.

As relic culture in the nineteenth century became more popular and commonplace, the idea of gravesite dedications and ornaments began to move more commonly into domestic places. Hair jewelry, the Summerfield piece in particular, is a great example of a movement towards the “domesticate . . . presence of the lost loved one.”³³ This includes not just the designated body part (hair in this case) but the epitaph or inscription as well. Lutz notes that “the majority of hairwork had tomblike inscriptions” included as part of the dec-

²⁹ Lutz, “Dead Still Among Us,” 128.

³⁰ Willett, *New Life*, 184.

³¹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 323.

³² Holland, *Memoirs*, 329–330.

³³ Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 109.

oration or engraving.³⁴ This allows the hair to be connected to an individual (or individuals) rather than an unknown fragment completely divorced from the lost love. Numerous examples exist, including in the collections at Drew University and the United Methodist Archives and History Center, which are clearly made from human hair and most likely created as pieces of mourning jewelry, but which do not identify to whom the hair belonged. The *mori* part remains (a fragment of a deceased individual) but the *memento* part is long lost—for no one knows who was being honored or memorialized.

For the surviving Summerfields, however, the decision to combine both father and brother into one piece, and to clearly inscribe said piece with the information needed to ask those questions raised above, makes it a perfect example of what hair mourning jewelry was intended to be. It provides what Lutz calls the “double movement of comfort and grief” for the owner.³⁵ The relic serves as a reminder of the finite death of a loved one, but also of the eternal hereafter and continuing memory held by those still living. It is both corporeal and spiritual at once; leaving the mourner to physically touch the remains of their loved one while reflecting on the absence of their physical being. These relics “mark the continued existence of the body to which it once belonged” and allow the owner to create “a link to that body lost” and “comfort with its talisman-like ability to contain, and prove the existence of, an eternity.”³⁶

The hair jewelry represents a connection to the dead and, in many ways, a promise of future reunion: *Until we meet again, I have this piece of you to remember you by and to keep us together*. This connection can be seen as the most important aspect of hair jewelry if one looks back from the Victorians to the early modern period. Megan Kathleen Smith’s study of three seventeenth-century poets (John Donne, Thomas Carew, and Thomas Stanley) focuses on the ways in which the hair jewelry “unites spiritual and corporeal matter” and, in most cases, unites two individuals across time, space, and even the mortal plane.³⁷ At the same time, Smith notes, the use of hair jewelry is muddled with “theological concerns and with the hair bracelet’s own negotiation between waste and preservation.”³⁸

These negotiations and concerns live not only in poesy, but in the actual items and their owners. How, for example, does the mourner deal with having to touch the physical remains of the deceased? Is it sacrilegious to handle the material? Should the hair be showcased, disguised, or entirely hidden? The answers to these questions are complicated and, as Smith writes, place the reader (or mourner) in the position of having to “alternate between sac-

³⁴ Lutz, *Relics of Death*, 109.

³⁵ Lutz, *Relics of Death*, 136.

³⁶ Lutz, “Dead Still Among Us,” 130.

³⁷ Megan Kathleen Smith, “Reading It Wrong to Get It Right: Sacramental and Excremental Encounters in Early Modern Poems about Hair Jewelry,” *Philological Quarterly* 94.4 (2015): 369.

³⁸ Smith, “Reading It Wrong,” 355.

ramental union and excremental detachment.”³⁹ The physical and spiritual connection to the dead is certainly there in the form of hair jewelry; but so, too, is the shorn locks of a dead person—the excretion of hair follicles, now inert and lifeless. This is where the macabre and “creepy” factor comes into play. For those handling objects of mourning and *memento mori* who have no connection or relation (or, as discussed above, even knowledge) of the deceased, these objects are strange, foreign, almost in-human in their gross humanity. Touching the watch fob (Fig. 5), which is made almost entirely from human hair, is a significantly different tactile experience than the cufflinks (Fig. 6) or the Summerfield jewelry (Fig. 1).

The feeling of uneasiness in handling these objects is not limited to the archivists, historians, art historians, and other researchers of today. Even in the nineteenth century, when hair jewelry was at its most popular, there were feelings of unease among those who commissioned and wore the jewelry. This explains, in part, the “hidden” aspect of hair within mourning jewelry that was “characterized as an increased hiding or disguising of the material’s bodily origin.”⁴⁰ This was done as a way for the mourning jewelry to be partly hidden away, with only the wearer knowing fully the “story” of the piece and its reason for being made.

This story can sometimes remain hidden to all except the wearer, and information about the hair jewelry can easily be lost or forgotten. It is a problem that often reduces these extremely personal relics to mere “things” to be poked, prodded, and studied; a problem Jane Wildgoose explores in her artistic work with relics:

I was examining the “unique status” ascribed to human remains, concerning their potential to be perceived as both object and subject I was embarking on a comparative study: exploring the ways in which human remains in museums may be perceived as *objects*, which may be used for “research, teaching and . . . display” and also as *subjects*, with “personal, cultural, symbolic, spiritual or religious significance to individuals and, or, groups.”⁴¹

Differentiating between *object* and *subject* is key to understanding how to work with and study individual instances of mourning jewelry. Seeing the item as a hand-crafted object with its artistic features and details is different than seeing the personal connections that the item holds.

The rise of popularity in hair jewelry in the nineteenth century meant that more and more of these (often) finely crafted relics were created to honor more and more dead. These were not the ancient relics of saints, or the “‘celebrity’ memento—fragments of kings, queens, heroes, writers, and artists” that dominated the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁴² Rather, these

³⁹ Smith, “Reading It Wrong,” 353. Note that Smith’s use of the term *excremental* is not necessarily scatological in nature, rather she uses the OED definition which “covers any ‘outgrowth; said esp. of hair’”

⁴⁰ Holm, “Sentimental Cuts,” 140.

⁴¹ Jane Wildgoose, “*Beyond All Price: Victorian Hair Jewelry, Commemoration & Story-Telling*,” *Fashion Theory* 22.6 (2018): 703.

⁴² Lutz, “Dead Still Among Us,” 129.

types of relics were another sort altogether:

[T]he relics under consideration here are of a third type: they came not from the saint, a great historical event or even the famous, but from any ordinary body. They had value only to a handful of people, or even to just one, and if that one died, then the relic became an unmarked grave, of worth to no one. They told a story, highly personal and intimate, sacred to few, alive only in a specific locale and set of years. For those who didn't know the narrative of the donor, the relic became a materialized secret, a kind of dead letter of the object world.⁴³

What is clearly lost, then, is the *subject*. Who are the people hidden behind the metal and glass? What was their story? Why did they, and not others, receive such an honor after death. What made John Summerfield so special as to warrant a piece of mourning jewelry?

“The Glorious Crown for Him Prepared”

John Summerfield's life in Dublin turned around in 1817 when he met William Haughton and “obtained the evidence of the forgiveness of his sins and was enabled to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”⁴⁴ His conversion was imminent and marked the first step on his journey to spiritual leadership. Summerfield found a mentor in Patrick French, who led the young convert in his studies for a time. So inspirational was French that when he left Dublin for his missionary work in the West Indies, Summerfield penned an honorific to him in the form of ten stanzas, which began:

And must we, then, for ever! ever! part,
 And tear asunder each from other's heart!
 And must we bid a long, a last farewell!
 No more to meet, till call'd by judgement's knell!
 That knell which shall announce the death of time!
 And sound eternity with solemn chime!⁴⁵

Such was the impact made by Mr. French in such a limited time; and such was the need for Summerfield to find a way out of his life of destitution and despair. Later in the poem, he wrote a somewhat prophetic closing couplet to the ninth stanza: “That so, the glorious crown for him prepared,/May shine with lustre bright, as his reward!”⁴⁶

Prophetic, it was, because Summerfield himself was on the path to being “crowned” in his own way; he would soon be deemed by many as a bright and future leader in the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Following French's departure, John Summerfield's life in ministry sped up rapidly and within five months he was received as a local preacher in Dublin. His first public address occurred in April 23, 1818, at Gravel Walk Chapel; his first official sermon followed less than a week later. From the time when he was at his lowest to the moment of his first sermon, fewer than nine months had

⁴³ Lutz, “Dead Still Among Us,” 129.

⁴⁴ Willett, *New Life*, 15.

⁴⁵ Holland, *Memoirs*, 46.

⁴⁶ Holland, *Memoirs*, 49.

passed.

This accelerated timeline did not stop in Dublin. By August, 1818, Summerfield was one of the most popular preachers in Dublin and was soon “engaged incessantly, at one place or another, preaching the word with increasing acceptance.”⁴⁷ Within a few months, “the fame of his name would fill not only to its utmost capacity the chapel and all the open space about it, but the covered archway leading to the street; such was the eagerness to hear him, such the charm of his eloquence.”⁴⁸ At the beginning of this fame, the Summerfields moved to Cork, where John found similar success. Absence, though, clearly made the heart grow fonder, resulting in “unbounded popularity and influence” in Dublin when he returned in January, 1819.⁴⁹ That March, he was formerly proposed to travel as a preacher in the Methodist connexion in Ireland and received his appointment in June. He preached continuously and tirelessly for the rest of the year, travelling in Ireland wherever he was needed.

The New Year came and with it his birthday in January. Upon reflection of his birthday, Summerfield praises God and clearly values the work he is doing. He mentions the successes he has had in the field, the conversions he has made, but laments about his own existence: “But what shall I say of myself? [D]espair begins to lay hold on me, and for some days I have left off [private] prayer.—My hell increases!” Holland and Willett both see this (and many similar statements in his journals) as reference to his physical failings and bodily weakness. It is almost undeniable, Holland argues, that Summerfield’s “misery arose from bodily disease” in addition to the “satanic temptations” that had plagued his teenage years.⁵⁰ These physical maladies did not prevent Summerfield from reaching ever-increasing heights of popularity and admiration. In fact, he kept his bodily distress secret from all but close family and friends—it was perhaps his journal that heard most tell of the sickness that was eating away at the young man as his star continued to rise within Methodism.

Summerfield returned to England in May, 1820, seven years after having left Liverpool (and his dead mother) behind. England beckoned to Summerfield in numerous ways: it was a place where he considered himself “unknown,” where he could “be instructed in the way of salvation,” and where he could find some inner peace and solace.⁵¹ His travels allowed him a brief time of reflection and relaxation; much needed after having preached more than four hundred sermons in Ireland over the previous eighteen months.⁵² His arrival in England quickly proved that he was anything but unknown and would only continue the torrential pace of preaching, travelling, and sermonizing. From his first evening in England, Summerfield was

⁴⁷ Holland, *Memoirs*, 116.

⁴⁸ Willett, *New Life*, 31.

⁴⁹ Willett, *New Life*, 39.

⁵⁰ Holland, *Memoirs*, 164.

⁵¹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 168–169.

⁵² Holland, *Memoirs*, 170.

asked to supply “a vacant appointment in one of the Methodist chapels, and, thus becoming known, was more or less employed preaching the gospel of the kingdom with great power and acceptance during the whole period of his stay in England.”⁵³ His popularity, in fact, was “too great, not to create envy in little minds” of some of his fellow preachers.⁵⁴

Despite some petty jealousies, Summerfield succeeded abundantly in England and became far more “known” than he ever expected (or, indeed, wanted). For this reason, his hope of using the trip as a chance for recovery of both health and spirit was somewhat dashed. He returned to Ireland in August, his health little improved from when he left for England. Indeed, Holland reports that in October, 1820, Summerfield “was again most alarmingly attacked with the same disorder which brought him to the verge of the grave” the year before. After a few weeks of convalescence, his doctors “advised a sea voyage” as part of his recovery.⁵⁵ This voyage, it made the most sense, should be made right away. The destination: America.

“A Glowing Patina of Memory”

Hair jewelry in America had many of the same components and connotations it had in England. As Helen Sheumaker explains:

For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century white, usually middle-class Americans, hairwork was figuratively love entwined. What has been lost since then is the understanding that was self-evident to many Americans at the time: being made of human hair, hairwork was the person whose hair was used; it embodied the sincerity of those individuals; it demonstrated the emotions shared by the people involved.⁵⁶

These emotions, as they did for English consumers, connected the mourner to the mourned, the wearer to the deceased. The jewelry served as a physical reminder of both the death and life of the individual lost; a demonstration of grief and love in the form of wearable art.

And art it was—in many cases. The finest hair jewelry was handmade for an express purpose. It was crafted with particular individuals in mind: the mourned and the mourner. The object was tied to these individuals, and the loss was made material:

When someone is lost—through death, distance, or estrangement—the everyday objects that formed part of the person’s habitual round take on an extra layer of meaning. A sort of numinous quality can give the material of these things—the cloth, paint, wood, metal, or glass—a glowing patina of memory.⁵⁷

The materiality of the jewelry was important, not only for the long-term physical security of the disembodied portion inside but also for the mourner and wearer. The physical object had significance beyond what it held inside.

⁵³ Willett, *New Life*, 132.

⁵⁴ Holland, *Memoirs*, 171.

⁵⁵ Holland, *Memoirs*, 177.

⁵⁶ Helen Sheumaker, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2007), viii.

⁵⁷ Lutz, *Relics of Death*, 53.

Sheumaker's work on hair jewelry in American history points to the same increase in popularity (and production) that Lutz and others saw in England. This rise in production, however, led to a division of hair jewelry between handmade, personally-crafted works and manufactured, mass-produced objects. The former had a more personal and familiar quality, and what was expected from those in mourning: "Customers expected that hairwork be made by hand and of the hair supplied by the customer. Thus, acceptable hairwork could not be mechanically or mass-produced."⁵⁸

Quality hairwork was always a custom order, with the customer (mostly women) working with a local jeweler to get the pieces made. Sheumaker states that from the 1770s to the 1860s, this more personalized, hands-on approach was how most hair jewelry in the United States was ordered and made. After that time, most Americans purchased hair jewelry through larger manufacturers as the "small artisan workshops" gave way to hairwork factories. These factories churned out hair jewelry more quickly and cheaply than the individual artisans, but they lost the personal connection factor and uniqueness of each piece. Even Sears started selling hair jewelry through its catalogs starting in the 1890s.⁵⁹

The Summerfield hair jewelry certainly comes from a period of hand-crafted work and is, most likely, American-made. It is very delicately and carefully crafted, with great precision and detail. This is most noticeable in the extremely small bow that is tied with the strands of hair within the case. This small bow, which also reminds the viewer of the symbol for infinity, is an example of the fine and delicate work that could only have been done by a skilled and successful craftsman. The attention to detail is also noticeable on the engraved side, where extremely fine work has created a small but wholly readable textual inscription. The case itself, on front and back, is decoratively styled and adds to an extremely impressive overall object of great quality and care.

Like many high-quality examples of eighteenth and nineteenth-century hair jewelry, the Summerfield piece is made from superior materials. Mourning jewelry in England and America at this time was made using gold, silver, copper, glass, precious gems, highlight stones, and other symbols of wealthy adornment. The choice of material was based on what the purchaser could afford; but the pressure to spend more money to create a more expensive treasure in honor of your loved one certainly could make people spend more than they would have for a regular piece of jewelry. There was, in fact, a connection between the materiality of the object and its value:

A lock of hair from the head of some beloved one is often prized above gold or gems, for it is not a mere purchasable gift, but actually a portion of themselves, present with us when they are absent, surviving while they are mouldering in the grave.⁶⁰

This quote comes from an article about hair jewelry in *The Family Friend*

⁵⁸ Sheumaker, *Love Entwined*, 87.

⁵⁹ Sheumaker, *Love Entwined*, 216.

⁶⁰ Lutz, "Dead Still Among Us," 137.

magazine in 1853. If the hair is seen as more valuable than gold or gems, then how can you place it in a cheap locket or gold-colored pendant? It deserves an expensive, hand-crafted, highly-adorned case to properly house the remains. Anything less would be cheap and tacky.

Nearly all of the hair jewelry examples in the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University demonstrate this higher quality approach to hair jewelry. There is an abundance of gold or silver present in nearly each object. In the watch fob, a beautiful red cameo is encased in gold and held together by the woven hair to create a brilliant and beautiful piece of jewelry (Fig. 5). For each of these specimens, an incredible amount of time, effort, detailed work, and money went into their creation.

Not all hair jewelry was so high end and expensive. Sometimes, it is evident, keeping the hair was much more important than what it was kept in. A perfect example of this can be found in the Summerfield collection as well. There are actually two examples of hair jewelry in the collection, not just the one that has been discussed thus far in this article. The second example is far more simplistic and even primitive in its creation (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7—Pocket watch case with lock of John Summerfield’s hair. Image courtesy of Drew University Special Collections, Madison, NJ.

There is also a question of whether or not this is actually an example of *mourning* hair jewelry. There is no indication on the item itself, or in the archival record, as to the history of this piece or when it was created. The text on the interior of the case simply says, “Lock of Hair of the Rev. John Summerfield, A.M.” It does not mention a date or location and does not refer to Summerfield as having recently passed away or his death date. The hair is placed loosely within the casing of a pocket watch, which has had its inner workings removed, replaced solely by strands of hair from one of the most

popular preachers of his day. It is very possible that the lock of hair comes not from the man after he died, but from when he was at the height of his popularity—when he was in America.

“The Modern Whitfield”

On March 17, 1821, John Summerfield and his family landed on the shores of New York. Like Philip Embury, who had come to the colonies in 1766, Summerfield arrived from Ireland and made a significant impact on the history of Methodism in the United States. Summerfield arrived and immediately began his ministerial work in New York, under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Just as in Ireland and England, Summerfield quickly gained an impressive reputation and the crowds followed:

His popularity now became unprecedentedly great; people of all denominations crowded to hear him: it was no uncommon thing for multitudes to surround the church, where he was expected, awaiting the opening of the doors, so that before the time of service, hundreds have had to return disappointed, being unable to gain admittance. And repeatedly these crowds have been so dense, that he had to get to the pulpit through the window.⁶¹

These large crowds not only meant good things for Summerfield, but for the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. As noted by Holland, Summerfield attracted audiences from various religious denominations. And many of those he brought into the Methodist fold. By January, 1822, Summerfield made note that in a single evening of preaching he converted “between twenty and thirty souls” and “added” them to the church.⁶²

It was this popularity (and conversion rate) that marked Summerfield as someone who could help shape and lead the future of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. No matter where he traveled, from Trenton to Philadelphia to Baltimore to Washington, Summerfield’s reputation and popularity preceded him. He was taken aback by the suddenness of his reception: “The attention shown me by all ranks, is more than I can well bear; . . . here, fame has preceded me, and blown a very loud trumpet indeed.” He lamented, though, that these adoring crowds (which grew larger by the city) had such high expectations that they thought him “something more than human” and would be disappointed by his actual preaching and public speaking.⁶³ From everything Holland and Willett gathered and reported, this was certainly not the case. Summerfield’s popularity and adoration seemed to have no end.

While visiting these cities, the crowds were almost incalculable and described by Summerfield and others as “great multitudes,”⁶⁴ “large masses,”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 190.

⁶² Holland, *Memoirs*, 194.

⁶³ Holland, *Memoirs*, 195.

⁶⁴ Holland, *Memoirs*, 195.

⁶⁵ Willett, *New Life*, 229.

and “literally crammed”⁶⁶ with people. The crowds of thousands, even tens of thousands, rivalled any other active preacher in the Church and could only be compared to the greatest of public speakers, as the *Washington City Gazette* did in 1822: “If we are to form an opinion of his merits by his popularity as a preacher, the eagerness to hear him has scarcely been equalled since the days of his pious predecessor, George Whitefield.”⁶⁷ To compare Summerfield to such a towering figure was not done slightly or without thought. Comparisons to Whitefield, Asbury, and even Moses were published in local papers after Summerfield addressed crowds of eager listeners.⁶⁸

His success was not without its reward. A few months after his return to New York from his multi-city speaking tour in April, 1822, Summerfield was ordained Deacon by Bishop William McKendree. The Bishop took Summerfield with him on a trip to Philadelphia in June of that year, a journey that took such a toll on his physical body that he was “taken with a violent hemorrhage of the lungs . . . so severe was the attack, and so reducing the consequent treatment, that he was brought down to the verge of the grave.”⁶⁹ On June 11, with the doctors having given up on him and expecting that it was only a few hours until his demise, Summerfield wrote out his will.

Word of his illness was published in newspapers in Philadelphia and surrounding cities. These reports apparently caused such “intense anxiety” and “public sympathy” throughout the region that one paper claimed to “recollect no instance of the kind . . . in which the danger of one individual has produced so lively a sensation upon the general mind.”⁷⁰

His recovery was slow, with Summerfield eventually being able to return to New York in October, 1822. On his way back to New York, he stopped briefly in New Jersey where he met with several faculty and administrators from Princeton College. The College awarded Summerfield a Master of Arts in honor of his “piety and talents,” calling him a “*virum ingenuum, moribus inculpatum*” (a gentleman defender of morals).⁷¹ Sheepskin in hand, Summerfield headed to New York to be with his family and continue his recovery.

On Christmas Day, 1822, Summerfield (again at the advice of his physicians) boarded a ship for another oceanic voyage to better climes. This time his destination was Marseilles, France, where he would serve as a delegate from the American Bible Society at the anniversary celebration of the Protestant Bible Society of France. He proceeded to Paris after a few months rest in Marseilles, giving a highly regarded speech to the French Bible

⁶⁶ Willett, *New Life*, 234.

⁶⁷ Willett, *New Life*, 236.

⁶⁸ The *Delaware Watchman* called him “the Modern Whitfield” in 1822, using a common misspelling of George Whitefield’s name.

⁶⁹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 209.

⁷⁰ Holland, *Memoirs*, 213.

⁷¹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 221–222.

Society that was “received with the greatest applause” and enjoyment.⁷² From there, he traveled to England in April, 1823, visiting numerous places throughout the land of his birth. His health while in France and England was steady, though not improving. He stayed in England for nearly a year before departing in March, 1824 on a voyage back to New York.

His return to America also signaled a return to his old ways: almost endless preaching, a lot of travel, and continued rising in the ranks of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In May of 1824 he was ordained an Elder in the Church. Though his health had not improved, Summerfield continued to work tirelessly and without respite, “as if indeed fully purposed to die in the field.”⁷³ His travels took him far, from Middlebury to Montreal and Baltimore to Burlington. Nothing, even his failing physical form, could stop Summerfield from preaching and converting.

This constant travel and public work took its toll. By December, 1824, Summerfield was in rather dire straits and was administered a treatment involving mercury that left his mouth very sore and inhibited his speaking to the point where he could only preach once per week. Yet, though his body was weak and the sickness increasing, Summerfield continued to preach steadily into the New Year, 1825. He spent a good deal of time in Baltimore, including his birthday during which he recorded a moment of self-reflection that was highlighted by a prophetic declaration: “January 31st. This is my birth-day. Time strikes a solemn knell this day to me;—it may mean, ‘*this year thou shalt die!*’”⁷⁴

Summerfield’s health continued to decline through the early part of the year. At the same time, his father’s health was also fading. John returned to New York in March, 1825, fully expecting to see his father for the last time. He remained by William’s bedside, caring for his father and awaiting the older man’s death, “little calculating upon the mournful alternative” that the son would die before the father.⁷⁵ A physician friend of the family, visiting to check on his father, saw the deteriorating condition of young John and ordered the man to bedrest. Summerfield went to the house of a friend in the city and stayed abed for about a month before he was feeling up to walking and riding around. Shortly after, in May, 1825, Summerfield made his final public address, at the first ever meeting of the American Tract Society—which he had helped found. The address was, as usual, a success and Summerfield had been invited to dine with distinguished guests of the Society. He declined the invitation, citing his poor health and the fact that his “diet is simply bread and milk” and he feared he would be an “inconvenience” to his host.⁷⁶ A few days later, John Summerfield took to his sickbed for the last time.

⁷² Willett, *New Life*, 241.

⁷³ Willett, *New Life*, 243.

⁷⁴ Holland, *Memoirs*, 313.

⁷⁵ Holland, *Memoirs*, 321.

⁷⁶ Holland, *Memoirs*, 322.

In Heaven and Under Glass

John Summerfield died on June 13, 1825 at twelve minutes past eleven in the morning. He was only 27 years old. His funeral was held the next day, having been prepared in advance at Summerfield's request. To no surprise, the funeral was attended by a large group of people, including church dignitaries and leaders:

It is hardly necessary to say that the greatest interest was manifested,—clergymen of various denominations attending his funeral, and the streets through which the long procession passed greatly crowded. His merits were highly spoken of in the public papers; the press, wherever he was known, was unanimous in its expression.⁷⁷

John Summerfield died as he lived: with a great number of admirers and supporters. His life's work, though short, made an indelible impact on the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.

Two memorials in New York City were made in his honor: the first his tombstone, located at Sand Street Church, which carried a long and "luminous" inscription written by Rev. J. N. Danforth; and the second, a cenotaph at John Street Church, that included an eloquent tribute written by Bishop Joshua Soule. These two monuments served as public sites of mourning for the Rev. John Summerfield; they became popular locations for Methodists to visit in New York. Both monuments make mention of Summerfield's power in the pulpit. From the tombstone: "Upon the lips that moulder beneath this marble, thousands hung in silent wonder: his element was not the breath of fame, but the communion and favour of God."⁷⁸ And from the cenotaph: "The learned and the illiterate attended his ministry with admiration, and felt that his preaching was in the demonstration of the spirit and of power."⁷⁹

John Summerfield was survived by his sisters, brothers, and father. He also left behind thousands of devotees, including one who may have taken a lock of the man's hair when he was alive and placed it within a deconstructed pocket watch. Summerfield's fame did not disappear overnight. His name lived on and his work reverberated in the form of the American Bible Society, the Young Men's Missionary Society, the American Tract Society, and (most significantly) the Methodist Episcopal Church of America.

His memory also lived on in his family: his sister Ellen, who turned from caring for her dying brother to helping her sisters care for their dying father, maybe most of all. William continued to linger near death for several months after John died. He was in and out of consciousness near the end, but his faith never faltered, and he looked towards his next life: "A few nights previous to his departure, his daughter Amelia was awake by his talking aloud in his sleep, as with his beloved son, John . . . Being interrogated on the subject, he replied, John and he had 'much to do together.'"⁸⁰ The father,

⁷⁷ Willett, *New Life*, 251.

⁷⁸ Holland, *Memoirs*, 334.

⁷⁹ Holland, *Memoirs*, 336.

⁸⁰ Holland, *Memoirs*, 18–19.

like his son who dreamed of seeing his mother in heaven, foresaw their reunion in the afterlife. Two days later, William left this earth to reunite with his wife and son.

The two men were reunited both in heaven and under glass. After William's death, his daughters cut a lock of his hair and, along with a "sentimental cut" taken earlier from their brother's head, had them fashioned into a small, but beautiful piece of mourning jewelry. The hair of father and son was intertwined and woven into a single unit, tucked neatly inside a silver case, and inscribed on the back with the death dates and ages of both men. The locket was put on a chain and worn in memory of both father and son. The man who wished for greatness in his child, and the son who delivered it.