

## THE REVEREND SAMUEL COOPER SCOTT AND HIS DIARY

by S. Harrison, B.A.

Samuel Cooper Scott, M.A., was Vicar of the church and parish of St. John the Baptist, Chester, from 1875 until his retirement in 1915. During his incumbency he kept a diary which is now with the parish records at the Cheshire Record Office.<sup>1</sup> The diary was given to St. John's parish in 1976 by Scott's daughter in law, Mrs. Edith M. Scott, and was deposited in the Cheshire Record Office in 1977 by the Rev. Donald Ferriday, Rector of Chester Team Parish. This remarkable document contains information relating to the affairs of the church and parish, together with observations upon local, national and international events. The diary is contained in a bound volume, in good condition, labelled 'St. John the Baptist Chester, 1876 Parish Records'. The volume is unpaginated and also contains various printed notices, newspaper cuttings, photographs and historical memoranda. It is an important source both for the history of the Church in late Victorian and Edwardian Chester and for the life of 'one of the most popular vicars who ever ministered in Chester'.<sup>2</sup>

The frequency and length of Scott's entries vary considerably. He rarely made more than three entries during a single month and often only one or two. Some entries are dated precisely, others by month only. Many of the entries were written retrospectively, and this, together with the inclusion of historical notes and other memoranda, gives the diary the appearance of a commonplace book rather than a straightforward journal of events.<sup>3</sup> Scott used much of the information recorded in the diary between 1875 and 1892 in compiling his lecture on the history of St. John's church and parish relating to that period.

Scott was born on 12 March 1838 at Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire, into a distinguished ecclesiastical family. His father, John Scott (1809-65) was Vicar of St. Mary's, Hull, a living previously held by his grandfather, John Scott (1777-1834).<sup>4</sup> His great grandfather was the biblical commentator, Thomas Scott (1747-1821), a Lincolnshire farmer's son who broke with his family's agricultural background.<sup>5</sup> Scott's three brothers also followed careers in the Church. The eldest, John Scott (1836-1906), held curacies at Kendal and Hornsey before succeeding his

<sup>1</sup> Cheshire R.O., P51/27/1.

<sup>2</sup> *Chester Chronicle*, 18 August 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Scott's punctuation is retained in the extracts.

<sup>4</sup> *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, part II, vol. V., 1953, p. 447.

<sup>5</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 51, pp. 73-75.

father as Vicar of St. Mary's, Hull, in 1865;<sup>6</sup> Charles Percy Scott (1847-1927) was Bishop of North China from 1880 until 1913;<sup>7</sup> and Thomas Errington Scott (d. 1930) was curate of St. John the Baptist, Chester, from 1875 until his appointment as Vicar of St. Paul's, Boughton, near Chester, in 1877.<sup>8</sup> The Scott brothers were cousins of Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811-78), the distinguished architect of the Gothic Revival, who was responsible for the restoration of Chester Cathedral between 1868 and 1876.<sup>9</sup>

Scott was educated at a private school in Derby and spent the years 1854 to 1863 as a clerk in Smith's Bank in Derby, before his admission as a pensioner to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1863. He was ordained deacon at Lincoln in 1866 and priest at Ely in 1867. His first ecclesiastical appointment was to the curacy of St. Peter and St. Paul, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, from 1866 to 1869. He subsequently held curacies at St. James, Derby, from 1869 to 1871, and St. George's, Bloomsbury, from 1871 to 1874, in which year he was appointed to the living of St. Peter's, Battersea.<sup>10</sup> Scott first visited Chester in September 1868 as the guest of Dean John Saul Howson (1816-85), who had been Scott's vicar at Wisbech. The Norman church of St. John the Baptist in Vicar's Lane left a deep impression upon him.<sup>11</sup> Seven years later, following the death of the Rev. William Buxton Marsden, vicar since 1838, Scott was presented to the living of St. John the Baptist by the Duke of Westminster. His induction took place in July, in August he read himself in, and on 1 November he took up residence in St. John's Vicarage, also described as the Rectory, in Vicar's Lane. On 22 September he married Susannah Jane Leggett at Rushmere, Ipswich.

Scott was under no illusions as to the challenge presented by his large, populous parish. His concerns were expressed in a printed letter to his congregation and parishioners, dated 1 January 1876, a copy of which is pasted into the diary. According to his estimates the parish contained between 1,700 and 1,800 houses and a total population of nearly 9,000. The church had seats for 800 worshippers, but the most convenient sittings were let. Moreover the church was inconveniently situated at one end of the parish, which extended as far north as the General Railway Station, and the inhabitants of the most distant parts were further divided from the church by the canal. In that portion of the parish between the canal and the railway station and between Frodsham Street and the leadworks there resided some 3,000 people, and there was a pressing need for a mission school or chapel and an additional curate to minister to their requirements.

Scott's diary shows that the problems increased during his incumbency, largely owing to social and economic factors beyond his control. An especially worrying and significant trend was the withdrawal of wealthier parishioners from the parish

<sup>6</sup> *Who Was Who 1897-1916*, 1920, p. 635.

<sup>7</sup> *Who Was Who 1916-1928*, 1947, p. 940.

<sup>8</sup> *Who Was Who 1929-1940*, 1947, p. 1209.

<sup>9</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 51, pp. 19-23.

<sup>10</sup> *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, part II, vol. V, p. 447.

<sup>11</sup> S. Cooper Scott, *Lectures on the History of St. John Baptist Church and Parish in the City of Chester*, 1892, p. 3.

to the suburbs, and the consequent conversion of large private residences into shops, offices, clubs and warehouses. This development had two important consequences: it led to a continuous decline in the income of the living and deprived the parish of people with the means and the leisure to assist in the work of the church.

A further challenge was presented by the social composition of the parish. The arrival of the railways in Chester during the 1840s, together with industrial growth and an influx of Irish immigrants following the potato famine of 1845-46, resulted in a marked increase in the city's working class population, many of whom resided in St. John's parish, especially in the area north of the canal and the insanitary courts and alleys on either side of Foregate Street and Boughton. Ever since the religious census of 1851 the Church of England had been particularly concerned at the apparent indifference to established religion amongst the new urban masses and Scott's parish illustrates the problem in microcosm. Scott was aware that many of his parishioners originated from backgrounds lacking a tradition of church attendance, and they were kept away from the church by the system of pew renting. As Scott wrote in 1879:

The pew holders are many of them no longer Parishioners, while the poorer inhabitants of the Parish cannot pay pew rents, and are kept out of the Parish Church by those who can afford them.

There is no evidence in the diary of specific schemes to attract the working people of St. John's parish. Scott's solution was to create a separate parish of St. Barnabas to serve the population north of the canal. However, the parsimony of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who refused to endow a separate parish, prevented its realisation.

The extracts from the diary which follow have been selected primarily to illustrate Scott's preoccupations and concerns, but they also reflect something of his character, as well as providing commentaries upon events of the period. Many of his entries relate to routine matters such as ecclesiastical appointments and resignations, confirmations, church bazaars, and local weather conditions. Most of these have been omitted, although some of his descriptions of the weather of the late nineteenth century are particularly vivid and have therefore been included.

The first decade of Scott's incumbency was eventful in the history of the parish and this is reflected in the large proportion of entries relating to parochial affairs. The first event of major importance was the mission to all the Chester churches in January 1877 led by the Rev. Canon Walsham How, Rector of Whittington, Shropshire, and the Rev. Rowland Ellis, Vicar of Mold:

During the time preceding the Mission the visitors had made 3 complete visitations of the Parish and the Clergy had held 31 Cottage meetings in the various courts and streets of the Parish, and had services in the room attached to the Angel Hotel in Francis Street which was crowded every evening . . . In addition to the regular services there were addresses to Servants, mothers of families, men at different times, and also addresses at the Station, the Lead Works, Foundries and Shoe factory.

On 20 May 1877 a confirmation was held at St. John's for seventy seven candidates from three parishes who came forward following the mission.

On 5 April 1877 the foundation stone of the mission chapel of St. Barnabas in the Railway Fields was laid by Bishop William Jacobson. The chapel was completed in October and the Rev. Wilfred Sparling was appointed curate in charge. The official opening took place on St. Luke's Day, 18 October:

The Mission Church was opened by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese. The sermon was preached by the Venerable Archdeacon Darby. The Duke of Westminster was present. At the opening services about £60 was collected towards the payment of the debt which amounted to £400. £300 was borrowed from Mrs. Drury at 4 Per Cent.

The winter of 1878-79 brought a severe frost which lasted for almost two months and caused much distress to the poorer inhabitants of Scott's parish:

During the first week in December a frost set in which lasted with the exception of a few days until 2nd February 1879. On Xmas Day the river was covered with skaters and sliders. Great distress prevailed especially among those who [were] working in the fields, or in the building trades. The Canal population suffered severely being fast frozen for 7 weeks.

In March 1879 the Ecclesiastical Commissioners agreed to a diversion of the boundary between the parishes of St. John the Baptist and St. Paul's, Boughton. This involved the transfer to St. Paul's of a portion of St. John's parish lying beyond Hoole Lane canal bridge, containing 123 houses. In his entry for April 1879 Scott lists all the streets and courts in his parish, noting the numbers of houses in each. There were 111 streets and courts containing 1,767 houses of which 583 lay beyond the canal, attached to St. Barnabas' chapel. His comments upon the figures conclude with an anxious reflection:

The Parish of St. John's is gradually becoming, in its principal streets, a Parish of Shops and Offices. Old family houses are every year left by their residents, and are turned into places of business, so that the population of the parish is likely to become of a different character than hitherto; the income of the Church for all purposes is likely to be affected by this, and it becomes a question how long the Church can be satisfactorily continued as a pew rented church.

Chester was no exception to a national trend of the late nineteenth century, the removal of the middle classes to the suburbs.

On 2 December 1880 there occurred forewarnings of a catastrophe:

Several large stones fell from near the top of the S.W. Buttress of the Tower, this greatly alarmed the residents near, who were awakened by the crash, which took place in the middle of the night.

The structure of the tower was further weakened by a spell of severe frost:

Frost set in, of extraordinary severity, it came on gradually, and about the 14th [December 1880] reached its severest point, 2 degrees below Zero: the River was frozen over to Eaton . . . In London and many other parts a snow-storm took place more severe than any within memory. Frost lasted until January 27.



On the night of 14 April 1881 the tower collapsed:

10 P.M. The Tower fell with a fearful crashing, rushing sound, the foot of the buttress N.N.E. had crumbled away alarmingly, and the buttress gradually pulled the side of the Tower out; dense clouds of dust and powdered mortar filled the air; at this time the roof remained and part of the belfry windows on the north and east sides, but at 4 o'clock on Good Friday morning [15 April] the roof slid from its place, and fell upon the heap of ruins . . . the Porch was crushed, and the rubbish poured through the inner archway of it into the passage leading from it to the vestibule; the roof of this passage was also broken . . . For a few days no one dared to approach the Tower.

The church reopened for worship on 19 June 1881, but the repairs and reconstruction took several years and involved the parish in considerable expense.<sup>12</sup>

On 29 December 1884, a meeting of pewholders and parishioners was held to consider whether St. John's should be made a free and unappropriated living:

The Vicar announced that owing to the many losses the Parish had sustained from the removal of former residents into the Country the Pews were many of them unlet, and that the Income of the living was suffering seriously. A Committee was appointed to enquire into the condition of the Parish, and to ascertain the feelings of the People on the subject, also to ascertain what amount of guarantee fund could be raised to meet deficiencies which might arise in the offertories for the Clergy Fund.

In March 1885 the committee decided not to recommend that the church be made free and unappropriated as the guarantee fund would not be sufficient to compensate for the abolition of pew rents. The problem remained unsolved.

On New Year's Day 1885 the Dee Bridge tolls were removed. Scott notes that the cost of this measure was £35,000 of which the Duke of Westminster contributed £10,000 and the city £15,000. The remainder was subscribed by 'Citizens and those interested in the matter'. The main events of the day were as follows:

A procession of Volunteers, Mayor and Corporation, Fire Brigade, Duke of Westminster and party, etc etc went from one bridge to the other, and removed the gates, planted trees, etc., etc.

The Mayor gave a Tea Party to all the old people over 60 in the various school rooms in the City, about 200 came to S. John's Schools.

The Tea was followed by an entertainment.

On 15 December 1885 Scott lost an old friend, Dean Howson, who died at Bournemouth following a long illness:

The Dean was noted for his many publications and his energetic and untiring work in connection with many useful organizations. He collected and expended about 100,000£ on Chester Cathedral during the 19 years in which he filled the office of Dean . . . The Dean had remained in Chester to Nov. 26 in order that he might record his vote in favour of the Conservative Candidate, which he did on his way to the station.

1886 was a year of political crisis. Gladstone was determined to pass an Irish Home Rule Bill which split the Liberal party asunder and resulted in almost two

<sup>12</sup> A detailed account of the collapse of the tower and the subsequent repairs and reconstruction is given by Scott in his *Lectures*, pp. 255-275.

decades of Conservative political domination. At the Mayor of Chester's banquet on 12 January, the Duke of Westminster, hitherto a strong supporter of Gladstone, delivered a sensational speech:<sup>13</sup>

. . . against making any concessions to Irish agitators. It was regarded as an intimation to Liberal leaders that he could not go with them much further. He also exposed 'Irwell' the late Candidate for Cheshire as a professed money lender.

In a letter to his mother, dated 16 January 1886, Scott provides more details of this event:

I went to the Mayor's Banquet quite the finest feast etc I was ever present at. The Duke came in his ribbon and diamond star and looked very Dukey indeed. I heard him make, what I felt was to be an historic speech, upon Ireland, and the land question in England: he was down upon the agitation with a vengeance. It was a kind of hint to Gladstone and Co. to mind their eye . . . there was a large mixed audience of about 150 or so. One leading radical walked out of room, I am told, after the speech was done. I hear the Times has taken it up. It made a great sensation among those that heard it, breathless silence, broken by tumultuous cheers from Conservative benches. I was deeply interested in it.

The following week, Chester was visited by the Prince of Wales and his two sons, who stayed at Eaton before journeying to Liverpool for the opening of the Mersey railway tunnel. The absence of Princess Alexandra, together with the Prince's hurried departure, occasioned some disappointment as Scott remarks in the letter to his mother:

After spending heaps of money in the City, and at Eaton we are told that the Princess is not coming after all and the Prince has to return to London on Wednesday for the opening of Parliament.

Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee year of 1887 began with a series of cold spells and on 20 May a great gale swept through the city. June however, brought a sudden change with '3 weeks splendid summer weather', including Jubilee day, 21 June, which Scott describes briefly:

Jubilee observed. 6,000 children taken to Cathedral, and had Tea afterwards, 2,000 old people fed, fire on Roodeye, Volunteer parade. Stone of new Reading room in S. John's St. was laid etc. etc.

During the Winter Assizes of January 1889 Scott was involved in an embarrassing episode. The Dean of Chester had refused to permit the county sheriff's chaplain to preach the Assize sermon in the Cathedral, which greatly offended the sheriff and his entourage:

On Saturday Evening at 11 P.M. a deputation consisting of the Under Sheriff, the deputy Under Sheriff, and the Sheriff's Chaplain waited upon the Vicar of St. John's to ask whether he would permit the Sheriff's chaplain to preach at S. John's on the following day, in which case the Judges would attend

<sup>13</sup> An account of the speech and its political repercussions is given in G. Huxley, *Victorian Duke*, 1967, pp. 160-165.

Divine Service at S. John's, and would continue to do so in the future. The Vicar pointed out to the Deputation the inconvenience, and possible scandal which would arise, if he was to accede to their request, which if they pressed, he would feel it his duty to refuse; he also pointed out to them the difficult position in which any of the City Clergy would be placed were the request to be made to them. He further urged that on this occasion the better plan would be for the Judges to attend the Cathedral as usual in the hope that such a difficulty would not occur again.

Scott's judicious diplomacy was entirely successful.

1890-91 was another exceptionally severe winter:

Christmas Day and Bank Holiday with the other days of the week, the most dreary, churches cold, and dark and sunless as could be. Frost returned [1891] the river was again frozen over, and a few skaters ventured upon it some accidents, but none fatal.

The spring tides carried off the ice but on January 18 the frost returned in greater intensity than ever and the river was again frozen. This winter colder and frost longer than any since 1880-81 which was of much the same character. We have no Tower left to fall however! ! ! The severe weather was felt all over the continent of Europe, and especially in the South.

The longest and most severe frost which has been for many years: it is known as the long frost: beginning at the end of November it continued until the 3rd week in January. The Soup Kitchen was open for 6 weeks and for several weeks 1,000 quarts a day were sold.<sup>14</sup>

In November 1891 Scott again became involved in ecclesiastical politics owing to the absence of Bishop Francis Jayne from Chester on 'Mayor's Sunday':

This gave great offence to the Mayor [Charles Brown] and his friends, and gave rise to angry articles in the newspapers.

Application was made to the Vicar of S. John's to know whether, if it was desired, he would receive the Mayor and Corporation at S. John's but he made it clearly understood that as it was a question of disagreement with the Cathedral authorities, he would not be able to comply with such a request if made. In the end the Corporation did not attend Service at all.

In 1892 Scott's lectures on the history of the church and parish of St. John the Baptist, originally delivered at the Grosvenor Museum during the winter of 1890-91, were published. Opinions of the book were mainly favourable:

The History of the Church was well and favourably received by The Guardian, Church Times, Church Bells, Athenaeum, Spectator, Antiquary; shortly and not so favourably by the Times and Saturday Review. It paid all expenses by the end of the year of publication, the large paper copies became so scarce, that the price rose from 15/- to 30/- a copy.

The lectures are the most detailed account of the history of the church and parish published to date.

In 1895 Scott compiled a statement of the affairs of his parish for the information of his patron, the Duke of Westminster, in which he reviewed and reflected upon

<sup>14</sup>The Chester Poor Relief Committee, which later provided the Soup Kitchen, was established in 1842. Its records are held by the Chester City Record Office (Refs. CCF/28 and CR 164/234-236).

the developments and changes of the previous twenty years. A draft of this statement is contained in the parish records.<sup>15</sup> It complements the diary and provides an insight into the social structure of the parish and the problems which Scott faced.

By 1895 the population of the parish had declined to an estimated 8,325, partly owing to the boundary alteration of 1879, but also to the fact that many of the local tradespeople, who formerly lived over their business premises, had moved out of the area. Gentlemen's houses had been converted to other uses. Between 1875 and 1895, 101 houses had been destroyed and 170 built. Those destroyed were mainly of poor quality; those built were principally working men's houses of between three and five shillings rent per week and 'as a rule very good dwellings'. The total number of houses in 1895 was between 1,900 and 2,000, of which 62 were public houses, hotels or refreshment places and 224 places of business with no residents. Very few of the private residences were rated at more than £20 a year and a large proportion of the houses were rated at less than £10 a year.

The nature of the population varied considerably. In the St. Barnabas district, comprising 600 houses beyond the canal, Scott found 'respectable working people. Railwaymen, artizans and a good labouring class'. However, in the courts and alleys of Boughton and Foregate Street he observed a far more degraded, degenerate populace, despite a marked improvement in the sanitary condition of the area during the previous decade, owing to the removal of open ash pits and other nuisances. Where there had once been 'respectable working people' there was now a 'distinctly lower class, some very degraded or drunken: in the better streets private families have given place to lodging housekeepers, the occupants are constantly changing and are difficult to get at, some going daily to Liverpool and others being at business and going away for what is called "week end", Saturday to Monday'. Altogether it was a 'very low neighbourhood'.

The church was fairly well attended and the offertories and subscriptions were sufficient to defray expenses, but many of the congregation now came from outside the parish and 'when they are gone a great change must be expected as there are none to take their place'. Also, the total income of the living was declining sharply. Between 1876 and 1880 the average annual income was £440, between 1890 and 1894, £340 and in 1895 it fell to £314. Scott perceived three main reasons for this decline: decreasing fees, mainly owing to the removal of wealthy families; the fall in pew rents; and a drop in the value of the tithe.

In one respect matters had improved. The parochial charities, previously in a state of great confusion with money being distributed indiscriminately, were now administered under a new scheme whereby the trustees were enabled to apply the charities in a number of ways; for example, by supporting a nurse for the sick, fitting out emigrants and persons for service or subscribing to convalescent homes and clothing clubs.

<sup>15</sup> Cheshire R.O., P51/11/18.

In the winter of 1895 there was considerable distress among the poor, necessitating much hard work by the voluntary authorities in Chester. Scott's description of this winter is one of his most vivid and detailed:

A terrible winter, soon after Xmas the cold weather set in, violent storms of wind and snow were succeeded by severe frost accompanied at first by bitter eastwinds; the frost continued until the last week in February; for a fortnight the River was fast frozen from Farndon to Connah's Quay; the Canals were frozen to the bottom and could not be broken up when the thaw came; for more than a fortnight after the thaw began, the water pipes in the streets remained unfrozen. This severe frost was prevalent over the whole of Europe, in England over 40 degrees of frost was registered on several occasions. The distress among the people was very great, and relief was given in various ways. About 2,300 relief tickets, soup, coal, tea, bread, given and were issued in St. John's Parish. The Soup Kitchen was opened January 8, and remained open until March 9 a much longer time, than on any previous occasion: on and after February 13 Bread was given with the Soup, a 1 lb ticket for each quart: up to March 4, 61,250 quarts were distributed of which 29,035 or nearly half were by tickets; the ordinary boilers were supplemented by 2 portable ones; so that the quantity produced was raised from 1,200 to 2,000 quarts per day, the greatest number in one day was 2,025. 4,674 Coal tickets, 1 cwt were distributed from the Town Hall by means of the Clergy and Ministers (12 Clergy 13 Ministers 2 Roman Catholics 1 City Missionary). A great deal of private charity was given at the same time, so it is not possible to estimate the amount contributed. The Poor relief Committee received about £500 at the Town Hall, while £125 was spent in soup tickets by the subscribers.

During the summer of 1895, political events attracted Scott's attention. At the general election on 10 July the Conservatives, led by the Marquess of Salisbury, were returned to power, a result which met with Scott's approval:

The elections were quietly and rapidly conducted and resulted in a return of 153 majority for the Conservative and Unionist Party. The Country was guided by the Politics of *common sense* on this occasion.

In August Scott attended a meeting held at Chester Town Hall to protest against Turkish atrocities in Armenia and the treatment of Armenian Christians. The meeting was summoned and chaired by the Duke of Westminster, and the resolution was moved by W. E. Gladstone:

Admission was by ticket, and as only 600 were issued, the difficulty of obtaining admission was very great: the doors were surrounded by people an hour before the opening time, Mr. Gladstone spoke for an hour and was well heard: the enthusiasm was great and such as is seldom seen in Chester which is not an enthusiastic place. There were 50 reporters, from all parts of the Country.

1896 brought Scott a rare honour. On 14 November he was offered and accepted the position of honorary canon of Chester Cathedral. The historical significance of the appointment did not escape him:

There had been no connection between St. John's and the Cathedral since 1558 when the Dean of the dissolved College of St. John's Richard Walker

was made Dean of Chester . . . Three of the Canons of the old College of St. John's had been admitted Canons of the new foundation of Henry VIII between the years 1541 and 1547.

1897 was Diamond Jubilee year:

This year being the 60th of the Queen's reign the air was full of schemes to do honour to the occasion; a good deal of money changed hands this year to very little purpose.

As a prelude to the Jubilee celebrations, the Prince and Princess of Wales visited Chester on 8 May and were enthusiastically received:

The streets were well decorated with flags and the rows thronged with people: the party drove to the Town Hall in front of which platforms were erected, an address was presented by the Mayor B. C. Roberts, Esq. The Duke drove in a carriage with the Princess drawn by two beautiful white horses. The Prince was in a carriage with the Duchess and Princess Victoria, drawn by 4 greys with postilions, they arrived at 6 o'clock in bright cold sunshine, spent Sunday at Eaton, drove on Monday to Hawarden to lunch with Mr. Gladstone, from thence back to London by special train.

The Jubilee, climax of the Victorian era, was celebrated appropriately in brilliant hot sunshine:

The 60th anniversary of the accession of Queen Victoria, the Diamond Jubilee as it was called was observed with extraordinary enthusiasm, a special service and hymn composed for the occasion were used in all the Churches, and the national anthem was sung after the service. On Tuesday, 22 June, the Queen went to St. Pauls to a Thanksgiving Service . . . In Chester the old people over 60, and the school children were entertained. At St. John's nearly 900 children attending the day and Sunday schools were treated. Heat intense.

In November electric light was installed in Vicar's Lane, almost a year after its introduction in Chester. It was a welcome improvement:

Contrast its condition with that of 1875, a narrow wind[ing] lane, about 15 feet wide, high walls on either side, a bar at end near St. John's Rectory, dark and dangerous at night, the resort of roughs, etc.

1899 began with violent winds and severe flooding in Chester:

The early part of the month [January] was marked by extraordinary gales of wind which continued for some time, and caused great destruction of property. The waves swept away the Holyhead line near Penmaenmawr, and a luggage train ran into the sea. After heavy rains the highest flood ever known on the Dee took place; there were no tides but the fresh water covered the whole country from Heron Bridge to Chester and flooded over the embankment of the meadows opposite Deva Terrace in a torrent, like the weir. The waters rose and covered the front of the houses in Deva Terrace, so that access was only possible further back: the Baths were swept away and lodged on the top of the causeway, and many landing stages, barges, steam launch covered docks etc. were carried over the weir and out to sea: for six days and nights the water poured in torrents over the weir before the river fell to anything like its ordinary height.



On 15 October 1899 the second Boer war began, a war of length and bitterness. Scott followed its course with great concern and his diary reflects much of the public anxiety of the time. This was how he viewed the prospects at the start of the war:

Many English people think the conflict will be sharp and short others that it will be sharp but prolonged. The Boers have apparently been storing arms and ammunition for years with the intention of declaring their independence. They are helped by many skilled European officers, French, German and others. History will tell us in time what the end was of this bitter conflict.

1899 ended in an atmosphere of gloom. On 22 December Hugh Lupus, first Duke of Westminster, died at St. Giles, Dorset, while visiting the Countess of Shaftesbury. Scott paid tribute to his late patron:

His death . . . caused inexpressible grief and dismay in Chester: as it is impossible to describe what this terrible loss means for Chester and St. John's Parish, I shall only record it and add that for nearly 25 years I have enjoyed the generous confidence and liberality of one of the best of men and perhaps the best of noblemen that the world has seen: his death is a cloud over my life and must remain in some degrees to remind me of the moral and material help he has always given in the gracious and unstinting way he knew how to bestow.

On 29 January 1900 a service was held at Chester Cathedral for a troop of volunteer yeomanry before their departure for Cape Colony under the command of Lord Arthur Grosvenor:

These Volunteers included many of our young men, of all classes. Sons of tradesmen and Professional men in the city and neighbourhood . . . The Mayor and Bishop said farewell to the Volunteers in Market Square at 9 a.m., they marched through the City accompanied by the artillery and other Volunteers and took train for Liverpool when they embarked for S. Africa, a scene of great enthusiasm.

During the next few months Scott followed the progress of the war with keen interest. On 18 May news of the relief of Mafeking reached Chester, which joined in the national celebrations:

The streets of Chester were impassable, at the Cross lantern slides of the Queen, Lord Roberts, Baden-Powell etc., were shown in the Rows, which were packed, as well as the streets below with cheering multitudes, waving flags, handkerchiefs, etc. The Relief of Mafeking had been long expected, and the delay had caused a feeling of anxiety which became more intense every day: there was a personal feeling of joy at the news in every man woman and child in the country, and the colonies were not behind us in the expression of it.

In June Scott's attention switched to China, where a serious outbreak of anti foreign violence led by the Society of Harmonious Fists or Boxers threatened the safety of European residents and missionaries, amongst whom was Scott's brother, Bishop C. P. Scott. Rumours of massacres of Europeans together with a lack of positive news from China created an atmosphere of intense anxiety:

The state of things on June 18 was terrible, and we expected to hear of the massacre of all Europeans at Peking, the soldiers joined the rebels, the Government preferring a revolution to the continuance of foreign intervention . . . Legations at Peking abandoned by allied forces at Taku and Tientsin, unable to get through the hosts of rebels and soldiers. 200,000 massed on way to Peking, Railway destroyed, roads and country flooded. Report reached us that all foreigners who had taken refuge in the British Legation and had defended it while food and ammunition lasted were massacred, and that not a foreigner remained alive in Peking. For 3 months we were left in uncertainty.

However, August brought news of the relief of the Peking legations:

Allied forces . . . found little resistance after first conflict with enemy outside Tientsin. Reached Peking about August 15, and found the People active in the legations but they could scarcely have held out a day longer, the whole power of the enemy had been launched against them, but the guards sent to protect them in May fought splendidly, excitement intense.

Scott's brother survived the siege. He visited Chester on 4 November and gave thanks for his preservation.

On 22 September 1900 Scott and his wife celebrated their silver wedding anniversary and were presented by the congregation with a cheque for £200, an illuminated address and a silver tray and tea service. The address, which Scott reproduces in his diary, pays tribute to his personal qualities and his devotion to the parish:

The constant and thoughtful attention which you have ever bestowed upon the affairs of the Parish, your earnest and unselfish ministry amongst us, your diligent and faithful visitation of the sick and Poor will long be gratefully remembered. The affectionate care which you have displayed for the fabric of our Venerable Church, and the light you have thrown upon its history will prove of inestimable value to all future generations.

The 19th century ended with a service in the Town Hall Square on 31 December to request the blessing of the Almighty upon the new century:

The Mayor made a speech, Prayers were offered by the Rev. F. J. Howson (Chaplain), Hymns sung by the people, accompanied by a Band, and the Blessing was given by the Bishop: The conduct of the people was very orderly.

On 22 January 1901 Queen Victoria died. Scott recorded the fact without comment in the diary, and described the proclamation of King Edward VII in the Town Hall Square three days later, and the 'great memorial service' held in the Cathedral on 2 February.

In May 1901 the second Duke of Westminster and the Duchess commemorated their marriage and the Duke's coming of age by providing a lavish entertainment for the people of Chester, re emphasising the links between the city and the Grosvenor family. A garden party at Eaton Hall on 22 May was followed by popular entertainments on the following day:

6 to 7,000 children attending Elementary Schools entertained on the Roodeye, Tea, Sports, Dancing, Swings, round-a-bouts, etc. etc. A Tenantry Ball in the evening at Eaton. 24 [May] all Chester Tenantry entertained at Eaton Dinner, Tea etc. Weather splendid.

In June 1902 the Peace of Vereeniging ended the war in South Africa, an occasion for great rejoicing in Chester:

1st Sunday after Trinity, at the Evening Service the buzzer at Messrs. Frosts' Mill [Steam Mill Street] was heard announcing that Peace had been concluded . . . the excitement was great, and a thanksgiving was used after Service, the streets were crowded with excited multitudes, and the bells of the Churches were rung, flags displayed etc.

At the request of the king services of Thanksgiving were held in all the Churches.

The national celebrations were swiftly followed by anxiety about the sudden illness of Edward VII, just two days before the proposed coronation day, 26 June:

The day . . . was spent in holding special Services of Intercession for the recovery of the King in all the Churches. No service was drawn up but each Incumbent was requested to provide as he judged best.

The postponed coronation took place on 9 August:

The Service appointed for use at the Coronation was held in St. John's Church on Sunday 11th after Trinity. The Sermon was preached by the Bishop of Chester from Hezekiah's writing after he had recovered from his sickness, and reference was made to the Letter which the King addressed to his people on the eve of his Coronation.

During the autumn of 1902 Scott took a close interest in the passage of A. J. Balfour's Education Bill, which abolished the school boards created by the Act of 1870, and conferred responsibility for education upon the county and county borough councils. He strongly supported this important reform:

The bill was bitterly opposed by dissenters, and it was used by the Radical party as a cry by which it was hoped the Liberal party might be reunited, a fresh attack on the Church with a view to disestablishment was threatened: the intelligence of the country was in favour of the Bill. The Vicar wrote a pamphlet headed 'It is well with the Child' showing the advantages of the bill for the children of the country, this was adopted and published by the National Society.

On 21 and 22 June 1904 a meeting of former assistant clergy of St. John's took place at the rectory. Those present included vicars and curates from Upton, Stretton, Disley, Ince, Hyde, Middlewich and Latchford as well as the churches of St. Oswald's and St. Michael's, Chester:

The Vicar was presented with a Silver Inkstand by the present and former assistant Clergy, and a copy of Browning's poems was given to Mrs. Scott. The inkstand had the following inscription:

'Presented to the Rev. Canon Cooper Scott Vicar of St. John Baptist Chester with grateful affection from his former Curates' . . .

A very happy meeting for which we thanked God and took courage.

In March 1908 Scott's elder son, Charles Wilfred, curate of Portsea in Hampshire, offered himself for missionary work in China. On Sunday 17 January 1909 before leaving for China, where he was to join his uncle, Bishop C. P. Scott, he preached at St. John's:

There was a large gathering of the Associates of the Mission, and the offerings were given to the Funds of the Mission. He was a great favourite in Chester, and the people were very sorry to lose him from England.

He sailed from Southampton on 19 January. The same evening his mother, Susannah Jane, died after a long illness. Her death was not only a personal blow to Scott but also a great loss to the parish:

It is difficult to give any just account of this remarkable woman . . . She was a most gracious, wise, and thoughtful woman, noted for devotion to duty, clearness of judgement, strong common sense, great love of justice, untiring industry, great sweetness and kindness of disposition and a simple and unobtrusive nature, she was much beloved by the people. . . . Her influence in the Parish and City was unbounded, and it will be many years before she will be forgotten in S. John's Parish, where she had been the life of every good work.

On 22 September a memorial tablet to Mrs. Scott was dedicated at a special service:

The Bishop gave an address, touching on the justice, and strength of character for fairness and firmness, which showed themselves in her life and work.

The highlight of the summer of 1910 was the Chester Pageant, held in the grounds of Eaton Hall from 18 to 23 July:

It was a magnificent success, and attracted multitudes of people: there were about 3,000 performers, and the children's dances were especially attractive: the proceeds after paying expenses, which were very heavy, were about £500.

During 1911 Welsh disestablishment aroused Scott's concern. A royal commission in 1906 reported that seventy four per cent of Welsh Protestant church members were nonconformists. The Liberal government introduced a bill to disestablish the Church in Wales, which was passed in 1914 after two rejections by the House of Lords.<sup>16</sup> On 2 November 1911 protest meetings were held in Chester. Scott was vehemently opposed to disestablishment for the following reasons:

We should endeavour not only to defend the interests of the Church (which we believe to be also those of the people), but to defend any Government (urged on by a few unreasonable supporters) from the commission of an Act which would, by a very large number of citizens, be regarded as a wrong, embittering and dividing, rather than healing and uniting Christian communities. The Disestablishment of the Church would mean that the nation, as a nation, could no longer make public recognition of religion. Thoughtful people cannot contemplate this result without serious concern. The proposals

<sup>16</sup> S. H. Steinberg and I. H. Evans, *Steinberg's Dictionary of British History*, 1970, p. 399.

made in the scheme for the Disestablishment of the Church show too much of the spirit that led men into measures of harshness in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which all right-minded people now heartily deplore.

On 1 March 1912 the five week coal miners' strike began:

Many iron cotton and other works were closed for want of coal and the distress amongst workers was very great, large sums were contributed for the relief of those who were thrown out of work: the railway companies took off  $\frac{1}{2}$  their trains, and the traffic was disorganized, quick trains stopping at many stations. The price of coal rose to between £2 and £3 a ton, and great distress was felt from this. Some £11,000,000 was the calculated loss to workers, and much trade was diverted from the country . . . A disastrous strike, and unsatisfactory to all concerned.

During 1912 construction of the hydro electric power works on the River Dee began on the site of the former Dee mills. This project was viewed with scepticism in some quarters:

Three turbines were provided in the bed of the river just below the Old Bridges, the work was adversely criticized by some engineers its success being considered doubtful.

However, the works were successfully completed and officially opened on 20 October 1913:

The Hydro electric works on the Dee were opened by the Mayor who went in state with Corporation. The speeches took place within the building, and when the sluice gates were opened the water passed through the turbines, and came out in a fairly tumultuous stream below.

A final protest against the Welsh Disestablishment Bill took place in September 1913:

Demonstration of Church people in Chester against the Welsh Church Bill. The People met at their various Parish Churches . . . and proceeded to the market Square with Banners and Bands. Clergy and choir in surplices, and after Hymns and Prayers the procession moved off to the Roodeye where speeches were made and resolutions condemning the Bill were moved and carried, at night a great service was held in the Cathedral when the Bishop of St. Asaph preached, about 500 people assembled at S. John's, S. Barnabas having joined us in these and with banners proceeded to Town Hall Square. A great deal of enthusiasm was shown and the affair made a great deal of stir in the place.

In December 1913 an attempt was made to demolish the King's Arms Public House in Union Street, together with the two adjacent houses in order to 'build a large place with skittle alley, etc.'

The proposal was strongly resisted by all the residents near. On the morning the application was to have been made, the landlady died, she was nearly 80 and had lived at the house for 52 years: she would have had to leave the house if the alteration had taken place, and she was so much troubled at the thought that she had a stroke and died.

Scott's anger was aroused by the proposed development. He sent a letter of protest to the chairman of the licensing justices, which is reproduced in the diary:

As a resident for more than 38 years in the locality and as being well acquainted with it, may I be allowed respectfully to express my opinion that the premises as they now exist provide amply for the needs of the neighbourhood. In support of this opinion I may say that during the past 30 years, 56 houses in Love Street and Union Street have been pulled down (this does not include 14 houses recently removed in the Headlands (Duttons and Allens Courts)) as against this 16 houses have been built in Priory Place.

The neighbourhood now consists largely of Schools and Institutions, and there is no land near for the erection of dwelling houses, so that the population round the house in question cannot increase in the future.

The highlight of Scott's final year as Vicar was the visit of King George V and Queen Mary to Chester on 25 March 1914. The main purpose of the visit was the official opening of the extension to Chester Infirmary, which at the King's request, was henceforth to be known as Chester Royal Infirmary:

They came from Knowsley where they were on a visit to Lord Derby, drove through the principal streets to the Town Hall Square, where platforms were erected, troops drawn up, and presentations were made from thence they drove by George St. to the station and visited Port Sunlight and Birkenhead. The King opened the new Infirmary Buildings by turning a lever on the platform in the Town Hall Square. In the cattle market galleries were erected for the School children. 6,000 of them assembled each provided with a small Union Jack. They sang the National Anthem, and then gave cheers waving their flags. A very impressive sight. The King in acknowledging his reception at Chester made mention of the sweet and effective singing of the children:

In contrast to the weather which ruled in March the day was a perfect summer day. The sky was cloudless from early morning to afternoon, and the air was soft and yet bracing, a truly beautiful day and to be remembered quite apart from the Royal visit.

In June Scott records 'one of several acts which our wise men at the Town Hall have done, and by which the picturesque and interesting features of the place have been removed'. The act in question was the alteration of the weir on the River Dee at Chester:

The old weir was one of the most attractive features of the river; its broken outline was further relieved by clumps of grass and reeds, the result of time and being let alone; on these the swans and ducks in summer, and the gulls and terns in winter might be seen picking up such trifles as rested on them. Under the pretext of repairing (which under the arrangement for the turbine erection they had power to do) they built a low concrete wall along the top of the weir, thus raising its height (which they had not power to do) removed every vestige of vegetation and reduced the ridge to a dull level colourless line. On the few occasions on which the water is allowed to flow over the weir it does so with dull monotony, instead of being broken up into picturesque effects by the clumps of grass and weeds its interest is wholly destroyed.

In August 1914 the First World War broke out. It is unfortunate that the diary comes to an end after the first few months of war, as Scott would surely have



had much to say about its impact both locally and nationally. However, his entry for August 1914 is of interest as a contemporary view of the outbreak of the war and the principal factors which brought the great powers into conflict:

The August Bank Holiday of 1914 will never be forgotten. History will record that on the Sunday the greater part of Europe found itself engaged in a war which has never been equalled in the history of the world. When the history of the war is written it will tell how by the engineering of German military politics Austria attacked Servia in revenge for the cruel murder of the heir to the Austrian throne. Russia stepped in to support Servia, Germany took up arms in alliance with Austria, and attacked France, Russia's ally, violated the neutrality of Belgium which England defended, and this then brought into conflict the leading nations of Europe. It soon appeared that Germany had prepared carefully for this war, and had used Austria to bring about her purpose. History will record the cruel outrages of the German Army upon the Belgian people and their country, and other details of the great war.

In 1914 Scott, now aged seventy seven, applied for a pension from the diocesan pension fund. His resignation from the living took effect in January 1915, although he remained until Easter pending the arrival of his successor, the Rev. John Polehampton from Malvern. Scott's reasons for retiring are outlined in the diary:

The Parish was in many ways getting beyond my control and I was losing power to deal with its divergent and growing needs. . . . I had made great financial sacrifices in the work of taking Holy Orders, and I had no scruple at the age of 77 years in applying for help to enable me to relinquish a task becoming each year more intricate and difficult, and for which I was yearly becoming less able to encounter.

Despite the heavy demands of his parish Scott found time to serve a number of public causes. For many years he was a member of the Chester Board of Guardians, he was chairman of the Chester Diocesan House of Mercy, a member of the Diocesan Committee of the White Cross League, and also gave service to the Charity Organisation Society. He was one of the original founders of the Queen's School in Chester and was a governor of the school for many years.<sup>17</sup> His sole recreation was carpentry.<sup>18</sup>

As a mark of esteem for his work in the city Scott received a special presentation from Countess Grosvenor at the Town Hall in May. This consisted of a cheque for £400, a silver candelabra and an illuminated volume containing the names of the subscribers, who included people from all social classes. After his retirement Scott returned to his native Yorkshire. Seven years later, in a letter addressed to a Mr. Morris, he remarked that he was 'much better for my removal from Chester, though I feel at times my idleness'.<sup>19</sup>

Scott had been vicar of a difficult parish during a testing period of social change, but although he was five times offered the chance to move to a new living,

<sup>17</sup> *Chester Chronicle*, 18 August 1923.

<sup>18</sup> *Who Was Who 1916-1928*, p. 942.

<sup>19</sup> Cheshire R.O., P51/11/14.

including two opportunities to return to the ancestral living of St. Mary's, Hull, he declined each offer. He served his parish diligently for forty years.

Scott died at Golders Green, London, on 1 August 1923, after a heart attack. The news of his death occasioned a wave of sorrow in Chester, evidenced by the large numbers of people who packed his former church for the funeral service and those who lined the streets to watch the funeral procession to Chester cemetery, where he was laid to rest beside his wife, Susannah.<sup>20</sup> The following personal tribute from Canon A. G. Child appeared in the *Chester Chronicle* a few days after his death:

Nothing that was human came amiss to him. He had wide sympathies and a humorous understanding of character, which made him not only the wise counsellor but the personal friend of all sorts of people.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Chester Chronicle*, 18 August 1923.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*