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The Mason Who Became a Baronet: The Work in North East England of Sir Walter Scott (1826–1910), Contractor

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SUMMARY

Walter Scott, although a leading public works contractor in the North East of England, remains little known. He began his career as a builder based in Newcastle but with the passage of time he became a major civil engineering contractor carrying out numerous railway-related, and other, works throughout the country. Not only did he undertake significant contracts, he also diversified into coal-mining, steel-making and publishing, as well as having financial interests in many companies and becoming a director of several of them. He played a part in both local government and public life and such was his business success that at his death he was ranked as one of Newcastle's wealthiest men.

INTRODUCTION

DURING THE PERIOD 1870–1910 Sir Walter Scott — he was created baronet in 1907 — was one of the North-East's leading contractors but, like many other such men, he remains little known. The general perception of his kind is that they either achieved great success or declined into bankruptcy and disappeared from view; Scott was one of the former but, nevertheless, sank into relative obscurity from which, only recently, he has been resurrected. Research into the construction industry has generally concentrated on consulting engineers, architects and clients rather than contractors and Scott is not alone in this treatment.

From very modest origins he achieved a great measure of financial success, albeit without recorded fame in spite of a baronetcy. No mention of him was made in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1897) and neither was he noted in the *Dictionary of Business Biography* (1984). He did, however, receive a mention in the new *DNB* (2004) but it failed to do him justice and gave a somewhat distorted account of his achievements. Even *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History* (1997) failed to notice him in spite of the fact that he became one of the Nation's wealthiest contractors and, moreover, had been the builder of the first of London Underground's tunnels.

Research has been hampered by the fact that virtually no records of his companies survive but, fortunately, it has been possible to piece together, perhaps inadequately, an account of his work. In many ways he was typical of his age but where he differed from his contemporaries is in the colossal business he built up, divorced from his contracting activities. No trace of any writing by Scott has been located although partial accounts of some of his works are to be found in the records of his employers. Nevertheless, of his many contracts, some 150 have



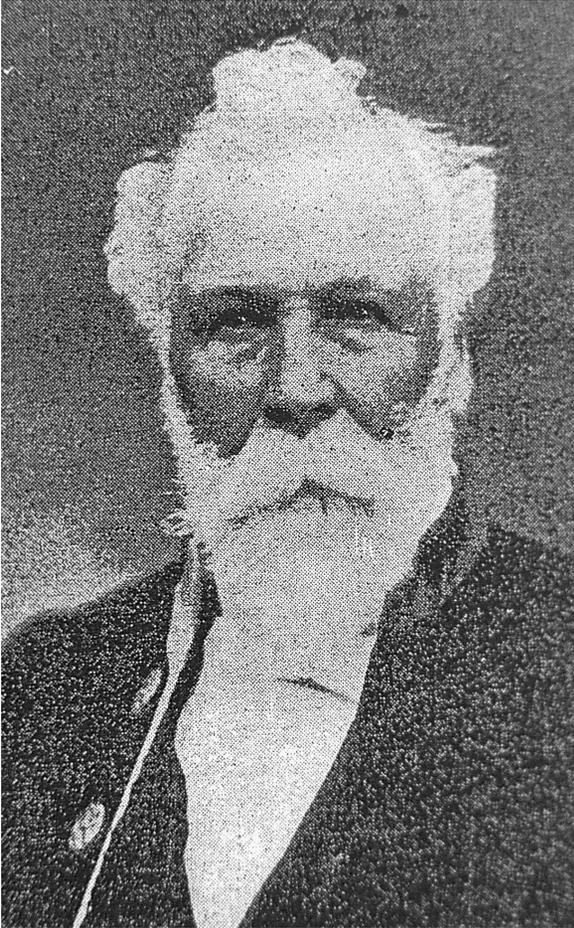


Fig. 1 Portrait of Walter Scott. [*Engineering*, 15 April 1910]

On completing his apprenticeship in 1846 he found work on the construction of the Caledonian Railway, becoming foreman for the building of the station at Gretna Green. In 1848 he began working on the Central Station buildings in Newcastle, presumably for James MacKay and John Blackstock, and the following year, aged 23, he set up in business as a builder in partnership with Robert Reed (b. 1829).⁴ The latter's brother, Nicholas White Reed (1831–1910), later joined the partnership and their earliest known contracts were for the building of relatively minor structures for the North Eastern Railway (NER) which was to become one of Scott's major employers. The partners began work on the construction of the North Shields Mechanics' Institute in 1857 and three years later, for the Rev Dr J. H. Rutherford, built the Bath Lane Congregational church in Newcastle, by which time it was recorded that Scott, a master mason, was employing 50 men and five boys.⁵ The last joint venture was a five-storey goods warehouse for the NER at Tyne Dock⁶ but, for reasons unknown, the partnership ended in 1863 with the Reed brothers — later joined by two further brothers — continuing as building contractors and stonemasons.

been located although it is by no means certain that all have been discovered. It has proved impossible to provide details of them in this paper but a complete listing has been deposited in the several establishments noted later; additionally the list of contracts will be found in the *Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers*, 1830–90.¹ It is hoped, however, that this paper will give some insight into the work of one of Newcastle's leading building and civil engineering contractors (fig. 1).

SCOTT & REED: BUILDING CONTRACTORS

Walter Scott was born on 17 August 1826 at Abbey Town (also known as Holm Cultram) a village some four miles (6 km) east of Silloth, Cumberland. His father, Samuel (1791–1833), an innkeeper and farmer, had married Mary Martin (1796–1877) in 1824; she was the daughter of William Martin, a farmer, and his wife Mary Waite.² Scott, the second of six children, was seven years old when his father died and his formal education subsequently took place at the village school, following which he was apprenticed as a stonemason to Joseph Relph of Wigton.³

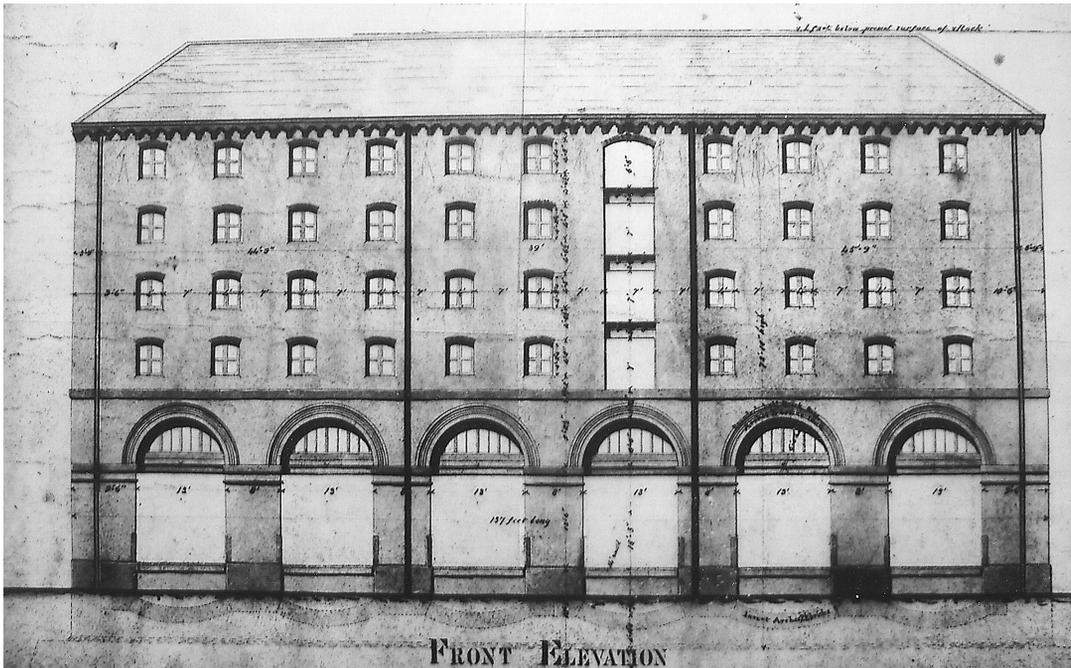


Fig. 2 Granary at Hudson Dock, Sunderland, for River Wear Commission; designed by Thomas Meik. [Courtesy Tyne & Wear Archive Services/Port of Sunderland]

WALTER SCOTT: BUILDING AND CIVIL ENGINEERING CONTRACTOR

After the break-up of the partnership, Scott continued as a building contractor with one of his early works being the portico of the Central Station in Newcastle, designed by John Dobson (1787–1865), its construction postponed and then completed under the direction of Thomas Prosser (1816/7–1888) only in 1864.⁷ Another of his works, completed the following year, was a six-storey grain warehouse designed by Thomas Meik (1812–96) for the River Wear Commission (fig. 2).⁸ After completing several relatively minor works Scott, in 1866, began the first phase of the Newcastle Lunatic Asylum at Coxlodge, near Newcastle; it was to become one of his major building works — it entailed three phases of work spread over more than 30 years — and reached an eventual cost of some £200,000 (fig. 3).⁹

In 1867 he became responsible for major work at St Nicholas's church (now Cathedral), Newcastle, namely the restoration of the tower and steeple. The work cost more than was anticipated but had been complicated by the fact that the foundations had been found to be 'in a much more dangerous condition than at first supposed, there being found a drain of water running underneath',¹⁰ while the stripping of plasterwork revealed massive fissures in the masonry. Other major problems were encountered and the cost of the first stage of the church's restoration amounted to £8,226, a sum which included £129 13s 5d interest owing to Scott as a result of the inability of St Nicholas's authorities to make payment when requested. It is unsurprising that a committee of management was established to secure funding for future maintenance.

The Building News, Aug. 5, 1892.

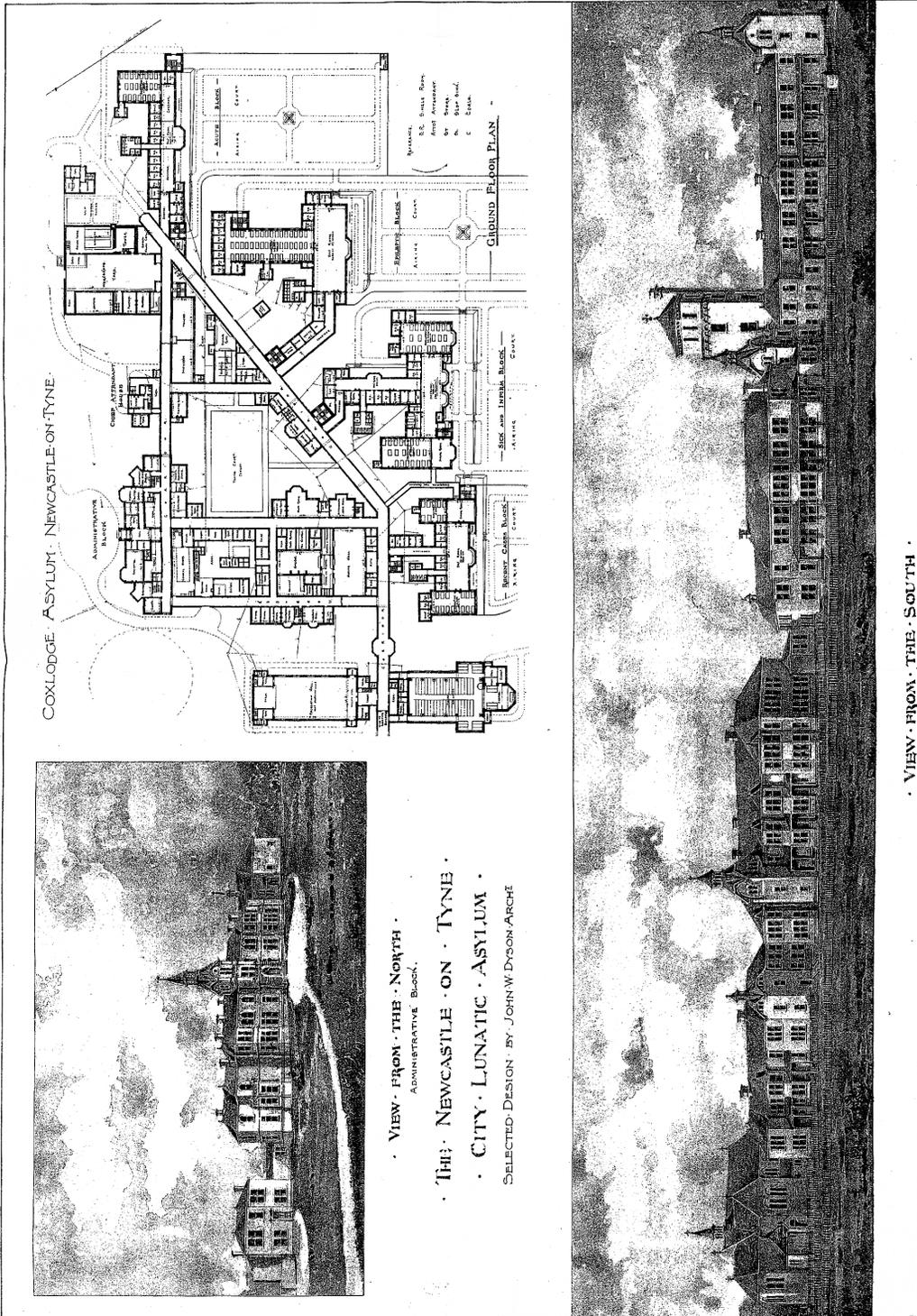


Fig. 3 The final stage of Newcastle City Lunatic Asylum, Coxlodge; architect John William Dyson. Its three-phase construction led to its becoming Scott's biggest building contract. [*The Building News*, 5 August 1892]



Fig. 4 Skelton Beck viaduct, Saltburn; designed by Thomas Elliot Harrison. [Author]

In spite of the many building works he had undertaken for the NER, under both its architect and its chief engineer, Thomas Elliot Harrison (1808–88), it was not until 1868 that Scott carried out his first sizeable contract relating to actual railway construction. The timing is perhaps significant in that it came relatively soon after the retirement of the two leading railway and public works contractors in Newcastle, Richard Cail (1812–93)¹¹ and Benjamin Carr Lawton (1815–89). The former in 1861 had moved into a (perhaps enforced) new field of interest, the management of the Walker Alkali Works, and the latter was experiencing financial problems. The contract awarded to Scott was for a branch line to Newcastle Quay-side and although only a mile (1.5 km) long, two thirds of its length were in tunnel, turning through 180 degrees and driven to an incline of 1 in 30; the contract included the building of 70 ft (21 m) high masonry retaining walls.¹² This work was closely followed by the Saltburn Extension railway which incorporated the superb 11-arch Skelton Beck viaduct, 150 ft (46 m) high (fig. 4).¹³

In 1868 he was appointed as contractor for the masonry approaches of the Redheugh road bridge, crossing the river Tyne and designed by Thomas Bouch (1822–80); work was delayed due to the insolvency of the contractor for the ironwork but problems were also encountered by Scott — employing *c.* 100 men — as a result of the settlement of two of the masonry piers.¹⁴ Further contracts followed but, additionally, he began to compete for the construction of docks and carried out work at Burntisland (1873–78 in difficult ground)¹⁵ and Ayr (1874–78);¹⁶ substantial contracts, they were each valued at between £100–150,000. Scott built two road



Fig. 5 Hartlepool Docks. Shown to the right of the photograph are the Central docks built by Scott for the North Eastern Railway. [Courtesy Society of Antiquaries]

bridges crossing the Ouseburn in Newcastle, the Byker and Glasshouse bridges, for both of which Robert Hodgson (1817–77) was the Engineer; the former was promoted by a company and the latter by the Corporation.¹⁷

Between 1870 and 1877 he undertook for the Newcastle Corporation, as several contracts, the construction of a new quay wall which was recorded as eventually being some 1000 yards (915 m) in length and as having cost *c.* £200,000.¹⁸ This work was continued with the completion in 1879 of a deep-water berth associated with a large privately-owned grain warehouse being built on Newcastle's Quayside; he was responsible, too, for the foundations — but not the building — of the warehouse. As completed, the quay was said to be 'a massive structure based on [6 ft (1.82 m) diameter] cast-iron cylinders filled with concrete and faced with granite';¹⁹ the cylinders were some 40 ft (12 m) long to give a minimum water depth of 23 feet (7 m).

In 1875 a contract for some £500,000 was awarded to him, the first of this magnitude. Again to the designs of Harrison for the NER, the contract was for three new docks at Hartlepool to connect the two separate systems then existing, one owned by the NER and the other built by the former West Hartlepool Harbour and Railway (fig. 5).²⁰ By 1865 both dock complexes were controlled by the NER so enabling a major expansion to be put in hand; supervision of construction was the responsibility of Charles Augustus Harrison (1848–1916).²¹ It was while

this work was proceeding that in 1877 he began his first work for a railway company other than the NER, the precursor of many similar works. It comprised the construction of a new 17-mile-long (27 km) line from Northampton to Rugby for the London and North-Western Railway and it was during its formation that his second son, Walter (1858–80), died from injuries received in an accident involving the derailment of a works locomotive.²²

WALTER SCOTT & CO

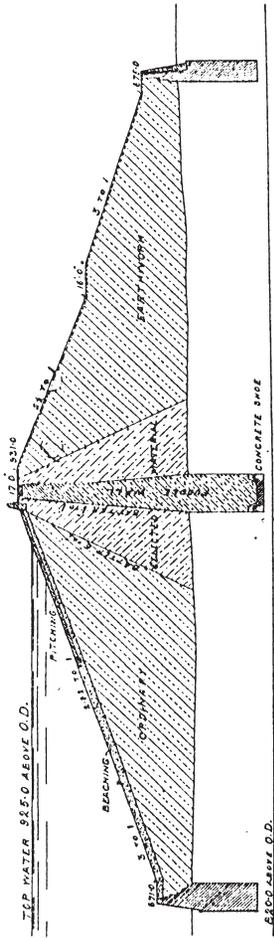
Although Scott would seem to have formed a partnership with John Gibson in *c.* 1880, and to have been in some form of association with Messrs J. & W. Lowry, nevertheless a further change was made as a result of the ever-widening scope of work undertaken. In 1882 John Scott (1854–1922), eldest son of the founder, together with the elder Scott's engineer and agent, John Thomas Middleton (1847–1922), were admitted as partners.²³ The firm subsequently traded as Walter Scott and Co. from Victoria Chambers, Grainger Street, Newcastle, premises built by Scott and maintained throughout his life. Gibson's name appeared in local directories at the same address, principally associated with brickworks. Both building and railway contracts continued, among the former two splendid churches on Tyneside, St James's Congregational church in Northumberland Road, Newcastle and St George's church, Cullercoats, together with the St George's Drill Hall in Newcastle, said to be 'perhaps the largest of its kind in the kingdom'.²⁴

After building dry docks at Blyth and on the Tyne, in 1884 the firm made its first major venture into water supply with the construction of Hury reservoir, completed in 1892 for the Stockton and Middlesbrough Corporations Water Board, its formation comprising the building of an earth embankment 1100 feet (335 m) long and 90 feet (27.5 m) high.²⁵ Such were the problems encountered that the reservoir, designed by James Mansergh (1834–1905), cost £218,335, twice the tender price. With work at Hury in progress, Scott succeeded in securing a negotiated contract for the adjoining reservoir, Blackton (fig. 6),²⁶ its embankment with a length of 725 feet (221 m) and a height of 71 feet (21.5 m). It was completed in 1896 and was probably unique at the time of construction in having an overflow in the form of a 45 ft (13.7 m) diameter bell-mouth.²⁷

As a result of the collapse of a section of the masonry of an earlier dock structure, Scott, in 1882, tendered successfully — from a list of some 20 contractors — for a new six acre (2.4 ha) dock at Silloth designed by Thomas Meik for the North British Railway. The dock structure was of concrete 'which is becoming very largely used in dock and harbour works'²⁸ and it was noted that the use of concrete would diminish the chance of interruption resulting from tradesmen's strikes; at the inception of the work, Scott advertised for 200 navvies and labourers. Major and complicated contracts for the NER were begun in 1885, namely, the doubling of the main line northwards from the Central Station, Newcastle, to Heaton, work which took place in two stages. The first comprised the length from Manors to Heaton stations and included the duplication of the Ouseburn viaduct²⁹ while the second stage included the duplication of the section incorporating the Dean Street Arch and a substantial length of masonry viaduct passing through Newcastle.³⁰ Associated with this work, in 1889 he became responsible for the substructure necessary for the extension of Newcastle Central Station which increased its covered area from three bays to five; construction above ground level was by others.³¹ He was successful, too, in obtaining the contract under the architect William Bell (1844–1919) for a major extension of the NER's Station Hotel in Newcastle, completed in

BLACKTON RESERVOIR.

TYPICAL SECTION OF EMBANKMENT
SCALE 40 FEET TO AN INCH



LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF CULVERT

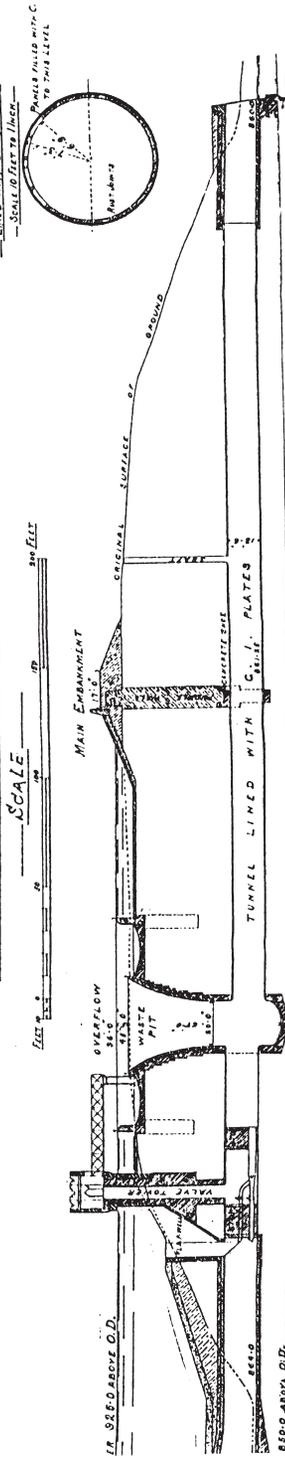


Fig. 6 Section of Blackton Reservoir embankment showing the bell-mouth overflow; designed by James Mansergh. [Author]

1892,³² two nearby hotels, the Douglas (1876), of which he was part owner,³³ and the 1899 extension of the County³⁴ were also built by him.

Having been proposed by Harrison, Scott became an Associate of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1887 and in the same year his railway contracting operations moved in a new direction with work on the City and South London Underground, 'the world's first deep-level electric railway'³⁵ which ran from King William Street, under the river Thames to Stockwell, a distance of three miles (5 km) (fig. 7). The initial contract had been let to Edmund Gabbutt but his ill-health resulted in Scott — with William Sewell as his agent — completing the first section and being awarded the contract for the second length.³⁶ Tunnelling was carried out under the direction of James Henry Greathead (1844–96) and involved the use of a cast-iron lining placed by means of a shield as it was forced forward; to seal the tunnel, grout was injected behind the lining by means of compressed air. Described as 'a notable work, for it brought the contractors face to face with many entirely new problems which called for much ingenuity and resourcefulness',³⁷ it was inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in November 1890; during Scott's lifetime a further five similar works were subsequently undertaken by his company at prices of up to £1 million each.

One of Scott's more unusual works was his connection with the Royal Mining, Engineering and Industrial Exhibition held in Newcastle in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. He became a member of the Building Committee and also the Lime and Cements Committee.³⁸ As a result of tendering against contractors from London, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Newcastle he was, in September 1886, appointed as 'contractor for the Exhibition',³⁹ thereupon undertaking construction work on the 31 acre (12.5 ha) site, including the building of a 'model house', its fittings supplied by the region's manufacturers. The exhibition buildings were supplemented by a two-third scale replica of the medieval Tyne Bridge which had been destroyed by a flood in 1771; the 120 yards (110 m) long exhibition structure was designed by Philip John Messent (1830–97), Engineer to the Tyne Improvement Commission. Between May and November the exhibition was attended by more than two million visitors.⁴⁰

John Scott severed his connections with the firm in 1893,⁴¹ and having been replaced by his brother, Charles Thomas (1868–1953), in the same year began to tender in his own name for work for the NER and water supply undertakings. Railway tendering was at times in opposition to his father, and his successful bid, £382,559, for the 1898 extension to Middlesbrough Docks to the designs of John Wolfe Barry (1836–1918), acting for the NER, was £70,000 below the second tender and nearly £160,000 below his father's.⁴² Details of the schism are lacking but it would seem that the younger Scott, because of family differences arising from his father's second marriage,⁴³ had severed his links with the older company and established himself on Teesside. Having managed the construction of Blackton reservoir he was awarded three contracts for the Stockton and Middlesbrough Corporations Water Board, including — by invitation — one of £384,499 for Grassholme impounding reservoir and tunnel (1900–14).⁴⁴ His contracting activities were first based in Cotherstone and later in Darlington, where he built himself a house in 1901.⁴⁵ During this period, building work continued to play an important part in the work of Walter Scott & Co. although a move would seem to have been made towards securing railway contracts. The fact that there appear to be few adverse press comments regarding Scott's building works would indicate that they were completed to programme and without major dispute; the one arbitration discovered concerned the County Hotel, Newcastle, and was brought about only by the insolvency of its owners.⁴⁶



Fig. 7 Work in progress at Stockwell for the City and South London Railway, the Capital's first line in tunnel. [Courtesy Capital Transport Publishing]

WALTER SCOTT & MIDDLETON LTD

In 1901 the construction division of the company was renamed as Walter Scott and Middleton Ltd. while another division, Walter Scott Ltd, continued as the holding company for Scott's diverse investments (see below). What was probably the company's last major contract undertaken for the NER was its line from Seaham to Hartlepool, incorporating 'no less than 26 bridges and viaducts, including ... the one at Hawthorn Dene having a central span of 127 ft [39 m], which is surpassed as a brick span only by that over the Thames at Maidenhead.'⁴⁷ Although completed in 1904, the line was not opened to passengers until the following year. In 1906 Scott, with three other directors of Walter Scott Ltd, was invited to the opening by King Edward VII of the NER's bridge over the river Tyne and which now bears his name, leading to speculation as to whether his firm played a part in its construction; possibilities are the building of the northern approach or the supply of steel sections for fabrication.⁴⁸

Several changes in the affairs of Walter Scott and Middleton Ltd were brought about by the break between father and son: first, after Blackton's completion, relatively little of their later

work was water-orientated; second, after the break, few further commissions originated from the NER, perhaps a result of the completion of the company's network or perhaps the death in 1888 of T. E. Harrison, his funeral at Whitburn attended by Scott; and third, virtually no building work was subsequently undertaken, perhaps a result of a gradual withdrawal of Scott from the running of the company. Additionally, Middleton's removal to the London area at the time he was appointed director, then establishing an office in Victoria Street, could also have been responsible for the company's change in direction. All in all, the firm's work became orientated towards railway contracts beyond the confines of the North-East of England rather than its earlier emphasis on building/civil engineering work based on Tyne-side. However, in spite of the changing pattern of contracts, the firm in 1911 completed the 850 ft (260 m) long Thompson graving dock in Belfast for the Harbour Commission and in the following year the Woolwich Footway Tunnel was opened.⁴⁹ It would appear that the younger Scott returned to the original firm following his father's death in 1910, an obituary (of 1922) noting the fact that he was 'the leading member of the firm of Walter Scott and Middleton Limited, contractors...'.⁵⁰

DIVERSIFICATION

By 1880 Scott's financial affairs were such as to enable him to undertake a programme of diversification, namely investment in coal and metals. As did other contractors, he already owned quarries (at Elswick and St Peters, Newcastle) and brickworks (at the Teams, St Annes, Benwell and Hebburn)⁵¹ but in 1880 he moved away from contracting-related investment and purchased the East Hetton and Trimdon Grange collieries in county Durham, west of Hartlepool. In 1882, by default, he assumed control of the Tyne Publishing Company Ltd at Felling; in 1885 he became a shipowner; three years later he took over a steelworks at Leeds; in c. 1890 he purchased from W. C. Gibson the Scotswood Fireclay Mine, Colliery and Brickworks; and in 1892 he acquired Trimdon colliery.

The East Hetton (Kelloe) colliery (NZ 346 370), some 14 miles (22 km) west of Hartlepool, like the other two which Scott came to own, had been first worked some 50 years earlier, its exploitation dating from the completion of the Byers Green branch of the Clarence Railway;⁵² the shaft reached a depth of 135 fathoms (247 m). Two of the seams had been worked out but nevertheless the colliery, with its associated manufacture of fire-bricks and its 70 coke ovens, employed 1100 men and boys underground and a further 340 surface workers; fireclay was extracted from the pit.⁵³ At Trimdon Grange colliery (NZ 368 357), 10½ miles (17 km) from Hartlepool and purchased at the same time, a new shaft had been sunk in 1873 but the pit had been worked very irregularly and was 'alike unprofitable to the owners and unsatisfactory to the men employed'.⁵⁴ Following its purchase Scott 'spent large sums in increasing and improving the plant [and the colliery was subsequently worked]... on a large scale, and giving employment to over 700 men and boys'.⁵⁵ Producing coal of high quality, the colliery at Trimdon Grange was subjected in 1882 to a disastrous explosion when 71 men and boys lost their lives.⁵⁶

It was not until 1892 that the Trimdon colliery (NZ 380 360), also 10½ miles (17 km) from Hartlepool, became the property of Scott's company, employing some 140 men and boys in 1896.⁵⁷ Scott's coal-mining activities had not been without problems and they must have experienced a drop in output in 1892 when the figure for the year for Durham as a whole, 23.8 million tons, showed a fall from 29.86 the previous year.⁵⁸ He was dealt another blow in

1897 when the East Hetton colliery experienced an ingress of water from the neighbouring disused Cassop workings, resulting in the deaths of eleven men,⁵⁹ and in 1906 he suffered the death of his son, Joseph Samuel (1863–1906) who managed the group's Trimdon collieries.⁶⁰ Associated with his mining activities, in 1885 he entered the shipping business with the construction by the Blyth Shipbuilding Company of the steamship *Walter Scott*,⁶¹ in 1901 William Gray of West Hartlepool built the *Merchiston* for him⁶² and in 1908 the *Sir Walter Scott* was brought into service, again built at Blyth.⁶³ Perhaps with others, the ships operated from the Hartlepoons in conjunction with his three collieries there.

In 1888, 'with Messrs C. Murieta & Co of London, [Scott] ... purchased the Aireside Steel and Iron works, Hunslet, Leeds, for £29,000,'⁶⁴ he and his son, John, becoming two of the four initial directors.⁶⁵ This plant, founded as 'The Airedale Hematite Company by Messrs Ledger and Cooper'⁶⁶ and originally an ironworks, was in the same year built into a fully integrated steelworks occupying some 25 acres (10 ha). On the site (SE 318 309), two miles (3 km) south-east of the centre of Leeds, there were three blast furnaces, each 65ft (20 m) high and 18ft (5.5 m) diameter, using ores from Lincolnshire and Northampton and charged by means of a vertical steam hoist; the blast was heated to 1350° F (733° C) in eight Cowper stoves. There were three cupolas each eight feet (2.5 m) in diameter for melting the iron together with a 120 ton mixer. Half of the blast furnace slag was crushed on site and used both for road fill and concrete production while the remainder was deposited on land owned by the company. Iron production in 1903 was 2,200 tons per week.⁶⁷

Steel was produced by plant some 400 yards (365 m) from the ironworks in four basic Bessemer converters (fig. 8), two of 7 tons and two of 10 tons capacity, and was poured into 1 and 2 ton ingots. The basic slag from the converters was crushed and sold as fertiliser, this part of the process being operated by the separate Leeds Phosphate Works.⁶⁸ The ingots were rolled on a three-stand steam-driven 32 inch (813 mm) rolling mill to produce a wide variety of sections and tram rails. Some 63 different sections of joist were produced, ranging from a maximum of 16 x 6 ins (410 mm x 152 mm), at 62 lbs per foot (92 kg per m), to 4 x 1.75 ins (102 mm x 44 mm), at 7.5 lbs per foot (11 kg per m); claiming to be the largest producer of tram rails in the country, the company also offered 44 different rails varying from 65 to 108 lbs per yard (32 to 53 kg per m). They pioneered production of tram rail in 60 ft (18.3 m) lengths, the rails supplied ready for installation, with ends squared, milled and drilled for fish plates. In 1903 the works employed some 1350 personnel⁶⁹ and the total weight of finished steel products was some 1400 tons per week. The blowers and rolling mills were steam driven but much of the ancillary equipment was powered by electricity generated on the site.

Perhaps the most surprising of Scott's interests was his acquisition in 1882 of a printing works, a move which was said to have caused comment at the time.⁷⁰ It would appear to have been connected in some way with the financial failure of the company as a result of its having built new premises, so leading to its being taken over by Scott — rather than sold — and run by him as a business venture.⁷¹ Trading as 'Walter Scott Ltd, printers, lithographers and publishers',⁷² it operated from premises on the south side of Sunderland Road, Felling, and its output included 'The Canterbury Poets, the Oxford Library, the Camelot Classics and the Great Writer Series.'⁷³ Popular novels and other books were also produced by the Felling works while 'translations of the writings of Tolstoy and Ibsen ran into many editions'⁷⁴ and its output even included the works of radical Russian émigrés. In 1889 Scott offered to donate to the Newcastle Public Libraries a copy of each of his books then in print and, further, 'a copy of such books as he might afterwards publish from time to time.'⁷⁵

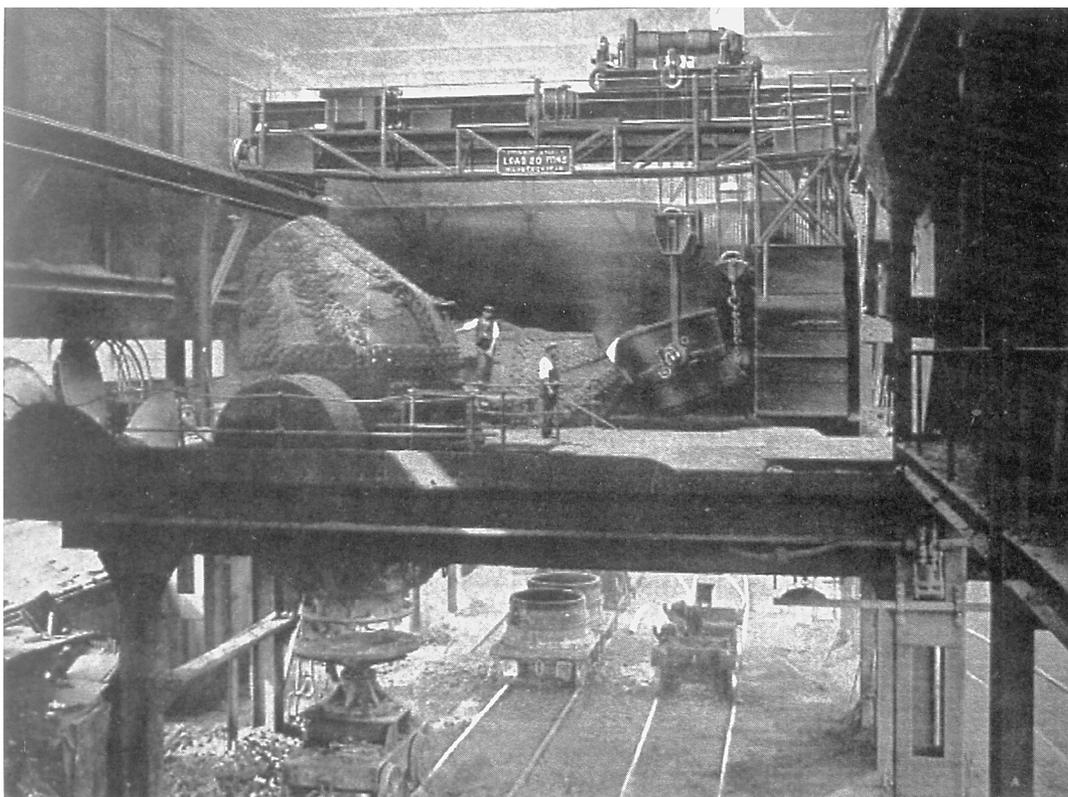


Fig. 8 Bessemer converters at Walter Scott Ltd's Steel Works at Hunslet, Leeds.
[Courtesy T. J. Lodge]

At the end of 1900 Scott's business ventures were reorganised. His contracting division was formed into a separate company, Walter Scott and Middleton Ltd 'for the purpose of taking over their business as contractors for public works';⁷⁶ the new company was capitalised at £250,000 in £10 shares and its subscribers were all members of the Scott and Middleton families, the first directors being Walter Scott, Charles Thomas Scott, John Thomas Middleton, and Thomas Tyler Middleton. Very soon afterwards Leeds (Aireside) Steel Works Ltd and Walter Scott Ltd, controlling the colliery interests, both until then private limited companies, were amalgamated as Walter Scott Limited. The capital comprised 300,000 cumulative 6% preference £1 shares and 275,000 ordinary £1 shares together with £300,000 of perpetual 4% debenture stock.⁷⁷ The published *Abridged Prospectus* itemised the assets of the new company: Leeds Steel Works; Leeds Iron Works (adjoining); 25 acres of land nearby; Leeds Phosphate Works; the East Hetton, Trimdon Grange and Trimdon collieries, with the steamship *Walter Scott*; Scotswood Fireclay Mine, Colliery and Brickworks (employing 75 men); Hebburn Cement Works; 1117 workmen's houses; 14 miles (22 km) of railway line; and 500 acres (202 ha) of colliery land.⁷⁸

Together with members of the Scott family, non-executive directors were appointed to oversee the operation of the new company. With relevant industrial experience they were: Sir William Haswell Stephenson (1836–1918), managing director of the Throckley Coal Company,

a Newcastle councillor and between 1875 and 1911 seven times Mayor or Lord Mayor of Newcastle; John Bell Simpson (1837–1926), managing director of the Stella Coal Company and a mining consultant; John Watson Spencer (1843–1908), chairman and manager of the Newburn Steel Works; and Henry Swingler (1844–1906), ironmaster and railway contractor of Derby. Outlining the company's activities, the *Prospectus*⁷⁹ noted that its output of ordinary bricks was ten million a year with a further five million firebricks; the output of coal was $\frac{3}{4}$ million tons a year while that of coke was 60,000 tons; production of pig-iron was 100,000 tons and of steel, 80,000 tons. Profits in the old group of companies had risen from £56,395 to £166,914 over the past five years. Scott and other shareholders in the vendor company subscribed for half the capital and Scott thereupon became chairman of the new company with Stephenson vice-chairman.

Not content with these ventures he began to take over or invest in other concerns, one the Wallsend Chemical Company, founded in 1848 by John Allen but which had subsequently declined as a result of the introduction of new methods of manufacturing alkali. The trade enjoyed a revival in 1883 and at that time the company was re-formed by Scott, with Joseph Edward Lee and John Spencer, and continued 'the limited manufacture of alkali, bleaching powder, and soda crystals . . . [together with] pale and fancy soaps'.⁸⁰ In 1890–1, however, 'the United Alkali Company was formed and all the existing firms on Tyneside were amalgamated into it'⁸¹ in a large-scale defensive reorganisation of the chemical industry. Like other alkali manufacturers on Tyneside, the Wallsend company was sold by Scott and Lee to the new company, which shut it down.⁸² In 1904 he acquired a controlling interest in the Tyne Brass and Copper Works, Jarrow, formerly owned by a shipowner, John Lockie, MP, together with Herbert Terry, which he (Scott) then ran 'as a private concern and not as a limited company'.⁸³ The works had been established with capital of £100,000 only in 1898 and covered an area of some three acres with a river frontage of almost 250 feet;⁸⁴ although seemingly flourishing in 1901 its sale would appear to have become necessary as a result of the financial collapse of Lockie's shipping business. Scott also invested in the Bede Metal Works, Hebburn — it was founded in 1873 — where two of his fellow directors were Alfred Molyneux Palmer (1853–1938) and Sir Andrew Noble, FRS (1831–1915), the former a partner in the Jarrow shipbuilding company and the latter Chairman of Sir W G Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. Ltd.⁸⁵ Other business investments were made by Scott, although no details have been ascertained: in partnership with Gibson, a brick-making works was operated at Hebburn; he was chairman of Smith Patterson & Co Ltd, engineers and ironfounders of Blaydon; he is recorded as a director in the Blyth Shipbuilding Company; he was a director of the Seaton Burn Coal Company; in 1894 he had purchased from William Vaughan a licence to mine iron ore in Norway;⁸⁶ and, like Noble, he was from its founding in 1896 a director of the Mountain Copper Company of America.⁸⁷

Additionally, as a director of both the Weardale Steel Coal and Coke Company and the Cargo Fleet Iron company, of Middlesbrough, he was a party to the amalgamation of the two companies. The former had been incorporated with a capital of £1,025,000 by Sir Christopher (later Lord) Furness (1853–1912) in 1899 but by 1901, as a result of foreign competition and the exhaustion of local ores, it was forced to close its Tudhoe works, acquiring for £120,000 the share capital of Cargo Fleet, formed in 1904 with a capital of £1 million;⁸⁸ incorporating machinery removed from Tudhoe a new works was established on the site of the former Cargo Fleet works which had an extensive frontage onto the river Tees. In 1906, the Tudhoe site was used to provide 120 new coke ovens.⁸⁹ The inclusion of Scott as an associate of

Furness was perhaps a result of the 'reconstruction of the works at Cargo Fleet [being] ... the most technically complex project associated with Furness, incorporating as it did the most modern equipment available and employing Talbot's new continuous steelmaking process.'⁹⁰ Another investment, made in c. 1909, was his purchase, with Furness and (Sir) John Storey Barwick (1840–1915), of the Wingate colliery (NZ 399 373), immediately to the North of the Trimdon group of mines, and employing some 1400 men.⁹¹ Although the purchase was not exceptional, what was unusual is the fact that Scott, a committed conservative, was planning to work the colliery with Furness, a 'Radical Liberal',⁹² on a co-partnership basis.

Scott evidenced some astuteness in his business investments. The earliest of his ventures into the non-construction field had been coal, the traditional source of much of the region's wealth, and which at that time was deemed inexhaustible. The second was steel, the coming structural material, of which, at the time of Scott's first interest, there was a national output of some two million tons; this figure was to multiply by four during his lifetime. Copper, the third subject of his major investments, its price 'constantly rising since its increasing employment for electrical purposes',⁹³ was to become vital for transmission cables and in generators themselves. It will be recalled that domestic electric lighting was inaugurated only in 1880 while the use of electricity for tramcar operation was first adopted in 1883 at Brighton.⁹⁴ If not a pioneer in any of these three industries, Scott would seem to have shown a good sense of timing.

Apart from his industrial interests he was a director of the Northern Assurance Company⁹⁵ and, during much of his career, was involved in land and property development. In 1868, on vacating his house in Gateshead, he retained Matthew Thompson, architect, to lay out the seven acre site for housing development, the plans showing that plots for 180 houses were to be provided.⁹⁶ At some time before 1882 he purchased for £20,000 land in Grainger Street West, Newcastle, perhaps that on which his own offices and the Douglas Hotel were built and with John Gibson he became part-owner of the hotel. Between 1878 and 1882 he bought 21 acres of land in the western area of Newcastle on which it is estimated that perhaps 400 houses could have been built;⁹⁷ this purchase was for three parcels of ground in North Elswick.⁹⁸ It would appear that Scott himself did not undertake building work on this site but either sold the plots or leased them to other builders for the construction of what were almost exclusively 'Tyneside flats'.⁹⁹ The opening in 1871 of the Redheugh bridge — upstream of the towns — had the effect of making housing developments in the western parts of Gateshead a much more attractive proposition and in 1879 Scott purchased part of the Redheugh Estate for £11,000, although it was not until 1885 that building work was put in hand.¹⁰⁰ He was the developer of three other sites: some five acres of land at Heaton Junction, to the east of Newcastle, where 120 sites were planned by William Glover;¹⁰¹ for the laying out in 1895, again by Glover, of land for the development of 155 sites at Whitley Park estate, Whitley Bay;¹⁰² and the planning of 65 building plots on a site adjacent to his printing works at Felling in c. 1910.¹⁰³ The numbers of individual dwellings provided was actually almost double the number of plots as the 'houses' planned by Scott were principally 'Tyneside flats', byelaw housing so common that by 1900 perhaps 50% of dwellings in the region were of this type. The upper flat possessed its own access, dedicated front and back stairs, and sanitation in a yard separate from that of the ground-floor dwelling;¹⁰⁴ some of this housing has been demolished but a considerable number of 'Tyneside flats' at North Elswick are extant (2006) as they are in the Whitley Park Estate. Completely different was his purchase in 1905 of the Crown and Mitre Hotel in Carlisle which he then rebuilt through another contractor, Beaty Bros,¹⁰⁵ and seemingly retained ownership of it.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS

An obituary described Scott as ‘a Conservative in politics, and a Churchman’.¹⁰⁶ As a politician he was a member of the Northumberland County Conservative Association but his part in political matters has not been ascertained. In 1881, however, his on-going Quayside contract with the Corporation completed, he was returned unopposed to the Newcastle City Council as a representative of the Elswick Ward, a position he held until 1890. He was initially appointed to minor committees but following his objection that ‘on account of his experience, he would have been of use’¹⁰⁷ on the Town Improvement Committee, in 1885 he became a member of it and of the Sanitary and the Estates & Property committees. Although with an 80% attendance at meetings of the full Council, his participation in debates was not noteworthy other than when consideration was given, first, to the location of a new Medical School in Newcastle — he advised a site better than that first mooted — and, second, to the extension of the quay wall when he strongly recommended that construction should be undertaken by contract rather than by the Corporation’s staff, on the grounds of expedition, cost and quality of workmanship.¹⁰⁸ He was a member of the Constitutional Club in London and of the Union Club in Newcastle, and from 1901 was a magistrate for Northumberland, sitting mainly at Hexham.¹⁰⁹

Scott regularly attended two churches, Benwell and Riding Mill, and his interest is thought to have been more than perfunctory. Two of his associates in Walter Scott Ltd, Spencer and Stephenson, were prominent lay churchmen in the region. The former, an Anglican, took an active interest in matters concerning the Newcastle Diocese while Stephenson was Tyneside’s leading Methodist and was in 1893 Vice-President of the Wesleyan Methodist conference, the highest position available to a layman.¹¹⁰ Scott gave to charities — for example £1,000 for the building of a new infirmary in Newcastle — and contributed generously to improvements at St. James’s church in Benwell where, among other gifts, he provided in 1894 the spire and clock, a new vestry, a porch and a baptistry, together with a peal of bells.¹¹¹ In 1902 he was responsible for the building of a North aisle, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* recording his ‘constant munificence . . . in the enlargement and adornment’ of the church.¹¹² He had also given generously to Saint Nicholas’s church (now Cathedral), Newcastle, when with his partner, Gibson, he had ‘bought a piece of land and turned it to good account, handing over the profit on the transaction to the canonries fund’.¹¹³

In 1853 Scott married Ann (1825–90), daughter of John Brough of Broomfield, Cumberland, and their first child, John, was born in Newcastle the following year, followed between 1856 and 1870 by five further sons — two of them played rugby for England¹¹⁴ — and two daughters. After the death of his first wife, he married again in 1892, this time a widow, Helen Meikle (1851–1936), daughter of John Dykes of Lanarkshire.¹¹⁵ After his first marriage, Scott lived in both Newcastle and Gateshead before moving in c. 1880 into Bentinck House in Benwell, the fashionable west end of Newcastle; he added a billiard room in 1882.¹¹⁶ In 1888 he acquired, additionally, a country residence, Beauclerc, at Riding Mill, overlooking the Tyne valley and there, among other modifications and extensions, he added a handsome stable block which also housed a racquets court.¹¹⁷

LATER YEARS

Scott, a commanding physical presence, was noted for his ‘broad, compact form [and the fact that in his youth] he was the best wrestler for his age and weight in the district where he

flourished.¹¹⁸ Over six feet in height and distinguished by white hair and beard he enjoyed an enormous business capacity and was referred to in an obituary as a brusque Cumbrian, 'a man of many parts and few words';¹¹⁹ it was recorded, too, that he was 'modest and unassuming, while his commercial character was unassailable'.¹²⁰ In 1907 Scott was created baronet in the King's Birthday Honours, taking as his motto 'Invitum sequitur honor';¹²¹ his arms, appropriately, incorporated two bees. It was, however, a distinction of short duration as he died on 8 April 1910 while on holiday in the south of France, at the Hotel du Cap Martin, Menton. The burial service took place in France on 11 April with memorial services similarly timed in St James's, Riding Mill and also St James's, Newcastle, where he is commemorated at the family grave.¹²² It would appear that his son, John, did not attend any of the services and one of his obituaries noted that 'when his father died in 1910, owing to a family estrangement, he refused to take property of considerable value that came to him ... and was very averse to taking the title'.¹²³ The matter was said to have been taken to Court but nevertheless he did assume the baronetcy.

Sir Walter Scott's Will was proved on 15 June 1910 at £1,424,130 3s 6d, gross (£1,255,020 14s 7d net);¹²⁴ three of his sons, but not John, were executors. The use of the principal house, Beauclerc, was granted to his widow during her life, then passing to his eldest son, John, with the proviso that after his death it should pass down the male line of the family.¹²⁵ Scott's widow also received an annuity of £3,500 and annuities or legacies were settled on his many relatives and friends while legacies were provided for members of his office, house and estate staff, including his chauffeur, cowkeeper, horsekeeper, stableman and gardeners. He made bequests to several Newcastle hospitals and institutions, as well as providing funding for both Benwell and Riding Mill churches. Money was also provided for the newly-established Diocese of Newcastle as well as funds for the church of his birthplace, Holm Cultram. Of the remainder of his estate, his trustees were to divide it 'into six equal shares and shall appropriate one of each such shares to each of my children (other than my eldest son the said John Scott) whether surviving me or not ...'.¹²⁶ The trustees were also granted powers to continue any of his businesses and, if thought advisable, to transform partnerships into limited companies. The later years of Scott's companies have not been researched although it would seem that they both continued under the management of members of the Scott and Middleton families.

CHARACTER AND ABILITY

Scott's expertise and expedition must have been appreciated by his many employers, and more widely, and in 1888 the *Newcastle Daily Journal* reported that he had begun 'with characteristic energy and comprehensiveness to make rapid progress'¹²⁷ with the construction of the new Gateshead Workhouse. There is evidence, too, that several times he was either awarded work or was chosen without having been the lowest tenderer. As a result of his diversification policies he became one of the biggest employers in the region and with almost 5000 men working in his coalmining and steelmaking divisions it is probable that at times he was employing more than 7,000 men, many of his contracts being extremely labour-intensive in spite of his growing use of mechanical plant. Examples of the mechanization of his works are his employment of mechanical excavators as soon as they became available; they have been noted at Hartlepool and on the Northampton and Rugby Railway contracts. On the Ashendon and Aynho railway contract — it was one of many — seven steam navvies were worked in



Fig. 9 Duplication of the Dean Street Arch, Newcastle, for the North Eastern Railway, 1893/4. [Courtesy Newcastle City Library]

addition to the labour force of 1200.¹²⁸ He also came to use electricity both for the operation of plant and for lighting; at Silloth in 1884, for example, he used a system of arc lights installed by J. H. Holmes & Co — formed only the previous year¹²⁹ — so that work could proceed during the hours of darkness.¹³⁰ Scott is notable for the quality of his work, both building and civil engineering. Of the former, several of his buildings are extant in Newcastle and bear comparison with the work of any contractor of the time; among the latter is the duplicate arch which carries the London to Edinburgh line over Dean Street, Newcastle (fig. 9).

CONCLUSIONS

Scott's wealth at death was such as to place him in the top rank of civil engineering contractors; only three others of those dying before 1914 — Brassey (1871), Wythes (1887) and Aird (1911) — left more than £1m.¹³¹ Full financial details of his business ventures have not come to hand but the breadth of his interests is unusual. From 1880 he had been a colliery

owner, from 1885 and associated with his mining interests, he was a shipowner, and from 1888 he owned a steelworks. His publishing business must have proved profitable as it was retained as a going concern for some time after his death; similarly the Tyne Brass and Copper Tube Manufacturing Co, Jarrow, where he was noted as proprietor rather than as a director. Some of his acquisitions were purely commercial investments, perhaps bought cheaply as a result of a trade depression or the financial failure by the former owners and then receiving an injection of capital to revive their fortunes. Some, such as the Cargo Fleet Iron Company, he was probably drawn into as a result of his expertise and eminence in both business and technical matters. Diversification would appear to have proved extremely profitable and, ranked by wealth at death, he was undoubtedly the most successful contractor of north east England.

In Holm Cultram church Scott provided an East window in memory of his first wife and his own parents and in 1913 his family restored the church's oak roof-beams in his memory.¹³² Likenesses of Scott were published in *Northumberland at the Opening of the Twentieth Century*¹³³ and *The Making of the Tyne*,¹³⁴ to accompany his obituary, a reproduction of a photograph by Elliot and Fry was published by the periodical, *Engineering*.¹³⁵

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Attempts have been made to secure copyright approval for all illustrations but in some cases replies have not been forthcoming. Nevertheless, all sources are acknowledged and my thanks go to those who have responded.

NOTES

Abbreviations:

NDJ	<i>Newcastle Daily Journal</i>
NDC	<i>Newcastle Daily Chronicle</i>
NWC	<i>Newcastle Weekly Chronicle</i>
NM	<i>North Mail</i>
Proc N C	<i>Proceedings of the Town Council of Newcastle upon Tyne</i>
TWAS	Tyne and Wear Archive Service
L&P	Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne

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