

Scott, Robert Henry (1833–1916), meteorologist, was born in Dublin on 28 January 1833, one of the six children (five sons and a daughter) of James Smyth Scott QC, a prominent Dublin lawyer, and his wife, Louisa, daughter of Charles Brodrick, archbishop of Cashel, and sister of the sixth and seventh viscounts Midleton. His elder brother Charles (*d.* 1894) was headmaster of Westminster School from 1855 to 1883. Scott was educated at Rugby School and Trinity College, Dublin, where he was classical scholar (1853), graduating senior moderator in experimental physics (1855), MA (1859), and honorary DSc (1898). He also obtained a diploma from Dublin School of Engineering. From 1856 to 1858 he studied chemistry, physics, mineralogy, and meteorology in Germany, working under Heinrich Dove in Berlin and Justus von Liebig in Munich.

Scott undertook the translation of Dove's famous book *Das Gesetz der Stürme*, which was published in Britain as *The Law of Storms* (1862). Dove dedicated the book to Admiral Robert FitzRoy, head of the meteorological department established under the Board of Trade in 1854, and FitzRoy ensured its acceptance within Britain by including it in his series of *Meteorological Papers*. FitzRoy died in 1865 and two years later the department was reconstituted as the Meteorological Office under a meteorological committee appointed by the Royal Society.

Scott had begun teaching in Dublin in 1859. He applied unsuccessfully for the chair of technology at Edinburgh, and in 1862 was appointed keeper of minerals to the Royal Dublin Society. He married Susan Louisa (1842/3–1901), daughter of the Hon. Walter George Stewart, island secretary of Jamaica, on 9 August 1865. There were no children.

Scott's meteorological output was confined to the translation of Dove's book but in 1866 he was approached by his intimate friend Edward Sabine, then at the height of his influence as president of the Royal Society and prospective chairman of the new meteorological committee, and was offered the directorship of the Meteorological Office. There were no other candidates and Scott was appointed director in January 1867. It was a clear case of personal patronage, but he was to remain executive head for thirty-three years. The office's constitution changed in 1877, control passing to a meteorological council. Scott's role and salary remained unaltered, although his designation became secretary to the council, a position he occupied until his retirement in 1900. He was succeeded by William Napier Shaw.

Scott was never a leading scientific thinker and probably owed his election as fellow of the Royal Society in 1870 to Sabine, but he was a capable administrator. His most important legacy to meteorology was as secretary of the international meteorological committee from its inception in 1873 until 1900. Meteorology is one of the most international of the sciences, and Scott played a significant part in establishing the tradition of co-operation between countries that became the norm. He retained an interest in mineralogy and served as president of the Mineralogical Society 1888–91. He joined the Meteorological Society in 1871 and was its foreign secretary from 1873 until his death, apart from 1880–81 when secretary and 1884–5 when president. Heavily bearded, Scott was a witty and apparently sociable man but became increasingly pedantic and intolerant of views divergent from his own. Doubtless this contributed to the personality problems within the

British meteorological establishment during the later nineteenth century.

Scott published two books, *Weather Charts and Storm Warnings* (1876) and *Elementary Meteorology* (1883), the latter becoming a standard text and running into nine editions. He also contributed over eighty papers and articles to a diversity of publications. Scott died on 18 June 1916 at 6 Elm Park Gardens, Chelsea, London, and was buried at Peper Harow, Godalming, then the Surrey seat of the Brodrick family.

Jim Burton, rev.

Sources

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Likenesses

photograph, repro. in *Meteorological Magazine*

Wealth at death

£13,651 0s. 4d.: probate, 9 Sept 1916, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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