

***“Mr Scott may be very upset”
Giles Gilbert Scott, Edwin Cooper
and the Building of the Star & Garter
Home.ⁱ***

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On 14 January 1916 the Star & Garter Home for Disabled Soldiers opened with the arrival of the first 11 patientsⁱⁱ in the derelict Star & Garter Hotel on Richmond Hill. Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960), a 36-year-old architect, was appointed to convert the hotel buildings into a hospital. Scott came from a family of eminent architects (his grandfather had been responsible for St Pancras Station) and had already completed designs for the rebuilding of Liverpool’s Anglican Cathedral. The Star & Garter Home would provide a stepping-stone between Scott’s predominantly small-scale, ecclesiastical commissions of the pre-war yearsⁱⁱⁱ and the larger works for which he would be best remembered: Battersea Power Station (1931), Waterloo Bridge (1942), Bankside Power Station (1947, now Tate Modern), and the two principal red telephone kiosks, the K2 and K6 (1926 and 1936)¹.

By 1924 the old hotel had been completely demolished and a new building was opened in July of that year by King George V and Queen Mary. They were accompanied, however, not by Scott, but by the new architect Edwin Cooper (1873-1942)². Scott’s tenure as architect had not outlived 1918 and Edwin Cooper had designed and overseen the construction of the new building. It has never been known why one of the twentieth century’s most significant architects was replaced by one whose

ⁱ I should like to thank the staff of the British Red Cross Society Archives, the staff of the Royal Star & Garter Homes and Rachel Freeman for their assistance in the production of this article.

ⁱⁱ The disabled service personnel at the Home are now referred to as ‘residents’; ‘patients’ is seen as a pejorative term. However, ‘Patients’ is used throughout this article as it reflects contemporary usage.

ⁱⁱⁱ Such as the church of the Annunciation at Bournemouth (1905) and Our Lady in Northfleet, Kent (1913).

“work has hardly been considered worthy of disparagement, even less praise”³. Scott’s presence as the Home’s original architect is only mentioned in a few of the books and articles written on the Star & Garter, none of which gives any indication of why he was replaced by Cooper⁴.

The British Red Cross Society, who ran the Home as an independent charity until 1922, had been given the Star & Garter Hotel in 1915 by Queen Mary. The first meeting of the Red Cross’s Star & Garter Committee was on 6 August 1915 at Pall Mall at which Giles Gilbert Scott was requested to prepare estimates for the alteration of part of the hotel to house 60 patients “while the hotel building was demolished”⁵. At a Committee meeting on 1 September 1915 Scott was formally appointed architect agreeing to waive all fees from the charity except his expenses. Arthur Stanley MP, the Committee’s chairman, wrote later that “we required a monumental building of beauty and dignity, and Mr Gilbert Scott who has a national reputation and who has won for himself by his executed work a high position as an Artist Architect, was selected”⁶.

It had been originally hoped that, while the main hotel building was demolished, the hotel’s annexe could be converted for 137 ward patients at a cost of £26,000. This had been built by Edward Barry in 1865 as a banqueting hall and was used for concerts during the period of the hotel’s decline in the 1910s⁷. The annexe was in poor repair and Scott suggested it be demolished to allow construction of a single, self contained building. He also objected to its “grotesque mixture of dog-tooth ornament, early French Gothic capitals and pseudo-Renaissance detail”⁸ and, even though local opinion was opposed to the annexe’s destruction⁹, it was agreed to demolish the annexe and for Scott to draw up plans for a single building.

In May 1916 it became apparent that there had been a disagreement between Scott and the Star & Garter. At a meeting on 3 May he was asked to produce a new estimate for the cost of the building. Later in that month he wrote a letter to the Home’s Secretary, Rudge Harding, explaining that his estimates had increased because “the committee’s requirements have increased from time to time”¹⁰. Scott wrote a letter outlining the number of changes made to the scheme since his appointment as architect as he was “afraid there is a feeling [...] that the increase [in cost] is due to inconsistency in my estimates”¹¹.



Patients in the hotel annexe. 1916

These changes to the scheme had begun in November 1915 when Scott was asked to enlarge his original plans to include private rooms and married quarters. The Star & Garter Committee found the 134 patients accommodated by this scheme insufficient. Scott produced designs for 285 patients by reducing the size of their rooms. The Committee thought these rooms were too small and asked Scott to enlarge them with, however, "a great reluctance to reducing the total accommodation". Scott's revised plans enlarged the rooms at the expense of internal wells that allowed for light and ventilation while concealing waste pipes. The committee then decided that these wells were too small. Scott's scheme to enlarge them added another storey to the Home in compensation. This fifth scheme would cost £77,000, but by July 1916 his estimates had risen to £104,000 due to increased costs. In August, it was decided that foundations should be sunk to these plans "in order to avoid the delay".

January 1917, however, saw yet another amendment. A Building Committee had been appointed by the Star & Garter Committee in December 1916 with a remit to oversee the construction of the new

building. This committee decided that the 77 patient rooms opening into the internal wells should be removed and the resulting loss of rooms made up with the provision of two extra storeys. The cost of this building would be about £200,000 and provide for 300 patients¹³. Despite Scott's elevations being "very handsome" and the plans greatly improved, they did not meet the Building Committee's approval, "in particular they showed greatly deficient day room accommodation"¹⁴. A. A. Hudson, chairman of the Building Committee, wrote to Arthur Stanley that if Scott's plans "had shewn the day room occupied by wheeled chair patients the whole floor space would look like sheep in a pen"¹⁵. At a meeting of the Star & Garter Committee on 14 February, Scott was asked to "supply a full statement of the whole position for the next Meeting of the Committee"¹⁶. This was to be the last meeting of that committee Scott attended in person^{iv}.

As a response to all this, the Building Committee began to talk about appointing a consulting architect "to be directly responsible to the Committee for the internal plans and for the construction [of] the buildings, reserving to Mr Scott all matters of art and decoration"¹⁷. In a Star & Garter Committee meeting on 26 March 1917 Scott, possibly unsurprisingly, disagreed with this and wrote to Rudge Harding in April that "the suggestion of appointing another architect to co-operate with me is a grave reflection on my professional ability"¹⁸. Sir William Lever and Sir Frederick Treves, two of the most prominent members of the Star & Garter Committee who supported Scott, also disagreed with the appointment of another architect. In response, the Building Committee threatened to resign and accused the Star & Garter Committee of acting in Scott's interests. The Building Committee were victorious and, in May, it was agreed to appoint a consulting architect "to advise the Building Committee"¹⁹ and that "in future Mr Scott would take his instructions solely from the Building Committee"²⁰.

Scott consented to the appointment of a Consulting Architect and suggested Aston Webb^v for the position. He was ignored and, on 23 May, the Star & Garter committee invited Edwin Cooper to their meeting room

^{iv} When Scott wrote later that he enjoyed working on power stations as "there is not nearly as much to do as one might anticipate from the size of the building" (Stamp, p 81) it is possible that he was thinking back ruefully to these days at the Star & Garter.

^v Sir Aston Webb (1849–1930) architect. President of the Royal Academy 1919–1924. Worked on the Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth (1907), Admiralty Arch (1911) and the eastern facade of Buckingham Palace (1913).

on Pall Mall and, after an interview, appointed him Consulting Architect. The circumstances surrounding Cooper's appointment are revealed in a manuscript written by Cooper at about this time, possibly as an attempt to get his side of a contentious story straight. A. A. Hudson, chairman of the Building Committee, telephoned Cooper on 12 May telling him about the decision to appoint a consulting architect and "he then informed me that [the Star & Garter] were in serious trouble, the plans prepared by Mr Scott were absolutely hopeless and the scheme would never be built from them. The committee had threatened to resign as a body unless the matter was taken up and another architect appointed to advise them, who would be paid any reasonable fee asked". This payment, which was as a result of "all the trouble with Scott", was rejected immediately by Cooper. Over the following weeks Cooper and Hudson came to an agreement that Cooper would accept only expenses and no other payment; he was then invited to the interview at Pall Mall where he would be appointed. Cooper made it clear that he was "not seeking any professional advancement out of it [the contract]" but also recognised that "remoulding the previous scheme [would have] the result that Mr Scott may be very upset"²¹.

Things come to a head in the summer of 1917. In June Scott presented the building committee with alternative plans to replace those they had found unsatisfactory earlier in the year; these plans "represented a completely new scheme varying all the internal and external walls". The Star & Garter ordered construction to cease on the foundations and the trenches already dug to be shorn up with timber, "because the trenches had been dug for walls in the interior of the building shown on [Scott's previous] plans which had not been approved by the Committee". Scott opposed this stoppage on the grounds that it would cause a delay of six to seven weeks, but the Building Committee replied that a much more significant delay "greatly exceeding six or seven weeks" was to be necessary for Edwin Cooper to comment on Scott's plans. Cooper's comments took the form of a report circulated to the Star & Garter Committee in July 1917, which the Committee saw as "obviously adverse" to Scott and sent it to him in order to give him an opportunity to reply²².

Cooper's report is based on eight main principles laid down by the Building Committee and states that it has been prepared "with exactly the same information" that Scott had been given. His criticisms of Scott's plans are extensive ("laboured" in Scott's view) and address a minute level of detail: "The Secretary and Typists' Dining Room is arranged in the Orderlies' Corridor, the outlook being a blank wall under the Terrace and the approach to an outside urinal". He particularly criticises the space

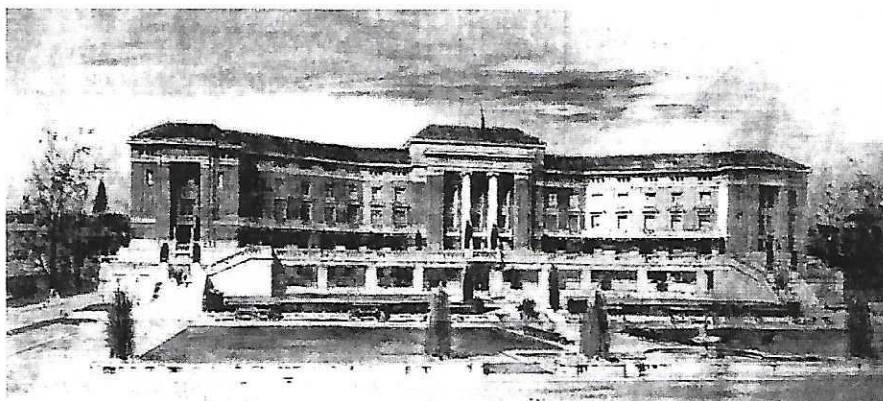
allocated to the patients in the wards, the day room and other communal spaces. Scott's reply comes on 21 August and explains the great number of alterations the scheme has been through and goes on to accuse the Building Committee of giving Cooper "requirements differing from those which it had been arranged I should work to". Scott found this "extraordinarily unjust" and that it made much of Cooper's report "entirely inapplicable". But Scott does address Cooper's criticisms: for instance he counters the charge that the day room is too small with the reply that he was briefed that it was never intended to be used by all the patients at once. Cooper complains that "no separate Staircases are provided for male and female staff", to which Scott retorts that he does "not understand the necessity for [this]. I trust that the morals of the staff will be equal to the strain of meeting on the stairs".^{vi} What is clear from the reports is that Scott had his instruction from the Star & Garter Committee, while Cooper had his from the Building Committee and that the details of their requirements were not in agreement. In a letter to the Building Committee accompanying Scott's report he accused them of "unfairness and injustice". The Committee replied to this letter on 3 December saying "that they much regret that you have thought fit to make the accusations contained therein. They are of the opinion that it would serve no useful purpose to enter into a correspondence thereon and do not propose to do so."²³ During the period that these reports were produced it had been agreed that the building of the Home would be postponed until after the war, due to an increase in building costs on account of the war.

A further confrontation between the Star & Garter and Building Committees came in the summer of 1918 over Scott's role in the design of the Home. The Building Committee advocated dismissing Scott and opening the building up to public competition. The Star & Garter Committee's response come from Frederick Treves, who said that Scott "has prepared plans which have never been criticised by a competent authority" and that "there is a more obvious need for a new building committee than for a new architect". Arthur Stanley sent two telegrams from Stornoway (one totalling 19 pages) praising Scott, opposing the idea of a competition and threatening to resign²⁴. Scott's position at the Home had become unstable and it seems likely that he was to have been dismissed. It must have come as a relief for all parties when, on 23

^{vi} Many details in the reports are technical in nature and the present author feels incapable of properly addressing them here; this also applies to any detailed comparison of Scott and Cooper's architectural plans, many of which are kept in the archives of the Home (AEG and AGG).

August 1918, Scott wrote a letter of resignation to Arthur Stanley, citing the pressures of architectural work and his military duties (Scott had become a major in the Royal Marines and was constructing defences in the Channel²⁵). Scott's resignation was received amicably, as is shown by a letter congratulating Scott on his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy in May 1918 and the granting an honorarium of 1000 guineas in December 1918²⁶.

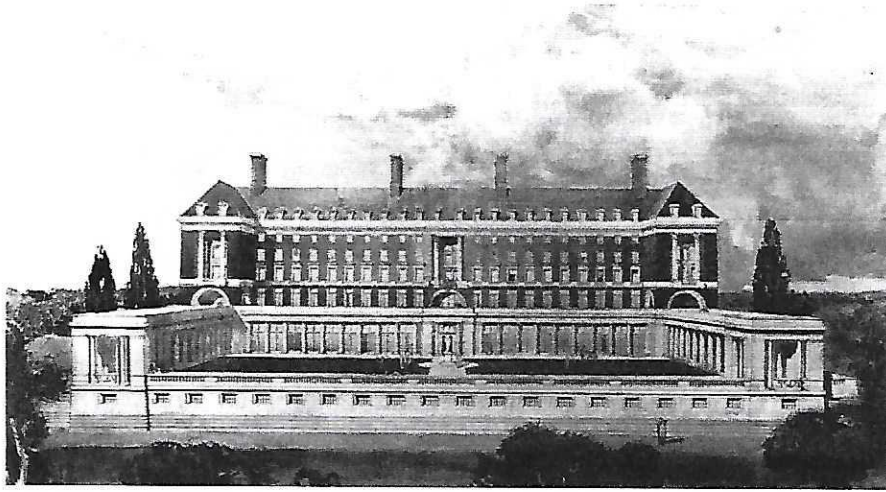
There was still the question of a public competition. The Star & Garter Committee's vigorous opposition of this plan, and suggestion that the completion of the building should be entrusted to the Office of Works while retaining Scott's elevations, was regarded by A. A. Hudson as "saving face" for Scott. The Building Committee's plan for a competition would remove Scott's name as architect and clearly implied that he had been incapable of completing the project. Hudson wrote that Scott's plans were "hopelessly wrong [and] Mr Scott has no one to blame but himself"²⁷. A compromise was evidently reached and Edwin Cooper was appointed Architect on 26 February 1919. This was, however, a compromise that favoured the Building Committee as Scott's name was removed from all plans and has only rarely been mentioned in the subsequent history of the Star & Garter.



Gilbert Scott's design for the new Star & Garter 1916

(Country Life April 15th, 1916)

"The first sketch of the new building. The design may be subject to slight alterations in the development of its details, but it represents with sufficient accuracy the architect's fine conception of a home for men who have given up everything but their lives for their country."



'Star & Garter Garden Front' by Edwin Cooper. c 1920

Cooper's work on the Home earned him a knighthood²⁸, close connections with the Cowdray family (major funders of the Home, for whom Cooper would work on a memorial plaque in St George's Chapel at Windsor, and on the Cowdray Club in Cavendish Square) and commissions for a series of medical buildings including the Devonport Nurses Home (1929) and the Royal College of Nursing (1922)²⁹. It is tempting to imagine what Scott would have thought when, on 19 July 1924, he accompanied King George and Queen Mary to the consecration of Liverpool Cathedral, just 9 days after they had opened Cooper's Star & Garter Home³⁰.

In the dispute over the building of the Star & Garter Home two sides have become apparent: on the one hand, Scott is supported by the Star & Garter Committee, especially Sir Frederick Treves, Sir William Lever and Sir Arthur Stanley MP; on the other, Cooper is supported by the Building Committee and A. A. Hudson. It is difficult not to see the Star & Garter Committee sticking with their chosen architect, in spite of the protestations of a technically competent but wayward sub-committee. It is also tempting to see Scott's dismissal as a result, not of any incompetence on his part, but as the result of the dispute between the Committees.

Perhaps it is also possible to locate another conflict behind the building of the Star & Garter Home. Cooper's building is undeniably impressive and the view of it from the Thames is justifiably famous. An article on Cooper in *The Builder* of 1931 writes of the Home's "appreciation of the

site”³¹ and Alan Powers, finds that “the effect of the high roof and tall chimneys tells well from a distance”. But Powers also refers to the “the large-scale institutional neo-Georgian of the 1920s” as “a trifle monotonous”³² and the Home as essentially a building several centuries out of date. It was completed at the very height of International Modernism in architecture – two years after Le Corbusier published his *Toward an Architecture* and three years after the opening of the Bauhaus. It belongs firmly to that Neo-Georgian architectural style Edwin Lutyens^{vii} (who was an influence on Cooper) referred to as ‘Wrenaissance’³³. Cooper was called “a bastion of humanist values against the first waves of Continental Modernism” in the pages of *Country Life* in 1971³⁴. While Scott was certainly not a disciple of Le Corbusier or an overt proponent of the International Modernist style, Gavin Stamp writes that “He [...] was strongly affected by what might be described as the first wave of Continental Modernism”³⁵. The Star & Garter Home is a fine building that the charity is very sorry to be leaving behind and which Richmond Council will hopefully repurpose sympathetically, but it could be seen as a lost opportunity in the history of English modernism.

Sources

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11. RC PP28
12. RC 961/3/3/1 and PP28
13. RS&G MHC/13. Min 25-27
14. RC 961/3/3/5
15. RC PP12-13
16. RS&G MHC/1. Minute 528
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^{vii} Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869–1944) architect. Worked on Homewood at Knebworth (1901), the Cenotaph (1920), the British Medical Association (1924) and the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi (1929).

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Comments from *Country Life* April 25th, 1916 on Scott's design

'We are wont to expect from Mr. Gilbert Scott that fresh handling of Gothic motives that won him when little more than a boy the greatest prize which ecclesiastical architecture has offered in the last fifteen years – the building of the great cathedral now rising at Liverpool. His vigorous outlook on the problems of modern Gothic has been shown since then in several smaller churches. It is clear that he is as skilful in the presentation of sober classical forms. The new Star and Garter is to be built of silver-grey bricks with Portland stone for columns and terraces, and the roof will be covered with great red tiles of a Greek pattern not hitherto used in England.'