

# Obituary

Judith Dorothea Guillum Scott OBE  
(1917-2011)



Secretary of the Church of England's Council for the Care of  
Churches and the Cathedrals' Advisory Committee from 1957-1971  
Noted authority on Anglican churches and cathedrals

*We are pleased to publish here the obituary of 15 June 2011 by Professor Peter Burman.*

Judith Scott was born on 6 March 1917 at 4 Battersea Park Road, in the parish of St George's Battersea, London. Her father, Guy Harden Guillum Scott, was one of the founders of the Battersea Dogs' Home. In recent years Judith, who was a woman of immense dignity and presence, used to say to newcomers to her circle 'I was born in a dogs' home', and watch with delight the surprised expression on their faces. Her mother was Anne Dorothea, born Fitzjohn. The family lived in comfortable circumstances and her father, a barrister-at-law, later became a judge and in due course first Secretary of the Church Assembly. Judith's elder sibling, Sir John Guillum Scott, followed in his father's footsteps and became Secretary of the Church Assembly, then first Secretary-General of the General Synod of the Church of England. So they were a solidly Church of England family. In a short memoir about her early life Judith wrote that after she had published, at age 20, her book about the history and architecture of St Mary Abbots, Kensington, where her father was a churchwarden and had to wear top hat and tails when members of the Royal family came to church from nearby Kensington Palace, she decided on religious emancipation and took her loyalties to St Mary the Virgin, Primrose Hill. This church, under its distinguished liturgist Vicar, Percy Dearmer, became in the 1920s one of the leading Anglo-Catholic churches in London where everything was done with conviction and well. Percy Dearmer's *Parson's Handbook*, with its emphasis on beauty and dignity in every aspect of worship, remained always for Judith the gold standard of Anglican worship and the interior arrangement of churches.

The next important step in Judith's life was when, on 13 June 1936, she joined the Central Council for the Care of Churches which was run, by Dr Francis Eeles, her great mentor, from a small suite of rooms in the Victoria & Albert Museum, close to the office of the then Director, Sir Eric MacClagan, who also became a close ally. At first she was a volunteer as Dr Eeles's assistant. But in 1939 she became Acting Assistant Secretary and was paid a modest salary by the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England. In 1957 she became Secretary and by that time, and in no small way thanks to her advocacy and leadership, the Central Council for the Care of Churches and later the Cathedrals Advisory Committee had become well-established bodies that were proving their worth.

During the second World War the office moved to Dr Eeles's country home in Dunster, Somerset, and one of their more ambitious projects was to find secure homes where the treasures from City of London churches could be safely stored during the war. The journey to Dunster became a regular pilgrimage for lovers of ancient churches and just after the war one such visitor was John Betjeman, researching for the *Collins Guide to English Parish Churches*. He wrote to Dr Eeles to say thank you and to propose another visit and said that next time 'I will take Miss Scott to the cinema so that she will be able to clear some of those rood lofts out of her mind'. Evidently he was not successful in that mission and Judith became one of the leading church antiquaries of her day. She became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on 14 February 1938; later she became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and served on its Council. Her scholarship informed the innumerable advisory reports she wrote on behalf of the twin organizations that she served so well, and enabled her to take part in strenuous debates with confidence and skill. As was said by Duncan Wilkinson at the Service of

Thanksgiving for her at Wymondham Abbey on 10 June: 'Her sharpness of mind easily dissected the subject to which it was applied and she could always be relied upon for a unique perspective.'

After the war there was much debate about the extent to which the City of London churches should be repaired or rebuilt. On a Saturday afternoon, on the telephone, she took the courageous decision to assure the Archdeacon of London that she would somehow and personally raise the money for the restoration of All Hallows', London Wall, a most delightful building by George Dance the Younger (to whom Sir John Soane was apprenticed as a very young man), 1768. Not only was the church superbly put back together again but it and the adjoining church rooms of 1901 were sensitively remodeled so that the Council for the Care of Churches and its sister body could establish their offices there, along with a library which became and remains one of real distinction. The chancel could, however, still be used for worship and the church became a 'Guild Church' governed by a special Act of Parliament. Here Judith reigned, until ill health forced her to retire early in 1971.

Meanwhile she had made a signal contribution to the evolution of Church legislation and policy with regard to the care and supervision of churches, through the *Inspection of Churches Measure 1955*, the *Faculty Jurisdiction Measure 1964* and the *Pastoral Measure 1968*. She had an uncanny knack for discerning what would be the impact of new legislation and policy, and knew well how to challenge and to ask the right penetrating questions. Judith believed, following William Morris, that it was better to 'stave off decay by daily care' and that regular inspection by a suitably qualified architect or surveyor, followed by a careful and continuing programme of maintenance and repairs, and ceaseless vigilance would mean - and she was right - that churches would survive much better into the future, and with more of their integrity intact.

She was nevertheless by no means hostile to courageous liturgical experiment. Moreover, she did her utmost to encourage churches and cathedrals to commission innovative artists and artist-craftsmen in many fields: it was regarded, and still is, as an opportunity and a privilege to be invited on to the Council's *Register of Artists & Craftsmen* which she established. She welcomed and encouraged the establishment of treasuries in a good number of cathedrals. She maintained excellent relationships with the Worshipful Company of Carpenters, for whom All Hallows' London Wall was their 'Guild Church'. She sat on committees for major exhibitions of church art including the epoch-making *Victorian Church Art* exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum. At the same time she was a significant figure in encouraging conservators to regard themselves as a profession and a discipline in their own right. The confidence with which she was regarded, by the Pilgrim Trust and other foundations, meant that there was a new and regular flow of charitable money to conserve such aspects of churches as their monuments, wall paintings, brasses, stained glass, textiles, organs, books and manuscripts, bells and bell frames. There seemed no limit to her interests, her energy and her ability to make others see the importance of churches and cathedrals as great repositories of treasures from throughout the ages to which it was also our duty to add a layer of beauty, interest and significance of the present day.

Her advice was sought by many organizations and individuals. She first attended a committee meeting of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, as an observer,

on 17 September 1936. For many years thereafter she was an influential member of that committee and later a member of its august Council. She worked closely and in several contexts with its chairman, the Duke of Grafton, and with its long-time Secretary, Mrs Monica Dance.

In her retirement, following her return to reasonably good health, she was appointed a member of the Advisory Board for Redundant Churches which had the weighty responsibility of advising the Church Commissioners on the fate of churches which had been declared redundant under the *Pastoral Measure 1968*. Settled in north-east Scotland with her long-term companion Philippa Buckton, Judith became Secretary of the Banffshire Coast Conservation Society, aptly demonstrating that it was possible to act locally as well as nationally. They converted a former railway station and cottages into a most attractive and imaginative home and guest wing, and moreover created a beautiful garden. When later on they came back to England and established a home in Wymondham, Judith became a very active member of the local community and a faithful member of the Parochial Church Council of Wymondham Abbey.

Service on other committees (but there were many) included the UK committee of the International Council on Monuments & Sites (ICOMOS), which advises the government on protection and management of World Heritage Sites, heritage tourism, and cognate matters; the Standing Joint Committee on Natural Stone; trusteeship of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust; Council of the National Trust for Scotland; Council of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland. The list seems endless, her energy and enthusiasm boundless.

For her part in protecting the treasures of the City of London churches and in finding solutions for them in the post-war period Judith was made a Churchill Fellow of Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, USA. She encouraged and advised on the translocation of a badly damaged Wren church from the City of London to Fulton. She was made an OBE in June 1970.

A service of thanksgiving in Wymondham Abbey followed her funeral and was attended by a large congregation, from among her many friends old and young (for she never lost the capacity to make new friends and could identify with people of all ages and stations in life) and by representatives of many of the organizations which she had served so faithfully during her long and active lifetime. She exercised her ministry of encouragement and support to others until very close to the end. She died on 22 May 2011, aged 94.

It is difficult to do justice to her personal qualities which included great elegance of appearance, a strong ethical backbone to everything she did and said, and a gift for the telling and original phrase. 'You strike me amidships', she once memorably said, when crossed in argument by a high official of the Church Commissioners. She was unfailingly generous, kind and loving. She was also immensely appreciative of the staff at Robert Kett House, Wymondham, who cared for her in her declining months. She kept the faith in which she was brought up and had a deep spiritual life. The word 'service' really meant something to her, and she gave her energy and time freely to all who asked it of her.

She is survived by her niece, Susan Guillum Jeffery, and by a group of devoted friends ranging from remotest Scotland to South Africa.