

The Scott Sisters

Harriet (1830 – 1907) & Helena (1832 – 1910)

Entomological illustrators extraordinaire

Helena "Nellie" Scott and her sister Harriet Morgan (née Scott) were prolific natural history illustrators and among the first professional female illustrators in Australia.

The Scott sisters were born in the Rocks in Sydney to a family of scientists and natural historians. Their father, Alexander Walker Scott, a noted entomologist, trained his daughters in natural history observation and illustration. After moving from Sydney to Ash Island in the Hunter River estuary in 1846, Harriet and Helena began drawing the native flora and fauna under their father's tutelage.

Nearly twenty years later, the Scott sisters had completed a collection of drawings of moths and butterflies for their father's publication, "*Australian Lepidoptera and their Transformations*". The success of this publication brought many commissions, including James Charles Cox's "*Monograph of Australian land shells*" in 1868, Gerard Krefft's "*Snakes of Australia*" in 1869 and "*Mammals of Australia*" in 1871. The paintings of the two sisters were renowned for their exquisite and life-like detail.



Above: Portrait of Helena Scott, [Unknown Photographer © Australian Museum].
Below: Portrait of Harriet Scott [Unknown artist, From the collections of the State Library of New South Wales]
Background: *Comocrus behri*, plate from "*Australian lepidoptera and their transformations*" (A.W. Scott, Public Domain).



In the 1860s the sisters faced financial difficulties following the bankruptcy of their father and the deaths of their mother and Helena's husband Henry Forde. They were forced to leave Ash island and to seek payment for their work. Harriet eventually married Dr Cosby William Morgan, but Helena still faced financial difficulty. She persuaded the Australian Museum to publish what was left of the *Lepidoptera* material, purchased for £200 in 1884. Under Helena's guidance, the museum published the second volume of the work in five parts between 1890 and 1898.

The Scott sisters continued to earn their living from drawing and painting, and are now considered two of Australia's earliest professional illustrators. Their work continues to be showcased by the Australian Museum.

