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JAMES SIMMONS: A CANTERBURY TYCOON

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I. INTRODUCTION

James Simmons was Canterbury's leading citizen in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. Stationer, printer, publisher, newspaper proprietor, seller of patent medicines, distributor of stamps, mill owner, banker, benefactor and reshaper of Canterbury, canal promoter, Alderman, Sheriff and twice Mayor, M.P. and 'Father of the City', he was a remarkable and doughty man of business, whose work on Canterbury is still to be seen.

This paper presents the significant events of his life, as culled mainly from City and County records, and from the pages of his *Kentish Gazette* and other contemporary publications.

II. PRINTING, PUBLISHING AND PATENT MEDICINES: FOUNDING A BUSINESS

Born 21st January, 1741, in Canterbury, James Simmons was a pupil at King's School from 1750–1756, under the guardianship of John Lade, his father, William Simmons, a barber, or peruke maker, having died a year or so after James' birth. James served an apprenticeship to a stationer in London, emerging in 1764 as a Freeman of the City, returning to Canterbury in 1767, after practising his trade in London.

On 20th January, 1767, he was admitted a Freeman of Canterbury by virtue of the fact that his father was a freeman at the time of James' birth.¹ With his right to practise his trade in Canterbury established, Simmons set about founding a stationer's and printing

¹ Cathedral Library and Archives Canterbury, *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, 20 January, 1767, A.C.9., 730.

business. From the start Simmons set his sights high, and he attacked his objectives with determination and skill. His primary aim was to provide Canterbury and east Kent with a quality newspaper such as he must have had experience of during his apprenticeship in London.

James Abree, founder of the first Kentish paper, *The Kentish Post or Canterbury Newsletter*, was about to retire, intending to hand over the business to his partner George Kirkby. Abree in fact died on 20th August, 1768, aged 77, shortly after handing over to Kirkby. Simmons offered to form a partnership with Kirkby, but Kirkby at that time refused. Rebuffed, Simmons on 26th May, 1768, printed the first issue of his *Kentish Gazette*, from his premises at the King's Arms Printing Office, Christ Church Yard, with his own name at the mast-head. In the issue of 2-6th July, 1768, Simmons printed an open letter from himself to his readers, in which, after claiming the general approbation of the public of his new venture, he referred to his abortive attempts to enter into a partnership with Kirkby, then publishing *The Kentish Post* in his own right. Simmons added² 'Great indeed is the labour I have undergone, and great the expense I have been at to promote the sale and attend the circulation. Yet notwithstanding all this, it seemed to be the general sense of the County that two papers were not only useless but very inconvenient. I made the utmost concessions to you gentlemen friends of Mr Kirkby in order to effect a coalition, but they could not be accepted . . . I am determined the *Kentish Gazette* shall contain the earliest intelligence and shall be circulated in the most expeditious manner.' While this appeal, as we shall see, did not sway George Kirkby's friends, Kirkby himself was apparently converted, since later that month³ Simmons was able to announce the amalgamation of the *Gazette* and the *Post/Newsletter* and the publication of the next issue of *The Kentish Gazette* under the joint direction of Kirkby and Simmons.

Established stationers and printers in Canterbury did not seem to relish the competition which the newcomer represented. There ensued a series of meetings and manoeuvres verging on intimidation, in which the Canterbury printers Flackton and Smith attempted to break the partnership between Simmons and Kirkby, and to prevent Simmons' entry into the Canterbury scene as an effective force in their area. Flackton and Smith either directly and/or through their lawyer Mr Peronet, discreetly applied pressure on Kirkby to allow

² *The Kentish Gazette*, 2-4 July 1768, 1a. Simmons also claimed that *The Kentish Gazette* reached Tonbridge, Stroud, Rochester and Chatham on the day of publication.

³ *Ibid.*, 16-20 July 1768, 3c.

them effectively to replace Simmons in the partnership. Flackton and Smith threatened that if they did not get their way, they would start up another newspaper in opposition. Kirkby, who was not in the best of health, did not think he could stand the opposition and was inclined to give way. The attempt to suborn Kirkby was done without Simmons' knowledge, but on 4th August, 1768, he was summoned by Peronet to see Flackton and Smith. They made their position clear to him: 'Unless you choose to let them have a share in the *Kentish Gazette*, they were determined to set up another paper to oppose you.' According to Simmons, in an open letter in the *Gazette*, which exposed the whole of Flackton and Smith's manoeuvres,⁴ he replied 'This gentlemen is most unexpected, and I think unreasonable request, but on my part it requires not much consideration. With infinite labour I have endeavoured to establish the paper and am determined never to part with the least moiety of my share'. After further meetings with Kirkby, Flackton and Smith indicated that their intention was to try to separate Simmons from the printing side of the business altogether, allowing him only the stationer's shop. Simmons accused them of taking 'an infinite deal of pains to prevent (Simmons) from obtaining a livelihood in a city where he was free born by a trade to which he has a right by legal servitude' and added 'unhappy it was for Mr Kirkby to be connected with a man the object of their high displeasure'. Kirkby, perhaps stiffened by Simmons' display of determination and courage, finally said he would abide by any step Simmons cared to take. Simmons then told Flackton and Smith he would carry on. They confirmed that they would certainly pursue their intended opposition. Simmons reported 'Nothing but experience can convince some people of an error.'

Both sides published their own version of the dispute, putting their own gloss on events. Things became so contentious that sworn statements on oath summarising the facts were deposed. Simmons and Kirkby made such a statement before the Mayor of Canterbury on 20th September, 1768, and published it in full in *The Kentish Gazette*.⁵ There the matter rested; Simmons had stood firm, rebuffed the opposition and obtained a foothold for himself in Canterbury. Flackton and Smith carried out their threat, and the first issue of *The Kentish Weekly Post* appeared in the week of 12–19th September, 1768. A bitter rivalry between the two papers continued for some years, but the progress of the twice-weekly *Kentish Gazette* did not

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14–16 September 1768, Supplement 'VINCIT VERITAS'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17–21 September 1768, 3c.

seem to be hindered by the opposition. A fuller account of this rivalry between newspapers is to be found in an article in *The Kentish Gazette* of 1977.⁶

In all this, while Simmons' courage and business skill shines through, it is not clear how he was supported by adequate financial resources, or whether he was able to rely on influential connections in Canterbury. According to Timperley, however, [*Encyclopaedia of literary and typographical Anecdotes*, (London) 1842, 826-7], after serving his apprenticeship with Thomas Greenhill, an eminent stationer opposite the Mansion House, Simmons had set up in business in London on his own account, and had done sufficiently well to have become a Liveryman, and to have been nominated for the office of Sheriff. Simmons may, therefore, have had sufficient resources to start on his own in Canterbury.

In any event, *The Kentish Gazette* was established. Its quality and style must have appealed to its readers, since its general content remained substantially unchanged throughout the 39 years of Simmons' ownership. A broadsheet of four sides, each with four columns, in easily readable print, it sold at 2 pence, rising to 6 pence by 1800. The title page was mainly occupied with advertisements of local significance, business arrangements and local sales. Each issue included dispatches on the wars and affairs in the American and other colonies and on the European continent, an account of parliamentary proceedings; a London newsletter, giving court and society news; and a Canterbury column which collected short news items from most parts of east Kent. Editorials were non-existent. Simmons conveyed his policy from time to time by way of open letters to his readers, and (we may suspect) through some of the *nom de plume* letters given prominence in the paper, either written or inspired by the editor(s).

From the start, Simmons diversified his and Kirkby's business. Alongside the stationer's, printing and newspaper business, they stocked and sold patent medicines of all kinds, and kept a lending library. As to the former, the *Gazette* in each issue carried up to a page of advertisements for medicines and household preparations, all of them available from the shop at the King's Arms Printing House. The range offered was very wide, and the prices for those days, quite high. MR HILL's medicines for sale through Simmons and Kirkby as agents included Pectoral Balsam of Honey, Essence of Water Dock, Tincture of Spleenwort (3/- a bottle) and Valerin (2/6d. a bottle).⁷

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 February, 1977. Article by David Rose, based on research by Victor Ralph, Divisional Librarian for Canterbury.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-15 June, 1768, 3d.

Duffy's Elixir,⁸ a Sovereign Remedy for Many Ills, Helfts Famous Powder 'for taking inkspots out of table linens etc.' 'Without the least injury'⁹ are typical of the preparations offered in every issue of *The Kentish Gazette*. The circulating library by 1782 was advertised as consisting of 3,545 books, all new and on every useful and entertaining subject. Subscription to the library was 14/- a year or 4/- a quarter.¹⁰ A neat business touch was that the distribution system, Simmons and Kirkby had set up to deliver the newspaper to parts of Kent as far afield as Tonbridge the same day as publication, was used to deliver patent medicines or books from the circulating library to patrons at no extra cost. That these were flourishing and important parts of the business from the start is evidenced by the fact that in October 1768 the stationer's, medicine and circulating library were moved to premises in St. George's Street, the former house of the late Mr Kidder, cabinet maker. There is also mention of a medicine warehouse at the corner of Hawks Lane and St. Margaret's Street.¹¹

As printer, publisher and book-binders, the firm provided the usual source of pens, pencils, paper, etc., and a range of diaries and almanacs with facts of interest to people in east Kent. Additionally, they were responsible for bringing out some notable publications, such as the first edition of Hasted's *History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent 1778-98*, in four folio volumes. Simmons had driven a hard bargain in this respect, probably contributing to Hasted's financial collapse, and certainly adding to his debts. The printing was done at Hasted's expense, and the large bill presented to him by Simmons in 1799 was characterised by Hasted in a letter to his friend and collaborator Boteler as 'beyond belief. No less a sum than £1000, all of which he must be paid before I can receive a shilling from it'.¹² Simmons also seems to have put his own publications before Hasted's since in November 1796 Hasted complained to Boteler that the printing of the fourth volume of the folio edition had been delayed 'thro the more weighty publications of Mr Simmons - pocketbooks and almanacks'.¹³ Simmons was obviously getting ready for the annual demand for diaries and seasonal almanacs. By this time, however, no doubt because of Simmons' treatment of him, Hasted had contracted with Bristow of the Parade, Canterbury, to

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-25 June, 1768, 4d.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-29 June, 1768, 4d.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-21 March, 1781, 4c.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26-29 October, 1768, 1d.

¹² J. Boyle, *In Quest of Hasted*, (Phillimore 1984), 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

print and publish the second quarto edition for him. The terms this time were more advantageous, with the printer taking at least some of the financial risk.¹⁴

Hasted's *City of Canterbury*, derived from material in the first folio edition of his *History of Kent*, was also published by Simmons and Kirkby in 1798, as was Duncombe's edition of Barnby's *History of Canterbury Cathedral*, and Gostling's *A Walk in and about the City of Canterbury*. In all, Simmons brought out five editions of the latter, beginning with the first edition in 1774 when Gostling was still alive, and ending with the fifth edition in 1804. The second edition, brought out in 1776 shortly after Gostling's death, had an introduction by Gostling's daughter and carried a subscription list which included Ald. Simmons and Mrs Simmons. Subsequent editions had an introduction signed by Simmons and Kirkby as editors.¹⁵ The Introduction to the fifth edition was over Simmons' name (Kirkby had by then died), though the text of the Introduction differed little from previous editions.

III. CIVIC DUTIES AND THE PAVING OF CANTERBURY: THE GREAT MODERNISER

In 1769, Simmons was sufficiently well established in Canterbury to be elected to its Common Council.¹⁶ In 1772/73 he served as Sheriff.¹⁷ The only event of note recorded in the Burghmote Minutes of his year of office was the fact that as Sheriff he acted as teller at the election of George Gipps as Mayor for the remainder of the term of Mr Tadley, who died in office.¹⁸ In 1774, Simmons was elected Alderman for Riding Gate Ward.¹⁹ On January 11th, 1776, he married Charlotte Mantell,²⁰ a spinster aged 23 of Tenterden, at Tenterden, and in September of that year he was elected Mayor.²¹ His year of office does not seem to have been marked by any event of note.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵ W. Gostling, *A Walk in and about the City of Canterbury*, (Canterbury, 1804, 5th Edition), vii-viii.

¹⁶ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.9., 804. 1 June, 1769.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, A.C.9., 869.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, A.C.9., 881. George Gipps, of Harbledown, M.P. for Canterbury 1780-1800, was subsequently a partner in the Canterbury Bank founded by Simmons in 1788.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, A.C.9, 928.

²⁰ A.J. Wells, *Canterbury Marriage Licences 1751-1780*, (Folkestone 1967), 263.

²¹ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*. A.C.9., 970.

His most significant civic work started in 1787 when the Canterbury Pavement Commissioners began their work. The move to modernise Canterbury's streets had been some years in gestation. As far back as 1770 the Burghmote had set up a committee to consider an Act for the Better Paving, Cleansing, Lighting and Watching of Canterbury. The committee had included the young councilman James Simmons as one of its members.²² It was not, however, until the 9th April, 1787, that the first meeting of the Pavement Commissioners took place in accordance with the act, which had been procured.²³ At that meeting, Alderman Simmons, who had played a prominent part in procuring the act, was elected treasurer, with Gilbert Knowles as chairman. It is clear from the records of the Pavement Commissioners that Simmons as treasurer until his resignation at the end of 1791, was a prime mover and mainstay of the Commissioners.²⁴

Once empowered, the Commissioners acted with commendable speed. By the end of their first month, April 1787, they had either made arrangements with existing turnpike authorities for the collection of coal and street duty at the entrances to Canterbury, or had set up their own toll gates. From the start they decided that tolls should be paid in weekly to the treasurer. They had consulted the surveyor of the City of London on the materials and methods to be used in paving the city, and had begun preparations for the lighting and cleansing of it. They had appointed watchmen to patrol the city in seven districts. By the end of May 1789, they had appointed a contractor to pave the length of the High Street between the walls.

The detailed work in raising and administering the finance for the Commissioners' work, in letting the contracts for paving, and in assessing and paying the bills, all fell on Simmons as treasurer. As to raising the loans, Simmons seemed to meet with no difficulty, and he and his friends contributed a fair proportion of the necessary amounts. On 27th August, £2,000 was borrowed, from three people,

²² *Ibid.*, A.C.9., 817. 4 January 1770. Contemporary writers were in no doubt that the work to be done was long overdue. In 1800, Hasted wrote that the houses in the City 'from the length of time they had been rebuilt, were grown ancient again, and from want of any improvements being made to them, were become unsightly, and the whole city was perhaps esteemed the most so in the Kingdom'.

²³ 27 GEO.II, Cap 14.

²⁴ Cathedral Library and Archives, Canterbury. *Minutes of the Canterbury Pavement Commissioners 1787-1866*. See also A. Turner, *Some Extracts from Minutes of Proceedings under an Act for the Paving of Canterbury (1787-1820)*, (Canterbury, March 1980, typescript copies only with the Conservation Department of the Canterbury City Council, and in the Cathedral Library and Archives); and also F.H. Pantton, 'Turnpike roads in the Canterbury Area', *Arch. Cant.*, cii (1985), 171-91.

including Simmons who contributed £500; on 24th December, a further £2,000 was raised; on 23rd June, 1788, a further £2000, including £300 from Simmons and £300 from his partner in the Canterbury Bank, George Gipps, M.P.; on 15th June, 1789, a further £1,000, including £200 from Gipps; on the 22nd September, 1788, a further £2,000; on 24th September, 1789, £1,000, with £200 from Gipps; a total of £10,000 in all, (the maximum amount permitted under the Paving Act), at 4½ per cent interest, payable quarterly.

The streets of Canterbury had, over the centuries, become cluttered with and obstructed by haphazard additions to buildings and in some cases by buildings themselves in the carriageway, and the Commissioners were given in the Act, draconian powers to ensure that the streets were cleared and were kept clear of all obstruction. In their work of paving, the Commissioners divided Canterbury into sections, tackling each one by one, starting with the main High Street. In advance of paving, they surveyed each section to determine what must be done to straighten and clear the street, and they drew up lists of actions affecting particular houses and buildings and their owners. The Commissioners also paid particular attention to rain-water disposal, insisting on the installation of proper gutters and drain-pipes.

Simmons was a prime mover in all this work. On the 23rd April, 1787, it was ordered by the Commissioners that 'the Proposals now delivered in by the Treasurer for removing bulks, projecting windows . . . be forthwith carried into execution'. In general, the walls or windows of buildings were not to project beyond the line of the foundations, though projecting bow windows of no more than 9 inches from the foundations of the house were to be allowed. Applying this rule, very many properties in Canterbury were forced to undergo drastic alterations, which in many cases may have destroyed the integral character of an old building, or have changed its appearance for the worse. On the 11th June, 1787, for instance, some 40 properties were listed in High Street in advance of paving; seven for windows to be removed entirely, one reduced to 6 inches, thirty reduced to 9 inches, one to 12 inches and one to 14 inches. Projecting signs and sign-posts were ordered to be taken down and affixed to the fronts of the houses to which they applied.²⁵ On the 11th May, 1787, it was ordered that notices should be applied to houses and churchwardens of the several churches to cause all spouts and gutters to be taken down and to cause the water to be conveyed

²⁵ Turner, *op. cit.*, 3.

from the roofs, cornices, eaves and penthouses by pipes or trunks to be fixed to the sides of such houses.²⁶

In this work the Commissioners applied their jurisdiction equally to other local entities as well as to individual householders. Petitions to vary their requirements were heard and sometimes allowed. For instance on 25th June, 1787, it was ordered that the steps of the Guildhall be taken away as soon as conveniently can be after due notice (to the Burghmote presumably).²⁷ About St. George's Church, which intruded unacceptably on to the carriageway, there were discussions with the archbishop as to what should be done regarding the staircase to the steeple. Eventually on 29th November, 1787, it was ordered that an experiment shall be tried by making an archway through the same building to open a passage for foot passengers.²⁸ On the 22nd May, 1788, it was ordered that the chamberlain of the city shall cause the water to be brought from the tower of Westgate by proper and sufficient pipes of trunks agreeable to the directions of the Act, and the spouts taken down.²⁹

By the end of November 1789, the Commissioners had achieved their prime objectives, and the main streets inside the city walls were straightened and newly paved. To be sure, this was achieved at the expense of houses and buildings suffering changes and amendments, which modern conservationists would have opposed strongly, but the transformation of the streets from medieval into Georgian must have been nothing short of miraculous. The success of the Commissioners' actions can be judged by the fact that the inhabitants of Northgate and Westgate without the walls of the city, petitioned to have their streets similarly treated by the Commissioners.

On 30th November, 1789, the Burghmote recorded two separate votes of thanks to the Commissioners for their work; one to Gilbert Knowles as chairman of the Commissioners, and the other to Simmons as treasurer. More than that, they showed their appreciation of the relative values of the contributions of the two men by voting in addition to Simmons alone a suitably inscribed silver plate, to the value of £50, to commemorate his work.³⁰ In his reply Simmons wrote 'To deserve well of my fellow citizens is the chief pride of my life'. He also made reference in his letter to the plan for

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁰ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10., 142.

inland navigation from the city to the sea, a canal project which was beginning to exercise his mind.³¹

In September 1788, Simmons had been elected mayor for the second time, and he continued his duties as treasurer of the Commissioners throughout his mayoral year. The Burghmote, probably through his influence, fully supported the work of the Commissioners from the start, and had for instance granted the use of the Guildhall for Commissioners' meetings.³² In his duality of office, however, Simmons was able, during his mayoralty, to take the lead in 'modernising' some of the features of Canterbury over which the City Fathers had jurisdiction, namely the city walls and gates, effectively co-ordinating the activities of the Commissioners and the Burghmote. The climate of the time was such that the City Fathers were not slow to pull down old monuments for monetary gain or if they stood in the way of progress. Indeed, Brent in 1879 wrote 'The close of the last century and the beginning of the present, were periods in which the destructionists in the Corporation had full sway . . .'³³ In 1768, for instance, the arches over the river near Brown's (after Abbot's) mill were taken down for use in widening King's Bridge.³⁴ In 1781, it was ordered that the centre of Burgate and the buildings over the Gateway between the two towers be taken down,³⁵ and in 1770 a petition to pull down 4 feet of the wall by Wincheap Gate was allowed.³⁶ The Burghmote had already given the Commis-

³¹ *Ibid.*, 52. Contemporary authors recorded that citizens and householders as a whole co-operated with and welcomed the changes. Hasted wrote 'the houses throughout it (Canterbury) were altered to a cheerful and more modern appearance; and most of the shops were fitted up in a handsome style, in imitation of those in London . . .' He added that the short tenure in which some of the householders held their property from the Church deterred them from 'hazarding more on such uncertain property, and had this not stopped their ardour, this city would in all likelihood have been second to few others in the Kingdom. *The Kentish Traveller's Companion* wrote 'it may with truth be asserted, that Canterbury, from being one of the worst paved cities, is at this time not exceeded, if equalled in pavement by any city or town in the Kingdom', and that 'such a spirit of emulation for improvement has gone forth among the inhabitants that many of the old buildings have been and are still wholly or in part taking down and rebuilding in modern style', and again, in summation, that a tribute of particular thanks was due to James Simmons Esq., 'by whose persevering and disinterested zeal, and unwearied efforts, in conjunction with his fellow citizens, these public improvements originated, were carried on and completed'.

³² *Ibid.*, 43.

³³ J. Brent, *Canterbury in the Olden Time*, (Canterbury 1879, 2nd Edition), 122.

³⁴ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.9, 797, 6 December, 1787.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, A.C.9, 1064, 5 June, 1781.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, A.C.9, 837, 18 December, 1770.

sioners liberty to take down the city walls, extending 30 rods from St. Mildred's Church, the material to be used in paving the city.³⁷

In November 1788, Mayor Simmons chaired a committee to look into proposals for making a carriageway through the Castle Yard into Wincheap³⁸ and in December a plan was approved to exchange a piece of land called Colton Land for enough of Mr Balderstone's Castle Yard to make a road through there by public subscription.³⁹ As part of the implementation of this plan, Worthgate was pulled down in 1791. In May 1789, Mayor Simmons headed a committee to see whether a proper place could be found for a new butter and greens market, the old one being something of an obstruction.⁴⁰ The recommendation brought forward was to pull down and rebuild Somner's market at the Bull Stake in front of Christ Church Gate. Simmons chaired the committee to oversee this and to fix the tolls for the new market.⁴¹ The new building cost £400 and added an additional 1008 square feet of space.⁴²

At the end of his mayoral year Simmons, on 16th October, 1789, was given a unanimous vote of thanks for his mayoralty. Typically, in his turn, Simmons gave the Common Council a present of two crimson velvet cushions for the mayor's chair.⁴³ This vote of thanks came a month before the vote thanking him for his work as treasurer, and together they constituted a singular double honour. At the end of 1791, Simmons handed over as treasurer to J. Hodges, who then combined his job as secretary of the Commissioners with that of treasurer. Simmons had received no salary as honorary treasurer, though no doubt his Canterbury bank benefited from the Commissioners' business, and probably continued to do so after he had given up the treasureship. Hodges held office at a salary of £30 per annum until 1814 when Messrs. Curteis and Kingford were appointed jointly with Hodges, until the latter retired that year.⁴⁴

Although Simmons resigned as treasurer in 1791, he retained an active interest in the affairs of the Commissioners. On 29th October, 1800, when the turnpike road to Thanet was being mooted, Simmons was a member of a committee of three appointed to negotiate with

³⁷ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 82, 11 November, 1788.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 85-86, 9 December, 1788.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 118.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 123, 132, 137-138, June-July 1789, September 1789.

⁴² *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 141, 13 October, 1789.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 148.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Canterbury Pavement Commissioners*, 1 February, 1814.

the new body, and on 14th January, 1801, it was decided to petition Parliament against the proposal to repeal the Commissioners' right to collect tolls on the Sturry Road. On 14th October, 1801, the matter was settled amicably, the Commissioners agreeing to compound their rights for £130 a year from the new trust. In October 1802, Simmons appears on a committee to survey proposed alterations in Iron Bar Lane, close to his printing office there.⁴⁵

There is one depredation with which Simmons does not seem to have been directly concerned: the taking down of St. George's Gate. He was, however, a member of the Council which voted in 1785 in principle to take down Westgate and St. George's and he must at least have acquiesced in 1799 in the decision to consider the practicability of taking down St. George's⁴⁶ and in the final decision in 1801 to take it down⁴⁷ and to transfer the city's water cisterns in St. George's Towers to a tower in St. Michael's Lane. The total cost of dismantling and transfer of the cisterns was £3,537;⁴⁸ a very large sum for such work. Perhaps, if Simmons had taken a direct hand in the affair, it might have been achieved at less cost.

The Pavement Commissioners had carried out their main work while Simmons was treasurer. Much of their work in subsequent years was directed towards managing the £10,000 they had borrowed and spent in the first three years of their existence. They continued as a body until 1866, when, after many vicissitudes and two further Acts of Parliament, they finally paid off all their debts and their work was taken over by existing local authorities.⁴⁹

IV. DIVERSIFICATION OF BUSINESS: STAMPS, BANKING, MILLING AND PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

The 1780s and 1790s were decades in which Simmons considerably extended the range of his business activities. Feather⁵⁰ has drawn attention to the fact that Simmons 'used his *Kentish Gazette* in the interests of the Rockingham Whigs, who made him Distributor of

⁴⁵ Turner, *op. cit.*, 50, 51, 53, 54.

⁴⁶ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.11, 47, 10 December, 1799.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 170, 14 April 1801.

⁴⁸ Brent, *op. cit.*, 119-120. Brent wrote that 'This presents an astounding amount as an expense incurred in pulling down the old gateway. It is a comment on the doings of a once irresponsible municipal authority'. Brent believed that probable cost saved Westgate from a similar fate, notably in 1824.

⁴⁹ Panton, *op. cit.*, 179-82.

⁵⁰ J. Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade in 18th Century England*, (C.U.P. 1985), 92, 93.

Stamps for Kent in 1782.' While Simmons never invested the *Gazette* with a recognisable editorial policy, and indeed seldom if ever indulged in editorials especially those of a political nature, nevertheless the columns of the newspaper in 1781 and in the early months of 1782 do reflect general criticism of Lord North's conduct of affairs, particularly his prosecution of the war in America. In February 1782, North's government suffered a defeat on a motion asserting the impracticability of the war with America, and in early March his government narrowly survived two motions of no confidence. Commenting on these events, *The Kentish Gazette* published an open letter to the inhabitants of Kent, signed 'STIGAND'.⁵¹ The letter drew attention to the 'constitutional question' of the war, which up to that time had cost £100M and an increasing effusion of national blood. North's vanishing majority was highlighted, and wrote Stigand, it was 'high time to have done with it'. Even while this article was being issued, a third vote of no confidence in North was scheduled for 20th March. It became obvious that this motion would be carried, and the King had no option but to accept North's resignation before the debate could begin. So the Rockingham Whigs came to power, assisted by a climate of opinion to which the *Gazette* contributed.

On 13th April, STIGAND wrote a further letter, about the corruption and tyranny of the late system of government, which had sunk under its own weight. The tried friends of the people are now governors; and 'to be united now is to be invulnerable' added STIGAND.⁵² The mayor and commonalty, doubtless with Ald. Simmons, got up a petition to the King on 22nd May, strongly supporting the change of government, and thanking His Majesty for it in the most glowing terms, and the petition was presented to the King on 8th June by Canterbury's M.P.s, George Gipps and Charles Robinson. *The Kentish Gazette* gave a full report of this,⁵³ and the same issue also reported a meeting of Kentish gentlemen at Maidstone at which a similar address to the King was agreed, against some opposition from Sir Horace Mann, one of Kent's M.P.s. A letter, dated 1st June, 1782, and signed 'East Kent Freeholder', appeared in the *Gazette* in advance of the Maidstone meeting, strongly supporting such an address.

⁵¹ *The Kentish Gazette*, 20–23 March, 1782, 2a. See also J.B. Owen, *The Eighteenth Century*, (Nelson 1974), 233–4, for a general picture of parliamentary events at this time.

⁵² *The Kentish Gazette*, 13–17 April, 1782, 2a.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 8–12 June, 1782, 4d.

The support given by *The Kentish Gazette* to Rockingham was therefore quite strong, and may well have influenced opinion in Canterbury and east Kent. The consequence was the appointment of Simmons as Distributor of Stamps, and in that capacity his responsibilities extended to issuing licences and stamped labels necessary to carry on a range of businesses.⁵⁴

Timperley, wrote in 1842 of Simmons appointment as Distributor of Stamps '... the emoluments of which, estimated as considerable, are known to have essentially contributed to his actual wealth'.⁵⁵ As Distributor for east Kent, with agents in the towns of that area, he must have gained an extra income of a thousand or more pounds a year. In 1787,⁵⁶ we find an advertisement in *The Kentish Gazette*, from James Simmons as Stamp Distributor, about the regulations for the sale of perfume. In 1790⁵⁷ there is a similar advertisement concerning licences and stamps for the sale of hats; 5/- a year for a licence to sell hats and up to 2/- a hat stamp duty on the most expensive hats exceeding 12/-. Penalties for not taking out a licence were specified at £50.

On 5th July, 1788, Simmons greatly extended his business range by founding the Canterbury Bank, in partnership with Henry Gipps. The advance publicity for the bank indicated that George Gipps (uncle of Henry), apothecary, surgeon and hop-dealer of Harbledown, M.P. for Canterbury from 1780 until his death in 1800, would be one of the founders, but it was not until a year later that he joined as a partner.⁵⁸ The bank continued under various names until 1918,⁵⁹ when it was merged with Lloyds Bank Ltd., who have a branch to this day on the site of the Canterbury Bank.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Stamp duty had begun as a temporary expedient to finance the wars of William III, but by the end of the eighteenth century it had become one of the bulwarks of the public revenue. Duties were levied on documentary transactions such as birth and death certificates; on the means of money exchange and credit; on insurance policies, wills, etc; and on the selling and buying of goods such as perfumes and hats. The stamps were sold by the distributors who sent the proceeds to the Commissioners of stamps quarterly or yearly in arrears, so that the money provided a useful float of capital. The distributors charged a fixed percentage for their services. In 1821, it was estimated that the average annual income of a distributor was £1,068, with some earning as much as £5,000. See Feather, *op. cit.*, particularly 85-7.

⁵⁵ J. Timperley, *Literary and Topographical anecdotes* (1842) 826-7.

⁵⁶ *The Kentish Gazette*, 10-13 July, 1787, 2d.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-8 October, 1790, 1d.

⁵⁸ P. Blake, *Christ Church Gate*, (Phillimore, 1965), 3, and footnote 7 on p. 40.

⁵⁹ *Bankers Almanac and Year Book* (1984), G.1447, (footnote).

⁶⁰ There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, in the reminiscences of Rev. George Gilber (1796-1874), retold by Blake, which illustrates Simmons' all pervading influence in the Canterbury of his day. Gilber's father was one day at the bank (on the corner of St.

Although we may assume that much of the business direction of the bank would be supplied by Simmons, it seems likely that the day-to-day management would be in the hands of Henry Gipps. Simmons' burgeoning business interests would have been serviced and supported by the bank, which doubtless also supported him in his role as Pavement treasurer, to mutual interest. Then, too, the acquisition of the description banker rather than stationer or printer was one which presumably gave him added status, and which he henceforth attached to his name.

In July 1791, Simmons branched out in another business direction. Entering into partnership with Ald. J. Royle (former mayor and distiller by trade) he rented the King's Mill and Brown's Mill (later Abbot's Mill) from the Corporation.⁶¹ The lease was for 30 years at £40 a year, and a premium of £2,450 was paid, drawn on the Canterbury Bank. The story of the rebuilding of Abbot's Mill in 1792 is well told in a footnote in the fifth edition of Gostling's *Walk*, which Simmons as editor and printer must either have written himself or at least have seen before publication.⁶² A similar account is in Hasted's second edition⁶³ and the building is given particular notice in *The Kentish Traveller's Companion*.⁶⁴ In brief, Simmons employed John Smeaton to design the building and machinery.⁶⁵ The mill was 72 × 52½ feet in area, nearly 100 feet high and cost a total of £8,000. There were six working floors with eight pairs of stones. The two water wheels supplying the power were 16 feet in diameter, 7 feet

Margaret's Street and High Street, opposite Mercery Lane) with Simmons and Jesse White (Surveyor of the Cathedral 1797-1821). Simmons, looking towards Christ Church Gate, said that 'if those damned turrets of the Cathedral Gate were taken away we should see the church Clock from the Bank door. Can't you pull them down, Jesse?' 'It shall be done', replied Jesse, and it was. In this connection, it is perhaps interesting that Simmons in his introduction to the fifth edition of Gostling in 1804 notes *inter alia* that the book contains a view of the Christ Church gate 'as it appeared before the late repairs'. The plate facing page 70 of the book shows the gate with turrets.

⁶¹ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 247.

⁶² Gostling, *op. cit.*, 13-14 (footnote).

⁶³ E. Hasted, *History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, (Canterbury 1797-1801, 2nd Edition), 658-62.

⁶⁴ *The Kentish Traveller's Companion*, (Rochester 1794, 2nd Edition), 223.

⁶⁵ A better man could hardly have been chosen. Smeaton, born in Yorkshire in 1724 was a Fellow of the Royal Society and their Gold Medallist for the paper 'The Nature Powers of Wind and Water to turn Mills and other Machines depending on a circular Motion'. He designed and built Eddystone Light (1757-59). Smeaton died in October 1792, after he had produced the design for Abbot's Mill, but before the building had been completed.

circle. Although the greatest fall of water was no more than 5 feet 3 inches, the mill could grind and dress up to 500 quarters of corn weekly. The total value of the business transacted each year was £40,000, of which about £7,500 was received from sales from a shop on the premises. Stone facing from the remaining abutments of the demolished arches of the bridge over the Stour close to the mill was used in the mill's construction. Simmons and Royle were also permitted to take the whole facing or outer stone of part of the city wall in St. Peter's parish, and to have the use and occupation of a tower on the wall hitherto used as a magazine for storing gunpowder. The proviso here was that they should provide an alternative gunpowder store.⁶⁶ Across the other side of the lane by the mill (Brown's/Knott's/Waterlock/St. Radigund's Lane) were built stables, stores, dwellings and a retail shop as accessories to the mill. Simmons also built a bridge for carriages across the river by the mill, presumably replacing the one whose arches had been removed for use in widening the King's Bridge.⁶⁷

Also in partnership with Royle, Simmons in 1793 rented from the city Council, St. Radigund's bath house.⁶⁸ This comprised 2½ acres of land in St. Mary Northgate, near and without the city wall, and included a bath house fed by a spring, and a cold bath outhouse. Simmons and Royle rebuilt the bath house and enlarged the basin of the spring. Separate dressing rooms were provided, and the aim was to enable Canterbury people of either sex to 'enjoy cold bathing in privacy and convenience'.⁶⁹

In 1798, the partnership with Royle came to an end, and Simmons asked to take over the lease on the mills and the bath house himself. In asking for a new 50-year lease, he stressed the great and expensive improvement that had been made.⁷⁰ The Burghmote transferred the leases to him, but for 30 years, not 50.

Although they rented King's Mill along with Abbot's, it must be doubted whether Simmons and Royle ever operated the King's Mill, which is of course only a matter of a few hundred yards upstream from Abbot's Mill, and would surely have reduced the effective head of water available to Abbot's Mill. Indeed, when Abbot's Mill was advertised for rent in 1806, it was stated that it had a fine head of

⁶⁶ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 277, 19 June, 1792.

⁶⁷ Gostling, *op. cit.*, 14 (footnote).

⁶⁸ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 321, 10 September, 1793.

⁶⁹ Gostling, *op. cit.*, 35 (footnote).

⁷⁰ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 492, 493, 20 March, 1798.

water, not only from its original source but also from King's Mill.⁷¹ This may have been a reason why in 1799 the Burghmote set up a committee to look into the state of the King's Mill and to consider proposals by Ald. Simmons to pull it down and erect a principal messuage there.⁷² Whether or not Simmons was granted the permission he sought, by 1802 he had pulled down the mill and had built a house on the King's Bridge site, next to All Saints Church. Having done that, he applied for an extended lease. This was granted for 57 years at £20 a year for the first twenty years, £10 for the last 30.

Abbot's Mill, with its sales of £40,000 per annum must have provided Simmons with a sizeable addition to his income; and part of its success, and Simmons' success as a business man generally, may be attributed to the fact that in the 1790s when other towns in the U.K. suffered from the effects of war, Canterbury increased in size and population, from about 9,000 to over 11,000. This prosperity may have been due in part to the military establishment in the city. It was the chief military station of the southern district of England, a general's command, with a park of artillery and several regiments.⁷³

Relatively prosperous though Canterbury may have been, the Napoleonic wars produced an alarming rise in the price of foodstuffs, good for business profits, but crippling to the poor. In this respect, Simmons demonstrated his ready concern for his fellow citizens. In 1801, the Burghmote passed a resolution of thanks to him for 'his munificence and unremitting exertions during the late alarming scarcity, for his liberality in supplying numerous poor of the City with good and wholesome flour from Abbots Mill under Market Prices'.⁷⁴ Simmons' reply was to the usual effect that to stand high in the esteem of his fellow citizens was his chief delight.⁷⁵

Simmons was involved over the years in a number of property transactions whose purpose is not apparent. In 1774, he gained a 30-year lease from the council of two tenements and gardens in

⁷¹ *The Kentish Gazette*, 13 June 1806, 1a. A 22-year lease was advertised, which would have been the remaining term from Simmons' lease of 1798. The advertisement also said that the present proprietor kept seven teams of horses, on constant duty to Whitstable, that the average supply of wheat was 600 quarters weekly, and that from October 1805 to April 1806 8,387 sacks of flour had been ground. Sales from the retail shop at the premises grossed upwards of £7,000 a year. An ill state of health, from which the proprietor had been suffering for some time, was stated to be the only reason why the business was being parted with.

⁷² *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.11, 42, 15 October, 1799.

⁷³ Gostling, *op. cit.*, 3 (footnote).

⁷⁴ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.11, 128, 29 September, 1801.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 133, 13 October, 1801.

Northgate, formerly held by Jane Simmonds, widow, deceased.⁷⁶ What he did with this property for the 30 or so years he held it is not clear, but it may be significant that his mother's name was Jane. Despite the difference in spelling of the surname, this may have been his mother's property, which he had taken over on her death.

Footnotes in Gostling provide evidence of other property ventures, with a philanthropic tinge. In Wincheap, close to Harris' Almshouses (1726), Simmonds built in 1792 a number of houses called Wincheap Place. The footnote in Gostling says 'it is greatly to be wished that the public spirited idea (for such it must be, during the present dearness of building materials) of erecting habitations for the industrious poor was more general. Crowding great numbers together under one roof as too frequently is the practice in most cities and large towns, experience has proved neither friendly to their health nor conducive to the improvement of their morals'.⁸⁰ As noted above, Simmonds edited this edition of Gostling, so we may take it that he would at the very least have supported this statement of paternal care for the poor. Again, it is recorded in Gostling that in 1802 houses at the corner of St. Martin's Street being in a ruinous state were pulled down, and six tenements or cottages for the labouring class of the community were created by Alderman Simmonds.⁸¹ Simmonds also built four houses on the London road at St. Dunstan's.⁸²

V. BENEFACTIONS AND REWARDS

On retiring from his second term as mayor in September 1789, Simmonds was made alderman for the ward of Northgate, and a Justice of the Peace.⁸³ Freed from that duty, but still heavily involved in the Pavement Commissioners affairs, and in his own manifold business interests, Simmonds nevertheless lost no time in embarking on his great project, the improvement of the Dane John Field, a tract of land enclosed on the south by the city wall, between Riding Gate and Wincheap Gate, and bounded on the east and west by the Dover and the Ashford roads. On 2nd March, 1790, he obtained a lease on

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, A.C.9, 921, 3 May, 1774.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, A.C.9, 1127, 13 July, 1784.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 336, 24 March, 1794.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 302, 17 December, 1805.

⁸⁰ Gostling, *op. cit.*, 25 (footnote).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28 (footnote).

⁸² *The Kentish Gazette*, 17 March, 1807, 1c.

⁸³ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 104, 29 September, 1789.

Dane John for 2½ years at a peppercorn rent, on the understanding that he would level the land (except the existing mound) and lay out gardens at an estimated cost of £450. When done, he should have the option of becoming a tenant for 21 years, or the land would be returned to the Burghmote in its improved state.⁸⁴ The peppercorn lease was in the event renewed in 1792,⁸⁵ and he was eventually granted the lease for life rent free.

The work which Simmons caused to be done there was described in a footnote in Gostling:⁸⁶ 'After immense labour, and the expense of more than £1,500, it became an exceedingly pleasant and greatly frequented promenade for the inhabitants. To maintain the plantation therein, this zealous and public spirited citizen also appropriated an annual salary (for a gardener) . . . But owing to a disagreement with the Guardians of the Poor, Mr Simmons surrendered his lease. In consequence this pleasant and much frequented spot fell so rapidly to decay through petty thefts and wanton mischief that the Corporation in 1800 voted £100 for its repair; but this not being sufficient, a further sum of £120 was voted in 1802 and under the judicious direction and management of Alderman Bunce, it has been restored to its former beauty and long may it continue the ornament and convenience of the City.'

Simmons' letter of resignation of the lease to the council dated 2 November, 1795, and accepted by the Burghmote in January 1796 gives details for his decision which are lacking in Gostling.⁸⁷ Simmons' letter mentions the death of his partner and pressure of business on him, but indicates that despite the large expenditure he had already been put to, he had been willing to go on and had engaged Mr Thomas Marseille at £30 a year to keep the gardens in trim, and had recently expended £25 to support the terrace leading to Ridingate. However, the cause of his resignation was that he had been taken 'like a Pauper to the Court of Guardians' for failing to pay a Poor Rate of £8 a year due on the land. 'Gracious Heavens' he wrote, 'what a return is this!' It was not the money (which in fact he paid in full) which hurt him, but the personal affront in summoning him before justices. 'Having expended more than £1,500, I say to you and the public at large, you are heartily welcome'. The corporation took some years to accept the burden, and then reluctantly at first. In

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 167, 2 March, 1790.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, A.C.10, 276, 22 May, 1792.

⁸⁶ Gostling, *op. cit.*, 7, 8, 9, (footnote).

⁸⁷ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 414-15.

1802, we find that amounts of £40,⁸⁸ £20⁸⁹ and £15⁹⁰ were voted until finally at the end of that year Bunce's committee was formed to oversee the gardens. Simmons was still interested enough to be a member of that committee. A monument was erected on the mound in 1802/3, with inscriptions to commemorate Simmons' and the council's public spirit in providing such a pleasure park.

In 1808, a correspondent in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, lauding Simmons' public spirit, gave a glowing description of the gardens.⁹¹ The writer describes the building on the mount, and goes on to give the texts of the inscriptions on the column, the one commemorating Alderman Simmons' public spirit, the other stating the fact that the council had taken over responsibility for the gardens.⁹²

Simmons was, at the same time, responsible for rebuilding the Ridigate adjoining the Dane John Gardens. In 1782, the Ridigate, 'being in a very decayed state' was taken down.⁹³ In 1790, 'a very spacious arch was created and the terrace walk formed on the rampart of the city wall' at the sole expense of Ald. Simmons,⁹⁴ and in 1792 Simmons built and coped a wall by Gravel Lane to Ridigate.⁹⁵ The Burghmote paid a half share of £11 towards this work because the wall replaced a quickset hedge which had cost the council 9/- yearly to have cut, and this would no longer be necessary.⁹⁶

A project, which occupied a good deal of Simmons' attention over the last twenty years of his life but which he did not manage to bring to fruition, was the plan to build a canal from Canterbury to the sea. As noted above, he already was working on this project when he wrote to the Burghmote in 1789 to acknowledge the vote of thanks for his work on the Pavement Commissioners, and he employed Robert Whitworth, the engineer, to survey the land from Canterbury

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 169, 22 June, 1802.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 181.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 199.

⁹¹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1808, 481.

⁹² W. Ireland, *A New and Complete History of the County of Kent* (1828). Ireland gives a similar description of the gardens, but points to the fact that though the inhabitants of the city were certainly indebted to the good intentions of a fellow citizen, 'the antiquary may regret these recent alterations'. Certainly, Simmons' reworking and landscaping of the mound and the area round it paid no regard to the archaeological evidence he may have been destroying and makes it difficult if not impossible now to recover a clear picture of how the ancient dungeon mound looked and what with certainty its function was.

⁹³ Hasted, *op. cit.*, vol. xii, 658.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. xi, 75.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. xii, 662.

⁹⁶ *The Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 287.

to Nethergang by Northmouth (Wantsum). The canal surveyed would have been 10½ miles long, for vessels up to 100 tons, drawing 8 feet of water.⁹⁷ In 1797, things had progressed far enough for the *Observer* to announce that a canal was about to be made from Canterbury to the sea at Reculver, from which much benefit was expected.⁹⁸ However, Hasted writing at the end of the eighteenth century commented that the plans had been frustrated by the Napoleonic wars. Nevertheless, work on the project continued, and in 1804 Mr Rennie produced a scheme for an upgraded canal of 150 tons, cost £80,000, which was double the earlier scheme.⁹⁹ The possibility was also introduced of a connection with the proposed Weald of Kent Canal and with the Royal Military Canal. In July 1804, the *Gazette* published an article commenting favourably on the Royal Military Canal project, not only for its defence value, but also for its peace-time utility. The article commented that the Royal Military Canal 'will be of infinite use to the County of Kent, should ever the projected canal from Yalden Lees . . . and Ashford to Canterbury . . . take place. This line of canal . . . has been found not only practicable but one of the easiest lines of canal ever discovered in this kingdom . . . From Canterbury a canal on one level has been projected to communicate with the sea at St. Nicholas Bay in the Isle of Thanet capable of carrying sea built vessels (a survey of this canal has also been made at the expense of Alderman Simmons of Canterbury) so that by joining of these two canals, the whole interior of the County of Kent will have a ready and easy navigation to the sea coast at Canterbury, Chatham, Rye and Hythe'.¹⁰⁰ We may detect the hand of Simmons in this article, and we may also suspect that he may have inspired Andrews and Dury to include the line of the projected Canterbury–St. Nicholas Bay Canal as a reality in the 1807 edition of their 1 in./1 mile map of Thanet. The line shown in the 1807 map must have been Simmons' latest plan and is probably the one he holds in his hand in the portrait of him painted in 1806, now on display in the Poor Priests' Hospital, Canterbury.

Simmons' election to Parliament in October 1806 would have given him an opportunity to promote the canal, but his death early in 1807 left the issue still unresolved. That the issue remained foremost in his mind to the last there is no doubt. Mr Frend, his supporter in the

⁹⁷ Hasted, *op. cit.*, vol. xi, 142.

⁹⁸ *The Observer*, 10 September, 1797.

⁹⁹ A. Bartlett, 'The Canal that Never Was', *Bygone Kent*, vol. 17, no. 2, February 1986, 87 (footnote).

¹⁰⁰ *The Kentish Gazette*, 19 October, 1804, 4b, 4c.

election, also participated in the election of his successor, and on that occasion said of Simmons and the canal 'in a conversation I had with him not many days prior to his death, I feel a conviction that he would not have ceased his efforts until he had seen vessels floating under the walls of Canterbury; that an object of such magnitude and consequence to your city may yet be completed is my utmost hope.'¹⁰¹ After Simmons' death a further survey increased the price to £150,000, but despite this an enabling act was procured in 1811, a company was formed and £80,000 was raised in London, and £70,000 in Kent, mainly Canterbury.¹⁰² Plans and intended levels were drawn up and deposited with the appropriate local authorities.¹⁰³ The canal was, however, never started.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the last sizeable improvement project with which Simmons was concerned was the creation of the New Street (Guildhall Street) connecting Palace Street direct to High Street, obviating the need to pass through the narrow and overhung Mercery Lane and Sun Street in order to reach Northgate and the new Turnpike road to Sturry and Thanet. In 1803, the corporation decided that such a street through the Red Lyon premises (owned by the corporation), next to the Guildhall, on High Street, to Palace Street would be a great improvement. Application to Parliament for an enabling act was

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1807, 4c.

¹⁰² 50 GEO.III, Cap. 144, 10 June, 1811.

¹⁰³ Kent Record Office, *Plan of intended Harbour and set Dock in the Isle of Thanet, and the Canal leading from thence to Canterbury*, Surveyed by Samuel Jones 1810. G. RUM. 21, and also *East Kent Levels*, SEK 2, 5-7, 9.

¹⁰⁴ After the Act had been passed, Rennie found that the harbour at St. Nicholas Bay was sited in quicksand. Whitworth had said that the harbour in the bay would need piling over the whole area, but Rennie in 1804 took the view that the bottom was chalk. Samuel Jones, who surveyed the line in 1810 for the act of 1811 said it was tenacious clay. This formidable obstacle caused faint-hearted delay, and various strategies were mooted, but no firm start was made. In 1824, the company got together with interested people from Sandwich, and, following a report from Telford, adopted a joint plan to improve the river Stour from Canterbury to Sandwich, with a harbour near Sandown Castle, essentially to allow 100-ton vessels up to Canterbury. The canal line pioneered by Simmons was dropped, and another act was procured in 1825, this time for the Canterbury Navigation and Sandwich Harbour Company, with a capital of £100,000, of which about £70,000 had already been subscribed. By 1825, however, the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway Act had been procured, including a harbour at Whitstable, at an estimated cost of £31,000. In June 1827, the Canterbury Navigation scheme finally disappeared (see Charles Hadfield, *Canals of the South and South East England*, David and Charles 1969, 51-6). With hindsight, even if Simmons had managed to bring his scheme to fruition in the 1790s, it might, like many other canals, have had only a few decades of life before the railways overtook it.

authorized.¹⁰⁵ Cost was initially thought to be £1,000, but the value of the lands to be bought to make way for the street was estimated at £2,159/16/- including the purchase of a Presbyterian chapel at £364/65/- .¹⁰⁶ The Red Lyon, sold to John Cooper, fetched £750. Simmons assisted the Corporation in finding the balance by offering to transfer £2,000 worth of 5 per cent Consols in return for £1,240 (plus interest), the price Simmons had paid for the stock. It was also recommended that St. Augustine rents be sold at twenty years purchase to provide capital.¹⁰⁷ Simmons had earlier lent the Burghmote £1,000 at 5 per cent interest for a purpose not specified, but this may also have been for New Street costs.¹⁰⁸ Work on the New Street-Guildhall Street was not finished before Simmons' death, for in January 1807 tenders were called for the construction of drains and kerbs for the street.¹⁰⁹ It is clear, however, that without Simmons' support in the enterprise it may not have got underway.

Two further public services in Simmons' later years should be mentioned. In 1795, as senior alderman, he was appointed by the Burghmote as Master of Maynards Spital¹¹⁰ and he was re-elected yearly to that honorary office for the rest of his life. Maynards Spital was founded originally in 1317, rebuilt in 1617, and again by the mayor and corporation in 1703 after a disastrous storm had blown the buildings down. It housed seven brothers and sisters.¹¹¹ Others may have treated the office as a necessary chore, but it is clear that Simmons took his duties seriously and applied himself to a much-needed reorganization of the affairs of the Spital. In re-electing him as master in 1800, the Burghmote added a vote of thanks for the way in which he had reorganized the rules and regulations of the internal government of the Spital and had increased its revenues.

Although he was not a trustee of the Kent and Canterbury Hospital (founded 1790), Simmons was one of the original subscribers to it,¹¹² and his newspaper gave full support and publicity to the venture. In a timely fashion, *The Kentish Gazette* issue before the public meeting on the 9th October which unanimously resolved to erect a county hospital,¹¹³ carried an article over the name HUMANITAS. The

¹⁰⁵ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.11, 202, 13 September, 1803.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 306, 18 February, 1806.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 308, 25 February, 1806.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, A.C.11, 200, 23 November, 1802.

¹⁰⁹ *The Kentish Gazette*, 16 January, 1807, 4a.

¹¹⁰ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.10, 397, 3 November, 1795.

¹¹¹ Hasted, *op. cit.*, vol. xi, 190-4.

¹¹² *The Kentish Gazette*, 8-12 October, 1790, 1a.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 5-8 October, 1790, 3d.

article rebutted arguments which had been made against the hospital and gave reasoned support to it. *The Gazette* continued to support the hospital over the years by statements of its progress and appeals for support,¹¹⁴ and there can be no doubt of Simmons' attachment to it.

VI. PARLIAMENT: DEATH AND ITS AFTERMATH

A general election was called in October 1806. Of the two sitting members for Canterbury, John Baker offered himself for re-election, but the Hon. George Watson signified his intention to retire. On the 18th October, the freemen present unanimously resolved to nominate Simmons, in recognition of his public services and benefactions. In an open letter dated 20th October, he accepted the nomination and declared his intention to canvas as many of the freemen in Canterbury as he could. Canvas in his favour among the non-resident freemen (presumably in London) had already begun, he wrote. The Canterbury column of the *Gazette* commented that Simmons had commenced a canvas 'unparalleled for its success in the annals of electioneering'.¹¹⁵ On the 28th October, in a further open letter, he announced 'from the unanimity that prevails through every class I have completed a successful canvas'.¹¹⁶

At the election meeting on 29th October, chaired by the Mayor of Canterbury, Simmons was proposed by William Bates and seconded by Mr W. Frend. Frend referred to Simmons work on paving the city and to his promotion of the canal project, but added that he recommended him as a man of business 'able to carry any business through the House which the welfare of Canterbury may require'. Frend's peroration called Simmons 'Father of the City'. There being no other candidates, John Baker and he were elected unopposed. After the election the traditional tour round the city by the new members with 'colours and bands of music' took place, followed by a dinner at the Fountain Inn, where 'the greatest festivity, harmony and unanimity prevailed'.¹¹⁷ The dinner seems to have been the only costs the new members had to meet in their election by acclamation. Simmons' open letter of thanks in *The Kentish Gazette* dated

¹¹⁴ F.M. Hall, R.S. Stevens and J. Whyman, *Kent and Canterbury Hospital 1790-1987*, (Canterbury 1987). See for instance, p. 11, which quotes HUMANITAS writing in *The Kentish Gazette* in August 1792.

¹¹⁵ *The Kentish Gazette*, 21 October, 1806, 1a, 4c.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 October, 1806, 1a.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31 October, 1806, 4c, 4d.

31st October, 1806, is a model of modest pride in the 'sacred trust' which had been given to him.

Simmons' attendances in the House must have been very few, since he died in London on his 66th birthday, 22nd January, 1807. *The Kentish Gazette* made a brief announcement of his death in its next issue, but no details were given, and no obituary appreciation seems to have been published. The only reference to his death in the Burghmote minutes is the election of Ald. Bunce to the Mastership of Maynards Spital in the room of Ald. Simmons, deceased.¹¹⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine* gave an account of his last illness.¹¹⁹ For many weeks before his death, it seems, he had complained of a painful affection in the region of his left ear. Indeed, in June 1806, months before his election, he had advertised the lease of Abbot's Mill for sale, on grounds of ill health. Medical advice had afforded him no relief. But having been elected to Parliament, he took a house in New Palace Yard, Westminster. The pain, however, obliged him to stop attending the House. On the 20th January a physician friend was called, who correctly diagnosed him to be in a dying state, with no more than 36 hours or so to live. Post-mortem examination revealed a large abscess in his head, which had been discharging for some time through his left ear.

He was buried in a vault in the church yard of St. Mildred's, Canterbury, on the 30th January. On that same day, a writ for election to the vacancy was promulgated. On 3rd February, at a meeting in the Guildhall, Mr Samuel Elias Sawbridge was elected unopposed. His proposer, the same Mr Friend, who had recently supported Simmons' candidacy, devoted a good deal of his speech to an eulogy of the late representative.¹²⁰

Simmons left no legitimate children, and he seemed to have no legitimate relative to carry on his business empire. His will, drawn up on 15th February, 1803, with a codicil dated 6th November, 1806, was proved in the Court of the Archdeacon of Canterbury on 5th September, 1807.¹²¹ It is an interesting document for the questions it raises about Simmons' private life. His friends John Lade¹²² of

¹¹⁸ *Canterbury Burghmote Minutes*, A.C.11, 359, 24 February, 1807.

¹¹⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1807, 1771.

¹²⁰ *The Kentish Gazette*, 3 February, 1807, 4c and 4d.

¹²¹ Kent Records Office. *PRC 17 Book 104* (1807), 64. Will of James Simmons, proved 5 September, 1807, before Rev. Joshua Dix, surrogate to the Rt. Hon. Sir W. Scott (Knight, D.L.), Official-General to the Archdeacon of Canterbury.

¹²² A John Lade was Simmons' guardian on entry to King's School and twice mayor of Canterbury. If this was the same John Lade, he would have been quite an old man by 1807.

Canterbury, Henry Bolland¹²³ of Mark Lane, London, and Henry Gipps¹²⁴ of Canterbury, are named as his executors, and the will charged them to realise all his assets, for the best prices that could be gained, and invest the capital thereby gained in public or private stocks of the Kingdom. A number of beneficiaries were named for whom the trustees were to use the capital and the interest from it. The will directed that annuities of £30 a year to be bought for Susan Petman of Canterbury, £50 for Simmons' natural daughter Sarah, wife of John Simmonds linen draper, late of Canterbury, and £100 a year to 'my friend Ann Matton who has long resided in my Family'. The chief and residual heir is named as his natural son James, known as James Simmons. All the capital and interest after payment of the other bequests, was reserved for his proper use and benefit. The trustees were, however, appointed his guardians until his twenty-fifth birthday. In the event that he did not reach his twenty-fifth birthday, the inheritance would be divided between children of Simmons' cousin, Frances Fairman, widow, of his sister Mary Down, widow, and of his brother-in-law William Mantell of Tenterden. A codicil, added after his election to Parliament, when he was setting up in London, and probably feeling very ill, left a sum of £2,000 to Ann Matton together with the house and contents in All Saints Parish, which Simmons had on lease from the Council (presumably the house he built on King's Bridge to replace the mill). In addition, Ann Matton was to have the 'Beds, Bedsteads, Furniture belonging to and standing in the Bed Chamber in which I sleep and in the Bed Chamber in which she the said Ann Matton sleeps'. In all other respects the will of 15th February, 1803, was confirmed. Without further evidence, we can only speculate on the relationship between Simmons and his friend Ann Matton.

The trustees went about the business of selling off Simmons' assets with all due speed. On 20th February, 1807, the patrons of *The Kentish Gazette* were informed 'that as from 31st March the Newspaper, with every other branch of the business of a printer, bookseller, stationer and bookbinder carried on by the late James Simmons will become the property of . . . Charles Petman Rouse, George Kirkby Junior, and James Lawrence. Kings Arms Printing House and Library'. On Friday, 3rd April, 1807, *The Kentish Gazette* came out for the first time in 39 years without Simmons' name at the

¹²³ John Bolland was a freeman of Canterbury, being in London. At the time of Simmons' election, Bolland was the leader of the non-resident freemen in London supporting Simmons for Parliament.

¹²⁴ Simmons' partner in the Canterbury Bank and nephew of George Gipps.

mast-head. On 18th February, notice was given for the sale of elegant and modern household furniture from his house in St. George's Street.¹²⁵ Six days in March were reserved for the sale, which, as a side-light on Simmons' interests, included a reflecting telescope and a camera obscura. Also in March was scheduled to take place the sale of four new-built brick freehold messuages or tenements in St. Dunstan's on the London Road. As noted above, the Canterbury Bank took on new partners and traded under a different name. By the 5th September, 1807, the trustees seem to have realized Simmons' assets, and his business interests had been dispersed for others to carry on.¹²⁶ From a footnote in his proven will, it would seem that his assets may have amounted to not less than £30,000, a very large sum, despite the many charitable acts for which he had been responsible.

VII. EPILOGUE

After Simmons' death his memory quickly faded. Some twenty years ago his portrait, which once hung proudly in the Guildhall, was rescued from obscurity and now hangs with honour in the Canterbury Poor Priests' Museum.

Material changes in Canterbury, which he was instrumental in bringing about, are still with us. The Dane John Gardens remain essentially as he created them.¹²⁷ Some remains of Abbott's Mill are still visible. The house on High Bridge, built by him to replace King's Mill, still stands. *The Kentish Gazette* still helps week by week to inform the public on matters of the moment. The newly-paved streets of Canterbury (1987-88) are modelled on the work of his Pavement

¹²⁵ *The Kentish Gazette*, 20 February, 1807, 1a, 1b.

¹²⁶ John Lade did not seem to have taken any part in the execution of the will before 5 September, 1807. Gipps and Bolland saw to the business without his participation.

¹²⁷ Inscriptions on the monument on the Dane John Mound read:

'This Field and Hill were improved and these terraces, walls and plantations made in the year 1790 for the use of the public at the sole expense of James Simmons Esq., of the City, Alderman and Banker. To perpetuate the memory of which generous transaction, and as a mark of gratitude for his other public services this pillar was erected by voluntary subscriptions in the year 1803.'

'The Mayor and Commonalty of this Ancient city in Canterbury in consideration of the expensive improvements lately made in this field unanimously resolved in the year 1802 to appropriate the same in perpetuity to the use of the public and to endow it with £60 a year for the maintenance and support of the terraces walls and plantation payable out of their Chamber.'

Commissioners of 1788–1789. Lloyds Bank on High Street still remembers its past with a plaque tracing its beginnings to his Canterbury Bank of 1788. His Guildhall Street (New Street) is an essential part of the Canterbury Street structure. His negative achievements, the destruction he and others wrought on the gates and walls of Canterbury, and on its old houses, in achieving the transformation of Canterbury into a Georgian city of eminence, remain to give conservationists cause to berate him.

The white stone monument erected on his grave in St. Mildred's churchyard has weathered to the extent that it is not possible to read the inscription on it. Inside the church, however, his coat of arms hangs by the west door in a good state of repair. The motto on it reads 'VINCIT QUI PATITUR' – which can be roughly construed as 'PATIENCE WINS'. And for him, in his lifetime, it did. By his industry and assiduity he became Canterbury's tycoon and its leading citizen and M.P., amassing a considerable fortune, while not overlooking the need to share some of it with his fellow citizens.