

It was not only a home-brewer of 30 years standing like me (also, hint hint, a connoisseur of bitter whose favourite is Shepherd Neame's 'Spitfire') who relished this copious flow of inside information. The level of conversation in the body of the hall waxed from murmurings to competitive volume and Mr Herrington graciously passed from speaking to answering the flood

of questions from every part of the floor. Acknowledging the praise which surged from the Chairman and John Owen, he told us to help ourselves to the remaining bottles and retired to tumultuous applause. I myself managed to seize the last bottle of 'Bishops Finger'. Thanks (*hic*), Mr Herrington. Thanks also to Cllr. Woodbridge who has, of course, been re-booked for 14 January 2002.

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**A talk by Dr. Frank Panton,
12th March 2001**

A TALE FROM CANTERBURY

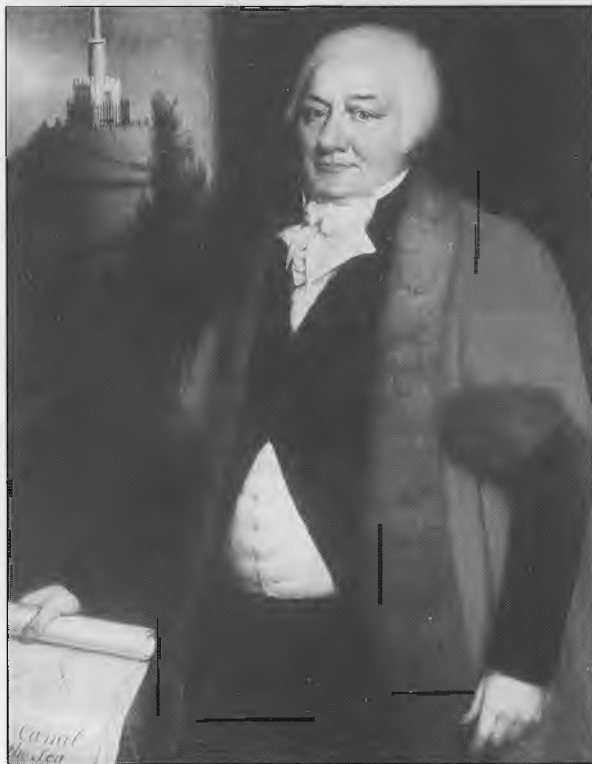
Reported by Maurice Wilson

James Simmons was born in Canterbury on the 21st January 1741 and became a pupil at King's School from 1750 to 1756. Then he went to London to serve an apprenticeship as a stationer, becoming a Freeman of the City before returning to Canterbury in 1767 where he also became a Freeman of Canterbury by virtue of his father being one before him, at the time of James' birth.

So with his London apprenticeship, James set about founding a stationers' and printing business. His aim was always high and he attacked with determination and skill, his primary aim being to provide Canterbury and East Kent with a quality newspaper. Naturally he was opposed by established printers and stationers in Canterbury who did their best to spoil his plans, but after one or two initial setbacks he started the Kentish Gazette on 26th May, 1768. This paper is still being published today.

The story of this man, James Simmons, one time stationer, publisher, patent medicine seller, librarian, banker, councillor, alderman, mayor, MP, was the very interesting subject of Dr. Panton's talk to us as the second part of our meeting on the 12th March.

In those days, the late 1760s, the Gazette was published twice a week and at an initial cost of 2d. per copy the broadsheet of



James Simmons

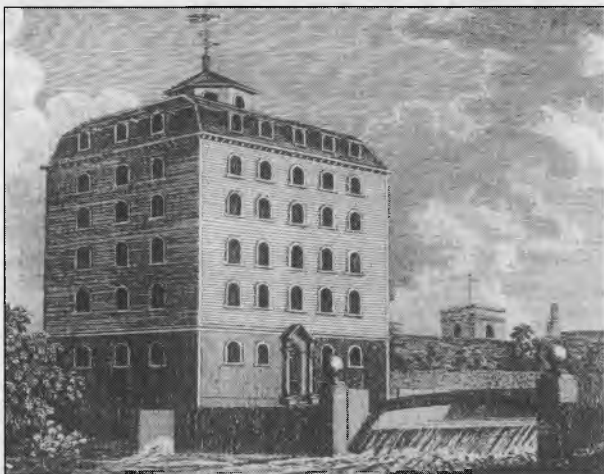
12 four sides, in easily readable print, remained substantially unchanged, despite inevitable price rises, during the 39 years of Simmons' ownership. The paper consisted mainly of advertisements of local significance, business arrangements and local sales but each issue also included dispatches on the wars and affairs in the American and other colonies, as well as the European continent; accounts 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.

Simmons believed in diversification, for apart from the printing and publishing side (and the supply of all the usual stationery items) he supplied patent medicines (advertised in the Gazette - and delivered to outlying parts with the paper delivery!) started a circulating library and brought out some notable publications, in particular the first edition of Hasted's History of Kent in four volumes.

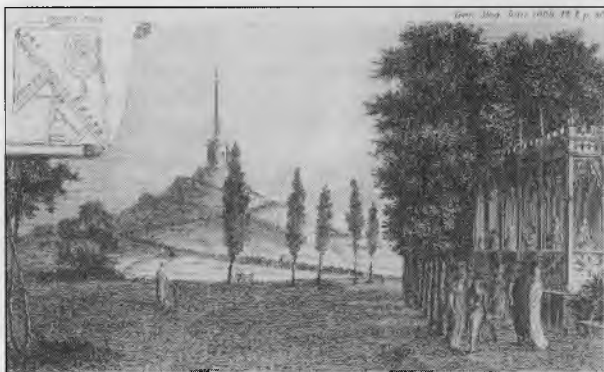
By 1769 he was sufficiently established to be elected to the Common Council of Canterbury, serving as sheriff in 1772/3, becoming alderman for Riding Gate Ward in 1774 and Mayor in 1776 - the year in which he married a young lady from Tenterden. His most significant civic work started in 1787, however, when he became Treasurer of the Pavement Commissioners whose remit was to realign, clear, and straighten the roads of the town, beginning with the High Street. All this was paid for by tolls on carriages and horses entering, and a duty on coal, coke and ash being brought into Canterbury.

They also took care to dispose of rain water in proper gutters and drainpipes and provided for lighting and cleansing. It is said that in two years Canterbury was transformed from medieval squalor to Georgian excellence, Simmons being the prime mover.

In July 1791, in partnership with Ald. J. Royle (former mayor and distiller by trade) Simmons rented King's Mill and Brown's Mill (later Abbott's Mill). Then, starting in 1792, Simmons built a completely new mill on the Abbott's Mill site, an imposing landmark in Canterbury.



Abbot's Mill, rebuilt by Simmons in 1792 at a cost of £8000 to a design by John Smeaton



The Dane John Field. This print from the Gentleman's Magazine of 1808 shows a 'Gothick' arbour which has long since disappeared

The designer was John Smeaton and the mill had six working floors and could grind up to 500 quarters of corn weekly, yielding a yearly revenue of £40,000.

After his second term of office as Mayor and appointment as Alderman of the ward of Northgate, he embarked on his great project, the improvement of the Dane John Field, obtaining a lease at a peppercorn rent for 2½ years on the understanding that the ground would be levelled (with the exception of the existing mound) and gardens laid out. As a result a pleasant and greatly frequented promenade was created for the inhabitants, with trees and flowering shrubs.

By 1802 King's Mill had been pulled down and Simmons had a house built on the Kings Bridge site, next to All Saints Church. (see illustration).

A project which occupied much of Simmons' attention in the last twenty years of his life was the plan to cut a canal from Canterbury to the North Kent Coast near Reculver but, before this

came to fruition, it was frustrated by the Napoleonic Wars and, although various ideas were put forward, even after his death in 1807, nothing developed, perhaps because the building of the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway found favour instead.

His life as an M.P. for Canterbury was short, as he was elected in October 1806 and died on the 22nd January 1807. He is buried in a vault in the churchyard of St. Mildred's, Canterbury.

Photographs from Frank Parton's book on James Simmons.



Kingsbridge House, built by Simmons in 1801-2 on the site of the King's Mill. The Regency All Saints Church is alongside.

A visit to **THE LONDON EYE**

Report by Elizabeth Senyard

Wednesday, 23rd May promised to be beautiful right from the start, and it never faltered for a moment; the weather was absolutely perfect from beginning to end.

The bus was fully loaded to its 52 passenger capacity, and we set off on our journey, full of anticipation for this great experience. Despite our worries about the London traffic, we arrived on time and were parked just a short walk away from the wheel. Suddenly, it came into view - this famous London Eye, slowly winding its

endless journey round and round, far up into the sky.

The wheel doesn't actually stop at all, but travels very slowly, so that passengers have plenty of time to board and dismount without difficulty. However, there are many attendants available to help if necessary. The propelling mechanism consists of several huge wheels. These are set on the main wheel, and as their massive tyres are turned round by an enormous motor, this causes the Eye to rotate. It makes the foreground-style big wheel seem very small