

## Dr. John Snow and Sir John Simon

By Bob Phillips

We have discovered that Simon is not called Sīmon (English) but Sĭmon (French). His family were very sophisticated members of English top society, of French origin (who pulled the levers of the well-connected to get Simon his top job). There is a nice contrast here which, we think, underpins some of the drama (and which would be accented by the pronunciation Sĭmon).

Here we have the two men who made Seething Wells famous by publicizing the contrast between its clean waters and the filthy waters of the tidal Thames.

Snow	Simon
Son of an English labourer who bettered himself to be a carter and then a small farmer	Son of a Frenchman who established a broking business in City, was on the Committee of the Stock Exchange and a member of a City Guild
From Northumberland	From London (born in the City, raised in The Paragon, Blackheath)
Educated in parish school and apprenticed at 14 to an apothecary in Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Educated at private schools, in Germany and apprenticed at 17 as a surgeon to the Professor of Surgery at King's College, London (also the Royal College of Surgeons and the Royal Academy)
Took his medical degree when he was 25 years old, having studied at Hunterian College and Westminster Hospital. Snow had to work and save to pay his way through	Studied at King's College and St. Thomas's but never took a medical degree – just proceeded to higher things on completion of his apprenticeship, paid for by Daddy
Had to work extremely hard to establish a general practice in Soho, starting at age 25.	Admitted to the Royal College of Surgeons very young (at 28). Given surgical charge of a 40 patient ward at one of the most prestigious London hospitals, St. Thomas', at the age of 30
First encounter with cholera at age 19, responsible, unsupervised for all the cases in Killingworth, when he was only an apprentice	Never treated cholera as a practitioner.
His private practice (with some teaching) was his sole source of income throughout his professional life	Continued a private practice as a surgeon throughout his life, while also receiving a salary and pension for his Government work
One of the leading practitioners in London in anaesthesiology	A highly successful surgeon, renowned for running a ward with exceedingly low

Snow	Simon
	mortality. Insisted on all his colleagues scrubbing clean.
Snow received little fame in his lifetime, even for his work on anaesthesia, and despite the prominence of some of his patients. He received no accolades for his work on the causes of cholera in his lifetime – his name became well known only after the 1866 epidemic, when he had been dead 6 years.	At the peak of his career, showered with accolades from the great and the good – The Times said of Simon that his reports are “universally regarded as conclusive on the questions with which they deal”

Bachelor	Very happily married to Jane, who was a powerful character and very popular – a lovely anecdote of Jane in a railway carriage with JMW Turner, just before <i>Rain, Steam and Speed*</i>
No children (of course)	No children (a matter of great regret). Adopts Boo, the daughter of his sister, beloved (at 11!) of the poet Swinburne. This was not a success.
Advocate of vegetarianism and drinking only distilled water, in moderation	Dined with the great and the good in the best restaurants; he and Jane were celebrated hosts and society company
Modest and quiet	Polished, urbane, at home in the most sophisticated company in the land
Not a public “mover and shaker”	Famous for “moving and shaking” the State, in collaboration with Sir Benjamin Hall, in a way that had been beyond Chadwick
Seemingly unaware of risks to his reputation – most notably when he appears as a witness for the noxious trades before a Select Committee and incurs the wrath of his professional peers and the ridicule of The Lancet.	Had a temper and a very satirical tongue, and quite willing to let it loose, e.g. to the Commissioners of the City of London, on the Sept 25, 1848, revealing that the Inspectors are not being assertive enough, and leaked it to the Times.  “Virtually inviolable, he could appeal over the heads of indifferent or hostile ministers, obstructive departments, and refractory localities ...” Lambert, p 283-4
Died aged 43 as plain Dr. Snow	Died aged 88 as Sir John Simon
Has a pub named after him	Nothing, as far as I am able to find out, named after him

Snow	Simon
<p><b>Snow – “in some ways lacking in humanity”</b></p>	<p><b>Simon – how to win friends and influence people:</b></p>
<p>Snow's marginal success in general practice was all the more remarkable because he evidently did not possess an easy bedside manner. The word on John Snow was: "A quiet man, very reserved ... not easily to be understood and very peculiar." He habitually spoke in a husky voice, which "rendered first hearings from him painful," and he sometimes had trouble making himself heard in meetings. ... While an obvious research talent, he was in some ways lacking in humanity. In his memoir Richardson felt compelled to defend Snow from these criticisms but readily conceded that "He did not become the idol of the people in common practice, far from it." Richardson felt that Snow's lack of popularity was a sign of his medical integrity. Richardson relates that in Snow there was too much of the skeptic to be popular and none of the quackery or "routine malpractice which the people love," and as a poor boy from York he had no entree to "the bed-sides of dowagers of the pill-mania dynasty... Additional factors not addressed by Richardson include Snow's temperance, which likely alienated him from the heavy-drinking working clientele in his neighborhood. The casebooks occasionally reveal his impatience, sometimes downright irritability, with what he perceived as general ineptitude among his neighbors. ... his antipathy toward alcohol and his skeptical attitude toward the locals</p> <p><i>Vinten-Johansen, page 83</i></p>	<p>For Simon himself, paradoxically, the cholera had been a blessing in disguise. Not only had it enabled him to fulfil temporarily the scheme of organisation of October 1848, but it had given him hosts of allies and made him something of a national figure. With the senior officials he had, on the whole, worked well, and even the Inspectors, stung by his denunciations, were working much more vigorously. ... Such was his infectious zeal, his diligence and attractiveness of character, that the Committee on Health, which had started off by suppressing his reports and blocking his proposals, ended months of daily work with him by inviting his amendment to their report, applauding his own, and proclaiming 'their unqualified admiration of the conduct of Mr Simon' and "of his personal assiduity and professional character and ability". Likewise with the General Board of Health and with Chadwick, Simon had co-operated warmly throughout the crisis. This capacity to win the confidence and good-will of his colleagues would be an incomparable asset in the future.</p> <p>Equally important for the next few years was another group of allies: the Poor Law Medical Officers. From jealous and resentful enemies they had been transformed into staunch and helpful supporters of the Medical Officer. The cholera had forced them to cooperate with Simon, and they had found him not only dedicated and disinterested but genuinely anxious to promote the dignity and usefulness of their own offices. The prominent role he assigned them in the visitation system, his public tributes, his insistence on their part in a permanent sanitary organisation had so flattered and impressed them that, at the end of their labours, they even gave a festive</p>

Snow	Simon
	<p>sanitary dinner in his honour. Evenings at the house in Lancaster Place, with John and Jane exerting their charm, conciliated them still more.</p> <p><i>Lambert, page 139</i></p>

Snow – structure of his thought	Simon’s vision
	<p>The exciting possibility in a new Act to create 'the most perfect embodiment of sanitary law'</p> <p><i>Simon Reports of the Medical Officers of Health to the City of London, 1848-1898, p 162</i></p>
<p>Snow considered the human organism a complex system in interactions with other complex-systems. For him the "person" was a hierarchy of systems that could be studied at many different levels of organization, from molecules at the lowest and smallest end to nations and continents at the highest and largest end. Each level of organization was associated with a collateral scientific discipline that was suited for the study of the natural phenomena that tended to occur at that level.</p> <p><i>Vinten-Johansen, page 219</i></p>	<p>“a concept of sanitary administration not as the passive application of fixed knowledge and rigid formulae, but rather as itself a perpetual experiment, continually discovering, rejecting, defining and revising knowledge and methods of execution in the effort to attain the paramount end: the extinction of all preventable disease.”</p> <p><i>Lambert, page 168</i></p>
Careers as medical practitioners	
<p>Today, when we think of specializing we often imagine a narrowing of medical experience to a more uniform type of patient, but Snow's specialization brought him into contact with all kinds of patients and conditions. His was something of a</p>	<p>Throughout his career as a civil servant, Simon had continued his practical work as Lecturer and Surgeon at the hospital. Until 1870, when he found the burden too heavy, he lectured on pathology in the medical school, continuing to draw good audiences by his exposition of the</p>

superpractice in which he traversed the metropolis of London seeing the complete range of patients and conditions, from the queen to the chimney sweep to the stable-boy, from breast cancer to strabismus to venereal warts to delirium tremens.

*Vinten-Johansen, page 360*

latest European research. He retained his position as a full surgeon for some six years longer. Though his operations continued as meticulous and competent as ever, they no longer attracted attention as being innovatory-Simon's original energies were exhausted in other fields.

*Lambert, page 168*