

# Samuel Smiles

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Samuel Smiles** (23 December 1812 – 16 April 1904), was a Scottish author and reformer.



## Contents

- 1 Early life
- 2 Career
- 3 Writings
  - 3.1 Self help topics
  - 3.2 Biographical works
- 4 The reliability of Smiles' work
- 5 References
- 6 External links

## Early life

Born in Haddington, Smiles was the eldest of eleven children. He left school at the age of 14 and was apprenticed to a doctor, eventually enabling him to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh. While studying and after graduating he campaigned for parliamentary reform, contributing articles to the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle* and the *Leeds Times*.

## Career

In 1838, he was invited to become the editor for the *Leeds Times*, a position which he accepted and filled until 1845. In May 1840, Smiles became Secretary to the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, an organisation that held to the six objectives of Chartism: universal suffrage for all men over the age of 21; equal-sized electoral districts; voting by secret ballot; an end to the need of

MPs to qualify for Parliament, other than by winning an election; pay for MPs; and annual Parliaments.

In 1845, Samuel Smiles left the *Leeds Times* and became secretary to the Leeds and Thirsk Railway and then, nine years later, the South Eastern Railway. In 1866, he left this position to be president of the National Provident Institution, but left in 1871, after suffering a debilitating stroke. He recovered from the stroke, eventually learning to read and write again, and he even wrote books after his recovery. He died in Kensington and was buried in Brompton Cemetery.

As editor of the *Leeds Times*, he advocated radical causes ranging from women's suffrage to free trade to parliamentary reform. But by the late 1840s, Smiles became concerned about the advocacy of physical force by Chartists Feargus O'Connor and George Julian Harney, though he seems to have agreed with them that the movement's current tactics were not effective, saying that "mere political

reform will not cure the manifold evils which now afflict society." In the 1850s he seems to have completely given up on parliamentary reform and other structural changes as a means of social advance. For the rest of his career, he advocated individual self improvement.

## **Writings**

Smiles is best known today as the writer of books extolling virtues of self help, and biographies lauding the achievements of 'heroic' engineers. Most of these biographies were contained in the four volume work, *Lives of the Engineers*, but he also wrote many other biographies. He selected the topics of his biographies as a means of emphasising his thesis of self help. These works have come to exemplify Victorian values for the modern reader. He received some criticism in his own time from socialists because of his emphasis on individual achievement.

He was a prolific author of books and articles.

The following is an incomplete list of his most important work. See Jarvis, below, for a full listing of his writings.

### **Self help topics**

- *Self-Help*, London, 1859
- *Character*, London, 1871
- *Thrift*, London, 1875
- *Duty*, London, 1880
- *Life and Labour*, London 1887

### **Biographical works**

- *The Life of George Stephenson*, London, 1857
- *The Story of The Life of George Stephenson*, London, 1859  
(abridgement of the above)
- *Brief biographies*, Boston, 1860  
(articles reprinted from periodicals such as the *Quarterly Review*)
- *Lives of the Engineers*, 3 vol, London 1862
  - Vol 1, Early engineers - James Brindley, Sir Cornelius

Vermuyden, Sir Hugh Myddleton,  
Capt John Perry

- Vol 2, Harbours, Lighthouses and Bridges - John Smeaton and John Rennie, (1761-1821)
- Vol 3, History of Roads - John Metcalfe and Thomas Telford
- *Industrial Biography*, London, 1863

Includes lives of Andrew  
Yarranton, Dud Dudley, Henry  
Maudslay, Joseph Clement, etc..

- *Boulton and Watt*, London, 1865
- *The Huguenots: Their Settlements, Churches and Industries in England and Ireland*, London, 1867
- *Lives of the Engineers*, new ed. in 5 vols, London, 1874

(includes the lives of Stephenson  
and Boulton and Watt)

- *Life of a Scotch Naturalist: Thomas Edward*, London, 1875
- *George Moore, Merchant and*

*Philanthropist*, London & New York,  
1878

- *Robert Dick, Baker of Thurso, Geologist and Botanist*, London, 1878
- *Men of Invention and Industry*, London, 1884

Phineas Pett, Francis Petit Smith,  
John Harrison, John Lombe,  
William Murdock, Frederick  
Koenig, The Walter family of *The Times*,  
William Clowes (Printer), Charles Bianconi,  
and chapters on Industry in Ireland, Shipbuilding  
in Belfast, Astronomers and students in humble life

- *James Nasmyth, engineer, an autobiography*, ed. Samuel Smiles, London, 1885
- *A Publisher and his Friends. Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray*, London, 1891
- *Jasmin. Barber, Poet, Philanthropist*, London, 1891
- *Josiah Wedgwood, his Personal*

- History*, London, 1894
- *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles*,  
*LLD*, ed. T. Mackey, London, 1905

The growth of industrial archaeology in Britain from the 1960s caused a number of these titles to be reprinted, and a number are available on the Web from such sources as Project Gutenberg, noted below.

## **The reliability of Smiles' work**

Jarvis discusses this exhaustively in his book, and it is clear that Smiles must never be taken as the last word on the lives of Victorian engineers. Aside from the accuracy of his statements (it is known, for example, that he was prone to making selective quotations from documents to show his subjects in the best light), there is the balance of his coverage. He tended to concentrate on civil engineering, to the detriment of mechanical engineering and invention. Present-day researchers, who seem



only to use Smiles and few other sources uncritically, thus get a lop-sided view of industrialisation during the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian era in Britain.

## References

Adrian Jarvis, *Samuel Smiles and the construction of Victorian Values* Sutton Publishing, 1997, 176pp, 16 illus. (ISBN 0-7509-1128-X)

"Samuel Smiles and the gospel of work" in Briggs, Asa, *Victorian People*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1968

## External links

- Works by Samuel Smiles at Project Gutenberg
- Character by Samuel Smiles in html format

Retrieved from  
"[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_Smiles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Smiles)"

Categories: 1812 births | 1904 deaths |  
Chartists | People from East Lothian | Scottish  
writers | Scottish biographers | Personal  
development | Burials at Brompton Cemetery

- This page was last modified 14:35, 5 July 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.)  
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.