

Lintorn Simmons, Governor of Malta (1884-1888)

In this article, the third in a series of five features on Malta's *Vanity Fair* Governors, **Christopher Grech** deals with Sir John Lintorn Simmons, Governor of Malta from 1884 to 1888.

When dealing with Governor Simmons it is important to get one thing straight: his name. He is variously referred to as John Simmons or Lintorn Simmons. Which is correct? It is hoped that the following will clear up any confusion.

Christened John Lintorn Arabin Simmons, at some point in his life he dropped his first given name. It is almost certain that Simmons (1821-1903) was named after his kinsman, the Somerset solicitor, John Lintorn Simmons, however in later years he may have preferred the more unusual name of Lintorn for two reasons. The first being a tribute to his first wife Ellen Lintorn Simmons, daughter of the abovementioned John, to whom he was married for just five years before she passed away in 1851. They had one daughter, Eleanor, who died in 1901.

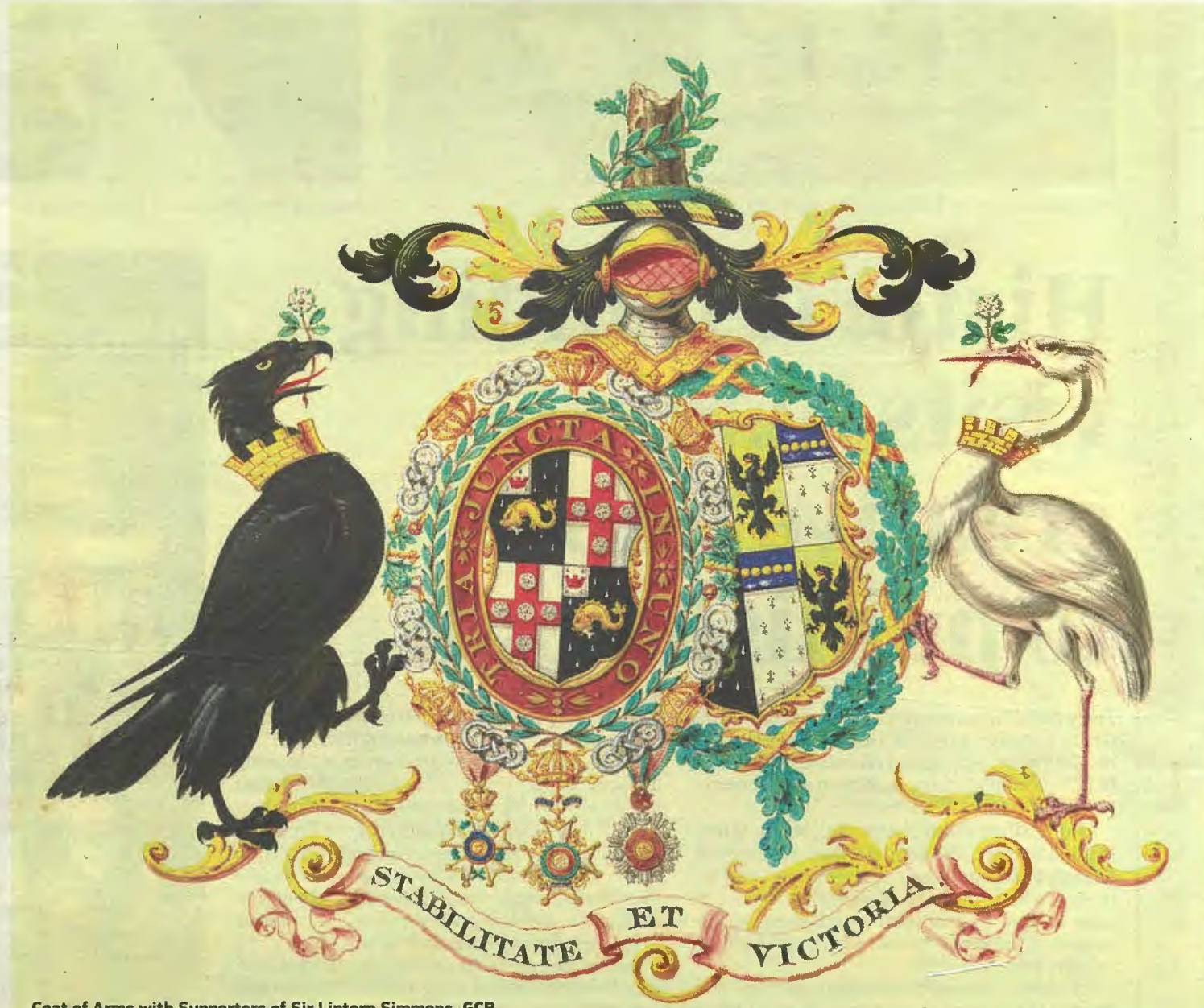
The second reason may be due to grander aspirations. Research indicates that this name transition occurred around 1869, when Simmons was elevated from Companion to Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (Military division). So he may have chosen a variation of his name that would distinguish him from the more common moniker of John Simmons. For the purposes of this article he will henceforth be referred to as Lintorn Simmons.

Simmons' parents were Thomas Frederick and Mary Simmons. His father was for many years a captain in the Royal Artillery. He must have been quite frustrated by his lack of promotion because in 1819 he was responsible for a book entitled *Remarks on the Promotion of the Officers of the Corps of Artillery in the British Service*, lamenting the lack of opportunity for promotion in the Royal Artillery and making some suggestions on how that situation could be addressed.

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Thomas Frederick's efforts were not rewarded and he retired with the rank of captain. However he did not waste his time; embarking on a career change of sorts he sought employment as a judge advocate within the Army. His most influential and enduring publication was the authoritative *Constitution and Practice of Courts Martial*, with a *Summary of the Law of Evidence as Connected Therewith*, which was first published in 1830 and remained in print until 1875, going through seven editions and becoming the standard text on the subject.

Research indicates that earlier in his career Lieutenant Thomas Frederick Simmons, RA, served in Malta in the 1820s. In fact, one of his sons was born and christened in Malta in 1822 and his name underscores the Malta connection: Alfred Angelo Simmons. It is not known whether Alfred was named as a tribute to one



Coat of Arms with Supporters of Sir Lintorn Simmons, GCB.



Captain Thomas Frederick Simmons, RA.

of his parents' friends or possibly after the fort where his father was stationed.

Alfred was killed in action on December 21, 1845, at the Battle of Ferozshah in India. There were two other Malta-related casualties at this same battle. Arthur Borton (the future Governor of Malta) suffered an elbow injury that severely affected the use of his right arm for the rest of his life. This was also the encounter at which Renaldo Sciberras, eldest son of Camillo, was killed.

Returning to the *Vanity Fair* caricature drawn by Spy (Leslie Ward), which was published in 1877, we see Simmons attired in morning suit wearing the neck badge and breast star of Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath.

The following year, immediately after his return from the Congress of Berlin (June 13-July 13, 1878), where he acted as a technical delegate advising on the borders between the Balkan States, Simmons was invested Grand Cross of the Order. The accompanying illustration shows the coat of arms devised for Simmons by the College of Arms. A receipt for charges and disbursements on the registration of said Arms and Supporters was made out for the princely sum of £136 and 15 shillings.

Simmons was informed of his investiture at Osborne House by Sir Albert Wood, secretary of the Order of the Bath, "on Tuesday next, at three o'clock precisely, I have it in command to apprise you thereof, and request your attendance accordingly. Morning dress".

As described previously (The Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, *The Sunday Times of Malta*, July 23), British military, naval and civil officials working in the Mediterranean were eligible for recognition in the Order of St Michael and St George. Although Simmons was appointed Governor of Malta in 1884 he was not granted the dignity of Grand Cross until relatively late in his tenure, May 23, 1887.

When initially offered the Grand Cross he declined to accept unless the names of the Maltese who he had proposed for honours were approved. Simmons received a stern reply from the Colonial Office to the effect that out of fairness to other claims it was not possible to bargain in this way.

Simmons accepted the honour but tried again – in vain – to argue in favour of the Maltese in 1890. He claimed that the Maltese would suffer severe hardships in the event of a war with a maritime power. Furthermore he pointed out that ever since the Ionian islands had ceased to fall under British protection the proportion of awards granted to the Maltese had not increased.

Simmons duly received the warrant under the Royal Sign Manual and Seal of the Order conveying on him the dignity of Knight Grand Cross, the Insignia and Statutes. Interestingly the insignia (badges, breast star and riband) were accompanied by a blank form of covenant for their eventual return following the death of the bearer. The Order liked to keep a tight hold on all its baubles. Simmons' insignia are today displayed at the Royal Engineers' Museum in Gillingham, UK.

The portraits of Sir Lintorn and Lady Simmons by Giuseppe Cali shown here must have been painted before Simmons' appointment as Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George. They are small but



Sir Lintorn Simmons, by Giuseppe Cali.

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not miniature portraits, each measuring approximately 14cm by 21cm.

The image of Sir Lintorn is very similar to, and most likely based on, an identical photograph (by an unknown photographer) of Simmons in the same pose and uniform as depicted by Cali. An engraved version of this image was also included in the *Guida Generale di Malta per l'Anno 1887* as well as an issue of the *Strand Magazine* dating back to 1897.

While the posture chosen for the Governor is generic, that of Lady Simmons is more informal and intimate; there is no doubt she was a person of forceful character but at the same time Cali has invested her with a sympathetic countenance that has been demonstrated through other sources.

In the late 1870s, while her husband was Governor of the Royal Military College, Woolwich, one of his charges was the Prince Imperial of France – the only child of Emperor Napoleon III and his wife Empress Eugénie. During this period Lady

Simmons was accepted as a close confidant of the Empress. So much so that when the death of the Prince Imperial at the hands of the Zulus in 1879 became known in England it was Lady Simmons who rushed to the Empress' residence to be the first to console the distraught royal.

Empress Eugénie continued to value her friendship with Lady Simmons and kept up a correspondence with the Simmonses even when they were living in Malta.

In one letter, presumably towards the end of Governor Simmons' tenure, Empress Eugénie wrote how she read with great interest the article in the *“Malta”* newspaper reviewing the Governor's administration, commenting on the positive effects he was having on the morale and wellbeing of the population. She ends by “sending my regards to Sir Lintorn and Mademoiselle Blanch and, believe me, dear Lady Simmons, affectionately yours, Eugénie”.

Blanch, Lady Simmons, was Sir Lintorn's second wife. They married in November 1856 and had one daughter, also named Blanch. Their daughter had a keen eye for art and recorded in detail her holiday visits to museums around Europe while on family vacations with her parents. These observations prepared her for the valuable work she completed while in Malta when she compiled the *Description of the Governor's Palaces* published in 1888, which serves as an invaluable catalogue of the works in the palaces at that time.

Lady Simmons was a devoted wife constantly at her husband's side to give support and encouragement. Consequently Sir Lintorn was severely affected by her death in 1898, after which he moved out of London to stay with his daughter, now Blanch Orman, near Blackwater in Hampshire. Simmons, who at the time of his death held the rank of Field Marshal, refused a military funeral and left instructions for a quiet burial in Somerset beside his second wife. Nevertheless his pall-bearers included the aides-de-camp of King Edward VII, the Prince of Wales, the German Emperor and the Duke of Cambridge.



Lady Simmons, by Giuseppe Cali.



Sir John Lintorn Arabin Simmons, by Spy, *Vanity Fair*, 1877.

Fifty years ago
August 20, 1967

GOZO EXPLOSION

The Catholic Action Centre, the Police station and the Government dispensary at Zebbuġ, Gozo, were extensively damaged when fireworks believed to have been stored at the centre, exploded shortly after noon on Friday. The fireworks had been prepared for today's feast of the Assumption at Zebbuġ. All festivities have now been cancelled. Mario Saliba, 18 years of Zebbuġ, died in the explosion whilst Carmel Cefai, 19 years, also of Zebbuġ, sustained injuries of a grievous nature but is not in danger of loss of life.

SELF FIRST AND FOREMOST

“It is a fact that the foreshore is public. However those who go down to the sea from tents in Mellieha do not seem to share this opinion. It is bad enough for the tents to be four deep at Ghadira, but that their forward ropes should reach down into the water is the limit. The moment one emerges from the sea one is forced to do a skipping act or else measure one's length along the sand. It is obvious that picnickers setting up the frontline tents do not give much thought to others.”

(Excerpt from Roamer's column)

RUSSIA FLIES MILITARY SUPPLIES TO NIGERIA

Fifteen Soviet transport planes have landed military supplies, including fighter aircraft, at the northern Nigerian airport for the federal government in a massive arms build-up against sucessionist Biafra.

Ten years ago
August 20, 2007

GOVERNMENT 'DIDN'T KNOW' OF SEXUAL ASSAULT CLAIMS

The government has vehemently denied claims by the Opposition leader that it was aware of the sexual assault claims surrounding the son of Malta's Ambassador to Ireland. The government said it was only alerted about the case through media reports on Friday afternoon. Less than three weeks after his reappointment, Richard Muscat resigned on Saturday following an alleged sexual assault by his son in Dublin.

Irish media reports say that 20-year-old student Christina Leech-Cleary was walking home through Dublin's Herbert Park Road in the afternoon on October 24 last year when she was confronted by a man who asked for directions. The man grabbed her, dragged her down the road and placed his hand down her top. The woman managed to escape, however, and contacted the police. The police have still not charged the ambassador's son.

SANT'S SURCHARGE PLEDGE FOOLISH – AD

Alternattiva Demokratika yesterday slammed Opposition leader Alfred Sant's promise to slash the electricity surcharge by half, describing the idea as an “expensive electoral trick” as the “season of electoral antics” kicks off. It was “utterly foolish” for Dr Sant to make such promises without stating how they would be financed, said AD chairman Harry Vassallo.