

Foreword to the Second Mechanics Institutes Worldwide Conference

by Baron Briggs of Lewes (Asa Briggs).



I would have loved to be present at this fascinating second international conference. I was one of the first historians to direct attention after the Second World War to Samuel Smiles. *Self-Help* was a term that I brought into scholastic use, and after writing the introduction to its centenary publication in 1959, at the invitation of John Murray, Smiles's publisher, I went on to preside over the complete edition of all his works. Smiles's reputation in his lifetime was international - global we would now call it - and *Self-Help* was translated into many languages.

All compound words beginning with "self" are interesting, including self-sacrifice and self-abnegation as well as self-reliance and self-control. The sessions of this conference will span many themes. For me, too, there is a personal dimension to the conference. I love Bath and have lectured here on the Pitmans. I was a boy at Keighley Grammar School, an old foundation which has long since disappeared and which was housed in the old Mechanics Institute in the middle of the town. My grandparents had gone to school in a Leeds building where Smiles had lectured. I now spend half the year eight miles from Hadington where Smiles was born. In 1959 I was in Australia, as a visiting professor at the Australian National University, a country in which so many Mechanics Institutes flourished and from where several delegates are attending this conference.

For all these reasons I would have loved to have been with you, as I said at the beginning of this, for me, all too brief message. I hope that everything will go off well. The topics to be discussed are all pertinent to twenty-first century life. They are not just part of history.

Dr Peter Ford MBE (Conference co-convenor) writes:

BARON BRIGGS OF LEWES

Asa Briggs was born in 1921 and educated at Keighley Grammar School in West Yorkshire and at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. During the Second World War he worked on deciphering intercepted German codes for the Enigma Project at Bletchley Park. He was a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford between 1945 and 1966 and later became Provost of the College from 1976 to 1991. From 1955 to 1961 Asa Briggs was Professor of Modern History at the University of Leeds and then Professor of History at the new University of Sussex from 1961 to 1967. Between 1967 and 1976 he was the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex. He was subsequently Chancellor of the Open University between 1978 and 1994.

Asa Briggs has been a prolific author. In addition to his work on Samuel Smiles, he has written a five volume *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Briggs has specialised in social history particularly relating to the Victorian era. Among many

others he has written books on *Victorian Cities* (1963); *The Power of Steam* (1982); *Victorian Things* (1988); *A Social History of England*, 3rd edition (1999); *Modern Europe 1789-1989* (with Patricia Clavin) (1997).

Today, Asa Briggs is a highly regarded and much loved member of the University of Sussex community. He is well known for his wit, erudition, intellect and kindness and throughout his career has been ably and loyally supported by his equally charming wife Susan.

Annotated mainly from Who's Who 2010
By Peter Ford DPhil (Sussex) 1969