

# Unveiling of the Simonds Brewery Information Board

## 26 February 2009



**(Left to right) Richard Bennett, Chairman, RCS; David Simonds; The Hon Mary Bayliss, Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire; Cllr Peter Beard, Mayor of Reading; Jamie Nimmo, designer of the board; Raymond Simonds; Andy Thearle of AJ Wells, manufacturer of the board.**

This happy event was the culmination of about 6 years of effort by RCS to place some sort of recognition of the erstwhile existence of the Simonds Brewery in the area now occupied to a large extent by the Oracle Shopping Centre, on one side of Bridge Street, and by offices and flats on the other.

The late Duncan Simonds was our President for 14 years from 1988 until his death in 2002 and we are very grateful for all his help and encouragement during those years. It had been a fond wish of his to have some physical acknowledgement of the Brewery's history and its contribution to the commercial life of Reading and we decided to make this one of our projects. We believe that Duncan would be pleased with the result we have achieved with the help of members of the Simonds family; Jamie Nimmo, the designer (or "miracle-worker" as we think of him); the excellent manufacturers, AJ Wells of the Isle of Wight and Steve Belam of the Oracle Management, whose kind permission was given for the siting of the board on Oracle premises.

As part of the celebrations Raymond Simonds adapted Tony Corley's history of the brewery, "The Road to Worton Grange", adding further researches by himself, Sidney Gold and Adam Sowan of RCS, and adding family portraits and memorabilia, creating a lovely booklet (also designed by Jamie Nimmo) which was a marvellous souvenir for all who attended the event.



**The speeches: RB, an ex-Whitbread man, had a glass of the special ale already; the Mayor, Cllr Peter Beard, spoke about his memories of the Brewery and performed the unveiling of the board, which he said was "spectacular". Raymond Simonds spoke on behalf of all the Simonds family.**

The unveiling event itself, being attended by some 80+ people, turned into a really good party with the Mayor and Mayoress, the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, Councillors and Council Officers, representatives from the Museum and the Berkshire Records Office, Oracle Management, representatives of CAMRA, The Brewers Company, the Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group, The History of Brewing Society, The History of Reading Society, Simonds pensioners and members of the Simonds family. All those members of Reading Civic Society who had generously contributed towards the cost of the board were invited. It was great that representatives of the manufacturers came all the way from the Isle of Wight to see their work in place and that Jamie Nimmo flew over from Spain for the occasion and then dashed back again that afternoon.

Further information about the history of the brewery emerged from the personal memories of those attending this event and Matthew Williams of the Museum is keen to capture oral history on tape for their collection. Ethel “Babs” Doswell came up from Devon and we learned that she had been the Head Brewer during WWII when the ladies of the company kept things going while all the men were away. Ken Walker of the Civic Society brought some photographs taken in the 1890s – a 360° panorama taken from the top of the water tower which was on the site south of the Kennet – which shows some views over the brewery in some detail, including some builders working on the site. This has set us thinking about producing a modern-day version.

Raymond Simonds is continuing to collect any such material which turns up and he is making it available to view on his website [www.simondsfamily.me.uk](http://www.simondsfamily.me.uk) where you can also find a downloadable version of the booklet for those who were not able to attend the event.

Another souvenir for everyone who attended was a bottle of ale specially brewed and labelled for the occasion by the independent Chiltern Brewery. This ale was also on tap from a keg, for consumption with the buffet in Strada, which was a welcome retreat on such a cold day. We thank Jack Warren, the manager of Strada, for catering so well for us. **ABB**

*Photographs by Chris Widdows*

