



*Logo from Simonds-Farsons, Limited  
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*Simonds and Farsons:  
Commemorating 90 years  
from their association*

*When William Simonds moved to Reading in 1774, started malting, as well as brewing his first ales, little did he imagine that his surname would remain associated with excellent beers to this day, 245 years later... in Malta.*

H. & G. Simonds Ltd had a long tradition of brewing before it arrived in Malta. When William's son took over the brewery in 1785, he immediately engaged the then young architect [Sir] John Soane to build a brewery on Seven Bridges Road. The business grew, but not without difficulties. England had a closed pub-licensing system. Thus, Simonds was faced with aggressive competition from local smaller brewers. Notwithstanding this, Simonds managed to clinch a momentous contract in 1813: supplying the newly opened Royal Military College at Sandhurst.

Another landmark contract granted Simonds the exclusivity of the canteen for the massive Aldershot Army's home base. By the early 1870s the brewery was producing an impressive 58,000 barrels per year. The family concern would thus register as a public company by 1885.



Simonds set up an agency in Malta in 1875 to supply the strong British military presence on the islands. Mr Hearne, a family member, was put in charge. Malta's well-sheltered natural harbours offered a strong and defensible logistical base in the middle of the Mediterranean for the Empire where "the sun never set".

The Simonds agency office was found in Palazzo Ferreria, facing the Royal Opera House, while a warehouse-bottling facility was found on Pinto Wharf. The company imported spirits, while beer was imported in large casks, to be carbonated and bottled for local distribution. By the early 1920s, L. Farrugia & Sons were supplying the carbonation gas to Simonds. This connection soon enticed the Farrugia brothers to embark on producing ale, managing to go in production by April 1928.



Frederic Adolphus [Eric] Simonds was aware that their share of the Maltese market had taken a toll in this period. Foreign competitors *Youngers* were looking into investing in brewing equipment, whereas *Mc Ewans* were slashing prices. Local brewers, namely *Farsons* and *Cisk* were taking on the market. Simonds sales had experienced a drastic slump. This prompted Eric Simonds to send Head Brewer Charles Stocker to assess the situation on the island. Stocker did not take long to give his recommendations. Simonds had to team up with *Farsons*.



Stocker had met with the Marquis John Scicluna, witnessing the extent of the banker's investment in the new modern brewery. Notwithstanding that both Simonds and the Farrugias were favourable to a three-way merger with Scicluna's Malta Export Brewery (M.E.B.), it is said that the Marquis' chief advisor, J. Gatt, was against striking any partnership with the British brewer. In such a scenario, Stocker pushed for immediate partnership with the Farrugia brothers. Stocker's recommendation struck the right chord in Reading. This move would establish a good base to export the brews to the near and far East, whilst pre-empting any foreign competition from investing in building more breweries.



The Simonds picked a cousin, Brigadier General Harry Simonds de Brett C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. to lead the negotiations with the Farrugias. In a few months, the merger took place. The 'General' took over the Chairmanship, while Lewis V. Farrugia was to be Managing Director. The partnership between Farrugia and Simonds was thus forged 90 years ago, in 1929. It was a first in its kind: a novel union between a reputable British company and an upcoming Maltese company which had already established itself as a leading local industrial pioneer.





The epic second battle of El Alamein (West Egypt) is termed to be the turning point for the Allies in WWII. Winston Churchill would later declare: *"Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat"*. With the German and Italian forces routed, North Africa soon became a large station for the Allied Forces, including Australian, American and other troops from all parts of the globe. The next push would be Italy.

This concentration of troops in such hot climates ensured that the demand for beer would be high. Water was not safe to drink due to contamination and associated diseases. Therefore, High Command approved the drinking of [pasteurised] beer as a healthy alternative.

A director with Simonds Farsons, R. Wingrave Tench, had been appointed by the British Governor as the Deputy Chief Censor in the Regional Protection Office for the Central Region during the war. Once the Axis forces had capitulated or escaped, the British forces started to establish themselves in preparation for the next pushes. Tench had the necessary contacts to advise Simonds Farsons on the opportunity to run a brewery in Tripoli. The company was selected to run a seized Italian brewery in Tripoli, Libya, in 1943, supplying the North African arm of the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (N.A.A.F.I.). With this contract in hand, Simonds Farsons could now make plans to grow and modernise back home.



The war had taken a toll on Malta. The period saw a resumption of the dormant discussions on partnership with the Malta Export Brewery. Both local brewers recognised that, in the face of post-war hardships, renewed excise duties and reduction of military forces in the Mediterranean, they only could overcome such difficulties if they were united. Remaining in a price-slashing competitive milieu would have only pushed them into mutual bankruptcy. Thus, with a new and expensive Mrieħel brewery, designed by Lewis V. Farrugia, being built, Simonds Farsons and Cisk reached an agreement to form a company made up of elements that had experience in brewing, resilience in the face of hardships and pluck to invest.



Brigadier General Harry Simonds de Brett would be Chairman, Marquis John Scicluna the vice Chairman and Lewis V. Farrugia the Managing Director.

This merger had finally overcome many obstacles, but ultimately goodwill, friendship, the 'gentlemanly' competition and business sense made the companies coalesce in a tighter, stronger and synergised organisation. All leading players, Eric Simonds, Lewis Farrugia, John Scicluna and Henry Simonds de Brett had struck up personal friendship in the course of their contacts: this was to remain through their respective lives. The relation with the English brewery remained strong.



Duncan Simonds, who was the last joint Managing Director of H. & G. Simonds before the company was merged into Courage in 1960, kept both the commercial and personal relationship strong with the Maltese brewery and the families.

Both Simonds and Farsons sent executives to each other's breweries for hands on exposure traineeships. Among these were William Simonds, who had spent a period of time at Farsons, and Anthony Miceli Farrugia, "*Is-sur Nini*", who was also exposed to a six-month enriching experience at the Reading Brewery in 1936. Such knowledge transfer was indispensable for the two breweries: in fostering a stronger alliance and in nurturing personal bonds.

1948 was the seminal year when the three families forged Simonds Farsons Cisk Ltd. The old English tradition of Simonds, the entrepreneurship of Farrugia and the financial savvy of Scicluna had combined to form one of Malta's iconic industries. From that year onwards, the story goes onto another successful tack.

