

**HEROES:** sculptor beats George Palmer, Oscar Wilde, Edith Morley

PRIDE OF PLACE – The Falconer in Central Park, New York, and the unmistakable Maiwand Lion in Reading are the most famous works by George Blackall Simonds, below

# By George, Simonds is the greatest



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A SCULPTOR boasting works in New York's Central Park and Reading's Forbury Gardens has been voted this town's greatest ever person.

George Blackall Simonds finished first in a poll among Reading's greats after a poll on the Reading libraries website and a debate at the central library.

The sculptor and member of the town's great brewing family beat biscuit baron George Palmer, playwright Oscar Wilde, suffragette Edith Morley and King Henry I into second, third, fourth and fifth places respectively.

The masterpiece which made

George Simonds famous was The Falconer which stands in Central Park in the Big Apple.

The sculpture depicts a boy in doublet and hose in the act of releasing a huge peregrine falcon.

The artist was a keen falconer himself becoming the founding president of the British Falconers' Society in 1927 and posing with a falcon for his official portrait when he became chairman of the family brewery.

Mr Simonds, who was born in 1847, was grandson of the great Reading brewing and banking magnate William Blackall Simonds.

He studied sculpture in Dresden and Brussels before working for 12 years in Rome where he learned casting techniques.

He worked as a sculptor until 1905 when he became a director of the brewery following the death of his brother. George died in 1929.

He is best known in Reading for his two works The Maiwand Lion in Forbury Gardens and the statue of Queen Victoria outside the Town Hall.

The lion, which is made of cast iron, was commissioned by the Berkshire Memorial Fund and the Berkshire Regiment in memory of the 66th regiment, which was almost wiped out in the Battle of Maiwand in the Afghan War of 1880.

Queen Victoria was sculpted in marble to mark her Golden Jubilee.

He also founded the Art Workers Guild in 1884, inspired by William

Morris and the arts and crafts movement.

Despite the reverence with which he is viewed by Reading's library users, Simonds's work has not always been treated with respect.

His statue in Central Park, now restored, was attacked by a hacksaw-wielding vandal and the Maiwand Lion suffered the indignity of having its testicles painted silver by local wags.

Raymond Simonds, son of Duncan Simonds who was the last member of the family to be managing director of the brewery later taken over by Courage, said: "I am absolute delighted that my ancestor has been voted number one in the Great People of Reading Debate. "He was a remarkable man."