

Duncan Simonds

ONE of the giants of Reading's bedrock industries of beer, biscuits and bulbs died this week at the age of 85.

Duncan Simonds was involved with Courage Barclay & Simonds Brewery in Bridge Street for more than 40 years, after distinguished Second World War service in the Royal Horse Artillery.

He was wounded twice and mentioned in dispatches three times, and after being captured at Tobruk he escaped from a prisoner of war camp and then returned to H&G Simonds as joint managing director.

While in charge of the world-renowned brewery - where The Oracle shopping centre now stands - he oversaw a successful expansion of the company's Reading Pale Ale and Taverner beers into pubs around the country.

The whole family was immersed in the town - James Simonds was president of Reading Football Club when it turned professional in 1895, while Stephen was one of its first full-time players.

Mr Simonds' cousin David said: "When he came back from the war he was full of ideas of management techniques to take the business forward, and improve facilities for pub licensees."

Following a merger with Courage and Barclay Ltd he was still determined we would be in the front rank of new developments in both draught beer, bottled beer, and canned beer when that came about.

"He was particularly interested in Soling class sailing, and his sons Colin and Gavin were actually selected for the 1960 Moscow Olympics, but unfortunately the team decided to boycott the games." He added: "He later became president of Reading Civic Society, and was very active in helping them in their efforts to restore the Father Willis organ



■ The late Duncan Simonds at his 70th birthday celebration

in the Town Hall, and they were all very pleased when that was finally completed."

Reading Civic Society chairman Richard Bennett said: "The whole family were deeply concerned with Reading, with the three Bs connection and the football club, and that's why he was so keen to be our president - to help shape the future of the town.

"We will miss his guiding influence. It will be difficult to find a successor who will be involved in the way he was."

Mr Simonds is survived by his widow Monica, sons Raymond, Colin and Gavin and nine grandchildren.

The funeral is today (Thursday) at St James the Less, Pangbourne, at 11.30am.