



H. & G. SIMONDS, LTD., READING.

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William Blackall Simonds in 1782 inherited from his father a Brewhouse in Broad Street, Reading and four pubs, £1,000 from his maternal grandfather, and married a wife (a Miss May, daughter of the Basingstoke Brewer) bringing a dowry of £2,000. The Brewhouse soon proved too small, and he bought a 'greenfield' site 100 yards south of Gun Street, on the Kennet, and commissioned his friend, Sir John Soane, the architect of the Bank of England, to build a Brewery. It was completed at a cost, for buildings alone, of £6,400 — and he had to borrow heavily to pay for it! It may just have been a happy coincidence that in the same year he also became Receiver-General of Taxes for West Berkshire, and co-founder of Messrs. Micklem, Stephens, Simonds & Harris' Bank in the Market Place, each partner contributing £1,000 capital. Reading's new Brewery had an output of 6,000 barrels per annum.

Nearly 200 years later, his successors moved out of the centre of the town to a 'greenfield' site 3 miles away on the M4, building a new Brewery at a total investment of £90m and an annual output of 1.5m barrels per annum.

It was about time for a move!

What a period of growth these last 200 years have been! Reading in 1785 was a quiet country town, the professional centre of the county, but known otherwise for malting and sailmaking. If the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the Battle of Trafalgar could be said to have been won in the sailyards of Katesgrove Lane!

In those days, the town's water supply was pumped from Mill Lane through elm pipes to tanks in Broad Street, and then by lead pipes to those houses lucky enough to have running water. It was often a chocolate colour, so it was said! No wonder beer was so popular! The brewing liquor came from our own deep wells, and the beer was purified by boiling during the process. Today, we are happy to use the town supply for brewing.

Reading's industries grew on the back of the canal system — before the railway era, 50,000 tons a year of Reading's total trade was carried by water, compared to 100 tons by road. The Maltsters sent malt to the big London Breweries — we sent beer to the London Docks for export to the Colonies. The railways came, and Simonds Brewery expanded along the line of the Great Western Railway to the West Country and South Wales — using the goods trucks as storage points, from which a multitude of carriers sold beer off the dray to customers — a cheap method of distribution — no depots, no telesales, no canteens, no problems! Today it is the motorway network which determined Courage on the site of the new Brewery.

By 1880 the population of Reading was 17,000, since when it has increased sevenfold to today's figure of 118,000, mainly due to the growing importance of Reading as a centre of communications. Beer sales increased considerably in the industrial expansion of the 19th century, and Reading was no exception. As far as Simonds Brewery was concerned, use was made of the excellent communications to the West Country (provided by the Great Western Railway) and to the London Docks. Simonds' Ales were to be bought in Bristol, South Wales and the West Country, and also across the seas in India, Africa and the West Indies.

Between 1830 and 1930 the Brewery's share of beer output in the UK increased from 0.08 % to 1.07 %, or to put it another way, total sales increased from 11,000 barrels to 279,000 barrels. Breweries were acquired in Staines, Plymouth, Bristol, Bridgend, Newport, Swindon, Cirencester, Basingstoke and the businesses were expanded and developed. The advent of bottled beer in the early 20th century caused further development in the Bridge Street site and, of course, motor transport created a new opportunity for centralising production and distribution, thereby making the Reading Brewery site more intensively used.

Export sales had always played an important role in the life of the Company, whether in "following the drum" — supporting the Armed Forces abroad — or in general sales throughout the globe. Overseas trading links were strengthened by the formation in Malta of Simonds-Farsons Limited in 1929, by closer trading ties with Saccone & Speed Limited in the Mediterranean, which became an associated company in 1945, and by a substantial share holding in East African Breweries Limited in Kenya in 1950.

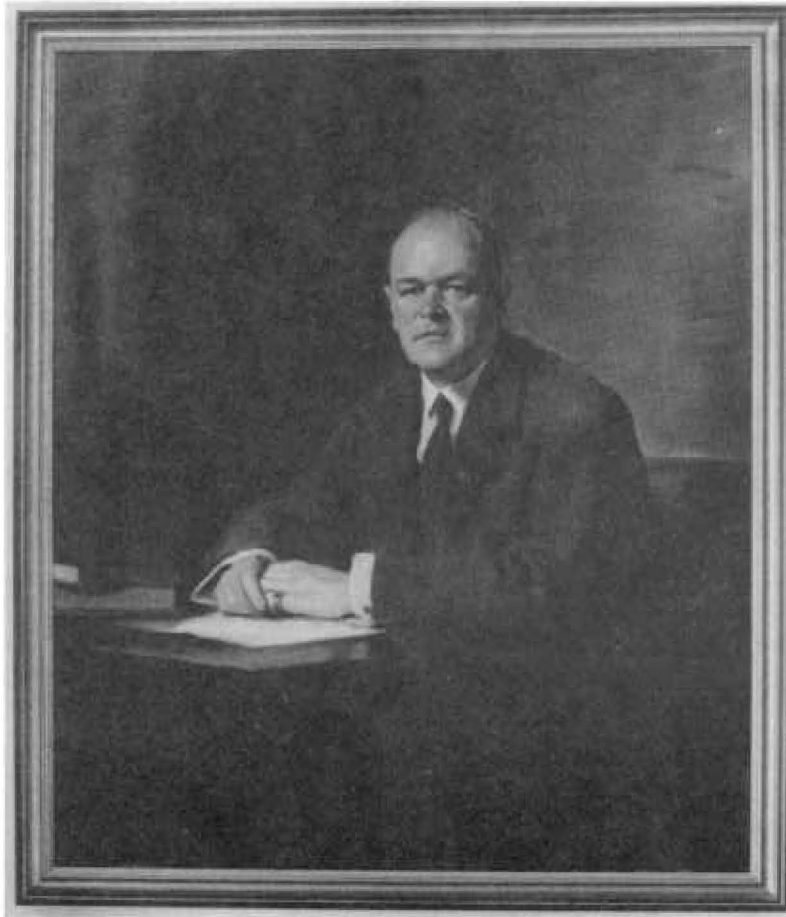
Throughout the history of the Simonds Brewery, members of the firm played their part in the affairs of the Town. The original William Blackall Simonds became Mayor of Reading in 1816, Henry Simonds was Mayor in 1824, Henry Adolphus in 1859, Henry John in 1866, and Blackall in 1882. Like other firms, it was a true family brewery, with sons following fathers in all departments of the company.

Eric Simonds was the Managing Director and, later, Chairman of the Brewery during its greatest period of expansion between 1913 and 1953. In 1952, amid great rejoicing, he celebrated his jubilee — 50 years in the firm — during which the share capital had increased from £348,000 to £2,447,000. He died in office in August 1953, and was succeeded as Chairman by General Sir Miles Dempsey.

The Octagon Brewery, Plymouth was acquired in 1954. H. & G.

Simonds Limited merged with Courage and Barclay Limited in 1959, as a third equal partner. Reading became the headquarters of the Central Region of the new Company, and today houses Courage Simonds Limited.

The transfer of the brewing capacity to the new Berkshire Brewery at Worton Grange in 1980 was simply a further step in the evolution of a successful brewing company, which has played a major part in the life of Reading and Berkshire and in Brewing History, since its founding in 1785.



F.A. (Eric) SIMONDS