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## **Messrs. H. & G. Simonds' Brewery, Reading**

READING has long, been famed as a centre of the brewing Industry, and chief among the firms which produce the "national beverage " is that of Messrs. H. and G. Simonds, Ltd., who enjoy a European reputation. They have branch offices and stores at London, Aldershot, Alexandria, Brighton, Brussels, Cairo, Dublin, Farnborough, Gibraltar, Hastings, Ludgershall, Malta, Oxford, Plymouth; Portsmouth, Salisbury, Shorncliffe, Slough, Swansea, Wimbledon, Woking, Woolwich. The brewery stores and handsome offices are situated in Bridge Street, and the malt-houses are close by in Fobney-street, near the Central Goods Station, which the Great Western Railway constructed, together with a branch line joining the Newbury and Basingstoke lines at Southcote, largely for the convenience of Messrs. Simonds, The firm employ in all over 500 persons in Reading alone.

The brewery was founded at the corner of Broad Street, during the latter part of the eighteenth century, by Mr. William Blackall Simonds, an ancestor of the present directors, who are as follows:- Mr. George Blackall Simonds (chairman), Messrs. Henry Caversham Simonds, Louis de Luze Simonds, Arthur Simonds, Frederick Simonds and Frederick Adolphus Simonds. The trade soon outgrew the Broad-street premises, and in 1790 the brewery was transferred to its present site on the north bank of the river Kennet, where Mr William Blackall Simonds erected a twenty-five-quarter plant, together with malt-houses and stabling sufficient for his requirements, together with a home for his family.

At this period the Duke of Wellington had not succeeded in passing the Beerhouse Act, therefore the only channels or outlets for the trade of a wholesale brewer were by purchase of the few then existing, fully-licensed public-houses, which commanded an enormous price, and whose number was practically limited. What is now known as a private trade had not been called into existence; light bitter ales were unknown, and Hodgson, the pioneer of that trade, had not even been heard of. No such thing as exporting ale was considered possible, hence the trade of a brewer was limited to the village alehouses. In those days no country gentleman's house was considered complete unless it had its brewery attached, and the itinerant brewer, who went from one to the other, was a notable character whose services were as much sought after as those of a physician nowadays. The custom of brewing was equally general among the yeoman and farmers, who vied with each other in their endeavours to beat the squire in the quality of their brew. Under these circumstances, the increase of the brewing business was necessarily slow, there being no licensed houses obtainable.

At one time, dissatisfied with this slow rate of progress, Mr Simonds thought of selling the brewery and confining his attention entirely to banking in which he was largely interested. His son, the late Mr George Simonds, appears to have been more hopeful and of a different opinion, for, leaving his brother Henry in the Banking firm, which still flourishes under the family name in King Street, he entered the brewery, and thenceforth devoted himself exclusively to that business.

Mr. George Simonds was possessed of great business capacity, energy and foresight, and, when the Beerhouse Act was passed, he exercised his remarkable abilities with such promptness and prudence that the trade rapidly increased, and, henceforth, the success of the brewery was firmly established. A good story is told in this connection. Mr. Simonds was remarkably fond of hunting and was part proprietor of the hounds belonging to a personal friend, Sir John Cope, the celebrated sportsman. Having long had an inkling that the Beer Bill would eventually be passed,

Mr; Simonds when hunting carried with him a pocket map, whereon he from time to time, marked spots, within a radius of fifteen miles from Reading, at which beerhouses might conveniently be opened, and in this he was often assisted by his old groom. Once having made up his mind on any subject, action, with Mr. Simonds, became a matter of necessity, hence he took immediate steps to buy the freehold or lease of any house suitable for his purpose situated in or near the locality marked on his map. Thus, while his neighbours were dreaming of the future, he had already opened 50 beerhouses. After many years of strenuous work in partnership with his brother Henry, Mr. George Simonds retired, and in subsequent years the business passed into the hands of his nephews, Henry John Simonds, Henry Adolphus Simonds and Blackall Simonds.

In the year 1868 the wine and spirit trade which since the beginning of the century had been carried on by Mr. Henry Simonds, was acquired by the firm, and it is now a valuable and considerable adjunct to the business.

In 1885 the business was converted into a private limited liability company. Messrs. Simonds' first trial in brewing pale ale was eminently disastrous, from a financial point of view. Having made the experiment in a good strong bitter beer of the old-fashioned type, they duly consigned it to Melbourne, where it fetched quite a fabulous price. Unfortunately, the consignee stuck to the money, and had not the grace to return even the empty casks. Nothing daunted, however, the firm turned their attention to making this class of ale a speciality, and wisely cultivated a demand for it among their own more immediate connection.

When the taste for a lighter kind of ale set in, Messrs. Simonds applied themselves to the task of producing a beer of much lower specific gravity, using a large quantity of the finest hops, and hopping down with dry hops introduced into the casks. To this beer they gave the name of S.B., and so pronounced was its success that the demand for it soon necessitated the reconstruction and enlargement of their brewery.

The wine and spirit stores shown in the illustration below are special interest, as this building comprises four storeys and is said to be the most unique structure of its kind in the kingdom. The walls are of solid concrete, as are also the floors, which are supported on iron columns, each calculated to carry a weight of a hundred tons. A hydraulic lift runs through the various floors for raising and lowering casks and cases. This new form of construction was devised and carried through by the chairman, Mr George Blackall Simonds.

In addition to extensive public and private trade the firm have for many years particularly maintained a large connection with the Navy and Army. In 1872 Messrs. Simonds supplied the troops of the flying columns on Salisbury Plain during the manoeuvres, and each year since that date have on similar occasions followed the troops, maintaining supplies in any part of the country.

Last year the firm were selected to supply the whole of the Red Force in East Anglia for the manoeuvres which were unavoidably cancelled. In September last, however the scheme of the previous year was carried out; Messrs. H. & G. Simonds were again appointed to supply about 30,000 troops, and carried out their contract with such success that they were highly complimented by the Army Authorities.

In March, 1912, the firm was awarded the Grand Prix and Gold Medal for Ale and Stout at the Paris International Foods Exhibition. It will therefore be seen that the process of extension of the business has steadily continued up to the present day, until it has become the largest provincial brewery in the South of England.