

The House of Simonds

through nine reigns



THE House of Simonds was founded by Mr. William Blackall Simonds late in the eighteenth century, about the time that George the Third came to the Throne.

The Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth in June means, therefore, that the Company has been in existence for nine reigns, and the present seems an appropriate time to look back and mention a few of the outstanding incidents in the story of the Firm.

Licensing laws were very different when the founder began his business at a site on the corner of Bridge Street, Reading. The Beer House Act had not been passed, and the only outlet he could obtain for his beers was by purchasing some of the existing fully licensed public-houses, which were very limited in number and which cost an enormous price.

An Excellent Reputation

Light bitter ales were unknown, and there was no such thing as an export trade. Every country gentleman had his own brewery, and home brewing was equally popular amongst the yeoman and the farmers. Competition, therefore, at that period was quite keen, but there is no doubt that Mr. Simonds' beers won an excellent reputation. Soon his trade outgrew his premises, and in 1790 he had to move to a larger building on the site of our present brewery in Bridge Street on the north bank of the River Kennet.

The passing of the Beer Act allowed Mr. Blackall Simonds, who was possessed of outstanding business acumen, the opportunity to increase his trade rapidly. A keen hunter, it was his custom whilst following the hounds to mark in a pocket

Sh

Reading 15 June 1864

I have taken the liberty to address you
respecting the supply of your Canten or
Sandhurst with Beer - Having supplied the
College for some time past I beg leave to
refer you to the Commanding Officer of the
same for the satisfaction I have given
should you have it in your power to
assist me I shall esteem it a particular
favor

Yours
with the kindest regards
J. B. H. S.
W. Simonds

The Birth of "S.B."

Whilst other brewers were waiting for the Act to be passed, he opened fifty beer houses, including one which he built adjoining the garden of a parson, who foretold that Mr. Simonds would soon lose his hunters "because the opening of his beer houses would destroy the trade of his old-fashioned brewery."

It is recorded that Mr. Simonds and the parson had a fierce altercation over this enterprise, but that they subsequently made it up and became the best of friends.

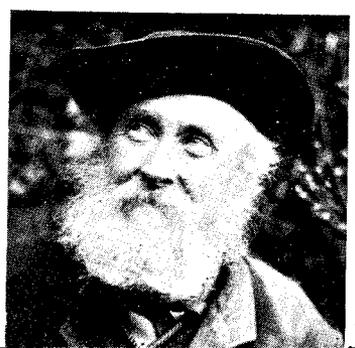
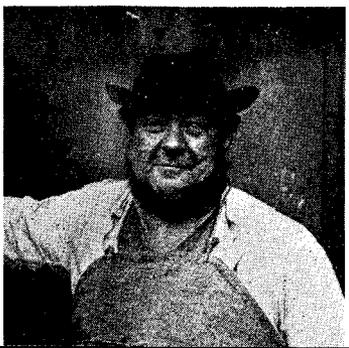
As the business of the brewery grew, Mr. Simonds was joined in the business by his two brothers, Henry and George, and in due course it descended to their nephews. In 1885, the business was converted into a private limited company.

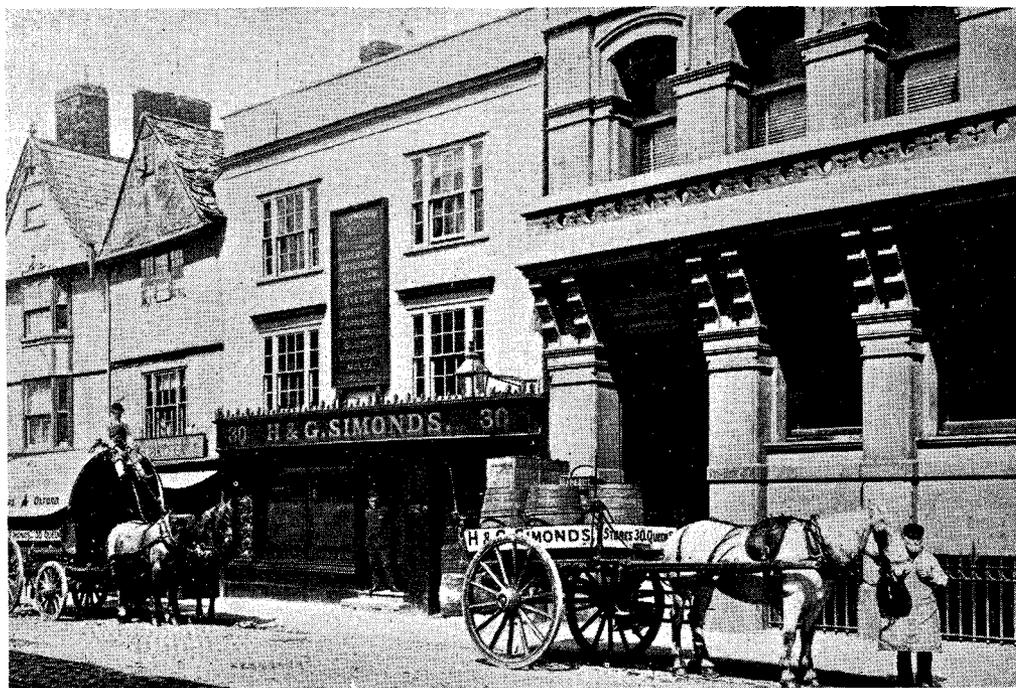
As a matter of interest, the brewery's first trial in brewing pale ale turned out to be disastrous from the financial point of view. The first consignment was exported to Melbourne where it fetched an extremely high price. Unfortunately the consignee stuck to the money and did not even return the empty casks. We continued, however, to brew this class of ale, for which there was soon a demand in the immediate vicinity.

A letter written by the founder, Mr. Blackall Simonds, the year before the Battle of Waterloo concerning the supply of our beer to Sandhurst. It now hangs in the front office at Reading.

map likely sites at which beer houses might conveniently be opened within a radius of fifteen miles from Reading. Then he bought the freehold or leasehold of any suitable house in or near the locality marked on his map.

Do you recognise them? Two jolly old warriors of the last century who helped to build the firm's fortunes. These pictures were discovered recently by Captain A. S. Drewe among some old papers.





A charming picture showing the Oxford Branch towards the end of the last century. It is interesting to note the names of the branches over the door.

As the taste for the lighter kind of ale grew, the brewery produced one of a much lower specific gravity which they called "Season's Brew," later to be abbreviated to "S.B.," and so tremendous was its success that the demand for it made it essential to reconstruct and considerably enlarge the brewery.

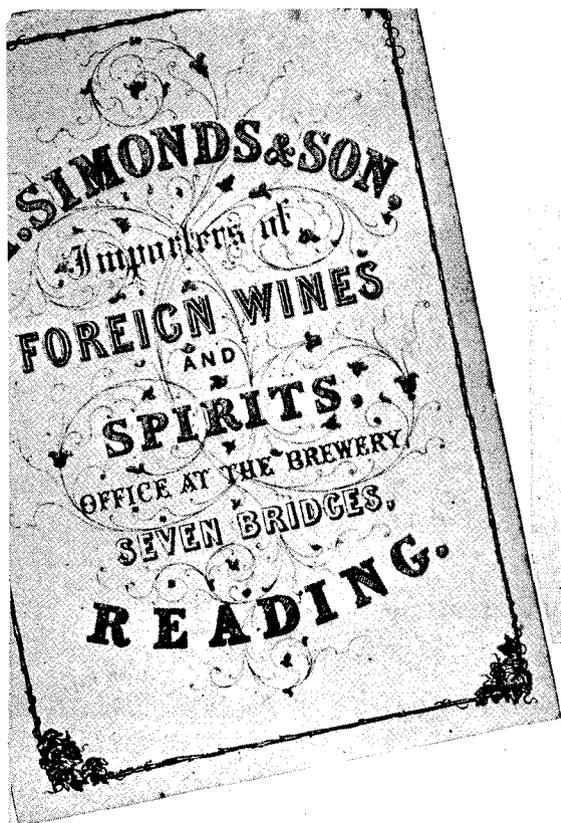
In 1868, the wine and spirit trade which had been carried on by Mr. Henry Simonds for more than fifty years was acquired by the firm.

At Waterloo

Soon after the firm was founded, we began to supply beers to the British Army and the accompanying illustration of a letter written by Mr. Simonds in 1815 proves that the victory at Waterloo was toasted at Sandhurst in our beer. This

connection continued, and it became firmly established in 1854, when troops for the Crimean War were trained and huted in Aldershot.

The troops took their high regard for our products with them to whatever part of the world they were sent, and this accounts for the early establishment of branches in military garrisons in parts of the world such as Malta, Gibraltar, Egypt, South Africa and Cyprus. The firm's connections with Malta started in 1875, when a certain Mr. Hearn, a relation of the Simonds family, was appointed agent there. A branch was started there in 1890, and a very flourishing business continued for many years until we merged with Simonds-Farsons (at a later date Simonds-Farsons-Cisk) in 1928, when the brewery at Hamrun was built.



	Per Barrel.	Kilderkin.	Pirkin.
X ALE PALE or BROWN	28 ^s / ₆	14/	7/
XX ALE PALE or BROWN	36/	18/	9/
XXX ALE BROWN	56/	28/	14/
PALE ALE	56/	28/	14/
XX PORTER	36/	18/	9/
XXX STOUT	56/	28/	14/
	<i>Per Keg. 12s.</i>	<i>Bts.</i>	<i>Imp. Bts.</i>
BASS' PALE ALE	6/	3/6	4/6
GUINNESS' STOUT	6/	3/6	4/6

A price list for beers issued by the Brewery about 1880.

A price list for wines and spirits was issued by H. Simonds and Son before the wine and spirit trade was taken over by the Brewery in 1868.

‘The Stuff for the Troops’

Wherever the British Army went, Simonds beer went too. In 1889, our first agent, a Mr. J. B. Caffari, was appointed in the Sudan. A branch was subsequently started there in 1908, and although this is now non-existent, supplies of our beer are still, of course, provided for the troops there through N.A.A.F.I.

During the Boer War, Simonds beer went to refresh our troops there, and agents were appointed in Cyprus and in Crete. The Gibraltar branch was established about 1890, although beers were sent there prior to that date. Subsequently the branch was handed over to Mr. E. B. Cotterell (Messrs. Baglietto) and later merged into the flourishing concern of Saccone and Speed Limited, who continued to be our agents, and in which firm we have substantial interests.

In 1898, the firm enhanced its reputation for dealing in big quantities when we took

on a very large contract in connection with the Army manœuvres on Salisbury Plain, and which culminated in the largest concentration of troops on West Down ever known. The consumption of beer during these manœuvres was colossal, and our resources of horse transport, assisted by hired transport, were severely taxed.

In Europe

We undertook a similar contract in 1911 in connection with manœuvres which extended from Aldershot and Salisbury Plain to the Eastern counties. This was the first time that our organisation was helped by our earliest motor transport.

Our connection with the Army during the past two hundred years has, of course, meant that we shared in their reverses as well as in their victories, and the flourishing trade we enjoyed in Ireland, where we had branches in Dublin and Cork, had to be closed down when our offices were shot up during the rebellion period.

We opened an agency in Belgium in 1908, and subsequently a branch there, which had to be closed down at the outbreak of World War I. We commenced trading afresh in Belgium about three years ago, with Mr. John Martin at Antwerp, and have built up a good market in the firm's Strong Bulldog Ale. During that war we maintained supplies to our troops in Paris, Dieppe, Rouen and Boulogne in the same way as our beer was there during the recent war before and after Dunkirk.

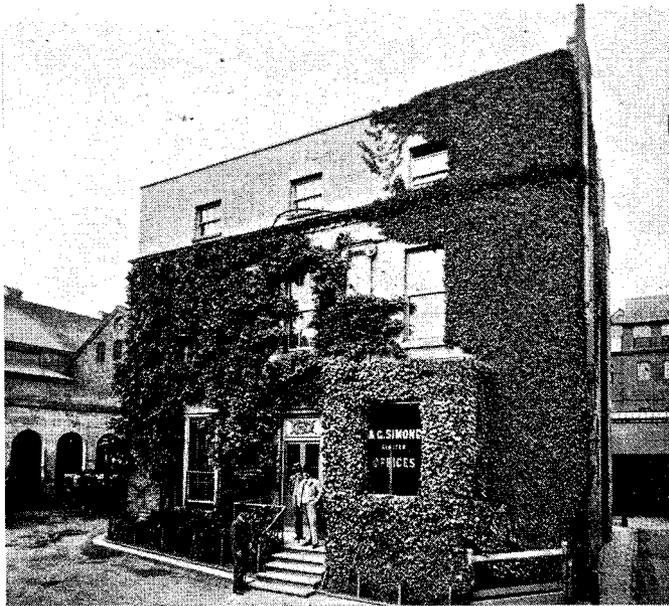
In Great Britain

We enjoyed the catering contract at Kennington Oval for many years, and in that connection lent a large sum of money to rebuild and equip the "Surrey Tavern." The termination of this contract coincided with the outbreak of war in 1939, and has not since been renewed.

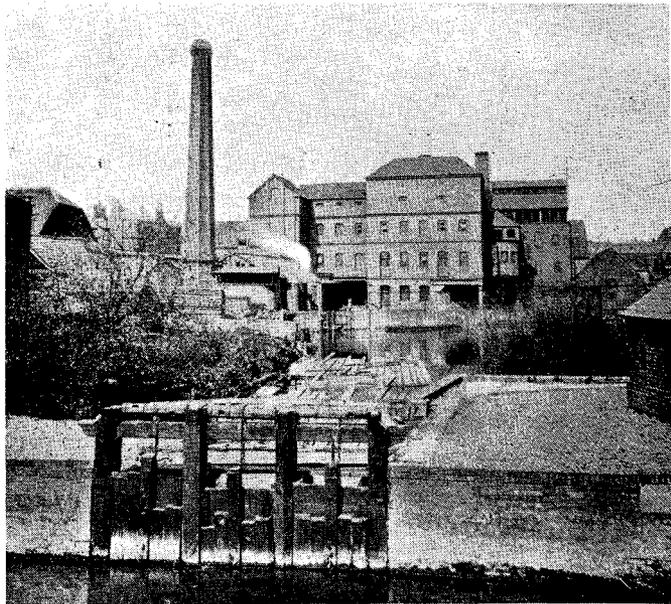
We also supplied, prior to 1900, the old London and South-Western Railway and the South-Eastern Railway.

During the last thirty-three years, commencing with the purchase of the Tamar Brewery, Devonport, we have extended throughout the south and west of England on a big scale. Amongst other acquisitions were the South Berkshire Brewery Company, Ashby's Staines Brewery Limited, Wheeler's Wycombe Breweries-Ltd., W. J. Rogers Limited, Bristol, and Phillips & Son, Ltd., Newport, acquisitions which have resulted in the firm becoming one of the biggest brewery concerns in Great Britain.

The Company's latest enterprise is in Kenya, where we have acquired a big interest in East African Breweries Limited, of Nairobi, Mombasa and Dar-es-Salaam. Although working



The old office buildings, at one time the residence of the late Mr. William Blackall Simonds. The gentlemen in the picture are (from left to right): Mr. J. Suddaby and Mr. Arthur Simonds, and Mr. Fred Simonds at the bottom of the steps.



An old view of the Brewery from Mill Lane. Only the foreground has changed much.



A view of the Stores at Sandgate, distinguished by the predominance of bowlers.

under great disadvantages at the present time, it is confidently anticipated that in the days to come it will prove a profitable concern.

The London Stores

At the end of the last century our London stores were situated in Grosvenor Road, Millbank. About 1890, the stores were moved to a building opposite the exit from Waterloo Station, and the bottling stores were situated under the railway arches. These premises became far too small when we took on the big contract for the British Empire Exhibition in 1925, and we were indeed fortunate in securing suitable premises in the Plough

Brewery, Wandsworth Road, which are still the headquarters for our London activities. In the early days at Grosvenor Road, Major Cotterell, grandfather of the present Chairman of Saccone and Speed Limited, was manager. Another manager was Mr. W. Muller, son-in-law of Mr. Henry John Simonds, father of Mrs. Guy S. N. Ashby.

In the last thirty years many of the smaller branches which we had at such places as Slough Woolwich, Exeter, Aldershot and Sandgate have been closed because the introduction of fast motor transport solved the difficulties and expense of double distribution.

Reading

The present office buildings at Reading were built during 1900-01. They were previously on the opposite side of the road, on the site of what is now the Delivery Office and Stage, which was also at one time used as the residence of the late Mr. William Blackall Simonds. Stabling for the directors' carriages and horses, and kennels for the Dalmatian carriage dogs, which used to run under the carriages, was on the site of the present Beer Loading Stage, and adjoining, and now part of the Beer Loading Stage, was a flourishing coaching house, "The Bear Hotel." which later became Mr. Wakeford's surveyor's office.

There may be a few people still working with the Firm who recollect the old pond at the bottom of Dr. Howes' garden, over which the present modern Bottling Stores were built. The construction of these Stores under those conditions was a very difficult task and caused much anxiety. There was a small boat on the pond which was used by Dr. Howes and family, and his predecessors.

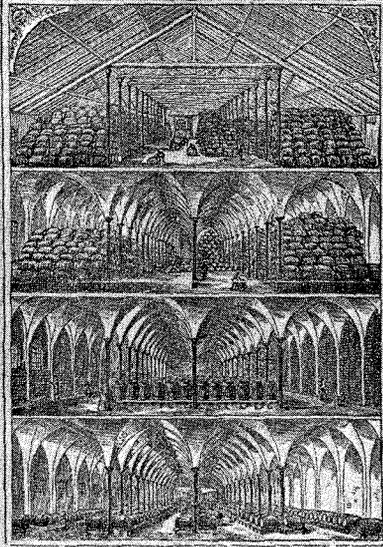
The first laboratory in Gas Lane, predecessor of the present elaborate establishment, was at one time the private house of the late Mr. Sam Wheeler and family, who rose to eminence in the building trade and architect's business in the Home Counties.

Years ago, timber for making casks used to arrive by barge from London to Fobney Street Wharf, and timber for export was loaded until recently on the remodelled wharf adjoining the site of the new power house.

Part of the stables, now almost entirely taken over by motor lorries, was at one time the boathouse for the Directors' craft, and there was access to the River Kennet from the stable yard. Boating and sculling on the Kennet, alongside the brewery, must have been far more attractive in those days than it is to-day!

H. & G. SIMONDS, PALE ALE & PORTER BREWERS,

LONDON STORES:—10, Grosvenor Road, Westminster, S.W.



HEAD OFFICE—"THE BREWERY,"
BONDED STORES:—S.E. RAILWAY STATION, READING.

WINE AND SPIRIT MERCHANTS, READING.

BANCH OFFICES:—Aldershot, Brighton, Dublin, Farnboro', Hastings, Oxford, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Shorncliffe, Slough, Swansea, Woolwich, GIBRALTAR. MALTA.



An old advertisement used by the firm.

In 1928 the Duke of Windsor, then Prince of Wales, visited the Brewery. He is seen here passing down a rank of ex-Service employees. In the centre of the picture is our Chairman and Managing Director; Mr. F. A. Simonds, and on his right is Mr. C. W. Stocker, then Head Brewer, and on his left the late Mr. George Blackall Simonds.



*An old picture of "The Griffin" at Caversham in more leisurely times.
It has since been rebuilt.*

The Royal Warrant

One of the most important days in the Company's history was February 1st, 1929, when the Firm received the grant of the Royal Warrant as Brewers to His late Majesty, King George the Fifth.

Amongst the interesting gallery of pictures in the present Chairman's office is one very interesting little exhibit. It is a voucher dated September 5th, 1937, ordering 368 bottles of Simonds L.P.A., which came to £9 14s. 8d., and is signed

"F. A. Simonds." The Chairman happened to be travelling in the P. & O. ship *Strathnaver* on that date, which was the centenary of the founding of the P. & O. shipping line.

To celebrate the centenary, the passengers were entertained to a champagne luncheon. Mr. Simonds enquired whether the crew were also taking part in the celebrations. On hearing to the contrary, he signed a voucher for the largest order for beers ever known in the history of the shipping line.
