

# At the sign of the Hop Leaf

## The rise of H & G Simonds Ltd A Berkshire brewer



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## Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to trace the development of Simonds, brewers of Reading, Berkshire's county town, from the firm's beginnings in the late eighteenth century to its merger with Barclay Courage in 1960. Of all the industries in Britain, brewing and the retailing of beer have been the most highly regulated by the state for centuries (for purposes of taxation and the control of inebriation). The development of Simonds is considered with this background in mind, notably the control of licences for retail outlets over the period in question, and with the structural developments in the industry of acquisition of competitors, rationalisation and concentration of production throughout the twentieth century. Emphasis has been on Reading and Berkshire but many other areas have been considered also as Simonds expanded outside its home area from 1919 onwards.

As a result of enterprising management, sound financial policies and with well regarded products, Simonds had developed as a strong regional brewer by 1960 and it is an unanswered question as to why merger occurred. It was a merger from strength not weakness.

Apart from a wide range of secondary sources and an oral source much use has been made of archival documentation (regrettably the vast bulk of which is split between Bristol and London), which is particularly comprehensive post 1885 when Simonds became a company. Archival material before that date is scanty. Inter alia the board meeting minutes and the annual accounts, with the accompanying chairmen's reports, have proved the most valuable sources.

There are several published brewery histories but not one for Simonds and, whilst there are very extensive gaps in material pre 1885 and some post, it is hoped a comprehensive picture of the firm's growth, with accompanying changes in the industry, has emerged as some sort of substitute.

## List of contents

Figures, plates, tables	4
Acknowledgements	5
Abbreviations	6
Two explanatory notes	7
Chapter 1     Introduction	8
Chapter 2     From birth to limited liability	13
Chapter 3     A well established county brewer	31
Chapter 4     A major regional brewer	48
Chapter 5     Merger and demise	69
Appendix I     Beer output at Reading 1837-1953	73
Appendix II    List of licenced properties Autumn 1958	74
List of sources	79
Addendum     Duncan Simonds	82
Copyright	87

## Figures

Fig 1	Berkshire distribution of the surname Simonds 1768	14
Fig 2	Reading Centre 1802	16
Fig 3	Distribution of pubs 1837	22
Fig 4	Distribution of pubs in Berkshire 1884	26
Fig 5	Simonds' brewery sites 1912	46
Fig 6	Site of bottling facilities	62
Fig 7	Simonds' brewery sites 1931	64

## Plates

Plate 1	The Hop Leaf sign	8
Plate 2	Plan of Brewhouse	17
Plate 3	King Street entrance ) Barclays Bank	18
Plate 4	Market Place entrance) Reading	19
Plate 5	Beer Store	30
Plate 6	Maltings	40
Plate 7	Malthouse	42
Plate 8	Malthouse	42
Plate 9	Fire-damaged malthouse	43
Plate 10	Rails across Fobney Street	44
Plate 11	Off Fobney Street	63
Plate 12	Canned beer	65
Plate 13	S B Advertisement	65
Plate 14	Public bar price list	66
Plate 15	Royal Warrant	67
Plate 16	Seven Bridges House	71

## Tables

Table 1	Pubs acquired 1837-1884	23
Table 2	Disposal of licenced houses by county 1952-60	58



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Staff at the Brewers' and Licensed Retailers' Association (formerly the Brewers' Society) in Portman Square, London were most kind in letting me have access to the library and its very comprehensive collection of bound trade journals for the last three decades of the nineteenth century and for the twentieth century. Staff at the London Metropolitan Archives in Clerkenwell, were very attentive to my requests for documents from the large section of Simonds' material held in the Courage files.

My unreserved thanks to Ken Thomas, part-time archivist for Scottish Courage, for completely unrestricted access to the most extensive Simonds' collection held at the archives in the old Georges' Brewery in central Bristol (shortly to move) and for giving up his time in discussions with me.

Thanks also to Norman Barber, archivist of the Brewery History Society, Alan Pateman, Brewer, Elgood's Brewery, Wisbech and to Norman Dursley (ex Simonds and Courage employee) for allowing me to interview him. Last, but certainly not least, my thanks are due to Mrs E Lynch of Peterborough for undertaking the word processing of this dissertation.

Needless to say, any textual mistakes or those of fact or interpretation are entirely my own.

## Abbreviations

BA Bristol Archives

BM(s) Board Minute(s)

BR British Railways

GWR Great Western Railway

HLG Hop Leaf Gazette

IPA India Pale Ale

LMA London Metropolitan Archives

LSWR London and South Western Railway

SER South Eastern Railway

Courtesy of the  
Simonds family archives



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## Counties and County Boundaries

All references to counties in this dissertation relate, in the case of London and adjoining counties, to the county boundaries as they existed prior to the London Government Act 1963; and in the case of all counties other than London, to the county boundaries as they existed prior to the Local Government Act 1972.

## Monetary Values

Monetary amounts are frequently given after a property or business has been bought or sold or cash deposits or loans are cited. The present value (December 2000) is given immediately after in brackets and is taken from 'Equivalent Contemporary Values of the Pound: A Historical Series 1270-2000', published by the Bank of England. It must be stressed that these figures are derived from the Retail Prices Index which is based on the combined cost of a number of specific goods and does not take into account other factors relevant to a comparison of values, for example, the cost of real property. However, in the absence of other series it does provide some sort of indication of past monetary amounts in present value.

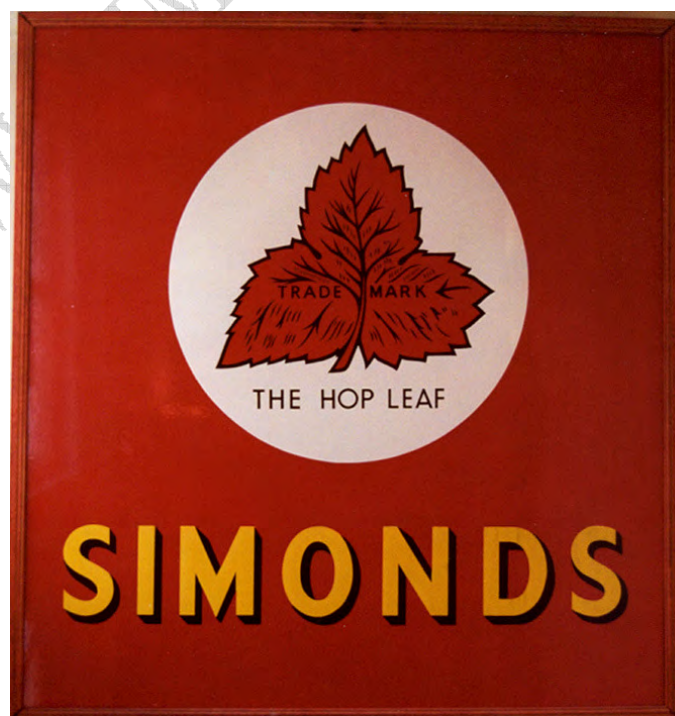
## Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation seeks to chart the rise of a well known Berkshire brewer, H & G Simonds Ltd, from the firm's origins in Reading in the late eighteenth century to its merger with Courage and Barclay in 1960. By that year the firm had become a major regional brewer in the south and west of England and in South Wales and had extensive free trade interests.

The first part of the dissertation's title requires some explanation. Anyone living in south east Berkshire in the 1950's, as I was, would have been very familiar with the Simonds' sign, red incorporating a white circle in which the firm's trademark, a red hop leaf, was positioned, with the name 'Simonds' below the circle (Plate 1). The sign was prominently displayed outside Simonds' licensed premises, the name of the establishment being shown separately above the sign and affixed to it, a pictorial sign being present only if there was a second inn sign in place.

The Simonds' sign is a good example of a brewery seeking to develop a clear brand identity. As early as 1930 the Directors had asked staff via the house magazine for any designs they might care to submit for a new sign: 'The general idea would be "The Hop Leaf" on an all-white background, with as little lettering as possible.'<sup>1</sup> The Directors felt that the signs at that time were out of date and suffered by comparison with those of some of their competitors.

**PLATE 1     The Hop Leaf pub sign**



<sup>1</sup> Hop Leaf Gazette, September 1930, p.639.

At the company's Annual General Meeting in December 1932 the Chairman, Mr S V Shea-Simonds, stated: 'Shareholders living or travelling in the South of England will not have failed to notice that, in conformity with the practice of leading firms of the country, we have adopted a standard sign for practically all our houses ... Those in need of refreshment gladly welcome 'The sign of the Hop Leaf' as indicating quality and service.'<sup>2, 3</sup>

I am conscious that when writing about the history of a particular firm there is a danger that the emphasis may be on the dynamics of the business process, in all its manifestations, in which the firm has been engaged over time, with maybe only passing reference to the space dimension – the locality or localities – in which the firm has operated. I have sought to avoid writing a pure business history by intertwining the localities in which H & G Simonds operated its business with the changing nature of that business over a period of nearly two hundred years.

The firm's genesis was in Reading, and it is here, and in the surrounding area, that the theme of locality will be developed most fully. However, from 1919 onwards Simonds started to acquire breweries elsewhere, with the customer base of beer houses, public houses, hotels and dedicated off licences, as well as free trade, around these breweries. Eventually the firm had a permanent presence in eleven English counties and four Welsh counties (as well as a presence farther afield in the free trade at home and abroad and through part ownership of breweries overseas). These other localities will be brought in to the narrative but treated less fully.

In an age of universal clean and assured piped water supply and with a large number of alternatives it is perhaps difficult to envisage today how widespread the consumption of beer was during the eighteenth century and into the early part of the nineteenth (notwithstanding the marked rise in the consumption of tea during the eighteenth).<sup>4</sup> It was consumed by all classes of English society across all age groups (except the very youngest) and by both sexes; it was a safe product to drink (since the most important constituent by volume by far, water, was boiled during the brewing process) and was of nutritional value.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> HLG, January 1933, p.191.

<sup>3</sup> W B Simonds (1761-1834), son of the firm's founder, had in his Reading residence, '...the hop leaf design – afterwards formally adopted as the brewery's trade-mark – on a tablet over the front door and on the wallpaper in the drawing room.' From T A B Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery at Reading 1760-1960' Berkshire Archaeological Journal, 68 (1975/76), p. 80. Alfred Barnard states: '... their trade mark the red "Hop Leaf", is now so well known ...' Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland (4 vols, 1889-1891), 4, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> The term beer includes ale, stout and porter. By the eighteenth century ale and beer were interchangeable terms. Up to the end of the sixteenth century ale was unhopped fermented malt liquor, beer hopped fermented malt liquor.

Average annual production for the United Kingdom (including Ireland) for the decade 1780-1789 was 14.95 million barrels whereas for the decade 1950-59 average annual output (excluding the Irish Republic) was 24.74 million barrels.<sup>6</sup> Given that population increased approximately fivefold from the 1780's to the 1950's one can appreciate how high consumption per head was in the late eighteenth century compared with the mid-twentieth century.

Home brewing – now virtually non-existent – was widely practised and the larger country houses had their own small scale private breweries.<sup>7, 8</sup> Beer was easy to make and the raw materials were widely available, the trade of maltster being a common one (maltsters are well represented in nineteenth century trade directories).

For those who did not brew their own beer supplies were available from brewer victuallers or common brewers. The former were retailers who brewed what they sold on the premises (in modern parlance, they operated home brew pubs). The latter were wholesalers, brewing on a larger scale and selling to publicans who did not brew their own beer; and to private customers (in quantities larger than a cask or a gallon).

Some brewer victuallers, more enterprising than their fellows ‘...might well begin to supply their fellow publicans with a proportion of their beer beginning a process of unconscious mutation which would eventually lead them to the position of being Common Brewers ...’<sup>9</sup> Common brewers did not have the estates of tied houses, some vast, which one typically associates with brewers in the twentieth century.

It would, however, be wrong to assume that common brewers owned no on licences in the eighteenth century or did not have some financial control over certain publicans. Where there was ownership of licensed houses or some financial arrangement between common brewer and publican we see the beginnings of the tied house system ie where the publican has to purchase all, or a very high proportion, of his liquid sales from one brewer (as opposed to a free trade publican who may purchase his liquid sales from whatever source he chooses).

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<sup>5</sup> J C Drummond and A Wilbraham, The Englishman's Food: Five Centuries of English Diet (Pimlico edition 1991), p.114.

<sup>6</sup> Calculated from figures in H A Monkton A History of English Ale and Beer (1966), pp. 219-223. The figures include official output figures plus estimates of home brewed output. Conventionally beer output is measured in barrels, a barrel being 36 gallons.

<sup>7</sup> Monkton, English Ale, p219. He states that for the period 1780-1800 official production figures for ale and beer represent only between 40% and 46% of total UK output and that even as late as 1826-30, only 50%.

<sup>8</sup> P Sambrook, Country House Brewing in England 1500-1900 (1996).

<sup>9</sup> P. Mathias, The Brewing Industry in England 1700-1830 (1959), p.254.

How did the tied house system initially evolve? Mathias states: 'Evidence is both plentiful and widespread from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and earlier, that public houses were falling into the hands of brewers by the acts of trade and bankruptcy, and tending to remain there.'<sup>10</sup> Publicans might get into difficulty and their regular suppliers might provide a loan; in the case of bankruptcy a brewer might wish to retain the sale from that outlet so steps in. Over time therefore the common brewers acquired premises.

The licensing system itself assisted in the development of the tied house system. 'The remarkable awakening which took place among the justices at the end of the eighteenth century led to the limitation in the number of public houses.'<sup>11</sup> As this occurred then brewers would have been keener, notwithstanding that they had to lay out finance for outlets and administer their estates, to acquire outlets to guarantee the sales of their beer since the number of on licences was restricted.

In the nineteenth century, following the 1872 Licensing Act, it became more difficult to obtain new licences and, partly as a result of a growing and vociferous temperance movement, the Licensing Act 1904 had as its avowed object that 'the number of licensed houses should be largely reduced.'<sup>12</sup> This provided a further impetus for brewers to increase the size of their tied estates to ensure outlets for their products, the process of forward integration. Estates could either be increased by buying up other brewers – to obtain their estates – or by buying out brewer victuallers, or non brewing publicans, or a combination of these (from 1830 to 1872 licences for beerhouses were easy to obtain however).

All sectors of the economy experience mergers and takeovers as firms seek to expand market share (or maintain market share in a static or declining market) by the process of external growth. The brewing industry in England and Wales has been particularly prone to merger and takeover, primarily to acquire other brewers' public houses and hotels, and H & G Simonds has played a full part in this process.<sup>13</sup> The brewing facilities have often been closed or downgraded to depots and/or bottling plants once the predator brewer has moved in to take control: invariably it is the tied estate that has been the prize. A similar process has accompanied mergers. In either event, takeover or merger, the common phrase used in the industry in the twentieth century has been 'rationalisation of (brewing) capacity' which process has been greatly assisted by falling

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<sup>10</sup> Mathias, *The Brewing Industry*, p.119.

<sup>11</sup> G B Wilson, *Alcohol and the Nation* (1940), p.81.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *Alcohol*, p.110.

<sup>13</sup> N Barber, *A Century of British Brewers, 1890-1990* (1996, Brewery History Society) is a comprehensive chronicle of this process on a national basis.

transport costs in real terms and the desire to reap technical economies of scale by concentrating production in fewer plants. The development of a comprehensive railway network in the nineteenth century and the upsurge in lorry transport on an improving road network post World War I, with accompanying developments in vehicle technology, has shrunk distance considerably. What were once local brewery markets protected by distance from outside competition have been opened up.

This then is the backcloth to the unfolding history of H & G Simonds. Brewers were gradually taking control of the on licences through which most beer was sold and this was set against an increase in consumption of beer per head in the nineteenth century – to a peak in 1875-79 – then followed by a long term trend of falling consumption per head.<sup>14</sup> Although total output increased up to 1960 – with peak levels of output during two world wars and in the years after – population increased at a faster rate and was accompanied by significant changes in consumption patterns. Over the period the brewer virtually disappeared to all intents and purposes (the common brewer having disappeared long before, with the exception of Guinness) and the brewers of tied estates came overwhelmingly to predominate (although some non-brewing free houses remained).<sup>15</sup> However there were far fewer firms in existence due to merger and takeover activity such that by 1960 a very high proportion of national beer output was in relatively few hands.

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<sup>14</sup> T R Gourvish and R G Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980* (1994), pp. 600-602.

<sup>15</sup> Four home brew pubs – all in England – survived to the early 1970's.



## Chapter 2      From birth to limited liability

This chapter chronicles the growth of the firm from its founding in the late eighteenth century to 1885, the year it became a private limited company.

Reading developed between the River Thames, coming down from the north west, and the River Kennet, at this point flowing from a south westerly direction, on a site about half a mile to the west of the confluence of the two rivers. In the early modern period and beyond, when land communication was difficult and expensive, the town's nodality at the junction of two navigable rivers was a great spur to its development.

The Thames became regularly navigable up to Oxford in 1624.<sup>16</sup> The year 1712 saw the Act for the construction of the Kennet Navigation, with many locks and cuts, one of the 'drastically reconstructed navigations in England'.<sup>17</sup> This was completed in 1723 with boats loading 100 tons trading up to Newbury.<sup>18</sup> Later, in 1810, Reading was connected to Bristol by the Kennet and Avon Canal, a broad 'watershed cut' running from Newbury to Bath, the Kennet Navigation being taken over by the proprietors of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Agricultural produce could be brought down from the upper Thames area, and from south and west Berkshire, to Reading and then on to London, with its voracious appetite for such produce. John Houghton, in 1728, 'had heard of no malt which came from Reading, Newbury, Abingdon and Oxford (to London) except by water'.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of malting in many Berkshire towns in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and earlier) is well recorded, much of this malt being conveyed downstream to the London breweries.<sup>20</sup> From early in the eighteenth century Reading was much engaged in converting barley to malt and, according to Corley: 'From early that century Reading and its environs became the malting centre for much of the upper Thames basin.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> L T C Rolt, *The Inland Waterways of England* (1950), p.17.

<sup>17</sup> C Hadfield, *The Canal Age* (1981), p.19.

<sup>18</sup> Rolt, *The Inland Waterways*, p.35.

<sup>19</sup> P Mathias, *The Brewing Industry in England 1700-1830* (1959), p.438.

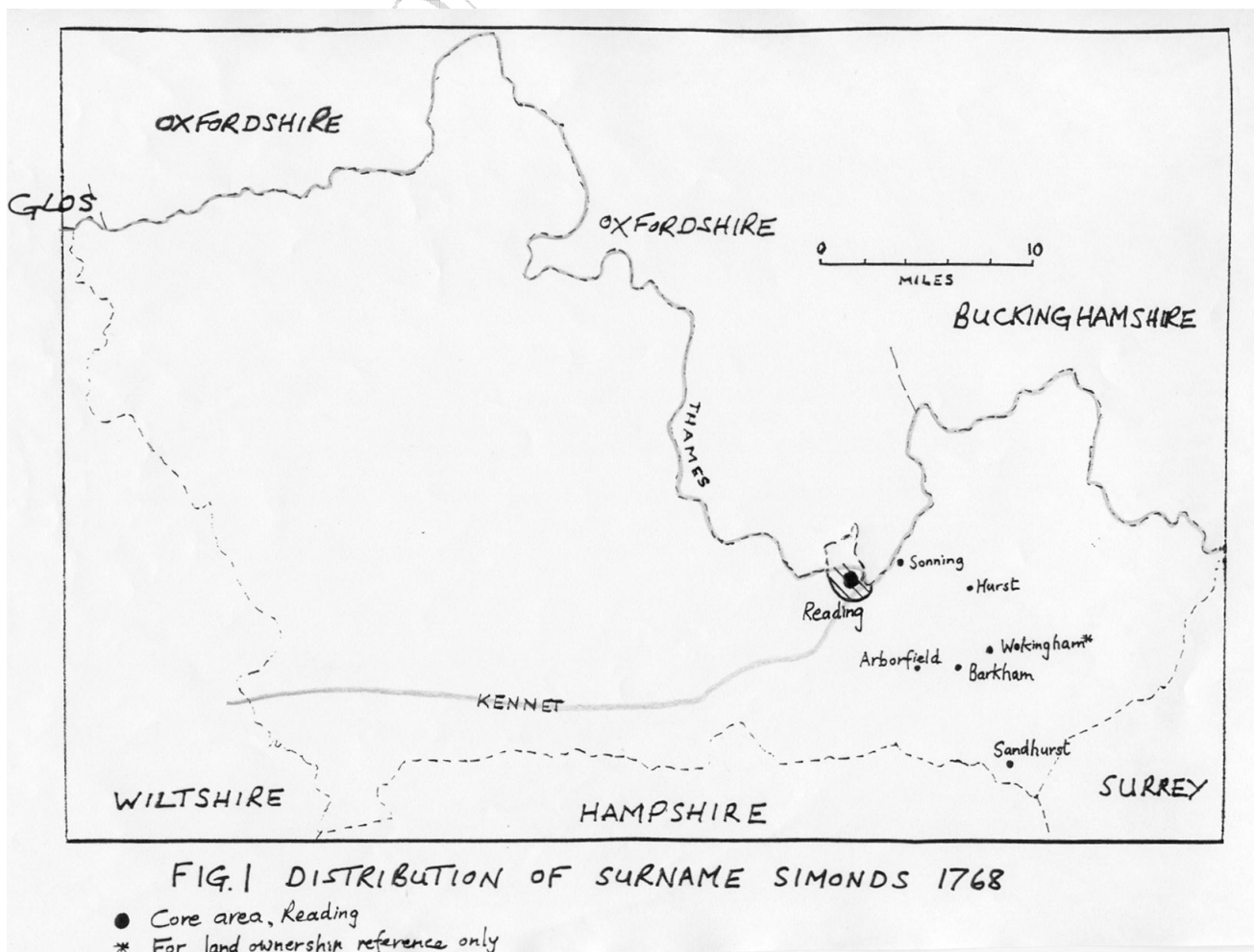
<sup>20</sup> Section on Brewing, in Ditchfield and Page, eds, *VCH Berkshire*, 1 (1906), pp. 404-411.

<sup>21</sup> T A B Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery at Reading 1760-1960', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, 68 (1975/76), p. 77.

Corley's statement is borne out by the collections from the duty from malt in 1741 and 1760-62. On the first date the Reading collection had the third highest of the ten highest collections in the country and by the second dates was the highest of the country's ten highest collections.<sup>22</sup>

In a poll book for the parliamentary elections (30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1<sup>st</sup> April) 1768, in which the names of all eligible electors throughout Berkshire are detailed by hundred, there are seven with the surname Simonds.<sup>23</sup> All are resident in and around Reading and all have property either in or close to the county town: Aborfield, Barkham, Hurst, Sandhurst and Sunning (Sonning) are mentioned (Fig. 1). It is highly probable that all were related. William Simonds (1733-82) is shown as having his abode at Reading and holding property in Sandhurst.

Simonds was the second son of a wealthy farmer who owned estates in the Aborfield, Hurst, Wokingham area. On the death of his father he received £550 in cash, having already inherited some property in Sandhurst from his grandfather which he could have let or used as security for a loan to provide additional funds. Simonds was a maltster in Reading, having doubtless used the funds at his disposal to establish himself in this business in which the commercial opportunities in Reading were considerable at the time. By 1768 he was describing himself as a brewer as well as a maltster (this was quite a common occurrence in England, since malt is used to make beer) and between 1765 and 1782 he is known to have bought two public houses in Reading and two elsewhere.



William Blackall Simonds (1761-1834), inherited the business on his father's death in 1782. He had first inherited £1000 (£59,380) from his maternal grandfather William Blackall (died 1781), and on his marriage in 1783 his wife's dowry was £2000 (£118,760) she being the daughter of Thomas May, a Basingstoke brewer (Simonds' took over May's in 1947).<sup>24</sup>

With funds at his disposal Simonds established a brewery in Broad Street, Reading's main thoroughfare (Fig. 2), in 1785, at number 83.<sup>25</sup> Business must have been thriving because a much larger site was acquired in Seven Bridges Street (now Bridge Street), on the west bank of the Kennet, in December 1789, presumably because the Broad Street site lacked room for expansion. He commissioned John Soane, a man from nearby Goring-on-Thames, to build a family house and a new brewhouse on this greenfield site (Fig. 2).<sup>26</sup> The twenty five quarter (of malt) brewhouse and malthouses were in use by 1791, the residence completed by 1794, all at a total cost of £6400 (£344,384).

#### Simonds' house

'was a typically elegant Soane design, its main façade decorated with four Ionic pilasters and having three ground floor windows set in sequential arched recesses ... The brewhouse ... with a series of tall, round-headed blank recesses featuring assorted sizes of semi-circular louvered lights. The brewhouse tower was of three storeys. ... The low roof pitch gave the whole brewery an Italianate quality.'<sup>27</sup> (Plate 2)

The architect's drawings show that very thin columns supported the wooden beams of the brewhouse and there has been a suggestion, because of their slenderness, that the columns may have been of iron. This is difficult to accept as it is generally understood that iron columns were not in use in industrial buildings (textile mills) until later in the 1790's.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Berkshire Record Office, D/EN 0/20/4.

<sup>24</sup> For most of the information in this and the preceding paragraph I am greatly indebted to Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery', pp.78, 79. This is the only source I have encountered giving this information.

<sup>25</sup> Hop Leaf Gazette, June 1927, p. 422. The site was later occupied by the Brewery Tap, a beerhouse which Simonds acquired eventually. A shop, Days Gone Bye, now occupies the site.

<sup>26</sup> Soane was knighted in 1832 and had a distinguished architectural career, having been appointed surveyor to the Bank of England in 1788.

<sup>27</sup> L Pearson, British Breweries: An Architectural History (1999), p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Pearson, British Breweries, p. 37.



Initially the power system in the brewery was horse driven, the brewhouse incorporating a horse wheel, but in 1799 this was replaced by a two horse power Boulton and Watt steam engine.<sup>29</sup> The engine provided steam for heating coppers and cleaning out barrels in addition to its major roles of pumping and the grinding of malt. Many of the London brewers had installed steam engines in the last two decades of the eighteenth century although somewhat larger than the one at Simonds.

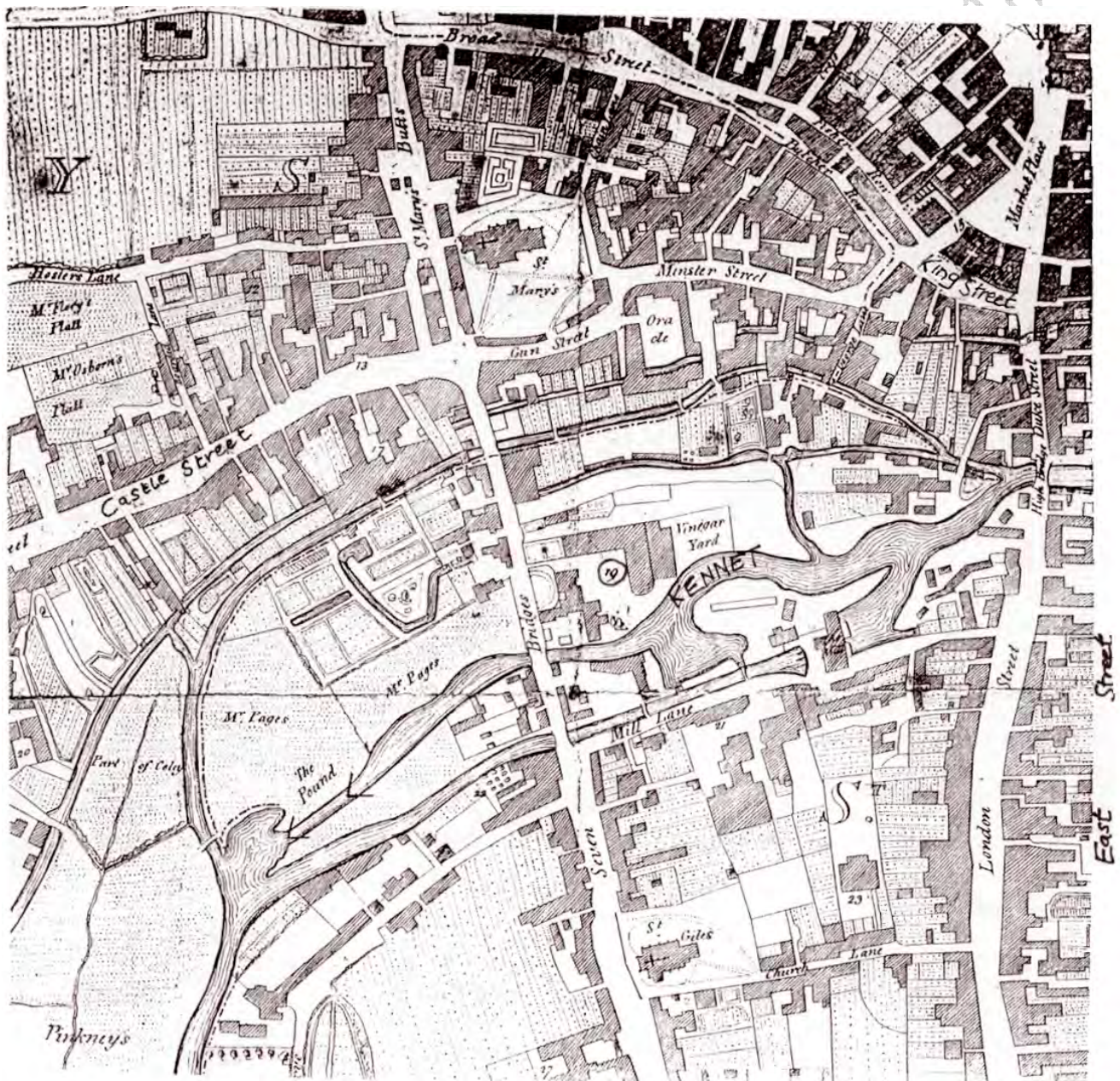
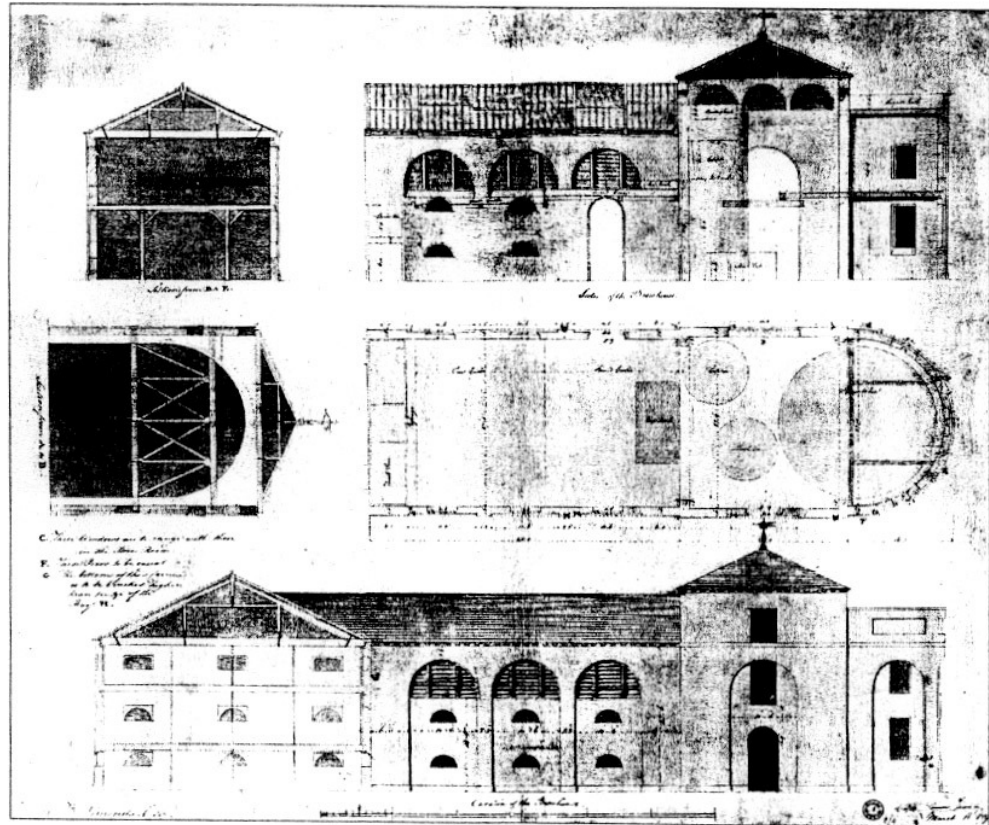


FIG.2 READING CENTRE (January 1802)  
(Charles Tomkins)

- ①9 Simonds' Brewery
- Site of first Simonds brewery
- ✕ Simonds' Bank (1814) onwards



The new site provided excellent water frontage to the Kennet and coal and raw materials such as barley and timber (in particular staves for the cooperage) could be transported into the wharves and beer transported out.



Section, plan and elevation (top to bottom) of the brewhouse designed by Sir John Soane for W. B. Simonds at Reading. The drawing, dated 11 March 1790, shows a horse wheel twenty-seven feet in diameter occupying the apsidal end of the brewhouse; the base of the copper, whose capacity was around 5000 gallons, stood sixteen feet above the base of the mash tun. (By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum)

## PLATE 2 PLAN OF BREWHOUSE

(From L. Pearson, *British Breweries: An Architectural History*)

Mathias has drawn our attention to the widespread family connections between brewing and banking.<sup>30</sup> Brewers engaged in banking, in part, to employ surplus wealth and the fact that brewing generated much cash.

In 1791 William B Simonds co-founded a bank with three other partners, Messrs Micklem, Stephens and Harris, in Reading Market Place, each partner contributing £1000 capital.<sup>31</sup> In the

<sup>30</sup> P Mathias, *The Brewing Industry*, p. 329.

same year Simonds had been appointed Receiver-General of Taxes for West Berkshire and he could use the tax receipts for six months before remitting them to London, another useful source of short term funds for the bank.

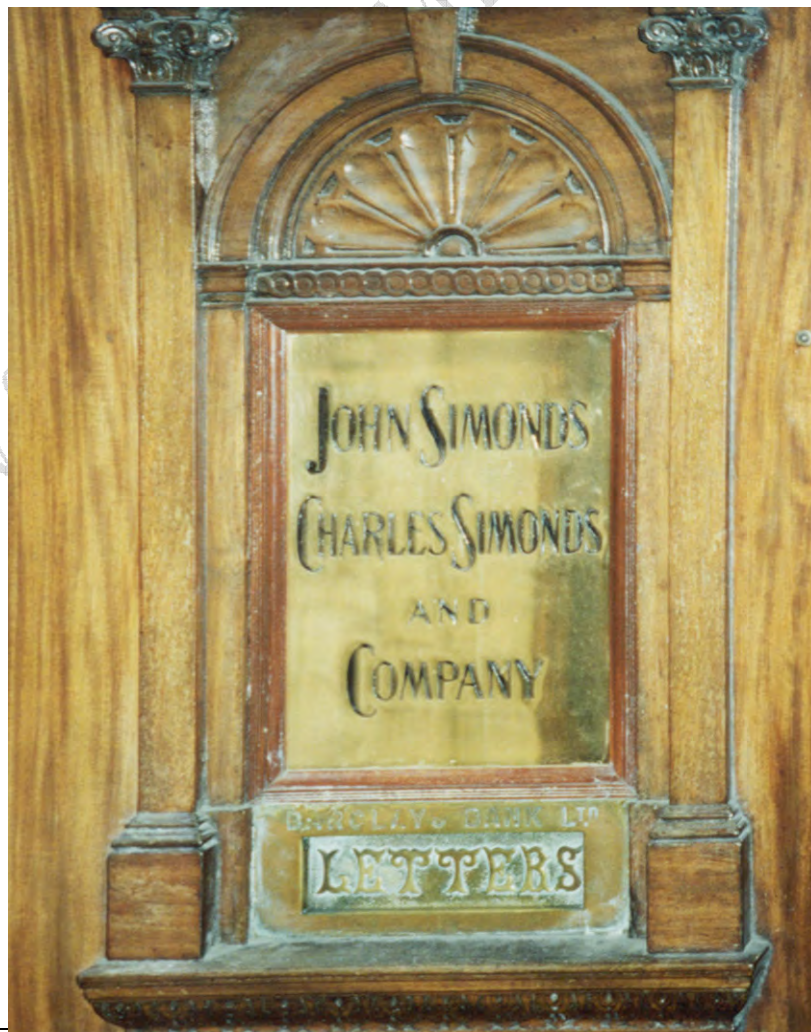
It appears that by 1814 Simonds had decided to get out of brewing and concentrate on banking. He withdrew from his banking partnership and founded another in nearby King Street (Fig. 2). His new partners were his son Henry, Ralph Nicholson, and two cousins, John and Charles Simonds.<sup>32</sup> Five branches in nearby towns were established over time.

This banking partnership was carried on completely separately from the brewing business. By 1859 John Simonds was the only partner alive and in 1871 he took his two sons, John and William, and a nephew, James Simonds, into partnership.<sup>33</sup> Changes of partners (all with the Simonds surname) took place subsequently and in 1913 the bank amalgamated with Barclays. Brass plates (Plates 3 and 4) are still affixed to the main entrance of Barclays Bank in King Street and to the back entrance in the Market Place, indicating the Simonds' connection.

**Plate 3**

**Barclays Bank  
Reading**

**King Street  
entrance**



<sup>31</sup> R S Sayers, Lloyds Bank in the History of English Banking (1957), p. 355.

<sup>32</sup> P W Matthews and A W Tuke, A History of Barclays Bank (1928), pp. 293-296.

<sup>33</sup> HLG, July 1929, p. 531.

**Plate 4**

**Barclays Bank  
Reading**

**Market Street  
entrance**



When H & G Simonds became a private company in 1885 three banks were appointed to serve the company, one of which was J and C Simonds and Company (BM 28-9-85). On the partnership's amalgamation with Barclays in 1913 a BM (13-10-14) states: '... they wish to express their satisfaction at the good relations between the Bank and the Brewery which have existed during the past century or more' and goes on to indicate that the Brewery will continue banking with the successor bank, Barclays.

John Hayes Simonds (son of John Simonds, one of the new 1871 partners) was appointed a director of H & G Simonds in July 1918 and gave his occupation as banker, being then a local director of Barclays Bank.<sup>34</sup>

During the war years in the early part of the nineteenth century Simonds did not benefit to the same extent as other older established local brewers as so many of the retail outlets were tied to these and there was strict control over the issue of licences. A trade directory lists six brewers in the town in 1796 whilst a directory of 1811, for which the Reading entries are surprisingly light by comparison with other Berkshire towns, shows only William B Simonds as a brewer in Reading.<sup>35, 36</sup> However this latter says of the town: 'Here are several very considerable breweries' (it also goes on to say 'and has a large trade on the river Kennett which is extended to the rivers Avon and Thames').

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<sup>34</sup> LMA 2305/60/21/1, Register of Directors (entry for 6-1-1919).

<sup>35</sup> Berkshire Directory (1796).

Corley states that by 1815 Simonds had ten public houses in Reading and seven elsewhere, one in Pangbourne and six in the Aborfield, Hurst, Wokingham area.<sup>37</sup> Very significantly for the longer term Simonds had secured the beer contract with the Royal Military College (now the Royal Military Academy) when it was moved to Sandhurst in 1813, but at this stage this was not of great moment.

William Blackall Simonds' eldest son, Blackall (1784-1875), persuaded his father not to sell the brewery, as his father was contemplating on his move to banking, and to let him take over its management. The brewery thus remained in family hands and was to prosper thereafter.

During the 1820's there had been agitation for free trading in beer to break the growing monopolisation of the trade by existing brewers through their tied houses (which the licensing system itself fostered). This agitation culminated in the Beerhouse Act, 1830. Under the Act any householder assessed to the poor rate might open his house as a beer shop free from justices' licence or control, on payment of two guineas (£2.10) to the local excise officer. Only beer – no wine or spirits- could be sold and there were restricted hours of opening during the week (4am – 10pm compared with all day and night opening of alehouses).<sup>38</sup> Simultaneously the tax was taken off beer.

As Wilson graphically puts it: 'On October 10 (1830), the country like a proclaimed American Territory, was thrown open to the drink adventurers'.<sup>39</sup> There was a vast influx of persons into the trade, with 24342 new beer sellers in less than six months, 30978 within a year, 45717 by 1838 and no fewer than 49130 by 1869.<sup>40</sup> The Act thus achieved its avowed aim of opening up the trade and provided opportunities for the smaller brewers to acquire outlets easily and sell to the free trade in the form of many small pub proprietors.

Alfred Barnard, when researching for his chapters on Simonds, indicates that he had 'free access to documents and papers connected with the early history of their business'.<sup>41</sup> Attention is drawn

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<sup>36</sup> Holdens Annual London and County Directory of the United Kingdom and Wales (1811).

<sup>37</sup> Corley, 'Simonds Brewery', p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Thus the beerhouse with a beer only licence came into being. This compares with a house which had a beer and wine licence and a fully licenced house (beer, wine and spirits). A few beer only licences survived into the last decades of the twentieth century.

<sup>39</sup> G B Wilson, Alcohol and the Nation (1940), p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, Alcohol, p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> A Barnard, Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland (4 vols, 1889-91), 4, p. 5.



to this statement because the quotation which follows is paraphrased in at least three secondary sources which have been seen and no earlier reference than Barnard can be found.

Blackall Simonds is said to have acted promptly in anticipation of the Beerhouse Act:

‘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, whilst his neighbours were dreaming of the future, he had already opened fifty beerhouses.’<sup>42</sup>

Whether there were fifty beerhouses by the late 1830’s in Simonds’ hands is a moot point. From documentary evidence it has been possible to establish that prior to 1837 there were at least 31 Simonds’ outlets (Fig. 3), twelve in Reading, five very close to Reading (two just over the Thames in south Oxfordshire), seven in south east Berkshire, three in Berkshire west of Reading and four in south Oxfordshire.<sup>43</sup> Corley states that in 1839 Simonds had thirty seven houses, twelve of which were in Reading.<sup>44</sup> The brewery’s output increased from 11,100 barrels in 1831 to 15,002 barrels in 1839.<sup>45, 46</sup>

On the face of it therefore, it appears that the Beerhouse Act did lead to an increase in the number of Simonds’ tied houses as well as to an increase in output. What is clear is that whilst Reading, not surprisingly in view of its population, still had the greatest concentration of Simonds’ houses, a third, compared with 1805, there were now pubs in Oxfordshire and in west Berkshire as well.

It is worth considering briefly the growth of Reading during the nineteenth century. By the end of 1884 Simonds had 45 outlets in the town and its immediate environs – Caversham, Earley, Tilehurst and Whitley – 38% of their tied estate. Reading was the largest town in Berkshire in 1801 with a population of 9742, rising to 18937 in 1841 and 42054 in 1881.<sup>47</sup> If the population of the immediate environs is included the 1881 population would rise by at least 15,000, giving a conservative total of 57,000. Reading was thus a significant market.

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<sup>42</sup> Barnard, *Noted Breweries*, 4, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> LMA 2305/60/116/1 This is a ledger in to which details of expenditure from 1837 on all tied houses is recorded, all the information having been transferred into the ledger on 1-1-1885. It is clear that some properties were acquired pre 1837.

<sup>44</sup> Corley, ‘Simonds Brewery’, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> Corley, ‘Simonds Brewery’, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> LMA 2305/60/77 Output figures 1837-1953.

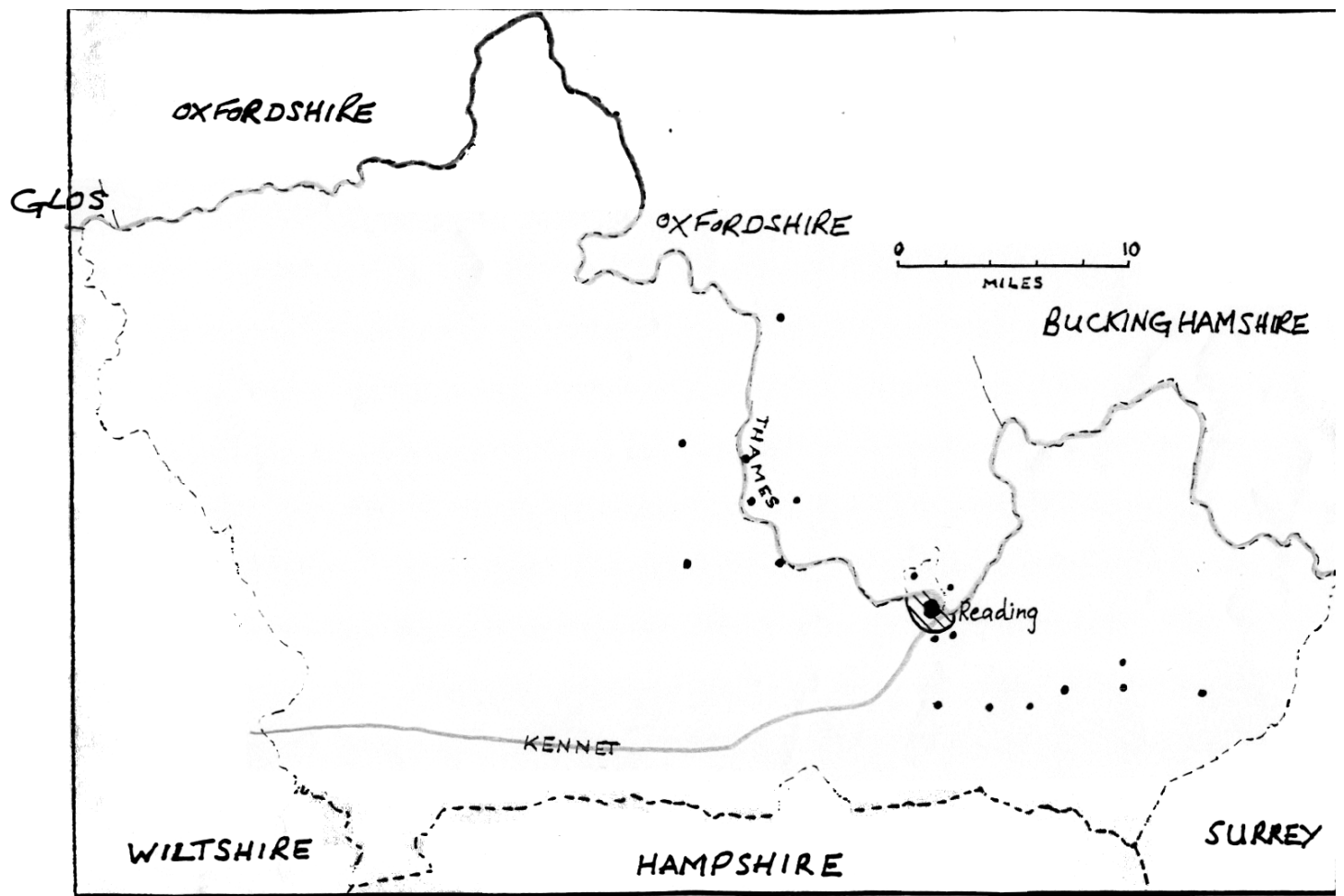


FIG.3 DISTRIBUTION OF PUBS 1837

During the middle years of the century the great transport innovation of the age, railways, had arrived, firstly the Great Western Railway and then the South Eastern Railway and the town became a major railway junction. By the 1860's Huntley and Palmers, started by Joseph Huntley in 1822, had become the largest biscuit factory in the country, employing several thousand and by far the largest employer in the town, and Sutton and Sons Seeds, established 1835, became the largest business of its kind during the century.<sup>48</sup> Both these firms made extensive use of the railways, as did Simonds.

<sup>47</sup> VCH Berkshire, 2 (1907), p. 243.

<sup>48</sup> T A B Corley, *Quaker Enterprise in Biscuits: Huntley and Palmers of Reading 1822-1972* (1972), Appendix I: 2500 employed in 1873 and 4053 by 1889.

During the period from 1837 to 1885 the number of Simonds' outlets increased to 117 (Table I).

**Table I**

Pubs acquired 1837-1884

1837 – 1844	4
1845 – 1849	0
1850 – 1854	4
1855 – 1859	7
1860 – 1864	12
1865 – 1869	10
1870 – 1874	10
1875 – 1879	24
1880 – 1884	15
Total	86

Source: LMA 2305/60/116/1

As can be seen 86 outlets were acquired over the period in question in addition to the 31 held in 1837. The rate at which acquisition took place increases as the century progresses, the exceptional 1875-79 figure being due to the purchase of Allnutt's estate in 1879 (eleven freehold, two leasehold and a beerhouse). After 1849 there are only three years – 1854, 1855, 1871 – in which no outlet was obtained. Of the total, four were newly built pubs on sites purchased (or, in one case, leased from the Queen's College, Oxford for a term of 99 years) by the firm and one was a conversion from cottages. The Brewery Tap in Broad Street (Above p. 17) was acquired in October, 1878 when the lease was purchased on the sale of Saunders Brewery (no reference elsewhere can be found to this brewery).

John Allnutt appears as a brewer at 112 London Street in 1844.<sup>49</sup> By 1863 another trade directory shows him to be in London Street and in East Street close by (Fig. 2).<sup>50</sup> On the sale of his estate to Simonds in October 1879 for £8867 (£424,109) the Brewery Tap is in East Street which would imply that the brewery entrance was in this street. In a directory consulted for 1869 (Post Office Directory for Berkshire) Allnutt does not appear as a brewer, and does not appear in subsequent directories, so the inference must be that he had stopped brewing some time between

<sup>49</sup> Pigot and Company's Berkshire 1844, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Dutton Allen's Directory of Oxon, Berks and Bucks 1863.

1863 and 1869 and was simply a retailer of someone else's beer, perhaps Simonds (as the largest brewery in Reading by this time there is a strong possibility that this was the case).

Allnutt's estate, with one exception, was entirely in Berkshire, with four pubs in Reading, three very close by and the rest within a few miles to the south and southwest and one near Newbury. There was one pub in Caversham, Oxfordshire.<sup>51</sup>

The acquisitions of 1879 were very much in districts already known to Simonds, as indeed were many of its other acquisitions between 1837 and 1884 (Fig. 4). However a number (26) were in areas that previously had not had Simonds' tied houses: north Berkshire, the Oxford area, north west Surrey and north east Hampshire, north Hampshire and one in London. Simonds was now beginning to move out of its core area of Reading and its environs and south east Berkshire and was colonising further afield.

North Berkshire was relatively sparsely populated, the prime centre being Abingdon with its major brewery of Morland (taken over by Greene King, Bury St. Edmunds in 1999) and with the growing rail centre of Didcot, a junction on the Great Western Railway. The increased presence here was small and Simonds never had a significant estate in the north of the county throughout its history.

Oxford was a major town with a large number of (then) relatively well off students and was not far from Reading. The houses in north Hampshire were almost a southward extension of the Berkshire estate, all being just over the county boundary.

The interesting development was in north west Surrey and north east Hampshire (Aldershot, Cove, Farnborough, Frimley, Pirbright etc), where the first pub was obtained in 1856 (The Hero of Alma, Aldershot). The county boundary between Hampshire and Surrey here is the River Blackwater, and the district lies immediately to the south of Sandhurst just over the Berkshire boundary. The significance of the area in the late nineteenth century was the growing military presence centred on Aldershot. Much of this area is poor sandy soil with heathland and was sparsely populated up to the 1850's when Aldershot was then chosen as a major garrison because of the suitability of the area for manoeuvres and training; moreover the Royal Military College at Sandhurst was very close by. By 1884 this area had fourteen Simonds' tied outlets.

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<sup>51</sup> The Caversham district lies immediately to the north of Reading centre across the Thames, the historic northern boundary between Berkshire and Oxfordshire. The northern suburbs of Reading developed in Caversham and by the Reading (Extension) Order 1911 Caversham was incorporated into Reading as were Tilehurst and part of Theale to

The London pub was at Woolwich and was acquired in 1872 – there was a major garrison here, the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

In terms of greater outlets for its products concentration so far has been on Simonds' tied houses. We must now turn to the free trade which encompasses sales to any person or organisation outside the tied estate: private individuals or families, public houses and hotels free of tie, private members' clubs, railway refreshment rooms, military canteens, annual events such as agricultural shows and sales abroad.

Every local brewery had its own private customers in the locality who would take bottles or small casks weekly or monthly. Simonds never developed, however, a country trade like the large London and Burton brewers who had private customers across the country (served by rail). There would be sales to free trade on licences and to clubs but what Simonds really developed in this period were sales to military canteens and to railway refreshment rooms.

Simonds had started the military connection in 1813, supplying the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. In 1814 the firm requested that it be allowed to develop a canteen nearby – a copy of this letter is reproduced in Pudney's book.<sup>52</sup> Few developments took place however until the 1870's although a depot had been established at Aldershot by 1866. During the summer campaign of 1872 when Messrs Simonds supplied the troops of flying columns on Salisbury Plain 'the firm acquired the reputation which has since secured them the largest military trade in the kingdom'.<sup>53</sup> Depots were set up close to military camps in England thereafter, at places like Sandgate and Woolwich. In 1875 an agent was appointed in Malta to service the garrisons there, with a similar arrangement for Gibraltar in 1881.

Railway refreshment rooms for the South Eastern Railway Company and the London and South Western Railway Company also provided a market for Simonds' beers. The first contract was entered into with the SER in 1877 when eight stations were mentioned (London Bridge and seven stations in Kent), nine were mentioned in June 1878 and by November 1883 seventeen were being supplied; the contract lasted until May 1884.<sup>54</sup> The contract with the LSWR ran from June 1883 to December 1884 with twenty eight refreshment rooms from London to as far as

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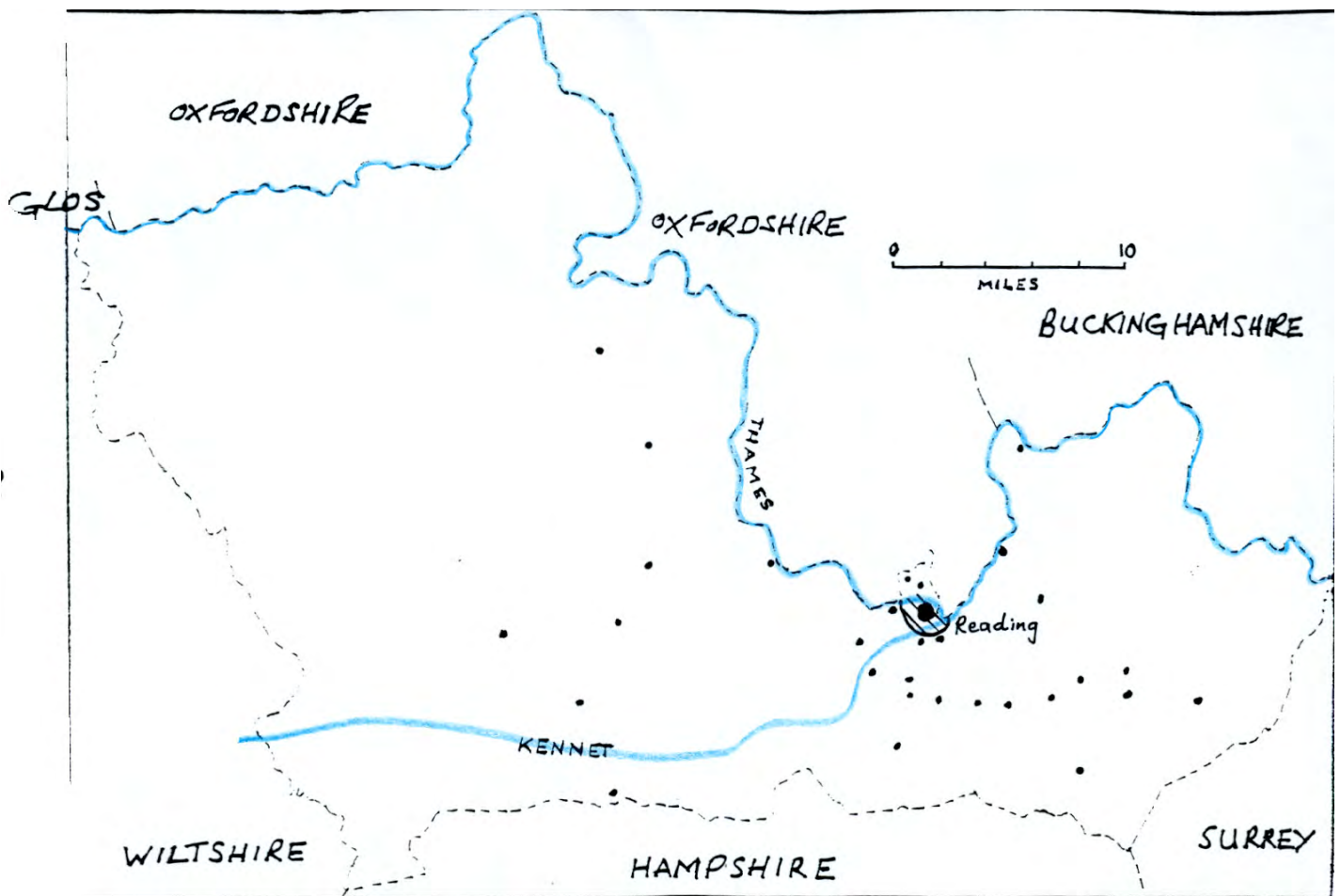
the west.

<sup>52</sup> J Pudney, *A Draught of Contentment – the Story of the Courage Group* (1971), Plate 21.

<sup>53</sup> Barnard, *Noted Breweries*, 4, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> LMA 2305/60/117.

Devon: Waterloo, Clapham Junction, Southampton, Exeter, Devonport, Barnstable, Windsor etc.<sup>55</sup>



**Fig 4 Distribution of Pubs in Berkshire 1884**

Although output in 1884 at 114,042 barrels was considerably higher than in the late 1830's (Appendix I) there was a decline to 1842 and then only modest increases over a number of years, so that the 1839 output was not surpassed until 1856. Thereafter slow growth took place until the mid 1860's when much faster growth took over – the output of 57906 barrels of 1871 had virtually doubled thirteen years later. This increase from the low point of 1842, particularly the acceleration from the early 1870's, reflects the growing number of tied and free trade outlets supplied.

As Reading grew in the nineteenth century, so opportunities grew for brewers other than Simonds, as a perusal of trade directories indicates. In 1830 five (and several home brew pubs) are recorded and by 1844 the figure had risen to twelve, with nineteen in 1854.<sup>56, 57, 58</sup> By 1863

<sup>55</sup> LMA 2305/60/117.

<sup>56</sup> Pigot and Company's Berkshire, 1830 p. 51.

<sup>57</sup> Pigot and Company's Berkshire, 1844 p. 31.

however there was a decline to twelve, with fourteen recorded in 1869 and a similar number in 1876.<sup>59, 60</sup>

Of the six brewers recorded in 1796 (Above p. 23) only the Garrard business, apart from Simonds, survived to 1830 and that is not recorded in the 1854 directory. Similarly, many other names appear in these nineteenth century directories that are not present in later ones. This situation is not surprising in an industry where entry barriers were low – small amounts of capital were needed to start up in business and the degree of technical knowledge required was not profound. However where this is the case business casualties tend to be high (not unlike the position with micro brewers in the late twentieth century) as many are attracted in who might lack the necessary entrepreneurial survival skills. The attraction for entry in the first place was of course the constantly increasing demand for beer in an expanding urban market.

Simonds was not only competing with local Berkshire and near out county brewers (since most towns had at least one brewery at the time) they were also competing in the London market with the large brewers there. Beer was loaded at the brewery wharves for shipment along the Kennet and down the Thames to the firm's London stores at Millbank Wharf. This could have been a two way traffic ie London brewers competing locally by sending beer upstream., but this does not seem to have happened at all on any scale. Whilst not comparable in scale in any way at this time to the London brewers it is perhaps a measure of the quality of Simonds' beer that these much larger producers did not get an established position in the county (it must also be said that there were breweries at Windsor, downstream from Reading - notably that of Neville Reid, much larger than Simonds - which also helped keep the London brewers out).<sup>61</sup>

With the growth of the British Empire there was increasing demand from expatriates for British beer. The problem was that in the late years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth the type of beer then brewed did not travel well, particularly into hot climates.

Although there had been trade in 'India Ale' conducted by some brewers with the East India Company from the 1780's at least, the beer was not very highly thought of. In the 1820's Bass and Allsopp, two Burton based brewers, produced a new ale, with paleness and brightness as its chief qualities – what became known as India Pale Ale. This was very well received in India, the largest market in the Empire, and other brewers started to imitate the beer style which was the

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<sup>58</sup> Macaulay's Berkshire Directory, 1854, p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> Post Office Directory, Berkshire 1869.

<sup>60</sup> Harrod's Royal County Directory: Berkshire 1876.

<sup>61</sup> Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery', p. 80.

forerunner of the bitter ale which became dominant in Victorian Britain, replacing the heavy dark porters and murky vatted beer prevalent in the earlier period.<sup>62</sup>

Simonds had brewed a consignment of pale ale for export to Melbourne, a journey taking up to six months in 1834. Commercially the deal was a failure since the consignee never paid for the beer and did not even return the casks. However Simonds started brewing this beer for local consumption and sales proved very buoyant. The beer was of a lower specific gravity (lower alcohol content but still strong by today's standards) than earlier products and was brewed 'on the principles now adopted at Burton'.<sup>63</sup> The unique Burton union system came to be used during the fermentation stage by Simonds later, in the 1880's, and Simonds dry hopped the beer, a handful of hops being put into the full cask of beer before it is sealed to provide a greater aroma.<sup>64</sup> The special water that made Burton so attractive to nineteenth century brewers was not available in Reading, Simonds having drawn its water from an artesian well on the premises, but the beer was so successful that a weaker version became the backbone of the business later on: this was called S B (Season's Brew, maybe so called because there was a brewing season. Until technical improvements and greater scientific knowledge in the industry later in the century – the 1880's – beer was only brewed nationally from September/October to April/May, summer months being avoided.<sup>65</sup> A document from 1870 shows that Simonds' last brew of the old season was on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and the first brew of the new season was on 24<sup>th</sup> August).<sup>66</sup>

Blackall Simonds was in charge of the business until 1845, having put it on a very sound footing. On his retirement the firm passed to his younger brothers, Henry (1795-1874) and George (1794-1852) and it is from these that the firm gets its initials. Henry had established a separate wine and spirit business with a partner in 1814, which was acquired by the firm in 1868.

Other Simonds joined the firm over time so that by 1885 the three partners were Henry John Simonds (1829-96), Henry Adolphus Simonds (1823-1910) and Blackall Simonds junior (1839-1905). Family continuity was a strong feature of the firm (and was to remain so to 1960 although the family's influence had weakened by then), and Simonds is specifically remarked upon in that context in conjunction with certain other brewing firms by Mathias: 'In no industry was this

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<sup>62</sup> T Gourvish and R G Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980* (1994), pp. 90-92.

<sup>63</sup> Barnard, *Noted Breweries*, 4, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Only one beer, as far as is known, Marston's Pedigree, a premium bitter, is now brewed using Burton unions. It is brewed in Burton.

<sup>65</sup> E M Sigsworth, 'Science and the Brewing industry, 1850-1900', *Economic History Review*, 17, (1964/65), p. 536.

<sup>66</sup> LMA 2305/60/79 Brewing Book.



family continuity in ownership and control more marked than in brewing; and in none has it been more tenacious ...'.<sup>67</sup>

As a result of increased sales and thus output the firm had to expand the premises and in 1863 £8270 (£374,796) was spent on additional land in Gas Lane on the north side of the then site (Fig. 5). Stores, offices and brewing premises were built on this land.<sup>68</sup> Pressure on space grew and the malting area was converted into beer stores. The firm had always made its own malt, even though it had bought some in from at least 1853, but now a local maltster, W P Dowson, supplied the malt.

Blackall Simonds junior was a civil engineer. Both brewers and architects were attracted to an innovation he brought about when he designed and supervised the construction of a four storey beer and wine store at the brewery of unreinforced mass concrete in the early 1870's. The walls and floors of the store were of concrete and iron columns supported the elegant vaulted floors (Plate 5).<sup>69</sup> Barnard says that the columns were each calculated to carry a weight of a hundred tons and that there was a hydraulic lift for raising and lowering casks from floor to floor.<sup>70</sup> The store's construction was said to be unique even in the 1880's.

Indicative of the level of activity by 1880 (January), Simonds was using 30355 casks at that time ranging from 4 ½ gallon pins through different sizes to 108 gallon butts.<sup>71</sup> The import of timber to make or mend casks must have been considerable and the cooperage and labour employed therein of some significance.

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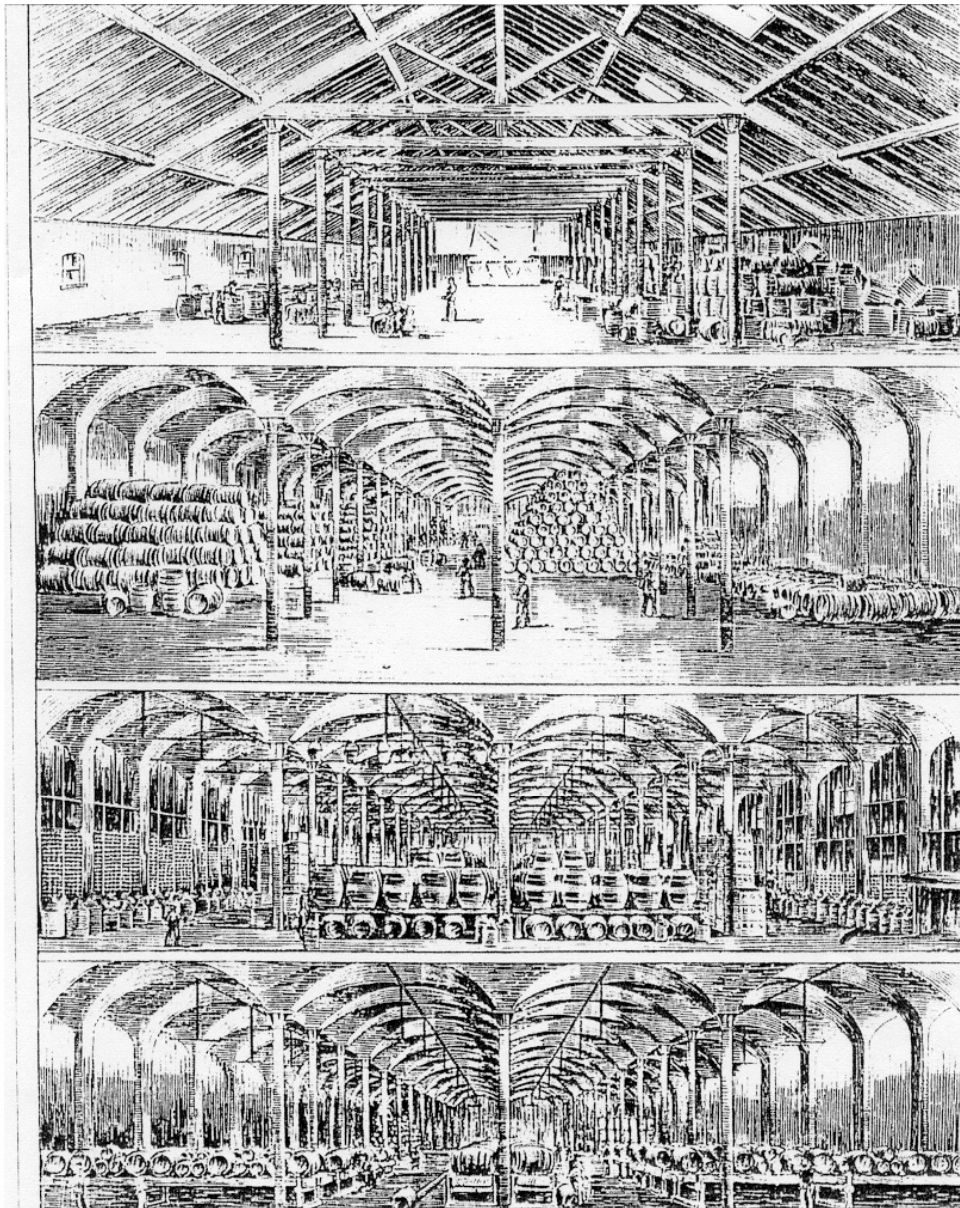
<sup>67</sup> Mathias, *The Brewing Industry*, p. 319.

<sup>68</sup> Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery', p. 81.

<sup>69</sup> Pearson, *British Breweries*, pp. 73, 75.

<sup>70</sup> Barnard, *Noted Breweries*, 4, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> LMA 2305/60/80/2 Ledger.



The interior of the mass concrete beer store built in the early 1870s at Simonds' Brewery, Reading, as shown in Barnard's *Noted Breweries*. Its designer was Blackall Simonds junior (1839–1905), a professional engineer and partner in the brewing firm. The store, which accommodated wine and spirits as well as beer, needed heating during the winter to maintain a temperature of 60° F throughout the year. (*Scottish Brewing Archive*)

## PLATE 5 BEER STORE

(From L. Pearson, *British Breweries: An Architectural History*)

## Chapter 3      A well established county brewer

Until 1885 Simonds had for some time been a partnership, all three partners being kinsmen. Partnerships are a valid type of organisation for a small firm but as firms get beyond a certain size they become a less relevant business unit: the liability of each partner is unlimited, so that in the event of the business facing financial difficulties partners are liable to the full extent of their personal assets to meet the debts of the firm; if more capital is required partners either have to provide it from their own resources and/or borrow from individuals or financial institutions; partners' capital may be locked in - if a partner wishes to withdraw a whole or part of the capital he has put into the business it may be difficult to obtain as withdrawal of capital could cause problems for the firm and possibly be fatal.

Simonds overcame this latter problem by persuading retired partners to take pensions and thus leave the capital untouched.

When Simonds wished to purchase the wines and spirits business of Henry Simonds in 1868 the partners had to borrow £10,000 (£410,000) at 5% from Messrs J W Kershaw ('merchant, City of London') and C M C Whatman ('gent of Salisbury'), with 'hereditaments and premises situate in the County of Berks' as security (document dated 15th February, 1868), the loan being repaid in April 1896.<sup>72</sup> When such sums are sought on mortgage there are additional legal and survey expenses as there has to be investigation of titles and the structural condition of the property to be mortgaged (in this case certain brewery plant and buildings and certain pubs).

The company form of organisation provides for liability limited up to the nominal value of a person's shareholding, additional capital may be obtained by issuing more shares and capital may be unlocked by selling one's shares on to others. For these reasons the company is a far more appropriate structure for the larger firm.

At a Special General Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1885 it was agreed that the company be registered under the Companies Act 1862 to 1885 as a company limited by shares and for that purpose the firm's name be changed to H & G Simonds Ltd (henceforth the company year would be 1<sup>st</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> September and the statistical year accordingly).

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<sup>72</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Courage Papers D/ECG T15/1.

The authorised nominal capital of the company was £500,000 (£26,090,000), split into 12,500 ordinary shares and 12500 5% preference shares of £20 each. The three founder directors, W J, W A and B Simonds held 16200 ordinary and preference shares between them, with H J having the largest number of shares and the other two having virtually the same size of holding. Four younger family members, George (later to be named George Blackall), Arthur, Louis de Luze and Frederick Simonds, had one ordinary share each.<sup>73</sup>

By December 1891 the paid up capital of H & G Simonds Ltd ie the capital actually subscribed for shares., was £336,080 (£18,084,464), with 9004 ordinary shares and 7800 preference shares purchased.

In 1895 the three Founder Directors appointed three more kinsmen, all Simonds, to the Board and until 1960 there were always between six to eight directors.

Interestingly, on a national basis, by 1886 few breweries were registered under the Companies Act, but Simonds was only just in the vanguard. When Guinness floated as a company in October, 1886 ‘... the death knell of British brewing partnership was sounded’.<sup>74</sup> So many breweries(and distilleries) had converted to public companies by the 1890’s that the Statist ran a series of fifteen articles about them from August to December 1894 for investors. The magazine stated: ‘Should the rapid conversion of private breweries to joint stock companies proceed at the same rate as during the past five years probably no brewery of any note or consequence will remain in private hands at the commencement of the twentieth century.’<sup>75</sup>

Clearly the relative ease of access to more capital and limited liability were the spurs behind this movement. However access to more capital was easier if the firm became a public company, in which case it had a Stock Exchange listing. Simonds chose to remain a private company until the 1920’s. At an Extraordinary General Meeting in December, 1924 it was agreed unanimously that the 9004 ordinary shares and 8410 preference shares then issued of £20 each be subdivided into more manageable £1 shares.<sup>76</sup> Then in 1928 the articles of association were modernised and a quotation for the shares of the company on the London Stock Exchange was sought.<sup>77</sup> (Its debenture stock had been listed previously however, debentures being loans to a company not shares.) The result was that the Chairman could say in December 1928: ‘This is the first

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<sup>73</sup> London Metropolitan Archives 2305/60/10 Registration of Members and Share Ledger.

<sup>74</sup> T Gourvish and R G Wilson, The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980 (1994), p. 250.

<sup>75</sup> Statist, 15-9-1894, p. 316.

<sup>76</sup> Bristol Archives C/104.

<sup>77</sup> Hop Leaf Gazette, January 1929, p. 193.

occasion that a chairman of this Company has been privileged to address at an annual meeting shareholders other than members of the Simonds family'.<sup>78</sup>

By remaining a private company for forty three years the Simonds' family retained much greater control than had the firm been a public company since in a private company there was a limitation on the number of shareholders and control as to who could own shares.

It is worth saying at this juncture that documentation of Simonds' history prior to the firm becoming a limited company is scanty. From that point in time, however, there is much greater documentation, notably the minutes of every Board Meeting (held every two weeks) from 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1885 to 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1960 and reports of Annual General Meetings.

When the firm was still a partnership it accepted deposits from outsiders and paid interest on these, as if it were a bank; by the end of 1872 over £2,300 (£94,300) was on deposit.<sup>79</sup> These were funds that the firm could use as working capital. After October 1885 Simonds carried on taking deposits, as the BMs indicate, although there is no mention of them after a 1905 reference (BM 30-12-05).<sup>80</sup> The Board Minutes show that in the period 1885-1905 at least £8,275 (£458,104) was taken in deposits. Typically references would read as follows: £150 (£8072), taken on deposit at 5% on three months notice from Sergeant Major I Morrell 2 South Lancs Regiment (BM 29-8-1891) – military men often figure as depositors; Mr Draper £600 (£35628) on deposit at 4% with six months' notice (BM 16-2-1895); 'That we take £550 (£30,553) on deposit at 4%, from Mrs Blea of the Castle Inn, Hurst' (BM 30-6-1900) – licencees are often reported as depositors, but the firm refused to take deposits from pub tenants if they were tenants of another brewery. Again, such deposits would help the firm with its working capital and at the same time depositors must have felt it was a secure investment, as indeed it was.<sup>81</sup>

Simonds started life as a limited company with at least 117 tied on licences and a developing free trade (Above, p. 27). By November 1895 the firm had 211 on licences<sup>82</sup>: by any calculation this is a very marked increase in the estate – 80% - over a ten year period. The size of this increase is most puzzling because output from 1885/86 to 1894/95 was more or less on a plateau, actually

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<sup>78</sup> HLG, January 1929, p.194.

<sup>79</sup> TAB Corley, 'Simonds Brewery at Reading 1760-1960', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, 68 (1975-76), p. 82.

<sup>80</sup> Presumably the firm still held the deposits that had been accepted previously if not taking new ones, as a BM of 27-1-13 indicates.

<sup>81</sup> The firm records in the Board Minutes that it was taking slate (thrift) club deposits from pubs from 1936 up to the 1950's at rates of interest of 3%-3½%, with maximum deposits specified. In real terms these were not at all as great as the amounts deposited up to 1905 but even modest amounts would have helped the firm's cash flow. It was also a goodwill gesture to licencees to take such deposits.

<sup>82</sup> LMA 2305/60/120 Particulars of Freeholds, Copyholds and Leaseholds belonging to H & G simonds Ltd.

showing a decrease to below 110,000 barrels in two years (Appendix I).<sup>83</sup> Profitability and dividend payments are down for a number of these years, dividends being below 10% for five of the years, the only time they fell below double figures in the history of the limited company.<sup>84, 85</sup>

It could well be that the calculation of the total number of tied houses for 1885 is too low by far but no other documentary evidence has been encountered to suggest otherwise. The BMs from 1885 to 1895 indicate that 23 pubs were purchased or leased for the first time during this period, but it is not clear whether every such transaction enters these minutes.<sup>86, 87</sup> Whatever, the documentary evidence of all the property in the company's hands in 1895 is there to be seen in great detail.

Of the 211 on licences 137 are public houses and 74 are beerhouses and compared with 1885, when no off licences were recorded, 19 are recorded in 1895. Another source indicates 213 'trade houses' in 1896<sup>88</sup> (Corley however maintains that in 1896 there were 158 tied houses, of which 120 were public houses and 30 beerhouses, no off licences being mentioned<sup>89</sup>). Freehold properties -two of which were leased out – account for 123 of the 211, leasehold 79, with 6 copyhold and 3 lifehold. Four of the copyhold properties show members of the Simonds family as tenants on the court rolls of the appropriate manor, no tenants being shown for the other two (copyhold tenure was abolished in 1922).

The comparison in location between 1885 and 1895 is instructive. Whilst the core area of Reading and immediate environs and south and south east Berkshire had more outlets (116), there were now pubs for the first time in Buckinghamshire and Middlesex, Brighton, Swindon and South Wales.

There were increases in north and west Berkshire and south Oxfordshire and ten now in the area of Oxford. The 'military' area of north west Surrey and north east Hampshire had a doubling in the number of outlets to 28 and north Hampshire increased to 17. Simonds was thus extending its tied estate farther afield as well as assuring that it benefited from the urban growth in Reading (65 pubs). Of the 19 off licences, four were in the Reading area and seven in the Oxford area, with three in London.

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<sup>83</sup> Output figures from 1837 are on a calendar year basis but from 1885 are on a company year basis.

<sup>84</sup> LMA 2305/60/49.

<sup>85</sup> BA/C/104.

<sup>86</sup> BMs 10/85 to 1/91, 20 pubs.

<sup>87</sup> BMs 1/91 to 1/99, 3 pubs to 11/95.

<sup>88</sup> Brewing Trade Review, 1-2-96, p. 56.

<sup>89</sup> Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery', p. 83.

The acquisition of outlets continued up to 1919 but not all considered were purchased. A local brewer, William Sims of Lion Brewery, Hosier Street (Fig. 6), first mentioned in Macaulay's Berkshire Directory, came onto the market in 1890 and a BM (1-3-90) states: 'The desirability of buying Sim's Brewery was discussed'. No decision to purchase was reached, and 16 pubs were offered for auction on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1890.<sup>90</sup>

The pubs of Hewett and Son's brewery in nearby Chain Street were bought in November 1898 for £59,000 (£338,600) but unfortunately no number is given. The firm of Harris and Hewett, brewers, 16 Chain Street, is first recorded in a trade directory in 1844 and is still found in one of 1876, but by 1887 had become Robert Hewett and Son, Victoria Brewery, Chain Street.<sup>91, 92, 93</sup>

Dowsett Brothers Brewery, 46/47 Broad Street (Fig. 6), was purchased by Simonds at auction on June 1906 for £7,500 (£430,500) but the BM (16-6-06) does not mention the number of outlets involved. This firm was first mentioned in the Berkshire Post Office Directory, 1869.

Under the Licensing Act 1904 the principle was established on compensating owners and publicans for surrendering licences, it being public policy to seek a reduction. The money paid out in compensation was to come from a levy raised on local licensed premises. Nationally 18611 on licences were closed from 1905-35 as a result.<sup>94</sup> In the BMs after 1904 and up to 1912 there are several references to the delicensing of pubs. Brewers had to weigh what they paid out in levy against what they received in compensation (plus receipts from the sale of the property) and there was a tendency to sell off the least profitable outlets.

The BMs show frequent references to breweries outside Reading, some local, some distant, which Simonds contemplate buying, or make enquiries about and/or inspect and make no further progress, or decline to make an offer from the outset; sometimes brewers approach Simonds.<sup>95</sup>

The references made are to: Wooburn Brewery (south Bucks) 1891, Shipston-on-Stour Brewery (Warks) 1896, Hanley's (Oxford) 1896, Mortimer Brewery (south Berks) 1898, Gloyne's (south Hants) 1898, two Bristol breweries (no names given) 1898, Justins' and Brinn's (Reading) 1900, Bramley Brewery (mid Surrey) 1901, Bath Brewery 1902, Watlington Brewery (Oxon) 1902, Clark's (north Hants) 1902, Headington's (Berks) 1903, Phillip's (Oxon) 1905, Bird's (Reading)

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<sup>90</sup> N Barber, *A Century of British Brewers 1890-1990* (1994), p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> *Pigot and Co's 1844*.

<sup>92</sup> *Harrod's 1876*.

<sup>93</sup> *Kelly's 1887*.

<sup>94</sup> A Wilson, *Alcohol and the Nation* (1940), p. 111.

<sup>95</sup> BA/C/1, BA/C/2 2-99 to 12-07, LMA 2305/60/2 1-08 to 4-17.

1905, Hewett's (south east Berks) 1905, Camden Brewery (London) 1907, Palmer's (west Berks) 1907, Tooting Brewery (London) 1907, Fuller and Story's (east Berks), Fisherton's (Salisbury) 1909, Blandy and Hawkins (Reading) 1909, a Leamington brewery (no name) 1910, Ive's (south Oxon) 1911, Belcher and Habgood (north Berks) 1913, Hussey's (mid Wilts) 1913 and the Anglo-Bavarian Brewery (east Somerset) 1915. In many cases the public houses associated with each brewery were mentioned for it was primarily for these alone - certainly of the local breweries considered – that interest was shown.

Such a list may seem tedious but it serves to illustrate how merger and takeover activity was sustained in the two decades before the First World War. There are no references to such activity by Simonds from 1915 until 1919, no doubt because of wartime conditions. One suspects that the history of most brewers which achieved growth during this period would show a similar pattern.

Of the Reading breweries in the above list Henry Bird's was acquired by Wethered and Sons (Marlow) in 1913 with nine tied houses, Blandy and Hawkins was acquired by the South Berkshire Brewery (Newbury) in 1910 (Simonds bought the South Berkshire Brewery in 1920), and Justins and Brinn by Fergusons (Reading) in 1900, with 30 public houses. Bird had first appeared in Harrod's Directory 1876. Blandy, with partner W Mots, first appeared in Pigot's Berkshire 1844, then as Blandy alone in Macaulay's Directory 1854, then Blandy and Hawkins in Dutton Allen's Directory 1863 and from then on. Justins, as two separate businesses, Thomas and William, was first noted in Macaulays Directory, then as Thomas Justins in the 1869 Post Office Directory and Justins and Brinn in Kelly's Directory, 1887.

Unsurprisingly, some of the Reading brewers mentioned in the nineteenth century trade directories disappeared, with nothing further known of them. Some probably went bankrupt and others stopped brewing and sold the small number of pubs they had, if any, on to other brewers. What with that and the takeover of certain other brewers Kelly's Directory 1915 shows only four remaining in Reading. Simonds was easily the largest of these four.

Simonds was under some sort of scrutiny itself in 1899. A rather cryptic BM (11-11-99) says: 'That Mr G Brown be informed that if a thoroughly responsible party will make an adequate offer to purchase the Brewery it will be considered'. Apparently Mr Brown wrote again to the firm and the BM (10-2-00) states: 'We repeat our answer to him'. Nothing more was heard of this matter.



Simonds was also increasing its estate by the purchase of pub freeholds and leases from 1895. The BMs record 26 new on licences up to 1915. A later BM records that it was agreed that it was 'not expedient to buy more public houses at this time' (19-6-16). Five off licences were obtained from 1908 to 1912. All the acquisitions of this period were in the same geographical areas covered by the 1895 property list.

A perusal of Simonds' Annual Reports for the period 1895-1919 indicates that in the last four years of the 1890's acquisition was much to the fore.<sup>96</sup> For the years 1895-96 we read: 'Considerable outlay has been incurred on the purchase and improvement of Public House property'. A similar comment was made in the Reports for 1896-97 and 1897-98.

The 1898-99 Report emphasizes the acquisition of Hewett's freehold and leasehold licensed houses 'all of which being in or near Reading have proved a profitable investment'. It is worth emphasizing that improvement of premises, as well as acquisition, was important: customers, once attracted, have to be retained for continual repeat sales and the drinking environment has a role in this.

The product itself, or rather the range of products – the different beers on offer – is also important. Barnard informs us that in 1891, apart from SB pale ale, there was an intermediate pale ale, an XX ale ('the labourer and artisan's drink') and the strong export stout 'principally sold in Malta and Gibraltar'.<sup>97</sup> Doubtless there were others as well.

A BM (8-4-99) is more revealing about the range of beers: there are two mild ales (1045 and 1048 gravity), a porter (1053 gravity), a bitter ale (1053 gravity), a pale ale (1053 gravity) and a stout (1065 gravity). These were listed in a quotation to the naval canteens in Plymouth and are probably not the complete range.<sup>98</sup>

Quality and price of the beers are very important factors in determining demand. The quality of Simonds' beer must have been considered high, certainly by comparison with many of its smaller local rivals, by virtue of the fact that it had grown to the extent that it had by Barnard's visit and through later expansion. By 1913 output had reached 194830 barrels (Appendix I) by comparison with 114047 barrels in 1886 (the output figures for 1914-1918 are influenced by the special conditions for wartime: much higher demand and output initially, then restricted output

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<sup>96</sup> BA/C/59. Company Annual Reports.

<sup>97</sup> Barnard, Noted Breweries, 4, p. 17.

because of raw material shortages – beer was also brewed to lower gravities to save on raw materials). Price must have been competitive as well given the increase in demand.

In the context of quality and increasing output (and with the increase of scientific knowledge in the industry in the closing decades of the nineteenth century) an analyst was to be permanently employed at the brewery for the first time, and a Mr Welch was appointed as analyst in 1887 (BM 1-10-87).

Developments in the free trade had also been taking place. The 1895 property list indicates refreshment rooms or kiosks at the West Pier, Brighton, the Admiralty Pier, Dover, Margate and Hastings Piers and the South Parade Pier, Southsea, a presence at the Surrey Club House, Kennington Oval and a restaurant in the Public Assembly Rooms, Gibraltar.

The list shows railway refreshment rooms were still being supplied, a new seven year lease with the SER commencing on 1-1-92.<sup>99</sup> Beer was also being supplied to the GWR (main) station refreshment room at Reading (but not to the SER station next door). A BM (9-6-92) shows that Simonds tendered for the railway refreshment room contract let by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway but a later minute indicates that the firm was not successful.

A depot had been established at Dublin in 1892 ‘for the purpose of doing military trade in Ireland’ (BM 13-2-92) and one had already been opened in Malta in 1890 to supply the garrison.<sup>100</sup> The firm had made losses on business in South Africa during the second Boer War but was still looking for trade there in 1902 (BM 24-5-02). Egypt was another British military market and a depot was established in Cairo in 1908 (BM 22-2-08). During the period from 1890 to 1914 there are BM references to trade with Lagos (1894), St Helena (1900), Calcutta (for India and Burmah) (1907) and the Straits Settlements (1914); in the cases of the first and last named the trade is in bottled beer, which in the case of some distant markets was the only practicable method of delivery, although bottled beer was beginning to take a hold on the domestic market in the late nineteenth century.

There were eleven depots by 1890 in England.<sup>101</sup> New depots were established in England and Wales (Swansea 1891) after, so that by 1917 there were 14, some in naval towns such as

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<sup>98</sup> Gravities indicate the alcoholic content of beer, the rule of thumb being approximately 1% alcohol for every 10 degrees gravity (above 1000). Up to 1914 British beer was generally much stronger than beers after that date, the average gravity today being about 1036+ (oral communication with A Pateman, Brewer at Elgood’s, Wisbech).

<sup>99</sup> LMA 2305/60/60/1 Private Ledger 1895-1906 pp. 149-151.

<sup>100</sup> K Thomas ‘The Adventures of H & G Simonds Ltd in Malta and East Africa’ *Business Archives* 62 (1991), p. 41.

<sup>101</sup> LMA 2305/60/71/1.

Portsmouth and Plymouth, others in army towns such as Woolwich and Farnborough, the largest in volume business by far between 1914-17 being at Ludgershall on Salisbury Plain. There were also depots in non military towns like Slough, Hastings and Oxford.<sup>102</sup> These depots (or branches, as Simonds liked to call them) served not only the local free trade but any tied houses in the locality. By 1917 there was, not surprisingly, a depot in France also; an agency had been established in Brussels in 1908 (closed by the war).

One other facet of the free trade should be mentioned – tying free houses to Simonds by way of loans to publicans and tying private members' clubs by way of loans to club committees. There is BM evidence of the former up to 1914 but with few examples; one such is 'loan at 5% of £300 (£17,220) to Mr Webb of the Portland Hotel, Southsea in return for exclusive trade in cask beers' (BM 17-3-94). A mortgage loan to a club committee was a more common occurrence eg £600 (£30,390) to Brookwood Working Men's Club at 4% in 1909 (BM 6-2-09), but for Simonds the club trade was never as important as for brewers elsewhere.<sup>103</sup>

In order to cater for expanding demand an 80 quarter brewing plant had been installed at the brewery in 1886. The statement accompanying the accounts for the 1886/87 financial year says '... the Brewery has been greatly enlarged the cost of which has been chiefly paid out of income'.<sup>104</sup>

Previously, because of pressures on space, the firm had ceased to make its own malt and bought it in. By the early 1890's however the Board made the decision that Simonds should start making at least a proportion of the malt used and accordingly two malthouses were erected, an 80 quarter malting and a 110 quarter malting. The report of the Board at the annual general meeting for the 1892/93 financial year stated that the malthouses were in the course of erection and the report for 1893/94 stated that they had been completed in the spring of 1894 and were now operating. These malthouses were financed by an issue of preference shares which raised £12,200 (£677,710), as compared with the 1886 construction financed primarily from ploughed back profit.<sup>105</sup> (This latter method of finance is the chief source of funds for investment in plant and equipment in industry, not the proceeds of new share issues).

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<sup>102</sup> Barnard, Noted Breweries, 4, p. 24.

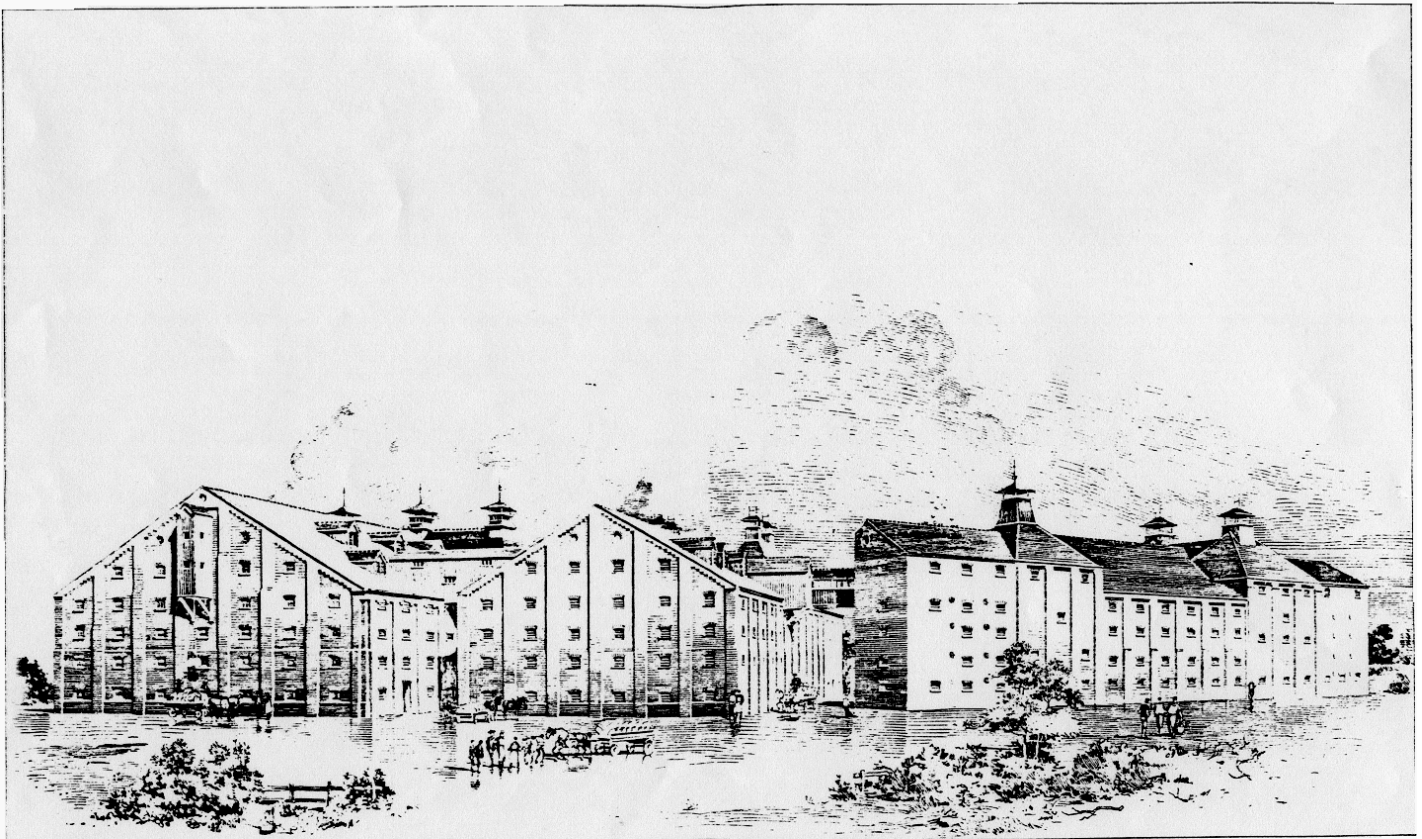
<sup>103</sup> The Working Men's Club and Institute Union (the CIU) was established in 1862 and by 1914 there were 1613 affiliated clubs (G Tremlett, Clubmen: The History of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (1987). There were many other unaffiliated clubs. The clubs tended to be greatest in number in mining and industrial areas such as the North East, West Yorkshire and South Wales.

<sup>104</sup> LMA 2305/60/49 Annual Accounts.

<sup>105</sup> LMA 2305/60/49 Annual Accounts.

The demand for malt must have been such that, even with the new malthouses, there was insufficient capacity. A BM (14-12-97) indicates that a third malthouse is to be built and a later BM (14-12-97) that an architect has been appointed. The tender for the third malthouse was agreed at £8,721 (£500,585), plus £732 (42,017) for girders, and was opened in 1899 with a capacity of 120 quarters.<sup>106</sup>

The three maltings (Plate 6) were constructed at the west end of Fobney Street and the shell of one is still in existence. It had been hoped to convert this to apartments but it was seriously damaged by fire on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2000 (Plates 7, 8, 9).<sup>107</sup>



**PLATE 6** 120 10. and 80-Quarter MALTINGS FOR MESSRS. H. & G. SIMONDS. LTD. BREWERS, READING.

<sup>106</sup> The Brewers' Journal, 15-1-1899, p. 525 gives full technical details.

# TONY KNOTT

Talking about the Reading he loves



## We will be watching the brewery's rise from ashes

IT WAS tragic to watch the flames engulf the Malthouse on the old Simonds Brewery site. It was I, back in the early 1980s, who wished to see it developed as an arts and drama performance space and restaurant, but in those days there

were no Lottery grants or the like to help out, so the idea fell flat.

I hope that the new owners are made to rebuild it back to its fine heritage stature. If The Oracle developers could work wonders renovating another

Simonds building, Seven Sisters House in Bridge Street, then the present incumbents can be made to do the same with their piece of Reading's important historic past.

We will be watching.

## Building work sparked inferno

*Reading Chronicle*  
by Graham Bond  
14-12-00

FIRE investigators say sparks from machinery used by workmen at Reading's old Simonds brewery malthouse were the likely cause of the blaze which tore through the historic building last week.

Contractors for owners Bewley Homes were converting the 150-year-old building in Fobney Street into luxury apartments to form part of a new riverside complex when fire broke out last Thursday.

But Bewley says the development will definitely go ahead despite initial fire brigade predictions that the grade two listed building would end up a pile of rubble.

The fire was reported at 4pm and was out by 8.40pm but on Friday morning the gables appeared little more than charred remains and huge cracks ran the length of the brickwork.

Engineers have examined the structure and insist it is safe and representatives from English Heritage were today (Thursday) expected to give the green light to the project to convert the building into a retail outlet, restaurant and four new apartments.

Bewley Homes' chairman Colin



Raging inferno: Flames ripped through the Malthouse last Thursday.

Brooks said yesterday: "There's no question of the development stopping. No-one from Bewley Homes was in the building at the time the fire started.

"Obviously it didn't self-ignite and liability needs to be established, but I can't comment until I talk to the fire investigators."

The Malthouse development will form part of a new 89-unit apartment complex facing the

River Kennet and Mr Brooks said the fire merely meant things would take longer.

More than 60 firefighters fought the blaze - assisted by water pumped from the swollen River Kennet and the pouring rain.

Apartment blocks just yards were hastily evacuated but nine families were allowed to return that evening and the other nine went home the following day.





(22-11 00)

**Plate 7 Malthouse, November 2000**



(22 11 00)

**Plate 8 Malthouse, November 2000**



(13-12-00)

**Plate 9 Fire damaged Malthouse, December 2000**

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Courtesy of the  
Simonds family archives



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The malthouses would have generated much traffic and although situated very close to the Kennet Canal (the wharf and the canal were owned by the GWR by this time) the railways must have had the traffic. BMs from late 1904 indicate a desire that the GWR put in a branch railway with sidings to Willow Street (at the west end of Fobney Street), to the north of the GWR's Central Goods Depot, to service the maltings: '... we could rely on placing about 24,000 tons of traffic annually on the branch if the extra cost did not exceed 6d (2.5p) per ton' (BM 8-10-04).

Eventually agreement was reached with the GWR and, additionally, that a railway siding be put across Fobney Street to carry the rails to the barley hoists in the malthouse (BM 2-5-98). The rails may still be seen embedded across that part of Fobney Street (Plate 10). The final arrangement of the three malthouses and the railway is shown in Fig 7.



(22-11-00)  
**PLATE 10 RAILS ACROSS FOBNEY STREET**

It is interesting to note that a BM (7-3-03) records that the firm declines 'to enter into negotiations for purchase of Mr Dowson's maltings, in Caversham Road for £6,500 (£349,765)'. Dowson had supplied the malt for Simonds from 1872 until the new maltings were built.




The property inventory of 1895 gives details of the main premises in Reading as well as lists of all licenced outlets.<sup>108</sup> It shows that at that time (November, 1895), H & G Simonds occupied three adjoining sites: (i) the Seven Bridges Brewery on the east side of Bridge Street (ii) land on the west side of Bridge Street between Fobney Street and the Kennet containing hay stores, stabling, the boiler house, scald sheds (where casks were cleaned with steam) and the cooperage (iii) land on the north side of Fobney Street, to the west and, containing (then) two malthouses, a cottage and some sheds.<sup>109</sup> In area these three contiguous sites covered 5.175 acres (2.094 hectares), the brewery occupying just under half this total (Fig. 5). The area to the west of the brewery just across Bridge Street and north of Fobney Street had not yet been acquired by Simonds. This land was acquired in part in 1897, including the Bear Inn, for £6,250 (£358,750).

There was a marked increase in the demand for bottled beer, as opposed to draught, in the very late Victorian and in the Edwardian periods. There had been additions to the bottling cellar in 1892 (BM 24-9-92). By 1909 the bottling stores were becoming inadequate and the premises across Bridge Street purchased in 1897 were converted to bottled beer stores in that year (BM 14-12-09). These were enlarged later in 1913 (BM 13-1-13) and new bottling machines installed in 1916 (BM 3-1-16). Bottling at Simonds was to expand considerably after the war.

Breweries use considerable quantities of water and the BMs indicate that in 1888 a new artesian well was sunk, of greater diameter than the existing one, to a depth of 175 feet (54 metres) and that in 1900 a new 11 ½ inch (0.3 metres) diameter well was sunk. Whilst well water was used as a raw material for beer town water was used in the brewery for other purposes as a BM (9-3-95) illustrates: 'We continue to use town water in malting rather than from our own wells'.

Office space was also in increased demand, building foundations for new offices agreed in 1899. As a result of the widening of Bridge Street the offices were to be rebuilt at an estimated cost of £11,307 (£608,430) in 1903 (BM 3-1-03).

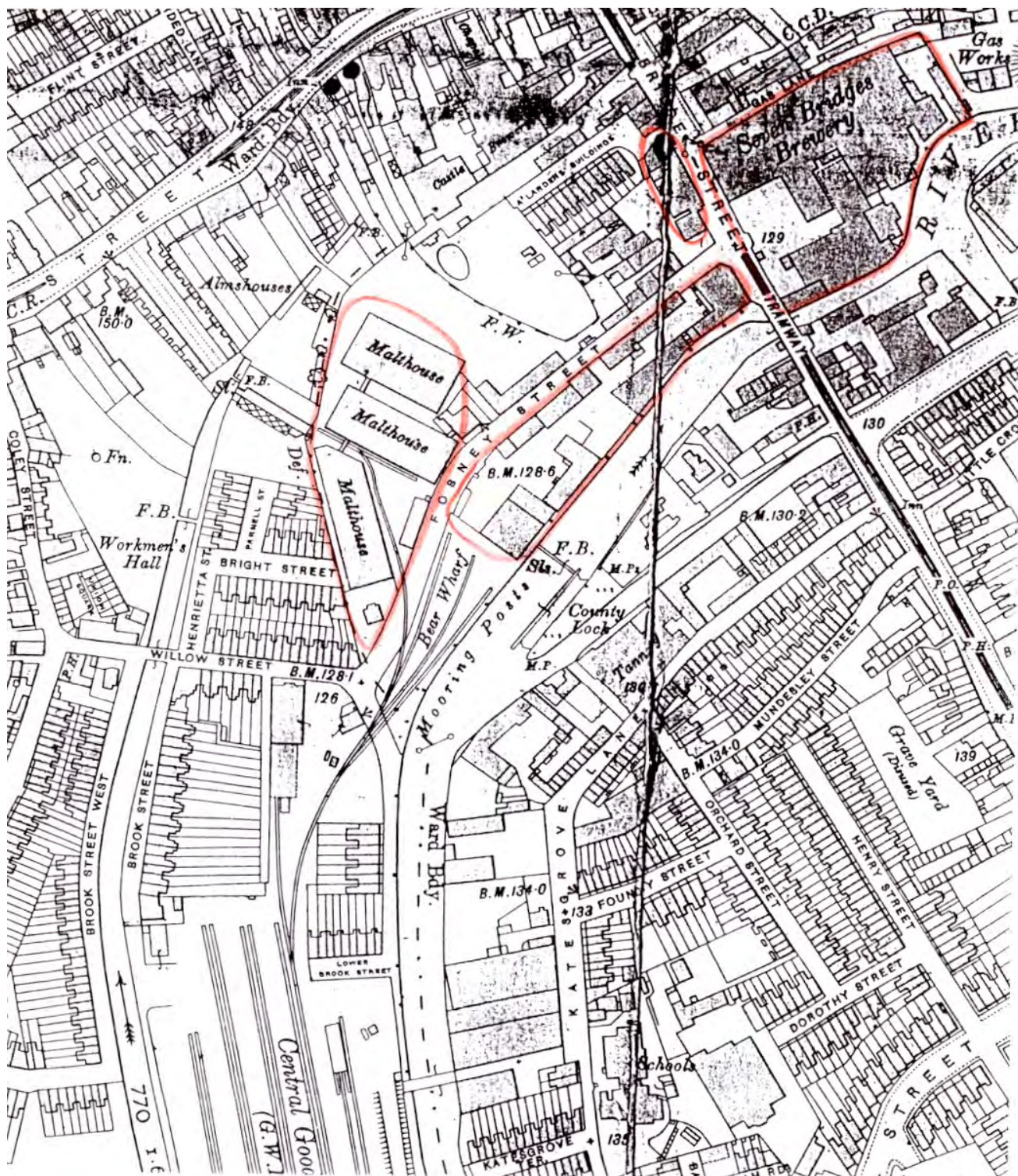
Courtesy of the  
Simonds family archives  
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<sup>108</sup> LMA 2305/60/120 Particulars of Freeholds etc.

<sup>109</sup> For a very complete account of the brewery buildings and equipment in 1890 see Barnard, Noted Breweries, 4, Chapter 2.





Ordnance Survey Berkshire 37/3 1912 edition Scale: 25 inches to the mile

FIG. 5 SIMONDS' BREWERY SITES 1912

There was a new cooperage built in Fobney Street in 1899 and there are several references in the BMs during this period of new investment in plant within the brewery.

For the whole of the period 1885 to 1919 the firm traded profitably, never ceasing to record less than a five figure profit.<sup>110</sup> The lowest figure recorded was in 1892/93 at £20,855 (£1,158,495), the highest £48,163 (£2,675,455) in 1899/1900. Notwithstanding Simonds' large investment in plant and real estate, from 1885 this profitability was reflected in dividends to shareholders over the period. Apart from some payments below 10% in the late eighties and early nineties dividends were always at least 10%, with long runs of 12% and 14%, and 18% and 23% during the latter half of World War I.<sup>111</sup> Certainly by comparison with many breweries Simonds' was doing very well financially. Of Georges', Bristol it has been written: 'In the 1900s its ordinary share dividend never fell below ten percent, confirming its reputation as the soundest provincial brewery in Britain'.<sup>112</sup> Simonds' dividends never fell below 10% for that period but they never reached the (slightly) higher figures of Georges' achieved at that time.

By the end of World War I Simonds was a very well established county brewer.

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<sup>110</sup> LMA 2305/60/49 Annual Accounts 1885/86 to 1894/95; BA/C/59 Annual profit figures 1895/96 to 1956/57.

<sup>111</sup> BA/C/104 Minutes of General Meetings 1884/85 to 1959/60.

<sup>112</sup> T R Gourvish and R G Wilson, 'Profitability in the Brewery Industry, 1885-1914', Business History (July, 1985), p. 159.



## Chapter 4      A major regional brewer

This chapter considers the growth of H & G Simonds from the end of the First World War up to the year before the firm's merger with Courage Barclay in 1960.

Prior to 1919 the firm had developed almost entirely by the process of internal growth: increasing its sales overall, and its share of the local market, by the gradual accretion of public houses, off licences and free trade contracts. Only three relatively small brewers, all in Reading, had been acquired with their tied estates (John Allnutt 1879, Hewett and Son 1898 and Dowsett Brothers 1906).

From 1919, in every decade, breweries with their tied estates were purchased, some local and some distant, such that by the autumn of 1958 there were 1137 Simonds' houses and 72 off licences.<sup>113</sup> This total in a way understates the position because the BMs indicate that at least 187 unremunerative pubs and some off licences were disposed of during the 1950's to 1958 (and several more were disposed of in 1959 and up to mid 1960). Simonds had clearly embraced the policy of external growth with enthusiasm from 1919.

In companies, as opposed to sole traders and partnerships, it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint a particular individual who may have had a disproportionate effect on the company's fortunes. Within Simonds one such emerges: Frederick Adolphus Simonds, known widely as Eric (1881-1953); his effect seems to have been highly beneficial.

'Mr Eric' was the eldest son of Louis de Luze Simonds who had been a director and the manager of the company up to the middle of the First World War. Eric was taken onto the staff in January 1902 and in 1905 he was appointed a director. In 1916 he was made managing director (taking over on the death of his father who had taken an active part in the management of the business for over 40 years), and in 1938 Chairman. He was at the helm to his death.

Eric must have been a dominant and thrusting figure as his obituary implies:

'In 1916 ... the firm of H & G Simonds, Ltd, controlled between 300-350 licensed properties, and one brewery, all situated in the Home Counties. By last year these figures had risen to 1400 licenced properties and four breweries. In September, 1902, the

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<sup>113</sup> Appendix II List of Licensed Properties, Autumn 1958.

Company's assets totalled more than £778,000 (£41,864,180) but September, 1951, showed assets of nearly 10 ½ million pounds (£175 million).'<sup>114</sup>

The obituary goes on to say that Mr Simonds was 'the inspiration and driving force'.

In 1919 George Crake's Tamar Brewery at Devonport was purchased from the Crake family, including 27 licensed houses for £65,000 (£1,435,200) (BM 2-6-19). It is not explained why Simonds chose to purchase a brewery so far from its home area but it may have had something to do with experience of naval contracts at Plymouth. Devon was to feature in the firm's plans increasingly over the years, particularly south Devon.

Mackeson (of sweet stout fame) of Hythe in Kent was acquired in early 1920 for £285,000 (£5,452,050), partly financed by a loan of £150,000 (£2,869,500) from Barclays bank (BM 10-3-20); the number of outlets is not mentioned. Simonds had a depot at nearby Sandgate (sold in 1921) and this again might explain in part a move well away from the home area. In any event this purchase does not seem to have fitted into the longer term plans of Simonds, as Mackeson was sold on in 1929 to Jude, Hanbury and Co Ltd of Canterbury. The sale price showed a 50% net profit on net cost (BM 3-4-29).

A condition of this sale was that there was an agreement not to compete with Mackeson for free trade in Kent east of a line just to the west of Hastings ie virtually the whole of Kent; Simonds seems to have had no presence in Kent thereafter. This agreement, a restrictive trade practice, was one of several that appear in the BMs over time. Such practices disappeared officially after the passing of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1956 which was designed to increase competition by outlawing such practices.

Fitting in more with expansion in the home area was the takeover of the South Berkshire Brewery, Newbury, in August 1920 for £65,000 (£1,243,450) plus £10,000 (£191,300) compensation to directors and officials of the company. Unlike the Crake and Mackeson purchases, which were outright, this was the purchase of ordinary shares only, not the preference shares, and so the South Berkshire Brewery continued as a separate entity until it went into voluntary liquidation in 1936. The effect of such an arrangement (and this occurred in later Simonds' takeovers) is that the firm taken over may carry on purchasing properties in its own name and the parent company receives dividends on its shareholding in that firm, not the full

profits, until voluntary liquidation is undertaken. When this company was acquired it had 128 licenced properties but by 1936 had 142, including four off licences.<sup>115</sup>

This company, renamed the South Berkshire Brewery in 1913, was based in Newbury and was the result of an amalgamation of two Newbury breweries in 1897, later on acquiring four other concerns, two in Newbury, one in Hungerford and one in Reading (1910). The Reading concern was Blandy, Hawkins and Co., Castle Brewery, Bridge Street, next to Simonds on the west side of the street. Brewing ceased here and at one of the two Newbury breweries in 1920 but brewing continued in Newbury until 1939 in the other brewery there.<sup>116</sup> The acquisition of this brewery company strengthened Simonds' position considerably in south west Berkshire and gave a greater presence in north Hampshire and east Wiltshire. Several pubs were also acquired in and around Reading and in south east Berkshire (the documents indicate that the pub closest to where I was brought up, the Green Man, Easthampstead, which is still there, was acquired by the South Berkshire Brewery in August, 1913).

A further foray was made into Devon in 1926 when the Tavistock Brewery, Johnstone and Johnstone, was purchased with two pubs for £4,500 (£124,965) (BM 4-10-26) but the brewery and plant was sold very shortly after for £1,050 (£29,159) (BM 13-1-27).

In 1929 further enquiries were to be made about Hunts Cider Brewery at Crabbs Park, Paignton (BM 7-10-29). Later in October, 1929 it was agreed to purchase Hunt's for £127,000 (£3,707,130), with about 30 licenced houses at places such as Dartmouth, Ashburton, Torquay, Totnes, Buckfastleigh, Teignmouth, Newton Abbot and Paignton. Not only was this another foray into south Devon, but this time cider capacity was purchased.

In a 1931 article a reference to the cider works speaks of 'Hunt's Glorious Devon Cider' (presumably an advertising slogan) and mentions a large orchard acreage attached, with supplies of apples brought in as well.<sup>117</sup>

During the early 1930's there was considerable investment in machinery and buildings at Crabbs Park Cider Factory - £20,000 (£660,000) – on several occasions, but by late 1934 consideration was being given to selling it on to Whiteways Cyder Co Ltd. A BM (5-11-34) states that the Managing Director had sold the cider factory and about 44 acres of land adjoining (orchards) to

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<sup>114</sup> Hop Leaf Gazette, Autumn 1953 pp. 308. 'Death of the Chairman'.

<sup>115</sup> BA/C/96 Conveyances re acquisitions of other breweries.

<sup>116</sup> L Richmond and A Turton (eds) The Brewing Industry – A Guide to Historical Records(1990) p. 306.

Whiteways, a Devon company, for £34,000 (£1,147,840) plus the value of the stock of cider held. The licenced houses were not sold off nor was all the land at Crabbs Park because BM entries on several occasions in the 1940s and 1950s indicate plots of land being sold off there, the last entry being a BM of 9-11-59. Crabbs Park is now part of the Roselands housing estate, a large suburban development on the west side of Paignton.<sup>118</sup>

As part of the deal with Whiteways, for a seven year period after the sale, 50% below the lowest free trade terms for all cider purchased from that company was allowed to Simonds. It is interesting to note that Whiteways Cyder is on the late 1950's Simonds' price list (Plate 14).

In 1930 Simonds' looked eastwards and in June of that year purchased Ashby's Staines Brewery together with Wheeler's Wycombe Breweries (High Wycombe) which Ashby's had acquired in October, 1929; the price was £750,000 (£22,657,500) for the ordinary shares plus £90,000 (£2,718,900) compensation to directors and staff (BM 28-4-30). This was a major acquisition, the two breweries having a combined total of 333 pubs.<sup>119</sup> Ashby's, which brought more outlets in to Simonds than Wheelers, had most of its estate in west Middlesex and adjacent parts of Surrey with a number of east Berkshire properties, whilst Wheeler's was mostly in south Buckinghamshire.<sup>120</sup> Considering the economic conditions of the time unemployment here was low by comparison with conditions elsewhere and the greater London market was growing. Ashby's went into voluntary liquidation in 1936, Wheeler's in 1950. Brewing ceased at Staines and High Wycombe in 1931 but bottling was carried out in Staines and there was a mineral water manufacturing plant there; it became a storage and distribution depot as well. In 1933 it was reported that several Wheeler's pubs had been closed, others remodelled and a number entirely rebuilt on the old sites or 'removed to more congenial areas'.<sup>121</sup>

Almost simultaneously Simonds took over the Newbury Brewery in July, 1930 by acquiring all the issued shares of this company. The brewery was the oldest in Newbury, having been established in 1608, and the last brew was on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1930.<sup>122</sup> Simonds acquired 36 fully licensed houses in Newbury and south west Berkshire and adjacent parts of north Hampshire and east Wiltshire, strengthening its position in the area.

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<sup>117</sup> HLG, April 1931 p. 405.

<sup>118</sup> Information from Strategic Services Directorate, Torbay Council.

<sup>119</sup> HLG, January 1931 p. 205.

<sup>120</sup> BA/C/96.

<sup>121</sup> HLG, March 1933 p. 277.

<sup>122</sup> HLG, November 1930, p. 85.

Bristol was a major urban area further to the west, as opposed to the south west, than Simonds had supplied previously apart from a small trade in South Wales. In 1934 the purchase of W J Rogers' Jacob Street Brewery in the centre of Bristol took place, £40,000 (£1,350,400) being paid for the ordinary shares and most of the preference shares. When the company went into voluntary liquidation in 1938 63 pubs were recorded, virtually all obtained before 1934, 27 being in Bristol with 11 in the surrounding area and 25 in South Wales, here with a concentration (10) in the Neath area; there were 17 off licences, 16 of which were in Bristol.<sup>123</sup>

Although national economic conditions were improving in 1934 purchases of outlets in Bristol, much less South Wales, could not be regarded as buying into areas of modest prosperity. Furthermore some of the South Wales outlets were scattered and were a long way from the brewery. Rogers did, however, supply other South Wales outlets. The other problem with Rogers was that its properties were in a 'very poor state of repair' (BM 17-12-34). Brewing ceased in Bristol on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1952 after 107 years production but bottling continued there until 1959.<sup>124</sup>

After the Rogers acquisition it was stated that Simonds now had over 1000 licensed properties under its control.<sup>125</sup>

In the nineteenth century Newbury had been a brewing centre, albeit on a minor scale nationally, with ten small breweries. By 1935 only one remained, J Adnams and Son (founded 1809), and this business was acquired with its three licenced outlets, by Simonds' subsidiary, South Berkshire Brewery, in early 1936. Thus in one way or another most of Newbury's breweries (6) had ultimately come to be acquired by Simonds, Ushers of Trowbridge acquiring two others.<sup>126</sup>

Simonds was still looking for further acquisitions and in 1937 moved into an area adjacent to its trading area, the mid Cotswolds and higher reaches of the Thames Valley, by purchasing outright (via a share exchange) the shares of the Cirencester Brewery Ltd, first established in 1798. The output of the brewery was about 9000 barrels a year on takeover and brewing then ceased. The number of pubs acquired was 93 (BM 5-10-36).

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<sup>123</sup> BA/C/96.

<sup>124</sup> HLG, Spring 1953.

<sup>125</sup> HLG, March 1935, p. 273.

<sup>126</sup> N Barber, A Century of British Brewers 1890-1990 (1994), p. 4.



Lakeman's Brewery at Brixham was obtained for £221,000 (£6,795,750), the acquisition occurring in November 1937 (BM 14-4-38). This brought another 48 on licences (two of which were cider houses) and three off licences to Simonds, almost all of which were in south Devon (Brixham, Dartmouth, Teignmouth and Totnes had particular concentrations), with a very few in Cornwall.<sup>127</sup> Given the brewing facilities at Tamar Brewery Devonport and the existing estate in south Devon this move was a very logical one.

R H Stiles and Co, Bridgend was purchased just after, in February 1938, for a sum of £62,500 (£1,921,875). The 29 pubs were situated in Bridgend, with some in the mining area to the north and some in the Vale of Glamorgan and on the coast to the south; all in all, a compact trading area.<sup>128</sup> The logic of acquiring Stiles' seems to have been that the Bristol brewery (Rogers) had been supplying beer to these pubs for many years.<sup>129</sup> Even in the late 1930's much of South Wales was still very depressed economically but later, with the war and the post war periods, coal and steel did very well. This was a market of heavy beer consumption which was to prosper in due course. A new issue of shares was utilised, in part, to finance the acquisition of Lakeman's and Stiles'.<sup>130</sup>

A final acquisition occurred before World War II, that of J L Marsh and Sons Ltd Blandford Forum for £30,000 (£922,500) (BM 7-11-38). Dorset was a county in which Simonds had no presence and this was a gap between Hampshire and Devon in the firm's drive towards the south west. The number of pubs acquired was low – only eight – and all were in a sparsely populated agricultural area of low wages: three were in Blandford and the other five in surrounding villages. Not surprisingly Simonds later sold these to another brewer, Brutton, Mitchell and Toms of Chard in 1950 (BM 2-10-50).

Acquisition activity ceased with the onset of hostilities but recommenced even before the war had finished. Simonds had entered the war a major regional brewer with an estate stretching from London to east Cornwall, but the firm was still keen to grow further by external means.

The prime centre in north Wiltshire was Swindon which, like other Victorian mushroom towns (Barrow, Burton, Cardiff, Crewe, Middlesbrough), had grown rapidly from a small settlement to a major town in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in this case based around the workshops of the GWR. Simonds had a very small foothold in this urban market by the 1890's but it had

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<sup>127</sup> BA/C/96.

<sup>128</sup> BA/C/93 Details of Stiles' estate.

<sup>129</sup> HLG, January 1938 p. 183.

never been developed. Some rural north Wiltshire pubs had been obtained by the purchase of the Cirencester Brewery in 1937 but with the outright purchase of R B Bowly and Company in Swindon in April, 1945 - 52 licenced properties in all – a much greater presence there was gained.<sup>131</sup> Brewing ceased straight away, Reading and Bristol supplying what now became the Swindon depot at the old brewery.

Basingstoke lies in north Hampshire about 18 miles south west of Reading. Simonds had had a number of pubs within north Hampshire since the end of the nineteenth century all along the way to the Surrey border. John May and Co of Basingstoke (established 1750) was purchased outright by Simonds in February 1947 and 94 licenced properties were added to Simonds' total – now 1295 – nearly all the pubs being in Hampshire.<sup>132</sup> Brewing ceased early in 1949, supplies of beer coming from Reading (BM 21-2-49). There had been a marriage between a daughter of John Simonds, Banker of Reading, and a May many decades previously and one of the Ashby's had married a Miss May.

Simonds had built up a modest estate in South Wales prior to the war. Now that economic conditions had vastly improved and the demand for coal and steel was very high there was logic in expanding this estate. There had been enquiries in late 1948 concerning Phillips and Sons, Newport, and in February 1949 the shares of the business were purchased outright via an exchange of shares.<sup>133</sup> Most of Phillips' 123 pubs were in the mining valleys of west Monmouthshire to the north of Newport and in and around the town. Brewing carried on at Newport and by the end of 1949 the BMs indicate discussion as to whether it would not be more economic to close the Bristol brewery facilities and concentrate the production at Newport. After further discussions in the early 1950's this is what happened although it was recognised that there would be increased transport costs and additional capital expenditure on vehicles to service a wider geographical area; but overall a net saving to the company. All of South Wales and the Bristol area were supplied from the beginning of 1953 from Newport and the Cirencester area from Reading via the Swindon depot.

All the final acquisitions of Simonds, in the fifties, took place in south Devon and in Cornwall. The firm paid £200,000 cash (£4,100,000) for 27 licenced properties of C W Blundell (Plymouth) Ltd and the associated South Devon Brewery Ltd (Kingsbridge) at the end of 1950,

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<sup>130</sup> HLG, June 1938 p. 444.

<sup>131</sup> HLG, March 1946, p.71.

<sup>132</sup> HLG, June 1947, p. 125.

<sup>133</sup> HLG, Spring 1953, p. 12.

physical possession taking place in early 1951 (BM 1-3-51). In 1951 the old established wine and spirit business of R Grant & Sons, Torquay was also purchased.

In late 1952 agreement was reached on the purchase of all the share capital of Pool and Son, Penzance in return for £180,000 (£3,099,600) of 5% cumulative preference shares (BM 5-1-53). In an article headed 'Into the Cornish Riviera' the HLG informed its readers that 30 licenced properties had been taken over in a very desirable holiday area.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, in 1954, the Octagon Brewery, Plymouth was acquired, financed by an issue of debenture stock. On completion of the purchase in December of that year 49 houses in and around Plymouth were added to the Simonds' estate.<sup>135</sup> Later, all brewing activity in Plymouth was to be concentrated in the Tamar Brewery, which was partly rebuilt (it had been damaged during the Plymouth blitz in 1941 and brewing had ceased for some time (BM 28-4-41)), and the Octagon Brewery closed.<sup>136</sup>

These further acquisitions in the south west were built on the presence of Simonds in the area since 1919 and the fact that there was an increasing population in south Devon, particularly in the incipient Torbay mini conurbation. In the 1950's that area and Cornwall were extremely popular with British holidaymakers (before cheap holidays in Spain and elsewhere). The relative isolation and much smaller population of north Devon seems not to have had great appeal for Simonds and its estate there was always to remain small.

Commenting on H & G Simonds of the 1930's, 'one of the most rapidly expanding businesses', Vaizey states: 'Thus, under the impulse of efficient management and brewing, with the use of road transport, Simonds became a leading brewer in the South and West'.<sup>137</sup>

Appendix II shows in some detail the size and disposition of Simonds' tied estate in the autumn of 1958. The influence of the many acquisitions outside the home area since 1919 may be clearly seen although Reading and south east Berkshire still have between them 12.5% of the estate.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> HLG, Spring 1953, p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> HLG, Winter 1954 p. 2.

<sup>136</sup> HLG, Autumn 1959, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> J, Vaizey, The Brewing Industry 1886-1951 (1960), p. 30.

<sup>138</sup> Appendix II Berkshire: the Forest, Reading Borough and Reading County Licensing Divisions have 142 pubs between them (off licences ignored).

The local Reading market continued to expand in population terms post 1919, from 92,250 in 1921 to 120,000 in 1961.<sup>139</sup> During the interwar period and up to 1961 there was considerable suburban development outside the county borough boundaries adding substantial population, notably to the east and south east, Earley and Woodley, and with ribbon building towards Wokingham. This last started to expand from the mid 50's and nearby Bracknell New Town – to the east of Wokingham - was well under way by 1961.

The discussion of the last few pages has featured only the successful takeovers since 1919. As with the earlier period up to 1919 many discussions and negotiations took place about and with other breweries and, having given examples in much detail of the earlier period, it would now be tedious to give a complete list. It is however worth mentioning some examples.

In 1923 Simonds looked at Wadworth's of Devizes 'which was offered to us' (BM 9-7-23). The offer was declined because the price asked was judged to be too expensive. Nearly 30 years later: 'We have been offered ... a controlling interest in Wadworth and Co Ltd' (BM 14-7-52). Nothing came of this. Wadworth – originator of the well known nationally marketed 6X premium bitter – is still an independent brewery based in Devizes.

Simonds itself was stalked in 1926: 'A suggestion from the Managing Director of Messrs Samuel Allsopp and Sons for the purchase of our shares was considered and it was decided that we decline to enter into any negotiations' (BM 4-1-26). Allsopp later did suggest the possibility of merging interests with its New Victoria Brewery and the Tamar Brewery in Plymouth, but nothing transpired (BM 5-9-32).

Morrells Brewery, Oxford was considered for purchase in 1928 (BM 23-4-28) but was not pursued, after investigation. Until recently Morrells brewed beer at its city centre brewery – now sold – and is a pub owner only, not a brewer, at present.

In the post war period there was a possibility of Simonds becoming an important player in Sussex, following prolonged discussions with the Kemptown Brewery, Brighton (BM 20-1-47). This brewery had an estate of 195 pubs and 33 off licences, stretching coastally from Hastings to Littlehampton and inland to Uckfield and Haywards Heath, and was in a prosperous area.

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<sup>139</sup> Census Reports (HMSO) 1921, 1961.

Negotiations broke down in June 1947 (BM 30-6-47) because Simonds felt that the price being asked was too great.<sup>140</sup>

There are references over the years to breweries in South Wales but, apart from the acquisitions at Bridgend and Newport, nothing further came of these. In 1951 William Hancock, a major South Wales brewer based in Cardiff, did suggest 'an amalgamation of our South Wales interests' (BM 22-10-51). Nothing further is recorded.

Simonds did take some interest in other Berkshire brewers – for example, Burge and Company, Windsor (BM 9-2-31) and Nicholson, Maidenhead (BM 2-1-56) – but these were later acquired by other brewers, Meux and Courage respectively. Simonds never had a particularly marked presence in the Windsor/Maidenhead town areas of the county. Of the Reading brewers noted in 1915 (Above p. 46) Dymore Brown was obtained by Morland of Abingdon in 1927 and brewing ceased, Fergusons was taken over by Morland in 1943 (brewing had ceased in 1914 and beer had been supplied to the firm by Morland subsequently) and S H Higgs in nearby Castle Street (8 pubs) ceased brewing on being taken over by Wethered of Marlow in 1953.<sup>141,142</sup> After that date only Simonds brewed in Reading. There is no evidence that Simonds even contemplated taking over these much smaller local rivals.

Apart from the acquisition of tied estates by taking over other brewers, Simonds was still purchasing individual houses up to early 1960, as the BMs testify at length. New pub sites were also purchased but not always used.<sup>143</sup> New pubs were built from time to time to take into account population shifts and post war rebuilding, notably in Plymouth. In 1953, for example, two new pubs were built, one in Bracknell and one in High Wycombe and in 1956/57 six new pubs were under construction, three in Plymouth, one in Reading, one in Slough and one in Newport.<sup>144</sup>

Issues of the Hop Leaf Gazette in the 1930's often show photographs of improved public houses, and this was another area in which Simonds invested as has been already noted of an early period in the firm's history.

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<sup>140</sup> BA/C/90 Kemptown Brewery file.

<sup>141</sup> Barber, British Brewers, p. 4.

<sup>142</sup> TAB Corley, 'The Old Breweries of Berkshire, 1741-1984, Berkshire Archaeological Journal, 71, 1981-82, pp. 85-87.

<sup>143</sup> I remember one such at Handpost Corner, south of Wokingham on the A321, which was purchased in 1936 (BM 17-8-36) and which had a board saying this was a site for a new Simonds' pub; the site was still empty in 1960.

<sup>144</sup> BA/C/59 Annual Reports 1953, 1957.

Pub closures have always taken place, and indeed it has been public policy in the UK to reduce the number of on licences which are open to the general public (but not private members' clubs or proprietary clubs). References in the BMs early in the twentieth century show that Simonds closed pubs under the aegis of the 1904 Act but there are virtually no further references to pub closures until the 1950's. In the early 1950's it became official company policy to close down unremunerative outlets and from 1952 to 1960 closures became a regular feature of the BMs. As a BM (14-1-52) puts it: '... that the Estates Committee be instructed to continue the disposal of unremunerative properties as approved by the Board as fast as practicable'.

Table II indicates the number of disposals mentioned in the BMs (there may have been more) between January 1952 and early May 1960.

**Table II**

**Disposal of licenced houses by county, 1952-60**

Berkshire	64
Buckinghamshire	26
Cornwall	4
Devon	16
Glamorganshire	4
Gloucestershire	21
Hampshire	30
Middlesex	1
Monmouthshire	7
Oxfordshire	8
Surrey	8
Wiltshire	14
Total	203

Source: BA/C/6, BA/C/7, BA/C/8, BA/C/105, Board Minutes.

Most of these outlets were in rural areas and would have been sold on as delicensed properties (probably, one suspects, with a restrictive covenant in the property deeds forbidding the use of the property as licenced premises in the future).

Every year saw some disposals, from 22 in 1952 to 8 in 1960, 1955 (49) and 1956 (31) being the peak years. There is no doubt that the sale of these properties generated a considerable amount

of cash for Simonds whilst at the same time leading to cost reductions. The sale of properties in the five years up to 30-9-1958 produced £900,000 (£14,220,000 at the 1955 valuation of the pound), this being used for capital expenditure (renovation of property, acquisition etc).<sup>145</sup> The effect on overall sales was doubtless minimal because of the location of the outlets: 'The sale of unremunerative and redundant licenced properties shows no apparent decline in our public house trade'.<sup>146</sup>

Off licences were gradually being purchased over the years because it was recognised that social habits were changing, with a trend towards drinking at home. These came to trade under the name Arthur Cooper, a firm Simonds had taken over in the Market Place, Reading.<sup>147</sup>

A Hotel and Catering Department was established in 1935 and by 1937 16 managed hotels were advertised under this heading.<sup>148</sup> The Department had also been set up to assist catering in tenanted houses, a sign of the future. This number of hotels had risen to 36 by 1949; not all the hotels were residential, some being classified as such solely for their catering facilities.<sup>149</sup> There were six residential hotels in south Devon, with Paignton having three.

The free trade was also being developed as well as the tied estate. Even in 1910 it was said; '... the company appears to depend to a greater extent than usual on "free trade"'.<sup>150</sup>

A Canvas Department had been established predominantly to serve the requirements of the Army. Waggon loads of tents and equipment followed units from place to place during training and other operations. The Hop Leaf Gazette regularly carried articles in the 1930's about the supply of beer to annual Army camps – for example, the heading of one article reads: '4<sup>th</sup> Division Concentration, East Anglia, 1930. H & G Simonds' Beers much in Evidence. Smart Work by Men of the Canvas Department'.<sup>151</sup> Over time, however, as the Army moved into huddled accommodation the Canvas Department looked more to civilian events (although it always had had some civilian work) such as agricultural, flower and horse shows, race meetings, sports meetings and exhibitions of various kinds and theatres. The Canvas Department supplied the marquees of various sizes, canvas chairs, tables, stillages for draught beer and glasses. In the

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<sup>145</sup> LMA 2305/19/10 Memorandum of Information (dated 9-11-59) concerning Barclay Courage merger.

<sup>146</sup> BA/C/59 Annual Report 1953.

<sup>147</sup> Lewis Cooper, Wine and Spirit Merchant, Market Place, Reading is recorded in Harrod's Directory 1876.

<sup>148</sup> HLG, September 1937, p. 625.

<sup>149</sup> HLG, December 1949, p. 60.

<sup>150</sup> The Investors Guardian, 29-1-10, p. 132.

<sup>151</sup> HLG, December 1930, pp. 129-131.



1950's the Bristol depot served the Bath and West, Royal Devon and Three Counties (Malvern) Shows and race meetings at Taunton, Bath, Cheltenham and Wincanton.<sup>152</sup>

There is little reference to railway refreshment rooms after 1919 but a BM does say that the firm hoped to obtain a contract for supplying refreshment rooms and restaurant cars 'on the Western and Southern sections of British Railways' (19-6-50) and a later BM (18-12-50) says that Simonds' beer 'will be sold at an additional 100 stations from 1-1-51'. From May 1954 beer is to be sold in 135 BR refreshment rooms (BM 20-4-54).

The firm was approached by Butlin's (BM 2-10-50) for a loan of £200,000 (£4,100,000) on security of some of Butlin's properties and sole supply of beer to the holiday camps (amounting to 7,500 barrels a year). This was turned down as being uneconomical because of transport and supervision costs involved at the height of the (Canvas Department) season.

There is a small supply of loans to private members' clubs recorded in the BMs, with an increase in the late 1950's, mostly to South Wales clubs. There are loans to two hoteliers on the Isle of Wight (both Cowes) in 1954 and 1955 to tie their trade.

Gourvish and Wilson calculated that in 1948/49 Simonds had 37% of its barrelage in the free trade, a higher percentage than most of the 22 brewers shown in their table.<sup>153</sup>

Unlike most other sizeable British brewers Simonds ventured abroad, not only in sales of cask and bottled beer (which a number of brewers did involve themselves with), but also in joint ventures. A brewery was established in Malta in 1929 with Farsons Ltd and this later merged with Cisk, a local competitor, in 1947. A new brewery was built in 1950.<sup>154</sup> The supply of beer to the British forces was a major market. Courage still had shares in this business up to 1986.<sup>155</sup>

In 1948 Simonds purchased a large holding in East African Breweries Ltd, Kenya and Tanganyika. In the longer term this did not prove a very successful venture and large quantities of shares were sold off in the 1950's raising £370,000 (£5,846,000 at the 1955 pound valuation) between 1952 and 1958.<sup>156</sup> Although there had been talk of disinvesting in Malta (BM

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with N Dursley, an employee at various Simonds' depots from leaving school (1947) to retirement; he was in sales for much of the 1950's.

<sup>153</sup> Gourvish and Wilson, British Brewing, p. 436 (Table 10.6).

<sup>154</sup> HLG, Autumn 1953, pp. 25-28 The Malta Story.

<sup>155</sup> K Thomas, 'The Adventures of H & G Simonds Limited in Malta and East Africa', Business Archives, 62 (1991), p. 54. This article gives a very comprehensive account of Simonds' overseas brewing ventures.

<sup>156</sup> LMA 2305/19/10.

April/May 1951) this did prove to be a financially sound investment in the long run. There was consideration given in 1952 'to be associated with the construction of a brewery in British Guyana' (BM 13-10-52), but nothing came of this.

Simonds and Simonds – Farsons had obtained a substantial interest in Saccone and Speed Ltd, 'the world-renowned firm of wine and spirit merchants and shippers and tobacco merchants', with a head officer in Gibraltar and various branches elsewhere, in 1944/45.<sup>157</sup> This firm built a new bottling factory, completed in 1949, to bottle beer brewed in Reading and shipped out.<sup>158</sup> British forces were again the major market.

After the First World War bottled beer came increasingly into vogue and this is reflected in statements made by the Company Chairman at Annual General Meetings in the twenties and thirties. For example, 'A marked feature of the trade of the year has been the enormous increase in the sale of bottled beers ... our output in twelve months amounted to no less than 31 million bottles'<sup>159</sup>: In the following year the figure quoted was 32.75 million bottles and by the 1934-35 year 47.2 million bottles.<sup>160, 161</sup>

Simonds had recognised this trend in the mid 1920's. In 1926 a tender for £24,594 (£682,975) was accepted for the construction of new bottling stores at Reading plus £15,000 (£416,550) for machinery (BM 6-12-26). This new factory, capable of filling 8000-9000 bottles per hour, was constructed on the north side of Fobney Street behind the existing Bottling Department built in 1910 (Figs 6, 7). This area, which had been low lying, had had to be built up before 1926 with large quantities of ash and broken bottles to bring it up to the levels of the surrounding ground.<sup>162</sup>

John A'Larders Buildings (Figs 6, 7), which adjoined this new construction, were purchased for additional space from Reading Municipal (General) Charities in 1935 (BM 30-9-35). A new reinforced concrete bottling store was constructed in 1938 for £3,374 (£103,751). Simonds now occupied all the land north of Fobney Street to the back of the premises on the south side of Castle Street.

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<sup>157</sup> HLG, March 1946, p. 71, reporting the company Annual General Meeting for 1944/45, held in December 1945.

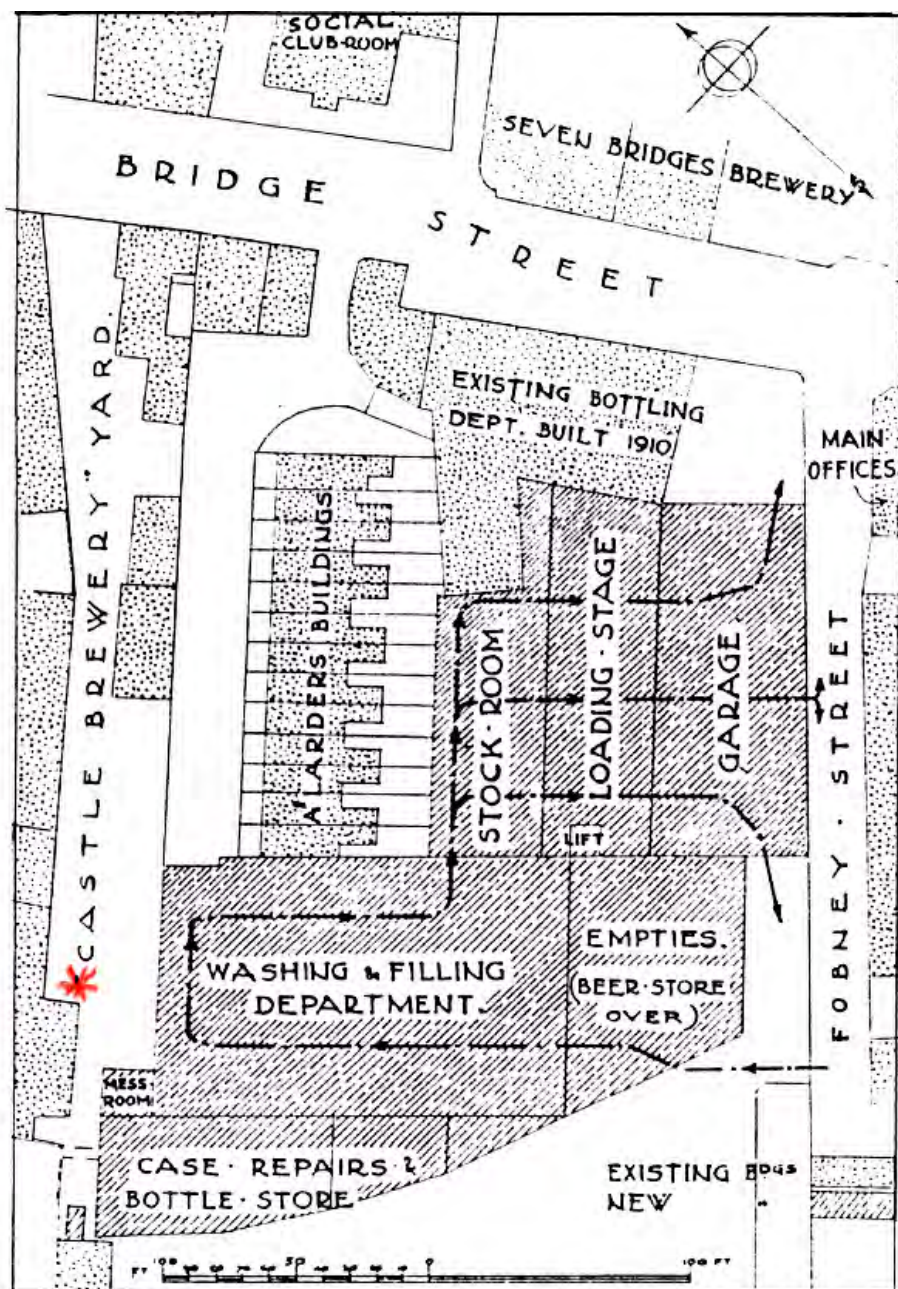
<sup>158</sup> HLG, Spring 1995, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>159</sup> HLG, January 1929, p. 195. Chairman at AGM for 1927/28.

<sup>160</sup> HLG, January 1930, p. 185.

<sup>161</sup> HLG, January 1936, p. 154.

<sup>162</sup> HLG, October 1927, pp. 707-719.



Plan of site 1927, showing the new Bottling Store and the course of the Beer, etc., indicated by the arrowed line, Main Offices, Castle Brewery Yard, Social Club and part of the Brewery. (HLG, October 1927)

## FIG.6 SITE OF BOTTLING FACILITIES

\* Former Blandy, Hawkins and Co. brewery



Simmonds (sic) Street (Plate 11), running at right angles from Fobney Street, now crosses the former site of these bottling facilities and the area is covered with new residential development.



(6-10-00)

#### **Plate 11 Off Fobney Street**

In the mid 1930's canning of beers was first starting nationally and Simonds started to can the SB ale (Plate 12).<sup>163</sup> Canning was subcontracted out, however, to Hibberts, although the Board did consider installing a canning plant in 1958 (BM 23-6-58). The importance that the firm gave to the SB brand is well illustrated by the advertisement in the Hop Leaf Gazette (Plate 13).<sup>164</sup> Many similar advertisements were used throughout the 1930's.

Container beer ie brewery conditioned keg beer as opposed to 'real' ale., was introduced in 1957 (BM 8-4-57), to be sold in aluminium containers and known as K B. It was in the late fifties that keg beer became widely introduced in Britain.

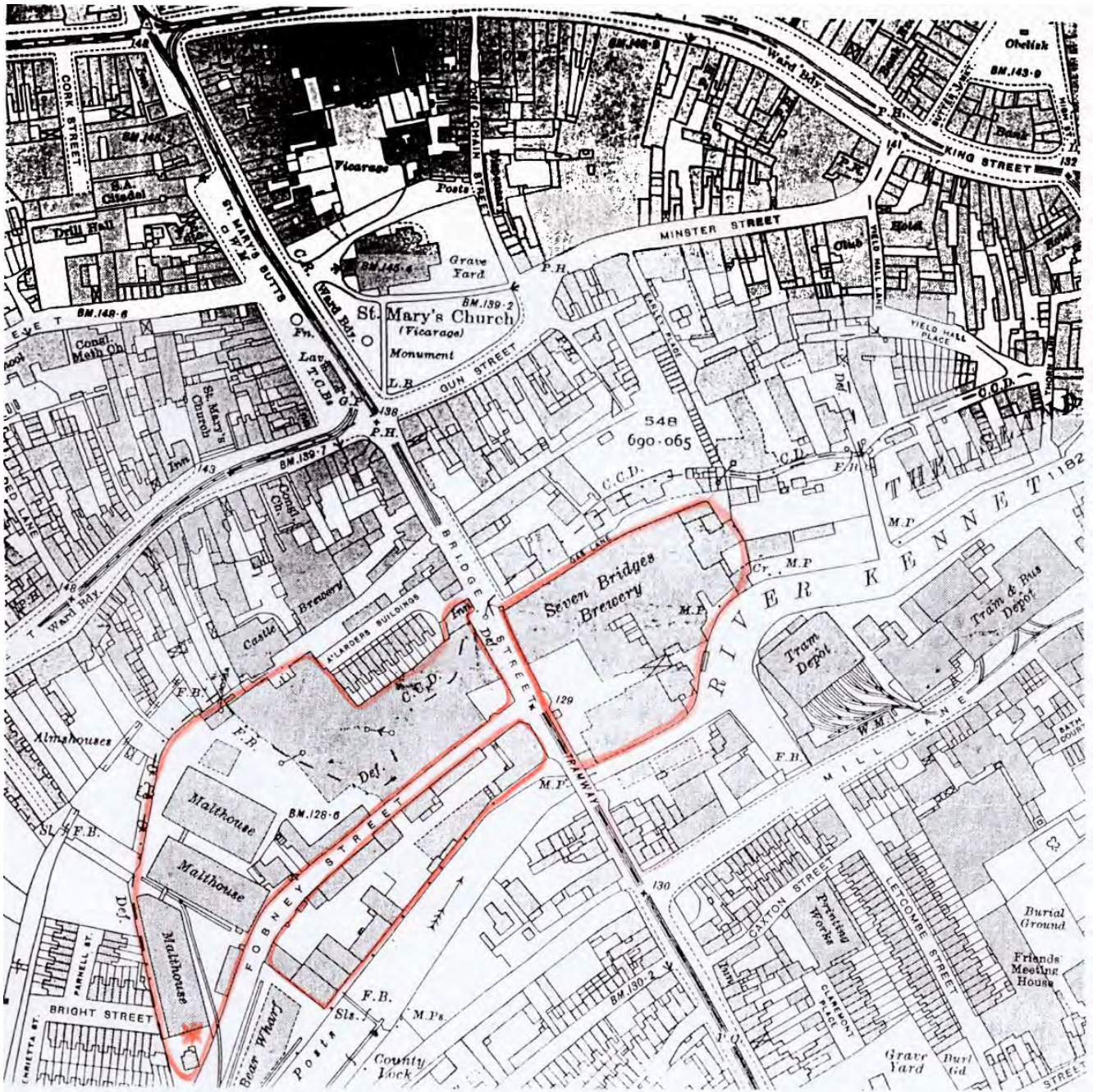
At this time there is virtually no mention whatsoever of lager in company documents. However Beck's Brewery, Bremen had made a proposal for Simonds to market that firm's lager but it was decided not to enter into an arrangement (BM 26-11-56). Simonds had been bottling lager for the London brewers, Barclay Perkins, and it was decided to continue this agreement (BM 29-4-57).

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<sup>163</sup> HLG, January 1937, p. 164.

<sup>164</sup> HLG July 1935, p. 457.





Ordnance Survey Berkshire 37/3 Revision of 1931 Scale: 25 inches to the mile

**FIG.7 SIMONDS' BREWERY SITES 1931**  
 (ringed )  
 \* Malthouse e



The range of beers produced by the company is well illustrated in the late 1950's price list (Plate 14) which does not mention lager. Cask beers were produced at all three of the breweries, Reading, Newport and Devonport, but bottled beer only at Reading; bottling did take place at the other two breweries, the beer being sent down in road tankers from Reading to be bottled. There were local variations in cask beer. The price list is a Bristol area one since it quotes BA Bitter Ale whilst in Newport AK bitter was produced.



One of the Cans.

(HLG, December 1937)

PLATE 12 CANNED BEER

**Stanley Baldwin**

*is the*

**Prime Minister**

*and*

**S B**

*is the*

**Prime Drink**



(HLG, July 1935)

PLATE 13 SB ADVERTISEMENT



# SIMONDS

## PUBLIC BAR PRICE LIST

### CASK BEERS

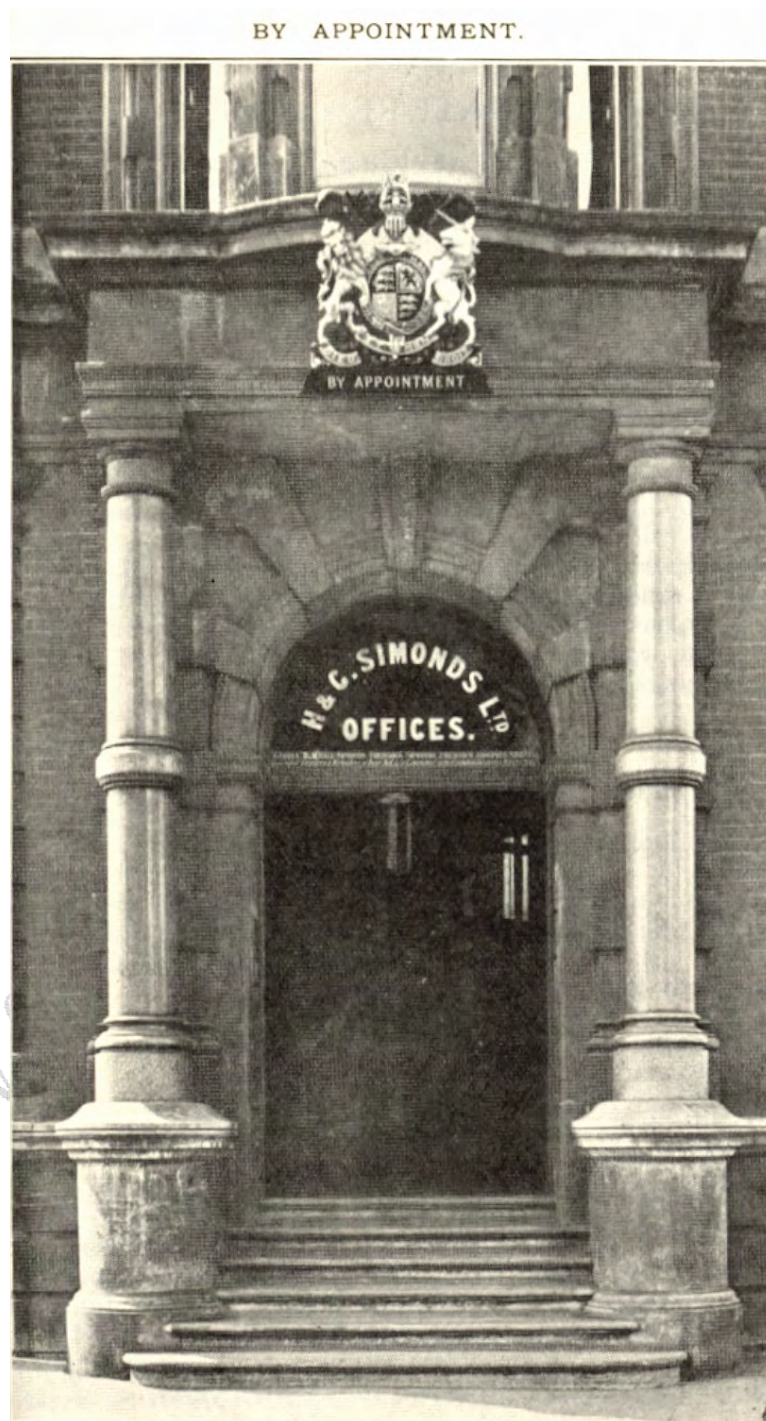
						PINT.	
						s.	d.
MILD XX	-	-	-	-	-	1	0
B.A. Bitter Ale	-	-	-	-	-	1	0
BITTER India Pale Ale	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
BEST BITTER East India Pale Ale	-	-	-	-	-	1	6

### BOTTLED BEERS & CYDER

	BOTTLE.		$\frac{1}{2}$ -BOTTLE.		NIP.	
	s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
Bitter Ale	-	1 4	-	9	-	-
"S.B." Light Ale	-	1 6	-	10	-	-
Berry Brown Ale	-	1 6	-	10	-	-
Luncheon Stout	-	1 6	-	10	-	-
<b>Tavern Export Ale</b>	-	-	1 4	-	1 0	-
Velvet Stout	-	-	1 4	-	-	-
Old Berkshire Strong Ale	-	-	1 7 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	1 2	-
Bulldog Pale Ale	-	-	1 7 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	1 2	-
Archangel Stout	-	-	-	-	1 4	-
Whiteway's Cyder	-	-	-	8	-	-



During the inter war period a very popular bottled beer was Milk Stout, the Chairman's statement in 1928 speaking of it as '...the Company's speciality ... which has now found a ready market in all parts of the world'.<sup>165</sup> This was discontinued because of prohibition of milk products in brewing by the government as a wartime measure (BM 27-7-42); it was not resurrected post war.



The sign of the Royal Warrant appointing the firm Brewers to His Majesty The King is here seen over the main entrance to the Brewery Offices in Bridge Street. It has attracted much attention in this busy thoroughfare.

**Plate 15 The Royal Warrant**

(HLG, July 1929)

<sup>165</sup> HLG, January 1929 p. 195.

Simonds won various prizes for beer in the 1950's notably for the strong Bulldog Pale Ale (Champion's Cup Gold Medal, Brewers' Exhibition, 1950), brewed primarily for the Belgian market.<sup>166</sup>

Simonds was keen to have the Royal Warrant as a marketing device. This was received from King George 5<sup>th</sup> in 1929, from King George 6<sup>th</sup> in 1940 and from Queen Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1955 (Plate 15). There was much displeasure at the loss of the Buckingham Palace account after 50 years in 1938 but the Windsor Castle account had been retained (BM 8-8-38).

Profitability had been sustained throughout and, because of Simonds' lower exposure to heavy industrial areas in the inter war period and growing sales around London, profits kept up well then when some brewers elsewhere went through a lean period. Profits were very healthy in the forties and fifties when the economy was working at a much higher level.<sup>167</sup> Dividends to ordinary shareholders varied from 10% to 25% in the twenties, 11.5% to 18% in the thirties, 18% to 30% in the forties and 12% to 24% in the fifties.<sup>168</sup>

It was not until A J Redman became a director in 1930 that a person other than from the Simonds family had been appointed to the board.<sup>169</sup> Up to the 1950's the majority of the board was still of the Simonds family but by 1960 the family had lost its majority. In 1960 the board was chaired by General Sir Miles Dempsey who had been invited to join in 1947. Dempsey, who had been in the Royal Berkshire Regiment, had also been invited in 1953 to join the board of the East Anglian regional brewer, Greene King.<sup>170</sup> Loss of control by the Simonds family was not auspicious for the company's future.

By the end of the 1950's Simonds had become, by taking over a string of local breweries over a forty year period, a major regional brewer.

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<sup>166</sup> HLG, March 1951.

<sup>167</sup> BA/C/59 Company Annual General Meetings.

<sup>168</sup> BA/C/104.

<sup>169</sup> Redman was the Chairman of Wheeler's Wycombe Breweries and a director of Ashby's Staines Brewery.

<sup>170</sup> Gourvish and Wilson, *British Brewing*, p. 387.

## Chapter 5      Merger and demise

In 1959 Simonds decided to enter into an agreement with Courage and Barclay Ltd for a period of a year from 8<sup>th</sup> July. The agreement involved selling each others beers in their respective tied estates to the exclusion of other brewers' beers (Board Meeting 8-7-59).

Some months later a Board Meeting (29-2-60) produced this statement: 'The Board unanimously approved the terms of the announcement of a merger between Courage and Barclay Ltd and H & G Simonds Ltd dated 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1960.'

At a Board Meeting held in March 1960 the Board 'strongly and unanimously recommend you (the shareholders) to accept the proposals in order to share in the increasing benefits to be expected from the merger'. The benefits were never spelled out, but presumably they would have included greater economies of scale from a larger grouping, including rationalisation of brewing capacity, and protection that size brought in relation to other large groupings developing at that time in the industry.

By the end of April the majority of holders of Simonds' ordinary and the preference shares had accepted the offers made by Morgan Grenfell and Co Ltd with a view to implementing the merger with Courage and Barclay Ltd. In late May, because more than 90% of the holders of ordinary and preference stocks had accepted the offers, 'Section 209 of the Companies Act 1948 was being applied to acquire compulsorily the remainder of the Ordinary and Preference Stocks' (BM 23-5-60). The firm of Courage Barclay and Simonds Limited was now in being.

Barclay, Perkins of Southwark could trace its origins to 1616 but only took the name in 1781. Courage, of nearby Bermondsey, had been founded in the eighteenth century and had merged with Barclay, Perkins in 1955.<sup>171</sup> Barclay's estate was virtually all in and around London, Courage's mostly in London, Surrey and Hampshire. The Simonds' estate would add considerably to the geographical coverage of the group without too much overlap of estates overall.

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<sup>171</sup> N Barber, A Century of British Brewers 1890-1990 (1994), p. 58.

By the end of the 1950's H & G Simonds was in a strong position financially and was a regional brewer of some significance with outlets continuously from London to Penzance and Swansea. Notwithstanding inflation profits had been rising in real terms throughout the fifties.

By 30-9-59 there were 1132 outlets and 63 off licences with 17 more attached to pubs. Total sales of Simonds had risen from 405 thousand barrels in 1954 to 483 thousand barrels in 1959 mostly from the Reading, Devonport and Newport breweries (which in 1958 produced 257,000, 64,000 and 85,000 barrels respectively although none was working to capacity).<sup>172</sup> There were maltings at Reading and Newport (producing two thirds of the company's malt requirements) with bottling facilities at the three breweries and at the Staines (ex Ashby's Brewery) depot. In addition there were twelve main branch depots and nine subsidiary depots. Of the total trade 35% was free trade, with exports of 29.5 thousand barrels in 1958.<sup>173</sup>

Given the strong position of Simonds why did merger with Courage and Barclay take place? Nothing, to the best of my knowledge, has been published giving explicit reasons. There is no doubt that Simonds need not have merged had the directors decided on the status quo and the company would probably have survived more than adequately given its strengths. Greene King, of Bury St Edmunds, did not go down the merger route and is still independent today, having taken over several breweries in its history since 1799 (it now owns 1620 pubs in East Anglia, the Thames Valley and south east England<sup>174</sup>): this is a brewery which had many similarities with Simonds.

One of the unsolvable questions is what would have happened in 1959/60 had the Simonds' family still had a majority on the Board of Directors? At the Annual General Meeting of the shareholders in 1918 it was reported that three members of the family, Lieutenant G P Blackall Simonds, Major St John Quarry and Major John de Luze Simonds, had all been killed in action during the war. What effect might these younger men have had on the company had they survived?

What is quite clear is that, whatever the motives were for merger with Barclay Courage, it was from a position of strength, not weakness.

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<sup>172</sup> The ratio between draught and bottled and canned beer sales in these six years averaged 11:9.

<sup>173</sup> All the information in this paragraph is from LMA 2305/19/10, Memorandum of Information (dated 9-11-59).

<sup>174</sup> Good Beer Guide 2001 (2000, Campaign for Real Ale), p. 478.

As a postscript, brewing ceased at Bridge Street Reading in November, 1979 and the brewery was demolished in 1983 (brewing ceased at Newport in 1968 and at Devonport in 1975). On shopping expeditions to Reading in the 1950's I vividly remember the smell of brewing suffusing the atmosphere in the town centre around Broad Street, if the wind was in the right direction. The brewery, now known as the Berkshire Brewery, moved out to a site south of Reading, just to the north of the M4 close by the Basingstoke Road, (A33), construction having begun in 1976. It produces four million barrels of lager a year using water drawn from three boreholes.<sup>175</sup> The site chosen, Worton Grange, was a greenfield site with room for further development and its location, next to the M4, was ideal for transportation of raw materials and distribution of finished product. The Bridge Street site had been working to capacity, was too cramped for further development and it was thought inappropriate to have industry in the town centre, with the associated lorry traffic.<sup>176</sup>

The old brewery site, on the east side of Bridge Street, is now part of the Octagon Shopping Centre, only one building from the Simonds' era, Seven Bridges House (finally used as the Brewery Reception Centre), now extant (Plate 16).<sup>177</sup> On the west side of Bridge Street new housing occupies the area to the north of Fobney Street and the fire damaged malting lies at the west end of the street.<sup>178</sup> The area to the south, lying between Fobney Street and the Kennet, has been derelict for some time but in December 2000 housing development started.



(22-11-00)

**Plate 16 Seven Bridges House**

<sup>175</sup> Berkshire Brewery (Scottish Courage publication 1999).

<sup>176</sup> Reading's New Brewery (Courage publication 1975).

<sup>177</sup> Seven Bridges House, 19 Bridge Street, is a listed building. N Pevsner (The Buildings of England, Berkshire (1966) p. 206) attributes the building to Soane but this is not the case. The building is early nineteenth century according to Reading Borough Council Planning Department.

Simonds had a noticeable impact on land use in the south centre of Reading for approximately 180 years and it is pleasing that one or two remnants of former brewing activity are present. It is to be hoped that the fire damaged malting will not be demolished and may still be converted to apartments.

In its leader article the Hop Leaf Gazette in the Spring, 1960 edition said: ‘What is proposed is essentially a merger of two great Brewery Houses who think alike, and not a “takeover”, in which one side is blotted out’. This might have been the intention but was not the fact: Simonds symbols quickly disappeared.

Ominously, in the last issue of the Hop Leaf Gazette (Winter 1961), the advertisement on the back cover was for a bottled Courage beer (IPA) – this was the future and the Hop Leaf would have no part of it.

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<sup>178</sup> The malting is a listed building.



## APPENDIX I

### H & G Simonds: Beer Output at Reading 1837-1953 (in barrels<sup>179</sup>)

Year <sup>180</sup>	Barrels	Year	Barrels	Year	Barrels
1837	12445	1876	78230	1915	328208
1838	13200	1877	80105	1916	304045
1839	15002	1878	86984	1917	253961
1840	11366	1879	83345	1918	242203
1841	10012	1880	87386	1919	260375
1842	9733	1881	91669	1920	214507
1843	10107	1882	101510	1921	218440
1844	10946	1883	111963	1922	203271
1845	10763	1884	114042	1923	191883
1846	11967	1885 <sup>181</sup>	85915	1924	202736
1847	12311	1886	114047	1925	221244
1848	12874	1887	115742	1926	215792
1849	12543	1888	108320	1927	209826
1850	11977	1889	109259	1928	210610
1851	12474	1890	111207	1929	198595
1852	12206	1891	112751	1930	196269
1853	13174	1892	113153	1931	237791
1854	13385	1893	112269	1932	204706
1855	14074	1894	111910	1933	207819
1856	16752	1895	117245	1934	221649
1857	17558	1896	113017	1935	235435
1858	18098	1897	114023	1936	242623
1859	19394	1898	125715	1937	257015
1860	19199	1899	130175	1938	260473
1861	19777	1900	176782	1939	279736
1862	19407	1901	166687	1940	277690
1863	20802	1902	168545	1941	303219
1864	21785	1903	179761	1942	289231
1865	23862	1904	186231	1943	281674
1866	28610	1905	193386	1944	316411
1867	35410	1906	199968	1945	312970
1868	40820	1907	194764	1946	300395
1869	43920	1908	190059	1947	275036
1870	48430	1909	190711	1948	266813
1871	57906	1910	190907	1949	275517
1872	64976	1911	195342	1950	260127
1873	66491	1912	191912	1951	266258
1874	67911	1913	194830	1952	264314
1875	72650	1914	206648	1953 <sup>182</sup>	226619
				(1958 <sup>183</sup>	257000)

Source: London Metropolitan Archives 2305/60/77

<sup>179</sup> One barrel = 36 gallons.

<sup>180</sup> Calendar year to 1885.

<sup>181</sup> To September 30<sup>th</sup> only. From 1886 the figures are from 1<sup>st</sup> October in the previous year to 30<sup>th</sup> September in the year shown.

<sup>182</sup> 1953/54 11 months only. No figure for September 1954.

<sup>183</sup> LMA 2305/19/10.



## APPENDIX II

H & G SIMONDS LTD  
LIST OF LICENSED PROPERTIES  
(Published by the firm in Autumn 1958)  
By county and licensing division

	On licences	%	Off licences
<b>BERKSHIRE</b>			
Faringdon	1		
Forest (Wokingham)	42		1
Hungerford	6		
Lambourn	3		
Maidenhead Borough	2		1
Maidenhead County	3		
Moreton (Didcot/Cholsey area)	2		
Newbury Borough	28		2
Newbury County	17		
Reading Borough	73		7
Reading County	27		1
Wantage	4		
Windsor Borough	11		
Windsor County	10		
	229	20.14	12
<b>BRECONSHIRE</b>			
Brecon Borough	1		
Ystradgynlais (Upper Swansea Valley)	3		
	4	0.35	
<b>BUCKINGHAMSHIRE</b>			
Amersham	2		
Aylesbury	2		
Beaconsfield	5		
Chesham	1		
Great Missenden	1		
Marlow	3		
Princes Risborough	3		
Slough	20		2
Wycombe Borough	41		
Wycombe County	17		
	95	8.36	2
<b>CARMARTHENSHIRE</b>			
Llanelly	1		
	1	0.09	

## CORNWALL

Bodmin Borough	1		
Callington	3		
Falmouth	1		
Helston	1		
Kerrier	1		
Launceston East	1		
Penzance	20		1
St Austell and East Powder	2		
St Ives	3		
Torpoint East South	7		
Truro City and West Powder	2		
West Penwith	4		
	46	4.05	1

## DEVONSHIRE

Barnstaple Borough	4		
Bideford Borough	1		
Braunton	2		
Dartmouth	6		
Exeter City	2		
Hatherleigh	1		
Paignton	20		3
Plymouth City	61		3
Plympton	16		1
Stanborough and Coleridge (Salcombe/Kingsbridge area)	8		
Tavistock	7		
Teignbridge	14		
Torquay Borough	7		2
Totnes Borough	5		
Wonford (Exeter)	1		
	155	13.63	9

## DORSETSHIRE

Poole			1
			1

Courtesy of the  
Simonds family archives



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## GLAMORGANSHIRE

Caerphilly Higher	2		
Caerphilly Lower	3		
Cowbridge (Vale of Glamorgan)	1		
Dinas Powis (Vale of Glamorgan)	1		
Merthyr Tydfil Borough	2		
Miskin Higher (Aberdare area)	4		
Neath	2		
Neath Borough	10		
Newcastle and Ogmore (Bridgend area)	33		
Pontardawe (Lower Swansea Valley)	1		
Swansea 100	1		
Swansea Borough	5		
	65	5.72	

## GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Bristol:			
Division A (Centre and North)	24 )		2
Division B (South)	7 )	50	4
Division C (West)	12 )		1
Division D (East)	7 )		3
Cheltenham	1		
Chipping Sodbury	3		
Cirencester	32		1
Fairford	14		
Gloucester	1		1
Keynsham	1		
Lawfords Gate (South Glos.)	3		1
Northleach	2		
Tetbury	1		
Thornbury (South Glos.)	5		
Weston (Bath)	3		
	116	10.20	13

## HAMPSHIRE

Alton	1		
Andover Borough	2		1
Andover County	5		
Basingstoke	37		1
Fareham	1		
Kingsclere	19		
Newport (Isle of Wight)			1
Odiham (Aldershot/Farnborough area)	31		3
Portsmouth			1
Ringwood and Fordingbridge	2		
Southampton			1
Winchester City	4		
Winchester County	1		
	103	9.06	8

## LONDON

Gore (NW2)			1
Hampstead			1
Wandsworth	1		
Westminster	1		
	2	0.18	2

## MIDDLESEX

Brentford	15		1
Spelthorne (Feltham/Staines area)	40		1
Uxbridge	7		
Willesden	1		
	63	5.54	2

## MONMOUTHSHIRE

Bedwellty (West Mon)	17		1
Caerleon	15		
Chepstow	3		
Newport Borough	33		
Newport County	15		
Pontypool	20		
	103	9.06	1

## OXFORDSHIRE

Bampton East (West Oxon)	3		
Bampton West (West Oxon)	2		
Banbury Borough			1
Banbury and Bloxham	1		
Bullingdon (Thame area)	3		
Henley	12		
Oxford City	7		6
South Wootton	1		1
Watlington	3		
	32	2.83	8

## SOMERSET

Axbridge	1		
Bath City	6		1
Frome	1		
Long Ashton	3		
Taunton			1
	11	0.97	2

## SURREY

Chertsey	26		1
Farnham	16		1
Kingston-upon-Thames	2		
Wallington	1		
Woking	10		1
	55	4.86	3

## SUSSEX

Brighton Borough	1		1
Stevington (Shoreham)	1		
	2	0.18	1

## WILTSHIRE

Bradford-on-Avon	1		
Chippenham County	1		
Cricklade and Wootton Bassett	9		1
Devizes	1		
Everley and Pewsey	2		
Malmesbury	2		
Marlborough	8		
Salisbury	1		
Salisbury City	2		
Swindon	11		
Swindon Borough	16		5
Warminster	1		1
	55	4.84	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1137</b>		<b>72</b>

Note: In the original the name of every town or village on and off licence is given – and the full address in the case of the large towns – as well as the type of licence, Full or Beer and Wine.)

## List of sources

### 1) Primary sources: not in print.

#### a) Berkshire Record Office

D/ECG T15/1

D/EN 0/20/4

#### b) Bristol (Courage) Archives

Board minutes

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BA/C/2 11-2-1899 to 28-12-1907

BA/C/3 16-4-1917 to 7-10-1929

BA/C/4 14-10-1929 to 18-10-1937

BA/C/5 25-10-1937 to 2-9-1946

BA/C/6 9-9-1946 to 10-3-1952

BA/C/7 17-3-1952 to 24-9-1956

BA/C/8 1-10-1956 to 28-3-1960

BA/C/105 4-4-1960 to 23-5-60 (used only to this date)

NB All references in the text to BM(s) are from these sources (but see London Metropolitan Archives also).

BA/C/59 BA/C/93 BA/C/104

BA/C/90 BA/C/96

#### c) London Metropolitan Archives

Board minutes

2305/60/1 15-10-1885 to 17-1-1891

2305/60/2 11-1-1908 to 2-4-1917

NB All references in the text to BM(s) are from these sources (but see Bristol Archives also).

2305/60/10 2305/60/77 2305/60/117

2305/60/49 2305/60/79 2305/60/120

2305/60/60/1 2305/60/80/2 2305/19/10

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22. J Vaizey, The Brewing Industry 1886-1951 (1960).



23. V C H Berkshire, 1 (1906); 2 (1907).
24. G Wilson, Alcohol and the Nation (1940).

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1. Courage, Reading's New Brewery (1975).
2. Scottish Courage, Berkshire Brewery (1999).

### **Learned journals**

#### 1) Berkshire Archaeological Journal

- a) T A B Corley, 'Simonds' Brewery at Reading 1760-1960', 68 (1975/76), pp. 77-88.
- b) T A B Corley, 'The Old Breweries of Berkshire, 1741-1984', 71 (1981/82), pp. 79-88.

#### 2) Business Archives

K Thomas, 'The Adventures of H & G Simonds Limited in Malta and East Africa', 62 (1991), pp. 40-54.

#### 3) Business History

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#### 4) Economic History Review

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#### 5) The Historical Journal

P Mathias, 'The Brewing Industry, Temperance and Politics', 1 (1958), pp. 97-114.

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- 1) Brewers' Gazette.
- 2) Brewers' Guardian.
- 3) Brewers' Journal.
- 4) Brewing Trade Review.
- 5) Hop Leaf Gazette.  
(House journal of H & G Simonds Ltd, published monthly from October 1926 to December 1942, and thereafter quarterly and later tri-annually to Winter 1961.)
- 6) Investors' Guardian.
- 7) Reading Chronicle.

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(from Universal British Directory of Trade).
- 2) Dutton Allen's Directory of Oxon, Berks and Bucks 1863.
- 3) Harrod's Royal County Directory, Berkshire 1876.
- 4) Holden's Annual London and Country Directory of the United Kingdom and Wales 1811.
- 5) Kelly's Directory, Berkshire 1887, 1895, 1903, 1915.
- 6) Macauley's Berkshire Directory 1854.
- 7) Pigot and Co's Berkshire 1830, 1844.
- 8) Post Office Directory, Berkshire 1869.

## ADDENDUM

Several months after I handed in the dissertation I was fortunate to be given Eric D. Simonds' (known as Duncan) telephone number. I phoned him and, as a result, had four discussions with him at his home in Pangbourne in the first half of 2002 about the dissertation and wider issues in the brewing industry during his time in it.

Duncan was the second son of the legendary Frederick (Eric) Simonds (see dissertation pp 59-60). Duncan entered the family business from university in 1938, was made a director in 1947. He was Joint Managing Director with Richard Quarry until the merger with Courage Barclay in 1960, he served as a director on the main board of the new company until his retirement in 1977. Duncan played a very active role in the family firm (apart from six years war service), in the enlarged firm and within the industry. I found him to be a mine of information – he was very generous with his time and it was a pleasure to talk with him. He died in August 2002 (there is a full obituary in 'The Times', 26-8-02).

What follows is the outcome of various points I raised with Duncan or to which he drew my attention. I also listened to a lengthy recording (2 hours 20 minutes) he made in June, 1999 about the history of H & G Simonds Ltd which is lodged at the Reading Museum and on which I also draw.

NB All page numbers referred to below are from the dissertation unless otherwise stated.

1 p 15 W. B. Simonds' wife

The wife of William Blackall Simonds, Elizabeth, was not the daughter of Thomas May of Basingstoke. She was the daughter of a Pangbourne miller but was related to the Mays of Basingstoke.

2 p 15 Sir John Soane

The Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London has plans and correspondence relating to the construction of the brewery and family house in Seven Bridges Street.

3 p 49 Plymouth

It was the experience of naval contracts in Plymouth which lead to the purchase of George Crake's Tamar Brewery in Devonport.

4 p 49 Mackeson Purchase

There was a concentration of troops in Kent in the early 1920's, too far from Reading to supply directly, so a local brewery, Mackeson, was purchased to supply them. By the late 1920's the number of troops had fallen and so it was decided that the brewery be sold on.

5 p 53 Purchase of J. L. Marsh and Sons

This brewery was acquired because there was a gap in Simonds' estate between Hampshire and Devon and there was a military presence near Blandford Forum. However, disposal took place later because 'it was not a good purchase'.

6 p 54 Purchase of Phillips and Sons

With zoning agreements in World War II (so that there could be savings in petrol and diesel in distribution) Phillips supplied beer to Simonds' South Wales estate. The agreement finished after the war but Phillips approached Simonds to be taken over. When purchased the brewery and the tied estate were in poor condition.

7 p 55 Purchase of Pool and Son

Even before acquisition most of the beer supplied to this firm's pubs came from Simonds.

8 p 56 Morrells Brewery

In June 2002 Greene King bought the bulk of the Morrells pub company outlets in the Thames Valley (Good Beer Guide 2003, Campaign for Real Ale 2002, p 719).

9 p 57 Pub refurbishment

There was a large rebuilding programme of Ashby's and Wheeler's pubs in the 1930's.

10 p 58 Pub disposals

No new pubs were built during World War II (the last pre war new build was completed in Paignton in March 1940) and there had been lack of maintenance in the tied estate during the war years. Many pubs lacked indoor toilets and there was often lead piping carrying potable liquids. The need to tackle the backlog of maintenance and the need to modernise facilities would be very expensive and, furthermore, many rural pubs did not attract sufficient trade. As a consequence many country pubs were disposed of ('about 300') in the 1950's.

Some of the disposals did carry on as pubs. There were no restrictive covenants on these disposals and Simonds would have been prepared to sell pubs off to other brewers. Simonds

wanted the cash from the sale of those uneconomic pubs and the firm never regretted its disposal policy.

#### 11 pp 59-61 Free Trade

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> (up to merger in 1960) Simonds was very keen to develop the free trade in all its facets.

County brewers had a more difficult time than London brewers. London brewers had a large urban market on their doorstep whereas country brewers, with many rural pubs of low barrelage (where often the wife ran the pub during the day Monday to Friday as the husband went out to work to supplement the family income), had to look for other outlets beyond their tied estates. There was a strong competitive and entrepreneurial streak in the Simonds family and great efforts were made to develop such outlets.

For example, Simonds supplied the Wembley Exhibition in 1924 as the sole supplier and was active in supplying race courses; every race course in England south of Newmarket (except Sandown) was supplied at one time or another. Post World War II Simonds sponsored a race at Windsor, the one and half mile Hopleaf Handicap, from 1946 to 1954 and anecdotal evidence within the company was that this was the first race ever sponsored by a brewer. As Duncan Simonds put it: 'The object was to sell beer'.

Simonds had sold beer through the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institute) to service personnel and the tag 'NAAFI beer' did not do the firm any good – this was 'a hurdle to jump over'.

#### 12 p 63 Canned beer

The Southampton firm of Hibberts canned the beer although Simonds canned at first. Cans were very important for supplies to the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy. Experiments took place whereby bottled beer was delivered to pubs in cans but this was not popular and was discontinued.

#### 13 p 64 Range of beers

Up to the 1950's there were many local beers in the overall product range. Mild was the favourite in Reading whereas in Swindon mild was not very acceptable and a light bitter was the drink.

For clubs in the free trade beer was often adjusted to the needs of an individual club – after the beer had been brewed it might be made a little sweeter or a little darker by the brewery head cellarman prior to despatch.

14 p 67 The Belgian market

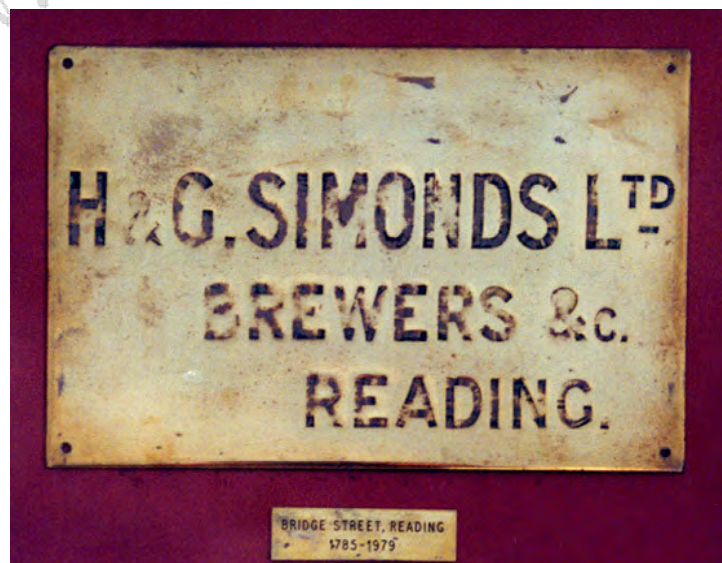
There was a significant trade with Belgium post World War II notably for strong beers (via the Belgian importer John Martin).

15 pp 69-72 Merger

Brewers were really large property owners with a brewery attached – this was the inevitable outcome of developing and nurturing a tied estate. The brewery properties were invariably of greater value than that shown on company balance sheets. This was brought home to Duncan Simonds by the sale of the Oatsheaf, next to Marks and Spencer in Broad Street, Reading, in the mid 1950's, for the expansion of the store. The pub was sold for the then unbelievable sum of £160,000 (£2,395,200: December 2000 value assuming a 1956 sale).

The reason for a merger with another firm was because of fear of assault by property dealers who could size up the undervalued property assets only too well and that being part of a larger concern would diminish such potential threats. Within Simonds it was felt that there was greater affinity (as Duncan Simonds put it to me: 'faute de mieux') with Courage Barclay than with any other larger scale brewers. The Simonds' board of directors was 'very cohesive' about the merger and four of the directors went on to the board of the enlarged company.

END



**H & G Simonds, company plaque.**

In the collection of Gavin Simonds. Recovered from the Bridge Street Offices on demolition.

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## **DISSERTATION BACKGROUND**

This dissertation is the final part of a part-time MA in English Local History undertaken from 1998 to 2001 in the Department of English Local History (now the centre for English Local History) at the University of Leicester. The Dissertation accounted for one third of the total course marks.

Research for the dissertation took place from July to December 2000 and it was written up in early February 2001.

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## **DISTRIBUTION**

John Lewis has presented copies of this dissertation to:

Reading Public Library / Reading Museum, Local History Section.

Ken Thomas, Courage Brewery Archivist until 11/03 and author of PhD work on Breweries in the 1950's.

The Brewery History Society [City of Birmingham Public Library]

The Royal County of Berkshire Archive

Raymond Simonds, on behalf of the Simonds family

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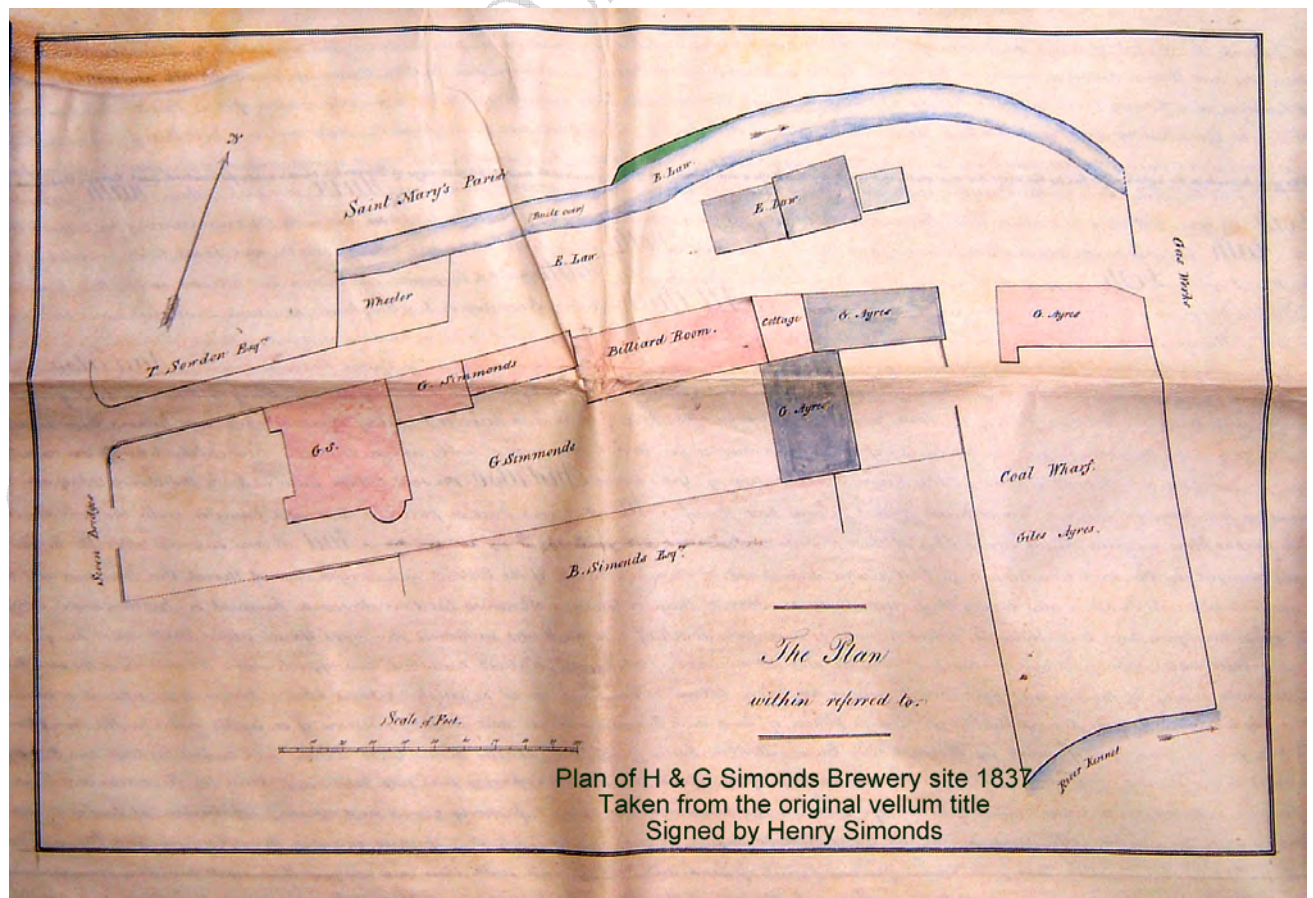


## SIMONDS FAMILY NOTE

Additional records and pictures of brewery memorabilia, from the family archives.

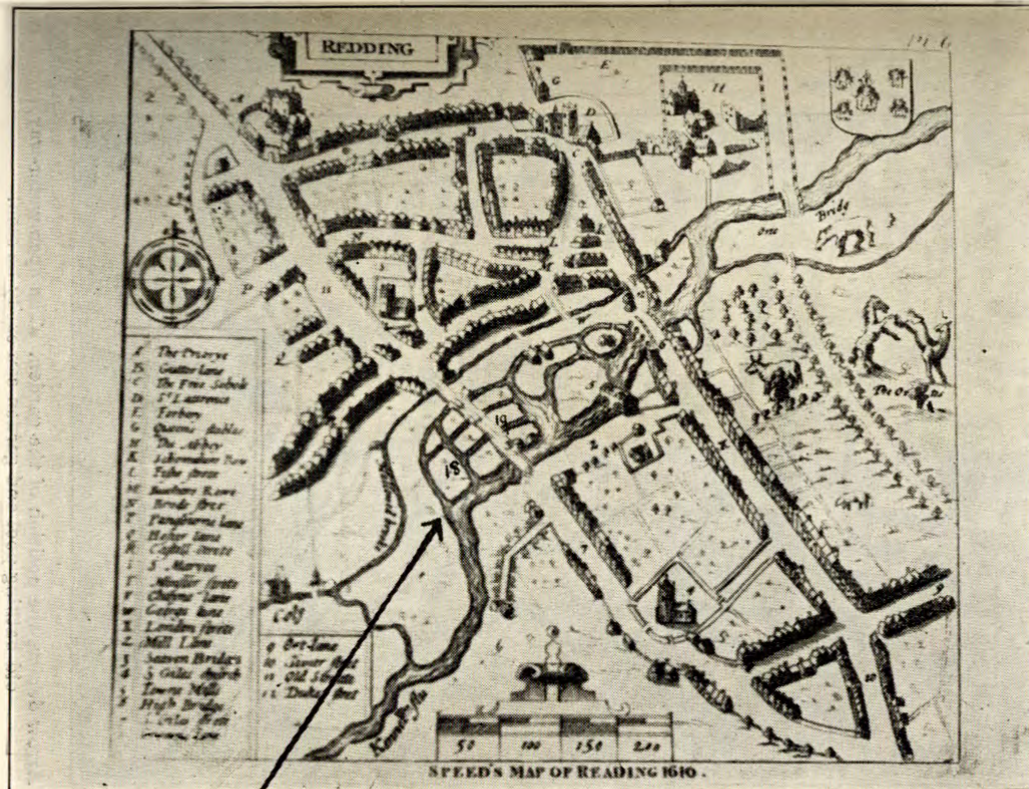


Site location plan 1834



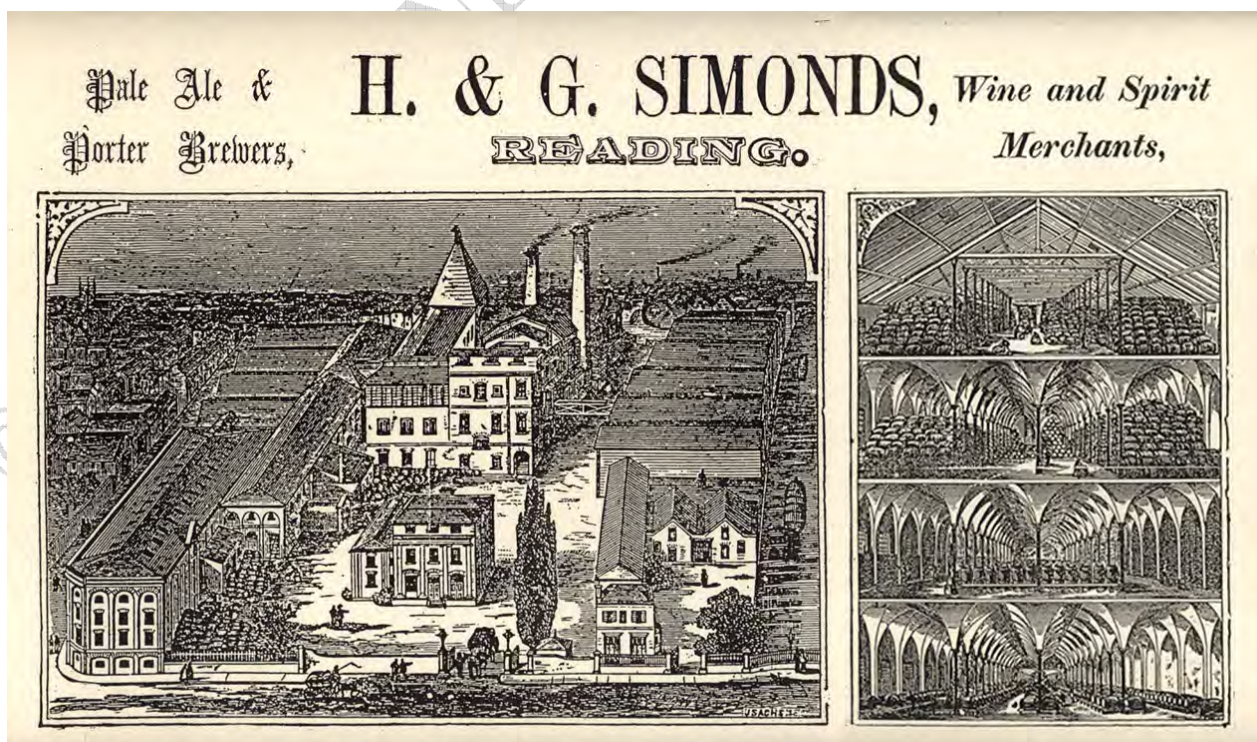
Brewery site plan 1837





The arrow pointing to the centre of the plan denotes the position of the Brewery. No. 18 is the new Bottling Stores and No. 19 the main Brewery. On this plan will also be seen three arches over the main river and four others over the various streams, from which the street derives its name of "Seven Bridges."

Brewery location plan, taken from the Hop Leaf Gazette.

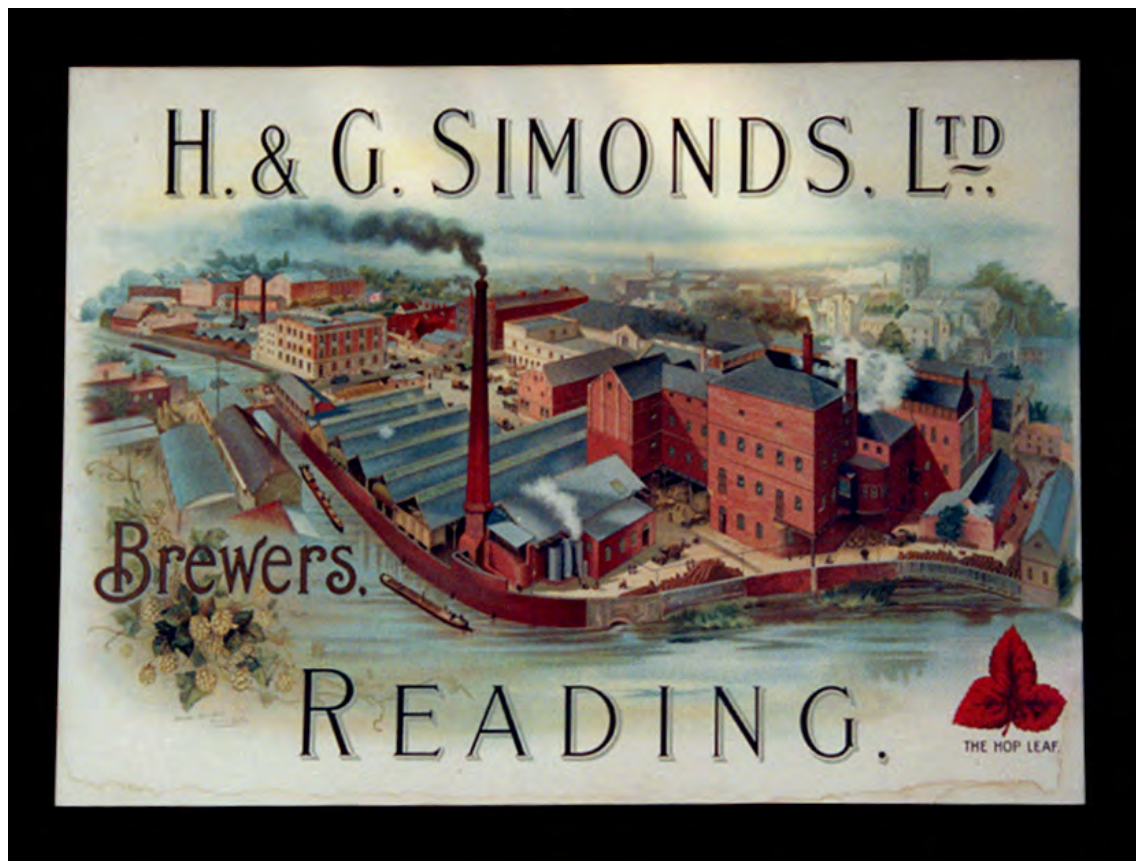


Dated prior to 1895, when the family home in the foreground was demolished for expansion of brewing

The main store is detailed. The first concrete industrial store on 4 levels

Detail of the first concrete warehouse





Brewery view, pub mirror

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**H & G Simonds, Head Office Building, c1900**



**The Bear Inn, off Fobney Street. Purchased in 1897**

**Compilers note:**

This article is based on the original typescript supplied by John Lewis. The original plates and photographs have been scanned and added back. Some further images have been added at the end.

A digital version of the whole, including photos and graphics is available on CD, for archive or research purposes.

**Raymond Simonds**

**December 2003**

**[www.simondsfamily.me.uk](http://www.simondsfamily.me.uk)**

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