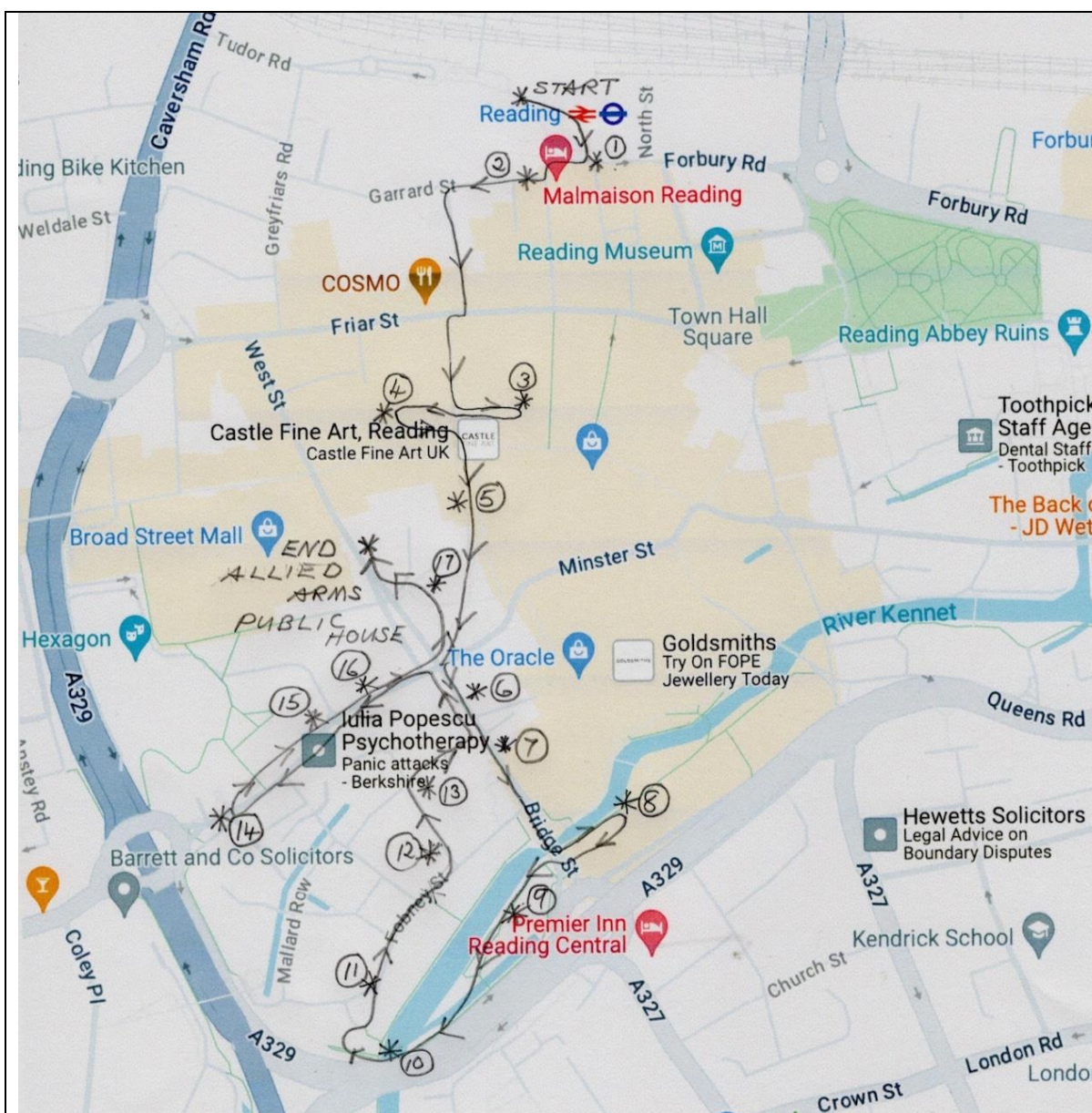


BREWERY WALK 2024 WALKS FESTIVAL 11 MAY

START IN FRONT OF THE THREE GUINEAS AT READING STATION



Route map sketched on google maps

STOP 1 Oakford Social Club once Flyer and Firkin

The Flyer and Firkin was part of the now defunct Firkin chain founded by David Bruce in 1979. There was a micro brewery in some of their pubs including this one, from 1996-1999.

Walk towards Station Road and then cross into Garrard Street – look out for buses and other traffic.

STOP 2 Garrard Street

This is Garrard Street, a commemoration of Garrards brewery and malthouse. Garrards brewhouse on Friar Street was one of the 4 Reading breweries marked on Tompkins 1802

map and in 1833 it was Reading's sixth largest brewer producing 3,224 barrels¹. Although the brewery and malthouse are long gone, the Boar's Head, originally one of their pubs was only demolished in the last 25 years and the site is beneath the Novotel and IBIS. The boar's head itself can be seen in Reading Museum.

Continue down Garrard Street and turn left into Merchant's Place past Shed/Milk Bar to Friar Street. To the right is the Siren Breweries Reading Bar that opened on 13 May 2024. Cross Friar Street, turn right and then left down Union Street (Smelly Alley) to Broad Street. Turn left on Broad Street.

STOP 3 Card Factory

Dowsetts Brewery, previously Russell and Martin and established by William Munt in 1850, was acquired by Simonds in 1906. They sold off the plant and equipment but kept the site and the brewery tap which they renamed The Oatsheaf. In 1932 they demolished the old premises and rebuilt it as a modern pub designed by local architect F G Sainsbury.

Note the drainpipe with '1932' on the rain hopper and the Simonds Hop Leaf logo at the bottom. The pub closed in the 1950s.

Turn round and walk west along Broad Street as far as Foot Locker.

STOP 4 Foot Locker

This site is reputedly the first location of Simonds brewery when it was established by William Simonds in 1774. However his son William Blackall Simonds soon moved the brewery to Seven Bridges where he purchased land in 1785.

Whether this was the first Simonds brewery or not it certainly was the site of the Broad Street Brewery for most of the nineteenth century. It was operated by a partnership of Lewis & Butler until 1829 and then Lewis alone until he was declared bankrupt in the early 1830s and the brewery auctioned. Henry Portsmouth and James Parker are later mentioned as brewers. In the 1860s adjacent properties were redeveloped and it seems likely that around this time the brewery closed but the brewery tap and also a cooperage continued.

In the late 1890s the brewery tap was rebuilt to the design we see today. Bill Knight (ex-footballer Elm Park) was the new licensee. The interior of the pub was considerably improved again in April 1956 when it was renamed the Peacock not to be confused with another pub of the same name on Broad Street that closed in the 1920s.

Turn back along Broad Street and turn down Chain Street to Bills.

STOP 5 Bill's

In 1838 Henry Knight ran the Victoria Brewery at the corner of Chain Street and St Mary's Churchyard. He went bankrupt, and on 4 September 1839 the brewery re-opened as a partnership of Harris and Hewett. The partners announced that, '...they have commenced BREWING A SUPERIOR and GENUINE ARTICLE of BEER, warranted from Malt and Hops...'

In October 1839 they advertised that they were able to supply Barclay and Perkins Superior London porter. In 1841 Robert Hewett married Mary Ann, the daughter of Thomas Harris and lived at the brewery until by the time of the 1861 census he was living at St Mary's Hill on Tilehurst Road.

The brewery closed in 1899 and was advertised to let in December of that year. In May 1900 it was advertised again as to be let and of interest to mineral water manufacturers and others.

¹ A barrel was 36 gallons (approx. 163.7 litres)

H & G Simonds acquired the brewery in 1900 and some of Hewetts pubs including the Allied Arms on St Mary's Butts.

Robert Hewett is remembered today in the Robert Hewett recreation ground on Tilehurst Road and for rescuing the gates of the Oracle workhouse that can now be seen in Reading Museum.

Walk across the churchyard, cross Gun Street and walk as far as the seat on Bridge Street. Note the Morlands Brewery (Abingdon) sign on the side of the Cross Keys (now Be at One cocktail bar) this was adopted due to a family link with the artist George Morland (1763-1804).

STOP 6 Zero Degrees

Going strong since 2007 with some beer brewed on the premises.

Walk a short way down Bridge Street to Seven Bridges House

STOP 7 Seven Bridges House

At its greatest extent Simonds brewery operated from both sides of Bridge Street.

This is the only part of the eastern side of H & G Simonds brewery that remains. The building dates from the early nineteenth century and had various occupiers and uses before becoming part of the brewery. The property may originally have been part of Sowdon's brewery, fifth largest brewer by output in Reading in 1833 producing 4,084 barrels, purchased by Simonds in 1851.

Seven Bridges House was used for almost 40 years as the brewery social club. It was opened on 11 November 1921, by Mr Fredrick Adolphus Simonds. In 1960 the club moved to Castle Street (later in the walk).

In July 1961 the premises were renamed Seven Bridges House and opened as a reception centre for the instruction of licensees and entertainment of visitors.

Continue walking down Bridge Street to the south side of the river, then turn left and walk as far as Wagamamas.

STOP 8 Simonds Brewery Information Board

The information board was unveiled on Thursday 26 February 2009. By 1833 H & G Simonds were Reading's biggest brewer with an output of 15,300 barrels. At the end of the nineteenth Barnard undertook his survey of the Noted Breweries of Great Britain and Ireland. The only brewery in Reading that was visited was Simonds and the conclusion of the visitors was that *'From any point of view, the brewery buildings, on account of their magnitude and picturesque appearance are most striking, particularly the lofty new brewhouse on the river side of the premises.'*

Turn back to Bridge Street, cross the road and go down the slope to the river stopping where the seat is.

STOP 9 Simonds Corn and Hay Loft

On the other side of the Kennet is one of the surviving H & G Simonds brewery buildings usually referred to as 'The Maltings' but it was actually a hay and corn loft. The surrounding area was used as a cooperage.

*From here walk up the slope by the side of the IDR and onto the bridge. **Take care to keep in by the railings away from the traffic.** Pause when you have almost crossed the bridge.*

STOP 10 View east along the Kennet and slightly to the north the remains of a Simonds malthouse.

The view of the river, the island and St Giles' Mill Stream is very similar to the view at the end of the 1890s.

Walk down the slope, then turn back on yourself and left towards the maltings, the large brick building.

STOP 11 Maltings

At the end of the nineteenth century there were three maltings buildings. The building that remains today is part of the most westerly building. Note the iron bosses decorated with hop bines. When the brewery site was redeveloped this was the only maltings that remained and it was nationally listed Grade II in 1978.

The railway track is part of the old Coley branch line.

Walk along Fobney Street passing by the front of Simonds corn and hay loft.

STOP 12 Simmonds Street

This is a misspelling of 'Simonds' the brewery. The street was named when the housing estate was developed on this part of the brewery estate.

Walk to the top of Simmonds Street, taking care as most of this area is car parking.

STOP 13 rear of Castle Brewery

The Castle brewery has the most complex history of any of Reading's significant breweries. It was founded right at the end of the seventeenth century and by the end of the eighteenth century was owned by Jonathan Tanner. Thereafter there was a succession of owners during the nineteenth century including Rickford and Bickham until around the mid-century it was owned by Blandy & Hawkins. William and Charles Blandy were also partners in the Mill Lane brewery. Brewing ceased on that site in 1856 and operations transferred here.

The Castle Brewery was taken over by the South Berkshire Brewery in 1910 which became part of the Simonds empire in 1920 and they absorbed the site into their estate.

Turn right and walk towards Bridge Street. At Bridge Street turn left and then left again into Castle Street and walk as far as the almshouses.

STOP 14 Almshouses

Look back over the almshouses to Simonds Maltings and towards Castle Hill somewhere under the IDR is where James Dymore Brown, before 1831, began his brewing career in Reading at the Kennet Brewery. In the 1860s he moved to premises, now demolished, on Queen's Road & East Street outside the area of this walk.

Dymore Brown were retail brewers which meant that they usually supplied customers directly rather than through public house and they are particularly notable for having supplied the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

Cross over Castle Street and walk as far as the junction to the underground car park/Sun public house (currently under renovation).

STOP 15 Courage Social Club

These premises were briefly, in 1999, the home of the Tudor Brewing Company. Now flats. The club became the Courage Social Club when Simonds and Courage merged and was operational until at least the late 1970s. Note the pub sign, which has the same metal frame as when it was the Social Club.

Take care crossing the road to the Sun and walk a few doors down until you are opposite Rowbery & Morris solicitors.

STOP 16 17 Castle Street

The house was associated with the Castle Brewery and was home to successive partners in the business, there is a carriage entrance to the side.

Walk to St Mary's Butts, cross the road and go into St Mary's Churchyard. Turn left and walk just past the Harrinson Testimonial Cross. Step on to the grass and walk a short distance to the nearest tomb.

STOP 17 Grave of Dymore Brown, brewer

Return to the path and walk north to rejoin St Mary's Butts, walk a short distance to the Allied Arms.

END OF WALK Allied Arms

The Allied Arms operated a brewery from at least 1878-1890 when landlord Thomas Jerome advertised Home Brewed Stout.

Evelyn Williams May 2024, with thanks to the walkers on 11 May 2024 for spotting additional landmarks en route.

LINKS AND REFERENCES

John Dearing, David Cliffe & Evelyn Williams. *Abbot Cook to Zero Degrees an A to Z of Reading Pubs and Breweries (2021)*, History of Reading Society.

H & G Simonds – lots of information, photographs and digitised copies of the Hop Leaf Gazette on the Simonds family website - <https://simondsfamily.me.uk>.

Brewery History Society Brewerypedia – summary histories and lots of brewery images - http://breweryhistory.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page

Goad Insurance maps for Reading for 1895 can be found via Wikimedia Commons - <https://tinyurl.com/bp7aaw4f>. For later years they can be found in Reading Borough Libraries local studies collection (ask the librarian).