



# BISCUIT CRUMB TRAIL

Explore Huntley & Palmers heritage on a walk between The MERL and Reading Museum

Part of a joint programme of events and activities at Reading Museum and The MERL, as part of Museums Partnership Reading, funded by Arts Council England.



## BISCUIT TOWN: 200 YEARS OF HUNTLEY & PALMERS IN READING

10 May – 25 September, 2022

The Museum of English Rural Life and Special Collections

While Huntley & Palmers is no longer located in Reading, biscuits have left their mark on the town. The MERL is located inside what was once Alfred Palmer's family home, together with the University of Reading's Special Collections which includes Huntley & Palmers' company archives.

In a new exhibition across The MERL's beautiful staircase hall and galleries, discover Huntley & Palmers' impact on the growth of Reading, physically and culturally, and learn about the extraordinary global reach the company attained as it became the largest biscuit manufacturer in the world. Explore stories from people impacted by the company's development, brought to life by gems from the Huntley & Palmers archive.

Learn more at [merl.reading.ac.uk/biscuit-town](http://merl.reading.ac.uk/biscuit-town)



2022 marks 200 years since Joseph Huntley opened his first baker's shop at 72 London Street, Reading. This moment was the beginning of a company that would become world-famous, revolutionising biscuit-making across the globe like never before, and transforming Reading forever: Huntley & Palmers.

This year, Reading is rediscovering its biscuit heritage with a series of events and visitor opportunities over the summer. Discover details of the town-wide programme at [visit-reading.com/biscuittown](http://visit-reading.com/biscuittown)

The MERL and Reading Museum are drawing on our Huntley & Palmers collections to offer a joint programme celebrating 200 years of biscuit heritage, as part of Museums Partnership Reading, funded by Arts Council England.

### WHERE DO I START?

Follow the map overleaf (approx. 3km) and discover significant places from Huntley & Palmers' history. Start and finish at one of the museums, or pick a route via London Street or Watlington Street if walking between the two.



## VISIT THE HUNTLEY & PALMERS GALLERY AT READING MUSEUM

A permanent gallery at Reading Museum tells the story of Huntley & Palmers, Reading's world-famous biscuit makers. Discover how the company pioneered the mass production of biscuits and why Reading became known as the Biscuit Town. See and hear what factory life was like for Huntley & Palmers' thousands of workers through oral history, photographs and historic film, including the earliest surviving film of a British factory.

### Gallery highlights:

- Almost 300 decorative biscuit tins as well as advertising and artefacts
- An African thumb piano made from a recycled H&P biscuit tin
- A biscuit supplied to Captain Scott's ill-fated Antarctic expedition
- The rude 'Kate Greenaway' biscuit tin that embarrassed the biscuit company!

Find out more at [readingmuseum.org.uk/biscuit-town](http://readingmuseum.org.uk/biscuit-town)



## VISIT THE MUSEUM OF ENGLISH RURAL LIFE

The Museum of English Rural Life tells the story of the English countryside. Discover the remarkable history of England's rural people: the food they produced, the crafts they perfected, and the communities they made.

Relax in the museum's beautiful garden, browse unique products in the gift shop, or enjoy a treat and a hot drink in the café.

### Opening Hours

**MUSEUM, SHOP, CAFÉ AND GARDEN**  
Tues – Fri, 9am–5pm  
Sat and Sun, 10am–5pm  
Closed Mondays

**READING ROOM**  
See website

Please check our website for Christmas and Easter opening hours

0118 378 8660  
[merl.reading.ac.uk](http://merl.reading.ac.uk)

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@THEMERL @THE.MERL



## VISIT READING MUSEUM AND THE ABBEY QUARTER

Explore the history of Reading across Reading Museum and the surrounding Abbey Quarter. Discover highlights such as the magnificent replica of the Bayeux Tapestry, the Story of Reading Gallery, a collection of three-hundred Huntley & Palmers biscuit tins, and the restored Abbey Ruins. Don't miss our shop for unique gifts, local books and crafts.

### Opening Hours

**READING MUSEUM**  
Tue – Fri, 10am–4pm  
Sat, 10am–5pm  
Closed Sun and Mon

**ABBAY RUINS**  
Daily, dawn till dusk

Please check our website for Christmas and Easter opening hours

0118 937 3400  
[www.readingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk)  
[www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk](http://www.readingabbeyquarter.org.uk)

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**The Museum of English Rural Life**  
East Thorpe was Sir Alfred Palmer's family home. Built by Alfred Waterhouse in 1882, the property houses The MERL and the University of Reading's Special Collections today, which includes the Huntley & Palmers company archive.

Discover the new **Biscuit Town 200** exhibition here from 10 May – 25 September 2022.

**The Acacias**  
George Palmer's villa, The Acacias, was initially built in 1818 for a local salt merchant. The original owner's trade, and the property's rectangular design, led to its nickname of the Salt Box Hall. George moved here in 1865 and lived here until his death in 1897.

**Joseph Huntley's first shop**  
This is the site of the small bakery where Joseph Huntley and his son Thomas began making biscuits in 1822. Situated near the Crown Coaching Inn on Reading's busy London Road, connecting London and Bath, the shop served biscuits to hungry travellers.

**The Huntley, Boorne and Stevens tin works**  
Thomas Huntley opened an ironmongers here in 1832. In time, as Huntley partnered with local businessmen, this business would evolve into the world-famous tin works of Huntley, Boorne & Stevens, where Huntley & Palmers' iconic biscuit tins were made.

**Quaker Meeting House and Burial Ground**  
The founders of Huntley & Palmers were members of the Religious Society of Friends, more commonly known as the Quakers. This is where they worshipped. Several members of the families, including George Palmer and Joseph Huntley, are buried here.

**Reading Museum and Town Hall**  
Visit Reading Museum's **Huntley & Palmers Gallery** to explore almost 300 H&P tins, and discover the story of how Reading became the Biscuit Town.  
In January 1912, Huntley & Palmers' workers gathered outside Reading Town Hall, protesting Huntley & Palmers' low wages and poor working conditions.

**Chestnut Walk and Reading Gaol**  
Oscar Wilde was a good friend of the Palmer family and visited the factory in 1892. Three years later, he was imprisoned in Reading Gaol, which was known as the 'biscuit factory' by inmates. During his imprisonment, Wilde was occasionally brought Huntley & Palmers' Ginger Nuts by a kind warder.

**Biscuit Factory Site**  
Huntley & Palmers' 24-acre factory site opened in 1846, shortly after the arrival of the Great West Railway. It was located close to Reading's station, canal, and river, and its railway links connected the factory to global trade. By 1900, this was the largest biscuit factory in the world.

**Recreation Club**  
Not quite on the scale of an earlier proposed social scheme, Huntley & Palmers' Recreation Club opened in 1938 within a former factory office building. Saved from demolition by a local campaign, it is Huntley & Palmers' only surviving factory building and has since been converted into flats.

**Factory Bridge**  
The Factory Bridge carries the King's Road over the Kennet and Avon Canal. In 1936 and 1937, the King's Road was widened, and the Factory Bridge rebuilt.

**Proposed Huntley & Palmers Social Scheme**  
In the 1920s, Huntley & Palmers planned to build a large social club as part of a company Social Scheme. The club would include dining rooms, baths, a gymnasium, and even a concert hall. Property was purchased on Kings Road and Watlington Street, but the club was never built. The site was laid out as garden in the 1930s and is now a public park.



The Acacias – spot this commemorative plaque from London Road

**Huntley & Palmers Audio Trail: Market Place & London Street**  
Journey through time with this fascinating audio trail by local artists Aundre Goddard and Richard Bentley. From 21 June visit [reading.gov.uk/audiotrails/londonstreet](http://reading.gov.uk/audiotrails/londonstreet)  
Part of Reading High Street Heritage Action Zone

