



THE MUSEUM  
OF ENGLISH  
RURAL LIFE



University of  
Reading



Women packing biscuits at the  
Huntley & Palmer biscuit factory, 1920s

# What industries have put Reading on the map? Beer, bulbs and biscuits

Reading is best known for the '3Bs' – biscuits, beer and bulbs. Your class has the opportunity to make a timeline, discovering how Reading has been shaped by these and other industries over the years.

The museum showcases many objects and artefacts related to local industries; many of which relied on the countryside and rural communities for raw materials used in the manufacture of their products.

# Learning outcomes

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By the end of this activity students will:

- be more aware of some of the industries that put Reading on the map and the town's relationship with rural areas
- be able to discuss when Reading's industries first arrived in the town by producing a timeline that outlines key dates ready to take to the museum to find out more.

## Before you visit

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Introduce your students to six businesses that have had an impact on Reading. There are archives online and the opportunities to find out more details about each business (see below).

### Making a timeline

Students should create a timeline ready to take to the museum to add in key dates and events for the different industries.

Finding archives such as photos on our database:

- Visit [merl.reading.ac.uk/research/using-collections/databases](http://merl.reading.ac.uk/research/using-collections/databases)
- Click on the Enterprise database.
- Type in key words into search.
- To refine, click on archive and object on the left under 'format', or any other refined search you would like.
- Images that are digitised will show as a small thumbnail. Click and it'll take you through to more detail. Click on the photo again and it will enlarge it a little more.

#### THEMES AND TOPICS

- A local history study.

#### LINKS WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES

This activity could also be used in conjunction with the 'What was farming like before modern technology' and 'Making and manufacturing' resources.

# Six industries that had an impact on Reading were:

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## Biscuits

The company Huntley and Palmers, set up in 1822, created the first brand of biscuits and once ran the world's largest biscuit factory. They continued to trade until the 1990s and after an absence have returned producing many old favourite recipes and new ones, [huntleyandpalmers.com](http://huntleyandpalmers.com)

This website, [huntleyandpalmers.org.uk](http://huntleyandpalmers.org.uk), refers to many archives, stories and a timeline related to the original biscuit company.

The University of Reading's Special Collections holds an extensive Huntley and Palmers archive. [reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/sc-huntley-palmers.aspx](http://reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/sc-huntley-palmers.aspx)



## Bulbs and seeds

Paper packets of seeds for gardeners were popularised by Sutton's Seeds, founded in Reading in 1806. Making use of rail and postal networks from the 1840s they soon supplied seeds around the world, including South America and the Indian subcontinent, [suttons.co.uk/About+UsHistory.htm](http://suttons.co.uk/About+UsHistory.htm)

Although no longer based in Reading, Sutton's Seeds continues as commercial suppliers of seeds, bulbs and plants today, [suttons.co.uk](http://suttons.co.uk)

The Museum of English Rural Life holds an extensive archive of Sutton's Seeds, [reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives\\_A\\_to\\_Z/merl-TR\\_SUT.aspx](http://reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives_A_to_Z/merl-TR_SUT.aspx)





## Transport

### *Gypsy and Romani caravans*

The beautifully decorated horse-drawn wagons or 'vardsos' were built by Dunton & Sons. In our Making Rural England gallery we have a vardo on display. 'Living' wagons became very popular in the mid to late 19th Century and the 'Reading' wagon, a particular design, was especially popular with travelling communities.

This webpage tells you more about the 'Reading' wagon, [berksfhs.org.uk/journal/Sep2002/TheReadingWagon.htm](http://berksfhs.org.uk/journal/Sep2002/TheReadingWagon.htm)

This website gives more details and photos on the history of the vardos, [gypsywagons.co.uk](http://gypsywagons.co.uk)

### *Wallis & Steevens of Basingstoke*

The company made agricultural equipment, steamrollers and traction engines.

Some images can be viewed in the Steam display in our Town and Country gallery. The Museum of English Rural Life holds an extensive archive, [reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives\\_A\\_to\\_Z/merl-TR\\_WAL.aspx](http://reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives_A_to_Z/merl-TR_WAL.aspx)



## Bricks

S & E Collier was a local brick making industry set up in the mid-19th Century. They were based in Coley, Reading until 1870 and then moved to Grovelands where they remained until 1966. They were well known for their terracotta and 'Reading Red' bricks.

Bricks and tiles have been made in Reading and the surrounding area since the medieval period. By the nineteenth century there were many kilns in and around the town, the largest of which – S & E Collier – was based in Coley.

To find out more about Reading's brick industry see [huntleyandpalmers.org.uk](http://huntleyandpalmers.org.uk) under Themes (click on Wider Picture and then The Other Bs) and through the collections website of the Reading Museum, [readingmuseum.org.uk](http://readingmuseum.org.uk)

The Museum of English Rural Life holds images of the local brick making industry and also many photos showing local brickwork in the area.

Our museum is made out of bricks – take a closer look at its architecture and brickwork when you come in or leave.

## Milk and dairying

Buildings very close to the Museum of English Rural Life used to be dairy buildings, where people came to learn how to milk cows and make milk products. While much of this work no longer takes place in Reading today, the University of Reading is still an important research institute. Among its research projects the university studies the best foods to feed cows so they produce lower amounts of methane, and try to understand how cows can produce milk with healthier fats for human consumption.



Butter making, with end over end butter churns, British Dairy Institute, Reading

The Research Institute in Dairying was established at University College, Reading by the Board of Agriculture in 1912. The college later became the University of Reading in 1926. More information here on our archives website:

[reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives\\_A\\_to\\_Z/](http://reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives_A_to_Z/)

## Beer

H&G Simonds Ltd origins date back to the 1760s and there is a wealth of information and resources on this website, [simondsfamily.me.uk](http://simondsfamily.me.uk). The company moved to Bridge Street, where it remained until 1978. The site is now occupied by The Oracle shopping centre.



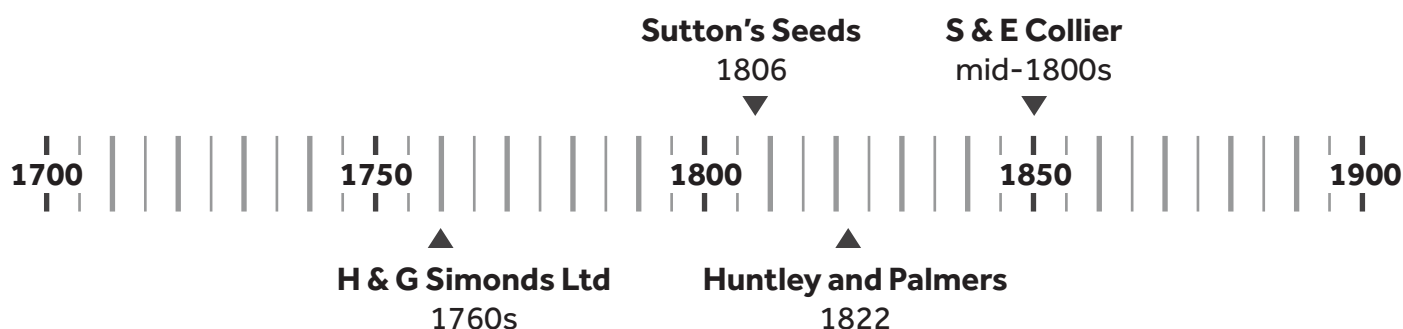
The yard at H & G Simonds Ltd

# Visiting the Museum of English Rural Life

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## Timeline

Continue exploring a timeline of Reading's industries through the ages. This might include changes in machinery and tools that may not have been unique to Reading, although they enabled the town and its countryside to move with the times. Students can add any of the key dates onto the timeline they created in the pre-visit activity.



# How were biscuits made?

Find out more about the ingredients used in biscuit making in Reading by exploring our galleries and looking at artefacts.



**Make notes in the circles related to each ingredient.** Write or draw anything that you find interesting about these biscuit ingredients. Page 8 details some of the galleries to visit.

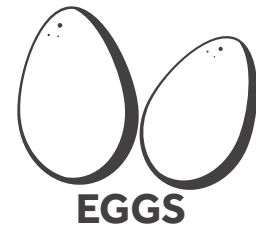
Sourcing the ingredients for making biscuits involved many other suppliers near Reading

and beyond. Throughout our galleries there are artefacts and stories related to all the ingredients you need for making biscuits. Your class have the opportunities to explore these different ingredients and discover how they were made or grown in the past.

## Eggs

Seasonal eggs and intensive production in our Winter display of A Year on the Farm gallery.

Salmonella in our Animal Health display (drawer) in our Town and Country gallery.



## Flour

A miller's wagon and millstone in our Wagon Walk gallery and the story of Benjamin Cole, who ran the Codicote and Kimpton mills near Luton, on the Hertfordshire border. He had to abandon both of these mills because the River Mimram became too low to power their milling stones.

Horsegear in our Horsepower display, Town and Country gallery. Horse engines convert the motion of horses into power. From the late 1700s, these were used for milling and threshing on farms, as well as in other industries.

A mill powered by horse engine and used as a teaching model for students; tucked in the corner of the Our Country Lives gallery.



## Butter

We also have many photos of objects and archives related to butter on our website (see pre-visit details for where to go and how to access these).

Throughout our galleries there are many references to the dairy industry, for example:

- Anne Wigmore, who set up a small business making cheeses after struggling to buy milk from the Milk Marketing Board – Forces for Change gallery.
- Farmer, George Odlum, who selectively bred cows to produce more milk – Forces for Change gallery.
- Tools and equipment used to study cow's health and make them better – Town and Country gallery.
- Dairy to Doorstep in the Town and Country gallery – looking at how milk was brought to our homes.
- Michael Eavis' Wellington boots, a dairy farmer and founder of the Glastonbury Festival – The Rural in Vogue, Town and Country gallery.



## Sugar

Sugar cutters and spice boxes in our Hearth and Home display of Making Rural England gallery.





## Transport

How did some of these raw materials get transported?

- Different types of wagons suited for carrying different goods (Wagon Walk gallery)
- Milk transport (Dairy to Doorstep in Town and Country gallery)
- Baskets used before plastic was invented (Making Rural England gallery).

Some of the other trades are represented throughout the museum too. Here's an idea of what and where to find them:

## Sutton's Seeds

Examples of Sutton's Seeds are spread throughout the museum, in particular:

- at the end of the Wagon Walk gallery, look for a display of different, colourful catalogue covers for Sutton's Seeds
- examples of paper packets of seeds in the Grow Your Own display, Town and Country gallery

You may also wish to look at the seed drills in the Forces for Change and A Year on the Farm galleries. Jethro Tull was well known for his seed drill. It sowed seeds in evenly-spaced rows called furrows, which were then covered with soil.



## Beer

- Hop stilts, used for reaching the highest hops. (Our Country Lives gallery)
- In our Town and Country gallery (Into the Country display) there are photographs and a poster of people going on holidays to the countryside, often to pick hops. Nearby is a tool known as a hop sampler. What and how was it used?



## Transport

### *Vardo or Romani Wagon*

In the Making Rural England gallery we have a vardo on display.

### *Agriculture equipment and steam rollers/traction engines*

Some images can be viewed in the Steam display in our Town and Country Gallery.

In our Showing Progress display of our Town and Country gallery we have a portable steam engine. Although not made locally, it shows students the type of technology that was being made and used at the time.

### *Costume*

We have various examples of occupational dress based on historic images that can be used as part of a visit. Please contact the museum if you would like to use these on the day.

# What next?

- Look up old recipes for making biscuits and have a go at making them.
- Buy some modern biscuits and think about where their ingredients come from today and how they are made. Explore modern production of biscuits.
- Write about the impact of these businesses on the families living in the surrounding area at the time.
- Explore what puts Reading on the map today. What has changed? What industries are key features of the town now? What has happened to the six industries you have been researching?
- Design and make your own biscuit boxes or seed packets.

## Additional archives and resources

The Museum of English Rural Life holds an extensive collection of 'local' photographs.

The largest collections are those of P. O. Collier and Dann/Lewis  
[reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives\\_A\\_to\\_Z/merl-P\\_DX322.aspx](http://reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives_A_to_Z/merl-P_DX322.aspx)

These date from the 1870s to 1960s. They cover Reading and the surrounding area. The interactive, Then and Now in the Town and Country gallery shows a large selection of Collier photographs.

There are other local photos used in the galleries:

- The butcher's shop in the A Year on the Farm gallery:  
P DX323 PH1/E150/233 Mundy's butchers shop, Caversham Road, Reading c.1925
- Nurse Jean Young was a district nurse in 1947, from East Garston and shown in the Town and Country gallery  
*Farmer's Weekly* photographs
- Cold Ash Cottage hospital in the Town and Country gallery are from the Collier Collection P DX323 PH1/L24/7
- Photographs of George Lailey, the bowl turner of Bucklebury in the Making Rural England gallery are from the Collier Collection P DX323 PH1/L16/21 & 23
- The photographs taken by Lavinia Smith in the Collecting Rural England gallery are of East Hendred and are from the Henry Owen Vaughan collection P DX2049
- Photographs of the well at Stoke Row in the Our Country Lives gallery is from Collier P DX323 PH1/E174/1

- The Mapledurham watermill photograph in the Wagon Walk gallery is from the Dann/Lewis collection P DX322 PH1/DL5/13.

The Eric Guy Collection features heavily in the galleries. He was a local photographer based in Basingstoke and Reading and many of the photographs show images from the local area.

[reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives\\_A\\_to\\_Z/merl-P\\_DX289.aspx](http://reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/Archives_A_to_Z/merl-P_DX289.aspx)



MERL galleries

