THE CRISPIN, Wokingham – A Dip Into The Past (And as it is now)

Issue 1



Sketch by Mohan Banerji



Compiled By Kevin Lenton 2026

1 Introduction

This booklet is not a potted history of The Crispin, but a selection of topics related to the iconic pub at 45 Denmark Street, Wokingham. It is a Grade II Listed Building.

2 Sources of Information

(1) THE INNS AND PUBLIC HOUSES OF WOKINGHAM by Dennis Ayres and Judith Hunter

(2) PubWiki – The Living History of Britain's Pubs

(3) Wokingham in the News (Extracts from local newspapers) by Jim Bell

(4) WikiPedia

(5) Bygone Days in Wokingham by Ken Goatley

(6) Wokingham A Potted History by Richard Gibbs

(7) thecrispinwokingham.co.uk

(8) britishnewspapersarchive.com

All other photographs were taken by Kevin Lenton

3 The Early Days

The Crispin is one of the oldest buildings in Wokingham. It was built in the 15th century as a hall-house. This means it had a large central hall, the main room of the building was open to the roof, with a fire in the centre of the room. The smoke escaped through a hole in the roof. It was obviously the home of a prosperous man. In later times it was 'modernised', and an upper floor was built across the full breadth of the house. Fireplaces and chimneys were also added. (1)

Some time, later the property was divided into three cottages. In 1837 the middle cottage was occupied by James Green, a cordwainer by trade, who made new shoes from new leather. Back then, shoe making was a common trade in Denmark Street. (1)
In 1840, James was recorded as a Beer Retailer in the Robson's Directory (2), which was a historical directory that provided detailed information about trades, residences, and public carriers in and around London. (2).

The 1841 census has Jamas, now a victualler aged 55 head of a family comprising of the following :- Ann Green, Sarah Green, Charles Green, a shoemaker and Clement Green. (2).

The 1851 census lists James as a Brewer & Beer Seller and having been born in Wokingham. (2). They, at that time had a lodger, John Zarral, who was a Tailor, having been born in Dublin, Ireland. James was still in the middle cottage and his sons, both shoemakers lived in the other two cottages. (1)

In 1850, James applied for a full license but his application was refused. (1)

By 1854, even without a full license, he was doing very well business wise and had three lodgers, the previously mentioned John Zarral and two tailors from Cornwall. (2).

He was able to pay of his mortgage of £ 160 and to buy out the other two owners and use the whole building as an inn. By the end of 1854, he obtained a full licence. (1)

The inn was known as the Crispin, a name that it has kept ever since in recognition of St. Crispin, the patron saint of shoemakers. According to fable, Crispin, and his brother were Roman shoemakers who preached Christianity in the 4th century (1).

The Crispin was bought by Simmonds Brewery in 1858.

The following is from (2): -

The 1861 Census shows that Ann Green, a widow aged 75 was head of the Crispin Beer House, Ann had been born in Hurst, Berkshire. Her son Charles was recorded as still being a cordwainer.

In 1868, the Casseys Directory records Charles Green as being the proprietor.

The 1871 Census has Charles, aged 53 recorded as the Inn Keeper. He was last recorded as being the Inn Keeper in 1877 in the Harrods Directory.

He remained the owner of the property until his death in in 1885 when the Crispin was sold by auction (8). See section 6.

The1881 census had Naish Rogers, aged 47 recorded as the Licensed Victualler.

The Kellys Directory or Stevens Directory had the following entries for the proprietor: -

1883 Arthur Scaffell
1884 Henry James Davis
1893 Mrs Davis
1887 Henry J Davis
1891 and 1895 Mrs Ellen Davis
1899 George Burrett

The 1901 Census has George Burrett, aged 46 as the Licensed Victualler. He was born in Wokingham.

1903, 1907 and 1911 George Burett is recorded in the Kellys Directory as the proprietor.

1915 and 1920 Mrs Ellen Burrett is recorded in the Kellys Directory as the proprietor.
Ellen was George's wife, born in Sonning and was aged 49 in the 1901 Census.

The Kellys Directory or Times Directory recorded the following proprietors: -

1924 Frederick W C Miller
1928 and 1931 Albt Oxlade
1935,1939, 1956, 1957-8 H G Smith

3 News from the Reading Mercury

There is only one mention of The Crispin in the Reading Mercury, 1858 to 1999 (3).

1938 CARNIVAL DARTS TOURNAMENT

The Wokingham Carnival Darts Tournament, which will be held at the Drill Hall on Wednesday, November 16th, has attracted an entry of 33 teams, which represent 231 players. The entries are as follows: Four teams each from The Plough and the Redan; three teams from The Rising Sun and the Red Lion; two teams each from The Victoria Arms, The Duke's Head, The Three Brewers, The Metropolitan, The White Horse, The Dog and Duck and The Lord Raglan: whilst The Thatched Cottage, The Territorial Club, **The Crispin**, The Queen's Head and the Wokingham Cricket Club have entered one team. The entry equals the previous record last year. The Victoria Arms are the present holders of the Challenge Cup. The sum of £100 10s. 7d. has been cleared from the past six events.

4 A Selection of News from Local Newspapers

There follows, summaries of a selection of articles from (8)

Berkshire Chronicle 2/1/1869

150 residents formed the "Ox Club" to provide a roast beef diner for Christmas, paying threepence a week. The previous week three very fine oxen were purchased and slaughtered. The distribution took place at The Crispin on Christmas Eve, supervised by the landlord, Mr. Charles Green.

Berkshire Chronicle 25/5/1878

Charles Green, landlord of The Crispin was fined by the Wokingham Petty Sessions for "keeping open his house for the sale of intoxicating liquor after eleven o'clock" and for selling to a drunken person. He was fined £ 5 for the first offence and 20s for the second.

Berkshire Chronicle 8/8/1885

A butcher of Reading was summoned for "furious driving". He had stopped at The Crispin and the landlord refused him a drink because he was not sober. The defendant got into his cart and made off towards the station.

Reading Chronicle 38/5/1887

A man was charged for cutting branches from a lime tree on the boundary fence of The Crispin. If the tree was taken down then the defendant would have been able to walk through the fence. The defendant was allowed fourteen days to pay.

Reading Standard 17/9/1937

A Robert Luker of Crowthorne pleaded guilty at Wokingham Crown Court to stealing two hospital collection boxes, one of which was from counter at The Crispin.

Reading Evening Post 28/5/1968

Alfred Ball, licensee of The Crispin was fined £ 5 by Bracknell Magistrates for pleading guilty to selling short measure whisky.

Reading Evening Post 14/7/1972

Festive celebrations on Wokingham Carnival day turned sour because of an “ugly intoxicated mob” outside The Crispin public house. Beer was thrown at people in the procession and two policemen were assaulted.

Reading Evening Post 1/4/1974

Mr Dennis Oxlade, had been born in The Crispin 47 year earlier, where his father was the proprietor. He had moved to the Merry Maidens, Reading and then in 1954 he took over the World Turned Upside Down. To mark his literally lifelong association with Courage’s, he and his wife were presented with a silver salver, decanter and glasses by a senior trade director of Courage.

Reading Evening Post 21/1/1975

A man put his hand through the window of The Crispin and was then chased down the road by the landlord and was caught by the police.

Wokingham Times 13/12/1979

During renovation work at The Crispin, Ann and Al Noman, the proprietors for the last four and a half years were surprised by what was revealed by the removal of concrete and plaster. They discovered a very old fireplace and original beams. The renovation was to create a single large bar. The pub was reopened with a Courage director pulling the first pint.

5 Articles from the Wokingham Times

In 1999, Wokingham historian Ken Goatley wrote a series of articles about the history of Wokingham that were subsequently captured in a book (5).

One of these articles was entitled “ Danish royal visitor left a mark” which explained that Denmark Street was previously named Down Street. Its name changed in 1863 following a visit to England from Princess Alexandra of Denmark, to marry the future King Edward VII.

Down Street was originally “le don” street meaning “hill street” (6).

The article had the following photograph taken in the 1920’s.

The article describes The Crispin on the left as being run by Fred Millar, so the picture would be before 1928.

The cottages to the right of the picture were demolished and stood in the area where the car park entrance is today.



6 Simonds

The Simonds brewery was founded in Broad Street, Reading by William Bklackall Simonds in 1785.

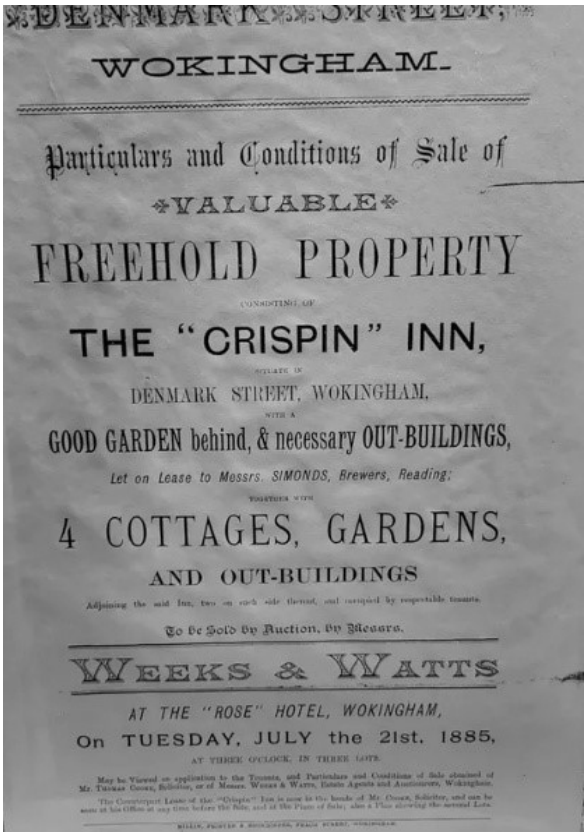
Simonds Brewery bought the Crispin in 1858.

Simonds became a very early limited company in 1885, taking the name of H & G Simonds from William's two sons, Henry and George.

On 21st July 1885, The Crispin was auctioned to be let on lease to Simonds.

Simonds was a pioneer of pale ale in the 1830s, including India Pale Ale (IPA) which the company exported to the British army in India. In the 1870s,

The hopleaf logo was introduced to all Simonds pubs in 1930. By 1938, Simonds' was producing just over one percent of all beer brewed in England and Wales.
(4) (7)



DENMARK STREET,
WOKINGHAM.

Particulars and Conditions of Sale of

VALUABLE

FREEHOLD PROPERTY

CONSISTING OF

THE "CRISPIN" INN,

SITUATE IN

DENMARK STREET, WOKINGHAM,

WITH A

GOOD GARDEN behind, & necessary OUT-BUILDINGS,

Let on Lease to Messrs. SIMONDS, Brewers, Reading;

TOGETHER WITH

4 COTTAGES, GARDENS,

AND OUT-BUILDINGS

Adjoining the said Inn, two on each side thereof, and occupied by respectable tenants.

To be Sold by Auction, by Messrs.

WEEKS & WATTS

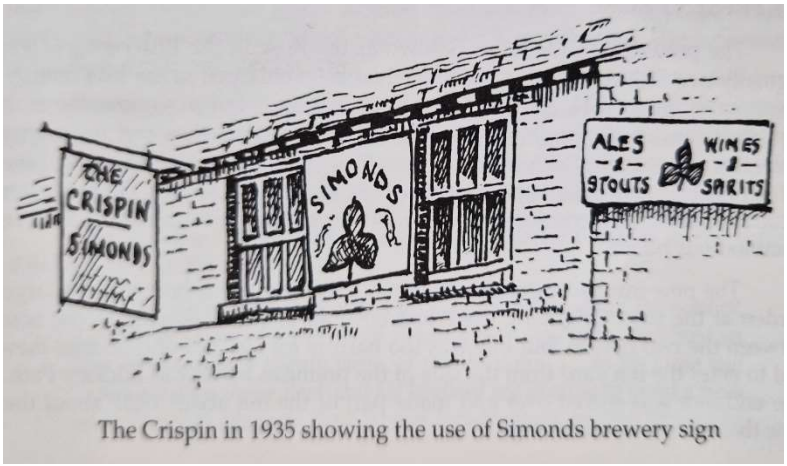
AT THE "ROSE" HOTEL, WOKINGHAM,

On TUESDAY, JULY the 21st, 1885,

AT THREE O'CLOCK, IN THREE LOTS.

May be Viewed on application to the Tenants, and Particulars and Conditions of Sale obtained of Mr. Thomas Cooper, Solicitor, or of Messrs. Weeks & Watts, Estate Agents and Auctioneers, Wokingham.

The Counterpart Lease of the "Crispin" Inn is now in the hands of Mr. Cooper, Solicitor, and can be seen at his Office at any time before the Sale, and at the Place of Sale; also a Plan showing the several Lots.



The Crispin in 1935 showing the use of Simonds brewery sign

(1)



(4)

In 1960, the brewery amalgamated with Courage & Barclay to become Courage, Barclay, Simonds & Co Ltd until simplified to Courage Limited in 1970.

7 Courage Brewery

Courage Brewery was founded in 1787 when Scottish merchant John Courage purchased the Anchor Brewhouse in Horsleydown, London for £615 13s.11d. This began more than two centuries of expansion, mergers, and brand evolution.

In 1972 Courage was acquired by Imperial Tobacco.

Ownership changes followed: Hanson Trust (1986), Elders IXL/Foster's (1990), Grand Metropolitan (1991), and then Scottish & Newcastle in 1995.

Courage was absorbed into Marston PLC in 2010 and then Carlsberg Marston's Brewery Company, fully owned by Carlsberg as of 2024.

It is thought that the brewery's Gold Cockerel image sprang from the family's French origins, and began to be associated with the brewery from the early 19th century.

In the 1930s, a new cockerel design became more prolifically used and was gradually introduced on pub signs, brewery stationery etc. In 1948, Courage commissioned designer Milner Gray to create a new silhouette design, and this lasted all the way up to the early 1990s. (2)



The cockerel above the Rifle Volunteer, Wokingham (2)

7 The Axe Man

The book (5) refers to an event in 1958, when Frank Mitchell (known as the "axe man") escaped from Broadmoor and held a local couple captive in their house in Gipsy Lane, close to The Crispin for 30 hours.

He was an English criminal and friend of the notorious Kray twins, and was later murdered at their behest.

Rumour has it that he popped into The Crispin. I do not think that he was a Mild man.

8 The Crispin – 2026

The Crispin building is owned by Wellington Pub Company, that advertise as being the largest free of tie pub estate in the UK. (4). The firm is owned by David and Simon Reuben, who have an estimated net worth of £24.4 billion. (Sunday Times Rich List in 2023.) The Times has reported that the brothers' businesses make extensive use of offshore tax havens. A spokesperson for the company said that their businesses "fully comply with UK tax laws". The brothers are donors to the Conservative Party. (4)

The Crispin's business (PubCo) is owned by AMS Ltd. You will not find them on the internet!

AMS Ltd. took over from Pubs and Bars Ltd. in 2009, which have since been liquidated.

Angie and Aid Evans took over The Crispin in 2017 from Mick Musson. The Crispin is known for its selection of local ales, making it a favourite among those who appreciate the charm of Wokingham pubs.



The Campaign For Real Ale (CAMRA) describes the pub as follows: -

“A friendly little hostelry, it offers two regular ales and up to three guest ales. The pub does not serve food, however plates and cutlery are provided to consume your own food with a drink purchased from the bar. Regular charity events are held and there is a monthly charity quiz. Beer festivals are held in the garden area which has seating, a gazebo and a smoking area.”

It was voted CAMRA Berkshire South East Branch Pub of the Year 2026.

Right: Proprietors Angie and Aid receive their certificate from the Branch Chair and producer of this booklet.

