

A historical black and white photograph of a street scene on Oxford Road. The image shows a row of multi-story buildings with various architectural styles, including gabled roofs and decorative window frames. A vintage car is visible on the left side of the road. The text 'History of Oxford Road mapped in Buildings' is overlaid in large yellow font across the center of the image.

# History of Oxford Road mapped in Buildings

# What can buildings tell us about the history of Oxford Road?

Buildings can tell us a lot about the history of an area. The type of buildings show that there is a need for them in the local area.

For example, a cinema in the local area might tell you that entertainment is important to people in the local area. It might also imply that there are great transport links and that people are willing to travel there. A cinema would need lots of people to visit and spend money in order to keep the business open. If people can't easily get there, they can't spend money and the cinema would have to close!

Other buildings like churches or mosques would suggest that people with strong religious beliefs live nearby or have moved to the local area.

# The Pavilion

The cinema first came to Reading in September 1904 with a showing at the Town Hall of Far East war scenes produced by the North-American Animated Photo Company. There were also local shots, including those of employees leaving the Huntley & Palmers factory. Reading's first cinema opened five years later in 1909.

The Pavilion Cinema was opened on 21 September 1929. Its site was first developed in the mid-19th century as the Clyde House School which catered for young ladies of what was then Reading's most affluent neighbourhood.

It closed in 1979, became a bingo hall, then a snooker hall. In April 2012, the Lifespring Church purchased the property and revived its original name and also restored much of the cinema's original art nouveau styled interior.

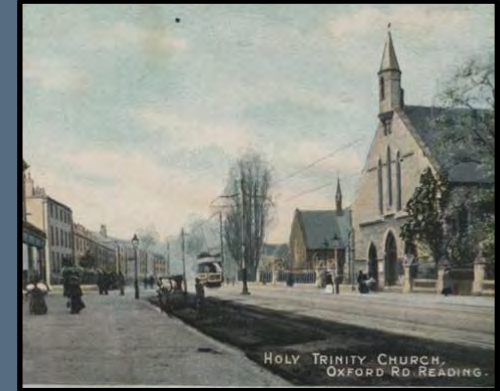




# Holy Trinity Church

Holy Trinity was built in 1826 on Oxford Road with its main façade facing the newly constructed Russell Street. Catacombs were originally built as a place where the rich could be buried but were sealed in 1858. Later they were used as an air raid shelter during the Second World War.

The current Bath stone facade with steep gable and bell turret was added in 1845 by local architect John Billing. It became a chapel of ease for St Mary the Virgin (St Mary's Butts) and was made a parish church in 1870.



# Oxford Road Bridge

The Great Western Railway reached Reading in 1840. The Berks & Hants Railway line passing through Reading West station was opened in 1847, although the station itself didn't open until 1906.

The railway and the bridge were placed at a distance from the edge of town which was then near to Prospect Street. The railway bridge divides the eastern end of the Oxford Road where the properties are a mix of Georgian and early Victorian building from the more commercial, largely late Victorian and Edwardian shops further to the west.

The original 1840s brick arch of Reading West bridge was replaced in the 1930s to provide greater head clearance. Until then, top-deck tram passengers were instructed to 'Keep your seats' so not to lose their heads!



# Greyhound Stadium

The Greyhound Stadium first opened in November 1931.

On the outbreak of the Second World War many sporting events were cancelled, and venues closed.

On 13 September 1939, Reading Greyhound Stadium, Oxford Road, reopened. The race highlighted by the Berkshire Chronicle as the most attractive of the afternoon was won by Peggy of Week who defeated the favourite Thrapston Hopeful in a time of 22.77 seconds.

The final race took place in 1973 and the stadium was closed in 1974.

Today the grounds house the Stadium Business Park.





# Brocks Barracks

The 20-acre barracks, on a site beside the Oxford Road, were built between 1877-78 just on the Reading Borough boundary.

The barracks were the home of the Royal Berkshire Regiment until 1959. In that year they were amalgamated with the Wiltshire Regiment to form the Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment.

Early in 1977, the old Royal Berkshire Regiment's museum in Brock Barracks was dismantled and removed to the new regimental museum in Salisbury.

Today the barracks are home to the Berkshire Army Cadet force, Reading Sea cadets, Reading Air Cadets and the 7 Rifles, a reserve infantry battalion.



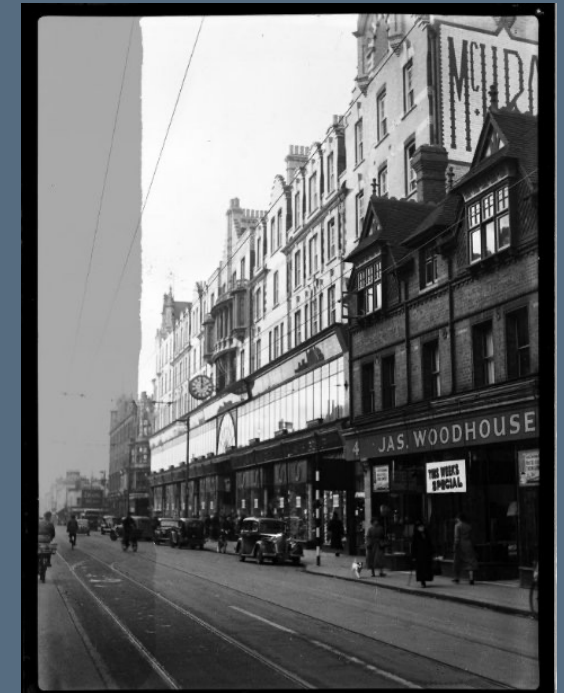
# McIlroy's Department Store

McIlroy's department store on Oxford Road was opened in 1903. It became known as the *Crystal Palace of Reading* because of its 2000 feet of plate glass windows.

It was part of a chain with many locations throughout the country with the first of the stores opening in Swindon.

William McIlroy, one of the business partners within the McIlroy family, actually became Mayor of Reading at around the time of the Reading store opening.

McIlroy's building still exists; the upper floors were converted into flats in the 2000s.





# 55 Baker Street

One of the world's first commercial photographic studios was established at 55 Baker Street, then 8 Russell Terrace, from 1844 to 1847 by William Henry Fox Talbot, a pioneer of photography.

Fox Talbot had invented the first photographic process using a negative image to make a positive print.

It is due to the presence of the studio in the town that Reading has some of the earliest photographs of the built environment in existence!



# Simonds Battle Inn

The Simonds pictorial sign at the renamed 'Battle Inn' pub on Oxford Road in Reading.

This picture taken in 1954.



# Bear Inn Public House

The Bear Inn was one of Reading's foremost coaching inns, however after the arrival of the railway in 1840 it lost its important role. The site in Bridge Street was the second site for the Bear, the first had been in Castle Street. The Inn saw important visitors such as Cromwell in 1648, the wife of James II in 1686 on her way from London to Bath and at the end of the eighteenth century Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote some of 'Religious Musings' while staying there. A large part of the building was demolished at the beginning of the twentieth century and the smaller premises were as in this photograph. The building had been purchased by Simonds in 1898 together with some surrounding properties. Previous brewery owners had been the William James Justins Brinn of the Truro Brewery on Castle Street, which was taken over by Fergusons in 1900.

The landlord at the time of the photograph was probably Albert Rex who was the last landlord. In 1938 the pub was closed and the licence was transferred to The Bear, Park Lane, Tilehurst. In the 1960s Simonds office staff were able to use the premises during their morning break. The building was demolished in the 1990s when the almost the whole of the Simonds (later Courage) brewery site on both sides of Bridge Street was redeveloped. The new Bear Inn at Tilehurst was purpose built and despite the historic associations, recently changed its name to The Water Tower a move that forced the Purple 17 bus route to change the name of its westerly terminus.





# Bridge Hall

Bridge Hall is still known to locals as 'Judo Hall', after Reading Judo Club was founded there in 1949, remaining until 1989. The hall was originally designed in 1890 as an assembly room for Reading's Open Brethren, an evangelical church group.

This was one of many evangelical Christian church groups on the Oxford Road.



# Reading Synagogue

West Reading has long welcomed newcomers to the town. In the 19th century, many workers were moving from the countryside into Reading to find work in its new factories and industries. This in turn led to new suburbs of middle-class and working-class housing in areas like Oxford Road.

By the late 19th century, more immigrants were settling from outside the UK.

Oxford Road became the centre of Reading's Jewish community, and Berkshire's only purpose-built synagogue opened on Goldsmid Road just off Russell Street in 1900.



# The Roundabout Pub

'The Roundabout' pub on Oxford Road in Tilehurst was opened in 1956. The building itself cost £35,000.

The pub served the ever-expanding Tilehurst housing estate. Upon being built, Mr and Mrs Eddie Burns, formerly of the Talbot Hotel in Bournemouth were appointed managers.

The pub was demolished in 2000 to make way for a care home.





# Oxford Road School

The Reading School Board was set up following the 1870 Forster Education Act, which required school places for all children between the ages of five and ten.

Oxford Road Board school was built in 1880-83, and was designed by local architects Morris and Stallwood in a gothic style using local red brick and tiles set behind wall and railings. It was extended by Stallwood in 1894.

It has remained in use as a school to this day!



# Reading Workhouse (Battle Hospital)

Reading Union Workhouse was founded in 1867 to replace Reading's three parish poorhouses. Before we had state pensions or unemployment benefits the workhouse was government's main method of welfare support. There was a great stigma attached to entering the workhouse. They were deliberately horrible places seen as the last resort for the old, sick and orphaned.

With the outbreak of the First World War, and the urgent need for hospital beds, it was decided in 1915 that the workhouse would become the No.1 Reading War Hospital.

In 1919 it became Battle Hospital, later being part of the NHS until its closure in 2005.



# Abu Bakr Masjid

Opened in 2013, on part of the land of the former Battle Hospital, Abu Bakr Islamic Centre is the newest addition to the landmark buildings of Oxford Road. It takes its name from the 7th century companion of Prophet Muhammad.

It has become a central Mosque for Reading's community of over 10,000 Muslims.





# Activity 1: Building investigation

Use the timeline and building information to answer the questions below. Find out how the uses of Oxford Road buildings have changed over time.

Choose a building:

1. When was this building built?
2. Who used it?
3. What does it look like?
4. Which materials do you think it was built from?
5. What different use has this building had?
6. Is it still being used today?

# Activity 2: Drawing conclusions

In Activity 1, you investigated the use of a building over time and you may have discovered that it changed or perhaps, even, no longer exists.

Use the timeline and questions below to help write up your findings about the Oxford Road. What conclusions can you draw from what you found out?

1. Have buildings that were originally religious changed their use?
2. What has happened to functional buildings like hospitals?
3. What has happened to centres of entertainment like cinemas or stadiums?
4. What factors (transport, money, space, population) do you think have affected the changes on the Oxford Road?
5. What do you think the future of Oxford Road might be?