

## The Town of Faringdon

The market town of Faringdon occupies a sheltered declivity at the western end of the plateau which divides the Thames Valley from the Vale of White Horse. An eminence east of the town, with its clump of fir trees, forms a notable landmark across the Vale and is known as The Folly, or Crosswell's Battery.

The town stands at the intersection of the main road from Oxford to Swindon and Bath with those from Wantage to Barford and to Cirencester and Gloucester. In spite of its long history, Faringdon retains only a few ancient buildings beyond its handsome old church. Yet this is a very pleasant town, built mainly in limestone, but with some mellowed brickwork and tiling. The restful atmosphere of its streets is not dispelled by the thriving nature of its business life and industry resultant from it being the market centre for the Vale of White Horse.

THE TOWN HALL



BELL HOTEL, MARKET PLACE

In the Market Place stands the old Town Hall, or Market Hall, supported on stone pillars over an open piazza and having a stone-tiled roof. It was presented to the town by Lord Berners on condition that it should be restored. This work was duly carried out and an oak panel near the staircase commemorates the men of this parish who gave their lives in the 1914/18 and 1939/45 wars. There are no records in existence to establish the origin of this public building; but most probably the present 17th century structure replaced a medieval market hall. In the upper chamber the courts were formerly held and a lock-up and stocks were provided below for use when required.

Faringdon has some gracious late Georgian houses. Its stone-built residences date mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries although two of its hotels retain interesting period features and some shop premises are of 17th century dating.

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**Faringdon House and Folly.**

Faringdon House was built about 1780 and stands on the edge of the Golden Ridge looking northwards to a private lake, the Upper Thames and far-descried Cotswolds, southward up terraced grass to the church beside whose north wall walks the headless ghost of Hampden Pye (Hamilton Tigue of the *Ingoldsby Legends*). The house is as charming an eighteenth century stone house as may be seen in England, square, three-storeyed, with stone attic hidden by a parapet and a curved screen wall on its entrance front. There is a double staircase and much Bath-style plasterwork within. The agriculturalist and Poet Laureate, Pye (immortalised in *Sieg a Song of Sixpence*) built the house and is said to have planted the fir trees on the hill known as Faringdon Folly on the Oxford side of the town. The tower in the midst of these was erected in 1530 at the expense of the fourteenth Lord Berners from designs by the eighth Duke of Wellington. It is the last purely Decoative building to give landscape pleasure to be built in England. From the observation room at the top of the tower is a wonderful view in all directions, for the Golden Ridge, though not high itself, rises out of flat country in a basin of distant hills.

—Extract from "Murray's Berkshire Architectural Guide"  
by John Betjeman, and John Piper.

**Sudbury House.**

Sudbury House, originally built in the 17th century, was then known as Gossips. About a hundred years later it became the home of Samuel Sudbury and was for some time thereafter known as Sadbury.

The present residence of stone retains parts of the original house but is mainly of Regency dating and displays some attractive period features.

**Wadley House.**

Wadley House, about 1½ miles east of the town, was the seat of the notable Unton family. When Queen Elizabeth stayed here Sir Edward Unton presented her with a "jewell of gold garnished with dyamondes and rubies."

This stone-built residence retains a fine 17th century oaken staircase and some handsomely-panelled rooms.

**Littleworth.**

This small village, situated 2 miles north-east of Faringdon near the road to Oxford and below Barcote Hill, has a modern church and a Nonconformist chapel.

There are numerous 18th century monuments and memorials to members of the Pye family, but although these are ornate they lack beauty and interest in spite of the splendour of their marble. A bust of Admiral (Nosey) Pye should be noticed. He was an uncle of Henry Pye, the Poet Laureate. The poet's great grandfather, Sir Robert Pye, the Parliamentarian, is buried beneath the floor of this chapel with his wife, Anne, who was the eldest daughter of John Hampden. They had a married life of sixty years and died within a few days of each other in 1701.

**Other Memorials.**

In the chancel are some good medieval brasses of Margaret Faryndoo, her husband in armour but now headless, and their daughter, Katherine Pynchpole. Another brass here depicts a priest, John Sadler (1505), and the last is to a 15th century merchant of Calais and his wife,



Sudbury House

## The Parish Church

Faringdon Church, dedicated to All Saints, is a splendid cruciform building which dates almost entirely from the 13th century, being of late Transitional and Early English architecture. The massive central tower carries a peal of eight tuneful bells. It has lancet windows on the south and west and was formerly surmounted by a spire; but this was smashed by cannon-fire in the Civil War.

The oldest part of the church is its north doorway, of plain Norman work. The porch has now been converted into a baptistry and contains an octagonal, 14th century font. In the round-headed south doorway should be noticed the original 13th century ornamental ironwork to the wooden door.

The light and spacious nave has a clerestory of round-headed windows. The massive supporting arches are also rounded although the arcades of the tower are pointed and rise from graceful, clustered columns.

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS



### THE PARISH CHURCH (cont.) . . .

The capitals, both of these pillars and of those along each side of the nave, display perhaps the finest stone-carving of this period in Berkshire.

The chancel, built shortly after the nave, is pure Early English work. It is very dignified and lofty and has a wagon roof and a beautiful triple-lancet east window. One of the side lancets forms a lowside window and retains its original grating and shutter. The triple sedilia, or priests' seats, with richly carved canopy, a double piscina and three ambries, all of 13th or 14th century dating, should be noticed.

The north aisle and chapel were added in the late 14th century. The south aisle, damaged during the Civil War, was rebuilt in 1853. In the north transept may be seen a Decorated window with good tracery. There are also inserted Perpendicular windows in the north aisle and a western doorway of the same period.

### The Unton Chapel.

This 14th century north chapel contains monuments to members of the notable family whose seat was at Wadley. Sir Alexander Unton (1547), knighted at the coronation of Edward VI, is shown in brass with his two wives and their eleven children behind them, all kneeling. On an alabaster tomb Sir Thomas Unton (1553) is depicted in armour with his wife in period attire. A monument of 1583 is to Sir Henry Unton who married Anne, Countess of Warwick, a daughter of the Protector, the Duke of Somerset. His son, another Sir Henry (1596), knighted for his valour at Zutphen, was appointed by Queen Elizabeth as Ambassador to France, where he died. He is buried here and this monument was erected by his widow, Dorothy.

### The Pye Chapel.

This is now used as an organ chamber. It contains the kneeling effigy of Sir Henry's widow, Dorothy (who afterwards married George Slutley), which has been moved from its original place in the Unton chapel.

## Places of Interest Around

On the Cirencester road from Faringdon stands the stone-built model village of **Buscot** which is very pleasantly set beside the Thames in the extreme north-west corner of Berkshire. St. John's lock is the last lock upstream on the river. The 13th century church with a Perpendicular tower contains a pulpit which displays painted panels from a Flemish triptych. In Buscot House, a Classic-style 18th century mansion, are the celebrated Brinr Ruse paintings by Burne-Jones. This house and gardens are now National Trust property and may be viewed on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.

Some 2 miles north of Faringdon stands **Rodcot Bridge**. It dates from the 13th century and was the scene of the defeat and dramatic escape in 1387 of Robert Vere, Duke of Ireland.

Westwards from Faringdon along the Swindon road and set on the hillside above the River Cole, which defines the Berkshire and Wiltshire boundary, is the village of **Coleshill** with a well-restored 13th century church which has a splendid Perpendicular tower and near which may be seen the shaft and base of a medieval cross. Coleshill House, built in 1650, is a handsome mansion said to have been designed by Inigo Jones, and it stands in a well-timbered park. About 2 miles from the village is the tree-crowned **Bulbury Hill** where a prehistoric encampment may be seen.

About a mile south-west of Faringdon are the villages of **Great and Little Coxwell**. The latter has a Norman south doorway to its church set within a fine 15th century porch. There are numerous pits in this area which may be figured iron-ore workings. An interesting local geological formation is known as sponge gravel. Great Coxwell was a possession of Beaulieu Abbey. Close to a picturesque Elizabethan farmhouse stands the monastic tithe barn, a massively-timbered structure dating from the 14th century. The church was built 700 years ago. Its oaken north door is original and displays good 13th century tracery.

**Uffington**, 4 miles south of Faringdon, is one of the most attractive villages in the Vale. Its splendid cruciform church was built 800 years ago and has been little altered. The reading room close by is of chalk construction and dated 1617.

Cut in the turf of the downs, which rise to 856 feet beyond the village, is the famous **White Horse**. Although popularly described as a commemoration symbol of the Battle of Ashdown, this work has now been authoritatively dated as about 100 A.D. and is, therefore, by far the oldest of the various horses cut out of the chalk downs of southern England.

**Uffington Castle**, a massively-defended prehistoric earthwork on the summit of the hill, commands wide views. Below it runs a Roman road, the **Portway**. About 1½ miles south-west and just off the more ancient Ridgeway, lies **Wayland Smith's Cave**, set within a circle of beech trees. This is a ruined cromlech, or prehistoric burial chamber.

**Kingston Lisle**, nestling under the downs about a mile from Uffington, is a pretty village of thatched cottages with an interesting little church which contains 14th century wall paintings and good 13th century woodwork. The manor house is an imposing early 18th century mansion in a very beautiful park with a series of fishponds converted into lakes. Near this village stands the **Blowing Stone**, a perforated sarsen. A wailing sound is produced by blowing through one of the holes. Like other local antiquities, this is linked in legend with King Alfred, who is said to have summoned his army by using this glacial relic as a trumpet. Both the **Blowing Stone** and the **White Horse** are referred to in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*.

L. ELGAR PIKE.

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## Classified Index of Advertisers

	<i>Page</i>
<b>Builder and Contractor.</b>	
F. H. Lister, Church Street .. .. .	<i>Map</i>
<b>Builders and Heating Contractors.</b>	
S. G. Bowler & Son, Bromsgrove .. .. .	18 & 19
<b>Cafe.</b>	
Jane's Pantry, Market Square .. .. .	15
<b>Coal and Coke Merchants.</b>	
W. Indge & Sons, Gloucester Street .. .. .	61
<b>Confectioners and General Stores.</b>	
West Stores, 4, Coxwell Street .. .. .	25
<b>Confectioners and Grocers.</b>	
T. H. Hicks, The Model Bakery, Gloucester Street .. .. .	31
<b>Dairymen.</b>	
White Horse Dairy, Southampton Street .. .. .	<i>Map</i>
<b>Electrical, Radio and Television Engineers.</b>	
Bartwell & Drew, Corwell Street .. .. .	311
Gordon J. Hardyman, 7, College Lane .. .. .	33
E. Leverton & Sons, Cornmarket .. .. .	27
<b>Footwear Specialist.</b>	
Frank Tair, London Street .. .. .	32
<b>Fruit and Potato Merchant.</b>	
J. E. Sharland, London Street .. .. .	35
<b>Furnishers and Ladies' and Children's Wear Specialists.</b>	
Cornley's, London Street .. .. .	30
<b>Garage and Motor-Cycle Agents.</b>	
The Faringdon Engineering Co., Ltd., Enterprise Garages, Gloucester Street and Lechlade Road .. .. .	29
<b>General Engineers.</b>	
Eagle Motors (Faringdon), Ltd., Station Road .. .. .	2
<b>Grocers and Domestic Stores.</b>	
C. H. Blissett, London Street .. .. .	4
<b>Hairdresser.</b>	
Elsabeth, Gloucester Street .. .. .	10
<b>Hotels.</b>	
Ball Hotel, Market Square .. .. .	26
The Crown Hotel .. .. .	1
<b>Nurserymen.</b>	
R. Tucker & Sons, The Nurseries .. .. .	16
<b>Printers.</b>	
The Portwell Press, Station Road .. .. .	28
<b>Turf Accountants.</b>	
Bridge & Co., Corn Exchange .. .. .	34

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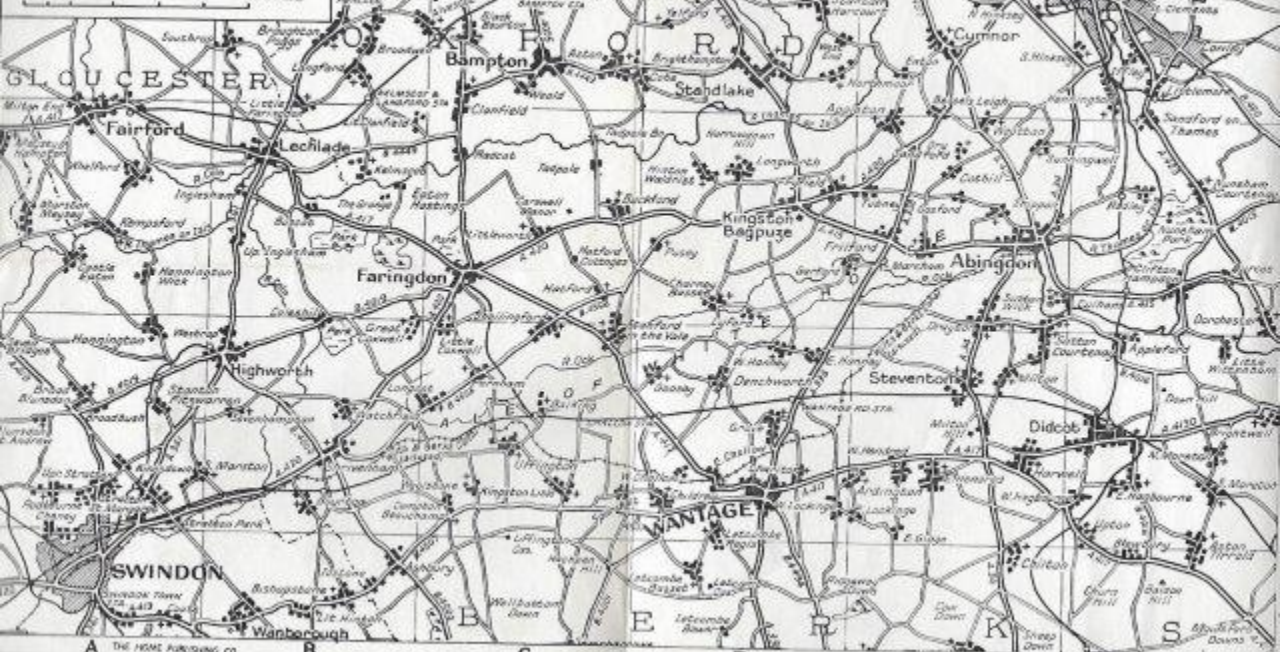
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