

History Trail Faringdon, Oxfordshire

Brief history

Faringdon has a long and varied history with evidence of habitation by Prehistoric man, Romans and Saxons, Normans and Vikings.

It ranked the 3rd town of importance in the Saxon Kingdom of Wessex. The name Faringdon is derived from Ferendune- the fern covered hill- and recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086.

In 1218 King Henry III gave the town a Royal Charter to hold a weekly market. Faringdon became the main market centre for the area with 2 annual horse fairs, a servants hiring and regular cattle, sheep, corn and dairy markets.

The Town became important because of its position on the London to Cirencester Road and on the old wool merchants route from the Cotswolds to the South East. This position resulted in there being many inns and public houses in the town. Even in the 1960s there were about 21 public houses for a population of around 3500.

In the 1780s stage coaches were used for delivery of the post and by 1840 came through Faringdon twice daily. It is believed that gummed envelopes were invented in Faringdon in the mid 19th century.

Faringdon was prominent in the Civil War, with Charles I staying in Oxford. Faringdon was one of the last places in England to hold out for the King. Oliver Cromwell briefly occupied the town in 1645, attacking unsuccessfully the Royalist garrison defending the church and Faringdon House.

The seige of Faringdon House started in April 1645. By the end of the Civil War Faringdon was ruined (Parliament judged that Faringdon and Torrington in Devon were the two worst war- damaged towns in England) and did not recover until the (c18th century)coaching age.

Until county boundary changes in the 1970s Faringdon was in Berkshire.

Town walk, approximately 1 mile Time 20-40 minutes

The buildings and places below are roughly in order.

Start at the Mc Coll's newsagent

Find Sadlers next door and continue.

Left into Church St

Left into Radcot road to see Cleopatra. Return to Church St

Walk towards the town, taking a left turn into the Market Square, by Salutation mansions.

Walk along the Market Square towards The Bell.

With The Bell on your left, continue past the Old Town Hall to Cornmarket

Pass the Red Lion continue into Marlborough St

On reaching the Roman Catholic Church, return and cross the road to the Corn Exchange.

Walk a little way up Gloucester St until you reach Gloucester House, then retrace your steps to Mc Coll's.

McColl's Newsagents, Market Square

Erected in 1911 for Mr Tinker Anns as Faringdon's first purpose built motor car showroom. There were two petrol pumps in the doorway with booms to reach across the pavement. The garage replaced a 17th century house and blacksmith's shop with a forge at the rear.



Former Sadlers Restaurant , Market Square

Dated 1645, it has been a dwelling house, dairy shop, greengrocer & fruiterer, café, greengrocer with fruit and flowers and now a restaurant.



Sadlers coffee shop, Market Square

A 17th century property. It was Coopers the Saddlers until 2003 and was thought to be the oldest shop window in the town.



The Old Crown, 16th century coaching inn, Market Square

Refronted in Georgian times Cobbled courtyard, from which there is a fine example of an Elizabethan external stairway, called the Judges staircase, which was access to the Manorial courts which sat in the courtroom on the first floor.

A tunnel leads off towards the church from the cellars. Note the stained glass window in the downstairs bar which features a Lancastrian red rose. After King Stephen's reign royal roses combined white with red. This rose is probably 14th century glass. The garages and storerooms at the rear were all once stables



<p>Portwell Cellar bar and Las Chicas above, Market Square</p> <p>Once part of the Crown Hotel. Until 1920s the northern end was the Angel pub and used by coachmen and stable lads whilst their masters lodged at the Crown. In 19th century it was the town's first Post Office and telegraph office.</p>	
<p>Towards the Church</p> <p>Camden House , Church Street</p> <p>A late 19th century town house built for Mr Ann's family. In the 1950s it was the offices of Faringdon Rural and District Council. More recently it was a private old people's residential home and now it is again a private house.</p>	
<p>Astley House, Church Street</p> <p>Late 17th century/early 18th century. Once the Dower House to Faringdon House and then the vicarage until late 1980s. This is a private house.</p>	
<p>Entrance to Faringdon House (not open to the public)</p> <p>The house was built in 1780 by Sir Henry James Pye when the old manor house was burned down. Henry James Pye was poet laureate to George III and once described as 'respectable in all except his poetry'. George Stevens, a literary critic punned on Pye's name satirising his poetry in the nursery rhyme 'Sing a Song of Sixpence'.</p>	
<p>All Saints Church, dates mainly from 12th and 13th centuries.</p> <p>The ironwork on the Church door is 13th century. There is a fine Norman Doorway on the North side.</p> <p>The Church contains tombs and monuments to 3</p>	

notable families. – the Untons, Pyes and Bennets.
On the east side there is damage resulting from the Civil War bombardments. The spire was tumbled to deter Cromwell's troops.
There is a cannon ball embedded in the east wall
The Church bells play a hymn tune at 3 hour intervals from 6am to 9pm daily.



Church Street

At the end of the churchyard there are the old gatehouses belonging to the original Faringdon House, and parts of these are timber framed with brick infill. In the 19th century a large stone barn stood in the top corner of the churchyard.
The large stone house facing the church was the original vicarage, now converted to flats. There is a large old sundial at the rear.



Cleopatra, Radcot Road

About 100 metres down the Radcot road, in the grounds of Faringdon House, is a statue reputed to be of Cleopatra. This is one of several in Faringdon House grounds. They came from the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851. Underneath the statue is a WW2 pillbox.



Salutation Mansions, Church St

This building is thought to be on the site of a hunting lodge used by King Alfred the Great and his son Edward the Elder who succeeded him in 901. Edward later became the first Saxon King of England and died in Faringdon in 924.
The site also was a monks' lodging house which dated from when the Cistercian order was given the Manor of Faringdon by King John in 1203.
The current frontage was built in 1890.
More recently this was the Salutation Hotel, later renamed the Faringdon Hotel, now private apartments called Salutation Mansions.



The Pump House, Market Square

Originally called the Pump House from the spring which rises in the cellar and supplied the Portwell It was Faringdon's first Bank.

You can see 4 paler squares from where the letters BANK were erased in the 19th century . The building is owned by Lord Faringdon of Buscot Park and leased to the town. During World War I Lady Faringdon established a hospital in the building.

In 2006 it was refurbished to become meeting rooms for the community. In the past it has been a Community Centre and before that the Institute and Services Club. It now is the home of Faringdon Town Council and the Information Centre.



The Portwell, Market Square

Given to the Town by Sir Henry Unton, Lord of the Manor in the 16th century it was the towns only piped water supply and fed an animal trough. A heavy lead cup securely chained, was for the use of passers by.



Market Cafe 7a Market Place

Parts of this property are very old. Inside is a large beam with Tudor style carvings.

There is a well, carved out of solid rock, under the front of the shop. It has been a grocer's shop and was the Tourist Information office until 2005.



Dominoes Pizza, formerly Lloyds Bank Closed 2018
Originally 2 town houses, it became a County of Gloucester Bank when it moved from the Pump House. It became Lloyds bank in 1897.



African Children's Fund, 10 Market Place
Another re-fronted building which hides an older interior. In the early 19th century it housed an open-fronted butcher's shop and in the late 19th century there was a *chymist* on the ground floor. In the rooms above there was a solicitor who ran a postal lending library as a sideline. His son, Bernard Haines, also a solicitor, worked full-time until he died at the age of 92. He was, at one time, Britain's oldest practicing solicitor. Until 2005 it was the Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Society.



London St Barber
A late 17th century building, drastically altered in the 19th & early 20th centuries. It was once the home of Faringdon's printing works. They published 'The White Horse Gazette' until 1930s. It was once a newsagent, first owned by W H Smith and then privately.



Bell Hotel, Market Square

An inn where Cistercian monks ran a hospice in the 12th/13th centuries.

It was refronted in the late 17th century, when it was a famous coaching inn.

There are traces of a tunnel from The Bell leading towards the Church.

A stone mullioned window looking onto Barclays Bank, is thought to be Tudor.

When the Faringdon Railway branch line was opened in the 1860s, the Bell advertised 'every train arriving at Faringdon Station will be met, and any person desiring to stay at the Bell Hotel will be conveyed with their luggage to the Hotel'.



Old Town Hall, Market Square

Built after the Civil war in 1645, of stone tiled roof supported on stone pillars above an open piazza.

The upper room was used as a meeting room and Magistrates Court. There was once a jail next to the stairs, and for a time it housed the fire appliance.

On Market days butter, eggs and other farm produce were sold on the steps.

At the beginning of the 20th century it was a fire station and later the Faringdon Branch Library.

It is now a meeting room available for hire.



The Cornmarket

A stream which divided Faringdon into the tithings of port to the east, hence Portwell, and Westbrook to the west used to be forded at this point but is now concealed in a culvert passing under the roadway and directly below no xx, the former Fish shop.



Mustard Seed, and Tribe Zero, Cornmarket

Very early 18th century. In the mid 1800s, an egg collector and dealer lived there. Later it was part of the Eagle brewery, which was situated where Southampton St car park is now.



<p>1, Cornmarket. Taylor's fishmonger was here from late 19th century until 1999. It was purpose built as a fishmonger, but now the marble frontage has been painted.</p>	
<p>Waymark Estate Agent Cornmarket Possibly mid 18th century. The street clock was made by a Mr Counsell in the mid 1800s, a watch and clockmaker. Formerly The Nut Tree gift shop</p>	
<p>Red Lion, Marlborough St. Closed 2018 Probably the oldest pub in Faringdon. It started trading in the 14th century and became a famous coaching inn with extensive stabling. It is featured in Tom Brown's Schooldays by Thomas Hughes of Uffington.</p>	
<p>Marlborough St</p>	
<p>Caprinos Pizza, Former Post Office, 1880, Marlborough St Built as a post office, on the site of the fishmonger's before it moved to the Cornmarket. It ceased being a Post Office in the early 2000s</p>	
<p>Roman Catholic Church Marlborough St Originally the Congregational Church built in 1840. Roman Catholic Church since 1974.</p>	

Corn Exchange, Cornmarket

Victorian stone fronted building now a community hall, with Town Council offices and Tourist Information at the rear. Dated 1853. In the 1920s it was used as a cinema. It is built on the site of the Green Dragon Coaching Inn.



Barber's Shop, Cornmarket

At one time a butcher shop with an abattoir at the rear.



Gloucester St

As you walk up Gloucester St, look on the left to see the singing a Song of Sixpence pie, and Dr Foster



Regent Mews , Gloucester St.

Residential apartments where the Faringdon Regent Cinema used to be. The cinema was demolished in the 1970s/80s.



Gloucester House, Gloucester St

This is largely a private house, with PG Walker the dentist at the rear of the property.
This house is linked with Cistercian monks who had a Priory on this site. In 1202 King John bestowed the Royal Manor of Faringdon on the Cistercian Order with permission to build an Abbey. A year later he re-granted Faringdon manor to the new Abbey at Beaulieu in the New Forest to where most of the monks transferred. Some remained to build the Tithe Barn at Great Coxwell c1250.

There is a below ground blocked up passage, one of many in the town associated with the monks and others that were religiously persecuted, and a tunnel called Monks' Walk leads from under the Gloucester Street car park directly towards the church's west door.



The Elms flats and Faringdon Library, Gloucester St

Until the comprehensive education system was introduced this was part of Faringdon Grammar School for Girls, and later Faringdon Comprehensive School. More recently it has been Faringdon Junior School. Before this it was the home of Mr Dundas who gave the Cottage Hospital in Coxwell Road to Faringdon.



Further afield

Continue up Marlborough St, turn left into Station Road, continue walking past The Swan

Old Station Nursery, Station Road

The station opened in 1864, terminus of the Faringdon Railway Company's broad gauge branch line to Uffington junction on the main London/Bristol track. It was converted to standard gauge in 1878 and bought by GWR in 1886. The Beeching plan closed the service to passengers in 1951 and finally to goods in 1963.



London St, on the right

Floyds Restaurant

Previously furniture shop, supermarket, cafe, grocer



Continue up London St, turn left into Coach Lane.

The Old Police Station, Coach Lane

Dating from 19th century the police station used to have a courtroom, 2 cells and was in use until 1976. It is now residential accommodation.



Walk up London St, until you reach right turn into Stanford Road. Look for the green wall sign.

Folly Hill and Tower, Stanford Road

Once a Celtic camp and for a short time a castle during the reign of King Stephen 1135-54AD.

During the Civil War in 1645 Cromwell stationed his troops on the Hill.

In 1936 Lord Berners, Lord of the Manor, built the tower, the last purpose built Folly in England, to the design of Gerald Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington. It seems that Lord Berners wanted a gothic tower and Lord Wellesley a classical one – perhaps an explanation for the mix of styles.

It is over 30m high and from the top on a clear day 5 counties can be seen.

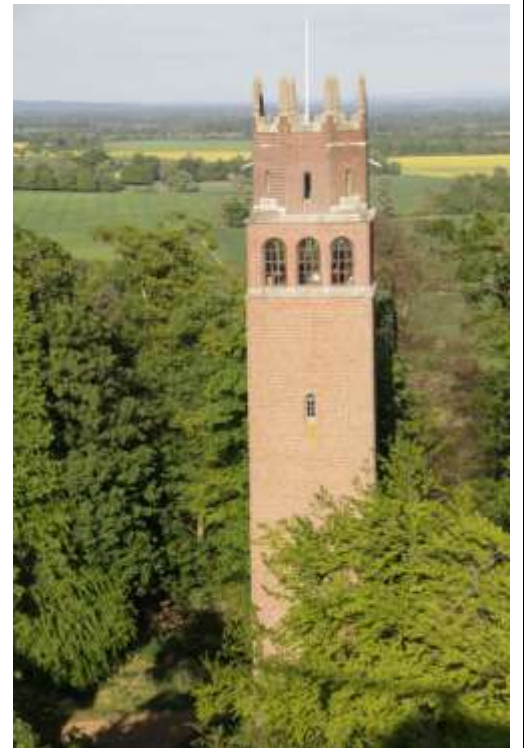
The original Scots Pine were planted by Henry James Pye in about 1780.

In 2011 the Tower was refurbished and the woodland cleared and trees and shrubs planted. The woodland is now home to many quirky sculptures.

Until 1999 there was no electricity in the Tower. A local businessman with initiative and energy raised money to install this and a beacon to mark the 21st millennium.

The rotating light could be seen many miles away.

The Tower is open on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month, April to October. www.faringdonfolly.org.uk



More information on www.faringdon.org and [Faringdon History Website - FDAHS](#)