

# Faringdon History Walk

## Geology - Faringdon Sponge Gravels

Faringdon is situated on the Golden or Corallian Ridge, a band of honey coloured limestone that stretches from Wheatley, south of Oxford, to Highworth. This limestone, rich in corals, was deposited in the Jurassic Period, about 155 million years ago, when most of north eastern Europe was submerged in a warm sea (then, Faringdon was located at the approximate latitude of southern Spain). At the end of the Jurassic the sea retreated for about 30 million years, but returned at the beginning of the Cretaceous, about 120 million years ago. Over the next 10 million years sponges, sand and gravel were deposited, collecting in pockets in the sea bed, while the surrounding floor was swept clean by marine currents. These fossilised sponges, embedded in a crumbly rock, are unique to Faringdon and are of great value to geologists in identifying strata from core drilling, particularly in petroleum exploration.

Unlike the fine grained, easily shaped freestone of the Cotswolds, local limestone and grits are of lower quality and can only be dressed into loaf-size blocks with irregular shapes. As a result buildings made from the local stone require extensive lime mortar, with corners (quoins), lintels and chimney stacks of brick to give a regular edge or face. The lowest quality coral-rich limestone (coral rag) has been used for garden walls or the 'unseen' backs of houses as in the wall of the Bell Hotel in Southampton St.

## Coaching Inns

A north-flowing river emerging from the sponge gravels on Folly Hill cut a valley through the Golden Ridge on its way to the Thames, providing a rare crossing point and access to the Golden Ridge; so, from ancient times Faringdon has been an important crossroads. The road from London to Cirencester, via Abingdon and Oxford, and then on to Gloucester, Bristol the West Country and South Wales crossed the road from the North of England, via Coventry and Burford, to Marlborough, Winchester and Southampton. Note that the streets in the town centre are named after the principal coach destinations. From 1635 a courier service ran between London and Bath and the Crown was where the mud-spattered post-boy riders changed their horses; but, because of their drinking habits, they were appallingly unreliable. By 1773 Faringdon was connected by a turnpike to London and Gloucester, and by 1752 to Wantage and Wallingford. By the 1780s stagecoaches were used for delivering mail, which was more reliable than the post-boys and Faringdon is where the gummed envelope was invented! By 1813 coaches to London from the West Country came through on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and by 1840 coaches were coming through twice day. Horses needed to be changed, which explains the large number of mews and stabling around the town and the coaching inns for the travellers; Faringdon was a town known for its hospitality, ales and good food.

## Old Crown Hotel



A Grade 2 listed, 16C coaching inn, refronted in Georgian times. There is a cobbled courtyard from which there is a fine example of an Elizabethan external stairway, called the Judge's Staircase, one of only two such remaining in England. This gave access to Manorial Courts which sat in the

courtroom on the first floor. It is said that Judge Jeffreys held a court here after the Monmouth Rebellion, in 1685, when he hanged four or five local residents. The County Court held monthly sessions here until they moved to the Court in the Police Station on Coach Lane. It was also used as an Excise Office. A tunnel leading off towards the church from the cellars, and then to Wadley Manor, enabled Royalist soldiers in the Civil War to move in safety. The garages and storerooms at the rear were once stables. The stained glass window in the downstairs bar is probably of 14<sup>th</sup> Century glass and features a Lancastrian red rose which predates the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 (after which the Yorkist and Lancastrian houses merged under the Tudors). Some other windows have the emblem of Queen Eleanor of Castile (widow of Edward I) who died in 1214.

Before the Civil War, England had no standing army and men were pressed into service. In 1640, there was an incident in the Crown when pressed men from Dorset sought out a Lieutenant Mohun for striking off the hand of a drummer boy who had threatened him and whom they believed had died as a result. The mob found Mohun and his fellow officers in the Crown; he tried to escape by climbing out of an upstairs window and clinging to the pole of the inn sign; but they poked him off with an 18 foot pike. He was then half drowned in an open sewer (now culverted under Cornmarket) but he survived. Unfortunately, a boy saw him climb out and told the Dorsetmen who then beat him to death. A hue and cry ensued and five Dorsetmen were hanged in Abingdon for the crime.

### **Martin's Newsagents**



The Anns family had been ironmongers in London Street since 1824 and from the dawn of motoring had a garage for car hire and repairs across the road in what is now Perry, Bishop & Chambers. In 1911, Mr. Tinker Anns bought what is now Martin's and opened Faringdon's first purpose-built motor car showroom and garage. There were two petrol pumps in the doorway with booms to reach across the pavement.

The garage replaced a 17<sup>th</sup> century house and Joseph Newman's blacksmith's shop, which had been there since 1877. There was a forge at the rear now owned by the Old Crown Hotel; during renovation it was found to be complete with blacksmith's tools and almost untouched since it had closed.

### **Sadler's Coffee Shop**



Dated 1645 this Grade 2 listed building has been a dwelling house, dairy shop, greengrocer and fruiterer (Taylor's), greengrocer with fruit and flowers (Robey's), a café (Jane's Pantry during WWII), a restaurant and is now a coffee shop. It adjoins ...

### **Sadler's Delicatessen**



Thought to be a 17<sup>th</sup> Century property, it was Cooper's the Saddler's until 2003 and was thought to be the oldest shop window in the town.

### The Old Town Hall



Following the Civil War of 1642-1646 Faringdon and Torrington in Devon were judged by Parliament to be the most destroyed towns in England. In 1648 the townsfolk asked Parliament for compensation, the damage being assessed at £59,976 4s, but was refused. Nevertheless, this Grade 2\* listed building was built as a Market Hall between 1650 and 1660 as part of the reconstruction. It has a stone tiled roof supported on Tuscan pillars, above an open piazza. It has never been used as a 'Town Hall'; the upper room was used as a meeting room and a Magistrates' court. The iron hoop on the pillar is supposed to be where wrong doers were tied to be whipped, commonly called 'the whipping post'; adjacent to this were the stocks. The first town jail was a tiny room in one corner (where the toilet is now) with a very small, high window as a peep hole in the door. It was said that if your friend was incarcerated therein and you wished to give him some ale, you placed the stem of your clay pipe through the peep hole, placed the pipe bowl in the ale and he then could suck the ale through the pipe! On market days, butter, eggs and other farm produce were sold on the steps. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was a fire station, housing the fire appliance, then the Faringdon Branch Library, then a Red Cross charity shop. It is now a meeting room available for hire, and Faringdon's War Memorial inaugurated in 1922. This was because of a plan to demolish the Old Town Hall for road widening; but, following a campaign for renovation by Mae Morris from Kelmscott Manor, the building was redesignated as a War Memorial, thereby preserving it for posterity.

### The Portwell Angel Café Bar



The Crown and adjacent premises are all that's left of Faringdon's pre-Civil War buildings. The Angel Inn, on the Market Place, was once part of the Crown Hotel and used by coachmen and stable lads whilst their masters took their refreshments at the Crown. Until the 1920s it was the Angel Pub; more recently it was a hotel, then a restaurant with a wine bar in the cellar. In the 19C the front of the building, next to the Crown, was Faringdon's first post office and telegraph office. To indicate to the various stage coaches that there was mail to collect, there was a tall post with three different coloured, semaphore-type arms attached to the top operated by wires from inside the Post Office

### The Market Place

On 7 March 1218 the town was granted a charter by Henry III which read: *"the Shire of Berkshire is ordered to hold a market in Ferendun on Mondays so long as this does not cause a nuisance to surrounding markets"*. Following a petition by the Cistercian monks, on 18 February 1313, Edward II allowed the market day to change to Tuesday, when it has been held ever since. Then, the town was known as Chepyngfarendon or Market Faringdon. It had two annual horse fairs, a servant hiring fair and regular cattle, sheep, corn and dairy markets; it was especially known for the sale of cheese and pigs. The large animals were sold in the Market Place with the small animals and poultry in Church Street.

Thomas Baskerville, passing through Faringdon in 1681, mentions *“a great fair for horses, cattle and other goods, was held here on Whitsun Tuesday and there were a great many inns in the town, the chief of which was the Crown”*. In a five month period in 1813, Faringdon slaughtered 4,000 pigs for the London market, and 8,000 sides were smoked annually before being sent to market. Edward Loveden at Buscot (the 19C model farm) reared the famous Berkshire Black pig which he fed on surplus milk from the farm. Many of the buildings were ‘faced’ in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Camden House



A late 19<sup>th</sup> Century town house built for Mr Anns’ family, Grade 2 listed. From the 1950s it was the home of Faringdon Rural District Council until 1974 when the county boundaries were revised and the Vale of White Horse was transferred from North Berkshire to Oxfordshire. A new District Council was formed based in Abingdon and Faringdon had a Town Council with a mayor for the first time. More recently it was a private old people’s residential home, then a private house, a bed and breakfast establishment and is now private apartments.

### Astley House



c.1720-40 rubble stone house with ashlar dressings, Grade 2 listed. It was once the dower house to Faringdon House, then the vicarage until the late 1980s. It is now a private house.

### Entrance to Faringdon House (NOT open to the public) – next to All Saints’ Church



The present Grade 1 listed house was built in 1780 by Sir Henry James Pye after the old Elizabethan Manor House, which was closer to the church, was burned down. Pye was Poet Laureate to George III and once described as *“respectable in all except his poetry”*. Steevens, a literary critic, punned on Pye’s name satirising his poetry in the nursery rhyme ‘Sing a Song of Sixpence’.

Before the Conquest the manor was in the hands of Harold and was assessed at 30 hides (a hide was 120 acres or enough to support a family; or £1 per annum of income in the Domesday Book); by 1086 it was demesne of the Crown; i.e. managed by Crown Stewards and not let out to leasehold tenants. During the second half of the 12th century it was let out to leaseholders for farming. From 1179 Faringdon was in the custody of William the Porter, who was removed in 1190 at the instance of the townspeople. In 1203 King John granted the Royal Manor of Faringdon to the Abbot and convent of St. Mary of Cîteaux (the Cistercian Order) with permission to build an Abbey, but in the following year the king founded Beaulieu Abbey in the New Forest to where most of the monks transferred while some remained to build the Tithe Barn at Great Coxwell ca.1250.

In the 13th and the early 14th century the manor was held in demesne, but from 1351 it was continually leased. It remained, however, in the possession of the monks until its surrender to the Crown in 1538 on

the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. It then passed to Thomas Seymour (married Catherine Parr, Henry VIII's widow and brother of Jane Seymour), but after his attainder and execution for treason Queen Mary took it back. It then had a succession of owners including the Pleydell family (Coleshill) and in 1590 was the home of Sir Henry Unton, Elizabeth I's ambassador to France; Unton's descendants sold it to Sir Robert Pye, MP for Woodstock in 1623.

### **Faringdon in the Civil War**

In the Civil War Faringdon was a Royalist stronghold defending the bridges at Radcot and the road to Oxford, which was the King's headquarters. Pye, who though outwardly a Parliamentarian, was secretly supplying the King with funds; but his son, also called Robert Pye, was a strong Parliamentarian and raised his own troop of horse to serve the Parliamentarian cause. Faringdon was defended by a regiment of 200 horse and two regiments of dragoons comprising 700 men (200 of whom were captured at Winchester in 1642). After the affair with the Dorsetmen, you can imagine how the people of Faringdon felt about their new lodgers!

King Charles I and Prince Rupert stayed with Pye on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1644. Following the visit Rupert and General George Lyle the Quartermaster General, and the Governor appointed by the King, thought the defences around Faringdon House and the church were inadequate as it was only a third fortified. The fortifications were strengthened with ditches and earthworks with emplacements for cannon on the corners; thick blocks of turf were stacked against the windows leaving only firing slits.

After capturing Bampton, Colonel Cromwell, as he was then, crossed Radcot Bridge on 28 April 1645, and encamped next to Faringdon with six regiments of horse and four troops of dragoons. He quickly occupied the town, laid siege to the earthworks and waited for the arrival of Sir Marmaduke Rawdon and his Royalist forces who he thought were marching to attack him. Unfortunately, Rawdon was still at Basing House, near Basingstoke, but Cromwell didn't know this and asked for reinforcements from Abingdon.

On 30 April he launched his first attack on Faringdon House. Before the battle, the usual courteous moves were made, but Cromwell was less polite than usual and threatened the "*utmost extremity of war*" should the garrison refuse to surrender. Faringdon House was defended by Lieutenant Colonel Roger Burges (of Sir John Owen's Regiment of Foot) who rejected Cromwell's summons. This angered Cromwell and he said: "*if God gives you into my hands, I will not spare a man of you, if you put me to the storm*". But Burges replied: "*we would have you know you are not now at Bletchingdon*". (Bletchingdon House near Islip had surrendered when summonsed because Colonel Windebank had overestimated the size of the Roundhead force threatening him, and so had marched out with full honours. But on arrival in Oxford, he was court martialled for being 'faint hearted' and shot against the wall of Merton College.) While this exchange of words was happening, Colonel Browne (from Pickering's Regiment of Foot) arrived from Abingdon with between five and six hundred Roundheads.

Cromwell launched his attack at 3.00 a.m. at three separate points. Men with ladders scaled the walls led by their officers, but they were thrown back. Burges himself threw one ladder back with a pike. Captain Henry Cannon, one of the first Roundheads up a ladder was thrown to the ground and lay there floundering in the mud and darkness until captured. Many Roundheads died and were driven back leaving the ladders in place. Burges managed to get a message out to the King at Oxford saying he could

hold out at for at least five days; then, unexpectedly, about 100 Royalist survivors, who had been thought captured or killed at the battle at Bampton, arrived back in Faringdon with their weapons to reinforce the garrison. A truce was called at daybreak and there was a 'gathering together of dead bodies'. Cromwell who had lost 14 men, was impressed by the stoutness of the defence and became more conciliatory in tone and offered an equal exchange of prisoners. The Parliamentarians settled in for a long siege. Abingdon was warned by scouts that a Royalist force was approaching fast and Cromwell and Browne were instructed to prevent an incursion into Berkshire, so Cromwell left for Newbury with a small escort. However, Rawdon was already in Lambourn where he met up with the main Royalist army under Goring who'd come up from Marlborough. In Newbury, Cromwell discovered from Royalist prisoners that Goring was intending to beat up Faringdon so he hurried back to strengthen his lines. He sent on a troop of horse to strengthen the small post at Radcot that had secured the Thames crossing.

Too late, a detachment of Goring's army had already taken the post and hid in ambush waiting for them; the Parliamentarian cavalry was shot up, several were killed and taken prisoner and two colours were captured. The Royalists then took the earthwork fort, the bridge and Radcot House. With the Royalist army so close, Cromwell abandoned further attacks on Faringdon House and withdrew to Newbury and the safety of the New Model Army.

Rawdon continued to defend Faringdon which was subject to continuous bombardment and attacks until the end of the war. But the end was in sight for the Royalists; on 27 April 1646, the King fled Oxford for Scotland and the day after, Colonel Rawdon died of natural causes, age 64. He was buried under a black stone slab in the nave of All Saints', but his burial party was blown up in the churchyard by a 200 lb mortar fired from the Roundhead lines.

Radcot House fell on 24 May and Sir Robert Pye Junior, now a famous Roundhead Colonel, was sent to attack his father's house, but the summons to surrender was again refused. A battle ensued; John Gwyn defending the house said that as he was bending down on the stairs, a cannon ball entered the building hitting the wall next to him. A fragment of stone hit his leg and he said that afterwards it broke three times at that same spot.

Gwyn was told that a number of Royalist deserters were locked up in the town pest house to the south of the town. The pest house had been fortified leaving only small loop-holes for muskets so Gwyn took the chance that the defenders wouldn't be able to see anyone approaching and led a daring attack to get the Royalists back. Crouching underneath the line of fire Gwyn's men approached the rampart of turf slabs surrounding the building and poured musket fire into it. The Roundhead guards surrendered and the deserters were escorted back to Faringdon House, but as they got there the Roundheads counter-attacked. The Royalist cavalry was slow in coming to their aid, and it took a dozen of Gwyn's friends to save him from death or capture.

On another raid on the Roundheads, Gwyn had just jumped over the entrenchments when a cannon ball landed on the spot where he had been standing killing two of his companions.



Another sally out developed into a full-scale battle that lasted four hours when 300 of the garrison took on 1500 Roundheads and drove them out of their earthworks into the town and then from a fortified house into the open fields where they routed them again.

But it couldn't go on; The King sent a letter from Newcastle on 10 June concerning the Oxford garrisons. *"Having resolved to comply with the designs of the Parliaments in everything which may be good for the subjects to require you upon honourable conditions, to quit those Townes and Castles, and Forts, intrusted by you to us, and to disband all the forces under your severall commands."* Lisle and Burgess were in Oxford at the time of the negotiations and were able to influence Faringdon's surrender as part of the Oxford Articles, insisting on the same benefits. These were read to Parliament on 23 June 1646, Article 24 dealt with Faringdon: *"That the Garrisons of Farrington shall be rendered to his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax and the Governor, Gentlemen, Souldiers, and all other of what quality soever within those Garrisons, shall enjoy the benefit of these Articles in every particular which may concern them, they rendering the Garrisons accordingly as Oxford"*. Rawdon's men marched out with full honours on Wednesday 24 June; it was raining.

The muster roles for Rawdon's forces show 48% were men, 10% were women in support and 42% were 'posemen'. These were women dressed as soldiers and usually employed as snipers, so Faringdon was defended by a force made up of 52% women. The posemen in Rawdon's force were armed with long 28 bore matchlock muskets that were accurate to about 120 yards compared to the mens' 10 bore muskets which fired a heavier ball, but were only accurate to about 40 yards; a 28 bore musket ball is on display in All Saints' church. Rawdon needed long range snipers to defend the ramparts so he recruited a large number of female posemen.

In 1847 Faringdon House was in the ownership of Daniel Bennett and was bought by Lord Berners in 1918 for his mother who had leased it from 1910; when she died he moved in. Berners was a lavish entertainer and his weekend parties for the great and the good were famous. He died in 1950 and left the house to his friend Robert Heber Percy whose granddaughter, Dr Sofka Zinoviev, now lives there with her family.

### All Saints' Church



Originally a Saxon building; the current church dates mainly from 12<sup>th</sup> (1180) and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the ironwork on the church door is 13<sup>th</sup> Century. There is a fine Norman doorway on the North side, but it was extensively rebuilt after the Civil War. On the East side there is damage resulting from the Civil War bombardments by cannon fire in 1645-6 and there is a cannon ball embedded in the east wall, not from the Civil War, however, but a ball that removed the legs of a sea captain during the French Wars; he included it in his memorial when he died and it is cemented into the wall. Nevertheless, cannon balls and other relics from the Civil War are on display inside the church together with the tombs of, and monuments to, three notable families: the Untons, the Pyes and the Bennets. Well worth a visit.

Originally, the tower had a spire but it was damaged in the Civil War. Reputedly, the Roundheads were trying to topple the spire onto the Royalists inside by mining underneath the church. However, it was

probably so badly damaged by cannon fire that the Royalists toppled in a controlled way to prevent it from crushing the garrison inside. It fell onto the south transept, which was not rebuilt until 1854; the tower itself was reconstructed in its current, truncated form and houses a peal of eight bells dating back to 1708. These were recast by the Loughborough Bell Foundry in 1926 and a carillon added that plays a hymn tune every three hours between 6 am and 9 pm. During the renovation two cannon balls were discovered in the belfry.

### **Church Street**

At the end of the church yard are situated the old gatehouses belonging to the original Faringdon House and parts of these are timber framed with brick infill. In the 19<sup>th</sup> 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.



### **Radcot Rd**

#### **Africa Embracing Egypt**



About 100 metres down the Radcot Road, in the grounds of Faringdon House, is a statue which depicts Africa embracing Egypt. This is one of several statues in Faringdon House grounds that came from the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851. Underneath the statue is a WWII pillbox.

### **Coach Lane**

#### **The Old Police Station**



Dating from 19<sup>th</sup> Century the police station used to have a courtroom, 2 cells and was in use until 1976. It is now private accommodation.



## The Market Place

### Salutation Mansion



Formerly known as the Salutation Inn, it was built on the site of the monks' lodging house, which dated from when the Cistercian Order was given the Manor of Faringdon by King John in 1203. It is thought to be 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. It is mistakenly said that he died in Faringdon but this is a misreading of Farndon-on-Dee where he died leading an army against a Welsh-Mercian rebellion, on 17 July 924. The new 1890's frontage was built on the site of an Elizabethan property last occupied by Mr Pettifer, a builder. It was a coaching inn and extended from the Market Place to Church Street. It was re-fronted in the 19th century and in recent years has been converted to flats.

### The Pump House



An early 19<sup>th</sup> century building, originally called the Pump House from the spring which rises in the cellar and supplied the Port Well. The building is owned by the Faringdon Estate and leased to the town. This was Faringdon's first bank, the County of Gloucester Bank (you can see four paler squares from where the letters B-A-N-K were erased). It then became the offices of the Eagle Brewery, the Institute and Services Club for ex-servicemen, then the Community Centre with a bar and club house at the back (now demolished). Since 2016 it has housed the Town Council Offices, with the Faringdon Community and Tourist Information Centre on the ground floor and meeting rooms on the upper floors. Behind there is a theatre which now houses the Pump House Project, a community facility providing many activities for adults and children alike.

### The Port Well and the Dali Diver



Given to the town by Sir Henry Unton, Lord of the Manor in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, it was the town's only piped water supply and fed an animal trough. A heavy lead cup, securely chained, was for the use of passers-by. The gas lamps were placed on top in the 19th century.

The stone bench portrays the events of a hot summer's day in 1936 when Salvador Dali, the surrealist Spanish artist, dressed in a full deep sea diver's suit trudged, sweating, through the Market Place as the result of a dare by Lord Berners. Dali was due to open the first Surrealist Art Exhibition in London and Berners and Dali had thought it a wheeze if Dali were to open the exhibition dressed as diver. Dali



had already nearly drowned when they were experimenting with the suit in the lake at Faringdon House; at the exhibition itself Dali had to be extricated from the suit before he suffocated. The inscription reads: *"Mistrust a man who never has an occasional flash of silliness"*.

The diver and inscription were sculpted by Tim Shutter in 2014.

### Hare in the Woods 7 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 and a mediaeval street that led to Swan Lane, now blocked off, between it and 6 Market Place, the former Market Restaurant. It has been a grocer's shop and was the Tourist Information Centre until 2005, then a florist's, until Hare in the Woods relocated from London St.

### Lloyd's Bank 8 Market Place



Originally two town houses; it became the County of Gloucester Bank when it moved from the Pump House. In 1897 it became Lloyd's Bank, then merged with TSB to become Lloyd's TSB around the year 2000, since when it has changed back to Lloyd's Bank.

### 10 Market Place



Another re-fronted building which hides an older interior. In the early 19C it housed an open-fronted butcher's shop and in the late 19C 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 practising solicitor. Until 2005 it was the Cheltenham and Gloucester Building Society and now houses the African Children's Fund Charity shop.

### London St

#### Davis DIY



A late 17<sup>th</sup> Century building, drastically altered in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was once the home of Faringdon's Printing Works who published the White Horse Gazette until the 1930s. It has been a newsagent, owned first by WH Smith then privately, recently a lifestyle and mobility specialist shop, before being reopened as a hardware shop under the name of a previous longstanding Faringdon hardware business

### The Bell Hotel



This was a coaching inn where the Cistercian monks ran a hospice in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It was refronted in the late 17<sup>th</sup> 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 what is now the Quad, formerly 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"*

### Corn Market



A stream which divided Faringdon into the tithings of Port to the East, hence Port Well, and Westbrook to the West, used to be forded at this point. The stream is now concealed in a culvert passing under the roadway and directly below the former Taylor's fish shop. In 1953 a company laying a telephone cable damaged the culvert. Then, before the bypass, traffic passing through the town was heavy with a Pressed Steel Fisher lorry transiting every two minutes

between Swindon and Cowley. In order to repair the culvert without stopping the traffic the Ghurkas built a Bailey Bridge over the culvert in 18 hours. At first the bridge was too steep and the bus from Oxford got stuck, but the slope was reduced and the work was completed in a week. On 26<sup>th</sup> May 1993, five inches of rain fell in 24 hours causing sand to be washed off Folly Hill that blocked the Corn Market.

### Little Big Top Toy Shop



This building was purpose built as Taylor's fishmonger's and was here from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century until 1999. It has since had various uses including an extension of the baragain shop opposite selling cards, picture frames, etc., a shoe shop, a coffee house, and now a toy shop.

### Mustard Seed and Manna Delicatessen



Very early 18<sup>th</sup> 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 Street Car Park is now.

### The Nut Tree

Possibly mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century, formerly a jeweller's. The street clock was made by a Mr Counsell, a watch and clockmaker in the mid 1800s. For many years this was a bespoke gift, card and jewellery shop.

### The Red Lion Inn



This is possibly the oldest pub in Faringdon. It started trading in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and became a famous coaching inn with extensive stabling.

It is featured in the book Tom Brown's Schooldays, by Thomas Hughes of Uffington, as the inn where the bully Flashman drank.



### **The Bangkok Kitchen**



Purpose built as a Post Office in 1880, on the site of the fishmongers before it moved to the Corn Market.

Following the move of the Post Office business to Martin's Newsagents, the building is now a Thai restaurant.

### **The Corn Exchange**



This Victorian, stone fronted building is Grade 2\* listed and stands on the site of the Green Dragon Coaching Inn. The Savings Bank at the mews end was built in 1853 at a cost of £1,400 and formerly housed the Town Council Offices and Faringdon Community and Tourist Information Centre. The hall itself was built as a Corn Exchange where local farmers congregated to sell their surplus grain to millers and dealers away from the noise of the animals in the main market place. It cost £2,331 1s 10d, inclusive of the site purchase of £550, and opened for business on December 29<sup>th</sup> 1863. The original roof lines are of natural Cotswold slats

or tiles each with its own Cotswold name; in ascending order from the roof plate to the ridge tile they are: Long Wyvetts, Short Batchelors, Middle Becks and Muffeties.

The ten plaques inside show rural activities, and the corbels different fruit and flowers. From 8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> March 1955 the floor was re-laid by one man using 8,183 strips of hard wearing Muhuhu wood from East Africa using a 'secret nailing' technique that required 8,500 1½ inch (40 mm) nails. (The Muhuhu tree is small and can only provide planks of about 1,200 x 60 mm (four foot by 2½ inch) in size.)

The Faringdon Corn Exchange Company went into liquidation in 1936 and Faringdon Parish Council bought the whole building for £1,000. It was subsequently sold to the Vale of White Horse District Council and was bought back by Faringdon Town Council for £1 in April 2010. From 1919 to 1935 it was home to the Regent Cinema until the Rialto was built opposite. Entry was 2d, or 6d if you sat in the auctioneer's gallery, known as cuddly corner. The old hire sacks stored there were a home for rats, which would venture out during a performance. The Regent Cinema was re-established in 2011 and shows one matinee film and one blockbuster each month.

### **Gloucester Street**

#### **Regent Mews**



This is the site of Faringdon's Regent Cinema that replaced previous barns and old farm cottages. It was originally called the Rialto, but was renamed by the new owner in 1948, and was the only building in the town which aspired to Art Deco. It was officially opened by Lord Berners in 1936 when he made the longest speech

of his life, all of 12 words. The first film shown was the Life of the Bengal Lancers, starring Gary Cooper, with John Betjeman and Adele Astaire (Fred's sister) in the audience. There was such a crush that an

usherette fainted and had to be carried over the heads of the crowd. It became a Bingo Hall in 1969 and closed in 1981; it was knocked down in 1984 and these town cottages were built on the site.

### **The Barbershop**



Thought to have been a gate house to the first Faringdon House, this was originally Taylor's Butcher's with an abattoir at the back. High up on the front of the building is a bull's head, to represent the abattoir. A selection of wooden meat skewers dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and coins from George II and George III were found under the floorboards. It was sold to Carters in 1959 and was Cotswold Outdoor Wear before becoming a barber's.

### **Gloucester House**



Also a Grade 2 listed building, possibly dating from Elizabethan times as the Manor Farmhouse with the barn next door. The small house across the street is reputed to be the dairy and cheese room. This is now largely a private house with P G Walker Dental Practice at the rear of the property in what was the coach house and stables. The Cistercian monks, who owned the manor from 1203 until 1558, had a

Priory on this site. Below-ground there is a blocked up passage, one of many in the town associated with the Cistercian monks and others who were religiously persecuted; a tunnel, called Monk's Walk, leads from under Gloucester Street car park directly towards All Saints' west door.

### **Elms Flats and Faringdon Library**



From 1948 until 1961, when the comprehensive system was introduced, this Grade 2 listed building was part of Faringdon Grammar School for Girls. It closed when Tollington School, now Faringdon Community College, on Fernham Rd was opened. Before then it was the home of Mr Dundas who gave the Cottage Hospital in Coxwell Road to Faringdon. It is now the town library, with the history room and offices for the Baptist Church upstairs.

### **Marlborough Street**

#### **La Bobina**



In Victorian times this was a haberdashery with counters up both sides of the shop. In the 80s/90s it was a restaurant called The Rats' Castle. More recently it changed to The Bobbin Bistro and Bar, holding burlesque cabaret evenings and showing classic films. It is now La Bobina, a Spanish Tapas restaurant.

#### **The Rookery**

Located on Arthur's Hill, named after H.N. Arthur who owned it, the three storey building at the top of Marlborough Street was originally a coach and harness makers, and has since been many different businesses: including an antiques centre, furniture store and now The Rookery, comprising a vegetarian coffee shop, and biophilic hair salon with artistic space for hire.





## Station Road Old Station Nursery,



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

## Folly Hill and Tower



Once a Celtic camp and for a short time a castle during the reign of King Stephen 1135-54. During the Civil War in 1645 Cromwell stationed a troop of cavalry on the Hill. In 1936 Lord Berners, Lord of the Manor, built the tower, the last Folly in Britain, to the design of Gerald Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington. Lord Berners wanted a gothic tower and Lord Wellesley a classical one – perhaps an explanation for the mix of styles. It is over 30 m high and from the top on a clear day five counties can be seen. The original Scots Pine trees were planted by Henry James Pye in about 1780. 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 and grounds underwent extensive renovation recently and there is now a willow pie and 24 blackbirds around the grounds and building, as well as a wooden cannon trained on the Church and Faringdon House and other wooden sculptures. The tower is open on the first and third Sunday of the month, April to October.

Compiled from various sources by **Faringdon and District Historical Society,**  
September 2005

Updated by **Faringdon Community and Tourist Information Centre**  
June 2016