

GREAT FARINGDON TOWN SIGN – BACKGROUND & PROCESS

AND THE BRAND PLAYS ON: FARINGDON'S UNIQUE IDENTITY

In the Introduction to the *Faringdon's Fabulous Follies* booklet, we discover that Faringdon (or Folly Hill to be more accurate) is at the exact rotational centre of England – with the Tower (since 1935) forming the vertical central spindle. Throughout history, Chepyngfarendon has so often found itself at the strategic centre of significant events and places: the civil war; the vital junction for travel routes; the gateway to pastoral middle England. More recently, we have been the watering hole for the social and cultural glitterati of the 1930s, an aesthete's paradise for the great and the good. And we've also had our fair share of residents and visitors who have been delightfully bonkers, including our very own Lord Berners. Where else can you put roundhead helmets and diving helmets into the same sentence and still have it make sense? Or - Pye's Poetry and Pink Pigeons? Both literally and metaphorically, Faringdon's famous fossils (animate and inanimate) are the building materials of today and the memories of tomorrow. We admire the sponge gravels of the Golden Ridge in the stonework of the stunning market place, and we delight in the well-developed sense of the ridiculous in the silly signs. This, and all the bits in between, is the fabric of Faringdon's uniquely distinctive personality. This is the special individuality that we celebrate, as the rest of England demurely rotates around us ...

1086 AND ALL THAT

In *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum* (The Close Rolls – kept in the National Archives at Kew) we read that on the 7th March 1218 Henry III granted Ferendun the right to hold a weekly market (as long as it didn't cause a nuisance to neighbours).

But Faringdon's recorded history goes back significantly further than this. Much of All Saints Church was built in the twelfth century when Queen Matilda also had a fort up on Folly Hill, and in the Domesday Book of 1086, Ferendone is described as *very large – with 45 households: 17 villagers, 12 smallholders and 16 slaves*. We can go back still further, into the eighth century, when Alfred was known to have had a hunting lodge here.

That's all well and good, but can we pinpoint these earlier happenings down to a particular date or day of the week, so that we can celebrate the anniversaries? Difficult. However, we *do* know that the granting of our Market Charter on the 7th March 1218, 797 years ago, was a *wodnesdæg* (*Wodens Day: Woden was the chief Anglo-Saxon god. the name comes from the word "wod" – meaning "violently insane"*), and I'm sure we would all wholeheartedly agree that 800 years of market charter is worthy of a little celebration.

Please put the date in your forward planning diary. On the 7th March 2018 (in only 28 months' time) we will be celebrating the 800th Anniversary of Great Faringdon's Market Charter.

And by quirky coincidence, in 2018 the 7th March again just happens to be a Wednesday. It would be appropriate therefore if our celebrations were violently insane.

A SIGN OF THE TIMES?

The 7th March 2018 is in just 28 months' time. Many of the party preparations for the great event can wait a little while longer, but there are a few things (such as the royal visit...) that need to be put into motion (gyratory perhaps?) now if they're going to be ready in time. Inspired by the wonderful village and town signs so typical of the East of England, the Pink Pigeons Trust have proposed that we develop a GREAT FARINGDON TOWN SIGN and erect this in the centre of the Market Place, to be unveiled in 2018, as a celebration not only of our 800 year charter but also of our unique identity. This proposal to develop a town sign has received the unanimous and wholehearted support of the Town Council and is therefore now going forward to the first public consultation stage, where we decide as a community which general direction we want to go in. We first need to choose the overall *shape* of the sign. Do we want it to be flat or 3D? Do we want it to be stationary or do we want it to be moving in some way? Do we want it traditional, or contemporary, or quirky? Once this has been chosen, it will then allow us to determine which elements to include, which will happen in the 2nd consultation stage during 2016.

YOU MEAN – WE'RE NOT THE FIRST TO HAVE A TOWN SIGN?

In many villages and towns of southern England an ornamental sign is erected in a prominent location such as the village green or market square. The design often depicts a particular characteristic feature of the village or a scene from its history, heritage, or culture. They are typically made of wood or metal or a combination of both, the designs are often chosen after careful consultation with the local community.

Signs are often shield-shaped, resembling a coat-of-arms; or they are designed to be in the shape of a local landmark or relevant object, or evocative scene perhaps. Some Village signs are symmetrical – but just as often they are not. (Google "village signs").

Ornamental timber and iron signs were common historically to identify buildings of importance such as inns or town halls. However, the tradition of village signs is believed to have started in Norfolk early in the 20th century when Edward VII suggested that village signs would aid motorists and give a feature of interest on the Sandringham Estate.

The spread of interest beyond Norfolk can be attributed to Prince Albert, Duke of York who gave a speech to the Royal Academy in 1920 promoting the wider use of village signs. This prompted the Daily Mail to run a nationwide village sign competition. The prize fund exceeded £2,000 (approximately £100,000 in today's money) and ten awards were made. The winning schemes were exhibited at Australia House, London in October 1920.

In 1924, King George VI recommended that the old custom of identifying villages with carved or painted name signs should be revived.

Many signs commemorate significant events such as centenaries.

A SITE FOR SOAR(ing) EYES?

The Town Sign will be 12ft high. Yes – you will need to be able to step back and look up in order to admire it. Officers from the Vale have been working together with the Town Council

and Pink Pigeons to choose the best site for the sign. It has to be prominent and central but must not pose a hazard or impede visibility for traffic, particularly high vehicles. It should not interfere with important market place activities such as market stalls. It needs to have space around it with no high objects (trees, buildings, posts) in the immediate vicinity, so that it stands on its own and can be fully appreciated from all sides. And it must not be vulnerable to being hit by a passing lorry or double-decker bus.

There are other considerations that will be important in the installation and construction, such as land ownership, planning permissions and hidden underground obstacles. These will be addressed through the pre-application, which will come after the general shape has been chosen.

After carefully considering a number of alternative sites in and around the Market Place, the team have now chosen a spot in front of Lloyds Bank, on the corner of the car parking bays. There is already a disabled parking sign there that would therefore be replaced by the town sign. The presence of the existing disabled parking sign suggests that there are no critical underground obstacles that would prevent the installation of the town sign, although the latter will be substantially bigger, and will require a significant block of concrete to keep it in place for the next 800 years.

Assuming that there are no significant obstacles identified during the pre-application, this looks to be a very good location for the new Town Sign.

DESIGNING DE SIGN

The overall aim:

- *Design should be welcoming to visitors and residents alike*
- *De sign should be beautiful, inspiring and uplifting*
- *Design should celebrate Faringdon in a contemporary and at the same time respectful way*
- *De sign should bring together all aspects of the location to create a unique identity and sense of place*
- *Design should be unique and distinctive, celebrating the history, identity and surrounding natural beauty of the urban-rural environment*
- *The finished work must be long lasting, robust, durable and low maintenance*

ELEMENTS : THEMES, LANDMARKS & EVENTS

A village sign might depict just one event or scene, or just a few carefully selected themes or landmarks. For the Faringdon Town Sign, it's clearly absolutely vital that the selection of themes, events and landmarks that are eventually represented on the sign are very carefully chosen by the community.

The final choice of elements can only be made once the general shape of the Town Sign has been chosen. Will it be 2D or 3D? Will it move or will it be stationery? This choice will also determine the number of elements possible.

However – the Pink Pigeons thought it would also be a useful exercise to get a rough overall picture of community priorities when it comes to the themes, landmarks and events that are most important in defining Faringdon’s identity, and might therefore make it onto the new Town Sign.

Therefore, we conducted a simple survey to try to ascertain what those themes, events and landmarks might be.

The survey brief was not specifically relating to a Town Sign. *“What themes, landmarks & events do you think help to encapsulate Faringdon’s unique identity? Please imagine for the purposes of this exercise that there is NO limit to the number of “elements” that might be included in your choices. If it’s helpful, consider the development of any/all of the following possible “products” when ranking the different elements: COMPOSITE POSTER OF LANDMARKS, CREST, COAT OF ARMS, ACHIEVEMENT, BUILDINGS QUIZ, INSIGNIA, BLAZONRY, SEAL, TOWN SIGN, FLAG, BADGE, EMBLEM, BRAND, SIGNET, ESCUTCHEON, GONFALON, ENSIGN, SHIELD, LOGO, LETTERHEAD, MERCHANDISING (such as mugs, calendars, effigies ...)”.*

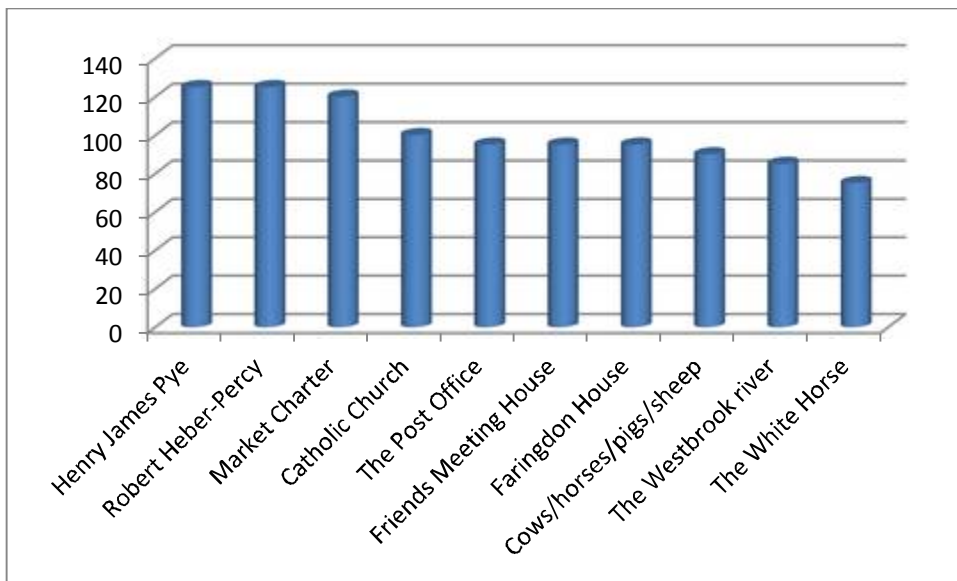
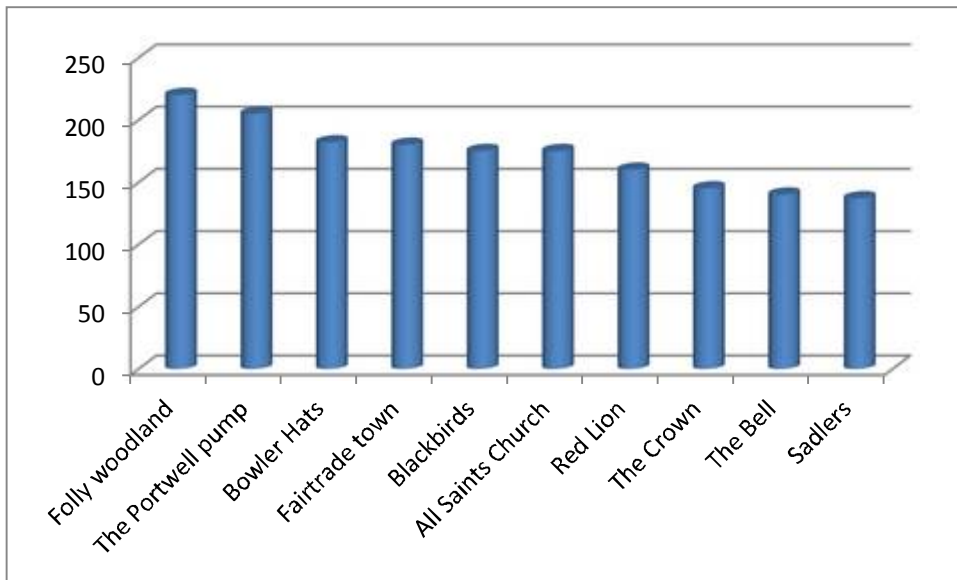
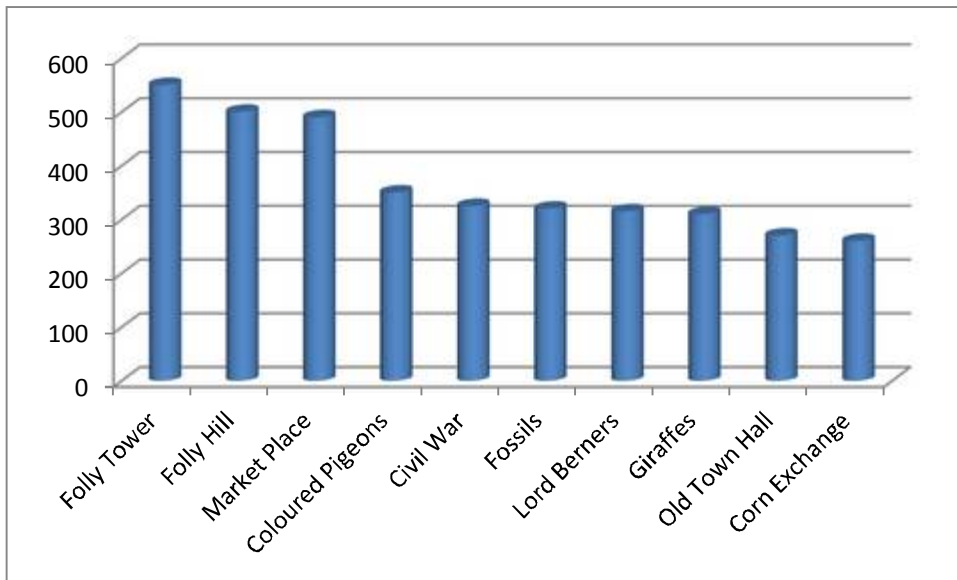
Overall the results were largely as expected, although the exercise did also throw up a few surprises:

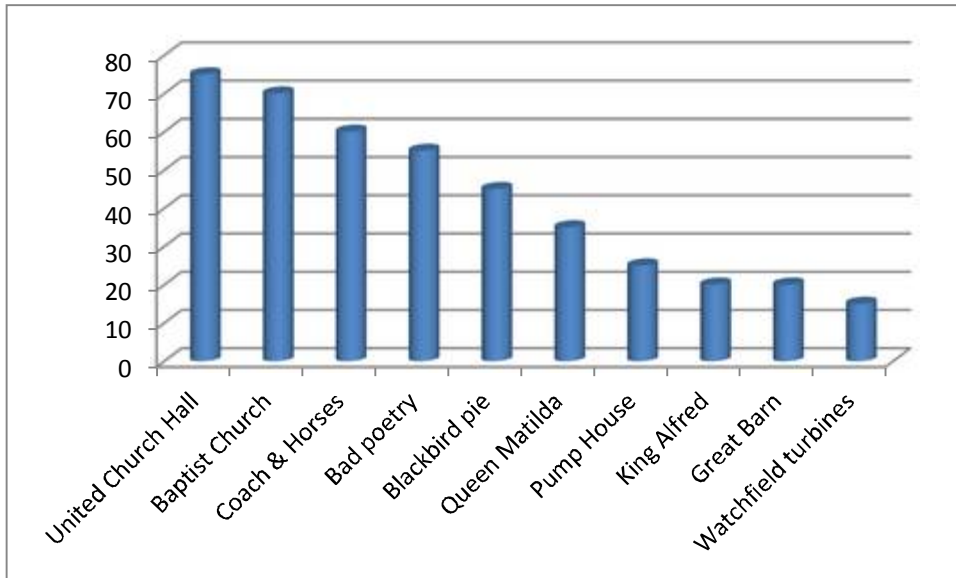
- *The Folly Tower receives maximum marks from every person who took part. The Hill and the Market Place follow closely behind.*
- *Clearly, people also like animals/birds; or at least they like the idea of incorporating pigeons/giraffes/blackbirds into a logo or coat-of-arms or town sign!*
- *The “social conscience” of Faringdon- as represented by the Fairtrade Town element, also does well.*
- *The Old Town Hall, the Corn Exchange & the Portwell are all seen as emblematic buildings/structures. But interestingly, a whole swathe of other buildings (mainly pubs & churches!) aren’t that far behind in the votes.*
- *Faringdon House isn’t rated very highly at all – perhaps because most residents and visitors hardly ever get to see it.*
- *And – bowler hats seem to have captured peoples’ imaginations!*

There was also room in the survey (see <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/UniqueFaringdon>) for people to add their own suggestions and comments. These are shown here below the graphs, and are also revealing and helpful. How could we have missed out the Dali Diver?

The Y-Axis in each graph shows the total number of marks received for each element.

The results are divided over four graphs so that the smaller scores don’t disappear into the X-Axis.





ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS & COMMENTS

Conquest of Egypt statue in Faringdon House grounds should be on the list
What about the signs that Lord Berners put up around town?
It's the incredible mixture of architecture & history that makes Faringdon special
Salutation Mansions is where King Alfred's hunting Lodge was – supposedly?
The Freemason's Hall in Gloucester St has 1830 on it & is a nice building
I like the idea of a giraffe. In heraldry there are often strange unexplained animals!
Camden House has an interesting history. Good looking building too.
Good to see the Friends Meeting House on the list. The oldest meeting house in the country.
ALL the buildings in the Market Place. They're all beautiful. How can you choose?
Plenty of pink pigeons please!
Thames location – crossroads to many places
Very useful and interesting list. Half the things I wouldn't have thought of – but I like them!
We're a <i>market</i> town. I still remember all the animals in the Market Place. Stinky smellovision required?
Need to know what we're choosing for (flag, coat of arms etc) . My rankings would change depending.
Why is "bad poetry" one of the choices?
How is that possible? You've missed out the Dali Diver! That's absolutely got to be included.
The rooftop skyline at night is very special.
The whole of London St could be a film set for Downton or Bronte novel
The market place is where it all happened. Civil war. Hangings. Animals.
The famous sponge fossils (=very old) are in the buildings (=new). Linking the past with the present.
The old railway station?
What about the only lighthouse that can't be seen from the sea? And the light on the Tower every year?
The RC Church (prev Congregationalist Chapel) is apparently quite unique

Overall –the tower, the hill and the marketplace all make it onto the podium as the three clear winners. Also giving a strong performance: quirkiness (Lord Berners, pigeons, giraffes, bowler hats, blackbirds) ; civil war (represented by a cannon perhaps?) , fossils, and buildings (all of them....) . And the link between old and new (fossils and buildings) also comes up in the comments.

But – how can we have a Town Sign that manages to encapsulate all of this?

PINK PIGEONS TRUST

The Pink Pigeons Trust is an open group of volunteers who meet regularly to “bring the spirit of Lord Berners back through public art”. Anyone is welcome to attend Pink Pigeons meetings. To register your interest, go to the www.pinkpigeons.info website where you will also find a “contact us” button. Regular attendees at Pink Pigeons Meetings include:

- *Vale Arts Officer*
- *Representatives from: Faringdon Art Society, Friends of the Folly, Folly Trust, Faringdon.org, Town Council, Tourist Info Centre, The Town Team*
- *Local artists*
- *Town Mayor*

FUNDING

JEF (Faringdon’s Joint Economic Forum) have contributed £300 towards the process of developing the town sign. Apart from that, there is no funding in place for the town sign at present. The overall costs will largely depend on the approach taken.

We hope that the Great Faringdon Town Sign is going to capture the imagination of the local community and local businesses, which will lead to fundraising and sponsorship opportunities.

Applications will also be made to potential local and national funding sources, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.

SUGGESTED TIMETABLE

The first consultation period (to choose the shape and overall direction: 2D/3D , stationery/moving, traditional, contemporary, quirky) will take place between Nov 2015-Jan 18th 2016 . This will involve social media, the tourist information centre and the Folly newspaper, culminating in a presentation at the Town Meeting on the 18th January in the Corn Exchange.

February 2016: The pre-application will then be submitted based on the approach chosen.

2016: Fund-raising and the further development of the design (also involving the schools), will take place throughout 2016. The process of identifying and choosing the right manufacturing partners will also happen in 2016.

2017: Design finalised and sign manufactured, using local skills where possible.

2018: Installation would be in early 2018, in plenty of time for ***the official unveiling on the 7th March 2018.***