

Community benefits from a Lord's bizarre behaviour

Eccentricity is not folly

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A TOWER built by one of England's greatest eccentrics has reopened for the new visitor season.

Faringdon Tower, also known as Faringdon Folly, was built in 1935 on the orders of Gerald Tyrwhitt Wilson, the 14th Baron Berners.

A novelist, short story writer, painter and composer, his credits include a ballet, the music hall song *Champagne Charlie* and a short book about a man whose wife runs away from home with a camel.

The aristocrat filled his home, Faringdon House, with unusual objets d'art and antiques, and his eccentricities included dyeing his doves pink.

The 100ft tower, which dominates Faringdon Hill, is now owned in trust by the people of Faringdon, and looked after by governors chosen from the local community.

One of them, Peter White, said: "I think the tower is a brilliant thing, but there is no question



■ A view worth the trip . . . Colin Holman studies the direction finder at the top of folly Picture: **BARRIE HOWELL** Ref: 15148-8

that is undervalued. I don't think some people realise how lucky we are to have such a tower in Faringdon, and it would be nice if more was made of it."

Lord Berners was born in 1883 and died in 1950.

After his death, the tower and the house passed to his close friend of many years, Robert Heber Percy.

Himself much admired for his

eccentricity and creativity, Mr Percy was known to friends as *The Mad Boy*.

With Lord Berners, he presided over gatherings whose guests included society photographer Cecil Beaton, author Evelyn Waugh, composer William Walton and Poet Laureate-to-be John Betjeman - whose wife once rode her horse into Berners' drawing room for tea.

Mr Percy survived into the 1980s, and bequeathed the tower in turn to the people of Faringdon.

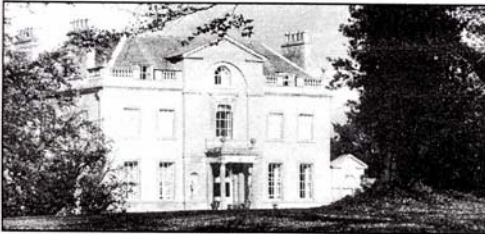
For many years it was bricked up, but towards the end of his life Mr Percy ordered that it should be opened.

Now it is open from spring until October on the first Sunday of each month, as well as bank holidays.

Details of opening hours and admission prices are available from another of the governors, Mike Cornley, on (01367) 240450.



■ The Folly at Faringdon . . . open for the summer Picture: **BARRIE HOWELL** Ref: 15148-



■ Faringdon House where Lord Berners lived