

The Martyrdom of Hugh Faringdon, last Abbot of Reading

Painted by Harry Morley (1881 -1943), 1917

Object no. 1931. 272. 1

Location - Foot of the main staircase, Museum of Reading



This picture shows the execution of Hugh Faringdon, Abbot of Reading, in 1539 during the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII.

Henry VIII's dissatisfaction with his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and their inability to have a male heir began a religious upheaval in England. Henry VIII eventually split from Rome making himself head of the English church, and he started a programme of dissolving religious houses.

Hugh Faringdon was accused of denying the king's title to be head of the Church in England and was found guilty of treason. He was sentenced to death by being drawn, hanged, disembowelled and beheaded.

The Abbot was dragged on a hurdle by a horse around the streets of Reading. The painting shows Faringdon tied to the hurdle beside the gallows that were built by the west front of the Abbey church in the Forbury. A priest kneels beside Faringdon reading the last rites. Behind him is the executioner with a rope over his shoulder.

At Faringdon's feet stand two priests, John Eynon, priest of St. Giles, and John Rugg, who were also executed. The Mayor of Reading, Thomas Mirth, is robed in a black gown; next to him are the two burgesses of Parliament, Thomas Vachell and John Raymond, with a sergeant at law representing the State.