

# FORGING

**N**IGEL FARAGE is perhaps the most widely recognised man in public life after the King. Occasionally reckless, sometimes daring, rarely dull, always outspoken, he is arguably the most consequential British politician of our age.

His stated aim was to smash the two-party system that has dominated Westminster for more than 100 years and Reform UK, the party he founded, has done just that, fundamentally realigning politics in this country.

Whether he can see it through and take Reform to victory in the next general election and himself into No 10 remains to be seen.

But no one should doubt his steely determination, as an incident from his school days shows.

He was set on following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps by working in the City, but the challenge he set himself was to do so on his own terms.

His chance came at the local golf club, where he earned pocket money as a caddy and then at 16 became a member.

There he met Bob McPhie, the managing director of a City metals trader called Maclaine Watson & Co. They barely knew each other, but as they played a round of golf on a cold December afternoon, Farage explained that he was champing at the bit to enter the world of work. McPhie offered him a day's work experience straight after Christmas.

Farage quickly studied what metals trading involved and did some research into McPhie's firm.

At the time he lived with his mother Barbara, a former shorthand typist, and his stepfather Richard Tubb – whose family owned a shoe shop – in the Kent village of Downe, which had been made pretty much inaccessible to traffic by heavy snow the night before the appointed work experience date in January 1981.

Undeterred, Farage woke early and tramped six miles by himself in the dark to Orpington, putting on a clean pair of shoes before catching a train to London Bridge. He was shown round MacLaine Watson's premises and then treated to lunch by McPhie.

He must have shone because McPhie told him that a junior position would be kept open for him if, upon leaving school the next year, he wanted it.

Nick Owen, who played on the school golf team with Farage, says that from this point, 18 months before Farage was due to sit his A-levels, he was effectively treading water, just waiting to get on with the rest of his life.

'He knew he was going to the City and he couldn't believe I was going to waste my time going to university,' says Owen.

**W**HEN his A-level results arrived in August 1982 and he was found to have scraped mediocre grades in his history, geography and economics exams, he didn't much care.

A few weeks later, while many of his contemporaries were organising round-the-world gap year trips or preparing to start university, he was limbering up to begin the job that Bob McPhie had offered him the previous year.

On September 1, not quite eighteen-and-a-half years old, he put on a suit and tie and embarked



by Lord  
**Ashcroft**

on the first of what would turn out to be many years of 6am starts, commuting from Orpington station to London Bridge on the edge of the City.

By the time he joined, the firm was a member of the London Metal Exchange (LME), the global centre for industrial metals trading. In 1982, five products were traded there – tin, copper, lead, zinc and silver. Others, including aluminium, were added as the decade progressed.

Now, as then, thousands of lots are traded daily by a small band of open 'outcry' dealers on the LME's trading floor, the Ring, a space 30ft in diameter that's

circled by distinctive red leather seats. Although they seem to behave like bookmakers at a race meeting and have a language of their own, the way the dealers shout out sales and purchase prices as they bid verbally between each other is considered vital to the process of price discovery, even in the electronic age. Today, as in 1982, the Ring remains an open 'outcry' system – the last one still operating in Europe and one of few surviving links with the City of the 19th century. The LME is, in many ways, a closed world according to those who have worked within it,

heavily dependent on who you know as much as how good you are at your job.

Farage took to life in the City. In his words, it was 'a cross-section

He's easily the most consequential politician of our age, but so much of his early life is steeped in mystery. Now a riveting new biography by LORD ASHCROFT reveals the most intimate portrait yet of the man the Establishment will do ANYTHING to stop being Prime Minister

of different parts of society' and 'a mixture of old gentlemen's club and very aggressive young men', many of whom came from 'the Essex marshes'.

This suited him down to the ground because, he has said, 'nobody cared how posh or how rough you were; you were rated on how much money you could make'. His first post was in the back office and he was paid £4,000 per year – well below the average British salary at the time, which, according to Hansard, was about

£5,100 for women and approximately £6,500 for men.

His duties were dull, principally revolving around him executing transactions on behalf of traders. Within six months, he was elevated to the front office, where he was required to meet clients, generate business and authorise trades. This put him closer to the action and meant, he has said, that he was 'handling millions' of pounds. Negotiating successful deals in a market where prices can change sharply is a

pulse-quickening occupation, which is why it is generally considered a young man's game.

Many who were active in the City at that time were heavily reliant on alcohol. Some drank to cope with the pressure-cooker environment. Others did so purely socially, understanding that it greased the wheels of the job. Farage was in the latter camp and adapted to this aspect of his professional day pretty effortlessly.

At the end of his first week at MacLaine Watson, he was intro-

# OF FARAGE



duced to Simpsons Tavern, an English chophouse founded in the 18th century and based in Ball Court, an alleyway just across from the Royal Exchange.

It was to become a favourite haunt. The seating arrangement, in which customers sometimes had to share a table with strangers, suited his personality perfectly. He has said he was often happiest basking in its historic atmosphere and chatting to other City workers over steak and kidney pie with bubble and squeak.

Simpsons and other old-fashioned City restaurants like the George and Vulture were the venues where Farage honed the art of the, as he refers to it, PFL ('proper f\*\*\*\*\* lunch'), during which each person is expected to consume at least two bottles of wine.

Although at 5ft 10in he is neither noticeably tall nor heavy-set, he was always able to hold his drink and, for better or worse, alcohol was the platform on which many of his closest friendships and business relationships were built.

The energy that has become his trademark as a politician was very clearly present in him from an early age.

His schoolfriend Nick Owen, a Dulwich College contemporary, says he didn't suffer fools gladly and was never too worried about upsetting people. 'He and I took part in a formal school debate on the Common Market referendum in 1975. I was pro-Europe and

even then, aged 11, he was anti-Europe, so he's certainly been consistent.'

He was more thoughtful than some might assume. Aged 14, he came across a copy of *On Liberty* by the 19th-century philosopher John Stuart Mill, a defence of individual freedom that opposes state intervention in people's lives. It has informed his approach ever since. 'Self-determination,' Farage once wrote, 'remains at the heart of my moral beliefs and the core principle of my politics.'

**A**ROUND the same time he was weighing up the importance of Mill's famous tract, another pioneer of ideas, the Conservative MP Sir Keith Joseph, who was Margaret Thatcher's chief policy adviser, visited Dulwich to give a speech to the politics society. He expressed a vision of free-market conservatism where hard work yielded success and those who were financially prosperous were able to keep more of their own money.

Farage was so moved he immediately joined his local Conservative Party, and there is no question that Thatcher's politics had an effect on him. He has said that as a youth he found her arrival in Downing Street inspirational.

Just before he left school Enoch Powell also addressed the Politics Society. Farage was transfixed, recalling that he was 'dazzled into awestruck silence'. In adulthood Farage has often expressed his admiration for Powell.

While many might assume he was drawn to Powell's trenchant views on immigration, amplified by his 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, it is too easily forgotten that he was a Eurosceptic of long-standing who was more often than not at odds with the Conservative Party – just as the adult Farage would be.

Powell had more than just a fine mind and a knack for public speaking. He was by common consent also a rebel and an outsider, two labels that Farage would wear with great pride.

By the late 1980s, he had begun to regard himself as a Thatcherite rather than a Conservative, particularly her Eurosceptic speech in 1988, when she stated, 'We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them reimposed at a European level.'

As his job required him to trade with countries all over the world, he concluded that Britain would be crippled economically if it remained under the increasingly restrictive regulations of the burgeoning EEC. A sense of his being on a mission showed itself.

Fast forward to today and he still has a mission – Reform UK, the third party he has steered to the top of the opinion polls in the past 20 years. We are living through an era of multi-party politics in which many people are

increasingly drawn to poles on both the Left and the Right.

These conditions have proved extremely fertile for a liberal radical such as Farage, who speaks of having spotted a gap in the market thanks to the Conservatives abandoning some of their traditional territory under successive leaders.

Despite the ups and downs of his lengthy career he has continued to surf the unpredictable waves of British politics as a self-styled 'political entrepreneur', emerging, in his early sixties, as the country's most experienced frontline politician. His possession of the most lethal weapon a public servant can have – a sense of humour – enables him to appeal to those members of the electorate who are not natural voters.

His ability to tap into people's concerns using his undoubted powers of communication makes him a formidable opponent. And his inclination to use all forms of technology for promotional purposes, including his own television programme, sets him apart further still.

There are many reasons why Farage divides opinion so markedly, quite apart from his politics. Some voters feel instinctively that they cannot trust him. Others may dislike an aspect of his character. Many will have been influenced by social media.

Proof of his divisiveness is shown by his blacklisting from BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*.

This venerable programme has never shied away from interviewing contentious individuals in the past, such as Enoch Powell, Lady Mosley – widow of Sir Oswald Mosley and friend of Adolf Hitler – and staunch socialists Arthur Scargill, Dennis Skinner and Ken Livingstone. Is Farage's life story really considered less interesting by Britain's publicly funded broadcaster than theirs?

A BBC source says: 'Farage is regarded instinctively by many BBC staff as unacceptable.'

'At least half of them would think Radio 4 had become an "unsafe space" if he was on *Desert Island Discs*. It's just classic liberal-Left BBC.'

But those who have studied his credentials know that he is much more than the pantomime villain his opponents portray him as.

And to those of his friends who have had the chance to peer beneath the bravado, he is a loyal man capable of deep thought and acts of kindness.

In 1994 he set up his own firm, Farage Futures. The office was open from 7am to 7pm so that it could trade globally, meaning he got up at 4.45 every morning to be in London in good time. One of his employees, Malcolm Freeman, remembers: 'Nigel had a couple of blisteringly good years and this

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helped fund his political career. 'He wasn't the best trader, but he was the most talented salesman. He got customers in. It was a very serious operation. We were trading some spectacularly large volumes for trade clients and funds.'

Another employee was Dan Gillespie, who joined Farage Futures in 1999 when he was in his mid-twenties. He remembers Farage having a photographic memory and an ability to bring people together so they worked as a team and had fun outside of office hours.

Gillespie's experience was that Farage also showed a thoughtful, caring side of his character. 'I was very overweight at that time and Nigel said to me one day: "Fat people don't live very long." And then we had what I'd call a "Dad chat". He really made me think about the way I was living. We had a bet. He said something like, "I'll bet you X you can't lose two stone." That was the incentive to get me to lose some weight, of course, so I joined a

gym and started eating sensibly. I lost the weight quite easily and went to cash in after a few months, but he refused to pay up. He said: "I said if you're two stone lighter on this day next year I'll pay." He wanted me to keep the weight off and this was a way of ensuring I did so. I ended up losing almost ten stone. He helped save my life, I'm sure.'

Years later, when working as a presenter at GB News – where he quickly became its most famous and popular personality and is credited by its senior personnel with helping prevent its closure before it had even got properly started – he helped save another young colleague's life. He noticed that Patrick Christys, a presenter then in his 20s, had a secret drinking habit that was killing him.

Farage worked out that, despite always managing to be highly functional at work, Christys was living in a state of deep personal torment as a very heavy secret drinker.

From the moment he got up until he went to bed, Christys would drink, usually beginning with cans of ready-mixed gin and tonic

on the train to work and then surreptitiously swigging from bottles of wine at the GB News office. He hid them in a bag that he stored in the changing rooms.

When he finished work, he'd return to his flat and drink several more bottles of wine. 'I was a little bit tipsy all the time,' says Christys. 'I was "topping up". I'd been like that before I began working at GB News. I was always on time for work and could perform, so nobody knew what I was doing.'

**T**HIS extraordinary double life carried on until the spring of 2022, when Farage contacted him out of the blue.

'I was on my way to a job outside London for GB News and he rang me and after a few minutes said, "I want to give you a bit of fatherly advice. You're drinking too much. If you don't stop this now, you'll lose everything," says Christys.

'I was really worried I was about to be fired and asked how bad he thought it was, and he just said, "You have a bright future ahead of you, don't f\*\*\* it up." I called him back four times in the next hour and he answered each time and said, "Please get some help."

'I'll always be grateful to Nigel. He was able to see the warning signs. He'd seen the physical changes in me. I was bloated and sweaty and ill-looking and weighed almost 17st.'

Within a few weeks, Christys told his boss, Angelos Frangopoulos, that he needed to take six weeks off to get himself sober.

'Nigel sent me a message when I was away just letting me know he was looking forward to seeing me when I got back. He was very kind when I did return, advising me not to work myself too hard.'

'A few months later he invited me to lunch and again put a metaphorical arm around me and told me about his father's drinking problem. It was striking to me that he wasn't afraid to confront things head-on. He took an interest in me and I think it says a lot about him.'

'It would have been far easier for him to say nothing, but he's fiercely loyal. He just couldn't sit back and watch me destroy my life.'

His readiness to speak out on subjects that tamer MPs might shy away from has allowed him to make the running on some of the most divisive issues of the day, in particular mass immigration and the net zero debate. As a result, his detractors routinely label him 'far-Right'. But is this fair? My conclusion after studying him closely is that he is not.

Labour peer Lord Glasman, often a panellist on Farage's GB News programme, says: 'People who call him far-Right don't understand the new era we've got with Meloni in Italy, Le Pen in France, the AfD in Germany.'

'To label it all as "far-Right" is to not understand that in the previous era of liberal globalisation, the working class was dispossessed, despised, excluded. The idea that opposing mass migration is far-Right dooms whoever says it to

despising their own people.'

Farage is unarguably a political visionary in that he has a strategy, he connects with large numbers of people and he is resilient. His defenders also point out that for all his diagnoses of the problems of 'broken Britain', he doesn't just want to tear down the things he doesn't like, such as net zero targets and the ballooning welfare state. He is motivated by a desire to restore.

Given that Labour has a working majority of 165 and Reform UK has only eight MPs, it is strange to think that it has become routine for people to talk about Farage one day occupying 10 Downing Street. But in the topsy-turvy world of 21st-century politics, who would bet against that outcome?

A further question worth asking, however, is whether the Establishment would allow Farage to become Prime Minister. Dominic Cummings, the political strategist who was Boris Johnson's chief of staff, predicts that dark forces may move to block him.

'They'll leak medical records, they'll leak tax records, they'll bug his phone and leak that,' he has said. 'They'll do anything that they need to stop him.'

Despite Reform UK's impressive showing at the local elections of 2025 and 2026, the scale of the challenge before it in securing power nationally is considerable.

There is still time for Reform UK to reassure uncertain voters that it has the policies and the personnel to form a government. But these reservations are only one potential obstacle between Farage and 10 Downing Street. Another is the electoral system itself. In 2024, the party won nearly 600,000 more votes than the Liberal Democrats but won 67 fewer seats.

These are the quirks of a constituency-based First Past The Post system. Publicly, Farage and Tory leader Kemi Badenoch have both ruled out a pact between their respective parties, but if, on the morning after the next general election, the numbers present a choice between some kind of deal and another Labour-led government, would either be able to resist?

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# The Mail

ON SUNDAY

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