

The Blue Plaque

Benjamin Franklin

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Benjamin Franklin, one of the most revered of America's founding fathers, was born in Boston in January 1706 and was apprenticed to his brother James, a printer, when he was only twelve years old.

After leaving Boston for Philadelphia as a teenager, he made his first visit to London at the age of eighteen. He worked for two years in a printing house there, studying the latest developments in his trade, before returning to Philadelphia to continue his career as a printer and journalist.

In 1729 he founded the Pennsylvania Gazette and, three years later, he published the first edition of Poor Richard's Almanack, the annual collection of wit and wisdom which was to bring him fame if not fortune.

Franklin spent many years in England and Europe including an almost uninterrupted stretch from 1757 to 1775. He lived in Craven Street, at different addresses, for thirteen years.

His earlier scientific experiments (including the famous one in which he used a kite to show that lightning was electrical in its nature) gave him an introduction to English intellectual circles. He was elected to the Royal Society, became a friend of Edmund Burke, David Hume and Adam Smith and received honorary degrees from three universities.

In 1776, back in America, he fixed his signature to the Declaration of Independence, remarking as he did so, "We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." Franklin's diplomatic skills and his knowledge of English society were largely instrumental in the signing of the Treaty of Paris seven years later which ended the American War of Independence. He stayed on as the new republic's minister in France until 1785 and then returned once more to America, where he was the President of the Pennsylvania Executive for three years before finally retiring from public life in 1788.

He died in 1790 at the age of eight four. One of the houses in which he lived in Craven Street, no 36, which is marked by a blue plaque, is currently undergoing renovation and there are plans to open it as a Franklin Museum in the near future.



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