

The John Meade Falkner Society

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SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS

Subscriptions are now due for the year 2015-16. For 11 years they were held at £5; since January 2012 they increased to £10. You will all be pleased to hear that, notwithstanding postage increases, I fully intend to keep them at the present rates for as long as possible. The fact that most of you now receive your **Newsletters** by email means the only large expenditure occurs with the printing and posting of the **Journal** each July. It follows that I have been able to fulfil one of the primary aims of the Society: to give some financial support to JMF-related buildings, such as Old Fleet and Burford churches.

Please pay the Sub as promptly as you can – the Renewal Form is either on a separate attachment or enclosed with the Newsletter posting. No Form means no Sub needed!

NEW MEMBERS

Since our July Newsletter, the Society has welcomed three new members.

Dr. Scott James Gwara, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of South Carolina. Dr. Gwara is a renowned palaeographer/medievalist and I am grateful to member **Ian Jackson** for introducing him to me. Our July Journal will carry an article describing a subsequent purchase from Scott for the Society's archives.

Rev. Simon Law is rector of Pitsea St. Gabriel with Nevendon St. Peter in Essex. He got in touch to ask about the BBC adaptations of *Moonfleet* and I was able to link him up to **George Robson**, so he could purchase a copy of the 1984 series. One of the main reasons *Moonfleet* is a favourite novel of Simon's is because Parson Gleenie "is portrayed as a genuine and faithful minister in the Church of England – when so often vicars are caricatured as being corrupt or just plain stupid!" Simon has come up trumps immediately, in that he has already submitted an article on 'Moonfleet and the Psalms', which will be in our May Newsletter.

Philip Simpson, DipHE (Adult Nursing) based in Llanelli, is our first member from Wales. Philip also requested a copy of the BBC production of *Moonfleet*. He writes: "I am so looking forward to seeing *Moonfleet* again, as myself and a school friend watched it being filmed and that made us seek out the book.... maybe one day in the not too distant future I will take a visit to Carisbrooke Castle, but I am not going down the well - I am too old for that now :)"

CONTACT AND THE CHESIL

Dianne Gardner has kindly sent me copies of two local publications dealing with the *Moonfleet* area. **Contact** is the community magazine for Chickerell and Fleet, whilst **The Chesil** covers the whole district around the famous beach. The former's September issue and the latter's October edition both carried a paragraph on our Society, with my contact details and brief comments on its aims and publications. Many thanks to Dianne.

MEADE FALKNER MEETS PEVSNER?

In Susie Harries's 850-page biography of architectural scholar **Nikolaus Pevsner** (2011), there is a 1930 tour of England, during which he tells his wife that he has reached Durham:

"I'm bowled over... imagine a river valley cut into the landscape with wooded sides. The river bends, and in the bend, on the hillside, lies the old town - first the residential town, then separate from it, and higher up, the castle - and then, out on its own, in the midst of tall trees, the enormous cathedral with its twin end towers. From the bridge it is a Romantic dream... the first thing that has made my heart pound... The cathedral in itself, just like the Matterhorn in itself - gigantic, grey, on its own"

This is very much in the spirit of Falkner whom - a footnote records - Pevsner visited there, according to Geoffrey Grigson in a late memoir. Susan Harries, however, points out that there is no mention of such a meeting in Pevsner's letters to wife. One is left wondering whether Falkner would have found a more congenial spirit in Pevsner's lifelong *bête noire* John Betjeman, who does not appear to have read his novels until later on.

STOP PRESS

Thanks to eagle-(or EBay-) eyed **George Robson**, who spotted an interesting collection of Falkner family photographs and bid successfully for them, we now have additions to the Society Archives.

They were offered as "A great selection of original photographs of the Meade Falkner family from the 1880 period to the early 20th Century. Includes original photographs of John Meade Falkner, the author of the 1898 novel, 'Moonfleet'. A great interesting lot for anyone with Weymouth, Dorchester, Dorset connections or an interest in 'Moonfleet'". Well, the JMF Society for one! More details in the **July Journal**.

THE GREAT STORM OF 1703:

Further to the article about the storm of 1824 and the resultant flooding along the south coast, including the devastation it caused to the Old Fleet Church and cottages nearby. There was another even greater storm in the year 1703 which does not seem to have been recorded specifically in this area, but certainly wreaked havoc in the south of England and even in London. Hundreds of people were killed, properties flooded and destroyed and boats along the coastal regions dashed together and broken up in even when anchored in harbours. In those days there was no warning and home owners were taken completely unawares by not only the terrific winds but a tidal wave that swept up the Severn and into the Somerset Levels. Many people had no chance at all and very few were able to escape to higher land to witness the devastation.



Artist's Impression of the Great Storm

In the following year, the author Daniel Defoe decided to advertise in national newspapers for eye witness reports and write a book describing the terrible events. He is probably best known now for his book *Robinson Crusoe* published in 1719, but in the early days of his career he was a journalist and narrator. This was the first time that the stories of those who actually witnessed major events were used, so it was a form of early reporting. He received several replies and chose around 40 to form the basis of his book. The book was called (rather unimaginatively) "The Storm". Strangely it was not that popular with the public and did not sell in any great numbers; a planned sequel did not materialise.

The novel *Moonfleet*, set in 1757 by J Meade Falkner, alludes to the storm of 1703, describing a terrific wind affecting the village in the second year of the reign of Queen Anne (reigned 1702 – 1714) and remembered by the older residents of the village. He goes on to mention another storm and flood at the time but it seems that JMF was describing the storm of 1824 which, as the novel was published in 1898, he would certainly have known about. Both storms occurred about the same time of the year - towards the end of November (even allowing for changes in the Julian/Gregorian calendars).

Flooding in low lying lands is not a modern phenomenon and medieval farmers and country folk would have regarded it as a natural course of events. Many areas were known as 'Summerlands', since it was traditionally recognised that the drier months were the only time crop farming and animal grazing was viable due to flooding in the winter months. Also householders had fewer prized

possessions and did not have fitted carpets and electric appliances to worry about. They would have just moved their bits of furniture to a higher storey if possible, moved out to stay with family or friends on higher ground and waited for the water to go down. They then returned to their cottages, washed down the stone floors, dried what they could and resumed their lives until the next time.

Dianne Gardner (Butter Street)

AN ESCAPE

The two delightful and atmospheric photographs of Fleet Old Church, recently submitted to the Society by **Dianne Gardner** and taken from an upper window of her home, remind me of a recollection recently related to me.

A fellow member of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene at the village of Whalton in central Northumberland is a **Major James McGowan** (no relation to the Major McGowan, the eccentric permanent resident of Fawley Towers, as played by Ballard Berkeley). Now of advanced years, the Major discovered I was a fan of JMF's *Moonfleet* and thus told me this slight, but nevertheless interesting, story.

Back in the 1930s the Major had been a boarding pupil at Sherborne School (Dorset). He fell in with a boy whose father owned a marina in Weymouth and, taking advantage of this, the two boys set off in a small boat to sail along the coast to Lyme Regis. As they got to the Chesil Beach not only was night rapidly falling but a sea mist was rolling in. As a consequence they thought the best thing was to make for the shore and shelter until morning when, hopefully, conditions would permit them to resume their voyage.

Tying up the boat, they moved inland and came across the outline of a dry stone wall which afforded some shelter from the breeze. Despite the chill and the dampness of the mist, they got some sleep and found the next morning blue sky, warmth in the air and excellent visibility. But they soon realised that the wall which they had sheltered under was the perimeter wall of a church - and a church they knew well.



The path to the old Church the boys would have walked along.

(1930s Photo.)

Not many months before they had been introduced to *Moonfleet* in English class and thus well knew of Blackbeard and the fate of Cracky Jones, who had ventured too close to the church and whose curiosity to what he saw led to his demise. With hearts beating, Jim and his pal scampered back to their boat, thankful nothing ill had befallen them. In their ears echoed Mrs Vining's shrieking - 'Lordsakes, we shall all be throttled like Cracky Jones'. One of Dianne's photographs shows Fleet Old Church in darkness and the other in mist. The boys were faced with both. (from **George Robson**)

BURFORD CHURCH FRIENDS

I have received a copy of the Friends' October Newsletter. Their last few months have seen considerable upheaval: the work on the Chapel of the Holy Spirit in the North Transept progresses slowly. Three of the pinnacles on the corners of the tower have been repaired and two of their finials replaced. It is hoped that *"everything is back to normal in 12-18 months' time"*. We look forward to our visit in 2019!

SIXTH BIENNIAL SOCIETY MEETING

Thoughts are already turning to our meeting planned for this summer in the **North East**. We were last there in May 2009, when we were based in Durham and were able not only to view JMF's home and listen to two excellent talks by Ken Warren and Chris Hawtree (later transcribed in Journal No.10), but also to experience the ambience of the wonderful cathedral (some of us stayed on for Evensong, privileged to sit in the choir stalls).

I suggest the weekend of **17th – 19th July** and hope that those of you who were planning to come will find that convenient. Our 'three men in the Northern wilds' have already researched potential places to visit – such as, Jesmond Dene House, Rothbury, Lorbottle, Wooperton, Chillingham, Old Bewick Church and Cragside. The Tyne and Wear Archives are, unfortunately, closed at weekends so we will be unable to peruse JMF letters among, for instance, the Lord Armstrong and Family, and Lord (Stuart) Rendel, papers.

The **Holiday Inn Newcastle-Jesmond** appears to fulfil most of our requirements: it is six miles from the Airport and the Central Station; there is ample parking; various size Conference Rooms (if needed); very close to the A1 and A19 and easy for commencing journeys to the places mentioned above. More specific details will be given in the **May Newsletter**; BUT, I would greatly appreciate an initial expression of interest in attending as soon as possible (by post or email).

THE POWYS SOCIETY

The Society's Newsletter No. 83 was published in November and included a two-page, fulsome review of the Dorchester meeting where the subject was JMF. It was good to see the late **Bernard Jones'** monograph on JMF referred to. Bernard was an early member of the Society and his widow, Frances, is still a valued member.

JMF MISCELLANEA

Ray Ion continues to send me JMF related material. He discovered that the **Right Reverend David Conner** Dean of Windsor and Chaplain to H.M. The Queen had given a Sermon in St. George's Chapel on Christmas Day, 2013 – using JMF's poem on Christmas Day as his theme. Ray subsequently wrote to the Dean and has gained his permission to use the Sermon "as you wish". It will feature as one of the articles in July's **Journal**.

George Robson teased me with the question: "What do JMF and Barbara Windsor have in common?" The mind boggled. It was occasioned by an article detailing the

conferring of the Freedom of London on the then 72 year-old actress (August 2010). At the ceremony Windsor said: "I can't believe it. I thought you had to be very posh".

JMF, declaring that he was "not an Alien", successfully petitioned in November 1922 to be admitted to the same Freedom. He chose membership of the **Worshipful Company of Musicians**. The Musicians' Company was formed in 1500 and given the right to regulate musicians within the city. One assumes they thought him posh!

THE BULL INN AT BURFORD

Roger Norris sent me The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings' 105th Annual Report (1981-2), in which these two rather distressing photographs appear.



The Bull Hotel, Burford High Street: above, immediately after the fire; below, following the attentions of local authority officials.



Those of us you congregated at the Hotel (some of us stayed there) in July 2013 may not have realised that it had been substantially rebuilt. Some regular bricks in the upper part of the façade are modern replacements, following the major fire in 1982. The Inn was JMF's usual haunt when staying in his beloved town.

THE JOURNAL - JULY 2015

As usual, I would be delighted to receive articles for this summer's **Journal**. Any topic related to JMF (his works or life, acquaintances or relevant places) are welcome.

Best Wishes,

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