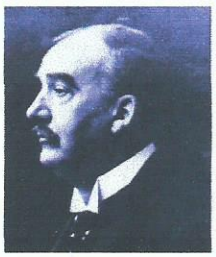
The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 21 **8 May 2006**

New Members
Since the last Newsletter in January, the Society has welcomed **George Robson** to membership

Paid up membership now stands at **fifty-four**.
There are **six** subs outstanding and I have enclosed a reminder slip for these members. The sub is still a mere £5.00 a year, which means no profit is made. I do hope all six will renew - if they send £10, I will not worry them again until January 2008!

Victorian or Post-Victorian?
Falkner continues to figure in such books as A.N. Wilson's recent sequel to his *The Victorians* called, fittingly, *After the Victorians* (Hutchinson £25). He remarks, 'Alan Bennett has memorably said that to be a fervent Anglican is a contradiction in terms; but Falkner almost was this embodied oxymoron'. Wilson posits the notion that *The Nebuly Coat* is an allegory of England on the point of collapse and, as others have done, he suggests that Falkner had a 'post-Wildean notion of the essentially destructive nature of seme-sex emotional involvement'. All Society members should hasten to read this fascinating account of the first half of the twentieth century, one in which Falkner, by the nature of his business, played more of a part than can ever be quantified.

John Meade Falkner in Durham
I still have a couple of copies of Ken Warren's Durham Cathedral Lecture for 1989, on JMF. Its full title is *John Meade Falkner in Durham (1899-1932): A perspective on a small cathedral city*. A bargain at £5.00 each - please send a cheque if you want one.

Underneath the Arches
In February, I had a rather disturbing e:mail from R. M. Healey, a Committee Member of the Alliance of Literary Societies. I quote:
"About nine years ago I discovered a pile of around 16 copies of Mr. Falkner's ***Poems*** on a junk stall under the railway arches at Brick Lane antique market. Each copy had its title page torn out, but otherwise was in good condition. Knowing little of Mr. Falkner's work, I was intrigued enough to buy a copy for 75 pence. Since that time I have discovered much more about these poems, particularly as both Betjeman and Geoffrey Grigson wrote about them in glowing terms.
But why was the title page torn out from each copy? Was this done by a bookseller who couldn't sell them and who then sold them for pulping? The removal of such an important page signified that they were no longer to be sold. I don't know. Please enlighten me. Naturally, I now wish I had bought the lot, but *c'est la vie...*"
Naturally, I had no more idea than Mr. Healey. The stock held in Burford were sold by Bloomsbury Book Auctions in August 1987 - perhaps an irate spouse, on finding her/his *aficionado* partner had bought the lot, started to wreak vengeance and was only stopped after nine had been vandalised. Any better suggestions?

JMF's works at Auction
Edward Wilson kindly sent me a photocopy of the relevant pages from Bonham's auctioning of *The Library of the late Eric Quayle* on Tuesday, 14 March. Amongst the section entitled 'Victorian and Edwardian Literature' were lots 235: ***The Lost Stradivarius***, FIRST EDITION, first issue (with advertisements dated 10/95); and 236: ***Moonfleet***; ***The Nebuly Coat***; and ***another*** - all FIRST EDITIONS.
235 was valued as £150-200; 236 as £150-250.
Edward also let me know the result. ***The Lost Stradivarius*** went for £280 and lot 236 (which included the brown covered and rarer ***Poems***) went for £750. I hope they all had their title pages intact.

JMF in PN Review
Mark Valentine drew my attention to another JMF mention - this time in a column in the poetry/literature magazine ***PN Review***, published by Carcanet. There is an essay of reminiscences by Peter Davidson, entitled *Visits in Autumn*. One visit recalled was to "the scholar Elsie Duncan-Jones, perfect expert on Andrew Marvell", and Davidson records, "John Meade Falkner, the Edwardian poet and novelist, had a particular interest for us both - his dreamy and melancholy poems about remote English churches, about time passing and quiet decay - evocations familiar to her but almost exotic to me. Falkner discoveries filled our correspondence after I had moved back to Scotland".

DiadEM Project and JMF
The East Midlands have led the way in providing an online data of libraries and collections, both public and private. Their DiadEM project has now subscribed to a national database called ***Cornucopia***, managed by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). I gave the DiadEM project worker, who was based at the University of Northampton, details of our JMF Library held at my home and it has now joined all the others on ***Cornucopia***. The database can be viewed on http://www.cornucopia.org.uk . I am assured it is easy to find the information!

Trevor Winkfield
a member of our Society, has an **Exhibition** entitled ***Small Works*** at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery (724, Fifth Avenue, New York) until 2 June.

The Nebuly Coat

"Into the quietly decaying backwater of Cullerne Wharf steps architect Arthur Westray, with a brief to restore the ancient Cullerne Minster and its precariously lofty tower. Westray is a young man and Cullerne is an old town. Thwarted ambition abounds here, above all the disputed inheritance if the Blandamers, with their nebuly coat of arms..."

Yes, another edition of ***The Nebuly Coat*** hits the bookshops, this time from the publisher Steve Savage. The précis above comes from the back cover of the well-produced paperback, which is selling at £7.99. (ISBN 1-904246-22-2) There are two quotations, one from one of our members A. N. Wilson: "What makes the book addictive, though, is..... its atmosphere, its whole perception of existence".

Steve Savage, based in London and Edinburgh, has his own website www.savagepublishers.com which also prints an extract from the book as an enticement to buy.

More *Collected Poems*

I am afraid I have not got any further with the plan to print the additional *Poems* found by **Frances Austin-Jones**, due to the pressure of other commitments, but **Michael Daniell** has been trying to establish the person behind the dedication of one of them - "R.W." Dated 26th May, the last stanza of the poem reads thus:

For on this day of Merry May,
Our hearts are with you, gentle Ruth,
May favouring Fortune guide your way,
And Fate for you weave Trust with Truth;
As year by year the Birthdays crown
Our Fairy-Queen in Overtown.

Michael tracked down the birth certificate of Ruth, daughter of William George Willis, a farmer at Overtown, Wroughton, and Ellen Willis, formerly Baker. Ruth was born on the twenty sixth of May 1889, at Overtown. The next stage is to find out some more details about William and Ellen, to try and establish the connection with JMF. As Michael writes, "It's tantalizing not to know more".

Research in the North-East

George Robson, our most recent member, has been beavering away in Tyne/Wear Archives on behalf of the Society. He has copied some very interesting letters from JMF to Lord Rendel and to Saxton Noble, which I hope to include in this year's **Journal**. One letter to Saxton, dated 19th November, 1920, and sent from Rome, starts with an apology - "Typed by me on a worn-out machine. Please pardon." - before mentioning his desire to be relieved of the Chairmanship of Armstrong's and ending "I feel rather on a desert island here and the position bristles with difficulties of every possible kind".

George has just given a paper on JMF to his local Lit. & Sci. Society, which went down very well. Most of his listeners had heard of *Moonfleet*, even if the author's name was more hazy. He kindly gave everyone a copy of the book at the end of the evening - now, that is dedication. Moreover, he parted with his copy of the *Collected Poems*, giving it to an Anglican priest who was very keen to read them.

George says he is a retired History teacher (join the club), magistrate, church organist, hockey official and umpire - he has clearly got plenty of time on his hands. Seriously, I am most grateful to him for all he has done so far and can only admire his enthusiasm and support for the cause.

Society Meeting?

One of the expressed aims of our Society is to hold meetings. With such a widely dispersed membership (Argentina, Canada, Spain, the USA as well as all over the U.K.) this is quite difficult to achieve. Since our Foundation, we have held gatherings at Fleet and Burford. Durham should really be our next venue. **I would be most grateful if any member who would like to attend a meet-up in Durham, would drop me a line.** It does not commit you to anything as, for one thing, no date has been set. If there is a positive response, I could then look at exactly where and when. Clearly, JMF's old home, *The Divinity House*, and the nearby cathedral library are high on the wish list.

The Collected Poems

We have now sold 160 copies, thanks in particular to one or two members, and are well past the break-even point. Other members have not ordered a copy, however, and I do urge you to support the Society by purchasing (at least) one.

The standard of production is excellent, thanks to **Michael Daniell's** involvement, and what you will have is nearly all the known poems of JMF in one publication. If I can get a little more finance together, I can contemplate publishing the poems found by Frances.

Copies can be purchased from me for **£15 (£16 overseas), including p & p**.

Bible. Latin. Vulgate (Ms. UCB 12)

In the last **Journal** (Volume 1 Number 6 July 2006), I referred to a Bible that had been sold by Sotheby's in their three day Sale of JMF's "Fine, Illuminated and Other Manuscripts..." and added "one wonders where the little vellum Bible is now?" Well, Ian Jackson, our knowledgeable member from Berkeley, California soon provided the answer.

It rests in The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley and I now have prized photocopies of letters Canon Wordsworth sent to JMF, discussing the Latin lampoon written on one of the blank leaves at the end. Further details will be put in the next **Journal,** but its ownership history is interesting. "Later belonged to the library of W. Cresswell; then in 1913 to that of John Meade Falkner; subsequently passed into the library of James K. Moffitt". Later bookplate of Pauline Fore Moffitt Library. Thank you , Ian, for the invaluable help.

Best wishes

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