

# The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



## Newsletter No. 62

3 January 2020

### 2020 SUBSCRIPTIONS

It's that time of year again: please renew your annual Subscription (**only £10/\$15/€15** – unchanged since 2012), by cash, cheque or Paypal. I would greatly appreciate prompt payment to save badgering you.

### NEW MEMBERS

We are very pleased to welcome **Valerie Rees** as a new Member. She actually lives in Fleet itself and writes of the desperate need to repair the roof on the 'New' church there. Last time the Society was in Dorset (2015), we visited both churches. Valerie already had a high regard for *Moonfleet*; having recently discovered *The Nebuly Coat*, she could "hardly bare to put it down until the end".

It is also a pleasure to welcome **William Raymond**, who joined us in December. He writes: *I am new to the works of JMF - I was introduced through The Nebuly Coat, the subject of a recent article in The Daily Telegraph Saturday Review. I have purchased his other two, lined up for my Christmas reading. I was chiefly interested in the similarities between his life and mine. Like him, I was a West Countryman, spending all my childhood holidays in Weymouth and, like him, moved to and loved the North East, first as a postgraduate student at Durham, and then, for part of my life, living in Northumberland.*

Not a new member, but a welcome return of a previous one. **Raymond Moody** originally joined on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1999, the thirteenth "Founder Member" of that first year. He has written articles for our *Journal* (another one is coming out this Summer) and given talks on JMF in Burford, where he lives. We had a very early meeting in his lovely old home at the bottom of the Main street. I am so glad he has re-joined!

### AN ADDITION TO THE J.M.F. BIBLIOGRAPHY

The principal British journal of bibliophily and bibliography is *The Book Collector*. The quarterly publication was founded in 1953 with the support of Ian Fleming and, in one of the novels, James Bond has the latest copy on his bedside table!

The journal has an occasional series devoted to 'Some Uncollected Authors', i.e. writers who are either worthy but unappreciated, or, as in the case of Falkner, authors whose output was important but limited. In the Autumn 1960 number the very eminent bibliographer Graham Pollard contributed series no. 25 on Falkner, with a very sympathetic biographical introduction, followed by a listing of ten first editions with all their reprints to date. He described the items mainly from copies in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, or the British Museum, noting the library accession dates in each case.

In the original journal this will be a difficult item to find [ed.: The Society has a copy], but there is a reprint, and in a very honoured place. In 2003 *The Book Collector* published a celebratory volume of its first 50 years, 'The Pleasures of Bibliophily, Fifty Years of The Book Collector' (The British Library and Oak Knoll Press). Of the hundreds of scholarly articles over the half century only 26 were selected for inclusion, and the only one from the 'Uncollected Authors' series is John Meade Falkner. It is at pages 42-47 of the anthology, and I am sure that its inclusion is due to the charm of Pollard's treatment of Falkner's life and writings.

Usefully to the myopic, such as myself, the article is reprinted in a larger print size. The 2003 print area is 200 x 127mm., whereas in 1960 it was 170 x 100mm.

There is a bit of serendipity here as I rather hastily bought the book for an article on the Cambridge librarian and bibliographer A.N.L. Munby, and only found the Falkner piece once I was back home.

**John Gretton**

### PRIMROSE LEAGUE IN NEWCASTLE



*The members of the Elswick Habitation of the Primrose League held their annual ball in the Old Assembly Rooms, Westgate Road, Newcastle, last night, and the event proved to*

*be highly successful and enjoyable. For the occasion the ball room and corridors had been very beautifully decorated with evergreens by Mr. Robertson, head gardener of Jesmond Dene House, and Mr. Henderson, head gardener of Chillingham Castle, and when dancing commenced shortly before nine o'clock the ball room presented a gay and animated appearance, there being present between 60 and 70 couples...an admirable programme of music was supplied by Mr. G. Foggis, and dancing was heartily kept up until this morning. Amongst those present were:- Miss Lilius H.G. Noble, dame president and secretary of the Habitation; Sir Andrew and Lady Noble, Lord and Lady Tankerville...Mr. and Mrs. Cochrane, Mr. and Mrs. Meade Falkner...and others.*

*Newcastle Daily Chronicle 26th January 1905*

(Thanks to Ray Ion for the above information.)

## NUNNYKIRK HALL

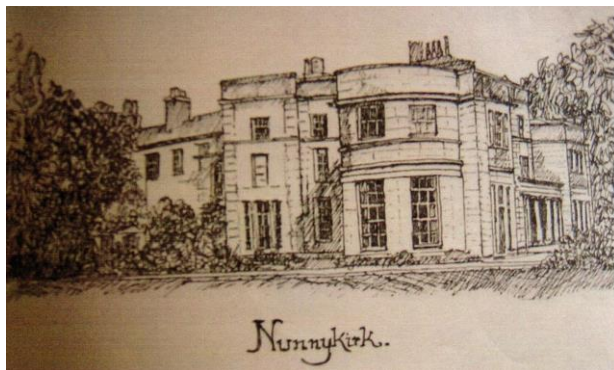
In the autumn of 1885, Meade Falkner wrote a poem about **Lorbottle Hall** – ‘Home of homes happiest’, (see George Robson’s article in *The John Meade Falkner Society Journal* Number 12, July 2011). However, Andrew Noble’s lease expired in 1886 and the family’s recreational breaks were to continue at **Nunnykirk Hall**, a large house seven miles north-west of Morpeth. In fact, JMF alluded to it in the final stanza of his poem:

*But let’s drink ere we part to the host and the hostess,  
Wealth health and happiness long years to come.*

*Nunnykirk or Lorbottle, a house at the most is,  
It’s the kind-hearted owners\* that make it a home.*

(\* one must forgive JMF’s error – the Nobles were lease-holders not owners of both properties.)

In 1536 the Nunnykirk estate, including a tower, was owned by the abbots of Newminster Abbey. At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, it was snatched by the crown; then, in 1610, it was granted to Sir Ralph Grey. Grey later sold it to the Ward family of Morpeth who built a manor house. In 1771 Ann Ward, the heiress of the estate married William Orde; their son, also William Orde, (1774–1843) rebuilt the house in a grand style designed by the notable architect John Dobson in 1825–7.

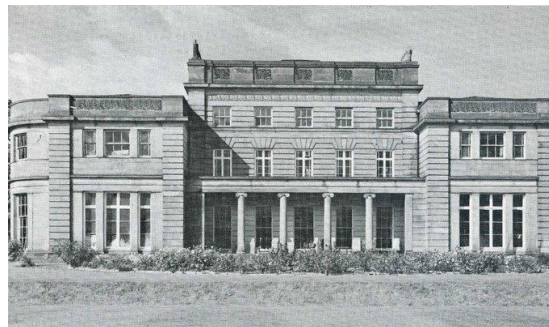


Andrew Noble rented the Hall from yet another William Orde until 1900. Many years later, in 1925 and at 97 years of age, Lady Margery Noble, encouraged by her family, wrote an autobiography. In it she tells us that amongst cricketing visitors to Nunnykirk was Matthew White, son of the first Lord Ridley – *on his first visit he was a boy of seventeen; we liked and admired him from that day until his death, deeply regretted by all who knew him, during the Great War.*

The majority of the Nobles’ guests and all the family were musically talented, not least Lady Margery herself, who occasionally travelled to Rothbury from Lorbottle and Nunnykirk on Sundays to fulfil her duties arising from the organist rota for the parish church.

Lady Margery’s autobiography gives further details of life at Nunnykirk: *We became intimate with Sir George Trevelyan at Wallington, and his family, and their cousins, the Trevelyans of Netherwitton. Mr. Perceval of Long Witton was another neighbour and intimate friend of us all. This was a link with the past; and I believe he was then still drawing a pension as the orphan child of the Prime Minister assassinated in 1812. This was before*

*the days of motors and people usually came out for weekends and we all enjoyed their time at Nunnykirk.*



*Among our visitors were Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Coleridge and their two charming daughters, Mary, the writer, novelist and poetess, and Florence, a gifted musician; the Reverend Dr. Ainger and his family from Rothbury, Mr. H.E. Luxmoore, the Eton housemaster and a much prized friend; besides the visitors from Elswick who came for a few days – a Japanese Prince, and Spanish, Chilean and Brazilian naval officers...*

*At Nunnykirk,  
there was a  
beautiful organ  
in a large hall  
where we made  
much music.  
We used to give  
a concert each*



*year and invite all the people round about us. Mary Coleridge, who was with us with her parents and sister, on one occasion gave such a good account of the evening in verse...*

Such was the environment in which JMF mixed freely during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Since 1977, the house has been occupied by a small independent school which supports pupils needs in the areas of SpLD such as ASD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

(Thanks to **George Robson** for the bulk of this article.)

### DVD OF BBC’s *MOONFLEET*

A reminder that DVDs of the BBC’s 1984 production of *Moonfleet* are still available for £8. If you contact me in the first instance (don’t send any money), I can pass on your details to **George Robson** who will send you a copy.



### JMF SOCIETY TREASURER’S ACCOUNT

Ever since 1999, when I first opened a ‘bank’ account for the Society’s finances, I have used the **Nationwide Building Society**. Unfortunately, they are closing all Treasurers’ Trust Accounts in 2020. I will be looking at moving our savings to another provider (possibly the NatWest, where I bank) in the next couple of months. I will, naturally, keep you all informed.



## WHAT ARE YOUR TEN?!

A hundred novels to change your life: After the BBC released a list of books that 'shaped our world', other writers revealed their own very different essential reads:

### From Libby Purves: Author and broadcaster

These are all books I first read long ago. Several are what I call 'journey' or 'long life' books, chosen because big sweeps showing life as a voyage are always consoling. Others are inspiring about the sea, which informed my subsequent sailing adventures.

There is, however, a moral thread through all of them. Some deal with eccentricity, always enlivening. And very importantly, many of them make me laugh and give me a sense of freed imagination.

*Vanity Fair*, by W.M. Thackeray

*Cold Comfort Farm*, by Stella Gibbons

*Moonfleet*, by J. Meade Falkner [sic]

*Nine Unlikely Tales*, by E Nesbit

*The Spy who came in from the Cold*, by John Le Carre

*The Future Homemakers of America*, by Laurie Graham

*The Young Visitors*, by Daisy Ashford

*The Last Battle*, by C.S. Lewis

*Life of Samuel Johnson*, by James Boswell

*We didn't mean to go to Sea*, by Arthur Ransome

### A NEW BOOK

My interest in *Moonfleet* first began after I found a paperback copy of it by chance in the bookcase of my parents' home. Nobody seemed to remember who bought it or how it got there, but opening it and scanning the plot, my interest was immediately ignited when I realised that I had visited many of the places mentioned by Meade Falkner, in particular the enigmatic scenery around Purbeck, Durlston and Tilly Whim Caves which had, ever since I had first discovered it, captured my imagination. Having also always been interested in pirates and smugglers and hidden treasures, I took the almost unprecedented (for me) step of reading it (any book!) and was subsequently 'bitten by the *Moonfleet* bug'. The idea of hiding a diamond down a well behind a brick especially appealed to my 'childish adult' mind.

Then, a couple of years ago I came across Ken's Website and he suggested I might like to send him a piece about my personal interest in the story, in particular something of the genealogy of the Mohun's which I had recently been delving into. In so doing, I realised that there was much more to this than I had first realised, not least because Meade Falkner had 'disguised' so many of his characters, places and events. The effort however was beginning to take a toll on my already fragile health. I made the decision that I had unearthed such a degree of material that I would like instead to put this into a booklet of my own. Ken was supportive of my change of plan and I would like to say that am extremely grateful to him for his kindness and patience to me during what transpired to be a protracted period of major illness endured while writing the book. Not ideal circumstances in which to write and as I perceived it, a potential race against time too but I was determined that my booklet be

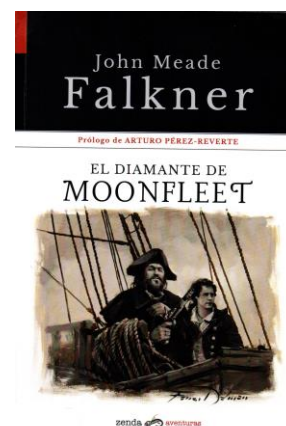
published before I keeled over it was too late! Fortunately, I survived that bout and I have called the book '*The Greatest Diamond in the World and its Curse*'. In it I have tried to explore aspects of *Moonfleet* which had not previously been researched in any detail but which were evidently still significant or of enough importance in Meade Falkner's own life for him to have chosen to include them, shrouded by him in mystery or not. Hopefully, my attempted explanations of these smaller details won't be too boring! Of course, like any other book, unless you have actually read it, then reading another 'book about that book' will always be pretty meaningless and so, on that score, I shan't attempt to defend myself!

One interesting aspect which I didn't include in my above book was the 'James Bond' / Ian Fleming connection with Meade Falkner and *Moonfleet*. Fleming went to prep. School in Langton Matravers in Purbeck, and it seems highly possible to me that his writings about Bond were influenced by having read JMF's Purbeck set novel or at least his knowing of its plot. Needless to say, Fleming wrote '*Diamonds are Forever*' and the lesser known '*The Diamond Smugglers*' and included in his novels well-known local Dorset family names such as Drax, Strangways and of course Bond himself. With Ken's permission, I would like to include a little more about this interesting 'Meade Falkner connection' for inclusion in one of the Society's forthcoming newsletters.

A. Gaydon

### EL DIAMANTE DE MOONFLEET

Thanks to Javier Marías, a long-time member of the Society, we have a copy of a new edition of *Moonfleet* in Spanish. Published by Zenda Aventuras, it has a prologue written by Arturo Pérez-Reverte, a friend of Javier. Also included was a Magazine interview with Arturo, talking about his new publishing house and the novel.



Arturo has kindly said we can use his Prologue in a future *Newsletter* or *Journal* – once I have had everything translated into English!

### EVELYN MEADE FALKNER'S INTERMENT AT BURFORD

Stephen Price, Verger at Burford Church has kindly sent me a copy of his research on the above. A recently discovered bundle of documents in Burford Church revealed how John Meade Falkner's attitude towards his wife affected her financially during her widowhood and kept them apart after death. Stephen writes:

The Vicar of Burford, Rev. Scott Tucker, received a letter dated 17 January 1940, from the solicitors acting for the executor to Evelyn Meade Falkner's will. The letter informed him of Mrs. Meade Falkner's death on 16<sup>th</sup> January and her wish to be buried "*in the space*

above her husband's coffin in his grave at Burford Cemetery, Oxfordshire". The letter further requested that the funeral take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. Scott Tucker replied by telegram, advising that there was "insufficient space for coffin" and "advise burial cremated remains small casket same grave".



Society members around the "bale" tomb in 2003

A letter from Scott Tucker, sent the following day explained that the lack of space for a coffin was due "to the presence beneath the surface of steel girders which support the tomb, and also the proximity of neighbouring graves". He suggested that the casket be interred at the foot of the grave. The vicar's letter crossed with the one he received from the undertaker advising the dimensions of the coffin. However, a further letter from the undertaker two days later confirmed that the ashes were to be interred on 24<sup>th</sup> January. A new town cemetery had been consecrated the previous year, due to the fact that the church cemetery was full. Scott Tucker alludes to this in another letter to the undertaker and he goes on to say that "burials in the churchyard are normally restricted to parishioners but, in this case, I have made an exception as the deceased is the widow of a great beneficiary to Burford Church".

Although the cremation went ahead in January at Golders Green, the interment itself was delayed until 14<sup>th</sup> February. An undated letter to the vicar from Evelyn's sister and executor, Mrs. Ethel Philips, explains that she had "not been able to come before as weather so bad [sic], and also there has been so much business to arrange for my sister's estate". Burial fees are the subject of several letters. In a letter to the undertaker, the vicar writes that "with reference to the matter of fees, I think it would be best, owing to the exceptional nature of this interment...to leave it to the Executors". The undertaker replied, telling Scott Tucker that "I have spoken to the solicitors about your fees and they say that it should not be more than £3.3.0 as the Estate is quite small" (in fact, it amounted to £935).

John Meade Falkner's estate in 1932 was £214, 338, from which he left an annuity of £800 a year to his widow (according to a website calendar, these figures are equivalent to £14 million and £51,000 respectively today). The bulk of his estate went to his brother's children. His relative parsimony towards his wife is perhaps not surprising, given their strained relationship. His nephew, Thomas Meade Falkner, refers to it very bluntly in a letter to Scott Tucker sent from India in February 1940: "I expect you know that my uncle's life was unhappy for a period of over thirty years and that it was his desire that he should be buried separately from his wife". (Thomas, a member of the Cambridge Mission to Delhi, taught at the Delhi United Christian School).

The interment was not quite the end of the story. Mrs. Philips had told the vicar that her sister wished for an inscription added to the flagstone on which her husband's tomb rested, the inscription to read:

**Evelyn Violet Meade Falkner**

**Born 20<sup>th</sup> July 1869**

**Died 16<sup>th</sup> January 1940**

The vicar declined to give permission without reference to Thomas, the nephew. Nothing more seems to have been heard from the nephew for several years, but eventually he wrote to Scott Tucker in June 1943: "I have written [to Mrs. Philips] to say that I regret I cannot possibly give permission to anything being done to the tomb or the plinth...until I come back to England and can see for myself what the permission is".

The last but one piece of correspondence in the church's file is a letter from the nephew, dated May 1946, sent from 8 Melcombe Avenue, Weymouth:

"Dear Sir, you may recollect that I wrote to you a few years back, from India, in connection with the grave of my uncle, John Meade Falkner. I have now returned to England for four months leave and am looking forward to a short visit to Burford to enable me to see the graves and also your great church, for which we all have great affection. I do not know yet when it will be possible for me to come over, but I should like to do so when you will be there...I shall probably come over on the bus from Oxford...

We can assume that Thomas visited the church later that year and that he was satisfied that his uncle's wishes had been followed.



No inscription was added to his tomb; whether this was due to Thomas' refusal or Mrs. Philips deciding not to pursue it is not known. A memorial tablet was placed over Mrs. Meade Falkner's grave in 1943, made of brown York stone and with the lettering "cut deep". Sadly, erosion has taken its toll and it is no longer readable. Overshadowed by the size and grandeur of her husband's (and his brother's) monument, its modesty – verging on insignificance – reflects their relationship.

**Stephen Price (Verger)**

## JOURNALS 20/21

Thank you to all the six contributors to last July's **Journal**. I am immensely grateful to all of those who, since July 2000, have kept the literary flame burning. Of course, I am hopeful of contributions for **Journal 21** – (I already have my first two articles - on John Meade Falkner and Murray's 'Buckinghamshire' and on Falkner and Burford); do contact me with suggestions or, even better, articles. I would like all contributions in **Times New Roman 10 font**, with illustrations sent separately (but indicating where they are to be placed in the text).

Best Wishes

**Kenneth Hillier**

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