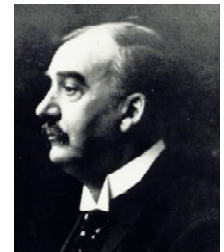


# The John Meade Falkner Society

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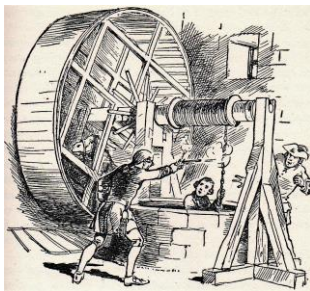
## 2023 SUBSCRIPTIONS

A big thank you again to all of you who have paid the Annual Sub. There are now just three members who have the 'Black Spot' hovering over them! The Society lives to fight another year!

## MOONFLEET REVIEW OF ROBIN DAVIES' ARTICLE IN JOURNAL 23

I was reading, and enjoying, **Robin Davies'** article on *John Meade Falkner 1858-1932* in Journal Number 23, when I reached the passage about *Moonfleet* on page 29. *Moonfleet* is my favourite Falkner novel (in fact, my favourite novel!) and so I was disturbed when I read: "*The diamond is deduced as being at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. It is located but a murder forces Trenchard to flee to the Hague ...*" (1)

No way was there a murder! In the book, Ephraim the turnkey attempts to shoot Elzevir and John to get the diamond, but Elzevir wrestles with him until he stumbles and falls backwards down the well. In fact, Elzevir tries to save him by grabbing his belt – but the belt snaps and Elzevir is left holding it! Although Elzevir bemoans the fact that he has blood on his hands for a second time – a murder has not been committed!



But – the Sky TV adaptation of *Moonfleet* in 2013, starring Ray Winstone, completely changed the original story. John becomes a murderer; the Maskews become Mohunes; and Elzevir Block is not the kindly guardian created

by Falkner but a rather coarse, alcohol consuming, sex-seeking smuggler! I have to confess that after watching it once, I would not watch it again – and I certainly would not recommend it to anyone! I wonder whether Robin Davies has been influenced by this adaptation rather than the book? It does make me cross when good things are changed to make them more "modern" or "racier!"

I appreciate that Copyright expires 70 years after the creator of the work died (2) – so in the case of *Moonfleet* that was in 2002, but even though I have researched and written somewhat extensively on Copyright during my music publishing days (3), I do not believe that it is ever right to change a story – especially a story as excellent as *Moonfleet*.

Similarly, I recently re-read *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas and then had the misfortune to

watch a 2002 film version, which totally distorted the story! In my profession, there are those that seek to change the Bible so that it fits their particular world view! In my opinion, a dangerous pursuit! I think that the work of John Meade Falkner should be preserved and promoted as is! My grateful thanks to the John Meade Falkner Society for doing just that!

**Simon Law**

Rector of Pitsea St. Gabriel with Nevendon St. Peter in Basildon, Essex

1 **Bold** is my accentuation!

2 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

3 Simon Law and Eric Lives *Keep Music Legal* (from the manuscript to mass production) [Fourth Edition] (London, Sea Dream Music, 1994)

ed. The drawing is taken from the first USA edition of *Moonfleet* (Little, Brown and Company, 1951)

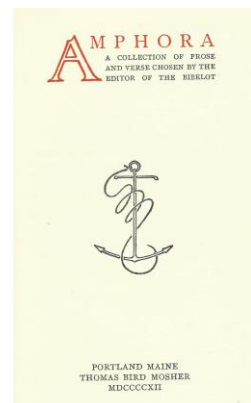
## A JMF POEM IN AMPHORA, 1912

One of Meade Falkner's less well-known poems is *Theocritus in Fleet Street* (see *Collected Poems* pp. 33-34), which was in *The Spectator* on 29 June, 1895.

Of some interest is the fact that the poem was later published in *The Bibelot* in 1912. The compilation was an American yearly anthology published by **Thomas Bird Mosher** between 1895 and 1914. It featured the lesser-known works of writers such as Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Morris, Arthur Symons, D. G. Rossetti, Austin Dobson, J. A. Symonds, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, and Fiona MacLeod.

*Amphora*, a collection chosen from the *Bibelot*, included within its 176 pages, poems and extracts from the works of E.F. Benson, Rupert Brooke, George Gissing, W.E. Henley, A.E. Housman, Arthur Machen and Cardinal Newman. Mosher also placed seven of his own pieces in the anthology.

Thomas Bird Mosher (1852–1923) was an American publisher from Portland, Maine. He was notable for his contributions to the private press movement in the United States, and as a major exponent of the British Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetes as well as other British Victorians. One assumes that he saw Falkner's poem in *The Spectator* seventeen years earlier. Did he ask permission? There is no mention of copyrights anywhere.



## JMF'S DORSET, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND GULLIVER'S SMUGGLED HOPE



I can't recall if JMF had any thoughts on the morality of smuggling, or about **Isaac Gulliver**, but having read Roger Guttridge's 2018 article in *Dorset Life Magazine* 'Smugglers, Dorset and Robespierre' I bought a copy of Beresford Leavens fascinating 2014 book about his ancestor 'King of

*the Dorset Smugglers*' *Isaac Gulliver, Le Contrebandier*. Isaac Gulliver, like JMF, was born in Wiltshire, Moonraker country, and was known for his imposing physique, daring, agile mind and leadership. His father, also Isaac Gulliver, seems however to have had some doubts about his son's paternity when he expressed in his 1765 will "my son or reputed son Isaac Gulliver, otherwise Matravers".

The events in *Moonfleet* in 1757 took place only 30 years before the start of the French Revolution (1789-1799) when, as Roger says, smuggling was at its height. His mentioned ancestor Roger Ridout was Gulliver's long-standing friend and probable partner and was also a prolific Dorset smuggler, though cursory research suggests he was unrelated to Gilbert Rideout the Vicar of Fleet in 1872.

The illicit trade between Britain and France continued throughout the Napoleonic Wars of 1803-1815, actively encouraged by **Napoleon**, who even built accommodation for the smugglers and was grateful for British money entering the French economy. Gulliver was known as 'the gentle smuggler who never killed a man'. He armed his men with coshes and black jacks but never with pistols, only he carried one (his alleged pistol is currently stored in the Russell-Cotes Museum). He was unofficially pardoned by George III for providing information about French and Spanish invasion fleets, by revealing their plots to kill the King, and eventually became a very wealthy banker and civic leader.



Perhaps JMF was mindful of this, since his two main characters, John Trenchard and Elzevir Block each contained elements of Gulliver's character and life story. The slight similarity in their names Elzevir and Gulliver was coincidental but both were Innkeeper's sons, as was John, arguably. JMF made several references in *Moonfleet* to Elzevir's physical strength and to his gentleness, not least his tender nursing of John in ch.5, having found him unconscious in the vault. He also displayed a comparable kind conscience not wishing to execute Maskew but to save his life. Gulliver's formally received free pardon from the authorities in 1782 had shades of John in ch.19 "...the ban against me and the head-price had been dead for many a year". In ch.12/13

JMF had them disguised as farm servants, their faces browned with walnut juice and wearing Carter's smocks. This tallies with Gulliver's men who also wore smock-frocks, whitened their hair and were known as 'white-wigs'. (N.B. 'The King of Prussia' John Carter was a renowned smuggler from Prussia Cove in Cornwall.) John's philanthropy in ch.19 after becoming Lord of the Manor faintly resembled Gulliver's own charitable deeds. Beresford Leavens relates the story of Gulliver's wife quickly hiding him beneath a trap door with a rug thrown over it, having just unloaded a valuable cargo at Branksome Chine, with Officer Pike in hot pursuit. This was reminiscent of an episode in the BBC's 1975 *Poldark* TV series. Elsewhere, he gives an account of the *Swan* Cutter, its owner William Arnold and its Commander George Sarmon (& James & W Sarmon). *The Swan* was named in the opening verse of *Moonfleet*. Francis Sarmon commanding *Swan IV* was killed by a musket ball, just as David Block was (see below). Coincidentally, Lewis was actually killed in 1822 - the same year that Gulliver died. In another echo from JMF's novel (*The Landing*) is the description of a fight between the Revenue Dragoons and some smugglers at Hookwood in 1779 after someone, just like Maskew had 'blabbed'.

Also, according to Leavens, in 1792 Louis Philippe Duc d'Orleans' English relations, Benjamin Harvey and William Harris, staged a daring circus raid, using a troupe of acrobats and clowns to steal the French Crown Jewels from the Garde Meuble de la Couronne in Paris. Gulliver by this time was acquainted with the Duc's family as well as the Harveys, Harris's and Arundels of Wardour Castle. The stolen Crown Jewels were handed over to the Duc, who was spirited away, firstly, through the old Roman stone quarry tunnels which spread for 22 miles under the streets of Paris and then to the coast, eventually arriving in Christchurch (unfortunately not Moonfleet Bay) on board Gulliver's ship *The Marianne* (Goddess of liberty and national personification of the French Republic since the Revolution). The Duc was disguised as William Wordsworth's assistant (see below). The Jewels included the world-famous Hope Diamond, otherwise known as the French Blue or Bijou de Roi, as referred to in my July 2022 article.



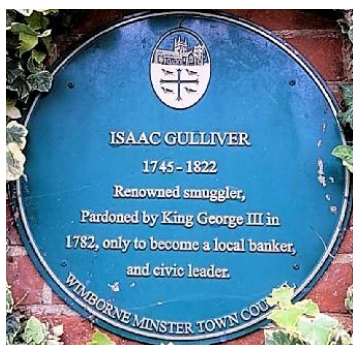
The facts around the above entertaining story are very likely true, as they accurately accord with the known history of the Diamond at the time of its disappearance and reappearance in England some years later, having been meanwhile in the possession of Daniel Eliason alias Nijmeguen, George IV and Thomas Hope. George III's pardon of Isaac Gulliver allowed him to "smuggle as much as he liked" and this was thought to have been an additional reward for his help in transporting the Duc, the Jewels and Blue Diamond across the Channel, which very likely were handed over directly to King George himself. However, three chests of the stolen Jewels dis-

appeared never to be seen again, but were believed to have been buried or hidden somewhere in the West Country and, if recovered today, could be worth up to £3bn.



**Priory House, Christchurch**

Duc Louis Philippe later lived at Priory House in Christchurch in 1807 during his 21-year exile before eventually becoming King Louis Philippe I of France in 1830. He was the 5<sup>th</sup> Great Grandson of the Regent Philippe II Duc d'Orleans, owner of the Pitt (see below) or Regent Diamond - the Moonfleet Diamond. In 1808 Louis Philippe proposed marriage to Princess Elizabeth, daughter of King George III, but this was rejected by her mother Queen Charlotte due to his Catholicism. William Harris lived in Bourne House, built by his father William Arundel Harris, which was for many years the only house that existed on old maps (1759) of central Bournemouth. It was located where the Debenhams building stood. Leavens also mentions Gulliver's property in 1775, Pitts Farm in Kinson, once owned by Thomas Pitt/s and possibly linked to the Pitt family, who intermarried with the Mohuns of Fleet, whose number included Thomas 'Diamond' Pitt.



Now absorbed by Bournemouth, Kinson still has its ancient Church of St. Andrew's, once used to store contraband (as was St. Sebastian's vault in *Moonfleet*). The Oakley chest tomb outside the main entrance door was reputedly also used to

store goods and had a smugglers' passage beneath it. Inside the church towards the rear, is a tomb in which Gulliver was once believed to have been buried, although his coffin was really filled with stones. His earlier, faked death at Howe Lodge and pretence of lying-in state in burial garb was possibly re-enacted by the BBC with Jud's 'apparent' death in a another episode of *Poldark*. When he actually did die in 1822, he was buried in the central aisle of Wimborne Minster (his slab was recently moved to the tower to preserve it from further wear), near to his already deceased son Isaac Jnr., who has a fine wall monument. His popularity was such that the town was packed with well-wishers and, in the funeral procession, Gulliver's carriage was drawn by four elegant black horses with plumes attached to their bridles.

One of his many haunts was Hillams Land Farm in Kinson. Its hidden cellar was capable of holding sizable amounts of smuggled wine and spirits. and there is what appears to be a bricked-up tunnel leading to the river. In Poole, Gulliver once ingeniously escaped capture beneath the noses of an army of revenue officers with specific instructions to apprehend him - he was hidden in a large beer barrel carried on the back of a dray cart! If JMF was aware of this acclaimed story, it's possible it fed into his own plot of the moving barrels 'in the vault'. Another of his hideouts was at Sandbanks/Poole near the Studland ferry, once known as Gulliver's farm.

The famous poet William Wordsworth was fascinated by the French Republican movement and was living in Paris in 1792. He was in touch with the Duc d'Orleans, but by 1795, shortly after assisting the Duc to flee the Country, he and his sister were living near Bridport. In 1805, their brother Captain John Wordsworth perished when his ship the *Earl of Abergavenny* sank off Weymouth with the loss of 263 lives. All the bodies, including Wordsworth's, were buried in Wyke Regis churchyard where William Lewis's carved grave stands, said to be JMF's inspiration for David Block's gravestone carved by Ratsey in the opening chapter of *Moonfleet*. An interesting further link, Edward Wilson, formerly of Worcester College Oxford, wrote in his article on Kenneth Warren's book '*JMF 1858-1932 A Paradoxical Life*' that in 1925 JMF was in touch with the family when he wrote a letter to the poet's grandnephew, Canon Christopher Wordsworth, who was a leading Anglican Church scholar and a former Chancellor of Salisbury Cathedral.

Roger Guttridge's excellent article finally mentioned the excavation of a suspected smugglers' tunnel found under the village school in Loders near Bridport, once home to the Hyde's and the Mohun's later of Fleet in 1560. On a visit to Dorset last year, amazingly I banged into a chap in Buckland Rippers churchyard whilst trying to get access to the locked church. He told me that when young, he and his mates often used to go down the tunnel in Fleet's Old Churchyard - I guess in the late 1950's. He described the tunnel in detail regarding its dimensions and direction/distance, and added with hindsight it was a pretty dangerous thing to have done but then, as we agreed, it wasn't so long ago that adults, let alone children, didn't think about such risks and, of course, there was no such thing as Health and Safety.

**A.G. Gaydon**

#### **JOURNAL NO. 24 (AND JOURNAL NO.25)**

You will either find this year's Journal accompanying this Newsletter (if you are not on the Internet), or you should be receiving it shortly. I am very grateful each year to the contributors – some quite well-known names to you by now. I have two articles lined up already for next year's No. 25, but would like at least three more.

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