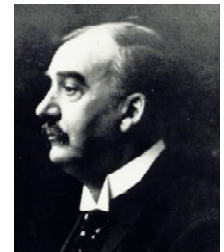


The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 68

3 January 2022

2022 SUBSCRIPTIONS

To misquote **John Keble**, *The trivial round, the common task, will furnish all I need to ask.*

The Sub (small, if not trivial) remains unchanged since 2012 - now a decade ago - **only £10/\$15/€15.**; paid by **cash, cheque, BACS or Paypal.** **If either of the latter, please email me for further details.** I am again very grateful to those of you who added an 'extra' amount, some substantial.



APPLES AND LOBSTERS IN MOONFLEET

Apropos my e-mail to the Society included in July 2019's Newsletter, concerning *'the Lobster'*-mentioned in *Moonfleet*, which I believe was based on both Lobster Cottage & the Square & Compass Pub in Worth Matravers, I recently discovered some further information which at that time I wasn't aware. The famous actor **Leslie Banks** CBE (9 June 1890-21 Apr 1952) (Hitchcock's *Jamaica Inn*, 1939) used to own said Lobster Cottage and Church Cottage in Worth in the 1930's both of which overlooked St Nicholas of MYra Church. **Leslie Banks**, his wife and their housekeeper's graves are situated high in the churchyard close-by. Notably, he was a good friend of the pub's then owner and regularly helped out behind the bar (where a photograph of him hung on the wall) as second 'mine host' when he was living in the village. Tenuously connected to the *'orchard'* (also mentioned in *Moonfleet*) Mr Banks reputedly had an Elsan (portable toilet) at the top of his garden and in order to avoid having to close the door when using it (thus presumably enjoying the panorama) he hoisted a red flag on an adjacent *apple tree* to let his family know that it was occupied! Whether Leslie Banks, born in West Derby, was related to the famous Bankes family of Purbeck, Studland Corfe Castle & Kingston Lacy is unclear. It may be purely coincidental; however it was stated, whether or not correctly, that the said landowning Bankes had originally owned the same group of cottages.

A. Gaydon

THE FRENCH FOR FALKNER

Apropos **John Gretton's** article on *Le Diamant de Barbenoire*, I am not competent to pronounce on the quality of **Denise Meunier's** translation of *Moonfleet*, but I can report that it is neither accurate nor complete. Apart from the obvious fact that she omits the prefatory poem ('Says the Cap'n to the Crew') and the chapter mottoes from Moore, Gray, Tennyson, and others, the

first few pages are sufficient to demonstrate the mistakes and the cuts.

In the second paragraph Miss Arnold is described as 'too strict and precise ever to make me love her'. Falkner evidently used 'precise' in the sense of scrupulous in religious observances, as in 'precisian'. This is rendered by Denise Meunier as 'maniaque', 'fussy'. In the fourth paragraph, Falkner's 'toothless gaps' becomes the colourless 'trous béants', 'gaping holes', and 'if a house wanted repair badly' becomes 'si une masure [hovel] avait trop besoin de réparations'.

Some of the cuts were made to overcome difficult passages, but others seem arbitrary. A good example of the latter appears in the first paragraph, where the sentence of nearly sixty words beginning 'When I was Child,' is represented by one of twenty words beginning 'Le nom du village'. Difficulty may account for 'my aunt was dipping winter candles on frames in the back kitchen' in the third paragraph becoming 'ma tante était en train de preparer la provision de chandelles pour l'hiver, dans la cuisine'.

It was perhaps a mixture of uncertainty and haste that reduced the fifth paragraph ('The sun had set') from eighteen lines of English to just over seven of French. The sentences beginning 'There was a little fog' and 'He had been mason before' are not attempted.

When a translator once discovers the joys of cutting the Gordian knot, the sword is rarely returned to the scabbard, so it is unnecessary to trace Denise Meunier's footsteps any further.

As to the crude illustrations by **Goor**, they seem to me even worse than those by Michael Manomivibul for the Folio Society, something that might seem almost impossible. Falkner still awaits his illustrator.

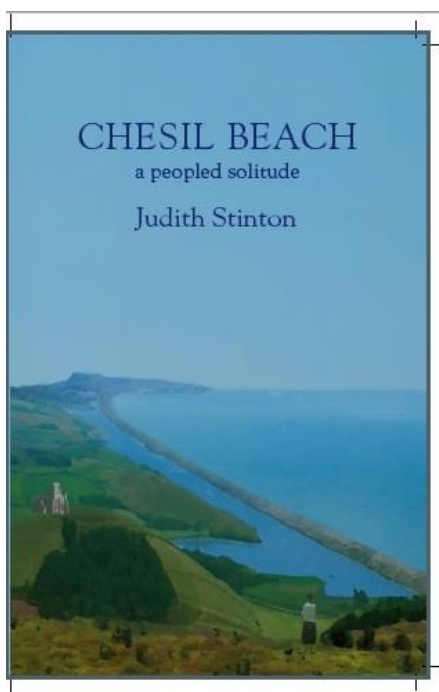
John Coulter

JOURNAL 23

Each January, I turn my attention to the Society's forthcoming **July Journal**. Normally, I have by now two or three articles already 'on the stocks'. This year, however, I have just two short pieces by **John Gretton**. Thanks to sterling research by **Ray Ion**, I have nearly enough material to begin work on my own article on Cuthbert Medd, mentioned in a previous Newsletter. However, I am still awaiting copies of relevant letters from Queen's University in Canada, before I plunge.

So, a **BIG PLEA for articles**. I would like offerings by the end of April at the very latest. Times New Roman in 10 font size, please – by email attachment.

NEW BOOK ABOUT MOONFLEET AREA



Chesil Beach is unique: a bank of pebbles stretching for sixteen miles along the Dorset coast, from the Isle of Portland to West Bay. It looks a lonely landscape, deserted and unchanging. Yet there have always been people living here, concealed behind the shingle barrier. Poaching, smuggling and wrecking were common practices, but it has also sheltered undercover agents, experimental communities and hush-hush weapon testing. D-Day soldiers left for France from this coast, and the Spanish Armada battled in its waters.

The sea provides rich pickings, but can become an enemy, a devastatingly destructive force. The seabed is crowded with shipwrecks, and in 1824 the villages of Fleet and Chiswell were swept away overnight, in the worst disaster ever to hit Lyme Bay. Chesil Beach itself is vulnerable – to exploitation as well as weather. While the geology, and the birds, beast and flowers of Chesil Beach have been closely studied, that other species, the human, has received far less attention – until now.

Chesil Beach: a peopled solitude is a 264 page illustrated paperback, price £12.

To order, please complete below and send to **Harlequin Press, 21 Cattistock Road, Maiden Newton, Dorset DT2 0AG**
Tel: 01300 320778 email: harlequinpress.net

I would like to order copies of Chesil Beach at £12.00 (post free inland)
I enclose a cheque for £ made out to Harlequin Press
Name.....
.....
Address.....
.....
.....
Postcode.....Tel.....

FLEET’S TWO CHURCHES

I thought you might like to know that the Old Church is open again for people to visit (closed for 16 months) and there have been a few visitors already.

The Archdeacon from Salisbury gave permission for both Fleet churches to open again (July 2021) following the end of Covid restrictions.

The New church has resumed monthly services but without the benefit of a vicar covering St Mary’s Chickerell and Holy Trinity Fleet as he left in April to take up another position in Leicestershire. It was decided that he would not be replaced (due to dwindling congregations, cost and availability) and the vicarage in Chickerell is to be sold. Services are now conducted by various circuit ministers in the local area. The Fleet PCC decided to align with Chickerell, Weymouth and Portland rather than the other Chesil Beach villages up to Lyme Regis. It was felt that Fleet has more links with Chickerell than those villages. It will probably be five hundred years since Chickerell has not had a residential incumbent vicar. Fleet of course hasn’t had one for many years now, the Chickerell vicar carrying out relevant duties. This is a fate befalling many rural churches.

Dianne Gardner

THE LOST STRADIVARIUS ON TELEVISION

Further to **Christopher Hawtree’s** article in last July’s Newsletter about the ‘lost’ television version of JMF’s *The Lost Stradivarius*, I came across a copy of **Michael Billington’s** review of the programme in *The Stage and Television Today* magazine of 3rd February 1966.

In theory, ABC’s idea of turning the best Victorian tales of the supernatural into television plays is a good one. Anything to do with the unknown has a universal fascination; the stories themselves are not over-familiar and the scope they offer, to designers and directors especially, is immense.

Unfortunately, though, The Lost Stradivarius (Saturday, January 29), the first in the new series called Mystery and Imagination, didn’t make my scalp tingle with fear and excitement. This was not through any weakness in J. Meade Falkner’s original story which contains all the classic ingredients.

A handsome young aristocrat is possessed by the evil spirit of a dead man, whose presence is first indicated by the rocking of an empty chair whenever a particular sarabande is played on the violin. Abandoning his adoring wife to live in Naples, the young man practises the pagan rites described in the dead man’s diary until, finally, his sister and best friend come to reclaim his soul and exorcise the evil spirit.*

*To present a story such as this with maximum effect, one needs particularly to swathe it in convincing period atmosphere. The more accurate the minute details are the more likely one is to accept the story’s improbable basis. And anyway, the whole of the piece – shown, for instance, in the way the sins of the dead man remain largely unspecified – belongs to a particular period. But the main trouble with *The Lost Stradivarius* was that it lacked atmosphere. This applied as much to the early*

scenes in the college rooms, oddly devoid of personal possessions, as it did to the later ones with their black magic and extravagant ritual.

However, even if the play didn't make my seated heart knock at my ribs, as the billing had led me to hope, it was certainly adapted with great skill by **Owen Holder** and very smoothly directed by **Bill Bain**.



The main acting burden fell on **Jeremy Brett**, who subtly presented the various stages of the hero's disintegration. When he said, after the black magic sequence, "I saw what Cain and Judas saw", it was possible to believe it from his stricken countenance.

David Buck played the Horatio-figure with considerable charm, though it remains to be seen whether it is a good idea for his characters to be used as a linking figure for the whole series. **Angela Morant** and **Patricia Garwood**, as the possessed violinist's wife and sister, had little chance to do more than register intense concern but they did very touchingly.

Kenneth Hillier

(*originally, a dance considered disreputable in 16th-century Spain, and, later, a slow, stately dance that was popular in France.)

J.M. FALKNER'S DECORATIONS AND MEDALS, A FOOTNOTE.

We have seen in Journal no. 22 (July 2021) how very generously Falkner was rewarded with orders and decorations on the completion of armaments contracts with foreign governments. However, I now realise that I failed to explain why he received nothing following his trip to Brazil in 1906, his longest and most exotic excursion.

The Brazilian Ministry of Marine had insisted that a Director of Armstrong Whitworth should personally sign their contract for three battleships and other works. Falkner agreed to go and took his wife Evelyn along for the adventure, no doubt the greatest of their married lives. We can picture Falkner on the voyage carefully studying a Portuguese grammar as he was a keen, though largely self-taught, linguist. I have not been able to find the ship they sailed out in, but they returned in the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's *SS Amazon*, which was a brand-new ship built by Harland and Wolff at Belfast between 1904 and 1906. She was 6,300 tons, over 500 feet long and with a sixty-foot beam; and had the regular run between Southampton and the South American coast. They are listed as First-Class British Passengers, John Meade age 48 and Evelyn Violet, 37. and they joined at Buenos Aires. The ship's Master was J.D. Spooner who would have welcomed them to the 'Captain's Table'.

Falkner didn't return with a Brazilian decoration, though such a reward was evidently normal elsewhere for the successful negotiator of an arms deal. The reason is that at the time the country temporarily had none to give. Their 'Order of the Southern Cross', founded in 1822, had been abolished by the republican constitution of

1891. It was only restored in 1932, and solely for award to foreigners, as there had been some embarrassment when decorations were very generously given by a Belgian delegation to honour Brazilian civil servants. They needed something to give in return so the 'Southern Cross' was revived and still continues today. The badge is a very handsome piece in coloured enamels featuring the leaves and berries of the coffee bush and the leaves and flowers of the tobacco plant, together with the constellation of the Southern Cross.

SS Amazon came to a sad end in 1918 when it was torpedoed by U-boat U-110 off the coast of Ireland and sank in 15 minutes. Fortunately, our destroyer *HMS Moresby* rescued all of her passengers and crew before sinking U-110 with depth charges and rescuing nine of the German boat's 48 crew. No doubt the Falkners read of this in the papers. The site of the wreck is known off County Donegal.

John Gretton

See also 'A Brazilian Adventure' in JMF Journal no. 14 (2013).

A WEIGHTY MATTER

During Falkner's time at Durham there was a grossly overweight Cathedral resident canon. His wife got so appalled with his increasing girth that she struck upon an idea. She made her husband push a garden roller around the cathedral - one full circuit per day.

In order to encourage him, she had a stonemason mark his progress by incising the yards into the path. These markers are still there (see photograph).



I wonder if JMF waved from a window each morning as the canon passed the Divinity House?! I do not know how effective this was in slimming him down.

George Robson

THE FRIENDS OF BURFORD CHURCH NEWS-LETTER (Issue 29 October 2021) - BOOK REVIEW *The Nebuly Coat* by John Meade Falkner

A small town left in the doldrums in the late 19th Century, as the railway passes it by a few miles to the north; a church with a spire and bell chamber too heavy for its original Norman tower and foundations; a leading firm of Victorian architects commissioned with the restoration of the church to its former pre-Reformation glory... it could be Burford, but in 'The Nebuly Coat' by John Meade Falkner it is the fictional town of Cullerne.

Burford went into decline when 'Cotton-was-King'. The coaching routes from Oxford became defunct and the Oxford to Worcester railway line went through Shipton-under-Wychwood; but Cullerne suffers from the silting up of the River Cull, which left it with a Minster far too

grand for the depleted population of the now sleepy town. John Meade Falkner is most famous for his children's classic *'Moonfleet'* and well known to us all for his generosity towards Burford Church, the graveyard of which is the resting place for him, his wife and his brother.

'The Nebuly Coat' is the last of his three novels, and it is not one for children; the vocabulary in places had me reaching for the dictionary to find out the meanings of many obscure words: 'abitrament', 'recrudescence' and 'proleptic' are just some of the words which the Microsoft Word Spell-Checker cannot handle. Also, the novel is a story of blighted love and the stuffiness of late Victorian society. The central character is the young surveyor charged with implementing the grand plans of a famous architect ('Sir Charles Farquhar, Bt.,' rather than G.E. Street) and his rivalry in love for his landlady's niece with the mysterious Lord Blandamer.

The seediness of the life of residents in lodging houses is conveyed exceptionally well, and the claustrophobia of a small town and the gossip that swirls around it must have existed in Burford in the same way that it does in the fictional Cullerne. Of course, the near collapse of the tower and spire in Burford Church was averted by some prompt action in the second half of the 15th Century; you will have to read the book to discover whether the spire and tower of Cullerne Minster is similarly rescued just in time.

Rory Darling

(Many thanks to the Burford Church Friends and to Rory Darling, for permission to reprint this Review. It is always interesting to get non-members views of JMF's novels.)

MOONFLEET IN FRENCH

As a follow on to John Gretton's article in July's *Newsletter*, I searched for the two other copies I had in French. The first was clearly brought out to link up with Fritz Lang's film, which was doing very well in France as *Les Contrebandiers de Moonfleet* (CinemaScope en couleurs).



It was No. 159 in Marabout's paperback collection. Other recent publications included: *Les Mysteres du Chateau D'Udolphu* by Anne Radcliffe; *Histoire d'Un Mariage* by Pearl Buck; *Sir Nigel* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; and *Le Vagabond des Mers* by R. L. Stevenson.

The translation was by Pierre Courtier.

The second, also a paperback, was published by Phebus in January 1990 in their Presses Pocket edition, and was translated into French by Florence Herbulot, with a Preface by Michel Le Bris.

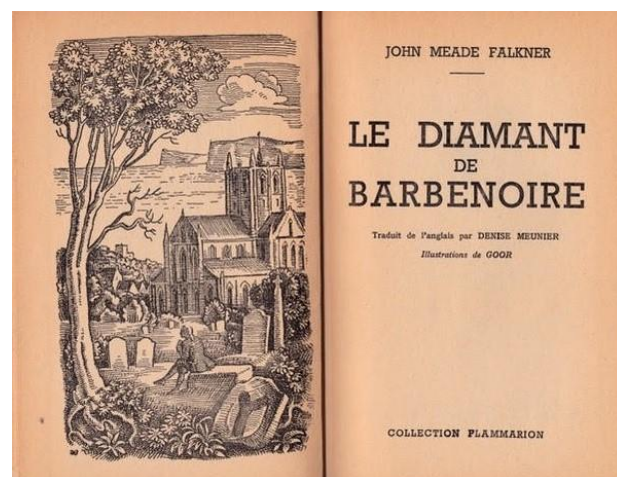


This publication, retained the English title and quoted two extracts from reviews on the back cover.

"Un formidable roman d'aventures..."

'Moonfleet' de J.M. Falkner ressemble à 'L'île au trésor' de Stevenson, il en a les ingrédients, le souffle, et on le lit avec une surprise émerveillée.

Also, what I forgot to attach to John's piece in the last *Newsletter*.



Moonfleet churchyard

Best Wishes and keep safe, well, and positive and hope for a better year this time around.!

**Kenneth Hillier nebuly6@gmail.com
Greenmantle, 75 Main Street, Kings Newton,
Melbourne Derbyshire DE73 8BX**



JMF in 1920 – 102 years ago