

In a further comment from JMF it is difficult not to perceive a disapproving tone: 'He collected about him a little band of devoted females. If they had been in the Catholic Church, listening day by day to a great orator of the Order of Preachers, they would have become Dominican Tertiaries: but being evangelicals they merely formed a little band of devotees who worshipped "The Rector" and all his *fait et gestes*'.

After the death of his wife Thomas Falkner became even less aware of the reality of life at 82 St. Thomas Street, which so distressed everyone else. The small back garden abutted what was known as The Backwater, an area of salt water where the River Wey met the sea, and, when there were particularly high tides, not only the garden flooded but the whole kitchen area. In addition, because the drainage was so deficient raw sewage washed into the house. Damp and the threat of disease was a constant problem. Eventually Thomas was persuaded to write to the Reverend Greaves complaining of the situation, but his protest was ignored. As JMF says, 'The Rector certainly had no mind to incur any outlay on the Old Rectory or its inhabitants'.

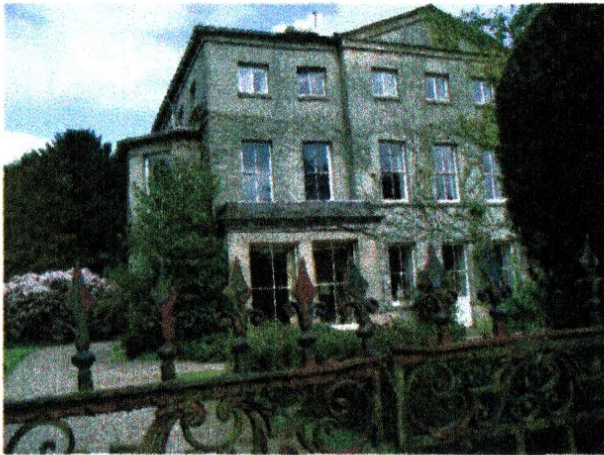
Yet Talbot Aden Ley Greaves was not poor. He had married Catherine Brecknell, who was niece of the last Earl of Portmore, and the Rodwell house he had built was named Portmore House. The motto on the Coat of Arms above the main entrance was *Aquila non captat muscas*, which has a somewhat arrogant ring to our ear. One wonders how much social intercourse there was between the Greaves and the Falkners. I suspect that the 12-year old JMF found it easier to form friendships with the women of the Greaves family and saw them in a more favourable light. Of Mrs. Greaves he says she was 'a woman of widest sympathies and most amiable disposition. She was devoted to all good works and was much beloved in the parish'. In contrast: 'I do not know that this could be said of her husband who was an austere and aloof man. He had been bred in the narrower school of Cambridge evangelicalism... He was little seen in the parish, and indeed did no "visiting work", confining himself to the meeting-room and the pulpit'. JMF also knew the Rector's spinster sister, Alice, well enough to mention 'her numberless good works'.

So where is the mystery in all this? The mystery lies in the fact that John Meade Falkner, apart from academic sojourn at Marlborough and Oxford, grew up in Dorset, and yet he set some of the most dramatic scenes in *The Lost Stradivarius* in Derbyshire. We can only guess at what may have been the inspiration for the creation



of Royston in that story. He knew that Talbot Greaves was the youngest son of a landowning family, and that the property in question was Mayfield in Derbyshire. If Mayfield was his model, then he could only have seen the exterior, the descriptions of the music room, picture gallery, etc. in the novel being the product of imagination. Since it was written in 1895, he was also much dependent on memory.

The manor of Matherfield, or Mayfield, was sold by Henry VIII in 1543, since when it has been greatly enlarged. In the early eighteenth century a larger hall was built, the entrance to which has a



domed clock tower. In the novel, 'The picture gallery at Royston is a very long, narrow, and rather low room, running the whole length of the south wing, and terminating in a large Tudor oriel or flat bay window looking east'. This is later described as having 'great windows'.

Mayfield has such a flat bay window on its south wing with an easterly aspect. In one photograph I have seen it even has French windows (mentioned in the novel), though these would have been added at a later date. The estate is a short horse-ride from Derby, a journey made by John Maltravers.

If Falkner did have the Greaves's family home in mind, we need to know how he could visualize it. There is no evidence to confirm, as has been suggested, that he visited the Midlands with his father in 1880. He did work briefly at Derby School after leaving Oxford, and it would have been well within his ability as a cyclist to visit Mayfield for a day. It may simply be that he saw a painting of the Hall at Mr. Greaves's home.

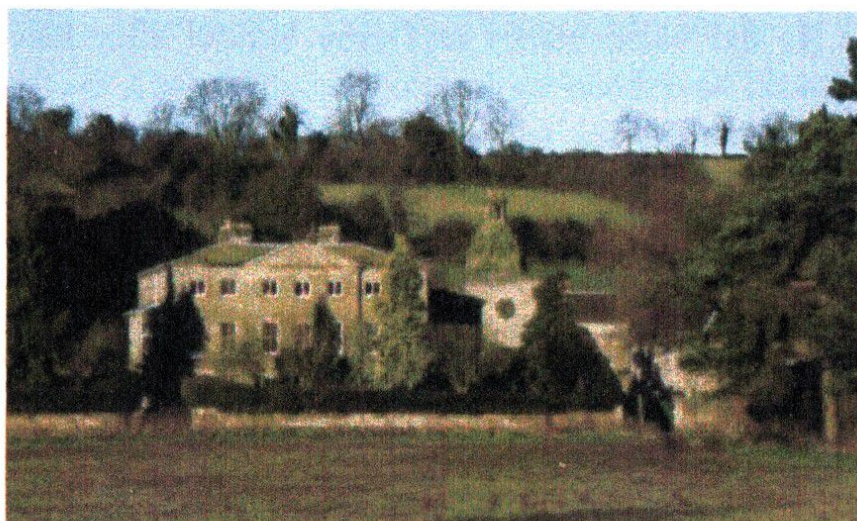
There is one other possibility connected with the Old Rectory. At the time JMF was growing up, photography was starting to take a hold in the public imagination. During the years at the house in West Walks, Dorchester, they had a 'Photograph Book which had become a feature of any self-respecting family'. Furthermore, about 1868 his sister Ann and his brother Charles 'were photographed by Mr. Pouncey... He was a very pioneer of photography, and his pictures were not only remarkable for their date but are remarkable today' (1925).



On arriving in Weymouth, therefore, it must have fascinated him to find that Miss Alice Greaves had a passion for photography. The morning room at the back of the house where the Falkners ate their meals was known to the whole family as 'Miss Alice's Room', and here, from Falkner's notes, is the reason why: 'It was a time before Codaks (sic), a time when photography had not long escaped from its cradle and when its practice demanded a vast amount of apparatus and a still vaster store of patience. "Miss Alice's Room" was at the back of the house... One whole side of the room was lined by a great cupboard built up with a mahogany skeleton frame and shiny green american-cloth. This cupboard had been used by Miss Alice for storing photographic apparatus and chemicals, and the passage which led into the front dining room had been turned into a dark-room for developing'.

Is it not likely that Miss Alice Greaves, who was living at Mayfield Hall in 1851 when her younger brother was Vicar of Mayfield, and who moved with him and his wife to Melcombe Regis, Weymouth in 1856 - is it not wholly likely that she photographed Mayfield as her main subject as she took her first steps in this new pastime? And since JMF knew so much about her activities, is it not also likely that he saw the results?

One final thought: Mrs. Greaves's middle name was Cecile and she had been born and lived in France. Was JMF thinking of her when he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Marriage*, his other story involving an estate - Minsteracres - in Derbyshire? The ghostly bride, Cecilia Bejant, has a French family name and drinks wine from Laffontine Abbey. Catherine Cecile Brecknell had been a visitor at Mayfield prior to her engagement to Talbot Greaves.



**Mayfield  
Hall**

[with thanks to Mr. Pat Smith, the chairman of the Mayfield Heritage Group]