

Fleet Dorset

“The village of Moonfleet lies half a mile from the sea on the right or west bank of the Fleet stream. This rivulet, which is so narrow as it passes the houses that I have known a good jumper clear it without a pole, broadens out into salt marshes below the village, and loses itself at last in a lake of brackish water. The lake is good for nothing except sea-fowl, herons, and oysters, and forms such a place as they call in the Indies a lagoon; being shut off from the open Channel by a monstrous great beach or dyke of pebbles, of which I shall speak more hereafter.”

This first paragraph lays the scene for his most famous novel, set in 1757. The book is based upon Mohun family traditions and the fact that smuggling was rife in the area. The actual church at Fleet was largely swept away by a flood in 1824, when the sea came over Chesil Beach into the lagoon and beyond. A young eye-witness recounted the story: *“Most soon as ‘twas light a lot of us boys was out where we be a-standing, for to look at the seas what was coming over the ridge. Then...twere the great sea hisself rose up level like, and come on right over ridge and all, like nothing in this world...we runned like mad...when we comed back, where was the church? – all but thic firm little chancel – all sucked away by that terrible rise of the sea...”*



The old chancel



Old cottages at Fleet

In 1827 the ruins of the nave were demolished, and the chancel rebuilt as a chapel. It contains brasses and a vault to the Mohun family. In 1925, a channel was found underground: *“The tunnel had solid walls, cemented on the inside, about five feet high and two feet wide, and was traceable across the church-yard”*. A terrace is all that survives of the hamlet of East Fleet, the houses below the chapel also being washed away.



The church has a brass plaque to Meade Falkner, which has sadly decayed enough to make the inscription hard to read. On Tuesday, 8 May 2001 [the anniversary of Falkner's birth] The John Meade Falkner Society placed a slate inscription beneath it. The **'new' Fleet Church** is a few hundred yards further along the lane. At the end of Fleet lane is the **Moonfleet Hotel**, once Fleet House, built by Maximilian Mohun in 1603. Bedrooms have been named after Falknerian characters in the novel: Elzevir, Trenchard, Master Ratsey, Grace Maskew and Rev. Glennie

The two plaques to Meade Falkner