

## *Music in the life of John Meade Falkner* John Gretton

John Meade Falkner touched life at many points, novelist, poet, antiquarian, bibliophile, and captain of industry. He also had had a deep and abiding interest in music and musicians primarily, but not exclusively, in an ecclesiastical context. He loved the choral and organ music of Durham cathedral. He was the Honorary Librarian to the Dean and Chapter and may have been able to hear organ practices from the room where he often worked when not in Newcastle. His first novel, in 1895, was *The Lost Stradivarius*, and *The Nebuly Coat* of 1903 has the four page appendix with sheet music for the chimes played at Cullerne at three hourly intervals. He also had his *Ad Majorem* collection of psalter chants printed just before the Great War, and there are scholarly musical references in his poems, for instance the mention of 'Boyce' in *After Trinity* (1910). This article aims to give an overview of Falkner's musical life and will also report the discovery of hitherto unnoticed aspects of his musical interests on a national stage.

In the J.M.F. *Journal* for 2020 there is a pioneering article by Philip Titcombe on the *Ad Majorem Collection of Psalter Chants*, a rare item for the Falkner collector. This was finely printed at Falkner's expense, and in the article the compiler's Preface is illustrated, beginning '*The inclusion only of Chants which possess a marked and easily remembered melody, the very sparing use of single Chants, and of some minor Chants, are some principles which have governed this selection*'. Falkner was assembling his book in 1911-12, just before the war, and wrote for permission to include the various pieces from their composers, pointing out that '*I am a business man, and a director of Sir W.G. Armstrong Whitworth & Co.*' The publishing, at some cost, of this very specialised collection shows Falkner's dedication to his interest in the minutiae of Anglican church music.

*The Lost Stradivarius* is a music-based story, though also a consummate ghost tale. It is also a fictional study of the possibility of the power of music to effect evil as well as good. The opening and closing quotations support this: the book opens with the text from Ecclesiasticus xxii.6: '*A tale out of season is as music in mourning.*' and closes with '*for some the light is darkness*'. The pieces played by John Maltravers on his violin in his Oxford college rooms are apparently fictional, including the key piece, the

*Gagliarda* of the *Areopagita* of Graziani which arouses the ghost who haunts John for the rest of his life, including his marriage to a relative of the rake Adrian Temple. His other problem is whether the Stradivarius he finds in his college room, and concealed from his best friend, is rightfully his despite the improvement in his playing. The story gathers pace and leads to John's untimely death, so maybe music can be a source of evil, a concept I cannot imagine Falkner ever really believed in. I doubt William Blackwood hesitated for a moment before publishing Falkner's first novel in 1895, and it went through various colonial editions before appearing as Penguin Book no. 487 in 1946. It was reprinted by Tartarus Press in hardback in 2000.

Another ghostly fiction is *A Midsummer Night's Marriage*, first published in the 'National Review' in August 1896 and reprinted by The Tragara Press, Edinburgh in 1977 and by Tartarus Press in 2000 (both limited editions). Anthony Santal of Christ Church, Oxford is transported back several centuries to the house at Winterbourne of Miss Cecilia Bejant with whom he falls in love. She is named for Saint Cecilia. She takes him by the hand and leads him to the chapel where her father lies in his coffin. The musical reference lies in the Latin versicle recited by the priest "Subvenite Sancti Dei, occurrite Angeli Dei" (Hasten to help the holy God, meet the angels of God) to which the congregation reply "Suscipientes animam eius" (receiving his soul). At the end of the funeral Mass, they approach the Jesuit priest and ask to be married immediately. We now know that this is after the Henrician reformation for the priest has been in hiding. Santal is then woken by the servant of the inn where he had been staying to be told that he had been found sleeping in the chapel of a ruined house with his head on the broken altar-step. In the next few days, he visits the parish church and finds the tombs of Roger Bejant and his only child Cecilia, aged 18, dating from June 1580. Eight years after his nocturnal adventure he becomes engaged to a Miss Willoughby, but their wedding is interrupted by a stranger who says, "*I forbid this marriage ... for this man is already married*", a fact that Anthony cannot deny. He moves to the Bejant Arms at Winterbourne, thinking constantly of Cecilia, and is received into the Roman Catholic church. At his funeral a priest appears and takes over the service, intoning "Subvenite Sancti Dei..." to which a man Santal had spoken to in 1580 replies from the back of the church "Suscipientes animam eius".

In *The Nebuly Coat* the daily bell chimes of St. Sepulchre's Church are printed with musical notation at the end of the novel (pp. 369-372 of the first edition) and named as:

3 o'clock 'New Sabbath'. 6 o'clock 'Bermondsey' (the chime in progress when the tower fell, the named bells with "a jangle of sound, a deep groan from Taylor John, and a shrill cry from Beata Maria..."). 9 o'clock 'Sheldon' and at 12 'Mount Ephraim'. Falkner had more than a passing interest in church bells. In his *A History of Oxfordshire* (1899) he mentions bell-founding at Burford and the burial in the church of Henry Neale in a spot which became known as Bell-founders Aisle. In his revision of Murray's *Buckinghamshire* (1903) he introduces a new section on Church Bells (p.xii): '*The county is a fine field for the study of Campanology....*'.

However, Falkner's devotion to his musical interests is best demonstrated by his membership of the Worshipful Company of Musicians from 1904, initially as a 'Liveryman' but later as a member of the 'Court of Assistants', the governing body of the London Company. As we shall see, his election to 'Court' in 1922 qualified him to seek admission as a Freeman of the City of London which he did in the November of the same year.



### **The Company's Coat of Arms**

The history of the livery company goes back to the fourteenth century when they were the 'Fellowship of Minstrels' under royal protection. In 1604 the guild received a full Royal Charter together with a grant of arms with the badge of a lyre. Charles 1st revoked the charter and from 1632 to 1950 the Company of Musicians operated without one. They didn't have their own Hall and generally hired a room in Stationers' Hall for meetings, as they still do today. By the eighteenth century most musical activity

had moved to London's West End and the Company started to elect non-musicians, principally leading City businessmen. Towards the end of the nineteenth century practising musicians were again encouraged to join and it was made clear to the businessmen that musical philanthropy was now

the core activity of the Company. King George VI, possibly prompted by Princess Margaret, granted them a new Charter in 1950 as The Worshipful Company of Musicians.

The Company was, naturally, much involved in celebrating St. Cecilia and presented a stained-glass window of her to St. Paul's Cathedral in 1907. It is in the north transept and was designed by John R. Clayton and presented by Charles T.D. Crews, Master of the Company. Every year on November 22nd they went in state to the St. Cecilia service of commemoration with graduates in their own academic dress, for Falkner his Oxford Master of Arts gown and hood, while non-graduates were provided with Livery gowns. Liverymen wore a distinctive badge on the left breast and 'Court' members also had their own badge. Membership was not for the impecunious, in Falkner's time the joining fee for a Liveryman was £35, and promotion to 'Court' involved a cheque for £50.

The Company currently has nearly 400 Liverymen, managed by a Master and two Wardens supported by the 'Court of Assistants' of which Falkner was a member from 1922 to 1932. Musical education is promoted through grants and scholarships, and the scope of the awards has been widened to include jazz, popular music and also choral singing, a newly popular activity through the medium of television. Falkner's own contribution, apart from his generous gifts, was that he was asked to advise on suitable pieces for performance at ceremonies and services, including the St. Cecilia commemorations. 'Boyce' was always useful.

The Company retains its long series of 'Court' minute books, and these are now published online, expertly edited. Here are the entries relating to John Meade Falkner:

12th May 1904

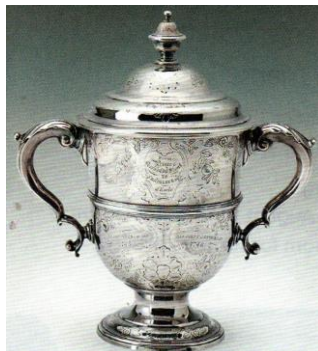
'John Meade Falkner admitted to freedom and took livery'.

24th October 1911

'Mr J. Meade Falkner M.A., Liveryman wished to present the Company with a cup to commemorate the coronation of King George V'.

Falkner was always very generous to places (Burford and elsewhere) or, in this case, public bodies he supported. The minute book for 1912 records:

*'Presentation of a gift by John Meade Falkner Esq., M.A. of The Divinity House Durham a very handsome silver gilt Loving Cup being a reproduction of a George II strapped Irish cup of 1728 to commemorate the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. Clerk to express thanks'.*



**A similar type of cup**

Inscription: The gift of John Meade Falkner Liveryman of the Musicians' Company in the Coronation Year 1911. and on the cover: 'Preserve Harmony. The Trumpeters and Singers were as One'.

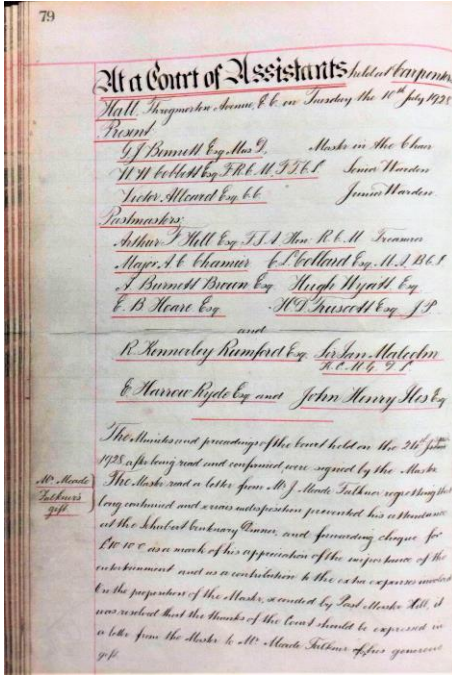
(notes: 'Preserve Harmony' is the motto of the Company, and the biblical text of trumpeters and singers is from 2 Chronicles 5:13. A loving cup is a two-handled cup, and 'strapped' refers to the elaborate silver work of the handles. The Company's silver is displayed at table during the twice-yearly formal dinners, and Falkner's cup is one of a number used in "The Ceremony of the Loving Cup". His cup was designed to be part of a growing collection of such pieces).

Minute Book for 1922

Resolved to invite Mr. J. Meade Falkner M.A. to accept a seat on the Court.

16th October 1923. He is recorded as present at the meeting of the Court of Assistants held at Stationers' Hall.

Membership of Court enabled Falkner to make the acquaintance of many of the most eminent musicians of his day, and he, for his turn, held their respect for his scholarship.



10th July 1928

"The Master read a letter from Mr. J. Meade Falkner regretting that long continued and serious indisposition prevented his attendance at the Schubert Centenary Dinner, and forwarding a cheque for ten guineas as a mark of his appreciation of the importance of the entertainment and as a contribution to the extra expenses involved. On the proposition of the Master, seconded by Past Master Hill, it was resolved that the thanks of the Court should be expressed in a letter from the Master to Mr. Meade Falkner for his generous gift."

11th October 1932

'The Clerk reported the death of Mr. J. Meade Falkner, a member of the Court, the Members upstanding.' (there is no mention of a letter of condolence as was their normal practice, possibly they didn't know he was married).

Here are the details of Falkner's grant of the Freedom of the City of London. The 'Receipt no. 486' survives in the City archives, and is dated 1st November 1922, with the following details:

Date of Birth 8th May 1858. Place Manningford Bruce, Wiltshire.

Receipt No. 486

1st day of November 1922

Date of Birth 8<sup>th</sup> May 1858

Place of Birth Manningford Bruce, Wiltshire

I John Meade Falkner  
 (son of Thomas Alexander Falkner late Manning Bruce, Wilt, Clerk in Holy Orders - dec'd)  
 occupying premises North 11<sup>th</sup> Mansfield Street North  
Newman Street The Society House, Wiltshire  
London, and carrying on the  
Master of Arts, Oxford do hereby apply

to be admitted to the Freedom of the City of London, by redemption, in the Company of Musicians London, in pursuance of the Resolutions of the Court of Common Council of the 17th March, 1855, 12th July, 1848, 6th October, 1856, 22nd January, 1857, 16th December, 1858, 29th July, 1867, 18th June, 1890, 17th January, 1907, 18th May, 1916, 24th January, 1918, and 30th October, 1921, and Court of Aldermen 6th February, 1866, 14th May, 1867, 6th June, 1916, 10th December, 1918, and 4th November, 1921, or some or one of the said Resolutions; and I hereby declare that I am not an Alien, that I am above the age of Twenty-one years, and that I have not previously been admitted to the Freedom of the City.

J. Meade Falkner

Witnessed

*I, John Meade Falkner son of Thomas Alexander Falkner, Clerk in Holy Orders decd., occupying premises (North Newnton House, Wilts -this struck through) The Divinity House Durham. Master of Arts, Oxford do hereby apply to be admitted to the Freedom of the City of London, by redemption, in the Company of Musicians in pursuance of the Resolutions of the Court of Common Council of (a series of dates follow) and Court of Aldermen (further dates follow); and I hereby declare that I am not an Alien, that I am above the age of Twenty-one years, and that I have not previously been admitted to the Freedom of the City.*

(signed) *J. Meade Falkner* (in the slightly 'art deco' style of signature he used for a while).

He was admitted by the Court of Aldermen on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1922 and would have been given a certificate on a narrow piece of vellum folded into a red leather cover. It will be noted that he was a freeman 'by redemption', meaning by his own application to the Common Council on payment of a fee, and not through the livery company. The newspapers often make much of a Freeman's ancient right to herd sheep across London Bridge and this is still sometimes done as a stunt to draw attention to good causes. The sheep look completely baffled.

The antiquarian portion of John Meade Falkner's library was dispersed by the auctioneers Sotheby's from 12th to 14th December 1932 when the 'Great Depression' was still having an effect on prices. Also, it was a highly specialist collection of the manuscript and printed devotional books of the Roman Catholic church in Europe and pre-reformation England. There were few of the more popularly 'collectable' books such as colour plate books, literary firsts (apart from Walter Scott), travel and topography etc. It made slightly over £8,000 in total, with the better books selling well in the context. The highest priced lot was no. 484, The Golden Legend, catalogued as 'The Largest Caxton Known'. Despite it lacking 87 leaves, the buyer (at £1,100) was the American dealer Dr. A.W.S. Rosenbach whose ambitions may be illustrated by his sourcing of a Gutenberg Bible for his best customer Carrie Estelle Doheny.

My copy of the Falkner catalogue belonged to the bookseller Percy Dobell who attended the sale and annotated it in pencil with the prices and buyers' names. The missing lot 31 has been written in as 'Latin Bible 1483', sold for £3. 5s. In those days private collectors and even institutional

librarians seldom attended auctions in person; they left commission bids with the professional dealers. The booksellers mainly had a clear run, and earlier in the century this tempted them into the practice of ‘ringing’ in which Dobell himself was involved earlier in his career before it was made illegal. It worked like this: in provincial sales the local trade attended and bought lots at low prices while the London professionals largely sat on their hands. An upstairs room at a local pub was booked beforehand, to which after the sale those in the ‘ring’ withdrew. There a second, or even third private auction took place of the lots originally bought by the smaller, local dealers. Thereby the local men went home with a few pounds in their pockets for an easy day’s ‘work’ and the Londoners shared the books at bargain prices. The scandal was chronicled by A. & J. Freeman in the book ‘Anatomy of an Auction, Rare Books at Ruxley Lodge 1919’ (1990) using Dobell’s personal copy of that catalogue with the hammer prices, and then the ringers’ final prices, pencilled in. For instance, a Shakespeare first folio was sold for £100 in the room and advanced to £1,550 among the ringers. Ruxley is near Esher, the seat of the Foley family, whose heir was robbed blind. A public outcry led to the Auctions (Bidding Agreements) Act of 1927, so J.M. Falkner’s library escaped the ‘ring’ by just five years.

Since the bulk of the library comprised devotional texts, it could be argued that it was very much a musical library in make-up, the delightful ‘Buckland Missal’ (lot 293, sold to Bernard Quaritch for £220) in particular having musical notation throughout, but I will highlight mainly those books which were essential textbooks for Falkner’s studies in cathedral music.



Lot 88 was ‘Boyce’ as mentioned in ‘After Trinity’ : Boyce, (Dr. William) Cathedral Music: Being a Collection in Score, 3 vol. rough calf folio, 1760-72, sold to Quaritch for £2. 10s. Falkner’s reference to “thick paper” in the poem evokes the size and weight of these eighteenth-century books. A set of Boyce in good bindings would probably command around £1,500 today. Similarly bound, and with the same title was lot 14 by Dr. Samuel Arnold, 3 vols., 1790, sold to Ellis for £1. There is also lot 187: Gibbons (Orlando) A Collection of the

Sacred Compositions edited by Sir F.A.G. Ouseley, folio, 1873 (sold for



10s.). Lots 200-201 comprise two copies of Handel's Messiah with music, and Lot 70 was 'Polypheme An Opera' by Porpora and Ralli, 1734 in an English royal binding (£1 to Ellis with two other books).

Lots 396-408 are manuscript Processionals with musical notations of particular historical interest for study of the 'Use of Sarum' (Salisbury). There are examples from the 14th and 15th centuries, and printed editions from the 16th century. Lots 237-239 are printed books of hymns, again following the usage of Sarum, the first by Wynkyn de Worde which Dobell has noted as "sold with lot 465", i.e. 'Sequences' by the same printer (the pair to Quaritch for £58). Lot 445 (illustrated with a full-page plate and sold for £130 to Kegan Paul) was the German 12th century 'Sacramentary of Banz in Bavaria' with interlinear musical notes in the form of 'neumes', which the Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines as "In plainsong, a prolonged pause or group of notes sung to a single syllable, especially at the end of a melody." It is currently unlocated, but see Edwards (bibliography), who notes that some items may have perished or been moved during the last war. Tragically, Sotheby's plate might be its only record.

In the festschrift for Dr. Christopher De Hamel (see bibliography) A.S.G. Edwards discusses 'Medieval Manuscripts owned by J. Meade Falkner', identifying the subsequent fates of Falkner's manuscript books. This is a key text for understanding the scope of Falkner's collection, though a number of items are reported as 'not located'. Many of the known books are no longer U.K. residents, this last being a sad circumstance when Falkner had originally intended to bequeath his collection to Durham University Library.

However, shortly before his death the university erected the **Pemberton Building** immediately opposite *The Divinity House* on Palace Green. It was designed in 1929 when Falkner objected to it, but it was complete by 1931. It was



to house lecture rooms, but also, crucially, the Durham Student Union Society with a debating chamber and facilities for evening use. Falkner

knew from his own Oxford days the potential for student 'rags' and other nocturnal diversions disturbing the peace of Palace Green. Old, and increasingly ill, he needed his night's sleep. For the winter of 1931 he and Evelyn withdrew to Ventnor, on the Isle of Wight.

So, the bequest was revoked and Sotheby's catalogue states in capitals SOLD BY HIS TESTAMENTARY DIRECTION. Ironically, if the University had waited a few more years, it could have had the library and the Pemberton Building. With its stone somewhat mellowed 'Pemberton' is now a listed building. Nikolaus Pevsner, who had met and dined with Falkner on his first visit to England in 1930, apparently with a letter of introduction from Tancred Borenius, describes the '*cold grey stone like the grammar school opposite*', i.e. *The Divinity House*. It has been said that the building attracting Falkner's wrath was an extension to the university library, but this was not the case as the library building designed by Salvin in 1858 was not extended until the 1960's, and on a new site in the city.

I am glad to have recovered this previously under-reported aspect of Falkner's diverse activities, which show that he was taken seriously by his peers as a researcher into the history of music. He was clearly proud of his London connection and the opportunity to be at the centre of the nation's musical community. It is, of course, singularly appropriate that *The Divinity House* is now the home of the School of Music of the University of Durham.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: My very grateful thanks to Mr. Hugh Lloyd, Clerk to the Musicians' Company for information on Falkner's 'loving cup', which is currently in store during the pandemic.

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Falkner, John Meade: *Collected Poems*. The John Meade Falkner Society, 2005. The notes at the end of the book by Kenneth Hillier *et al.* usefully identify the many biblical quotations in Latin to be found among the poems.

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**William Boyce**  
**1711 - 1779**