

# A History of Durham Cathedral Library

## Some Reviews of *A History of Durham Cathedral Library*

Towards the end of 1921, Falkner was asked to help Durham Cathedral in the post of Honorary Librarian *“with no conditions but merely to give a general oversight. I could not refuse to help, the more because I am much attached to the Cathedral, and the immense treasure of books which it possesses deserve a very reverent care and require some strengthening of supervision”*. It was work here that led to Falkner’s last significant prose publication.

When, in 1925, a history of the Library was published with **H. D. Hughes** [the Sub-Librarian] named as its author, its subtitle continued *“with an Introduction and Additional Chapter on ‘Some Later Durham Bibliophiles’ by J. Meade Falkner, M.A., Hon. Librarian”*. The introduction was a massive 33 pages and was full of useful and erudite information about the development of the Library. Falkner could not help a barbed aside in a footnote on the very first page! *“It is the modern fashion to call the Dormitory a Dorter, and the Refectory a Frater, but the usual terms have been retained as being more readily understood”*. His chapter on the Bibliophiles dealt with Bishops such as Richard de Bury *‘a library bishop’* and reputed author of the famous *Philobiblion*, John Shirwood, Richard Foxe and Cuthbert Tunstall; and Deans such as John Sudbury and Thomas Comber.

Researchers remember Falkner’s readiness to help: *“His enthusiasm for the treasures of the Cathedral Library led him to spend a good deal of time sitting by my side and discussing them with me, making it at times difficult to carry on with my research, but he was so charming that one readily overlooked such matters”*. [**E. G. Millar**] *“Meade Falkner was ... to be found most mornings in the Chapter Library...there was no gush about him but he was always quietly courteous in a way that a youngster likes; no talking down to you, and you learnt a great deal”*. [**R. K. Roper**]

In 1921 Meade Falkner was elected Vice-President of the Surtees Society, which had been established in 1834 *“to have for its object the Publication of inedited Manuscripts, illustrative of the intellectual, the moral, the religious, and the social condition of those parts of England and Scotland, included on the East between the Humber and the Firth of Forth, anon the West between the Mersey and the Clyde, a region which constituted the Ancient Kingdom of Northumbria”*. At a meeting in December 1927 it was resolved *“That the Statutes of the Church of Durham should be edited for the Society by the Secretary from the Latin text prepared by J. Meade Falkner”*. Falkner had typed out the text and he now gave regular support to the editor, **Hamilton Thompson**, who was an eminent researcher and writer on medieval and ecclesiastical history. In his preface, Thompson praised Falkner for his *“constant interest in the work... indeed no tribute is too high, as the editor has merely watered what he planted”*.

After Falkner’s death the Society minutes recorded that his medieval scholarship was *“fine and discerning”* ... and...*“while he retained his health, his interest in the affairs of the Society was constant and he kept a vigilant watch against any proposal which seemed to his fastidious taste to imperil the high standard of its production”*.