

# Newcastle-upon-Tyne

## Northumberland

At the end of 1882, John Meade Falkner – at a loose end after going down from Hertford College, Oxford – received the offer of a post tutoring the children of a Captain Noble, a partner in the armaments firm of Armstrong at Elswick, near Newcastle. “It was not, I fancy, a very promising enquiry, and I opine that the prospect of temporary work in the North was not congenial to you”. His brother Charles’ remark may well have been true, but Falkner was to spend the bulk of the rest of his life up North, far away from the climes of coastal Dorset or the dreaming spires of Oxford.

On Wednesday, 3 January 1883, Falkner was ushered into the Noble household. It was to be a key date in his life - which the John Meade Falkner Society celebrates by publishing one of its three Newsletters a year. He was primarily tutor to Noble’s eldest son, John, and they were to become close friends until Falkner’s death fifty years later. Gradually he seems to have been regarded as one of the family; certainly, Captain Noble must have thought highly of him, as he was appointed secretary to Armstrong Whitworth in 1896 [the same year *The Lost Stradivarius* was published] and became ever more influential in the armaments firm’s business. His working environment was an aggressively modern one of smoke, noise, grime and unceasing activity. At the time, Elswick was probably the biggest single agglomeration of industrial plant in Britain: iron making, steelworks, commercial engineering, gun-forging and shipbuilding vied for his attention.



**Elswick Works**

Falkner had moved his home to Durham by the time he married Evelyn Violet Adye, the youngest daughter of Sir John Miller Adye, a member of Noble’s circle, in 1899. Two years later he was made a director of Armstrong Whitworth and, on the death of Captain Noble in 1915, he was elected Chairman. He remained in this exacting post for the rest of the Great War and beyond, only retiring in 1921. At the frenzied peak of the War the firm employed some 70,000 men and women. As Falkner’s biographer, Kenneth Warren, has remarked, “in the midst of the greatest war in history, and therefore at its own most critical time, one of the world’s major producers of weapons of mass destruction elected as its leader a 57-year-old graduate in the humanities, among whose predilections were topography, literature, baroque church music and palaeography”. It was a paradoxical life! \*

\* *John Meade Falkner 1858-1932: A Paradoxical Life* by Kenneth Warren  
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