

Biographical Notes on the Mead, Mobbs and Gaskell ancestors of John Meade Falkner William Peter Mead

John Meade Falkner's grandparents were John Mead [1774-1851], Retd Officer of The Board of Ordnance, and his wife Elizabeth [1796-1863], nee Mobbs. They lived at 9, Brunswick Buildings, Weymouth, where his mother, Elizabeth Grace Mead, was born on 8 April, 1822.

There is evidence to show that the Mead family were originally from East Anglia: James Patterson Mead, brother of John Mead, left property in Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely. Their branch of the family had connections with Officers who served in the Royal Navy, the Customs and Excise and the Board of Ordnance.



Based on the fine old custom of nepotism, a forebear of John Mead can be identified with certainty as Robert Mead, Ordnance Officer and Paymaster to the Duke of Marlborough's forces at Gibraltar, 1702-3. He died in 1729. There are various "sightings" in Ordnance papers and Mead wills between that date and 1777. Then an extract from the Day Book and

Appointments Register of James Patterson, Esq., General of HM Forces and Commander of Royal Artillery in North America reads: "Appointment of Robert Mead, Clerk of Stores to the train of

Robert Mead Artillery in North America". He was, without question of doubt, the father of John [our man!] and James Patterson Mead, his brother, named gratefully after the General. Both boys were born in New York [ref.: National Census, 1851].

We shall return to Robert and the rest of the family later, but now to continue with John. Born in 1774, in 1788 aged 14, when many boys of his class would have been still at school, he was appointed an Assistant Paymaster to the Board of Ordnance in the British West Indies. It can be presumed that he pursued his duties with diligence because in 1792, when 18 years old, he was promoted to be Paymaster and Clerk of Cheque at Grenada. [The present writer holds his Commissioning Papers for this appointment.]

John remained there until 1810, when he was appointed as Ordnance Store Keeper and Paymaster at Colombo in the Isle of Ceylon. He retired in 1815 after 27 years' service at the Board of Ordnance. He had returned to England by 1820, when he was married at St. Helen's Church, Worcester, to John Meade Falkner's grandmother, Elizabeth [nee Mobbs] - verified in the autobiography of Admiral James George Mead, *Recollections of My Life*".



The bridegroom was aged 46, a worn-out veteran from tropical climes, his bride was 24, an only child and heiress. Her personal fortune will be discussed later in this paper. Between then and his death in 1857, at the age of 83, John and Elizabeth begat nine children, the last [Anna Margaret] being born in 1837, when John was 63 years of age and Elizabeth was 41. Their eldest daughter, Elizabeth Grace, born on 8 April 1822, was to marry the Revd. Thomas Alexander Falkner and was John Meade Falkner's mother.

John Mead

Now to consider the distaff side of this union. Elizabeth Mead [1796-1863], nee Mobbs, was the granddaughter of Thomas Gaskell of Ludlow, described in his Will, dated 11 February 1779 and in this writer's possession, as the London "Carriere" [sic]. He married Mary, the daughter of a Mr. Randle, also of Ludlow.



Unfortunately, I have no biographical details of this family. Their union produced four children. Thomas, who died a bachelor; Elizabeth [Elizabeth Mead's mother]; Mary, who died a spinster and intestate; and a youngest daughter, Anne, who married James Hookey of Ludlow. Their son, George Randle Hookey shared the Gaskell/Randle inheritance equally with his cousin Elizabeth, who married James Mobbs. One child was born of this union, Elizabeth, born in 1796 in Southampton [ref. National Census, 1851]. She was John Meade Falkner's grandmother and great-grandmother of the writer of these notes.

Reference has been made to the fact that Elizabeth was an heiress, and a search of family wills in my possession bears this out. In 1848 her schedule of property showed that she had inherited from her grandfather Thomas Gaskell [shared with her cousin **Elizabeth Mobbs** George Randle Hookey]:

- 1) Cottage, buildings, stabling, closes and fields in Ludlow or the adjacent village of Stanton Lacey. [Typical appointments of a "Carriere's" trade.]
- 2) From one Edward Burnidge, landlord of the Rein Deer Inn, Friar Street, Worcester, dwelling houses in Friar Street. [Unfortunately not the pub!] I have been unable to trace Burnidge, although I have his will dated 9 August, 1842. It would seem that Elizabeth Mobbs was related to him. After all, she was married to John Mead at St. Helen's Church, Worcester.
- 3) The leasehold of 33, Cambridge Street, Paddington, with 15 years to run, plus the sum of £1,500 from William Richardson, Esq., a solicitor of London and a family friend.

The total valuation of her estate was £3,415.00. When her husband, John, died in 1857 his estate was valued at £619.6s.8d.

Further proof of the meanness of the Board of Ordnance towards its servants can be found in an incident which involved Elizabeth Mead and her in-laws. The final posting of John's father, Robert, on his return from America at the end of the 18th. century, was as Ordnance Storekeeper and Paymaster at Carlisle. There he died in 1802, leaving a wife and three daughters - in penury. No connection can be found to have existed between John Mead and his parents and sisters in Carlisle. However, in 1847 one of the sisters wrote a pathetic letter to Elizabeth Mead. First she asked that her brother, John, is not informed of their circumstances. She then related that after her father had died, his wife [John's mother] scratched an existence as the mistress of a "dames school" in Carlisle. She died in 1816 and the girls existed earning a pittance as dressmakers. One of them organised herself a better life - as wife to the butler of a lady of substance in Edinburgh. Now they wrote to beg financial aid from their sister-in-law, Elizabeth, in order to save them from eviction for rent arrears. However, they implored that their brother should not be informed. The sum requested was £50, which was presumably sufficient to secure the rental of their humble home. Of course, Elizabeth arranged payment in great secrecy, through an unnamed intermediary [see note 1]. No trace of any acknowledgement was found amongst these papers.

It is interesting to speculate as to why John Mead refused any contact with his own family, apart from his brother, James Patterson, with whom he was in regular correspondence.

My father, years later, spoke of some family feud of which he had no details. Was it possible that a boy whose family ties had been severed at 14 years of age, bore a grudge, which was never to be healed, against his father and mother who had evicted him when so young to face a hostile world overseas?

My Grandfather, in his privately published autobiography, *Recollections of My Life*, deplored the fact that he knew so little of his own father's life. It is on this sketchy information, which I have been able to piece together, that I submit this short biographical note, in the hope that it will prove of some interest to members of the John Meade Falkner Society.

Note 1. It is probable that payment was arranged through the solicitor, William Richardson. Not only was he Elizabeth's solicitor, she was a beneficiary of his will. Further, he arranged for her eldest son, John, to enter legal chambers at 2, King's Bench Walk, Temple.

Note 2. Elizabeth Mead, JMF's grandmother, died in Weymouth in 1863 [aged 67] of pneumonia brought on from a chill contracted whilst visiting her Falkner relations in Dorchester.

Note 3. Elizabeth Grace Falkner, JMF's mother, died on 12 March, 1871, in Weymouth [aged 49] of typhoid fever brought about by drinking water from the Rectory well, which had been contaminated by a dead rat.



Elizabeth Grace Mead
8 April 1822 - 12 March 1871

