

Falkner's Farm, Wiltshire
Ray Ion and Kenneth Hillier

John Meade Falkner drew up his will on 16th July, 1925; a codicil was added on 24th August 1931 (which left "His Holiness the Pope reigning at my death...the sum of five hundred pounds"). Probate was granted on 28th November 1932, four months after his death. After detailing wishes on where he was to be buried, legacies to his sister Anne, his friend John Noble and his wife Evelyn Violet, Falkner turned to his brother:

I devise my estates at North Newton and Hillcot in the County of Wilts and all other my real estate to the use of my brother Charles Gaskell Falkner for his life with remainder to the use of the first and every other son of the said Charles Gaskell Falkner successively in remainder one after the other according to their respective seniorities in tail male....

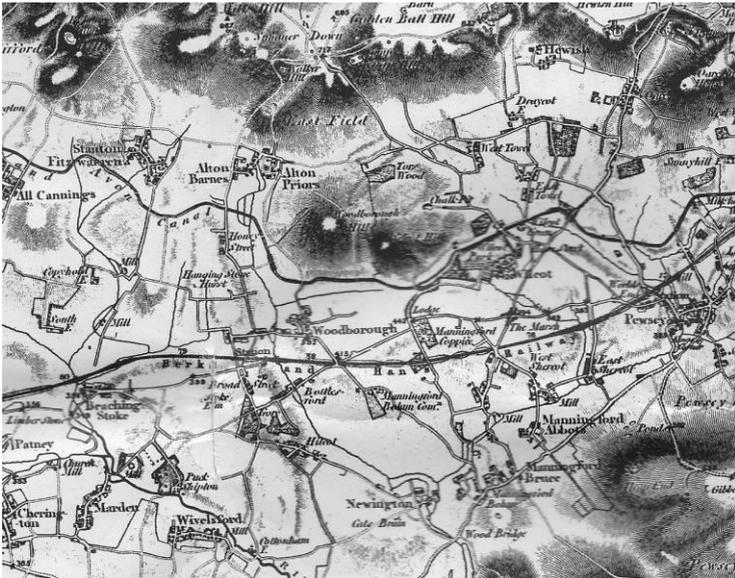
A farm of 41 acres in North Newton, with buildings at the crossing of the Avebury-Amesbury road and Cats Brain Way, belonged to Thomas Alexander of Manningford Bruce in 1803. Amongst the main provisions of the marriage settlement between his daughter, Lucy, and Robert Falkner in June 1818, were the following:

Messuage and Dwelling House, arable meadow and pasture land in North Newton and Hilcot – lands which were formerly part of the Manor of North Newton and Hilcot and were purchased by Thomas Alexander of Viscount Wenman in 1790.

22 acres arable – 10 acres meadow – 1 acre Vicaridge Close – 1 acre Doles – 1 acre Middle Doles – 1 acre Little Doles – 2 acres Upper and Lower Waishes – 10 acres arable land, Bush Field – 10 acres arable land, Woodbridge Field – 11 ½ acres arable land, The Home Field – Close called Cow Lease – Part of an orchard.

How the Falkners became acquainted with the Alexander family is not known; but when Robert's older sister, Anna, married John Grant (whose family had occupied the Manor at Manningford Bruce for many years), a further link was established. Robert, born in 1788 and from Bath, now moved to Wiltshire. At first they went to Huish, between Pewsey and Marlborough. Lucy, unfortunately, died at Manningford from the effects of

having a fourth child in 1827. Robert, never in good health and rarely failing to bemoan the fact, lasted until 1833. (2) His lands passed, before 1837, to his sole surviving son Thomas Alexander, then a minor.



**The country around North Newnton
(Newington on this 1817 Map)**

Thomas, “a gentle, scholarly man...[who] seems to have had no worldly ambitions [apart from] prospects of quiet, life-long cultured ease in the congenial environment of ‘The Hold’, Manningford Bruce” (3), was to find marriage – to Grace Mead - and a growing family necessitated at least a token approach to earning his living. Ordained with some speed in December 1855, he was installed as curate of North Newnton. The little church of St. James has a short Perpendicular tower, castigated by Nikolaus Pevsner as being ‘disfigured in the most unexpected way by big warts. They are the projecting beams of the bell-cradle, protected each by a little stone roof. There are eight of these excrescences. May they not be removed.’(4) Meade Falkner would probably have approved of this .

Tom continued to live at Manningford. Within two years John Mead (JMF added the extra e) was born. Although the Falkner family soon moved to

Dorchester, then Weymouth and (after Grace's death) Buckland Ripers, Tom retained his Wiltshire property. When he died in 1870, it passed to John.

In 1803 the hamlet had consisted of only three farms, a few cottages, the church, and the mill. The two latter standing together at the east of the village by the eastern branch of the Avon were approached by two paths, one in the north leaving an elbow of the Avebury-Amesbury road and making a direct path from Hilcott to Newton church, and one in the south being a continuation of Cats Brain way. The farms stood where those paths left the Avebury-Amesbury road and the cottages stood mainly between them and the church.

The population of the village was 61 in 1841 and had declined even further by the third quarter of the 20th century. The village then contained only the church, farm buildings opposite Cats Brain way, a late-18th-century farmhouse and an early 19th-century cottage, both thatched, a pair of cottages dated 1907 south of the farm, and a pair of late-19th- or early-20th-century cottages at the bend in the Avebury-Amesbury road. Since 1898, the Rev. Edward George Alfred Sutton had held the rectory and vicarage (with 20.75 acres of glebe), in the gift of the Earl of Pembroke. The Earl of Normanton was lord of the manor.

Soon after the turn of the century, Meade Falkner began to consolidate and extend his property holding in the hamlet. He was growing increasingly wealthy, regularly purchasing expensive books, manuscripts and silver, and clearly was looking for other forms of investment. Between 1909 and 1917, he added considerable acreage to the main farm's holding: from James Lucas (16.12.1909) and George Butcher (21.3.1911); from Rev. Sutton (1.10.1912) and Samuel Farmer (17.3.1913 – this included Fowle's Farm); just after the outbreak of the Great War, from George Tilling (29.9.1914); and whilst the war was still going on, from the Earl of Normanton and the Earl of Clarendon (15.11.1917). Normanton was Sidney James Agar, the 4th earl (1865-1933) and lord of the Manor, whose family seat was Somerley House, near Ringwood.

Meade Falkner also purchased the Dairy Cottage, "an attractive detached thatched cottage" from the Rev. Sutton (1.10.1912), which was situated on the lane leading to the church. The property included a garden and large meadow. A more substantial purchase from Samuel Farmer (17.3.1912) and

the two earls (15.11.1917) was Butts Farms House with surrounding meadows. The building was described in 1976 as “an attractive period house brick built with part pebble dash finish and a thatched roof standing quietly on its own”. Another bulk purchase, of nearly 38 acres, from Samuel Farmer (17.3.1913) included pasture, rough grazing and woodland.

Amongst the records of Andrews and Hepworth, solicitors based in the nearby village of Pewsey, there are three bundles relating to the estate of Thomas Swatton, a grocer of Upavon. He was alleged to be ‘of unsound mind’, and the material includes receivers’ accounts of his business and valuation with a plan and conveyancing papers of land in North Newton to be sold to Meade Falkner are included. (5) It is not clear which land this refers to.

A much later purchase by Meade Falkner was Jessee’s Farm, bought from R. Eavis in 1926. The farm was situated next to Fowle’s Farm on the sharp bend on the Amesbury-Avebury road. Certainly, even by 1915, it is no surprise that Meade Falkner was being referred to in County Directories as a principal landowner in the hamlet.

Occasionally, Meade Falkner mentioned his estate in Wiltshire in correspondence. On 27th August 1917, he replied to a Canon Christopher Wordsworth letter: *“It is curious that you should mention Manningford Bohun. It was from Manningford Bohun that I came over last week to see you, and I was born at Manningford Bruce. My property is in the next parish of North Newton and Hilcot”*. Two years later, on 20th June 1919, he tells Wordsworth *“I am spending a few days on my Wiltshire property”*.

John Meade Falkner died on 22nd July, 1932. Probate was not granted until 28th November 1932, at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. By then Charles was also deceased – dying at Weymouth on 15th September.

His eldest son, Thomas Alexander Meade Falkner, thus inherited the estate. Tom died in 1983, but some years earlier, in 1976, he had sold Falkner’s Farm in 7 Lots.

Lot 1 extended to 298.304 acres and comprised the main four-bedroomed Farm House, various outbuildings (a Dutch Barn, Dairy and Cowshed, Bull Pen and Yard)



Falkner's Farm

and a pair of Cottages, 100 yards to the north of the farm house. The land was described as 'first class arable land'.



The cottage[s] (6)

Lot 2 comprised the Dairy Cottage and its meadow.

Lot 3 was made up of Butts Farm and land totalling 11.537 acres.



Butts Farm from the west

Lot 4 included the pasture rough grazing and woodland of some 38 acres, known as North Newnton Wood.

Further research is needed to find out if all the Lots were sold and what price they achieved. Falkner's Farm and its surrounding cottages and acreage is a little known aspect of John Meade Falkner's life and business activities. Sheer sentiment - so many of his relatives were buried in nearby Manningford Bruce churchyard - as well as financial investment, perhaps drove his acquisitions over nearly two decades.

1. This article was stimulated by the kind donation, by Celia Grover (Meade Falkner's great-niece), of the Auction Catalogue for the Sale of Falkner's Farm in 7 lots at the Red Lion Hotel, Salisbury on Tuesday, 8th June 1976 at 2.30 p.m.
2. See Christopher Hawtree's article on Robert in The John Meade Falkner Society Journal Number 9 (July 2008) entitled "*Crazy Vessel*" – *Falkner's Bath Inheritance*.
3. q.v. Ken Warren: *John Meade Falkner 1858-1932: A Paradoxical Life* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) p.2.
4. q.v. Nikolaus Pevsner: *Wiltshire* (Penguin Books, 1963; revised edition by Bridget Cherry, 1975) p.359
5. Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, Andrews and Hepworth, Pewsey, solicitors papers 1225/116 (1910-1914).
6. Faulkner's (*sic*) Cottage (this suggests it had been refashioned into one property) was sold on 4th January, 2008 for £700,000. On 30th May, 2014 the estimate of its value was £726.090.