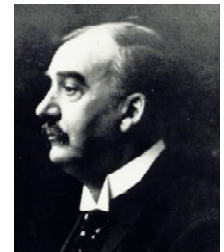


The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 66

8 May 2021

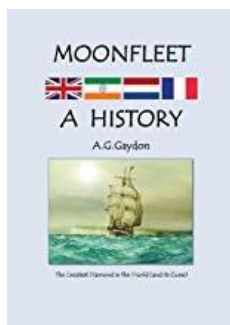
2021 SUBSCRIPTIONS

I am again very grateful to those of you who added an 'extra' amount, some substantial. The Sub remains unchanged since 2012 - **only £10/\$15/€15.**; paid by **cash, cheque, BACS or Paypal. If either of the latter, please email me for further details.** I would greatly appreciate prompt payment by the few still outstanding. I have had an enquiry about Membership from Bosnia & Herzegovina.

RIDGERUNNER

Hamish Guthrie, one of our Canadian members, emails me to say he has just read *Ridgerunner*, a new novel by Gil Adamson, a prize-winning Canadian author. It is the story of a thief who scratches a living in the wild logging and mining towns of Alberta and Montana in the early 1900s. His son's favourite book, one of his most prized possessions, is *Moonfleet*. Good taste even in the 'backwoods' – I just hope Dad hadn't stolen it for his son.

MOONFLEET A GUIDE BY A G GAYDON



A reminder that the following is available on Amazon.co.uk

The Greatest Diamond in the World (and its Curse): Moonfleet - A Guide
by A.G. Gaydon | 17 Oct 2019

Paperback £14.99
Kindle Edition £3.86

FALKNER APPRECIATED ONLINE

I am an enthusiast for John Meade Falkner. He is best known for that smuggling tale *Moonfleet* but the novel I urge upon everybody is *The Nebuly Coat* (1903). Invariably, after reading it, people exclaim in delight and marvel that they had not known it. I edited it for the World's Classics and turned up much interesting unknown material along the way.

And more emerges (though not the fourth novel which he left on a train and, according to some, was stolen by an enemy agent under the impression that it concerned plans as part of his work for armaments manufacturers Armstrong-Whitworth). Falkner's three novels are rooted in his keen interest in buildings, and so it was natural for him to be engaged to revise Murray's Guides to English Counties. These are compact, well-written volumes which sometimes still have maps tucked into endpaper flaps. Falkner worked on Oxfordshire and Berkshire, but it now emerges that he had a hand in updating Buckinghamshire, work duly

revised further and issued under the name of P. H. Ditchfield (and published the same year as *The Nebuly Coat*).

One can detect Falkner's hand in it, not least in a description of a stained-glass window at the church in Stoke Poges. That is of course famed for Gray's "Elegy", but who knew that in the north west of the church "with fine figures of saints, of great beauty and interest but of unknown origin; and also some armorial windows, one of which has the earliest known representation of a man mounted upon a velocipede, or rather dandy horse".

Falkner was a keen cyclist, and these vehicles which he highlights were precursors of the bicycle (with no pedals one had to push against the ground).



As for the description of The Hell-Fire Club, one wonders how much this inspired Falkner's first novel, a ghost story *The Lost Stradivarius*. This is a more subtle work than those gatherings appear to have been (according to this volume, one of them had the members terrified when an ape was lowered through the chimney and taken to be the Devil himself).

Christopher Hawtree

<http://www.christopherhawtree.com>

CUTHBERT MEDD AND JMF

Thanks to a tip-off from Richard Davenport-Hines, I searched for, and bought, a lovely little book, *Poems by Arthur Cuthbert Medd* (Printed for Private Circulation, n.d. but 1903/1904). They were collected and published by his uncle Justice Sir Edward Ridley, as Medd had died in November 1902, aged only twenty-four. The young man had excelled at Harrow School and at Balliol College, Oxford and had been elected a Fellow of All Souls in 1901. He was a close friend of John Buchan and Raymond Asquith (son of Herbert Asquith, later Prime Minister) and seemed set for a stellar career. Sadly, it was not to be - as Buchan wrote "It seems such a stupid causeless thing for a man so brilliant and courageous to die of a thing like fever in a place like London..."

Amongst the poems published was one simply headed **To J.M.F.** It was dated 1895 and, with lines like *To days of dear remembering, When first, with night upon the sea, We heard the swarth Italians sing...*, it is clear they knew each other. Medd's father (d. 1894) had been vicar of Rothbury 1887-94 and must have known the Armstrongs and Nobles. I would be grateful if anyone knows anything about Cuthbert Medd to get in touch with me.

THE FALKNERS' HOME - WEYMOUTH



Instagram



christopher_stocks The saddest sight in Weymouth is this beautiful pair of Georgian houses, set well back from the main shopping street, which have been derelict now for years and are crying out for someone to rescue them. Built in the late eighteenth century, they have a fascinating history.

One or both halves served as the rectory of St Mary's church, whose most notable incumbent was Thomas Falkner, who arrived in March 1871 with his wife, Elizabeth, and their six children. The excitement of their arrival quickly turned to tragedy as the family fell seriously ill, and though the children eventually pulled through, Elizabeth died within days.

Her death was put down to typhoid, with its source identified as a dead rat in the rectory water tank, from which the family had drunk. Thomas's 13-year-old son John Meade grew up to be a successful author, winning lasting fame for his Dorset adventure novel, *Moonfleet*.

In 1887 a large iron-framed structure was added at the rear and named the Royal Jubilee Hall; later converted into a theatre, a cinema and a bingo hall, it was demolished in 1989, and the Georgian front was revealed again for the first time in a hundred years.

Some of the iron columns from the hall can still be seen in a quarry on Portland, overgrown with brambles and slowly rusting away

Thanks to **Richard Davenport-Hines** for the above.

MEADE FALKNER'S COLLECTED POEMS

A non-member of the Society gave copies of our edition of *Collected Poems* of John Meade Falkner to friends of his for Christmas. I am very grateful that he has allowed me to share some of their comments about the poetry.

[It is] a sumptuous copy, with a lovely cover picture of Burford, of JMF's Collected Poems, introduced by A. N. Wilson. My favourite poem so far is 'Bridlington', with its evocative tones that bring place to life in verse; but I shall work my way through the other riches soon enough. He strikes me as comparable to Housman, if without the

latter's pithier command of precision in word-choice: if AEH alludes in laser-like fashion to scenes, people, places, I sense that JMF picturesquely evokes them.

The poems evoke a quintessential Englishness. Many of the places I know, and I particularly like Ballade of Burford, evoking the beautiful Windrush valley which I realise was close to his heart. I am enjoying reading more by the author of The Nebuly Coat...

I am... enjoying Falkner's poems... very [M.R.] Jamesian is A.N. Wilson's comment that Falkner's Christianity was 'for faint English sunlight shining through clear glass on to crumbling medieval masonry'.

The Society has now parted with 247 of the 300 copies – only 53 left! It does make an excellent present at any time of the year and a bargain at £10, including postage.

CHARALAMPYA/CHARALAMPIUS

John Meade Falkner's short story 'Charalampia' was first published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in December 1916, at the height of the Great War, a timing reflected in the rest of the issue which is mainly devoted to literary essays highlighting incidents in the conflict at sea, on land and in the air.

CORNHILL MAGAZINE	
CONTENTS, DECEMBER 1916.	
Flyleaves; or Tales of a Flying Patrol, B.E.F. 1915. II.	641
Charalampia. By John Meade Falkner	659
With the Anzacs in London. By Sir Sidney Lee	680
The Children of Egypt. By Arthur E. P. Weigall	692
The Old Contemptibles: In Rest. By Boyd Cable	702
A Rogue Bison. By Edwin L. Arnold	711
The Luck of the Navy: How the 'Sydney' met the 'Emden.' By Bennet Copplestone	716
Sunset at Sea: A Poem. By Lieut. E. Hilton Young, M.P., R.N.V.R.	729
The Passing of a Zeppelin. By Lewis R. Freeman	731
'The White Hart.' By S. G. Tallentyre	739

To avoid disappointment, readers of the 'Cornhill Magazine' are advised to order early in the month.

By contrast, Falkner transported his readers back to the 6th century A.D., and to a setting generally suggestive of Byzantium, in introducing his heroine Charalampia, a fifteen-year old with "hair as if one had beaten gold and copper together". The account of her life is supposed to be "From the Greek of Trachyliades written not earlier than 1438". (Constantinople was captured by the Turks in 1453).

The tale recounts the ups and downs of her courtship by the unnamed 'Prince' of the fictional kingdom of Caucasia. Both her father, the Duke of Petraia, and her suitor, want her to learn Persian, which she resists on the grounds that she is "wayward and headstrong". The child is sent off to a convent where four nuns attempt to teach her all she should know, and where much of the subsequent action takes place.

Finally released, and now a good scholar of Persian, she meets the Prince again but will only speak to him in Greek. Eventually he returns, but as 'someone else' for he is now the King of Caucasia and asks her to be his Queen. She now answers him in Persian and is engaged with a sapphire ring.

In fact, classical Persian, known as Farsi, was used as an official international language into the early nineteenth century in large parts of the Middle East and India, including the inscriptions on medals presented by The Honourable East India Company to its troops.

The story has no specific historical or geographical context, there is no recorded history and its geography is deliberately vague. Falkner has something of a tease in the final paragraph in which he introduces Charalampius, the son of the King and Queen and born some 10 months into their marriage.

The tease is numismatic, for the boy lived to found the Charalampiad dynasty which apparently ruled a combined Petraia and Caucasia for 700 years. He minted beautiful gold coins with the words "Make Use of Occasion" and a dekadrachm, which in the Greek world was a silver coin, inscribed "He shall drink of the brook in the way". These were the spiritual passwords given to his mother as a girl by the Holy Hermit to guide her through life.

Of course, Falkner knew that Greek and Byzantine coins, though indeed of great beauty, did not come with moral precepts. As he says, the dekadrachm is a very rare coin. In ancient Greek coinage it was the largest silver denomination, the best-known pieces being those struck at Syracuse or Carthage. They are sometimes held to be commemorative strikes, and not intended for general circulation. They typically show the head of Arethusa with an elaborate hair style and surrounded by dolphins, and a 'quadriga' four-horsed chariot with a driver, sometimes female, who is being crowned by Nike (Victory) flying overhead.



dekadrachm

If Falkner assembled a coin collection it would certainly have been compatible with his other interests, but it could not have been a systematic one as he doesn't have a sale catalogue listed in *'British Numismatic Auction Catalogues 1710-1984'* (Baldwin & Spink, 1986). The library was his priority as a collector.

Unfortunately for present-day readers, 'Charalampia' is not an easily accessible text. Since 1916, it has been

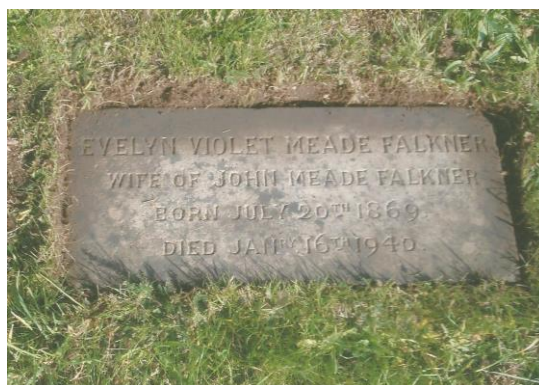
reprinted twice, in 1948 in *'The Mint'* no. 2, Geoffrey Grigson's literary and arts miscellany, unsuccessful after two issues, and in the 1948 number reduced to a paperback when 1946 had been a clothbound book. For *'The Mint'*, the collector's problem is that the second number is much scarcer than the first, which is itself uncommon on the second-hand market. In the Tartarus Press edition of 2000, a pleasant printing, it shares with *'The Lost Stradavarius'* and *'A Midsummer's Night's Marriage'* but in a limited edition of only 300 numbered copies. Reprinted on its own, perhaps with sympathetic illustrations, *'Charalampia'* would be a welcome project from a modern private press.

It is not easy to visualise the readership Falkner aimed to reach with this mysterious but delightful story published in what was virtually a military journal in the December 1916 issue. If *'Moonfleet'* was seen as a boy's novel (see the Shakespeare quotation "to be boy eternal"), *'Charalampia'* might appeal more to girls. Hopefully, one might imagine Paterfamilias, having had his fill of war stories, and no doubt worrying over sons at the Front, passing the *Cornhill Magazine* over to his daughters, home from their volunteer nursing: "*Here you are, my dears, more in your line than mine, but a wonderful read!*".

John Gretton

See also, for a more academic assessment, **George Woodman's** *'Charalampia: A quasi-Byzantine romance?'*, Journal of the John Meade Falkner Society no.14, 2013.

EVELYN FALKNER'S LEDGER STONE



From **Stephen Price, the Friends' Acting Secretary**

The main purpose of my writing is to bring you up to date regarding Evelyn Meade Falkner's ledger stone and I'm afraid that the news is not good. I last wrote to you in April telling you that we were waiting for approval from the PCC. That was granted with no problem, but there followed a hiatus of about six months for reasons outside our control. Eventually an application for a faculty was sent to the Oxford DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee), which is the body that has to give approval. This week the DAC's solicitors have written to the vicar informing him that they require the following:

(1) evidence that a reasonable attempt has been made to contact the heirs of Evelyn Meade Falkner

- (2) a "petitioner's fee" of £305.40
- (3) a stonemason's drawing confirming the details of the type of stone, the colour, size and the inscription.

The solicitors have also questioned who is the petitioner? which has a direct bearing on who pays the petition fee.

If it was a "normal" church matter (e.g. replacing furniture in the church) the church itself would be the petitioner and the diocese would pay the fee as a matter of course. However, Evelyn's stone is an entirely different matter and the church does not see itself as the petitioner. I would add that all this was unknown to the Friends of Burford Church committee when they asked the church to submit the application.

This unexpected development is tiresome and frustrating. The Friends committee members have conferred and decided that, although we are happy to continue supporting the project with a contribution of £250 towards the cost of the new stone, we don't regard ourselves as the petitioner. Is the JMF Society willing to take on the task, which will include the additional expense and the genealogical work?

I replied:

Disappointing.

Does 1. mean JMF's heirs as well? We can be in contact with them. If it means just Evelyn's own side, then it's a non-starter.

If one does pay 2. the £305.40, does that mean an automatic "yes"? If it could still be turned down, it simply isn't worth the trouble.

Would 3. a stonemason have to be paid extra for doing this?

Would it be easier to re-chisel the letters on the present one? Would one need permission for that?

The total cost could be £516.41 + £305.40 = £821.81 (+ increase in stonemason's original estimate + drawings) and then not be sure of getting it passed.

It's very good of the Church and you to support the amount with £300, but I am not sure it is now worth it. I could put it to the Members in the May Newsletter, though.

The Society have no problem with being the Petitioner.

Stephen responded:

To answer your questions:

- 1) Tom, our vicar, has looked at the rules and he reckons that approval from JMF's heirs will be acceptable.
- 2) There is no certainty about a favourable decision from the DAC. Although the church has long experience of dealing with the DAC, we have never had to ask for a ruling of this nature before.
- 3) I have contacted the stonemasons and they have said that they can supply a line drawing of the lettering and a sample of the stone for no additional cost.
- 4) When I first approached the stonemason, I asked about the possibility of re-cutting the existing stone but was told that it would be more expensive than creating a new one. But in any case, the removal of a monument or

ledger stone that is over 50 years old requires a faculty, so there is no advantage to be gained (the original would have to be removed because the re-cutting can't be done *in situ*).

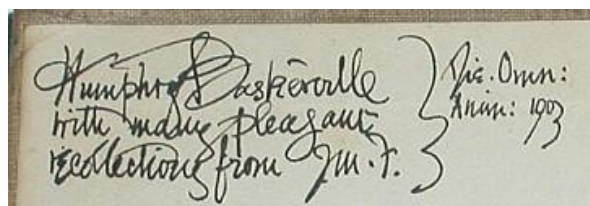
**** I would be very grateful for Members' views on where we go from here. ****

A BOOK LOOKING FOR A GOOD HOME

Free (but postage costs payable please) a copy of *Armstrong: The Life and Mind of an Armaments Maker* by **Kenneth Warren**. (Northern Heritage Services) Paperback, 2014. If you get in touch with me, I will pass your details on to the kind donor. First come, first served!

HOUNDING A BASKERVILLE

One of our long-standing members, **Charles Nugent** recently (and I quote) 'succumbed' to the purchase of a copy of *The Nebuly Coat*.



It was inscribed to *Humphry Baskerville with many pleasant recollections from J.M.F.* and dated *Die. Omn: Anim: 1903* i.e. All Souls Day. Charles and I would both be very grateful if any of you could shed light on who Humphry Baskerville was.

JULY 2021 JOURNAL

I am pleased to say that this Summer's *Journal* is now complete. There are five articles: *John Meade Falkner and Burford* by **Raymond Moody**; *The Decorations and Medals of John Meade Falkner* by **John R. Gretton**; *Moonfleet's People* by **George Robson**; *Mr. Meade Falkner's Last Tales – The West Door & Other Stories* (Arnold) by **Mark Valentine**; and *Moonfleet in the Kingfisher Library 1946 (and other by-ways in Bibliography)* by **Kenneth Hillier**.

I am already in the market for contributions for the **2022 Journal**. Eager authors should send me material by attachment in Calibri size 10 font. Any illustrations should also be sent, marking where they are to go in the text. March 2022 is the latest for submissions, please.

AND FINALLY

The cellist **Steven Isserlis** enthuses over *The Lost Stradivarius* and says on his website: *A wonderful ghost story by the author of Moonfleet – convincingly creepy. Never trust violinists – even dead ones.*

Best Wishes and keep safe, well and positive!

Kenneth Hillier
nebuly6@gmail.com