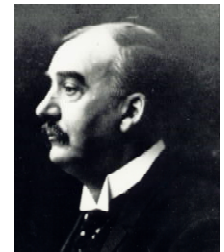


# The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 69

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## 2022 SUBSCRIPTIONS

There are still a few Subs outstanding (I will notify those Members separately). I would be most grateful for a prompt response.

The Sub remains unchanged since 2012 - now a decade ago - **only £10/\$15/€15.**; paid by **cash, cheque, BACS or Paypal.** **If either of the latter, please email me for further details.** I am again very grateful to those of you who added an 'extra' amount, some substantial.

## JMF's GOOSE EGG, DIAMONDS AND RUBIES



**The Black Prince's Red Spinel Ruby (or the Regal of Fraunce) set in the Imperial State Crown, in the Tower of London**

### ROGER NORRIS (1941 – 2021)

Thirteen members joined the newly formed JMF Society in 1999. Roger was the ninth, joining on 11<sup>th</sup> June. Now only four remain.



**Roger (c.) at Burford**

Roger was appointed deputy Librarian to the Dean and Chapter at Durham Cathedral in 1966. Retiring in 2002, he was then appointed emeritus librarian at St. Chad's College. Over the years, he was Chairman of the Durham City Freemen 1995-2015 and a Gentleman Freeman from 1998. He was Hon. Sec. to the City of Durham Trust; vice chairman of the Durham Diocesan Committee for the Care of Churches; and held similar positions with the Victoria County History Trust and Northumbria Historic Churches Trust.

He was also a former Chairman of the Durham Council of Churches and President of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland. With Douglas Pocock he co-authored *A History of County Durham* and, later, with Neil Jinkerson, *Stained glass of Durham Cathedral*. No wonder he felt an affinity with John Meade Falkner.

I will miss his companionship on the Society's weekends and the Society, as a whole, will miss his constant support over two decades. R.I.P.

Quoting from JMF's lauded *History of Oxfordshire* 1899 (p.214, The Life of Archbishop William Laud) are the following diamond engraving and stone wall carving references apropos *Moonfleet* 1898 and King Charles I's time as a prisoner at Carisbrooke Castle in 1646. On page 160, utilising his favoured ornithological analogies JMF writes "*from the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury alone were taken nearly 5,000 ounces of gold and more than 10,000 ounces of silver, besides jewels as 'big as goose's eggs' and that amazing diamond called the 'Regal of Fraunce'*" (prob. source, 'Henry VIII and the English monasteries;' by Francis Gasquet Vol.2, p.406-408). \*This is described as being either a diamond or a ruby. 'The oft-mentioned jewel given by the King of France and called a ruby by the Venetian pilgrim, is described by the Bohemian Ambassador, in 1446, as "a carbuncle that shines at night, half the size of a hen's egg" but it was described as a diamond when it came unto the possession of Queen Mary in 1554...and it was probably owing to the prismatic colours given forth from this exceptional diamond in the gloom of the chapel that we have these discrepancies in name' - *Shrines of British Saints*, 1905, by Charles J. Wall. By tradition, from the C14th 'The Regal of France' was believed to have been donated by King Louis VII who made a pilgrimage to the shrine in 1179, but by Henry VIII's time it was thought to be lost.

It is believed by some today to be, in reality, the Black Prince's Red spinel Ruby mounted above the Cullinan in the Imperial State Crown in the Tower of London,

However, this jewel was believed to have originated in the C14th in the mines of present day Afghanistan and been given to the Black Prince by Peter of Castile, otherwise known as Don Pedro the Cruel, ending up in the British Crown Jewels. The Regal of Fraunce should not be confused with the more famous Regent Diamond on which JMF based *Moonfleet*.

Meanwhile, on p.188 JMF refers to Princess Elizabeth at Woodstock (Blenheim Palace) in 1554; he writes, "But one day in a more hopeful mood she cut with a diamond on a ' glasse window verie legible as followeth: "Much suspected of me, Nothing proved can be, Quoth Elizabeth Prisoner." And, on pp.294-5 writing of Pope's Tower at Stanton (Harcourt) Manor "On a pane of red glass now preserved at Nuneham Courtenay,' in the top tower room was scratched with a diamond: 'In the year 1718 ♦Alexander Pope finished here the fifth volume of †Homer;' " (♦ his Moral Essays, †Moonfleet ch.19).

**A. Gaydon**

### A SPECIAL COPY OF *THE NEBULY COAT*

E-Bay offers page after page of JMF material, invariably various editions of the three novels at little cost. However, in February this year there appeared a very special edition of *The Nebuly Coat*, for which a number of bidders were prepared to pay a more than a few coppers. The successful bidder paid a huge £388.89.

This was a 1904 sixth edition made special by it being bound in full calf leather by the eminent firm of Sangorski and Sutcliffe. It had marbled endpapers and an original front cover was added to the inside front board.



In 1898 Francis Sangorski and George Sutcliffe met each other at book binding evening classes taught by the eminent Douglas Cockerell at the London County Council's Central School of Arts and Crafts. Each won one of the ten annual craft scholarships awards, giving them £20 (£2000) a year for three years

to continue their training as apprentice bookbinders. To supplement the scholarship, they were employed at Cockerell's own bindery and shortly afterwards began to teach bookbinding at Camberwell College of Art. In October 1901 they moved on to set up their own bookbinding business in Bloomsbury, soon joined by Sangorski's elder brother Alberto (1862-1932) who was an accomplished calligrapher and illuminator. Although it was normal practice for the firm to leather-bind books undecorated, the firm specialised in the art of jewelled bookbindings, decorating their multi-coloured leather book bindings with gold inlay and precious and semi-precious jewels. Binding books with exquisitely jeweled bindings had been popular in the Middle Ages and the Sangorskis and Sutcliffe revived the art.

Whilst some books were chosen to be bound in bulk for general sale, the firm was open to one-off commissions and the firm received instruction to bind a copy of *The*

*Nebuly Coat* from W. De Zoete in 1905. However, a very special 'one-off' commission came in 1911 when there came an instruction to bind with no limit to the expense a valuable early edition of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyem. At the suggestion and backing of a wealthy book fanatic called John Stonehouse, it was Sangorski and Sutcliffe themselves that accepted the commission with speculation over the possibility of a significant profit in mind. The task was to make the most remarkable specimen of artistic bookbinding the world has ever seen, and it was to take two and a half years of continuous work before the book was finished.



### The Rubaiyat binding

An early copy of the *Rubaiyat* had been bought and a binding boasting 1,050 precious jewels set in gold was made. These consisted of rubies, turquoises, amethysts, topazes, olivines, garnets and a single emerald. Peacock feathers were formed using 97 topazes and

the rubies formed the eyes of the peacock. The binding boasted 1,500 tooled Moroccan leather inlays and the book was advertised as the most sumptuous book in the world.

On completion in early 1911, it was listed for sale by Sothebys at £1000 which is equivalent in today's money to £12 million. Although the winning bid fell short of this sum the investors nevertheless made a handsome profit. The buyer was a twenty-seven year-old American businessman and bibliophile called Harry Widener whose family was the second most wealthy in the U.S.A. He had travelled to London for the auction, along with his parents and their servants. Prior to returning to America the Wideners had a specially designed mahogany box made to house the book and the party boarded the *Titanic* as it set off on its maiden voyage – the most fabulous book in the world aboard the most fabulous ship in the world. The book went down with the ship and also lost were Harry Widener, his father and manservant. Mrs Widener and her maid were rescued. To add to the tragedy, Francis Sangorski was drowned only a few weeks later as he attempted to rescue a drowning woman.



**Harry Widener**

Undeterred, Sutcliffe's and Sangorski's business continued, and it created a second Great Omar to replace the first. As soon as it was completed it was placed in a secure bank vault for safety but sadly the bank, the vault and the book were destroyed in the bombings of WW2.

Having suffered a stroke in 1936, Sutcliffe had put his interests in the firm into the hands of his nephew Stanley



Bray who went on to create a third Great Omar which currently lives in the British Library. But neither the second nor the third Great Omars came even close to matching the first in value.

The firm of Sangorski and Sutcliffe still lives on as part of Shepherds Bookbinding in London. As has always been the case, only books deemed of real merit are produced leather-bound, some decorated with jewels. Society members will be gratified to know that *The Nebuly Coat* was deemed of sufficient merit to warrant attention, albeit devoid of jewels.

\*In 1924 Sangorski and Sutcliffe was commissioned to bind the miniature books earmarked for Queen Mary's Doll House. The books all had original stories written by eminent authors of the day such as A.A. Milne and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

\*In her son's memory, Mrs Eleanor Widener financed the building of what became known as The Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library at Harvard College in



Massachusetts. It was in time to boast 3.5 million books using 450 languages and held on 57 miles of shelving. It opened in June 1915 and shortly afterwards acquired one of the few

Gutenberg bibles. It is said one cannot enter the library without feeling one must have a compass, a sandwich and a whistle.

**George Robson**

### **THE LOST STRADIVARIUS ON BBC4 EXTRA**

The BBC had a repeat of Joanna David's reading of Falkner's *The Lost Stradivarius* in March/April. There were four episodes: 1: **The Cupboard:** An Oxford student John Maltravers plays ancient violin music, a hidden cupboard is revealed in his rooms. 2: **Adrian:** Hiding his discovery, John outwardly woos Constance, but starts falling under Adrian's sinister spell. 3: **The Secret:** Absent in Italy, John sends a letter summoning Sophia to Naples, where she learns a terrible secret. 4: **The Return:** As John returns from Italy, his friend Gaskell tries to penetrate how he fell under Adria's malign spell.

### **ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO A LETTER FROM ROME 10<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1922**

*My dear John, \**

*I have no world-stirring communication to make, and this is merely a line written betimes to wish you all kinds of good for the 18<sup>th</sup>. It is a curious mélange of things ancient and modern – a birthday is it not? Going back to what some of us is the far antiquity of childhood, looking forward to a rapidly dwindling future, and generally present in thought as the time comes round. Childish tradition is so ingrained that even now a birthday seems to bring some sense of pleasure to me, and I should not be surprised to find that it did to most people if they would confess it. Anyhow it does not affect me with any regret for the passing years, as some people profess that*

*it does to them. Perhaps such people are mostly women: to me I think it generally gives an excuse for hiring a motor-car, and taking a day in the country, taking champagne 'to' my dinner, or some other extravagant dare-devilry, which I could ever bring myself to contemplate on any occasion less than a duplex majus. I could have wished that you and I had been able to make a Philip-and-James of it and have a joint birthday party for us both, with one of your soles and a grilled cutlet, and a bottle of (?) Moet and Chandon at the table at the Athenaeum from which we can see Bell blow his nose in his napkin. Such delicacies and table-refinements fill me with longing, for fish is difficult to get here and I cannot eat Italian meat. Even the multi-e-ben-sotti do not fill the gap, for this year they have been thin and indifferent.*

*Experience makes me think that after 6 months in Rome one gets a little flat. I found it so last year and it is the same this...Perhaps it is the incessant (almost daily) see-saw of seirocco and tramontana which goes on specially in these spring months At Easter I had to take a few days in bed with some sort of a low fever and bronchitis and have felt as limp as a dish-clout ever since.*

*Things in general here are a little flat just now. All the effervescence of the Papal Election \*\* has subsided, the great Pilgrim-caravans have ceased for the time, and the exodus of ordinary travellers has well begun...There seems to be an absolute dearth of anything attractive in Rome – and still more in Naples – just now. I cannot understand it. I have not been into either of the Segres because they are generally such Jews, but in the windows, where one sees some of there [sic] best things as a rule, there has been nothing...I have had no luck whatever with books either and have not bought a single thing...*

*Once more, my very best wishes for your birthday and do not crush my hope that before this year is gone, we may dig up the green heads of the regicides and once more visit Gosberton \*\*\* or Chipping Camden in some shandridan.\*\*\*\**

*Affectionately yours,  
J.M.F.*

\* John Noble, Meade Falkner's colleague, 'best friend' and former pupil.

\*\* Cardinal Achille Ratti, Archbishop of Milan, was elected Pope and adopted the name of Pius XI.

\*\*\* village near Spalding, Lincolnshire

Falkner had been in Rome since December 1921 and did not return to England until July at the earliest.

\*\*\*\* a rickety, old-fashioned conveyance.

### **NATIONWIDE B.S. TREASURER'S TRUST ACCOUNT CLOSING**

After threatening this for over two years, Nationwide is finally pulling the plug on all Treasurers' Trust Accounts, "because we are not a Bank"! Well, they've been one for us since 1999. 25<sup>th</sup> June is the black letter day. I am looking at their Business Instant Access Saver Account to see if that fits. If not, I will try the NatWest.

Best Wishes

**Kenneth Hillier** [nebulv6@gmail.com](mailto:nebulv6@gmail.com)

**Greenmantle, 75 Main Street, Kings Newton,  
Melbourne Derbyshire DE73 8BX**