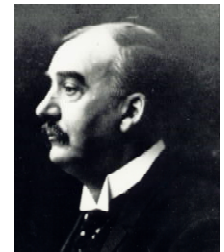


The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 65

3 January 2021

2021 SUBSCRIPTIONS

Unfortunately, my plea to the last six members for their 2020 Subscriptions fell on deaf ears. I was therefore doubly 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. I am also hoping that membership of the Society, with its three Newsletters and annual Journal gives you a boost in these trying times.

JMF AND HONOURS

I read the Journal with interest and thought I would respond on one point. In the article by **John Gretton**, he speculates at the bottom of page 14 about why JMF was not honoured by the government after the war. I can add to the speculation and maybe shed a little bit of light.

My great grandfather (Sir Andrew Noble) was offered a peerage by the Liberals before the war, but on the basis of making a payment to the Liberal Party. He refused on principle, saying that he would be very honoured to be made a peer, but the honour would vanish if he had to pay for it. He died in 1915 and JMF succeeded him as chairman of Armstrongs. JMF was the compromise candidate because the Nobles and the Rendels, the two biggest groups of shareholders, were at loggerheads and neither a Noble nor a Rendel was an acceptable outcome. My grandfather became vice-chairman at that time, I think.

At the outset of war, the British government turned round to Armstrongs and said that from that moment on Armstrongs would have only one customer. The government would tell them what to produce and afterwards would sit down to work out what the government would be prepared to pay for what had been produced. The government felt it would be unconscionable for Armstrongs to make big profits out of the war, although many others did. During the war Armstrongs did make profits but were only allowed to charge what the government thought was reasonable. At the end of the war the government stopped ordering from Armstrongs which then had to find other products to sell as nobody wanted armaments anymore. This was in addition to buying new machinery and taking on a new workforce in the form of soldiers returning from the war. In the circumstances, therefore, you would have thought that public recognition for those in charge at Armstrongs was in order.

My grandfather, like his father before him, was offered a peerage – again on the basis of payment to the Liberal Party. Like his father he turned this down on

principle. As far as I am aware, nobody at Armstrongs was honoured in the aftermath of the war. I suspect that JMF was probably offered a peerage on the same basis, but he too turned it down. Maybe in his case he could not or did not wish to afford the cost which was believed to be the equivalent of £500,000 in today's money.

When the Lloyd George honours scandal erupted in 1922, it emerged that my grandfather had turned down a peerage although he was known to be able to afford the cost. In the first honours list after the scandal – in June 1923 – my grandfather was made a baronet (for free!) to prove that the new honours list was free of scandal. This is the baronetcy which has now come down to me. One would have thought that some sort of honour for JMF would have happened then too and I cannot explain this deficiency.

Timothy Noble

THE ELSWICK BATTERY GUNS

The Society's **Journal 21** (July 2020) features a detailed article by **John Gretton** describing JMF's association with the 1st Northumberland Artillery and its exploits in South Africa during the Boer War.

It tells us that after the war Lord Roberts distributed the guns, one each to Ladysmith and Cape Town. The other four were brought back home, one for Eton College, one to Lord Roberts' garden at Ascot and two initially to Theobald Park, though they are now at *HMS Excellent*, the shore base at Portsmouth.

I am able to update the present location of the gun that had overlooked the parade ground at Eton College:

In 1935 the Provost and Fellows of Eton College permitted the gun to be moved up to Northumberland on permanent loan and to be displayed on Tyneside. In 1967 the Territorial Army was reorganised. Three batteries of the Royal Artillery were merged to form 203 Battery based in Blyth, Northumberland, forming part of the 101st (Northumbrian) Regiment Royal Artillery. The Elswick Gun was sent from Newcastle to Blyth to be part of the new regimental museum that was being constructed within the newly built Battery H.Q.

George Robson



(see 103 Elswick Battery website)

THE AD MAJOREM CHANTS – A FOOTNOTE

Further to **Philip Titcombe's** excellent article on Falkner's compilation of Chants in last July's **Journal**, I came across (too late to alert Philip) the following in a letter JMF wrote to his 'dear friend' Canon Christopher Wordsworth, dated 7 September 1917.

Thank you for speaking so kindly of the Ad Majorem Chants. If you have any friends to whom you cared to give a copy, please do. I have told Novellos to send you half a dozen copies, and you will give me much pleasure if you will accept them. If any clergyman wanted a choir set for his church, I shd like to send him one. I need not say that I have no commercial object or interest in the book...

Again, he stresses that the Collection was not produced for personal financial gain.

MOONFLEET AND JAMES BOND – A LINK?

Before Eton, Ian Fleming attended a somewhat eccentric preparatory school, Durnford, near Swanage in the Isle of Purbeck. His brother Peter was his senior in the school by a couple of years. It was a very difficult time for them as in May 1917 their father, Major Valentine Fleming D.S.O., had been killed in action on the western front when Ian was just nine years old. Before dinner every Sunday at Durnford the headmaster's wife would invite the boys into her drawing room to hear her read a story while a favourite pupil would stroke her feet (!). Fortunately, the headmaster, Mr. Pellatt, took his bath while his wife's performance was in progress.

For some years her chosen novel was *Moonfleet*, but shortly after Fleming joined the school, she widened her repertoire to add the Bulldog Drummond books by 'Sapper'. From this introduction to adventure fiction, from *Moonfleet* onwards, Ian Fleming widened his own reading to everything he could find by Sax Rohmer, John Buchan, Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson. He could not have had a better self-education in constructing exciting plots or a more effective way of developing his own easy writing style to carry the attention of his readers. So, James Bond is possibly a combination of an adult John Trenchard, an updated Richard Hannay, a more sophisticated Jim Hawkins, and many others, all rolled into one.

It has been suggested that Fleming's 'Bond' is semi-autobiographical, but James was the secret agent his creator might have wanted to be but was not. Although Fleming served with distinction throughout the war in Naval Intelligence, it was mostly a desk job apart from a sortie to Bordeaux just before the fall of France. His researches into military and other 'gadgets' stemmed from those years, however. No doubt he remembered John Buchan's declaration in *Greenmantle*: "*If I had a big proposition to handle and could have my pick of helpers, I'd plump for the Intelligence Department of the British Admiralty*".

However, the real antecedents following from Fleming's adolescent reading in adventure stories, were filtered through his many adult experiences, expertly researched

throughout the world. They were the 'thrilling cities', casinos (not always royale), discussions with firearms experts (though it was Fleming's typewriter that was gold plated rather than his gun), and, forever, the fascination of diamonds. But the first adventure novel he heard from his headmaster's wife on those Sunday evenings in prep. school was by John Meade Falkner.

John Gretton

See: *The Life of Ian Fleming* by John Pearson. (Jonathan Cape, 1966).

JONATHAN BROUGH

St Swithun's, Winchester has appointed Jonathan Brough as head of the prep school with effect from the start of the Autumn term 2020. Jonathan had been headmaster at Hurlingham School in London since 2010 with full responsibility for all aspects of educational life. Prior to this, he was head of prep at City of London School for girls for six years.

Jonathan has been a member of our Society since February 2015 and we published an excellent article by him in **Journal No. 16** in **July 2015**, where he compared *Moonfleet* with *Diamond Boy* (2014) by the South African writer Michael Williams. We congratulate Jonathan and wish him full speed ahead in these times of rough weather. *Prosper the Bonaventure!*

JMF LETTERS TO ROSEMARY NOBLE

Sir Timothy Noble has very kindly passed over to **Ray Ion** a cache of original letters from JMF to his god-daughter Rosemary Noble. They date from October 1915 to April 1930. Some of these have already been printed in a previous **Journal** (No.18 July 1917 '*Three Little Maids*'). It is a stimulus to attempting a privately printed **Collection** of his Letters for Members. Watch this space!

STEWART GRANGER AND MOONFLEET

I was recently flicking through my copy of **The Great Movie Stars 2: The International Years** by David Shipman (1989 rev. ed.) and came across these sentences amongst his otherwise rather jaundiced view of Granger and his acting ability: "*Moonfleet was fine, certainly the best film that Granger was ever in. A British smuggling yarn from a boy's classic novel, it was acted with gusto by a good cast and directed by Fritz Lang with a nice emphasis on Strawberry Hill Gothic. MGM disliked it so much that it played the lower half of double bills, but when it finally arrived in France the press voted it the Best Foreign Film of the year.*"

MY E-MAIL ADDRESS CHANGE

A reminder that I have been experiencing difficulties with my emails earlier last year. PLEASE NOTE MY NEW EMAIL ADDRESS BELOW.

Best Wishes for a healthy 2021

Kenneth Hillier

nebulv6@gmail.com