

The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 79

22 July 2025

2025 SUBSCRIPTIONS

There are now only **four** members who have not sent me their 2025 Subs yet. A reminder that it is still **£10** for UK members. I hope that they will all want to remain members of our select Society. I am always grateful and mindful of your continuing support and particularly of the extra amounts many of you provide.

NEW TOUCHSCREEN AT BURFORD PARISH CHURCH

A new touchscreen at a church in a west Oxfordshire town will allow visitors to explore one of the building's stained-glass windows. Burford Parish Church has installed the touchscreen to help visitors learn about the window in the south transept, which depicts scenes from the life of St John the Evangelist.

It also serves as a memorial to **John Meade Falkner** and **Sir John Noble**, who donated the window, and **John Leggare**, an earlier benefactor. Through the touchscreen, visitors can see close-ups of various panels, through photos by local photographers Pete Gould and Derek Cotterill. It also offers information on what the panels depict, their significance to Christians, and details about stained-glass and the window's designer.

The window was designed by **Christopher Whall**, a leading stained-glass artist of the Arts and Crafts movement. Known for his vivid colours and detailed imagery, Whall played a significant role in the movement which aimed to reform design and decoration in mid-19th century Britain.

The new touchscreen, developed by experts from the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at York University, was funded by the Friends of Burford Church with a grant from the Olive Greening Trust. While some cathedrals have similar displays, they are rare in parish churches.

The Friends of Burford Church is a charity set up around 80 years ago to improve the church and unite those who value it. (*Oxford Mail*. 14th April 2025)

Some members will recall, when we visited the lovely church in September 2003, July 2013 and July 2019, marvelling at the window.

Thanks to **Ray Ion** for alerting me to this story.

MOONFLEET RETURNS HOME

After many years of membership of our Society **George Robson** has collected eight first editions of

Moonfleet, seven of *The Nebuly Coat** and two of *The Lost Stradivarius*.

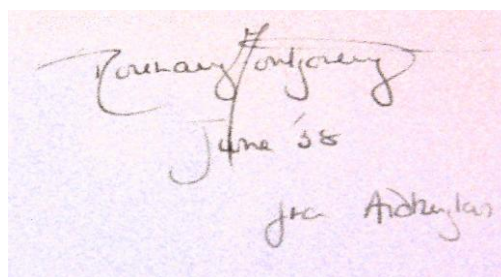
In the May 2019 *Newsletter* George gave a lengthy description of one of the *Moonfleets* - bought in 2010 for £850 from Dacobra Book in Australia and having been annotated in 1936 by JMF's god-daughter Rosemary Montgomery of Ardkinglas**. On the west coast of Scotland on the shores of Loch Fyne, it is a mansion built in 1907 by Andrew Noble and is still the seat of the Noble family. JMF occasionally visited the house (Margery Noble writing her memoirs at the grand age of 101 refers to JMF as a *valued dear friend*). The 2019 article explained the circuitous story of how the book came to end up in George's hands.



However, to say 'ended up' is erroneous. Of ever advancing years and having had the satisfaction of owning the book for so many years George decided he would be pleased if it found its way back to what he regards as its proper home in Scotland.

Rosemary's copy

On contacting the current family at Ardkinglas George received an interesting and courteous reply from Rosemary's great nephew **David Sumsion**. He remembers in his very young days meeting with his elderly great aunt Rosemary with some awe. He would welcome the return of the book and is grateful for the donation. He will see that the book is put on special display in the house's library - well away from the attic to where it had been erroneously relegated some years ago.



Rosemary's signature in the book

* One of which is the bespoke version, produced in 1905 for W de Zoete by Sangorski and Sutcliffe.

** Ardkinglas Historic House and Woodland Estate is open to the public. Details are shown on its website.

<https://www.ardkinglas.com/>

BUTTER STREET, FLEET

I managed to purchase another atmospheric postcard of Butter Street, Fleet on EBay recently. It dates from before the Great War – probably between 1904 and 1914, when thousands of postcards were being sent around the country. This one has nothing on the back, i.e. no stamp to give an approximate date.



It would be interesting to research the 1901 and 1911 Census Returns for the street, to see if one could hazard a guess at who the various figures were in the photograph.

As owner of a Border Collie myself, I do hope that the one in the picture was taken for regular walks down to Chesil Beach.

I thought I'd add a second photo which, I know, I have used in a previous News letter, but it is still fascinating to imagine locals making their way to the *Why Not!*



A MOONFLEET RE-WRITE

Dear readers.

I'm writing in the hope of finding a contact interested in my latest project, a rewrite of the wonderful story *Moonfleet*. Ideally, a contact who may have a connection to the original author, perhaps.

I am a musician and a writer; I have published a few children's stories and a few albums of folk songs, and I am currently well into trying to write this full-length children's novel. It will also be accompanied by songs so that it can be an audio story, book and even possibly a school musical.

If the very thought of this fills you with horror, I can understand. I studied classical singing when I was younger and spent much time learning many beautiful songs written by English composers and writers of the same period, songs of travel, for example, with poems by Robert Louis Stevenson, set to music by Vaughn William. So, I appreciate that many works will never be bettered, and somebody could be justified in thinking the same for stories like *Moonfleet*.

Of course, I am not looking to improve or change the original story; I am inventing a whole new story that the original has inspired.

I grew up mainly in Dorset and, from around the age of 11, in the village of Chickerell, a couple of miles inland from the Fleet and Moonfleet Manor. From that age, until I left school, I spent my summers working with a seine fishing crew on the Chesil beach, rowing a wooden Lurette fishing boat, hauling it up the coast, carrying pots of fish, and using a quant to push a trough full of fish to be landed at Moonfleet.

Although I am now in my 60s, I still live next to and spend much time around the Chesil and the Fleet, which greatly inspires me and my creative art.

A number of years ago, I decided that it might be nice to try writing a collection of folk songs to tell an abridged story of *Moonfleet*. But when I looked into it more, I discovered that Chris De Burgh had already done it. Never mind.

I gave up the idea and instead wrote a folk-rock album called *Nautical Graffiti*; this starts with the story of the Mary Rose and ends with Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. It was well received and reviewed, but I have no real fan base and am not famous, so it was just a vanity project. I have written and released more albums since.

Then, a couple of years ago, I started writing children's musical stories that were both songs and illustrated books. The latest series is sold through places like Waterstones, so again, it is published but in no way known or famous. But I actually do perform these songs to children in schools, festivals, etc., which is reward enough.

However, a few months ago, I decided to try to write a full-length children's fictional story set locally with some of the characters I had known growing up. Woven into local history and places, such as Issac Gulliver, the King of the smugglers in Dorset, then Moonfleet, the Chesil and its fishermen, I returned for ideas to *Moonfleet*, the original story.

Moonfleet Crimson Tide is a new story of *Moonfleet*, set 50 years after the original, at the outbreak of the Napoleonic War. I have kept John, Elzevir, Blackbeard, Grace, and even a diamond in the story, but almost everything else is very different.

I wanted it to connect to the original, mentioning it somewhere in the book, but I am unsure how or who I would now contact to ask.

I hope that modern children will enjoy it, as they did, and still do the original. But for those who probably wouldn't find the original so accessible on their own, maybe it will spark curiosity to explore the original version at some later point.

I want to reference some small parts of the original in my story as a compliment to the original. **Therefore, by writing about this, I thought it was possible that a suitable person might contact me.**

Kind regards **Will Adams**

<https://thesleepybearofleafywood.com/>

NATWEST BANK CLOSURE

I have read online that my local NatWest Bank in Ashby de la Zouch will be closing on 18th September. This means there will be no banks left in the town, notwithstanding it tripling in size due to more 'little boxes' being built on the surrounding green fields (some of which had retained the medieval ridge and furrows). The Way of the World. I had to leave the Nationwide B.S., due to the fact that it would no longer cater for small 'business' accounts like the JMFSoc one. This means, I'm afraid, that I would much prefer next January (or earlier!) Members to use **BACS** or **PayPal** or **cash** for their Annual Subs. If you send a cheque, it means I will have to travel to Derby to pay it in; not impossible, but rather inconvenient. It's called Progress.

PHILIP WELLER

Those of you who came on one of the Dorchester trips might remember **Philip Weller**, who, with his wife **Jane**, came to a meeting and talked about JMF and Italy. He later wrote four excellent articles for the Newsletter (No. 17 July 2016; No. 18 2017; No. 20 2019; and No. 21 2020) on 'Wanderings Around Naples'. They can still be read on our Website.

Unfortunately, over the last few years Philip has been suffering from both Parkinson's and dementia and is now permanently in a Nursing Home. Jane has emailed to say that she is engaged in the 'herculean' task of thinning out their book collections. Included in these are some JMF related material. She has kindly said that she is willing to send material detailed below, free, to any Member who would like them (UK only)

Kenneth Warren "Armstrong. The Life and Mind of an Armaments Maker" Authorhouse, 2010.

Elizabeth Rowell, ed. "In Peace and War. Tyneside, Naples and the Royal Flying Corps. Memoirs of Herbert and Robin Rowell." ER Rowell, 1996. ISBN 0 9527716 08 (Chapters 3-5 include extensive coverage, with lots of photos, of the Armstrong Naples Works)

JMF "The Lost Stradivarius" Large Print edition. 978 15085578 21

JMF "The Lost Stradivarius" Penguin, 1946 (complete and unabridged, but not in great condition)

JMF Journals Vol 1 No 1 – 14 complete. In a Binder, with each Journal in a separate plastic sheet.

JMF Journals, individual. Nos 15, 16, 19, 22

Kenneth Warren "JMF in Durham (1899-1932) A perspective on a small cathedral city 0 907078 27 3

Please get in touch with me first and I will pass on your address to Jane (first come first served!) Naturally, we wish Jane and Philip our very best wishes in this time of difficulty for them both.

A LETTER TO MISS NOBLE (100 YEARS' AGO)

Durham October 16th 1925

It was a real pleasure to see an envelope directed in your hand. Hand-writings which are welcome to me have

become rare enough, but yours and Mr Luxmoore's are still among them.

On Tuesday 27th, I have two meetings in Newcastle, one in the morning, and one in the afternoon, and cannot escape them with any propriety. I do not think that my being away would be of any real importance, Evelyn will be at home and delighted to entertain you; yet I should be chagrined to think, that you came to Durham, and that I had not been there to show you the honours. So, if possible, do take one of the other days, or indeed any other day in that week. On Thursday afternoons there is only the 'Male-voice choir', and on Fridays there is no Organ. Personally, I prefer the unaccompanied singing, and also am very fond of the Male-voice, but I think it just as well to point out these arrangements to you.

Thankyou for asking after me so kindly. People say that I look now my normal self; but I am still oppressed by quite a troop of ailments more or less serious, and feel like one of those stuffed figures which are carried about on the 5th of November; only, in my case the stuffing has dropped out and I am physically very weak. I hope that I may keep out of a Nursing-Home, and, in any case, I could never go back to that 'Home' in Victoria Square: though a few months masks some of its inconveniences, it was a deplorable place. Yet, even so, memory pleads alleviating circumstances; there were your visits with books and flowers and cheering conversations, and there was the Odyssey, and the Vite dei Pontifici of Plotina, which I found inexhaustibly sedative.

I shall be particularly glad to see you here. We (The Library) have had one or two nice pictures given us and are in the throes involved by changing places and fitting-in the new jigsaw puzzle. And I have 'discovered', in a glass-cupboard on a back staircase, a small but quite good collection of Greek Vases. I had passed them many times and paid little attention to them, for they were grimed with a coating of black dust; but I have dusted them lightly and am making a proper catalogue, for there has never been a catalogue before. Dean Waddington bequeathed them to Chapter, when he died in 1869. He made the Grand Tour about 1818 when such things were cheap enough, and when there was no difficulty whatever, or risk, in forwarding them to England. He spent a great deal of time in Athens and in the Peloponese, and wrote a book about his travels which he published at John Murray's in 1823. But the whole place was effervescing with Byron and revolution, and there is much politics, and no Greek Vases.

I am interested in what you say about Rimini, and have a long-forgotten jingle (is it in *Patience*?) about a 'niminy-piminy' young man. I cannot find the old rhyme to niminy-piminy, but have an idea that it was 'Francesco di Rimini'.

Do manage to come when I am here: Evelyn, who is just going to bed with a cold, begs me to send her warm messages, and warmest invitation to come to this house to lunch and any meals that you like with her on the 27th, if the other days are not available for you.

I remain Ever yours sincerely. J. M. F

Kenneth Hillier

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