


Eighty Years On: 22nd July 1932

John Meade Falkner suffered ill health for much of his adult life – and he was not a man to keep quiet about the fact. His letters to friends – in particular John Noble – regularly refer to his bouts of illness. As Ken Warren remarked, a strong thread of hypochondria ran through much of his correspondence. His recurring ‘neuritis’ was both painful and inconvenient; his bout of pancreatitis followed by acute jaundice in 1925 meant a two month stay in a Newcastle nursing home; by the autumn of 1927 he had ‘worried through’ bronchitis and eczema, but he now reported that his heart condition had ‘begun to hobble me in the old fashion’. During September 1931, he suffered from sleeplessness, an abscess on his head, and an outbreak of boils.

As 1931 drew to a close, Falkner could be found with his wife Evelyn at the Royal Marine Hotel, Ventnor, on the Isle of Wight. He wrote to John Noble that he ‘had dropped down the ladder a few more rungs since we met last’, and was still ‘a butt for strange and unforeseen maladies’. At the end of May, 1932, Falkner was staying at The Royal Hotel in Weymouth. John Noble was informed ‘I have been so long and seriously ill, that I trust you will forgive my long silence’. In late June he returned to *The Divinity House* in Durham. Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham, visited on 30th June and was shocked at his old friend’s condition: he looked ‘extremely ill. He is a complete wreck and has a moribund aspect and manner. I was painfully impressed’. On Friday night, 22nd July, Falkner died.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH				Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE SOMERSET HOUSE				
The statutory fee for this certificate is 3s. 6d. Where a search is necessary to find the entry, a search fee is payable in addition.				3276 Application Number 2576				
REGISTRATION DISTRICT <i>Durham</i>								
1932. DEATH in the Sub-district of <i>Durham</i> in the County of <i>Durham</i>								
Column—	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description, and residence of informant	When registered
302	<i>Twenty second July 1932 Divinity House Durham U.D.</i>	<i>John Meade Falkner</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>74 years</i>	<i>Retired Engineering Company Director</i>	<i>Red Hypostatic congestion of the lungs (a) Myocarditis (b) Aortic Fibrillation certified by No P.M. S. Knibb Young M.D.</i>	<i>S.E. Stephenson Present at the death 22 Langham Street London W.1.</i>	<i>Twenty third July 1932</i>
CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.								
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, the <i>1st</i> day of <i>November</i> 19 <i>32</i> .								
This certificate is issued in pursuance of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1953 (1 & 2 Eliz. 2, c.29). Section 14 provides that any certified copy of an entry purporting to be sealed or stamped with the seal of the General Register Office shall be received as evidence of the birth or death to which it relates without any further or other proof of the entry, and no certified copy purporting to be given in the said Office shall be of any force or effect unless it is sealed or stamped as aforesaid. CAUTION.—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses a falsified certificate as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to prosecution.								

DA 420367

The cause of death was given as 1(a) **Hypostatic congestion of the lungs** (where there is an obstacle to the return of the blood to the heart); 1(b) **Myocarditis** (or inflammatory cardiomyopathy is inflammation of heart muscle); and 1(c) **Auricular Fibrillation** (very rapid uncoordinated contractions of the atria of the heart resulting in a lack of synchronism between heartbeat and pulse beat).

Section 3 of his Will, dated the sixteenth day of July 1925, said "I

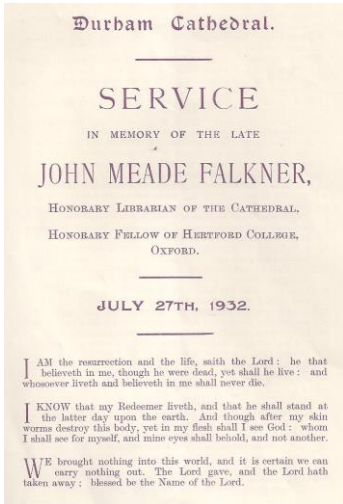
DESIRE to be cremated at the Crematorium nearest to the place of my death and my ashes buried in an ordinary coffin in the churchyard of the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist at Burford in Oxfordshire by Legards Chapel where there is a place left for me by my dear brother William Richardson Falkner. I DESIRE my trustees at the expense of my estate to fill with the best stained glass in memory of me or my family two south widnows in the Lady Chapel in the said Church

His body was taken on Tuesday, 26th July to Darlington, the nearest crematorium. His ashes were then put in an ordinary coffin and taken to Burford churchyard. The Service was held on the afternoon of Wednesday, 27th July. A simple Order of Service sheet was headed

John Meade Falkner. At Rest. July 22nd 1932. R.I.P.

After the church service, conducted by another old friend, the local priest Canon Emeris, the mourners moved outside to the grave. On the coffin had been placed Falkner's Master of Arts hood. Falkner's wife, Evelyn, was recorded as having 'contained her grief very well'. His sister, Annie, later remarked that she had found the whole occasion 'unsympathetic'.

On the same day, a Memorial Service was held in Durham Cathedral. Many of the cathedral clergy were there, including Bishop Henson. The Pro-Vice Chancellor attended on behalf of Durham University. Wilfred Cochrane represented Armstrong Whitworth and there were directors from the Newcastle and Gateshead Gas and Newcastle and Gateshead Water companies.



The Cathedral Service Sheet

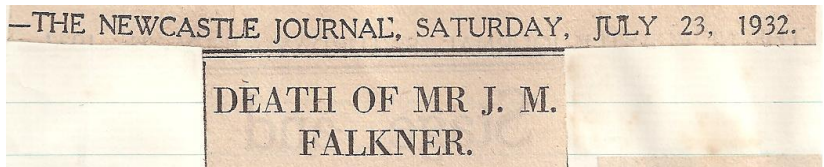
The Burford Tomb

The Durham Cathedral service included Psalm 90; a Lesson from Revelation vii. 9 – end; Anthem 1222; and Hymn (A & M) 438.

The **Obituaries** make interesting reading. The rest of this article will comprise of long extracts from national and local publications.



The Newcastle Journal was first off the mark:



We regret to announce the death at his home, Divinity House, Durham, last night, of Mr John Meade Falkner, M.A., who had resided in the city for 40 years and had been closely associated with the Cathedral during the whole of that time.

Mr Falkner had a serious illness while on the Isle of Wight at Christmastime, and had been in a precarious condition since. His love for the Cathedral knew no bounds. Indeed, for many years and at the time of his death he was honorary librarian to the Dean and Chapter Library of the Cathedral, and was regarded as a foremost authority on its contents, which represent almost the history of Northern Christendom. He occupied a seat in the Choir Stalls, and none was more regular in attendance at the services.

Mr Falkner was also an outstanding authority on archaeology, and held the office of Honorary Reader in Palæography in the University of Durham.

In the public mind, however, he will be long remembered in connexion with his association with Sir W.G. Armstrong, Whitworth and Co., Ltd., of Newcastle, with whom he was first a director and during the critical years of 1915-20 chairman of directors. It would be difficult to estimate the responsibilities that that office entailed during the war period.

Mr Falkner held several important Japanese decorations awarded during his connexion with the Newcastle firm.

Eldest son of the Rev Thomas Alexander Falkner, of North Newnton, Wiltshire, he was born on May 8, 1858, and received his early education at Marlborough, proceeding from there to Hertford College, Oxford. Five years ago he was made an honorary Fellow of that college — a distinction he greatly prized.

Mr Falkner was held in high regard in literary circles. He wrote "The Lost Stradivarius", "Moonfleet", "The Nebuly Coat", "Ad Majorem Psalter", and also a history of Oxfordshire and handbooks on Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

He will be sadly missed from Durham, where his generosity was experienced unobtrusively in connexion with many benevolent and charitable organizations.

He was a well-known figure on Tyneside, and held directorships on the Newcastle and Gateshead Water Company and the Newcastle and Gateshead Gas Company. Great sympathy will go out to his widow, who was before her marriage Miss Evelyn Violet Adye, the youngest daughter of General Sir John Miller Adye, G.C.B.





Mr. J.M. FALKNER
SCHOLAR AND MAN OF BUSINESS

Mr. John Meade Falkner went as tutor to the sons of Sir Andrew Noble, at that time vice-chairman of the Armstrong firm, on leaving Oxford, and in 1885 was offered a post in the company. He was promoted to be a director in 1901, and when Sir Andrew Noble died in 1915 succeeded him as chairman of the board, a post which he resigned in 1921, remaining a director until the reconstruction of the company in 1926.

In his long connection with the Armstrong, Whitworth Company, Falkner made himself specially useful in conducting negotiations with foreign Powers, and he travelled widely on behalf of the firm in Europe and South America. For this purpose he was well fitted alike by his charm and dignity of manner, his gift of languages, and his patience. He was, in short the chief diplomatic representative of the firm for many years. These business visits were with him always contrived "a double debt to pay". "For," as he used to say of himself, "I have a medieval mind," and he was never happier than in Constantinople, Florence and, above all, in Rome, where he early became a constant frequenter of the Vatican Library, a relationship crowned by the gift to him from the present Pope of the gold medal struck for presentation to a limited number of distinguished scholars, native and foreign.

All sorts of medieval lore appealed to him — black-letter, demonology, and old Church music. He was an assiduous collector of rare books, especially of missals. His whole life had a strange dualism, for this mediievally-minded humanist rose to his high position as chairman of a great industrial corporation not by favouritism, but on his merits, and as the direct result of their recognition by the creator of the firm and his ablest successor. Falkner's annual statements were models of lucidity, and were marked by a distinction of style that never failed him whatever he wrote.

He wrote beautifully, in every sense of the word, for until he was disabled by writer's cramp, his script, modelled upon that of the best medieval scribes, was exquisitely decorative as well as perfectly

legible, and a letter from him was a work of art as well as a revelation of the workings of an original and observant mind. Some of his earliest literary ventures were of an instructive order — his admirable “History of Oxfordshire”, and his handbooks to Oxfordshire and Berkshire in Murray’s series, for which he prepared himself by long bicycle tours of exploration visiting country churches and villages. In fiction he made his mark in “The Lost Stradivarius” (1895), a romantic ghost story, tinged with mysticism, in which his command of atmosphere and of the “law of suspense” was strikingly displayed. “Moonfleet” (1898), a story of the old smuggling days on the South Coast, is a more straightforward story, which suggests comparisons with Stevenson in subject, but is written in Falkner’s own style, in which every word is right and in the right place. But “The Nebuly Coat” (1903) is a far higher achievement, and still remains one of the best novels, appreciation of which establishes a curious link of sympathy between its admirers. He had written a considerable part of a fourth novel, but left the only copy in a bag in the train on his daily journey from Durham to Elswick, and never saw it again. His friends often begged him to rewrite it, but he declared that he was too old for the task.

After the War he published anonymously a brief, but most illuminating, study of Bath in its palmy days, and he contributed to Cornhill (December, 1916) the short story entitled “Charalampia”, an entirely fascinating pseudo-historical romance of the Byzantine period. For, while a devout reader of the classics, his studies were not confined to the canon.

There remain his verses, mostly written for private circulation, though a certain number appeared in the Spectator, where they never failed to attract attention by their peculiar dignity and charm, notably the lines entitled “The Family Pew”. They were almost always meditative and reflective, suffused with a tender regret, and notable for the effective use he made of Latin phrases from the Vulgate or the great Latin hymns. It may be added that his interest in liturgical literature was not confined to missals, but ranged over a much wider field. He filled more than 40 notebooks (all in Latin) on the Vatican manuscripts. Apart from the Vatican, he was in close touch with the manuscript section of the British Museum and of the Bodleian. It was largely due to these associations and connexions, as well as to his own talents, that he was able to make improvements at Durham (where he succeeded Canon Greenwell as Librarian to the Dean and Chapter), which made the collection probably the first among

cathedral libraries in England, and caused it, to his great pleasure, to be visited and consulted by more and more students every year. To his friends at the Athenaeum and elsewhere, Falkner was always an interesting character, full of curious contradictions but equally full of enthusiasms which he was able to impart to others. An element of the unexpected lent attraction to his conversation, for, though consistent enough on many subjects, on others his views were fluid, and it was impossible to anticipate what he might say. Proclaiming himself a recluse, he enjoyed congenial society; in politics, he was one day a Radical and the next a reactionary; while he affected a cynicism which covered much real kindness of heart. He had no intellectual arrogance; he was singularly free from snobbishness or ostentation; he was a most loyal and affectionate friend. The extent of his charities, whether in cash or kind, if it could be known, must have been astonishingly large, while the amount of time he took to comfort the downhearted or ailing must have added heavy burdens to his daily work.....

The following day "C.R.C" wrote in to **The Times**:

By the death of Meade Falkner, Hertford College has lost an Honorary Fellow and a most loyal and engaging friend. He never lost touch with the college, and welcomed his election to the Honorary Fellowship, in his own words, "with boyish delight". The scene of one of his most charming and subtle novels, "The Lost Stradivarius", is placed in a sixteenth century room of the college, which he inhabited as an undergraduate. His immensely tall, gaunt, and stooping figure, his long, distinguished head, with its intense eyes, were often seen in Oxford, especially in the Bodleian. Scholar, novelist, guide-book writer, man of business, and man of the world, he showed all the versatility of his life in his conversation, seeming to fulfil, in his person Aristotle's ἀνὴρ περὶ πάντων παιλευμένος. He had a curious intuitive faculty of penetrating, after the shortest acquaintance, into the interests and tastes of others. Hence he not only talked well, but was the begetter of good talk in others. A junior Fellow, after one evening in his company, would feel that he had made a sympathetic and discerning friend. He had a charming appreciation of good food and drink, and his friends at the college would try to set some special vintage for his appreciation when he dined at High Table. For some years he fought a losing battle against ill-health, the advance of which he bore with a half-melancholy, half-whimsical resignation.



ARMSTRONG · WHITWORTH · RECORD

Autumn 1932

The death occurred at his home, The Divinity House, Durham, on July 22nd, of John Meade Falkner, at the age of 74.

The son of the Rev. Thomas Alexander Falkner, of an old Wiltshire family, a scholar of Marlborough and of Hertford College, Oxford, Mr. Falkner's first connection with Newcastle was an engagement in the spring of 1883 to act as holiday tutor to Sir Andrew Noble's younger sons.

He always said that having made this engagement he tried his best to get out of it, but fortunately for himself and for many others Sir Andrew was not to be put off, and so, in somewhat unwilling fashion, was started his close association with the North of England, which was ended only by his death.

In November, 1885, having done a good deal of unofficial secretarial work previously for Sir Andrew, he was formerly engaged at Elswick, and three years later he succeeded Mr. W.D. Cruddas as secretary of the Company.

Elswick, when Mr. Falkner first joined the Company, was on the threshold of a tremendous expansion of its foreign business, and his exceptional qualities were undoubtedly of great value in this connection. Routine work was never very congenial to him, but he delighted in travel and in the unconventionality of life abroad, had a good working knowledge of many languages, a most impressive appearance and manner, and a personal charm which few could resist. Above all he revelled in the diplomatic scheming which was usually an essential feature of all negotiations for foreign work. Wherever he went — whether to Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Greece, Turkey or Brazil — he had friends and was equally at home. Until war broke out in 1914, and all that he had worked for came tumbling down like a house of cards, he was never happier than when engaged on the Company's business abroad.

In 1901 he was made a director, and in 1915, on the death of Sir Andrew Noble, he was appointed to succeed him as Chairman. This position he held until the end of 1920, when his health, which had never been robust, obliged him to relinquish it, though he continued to be a member of the Board until 1926.

Of his serious work for the Company much that is very interesting might be told, but an equally long and quite as entertaining an account could be written of his less serious moments. He was possessed of a most impish sense of humour, which found an outlet in a host of practical jokes. Any one might suffer, but for many years one of his most willing and appreciative victims was the late Sir Philip Watts, whose good temper never, and whose simplicity hardly ever, was known to fail. A number of poems, many of which are lost but some of which fortunately survive, are another indication that life at Elswick in his earlier days was not all sheer drudgery.

Apart from Elswick and his work for the Company he was a man of the widest interests. His love for and familiarity with the Classics never left him. Music — especially Church music — occupied much of his time and thought at one period, during which he spent most of his Sundays in the organ loft at Durham and compiled and published his Ad Majorem Psalter. In many branches of archaeology he was an acknowledged authority. He was a keen games player so far as his health allowed; a more than useful wicket-keeper, he also played golf, tennis, racquets and lawn tennis, generally in his own way, which was often not the most usual or the best way, but always with the greatest enthusiasm. Field sports had not much attraction for him, though he fished occasionally, but he understood and appreciated the sporting interests of others.

Books, all aspects of books — even to the ravages of the bookworm, of which he once produced at Elswick a specimen in a glass case — probably provided him with his chief and most lasting interest. All his life he collected them: at first early editions, rarities and fine bindings, nothing of very great value, but each representing a thrill either as a find or as having cost a little more than he could afford. Later when, owing to increasing means, he found regretfully that the thrill was no longer there, he turned to liturgical books, where he found once more no difficulty in paying more than he thought he ought to, with the result that by the end of his life he was the owner of one of the outstanding collections of such books in the country....

....Looking back on him across the years, with all his weaknesses and all his greatneses, he towers physically and mentally. To have been associated with him at all was an education; to have counted him as a friend is a possession which those who could lay claim to it will treasure to the end of their lives.

W.T.C.C.

Weymouth College Magazine

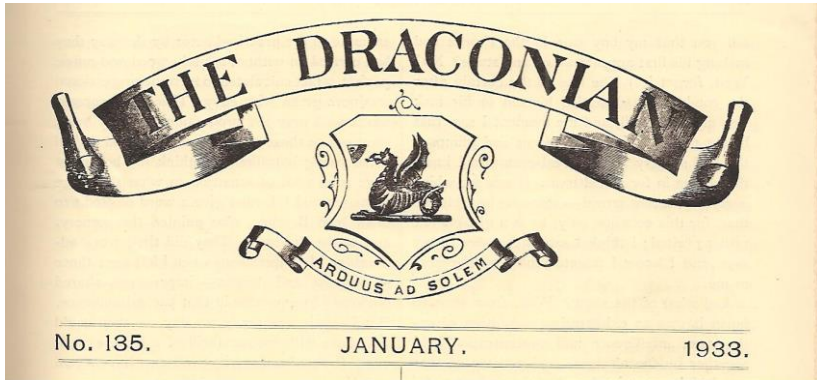
The death of John Meade Falkner on July 22 at the age of 74 terminated a most remarkable career. Falkner had always been a close spectator of school affairs. Although he only spent two years at the School, and afterwards became a foundation scholar at Marlborough, he retained his close affection for it, to the end of his days.

*Spending his early holidays in cycling over the hills of Oxfordshire, he produced as his first literary work a guidebook to that county. In 1896 (sic) he published *The Lost Stradivarius*, a mystic ghost story, the scene of which is laid in a sixteenth-century room of Hertford College, Oxford. Then came *Moonfleet*, a smuggling story well-known to all lovers of Dorset, and lastly in 1903, he brought out *The Nebuly Coat*, a long and elaborate novel, which many consider his best work. In addition to these novels, Mr. Falkner produced books, which revealed his great love of antiquarian research and things medieval. Admirable poetry also flowed from his pen. Most of it was for private circulation, but some reached the public through the pages of the *Spectator*.*

In business life, as secretary and chairman of Armstrong, Whitworth and Co., he negotiated in the critical days of 1915 "with the charm of a diplomat, while he looked at life through the eyes of a poet".

*Though he proclaimed himself a recluse, his varying and absorbing experience as a scholar, novelist, guidebook writer, man of business, and man of the world, made his conversation versatile and interesting, full of the charm of the unexpected. The extent of his charities (writes a *Times* correspondent) was astonishingly large and the amount of time he took to comfort the downhearted or ailing must have added heavy burdens to his daily work. He neither received, nor expected any reward from his own country in recognition of his services, though he was decorated by the Turkish, Italian and Japanese governments. As his health gradually failed it was not such decorations as these on which he cast back his eyes, but on those conferred on himself as a man of letters, involving no initial behind his name and no handle in front of it.*

(Falkner was a pupil at Weymouth from July 1871 to December 1872)



A very great friend and exact contemporary of the Skipper's (Charles Lynam – Headmaster of The Dragon School, Oxford) will be remembered by many Old Dragons. From 1883, when he left Oxford to go as Secretary to the great Armstrong firm at Elswick, till 1900, Falkner was a constant and welcome visitor at the Dragon School. He took us on many delightful visits to the picturesque places round Oxford. To Royal Ryecote of Queen Elizabeth, to Fairford with its wonderful stained glass, to Burford with its splendid church and ghost-haunted old Priory, to Eynsham, Witney, up the River by Godstow monastery to Wytham and to the Spread Eagle at Thame, even as far as Hughenden and Wycombe he led expeditions, entertaining us with marvellous stories and inspiring us with his love for romance and antiquities.

To me he was the most inspiring friend a man could have. He was full of quaint humour, of strange stories and out-of-the-way information, with a wonderful fund of anecdote and apt quotation, and I imbibed from him a priceless love of history and literature and archaeology. One unforgettable memory I have of a winter visit to him at his Divinity House, Durham, and a walk on the far side of the river. The magnificent rock pile of Cathedral and Castle stood out in the moonlight over the misty river-bed. Together we were filled with the magic of the view, and later we went into the dim brazier-lit Cathedral, wonderful, past all words. Here, at his home, he died on July 22nd this year, 1932. He was an intense lover of the classics. I once found him reading the Odyssey in the original – for the fifteenth time. I think Odysseus was his favourite hero. On one visit to the School he recited to me the whole of Tennyson's "Ulysses" and was astounded that I did not know it. Afterwards every boy who passed

through my English form learnt that poem. He was extremely fond of music, especially Church music. And always played some sacred music on the organ of any Church we visited. His weird story of The Lost Stradivarius (now unfortunately quite out of print) shows his knowledge of violin music. To my mind this is his most interesting story, a story of Hertford College when it was Magdalen Hall, and of Italy; the Nebuly Coat with its heraldry and old organist hero, and Moonfleet, so popular with boys, about Dorsetshire smugglers, are his novels. He had finished a fourth, but this was 'snatched' by a thief, who mistook the case which contained it for a cash case on the Newcastle Station platform. It was never recovered; the author had no copy, and he never wrote another novel. Falkner's tomb with that of his brother is in his dearly-loved Church at Burford.

London: Sharp and Sons, Peter Lane.

BURIALS in the Parish of <u>Burford</u> in the County of <u>Oxford</u> in the Year <u>1932</u>				
Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
John Meade Falkner	Durham.	July 27 th 1932.	74 years	William Emaris Vicar
No. 1521				



Memorials to John Meade Falkner

Left: in the south aisle of the cloister at Durham

Right: on the south wall of Fleet Old Church.

