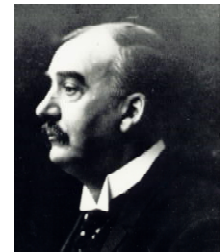


# The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



Newsletter No. 72

8 May 2023

## 2023 SUBSCRIPTIONS

A big thank you to all of you who have already paid the annual sub – 18 before the end of January. With a further seven having been paid last year, we are now over half-way there. Moreover, several of you have kindly added to the requested amount. This is how the Society can afford to print the **Journal** each July. I do hope the rest of you, with this **Newsletter** as a gentle prompt, will now scurry to BACS, PayPal or your chequebooks. A reminder that the sub is **only £10/\$15/€15.**; paid by **cash, cheque, BACS or Paypal.** **If either of the latter, I have put the details in the main email.** The ‘Black Spot’ hovers over those who have not yet paid!

The **July Journal** is now ready for printing and will be sent out to all those who are up to date with their Subs. A real incentive to get rid of the ‘Black Spot’!

## THE NEBULY COAT

I was sorting out my collection of early literary magazines and came across the *John O' London's Weekly* for Friday, April 7, 1939 (price Two [old] pence). I think I may have already copied the following into a previous Newsletter, but it bears repeating.



### Violet and her father

*gigantic hammers rose and fell and men seemed a mere incident. At the end of our tour we were taken on a launch up the Tyne, to look at the shipping. I found myself beside one of the directors, whose name I had not caught, and somehow for a few minutes the War and its horror dropped away and we began to talk about books. "There is one book you must read," I said to him, "I cannot tell you why, because its quality is indescribable – it is called The Nebuly Coat." "I wrote it", he said. His name was John Meade Falkner.*

*I find it difficult to convey the rare and haunting quality of The Nebuly Coat to my readers to-day as I*

Under the heading ‘Books I cannot forget’, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter had this to say: *In the first year of the War, I think it was the spring of 1915, I went with my father [the Prime Minister H.H. Asquith] to visit Armstrong's great munition work at Elswick. We walked for hours through a bewildering maze of machinery, in which fiery furnaces roared,*

*did then to its author. I can only say that those who have once read it will never forget Cullerne Church, standing in the water-meadows, with its crumbling tower and jewelled windows, the refrain of its weary arches – "The arch never sleeps, never sleeps, they have bound on us a burden too heavy to be borne" – nor the character of Mr. Sharnall, the drunken organist, playing his fugue alone to the bats at full moon. It is the work of great originality and beauty.*

## JMF THE INSPIRATION FOR JAMES BOND?

Recent holiday reading included ‘Goldeneye’ by Matthew Parker about the eponymous house which Ian Fleming owned in Jamaica and the influence the island had on his Bond novels. In considering his literary background Parker writes: Fleming’s Jamaica, or at least the first impressions of it, with the pirates, redcoats and admirals, machetes and ghost stories awoke in him the adventure stories of his childhood. One of the few respites at Durnford prep school was on Sunday evenings, when the whole school would assemble in the hall to hear the headmaster’s wife read tales of exploration and derring-do. Her favourite for a long time was John Meade Falkner’s ‘Moonfleet’, a story of diamonds, smuggling, phantoms and shipwreck. Also enjoyed by the boys were ‘The Prisoner of Zenda’ and the Bulldog Drummond stories. Best of all for Fleming were Sax Rohmer’s novels with fast-paced plots featuring the ‘Yellow Peril’ archetype of the Chinese criminal genius. Fleming later told Raymond Chandler that he ‘was bought up on Dr Fu Manchu’. Other influences included John Buchan and indeed his first novel ‘Casino Royale’ (1953) was described by one reviewer as ‘super-sonic John Buchan’.

This prompted the *Sunday Times*, for whom Fleming worked, to declare him ‘the best thriller writer since Eric Ambler’. Praise indeed! At least he was not described as superior to Ambler. His second book, ‘Live and Let Die’ (1954) was said to be a mixture of (E. Phillips) Oppenheim and (Mickey) Spillane, whose hero (if that is the right word) lent itself to Bond being dubbed ‘the intellectual’s Mike Hammer’. Fleming’s 1959 offering ‘Goldfinger’ induced the description ‘Sophisticated Sapper.’ One is not sure how flattered Fleming should have felt by these comparisons or indeed if the headmaster’s wife at Durnford prep school would have been pleased at what her reading had inspired.



**Ian Fleming**

**Robin Davies**

**TWO VIEWS OF BUTTER STREET, FLEET**

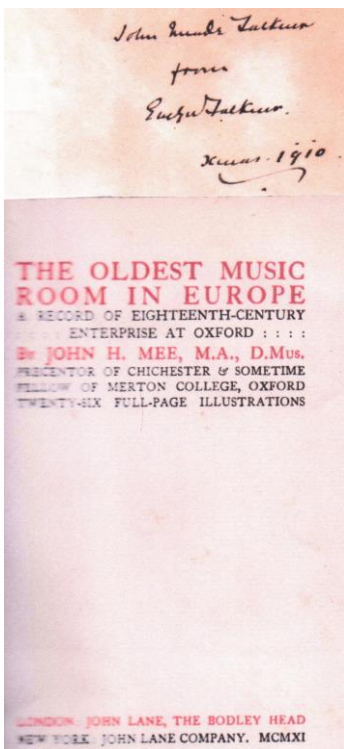
Although I included the first photograph in a previous Newsletter, I thought Members would like to see it next to one kindly sent in recently by **George Robson**. It was in a first edition copy of *Moonfleet* he had acquired.



*Butter Street, Fleet.*



**AN EVELYN FALKNER SIGNATURE?**



I had a fascinating email in mid-April from Michael Kassler, Managing Director of Michael Kassler and Associates Pty Limited based at Northbridge NSW 2063, Australia. He sent scans of the title page of a book and a signature which he thought might be in JMF's handwriting. It is reproduced here.

The writing does not match any examples I have in the Archive, so one must assume that it is Evelyn's. Most spouses might have put 'Love from' but knowing JMF, perhaps not!

Interestingly, it is signed 'Xmas 1910', but the book itself is dated 1911. Original copies can be purchased online from £9 to £15.

The Holywell Music Room, built in 1748, is the city of Oxford's chamber music hall, situated on Holywell Street in the city centre, and is part of Wadham College. It is said to be the oldest purpose-built music room in Europe, and hence Britain's first concert hall.



It was important for popularizing the music of Haydn in the 18th century.

**A CORONATION POT POURRI**

6<sup>th</sup> May ~ King's Coronation

King's Crown +  
Spencer/Mohun

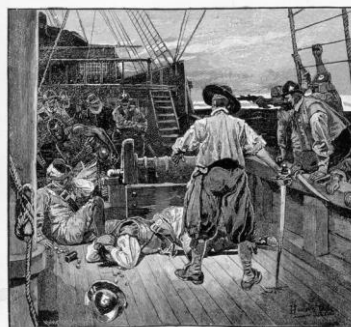


King Charles' *Moonfleet* related namesake, *the riotous wastrel*, Charles 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Mohun's duel with the Duke of Hamilton in 1712 resulted in the deaths of them both, the source of their duel being the so-called Macclesfield Inheritance associated with Hamilton's second wife Elizabeth Gerard (Charles Mohun by Thomas Seccombe DNB Vol. 38 1894 – 'his riotous life'), but Hamilton's first wife Anne Spencer was the daughter of Robert Spencer 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Sunderland, direct ancestor of Diana and Princes William and spare Harry.

*'When the Moons move, then Moonfleet mourns',  
'Moons-lease'*

The Moon's a Mohun - Three Mohuns in Y Royal Naval Fleet

**Captain Thomas Moone/Mohun**, son of Richard Moone and Joan Howman, brother of Robert Mohun first of Fleet. Captain Moon was born about 1520/1525 and killed by a Spaniard in the harbour at Carthagenia in 1585. He was Sir Francis Drake's favourite who said he could trust Captain Moon more than he could trust his own brother John Drake. His likely son William Moon was one of the early emigrants to Virginia along with in 1607 Churchill Moon and Nicholas Moon and in 1623 Captain John Moon.



Captain Thomas Moon(e)/Mohun with sword in hand on the deck of the Francis, part of Sir Francis Drake's fleet. Picture by Howard Pyle, (*Harper's Magazine*, 1883.)

From Harper's Magazine, January, 1883

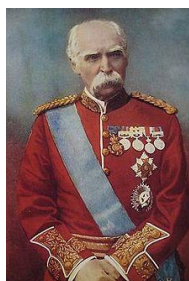


**Captain Robert Mohun of Fleet** son of Maximillian Mohun of Fleet and Elizabeth Chawcott he was born about 1630 and died in 1667. Distinguished himself in the Dutch Wars of 1666 when the enemy were totally defeated.

**Francis Mohun**, son of Gilbert Maximillian Mohun of Fleet and Sarah Cooper. Born in 1713, he was third Lieutenant on the Victory in October 1744 when the ship was lost and he perished. The Fleet Estate passed to Robert his youngest brother who died unmarried in 1758. It then passed to the Goulds of Upwey

**‘Royal’ Stewarts**

This portrait displayed on the garden wall at Moonfleet Manor alongside presumably his Yacht club regalia (Hurlingham/Royal Dorset/Albert, Aberdeen Univ?) depicts Field Marshall Sir Donald Martin Stewart 1<sup>st</sup> Bt. (1824-1900) of the blue-blooded Stewarts of Fincastle stock, and a military associate in India of JMF’s father-in-law, Sir John Miller Adye. These items, according to the Hotel’s staff were picked up at auction by the previous owners who very probably had no knowledge of this coincidental JMF connection. There is another picture of Sir Donald as a young officer at Lytes Cary Manor.



With his swarthy good looks, 6ft 2-inch swashbuckling Moonfleet star **Stewart Granger** (1913-93) was born 110 years ago in the Old Brompton Road ‘opportunely’ on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1913 as James Lablache Stewart, the

only son of Major James Stewart OBE. During the war he enlisted with the Gordon Highlanders and then transferred to the Black Watch. When young he lived with his mother in Boscombe, Bournemouth (not 100 miles from Moonfleet) which has a blue wall plaque to his memory. He was the great-great-grandson of Italian opera singer Luigi Lablache and the grandson of the actor Luigi Lablache. ‘*And when men say they love a place or town, thou mayst be sure ‘tis not the place they love but some that live there’.*

**A.G. Gaydon**

**THE ESCAPE**

.....How fearful  
And dizzy ‘tis to cast one’s eyes so low!  
.....I’ll look no more  
Lest my brain turn - *Shakespeare*

There are three particularly dramatic episodes in *Moonfleet* which live in one’s memory – the climbing of the Zigzag, the descent of the well at Carisbrooke and the running aground off the Snout in Moonfleet Bay. The novel is littered with examples of real places. For example, the well at Carisbrooke is a much visited attraction to this day as are the two churches at Fleet.

The whole of the Dorset coast has features of real beauty, though much of it presents dangers to shipping.



White Nothe means White Nose and is a chalk headland on the eastern edge of Ringstead Bay east of Weymouth. The zigzag path up the cliff is recorded, and now known as **The Smugglers’ Path**. At the top of the path is a protrusion of white chalk in the shape of a nose. JMF knew the Dorset coastline in detail and it is thus very likely his

knowledge of White Nothe was the source of the exciting episode featuring the ascent of the Zigzag. John and Elzevir’s climb is spun out in Chapter 10, but breathtakingly so:

*I was so besotted with fright that I would not budge an inch fearing to fall over if I opened my eyes. In an instant I felt a sickening qualm and swimming of the brain and I knew I was giddy and must fall. Now I do believe that there were half a dozen men beside in England who would have ventured up the path even free and untrammelled and not one in all the world to do it with a full-grown lad in his arms.*



The 1984 BBC’s six-part adaption of the novel \* brilliantly interprets the climb and the viewer will relate to *The relief of being once more on firm ground and the exultation of an escape from immediate danger removed my pain and made me forget that my leg was broken.*

During its existence the JMF Society has had a number of get-togethers based in Dorchester but has not as yet ventured out to White Nothe. Maybe this omission can be rectified on our next visit?

**George Robson**

\*The BBC’s production was never released commercially but one Society member recorded the six episodes on VHS tape. After a few years the tape started to deteriorate, so it was transferred onto DVD disc. Whilst the quality of the disc is not of the highest quality it is perfectly acceptable. A copy is available for £10 (£3 for the cost of production and £7 going to Society funds. If interested, contact Kenneth Hillier for further details.

Best Wishes

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