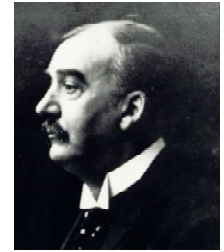


The John Meade Falkner Society

Founded 8th May 1999



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2022 SUBSCRIPTIONS

There are now only two Subs outstanding (I will notify those Members separately). Thank you to those Members who responded to my plea in the March Newsletter.

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.

JOHN MEADE FALKNER – HUMORIST?

When one thinks of John Meade Falkner, *humorous* and *mischievous* are not traits that would first come to mind. However, there is evidence from several sources that this is a misconception.

In his 1932 obituary of Falkner, Wilfrid Cochrane, who knew him well as a friend and colleague, wrote: 'A long and quite entertaining 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. Anyone 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.'

Later in the obituary, Cochrane describes how one day Falkner brought to his Elswick office a specimen of a book worm in a glass jar, much to the intense interest of the gullible staff. Also, he describes how youth held a fascination for him and, as a born storyteller, loved to tell remarkable tales to the young, the only difficulty being to know exactly when strict fact ended and imagination began.

Further to this point, in his companion sheet to the Puffin edition of *Moonfleet*, George H. Atkins states 'Meade Falkner had the skill to be realistic in blending fact with fiction. If we do identify somewhere, and it does not measure up to the image given in the novel, we can imagine there is a tinge of mischievous humour lurking somewhere.'

In her 1925 autobiography, Lady Margery Noble wrote: 'Rome, 26th March 1893. Mr. Vavassore joined us, and Mr. Falkner got the concierge, Gunther, to illuminate a large card with the words *EVIVA L'ILLUSTRE VAVASSORE* and stuck this on his door at the hotel. (This sort of trick was very characteristic of Mr. John Meade Falkner, who came into our lives about 1882 and who has been an intimate and dear friend ever since).'

Another example of Falkner's humour comes from his own hand. In a letter to Lord Stuart Rendel, dated Sat. April 13th 1912 and written on Elswick notepaper, he wrote: '*Your letter interested me as your letters always do. There is something irresistibly comic in what you write. First I chuckled over the letter by myself; and afterwards took the liberty of showing it to Alfred Cochrane who, under his rugged manner, has a very keen sense of humour. Then we had a joint explosion of mirth. It was not only what you wrote, but you contrived to make it in a deliciously laughable way that relieved the whole situation. I enjoy your quizzical powers and wish I could write in the same vein.*'

Eighteen years before this letter, in 1894, another written from Elswick by Falkner shows a charming, easy relationship with the young Wilfrid Cochrane who, on gaining entry to Repton School, received a letter, part of which reads: *...It is awfully jolly and you must accept my congratulations...You must write to me and tell me when you are going to the 'Land o' the Seal', so that I may see that the City people here have time to get up the triumphant arches and gas-illuminations.*

In fact, other letters written by Falkner show the same humorous touches, right up until the end of his life.

George Robson

THE COLLECTED POEMS

When the Society's edition of Falkner's *Poems* came out in 2005, it was in a limited edition of 300 copies. After an initial flurry, sales settled down to a few a year. We have now sold 253, so there are just 47 left. If you do not have a copy, then it would be sensible to purchase one before too long. The cost is only £10 with postage extra (£3) in the U.K. Overseas orders are £17, plus relevant postage. The book makes an excellent Christmas or Birthday present.

THE SOCIETY WEBSITE

Most of you will know of, and have hopefully used, our Website. It is regularly updated with the **Newsletters** (1-70) and **Journals** (1-23); all the former can be read in full. Nearly all the articles from Journal No. 8 (July 2007) onwards can also be read online, except for the last two years. They are uploaded after a two-year gap.

The Website also features details about all of Meade Falkner's works, fiction and non-fiction; a gazetteer of places relating to Falkner; a biography of Falkner; short write-ups of Society meetings over the years; and links with other relevant Literary Societies. There have been over 6,000 viewings of the site.

THE FAMILIES AT MOONFLEET MANOR (FLEET HOUSE) IN JMF'S LIFETIME AND THE HOPE DIAMOND

Moonfleet was not only JMF's gift to the world; it was a reminder for himself of the Dorset that he loved, where he grew up and had deep emotional ties. Drawing on past events, memories and experiences particularly the great storm of 1824 the writing process was doubtlessly cathartic, living as he now was at the extreme other end of the country. Despite his influential new circle of friends and burgeoning career he probably missed his family and friends and pined for home, at least to begin with. Blending his knowledge of Dorset with ancient and contemporary stories like the Arabian Nights (and Treasure Island?) these were likely his key influencing/motivating factors. His new wife Evelyn possibly also provided encouragement, having a strong Dorset family link through her ancestor the Duke of Monmouth. The timing and the ingredients for *Moonfleet* (and *The Lost Stradavarius*) were all in place.

As a young man living in Dorchester and Buckland Ripers, the two families that owned Moonfleet Manor House in JMF's time were successively the Petos and the Georges ('gaffer' ch.3). He was perchance first introduced to them by his curate father Thomas Falkner, his Weymouth based Mead Aunts or through his Admiral Uncle James Mead's Naval connections, or possibly by his artist Uncle in law Henry Moule. The Moules were influential in Dorchester and also connected to the church. In 1878 Philip George, a scion of the Bristol Brewery family Georges & Co. bought Moonfleet Manor having married Fanny nee Vining (ch.2). She was related to the famous acting dynasty which included Fanny, George and Frederick Vining their shared ancestors being Thomas Llewellyn Vining and his wife Anne Thick. Philip's daughter Fanny Vining George married Cdr. Alexander Cook RN. His son Charles E.A. George married in 1876 Ann Loftus Tothill daughter of William Tothill a Bristol merchant/railway pioneer and his wife Hannah Darby daughter of Abraham Darby III who built the first ever iron bridge. Because of their similarity in age, it is possible that JMF had some romantic feeling for Fanny Vining George, however this is pure speculation. In 1927 Ann Tothill's half-brother Admiral Hugh Tothill RN was buried at Holy Trinity new Church Fleet. There is a memorial inside the church to Major Hugh Crawford Cavendish who married in 1908 Charles and Ann's second daughter Marjory George and there is a gravestone outside to Hugh's mother Joanna May Campbell Cavendish. Another of Charles George's daughters Dorothea married Admiral Clement Greatorex RN in Fleet. The aforementioned Darbys from Shropshire were related to JMF's wife Evelyn Adye through marriage with the Montagus, Scotts, Whitmores and Stopfords - all direct descendants of King Charles I.

Sir Henry Peto (1840-1938), a barrister and son of Sir Samuel Morton Peto whose plaque is in the new church porch lived in Fleet House in the 1870's. His sister Ann Peto married James Alexander Campbell MP of

Stracathro, brother of Prime Minister H. Bannerman Campbell. They were related if distantly to Lady Margery Noble nee Campbell. Margery's father Archibald Campbell of Quebec was likely JMF's model for Squire Maskew in *Moonfleet* (who analogous to the Doones in Lorna Doone felt compelled to leave Scotland to forget his 'rascally past'). Archibald's brother John Saxton Campbell built the SS Royal William, named after King William IV. Applying one of his trademark twists this Atlantic paddle steamer may have provided JMF with inspiration for *The Royal Sophy* in *Moonfleet* - named after William's cousin, Princess Sophia Electress of Hanover. It is probable if unproven that Margery Campbell's mother Agnes Durham nee George was descended from the same George family that came to live at Moonfleet Manor (see below tree). Agnes's mother Joanna Margery Durham may have been granddaughter of Patrick Durham of Pitkerro/Omachie (?). Sir Andrew Noble and Lady Margery's son Sir Saxton Noble subsequently moved to Moonfleet Manor with his wife Celia nee James. Celia was the granddaughter of Isambard Kingdom Brunel who lived in Bristol/Clifton and he was a friend and associate of the Tothills and the Georges. Two years after JMF's death and 36 years after Moonfleet was written a strange irony occurred which may have had some bearing on Sir Saxton's decision to live at the Manor. His nephew and JMF's friend John Samuel Brunel Noble married Elizabeth Lucas, whose mother was a member of the Jewish Amsterdam merchant Goldsmid family. Pertaining to the history behind Moonfleet the Goldsmids were employed by Pitt the Elder and were known to Lord Nelson and the Prince Regent. They also had large landholdings in Hove at the same time Isambard Kingdom Brunel was being educated at nearby Dr. Morrell's academy in 1820. In 2013 Lyon & Turnbull auctioned Sir John Noble of Ardkinglas' Silver Collection.

The Goldsmids had intermarried into the wealthy Jewish Diamond merchant family of Eliason alias Nijmegen, a name that JMF had already spun into Moonfleet and into the wealthy East India merchant family of de Vries Rofe/Roff, paralleling key facts contained within his story. In 1812 Daniel Eliason alias Nijmegen was in possession of 'the most famous diamond in the world' the deep-blue Hope Diamond otherwise known as the Kings Jewel/Bijou de Roi or Blue de France having previously been owned by three Louis Kings of France. Between 1812 and 1830 the Hope Diamond was thought to have been in the hands of King George IV as part of his mixed collection of Crown Jewels before the Scot, Henry Philip Hope, a member of the Anglo-Dutch banking group took possession of it. Fatefully in 1749, The Hope, a Dutch Privateer/East Indiaman from Amsterdam probably named after the same family was wrecked off Chesil Beach near Moonfleet, like the Aurungzebe (ch.18). The Hope Diamond had been owned by a Russian Prince Ivan Kanitovski. In common with the Regent Diamond/Moonfleet Diamond whose secondary stones were owned by Tsar Peter the Great it was found in the famous Kollur mine in India and is said to be cursed. It is now in the Smithsonian Museum in

Washington DC. With his knowledge of this and his varied use of the word 'hope' in *Moonfleet* 31 times, it's possible JMF was hinting (if at all) to the Hope Diamond or the Hope shipwreck amongst his other clues. Perhaps he was actually pointing to Hope Square in Weymouth, completely unconnected, whose name is believed to derive from Hop, the Viking word for an inlet or opening or Ope, as in Church Ope Cove on Portland. (ch.8 Luckham/Nothe). Hope Square was recorded as Hope Huse in 1252, le/la Hope in 1364 and the Hope in 1617 (A.D.Mills). Whatever was in his mind the Hope/French Blue Diamond can be ruled out as the *Moonfleet* Diamond since it has no historic connection to the Mohun family and although JMF used the word 'blue' a large number of times in his story, had the Hope Diamond been his 'chosen model' he would surely have dropped the hint by referring to its defining blue colour, but he didn't. When bombarded with ultra-violet light the Hope Diamond glows fluorescent red.

Apart from being inspired by JMF's book and Moonfleet Manor's pleasant location and his nephew's latter serendipitous marriage into the family of the previous owner of the Hope Diamond one wonders if there was anything else which motivated Sir Saxton and Celia Noble to move there. With his Jewish sounding forenames, one could speculate for instance that Sir Saxton's twice father-in-law Samuel Abraham Walker-Waters, although Irish, may have had some distant Diamond connections, but of course there is no evidence for that (Sir Saxton's brothers George & John Noble married sisters Ethel and Amie Walker-Waters). The passage of time and the internet will no doubt reveal more dormant but fascinating *Moonfleet* gems.

The significance of Holy Trinity New Church in Fleet to the *Moonfleet* story has for years been somewhat overlooked. However, many interesting clues connected directly to JMF's most famous novel can be found both inside and outside this characteristic gothic pile. Built by Rev. George Gould, it was consecrated on 25 August 1829 by the Lord Bishop of Bristol, the Right Rev. Robert Gray. As a point of interest during the ongoing pandemic it is worth noting that William Pitt the Younger was responsible for wrongly supporting the jealous Edward Jenner as the discoverer of the Cowpox vaccine against smallpox. In fact, the discovery was made some twenty years earlier, in 1774 by local farmer Benjamin Jesty who, with his experimental guinea pig wife, is buried in the churchyard of Worth Matravers, Dorset.

† **List of Vicars of Moonfleet, 1552 to present †**

1552 W. MANDEFLYDE **1556** THOMAS LANE
1560 JOHN WELSHE **1580** THOMAS MILDNEY
1663 JOHN TUCKER B.A.Oxon **1680** WILLIAM OLDIS B.A Oxon **1726** JOSEPH CASE **1731** THOMAS FRANKLIN
1762 EDWARD FALCONER M.A Oxon **1802** GEORGE GOULD M.A Oxon **1829** **New Church Consecrated**
1841 JONATHAN HENRY LOVETT CAMERON M.A Cantab
1847 WILLIAM PROVIS TRELWAY WICKHAM M.A Oxon
1849 HENRY JOHN URQUHART M.A Oxon **1857** JOHN DUPREE ADDISON M.A Oxon **1863** CHARLES BARING CONEY

M.A Cantab (**1876** GEORGE GOODEN)? **1869** FREDERICK FISHER **1872** GILBERT ADELOHUS RIDEOUT B.A Oxon
1880 NICHOLAS LOWER GEDGE **1883** CLEMENT HAMMOND GOSSET M.A Cantab **1886** FRANCIS BRIGGS SOWTER M.A Cantab **1890** WILLIAM HERBER STENT **1892** JOHN HARRINGTON TWINING M.A Dun Mc **1894** THOMAS MORGAN BEN SALTER M.A. Oxon **1900** CYRIL EDWIN KINDERSLEY M.A Cantab **1901** REGINALD FRANCIS WILSON M.A. Oxon **1904** JOHN PADMORE NOBLE M.A Cantab **1905** CECIL LEAVERS QUIBELL M.A Oxon **1927** ALBERT FERDINAND GABRIEL CHRISTIE M.A Oxon **1949** THEODOR CARL CRAVEN BROCHNER M.A Cantab **1962** OSMOND NEWNHAM **1995** NEIL POLLOCK **2001** RICHARD PRESS

A.G. Gaydon

LORD GAINFORD

(George Pease) died aged 96 on 12th March. Those who attended the Society weekend in the North-East in July 2015, probably remember that he joined us for part of the time. His mother, Veronica, was a close friend of JMF.

Lord Gainford was educated at Eton and trained as an architect in Edinburgh. With his new wife, Daphne, a sculptor, he went to Canada in 1958 to help design a new town for an aluminium ore company. It included a harbour, mine, airstrip, schools, churches and houses. Two of his four children were born in Quebec, and the family returned to Scotland in 1962, where the other two were born. He was the County Planning Officer for Ross and Cromarty and then a Scottish Office Enquiry Reporter – a leading planning inspector, in English terms – until he retired in 1993. He inherited his title on the death of his elder brother, Joseph, in 2013, and now the 5th Lord Gainford is his eldest son, Adrian, 62, a Citroen DS specialist in Norfolk. A Quaker meeting of remembrance was held in Lord Gainford's house near Kinross, Perth.

**NATIONWIDE B.S. TREASURER'S TRUST
ACCOUNT HAS CLOSED**

After threatening this for over two years, Nationwide has pulled the plug on all Treasurers' Trust Accounts, "because we are not a Bank"! Well, they've been one for us since 1999. On 20th June, I withdrew our money. It is now very temporarily lodged in my own Nationwide B.S. A/C. I am presently engaged in trying to set up a NatWest 'Business' A/C. You wouldn't believe how many hoops I am trying to get through. It looks increasingly as if banks and building societies simply don't want to bother with tiny accounts. More details anon.

Best Wishes

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