

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
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CHARLES (CHARLIE) TOWNSEND COBBOLD

Apr 2013

His father, a relatively junior banker at the time, lost his first wife, albeit after the birth of a son and a daughter, only 6 years into the marriage. He married a second time and within 18 months this wife and their son were dead too. Marriage and parenthood were not going well.

Charles Cobbold, or Charlie as he was always known, was the first child of his father's third marriage. He was a fine strong baby with a healthy mother and only 6 years later a fine strong sister joined him. Things were much better. Charlie did well at Bradfield and won himself a place at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge where he took up rowing, and won his oar in the 2nd May Boat in 1913; that oar later being donated to the Caius Boat Club.



Motivated, as many young men were, by that deep sense of injustice, Charlie volunteered immediately after the outbreak of war. He served 11 months as a Trooper with the Hampshire Carabiniers Yeomanry before being commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery (RFA) in August 1915 and being posted to the front line as an Officer of 32nd Brigade on November 18th.

Some of his letters 'home' have survived and they tell of a man who, despite being responsible for medium calibre guns and howitzers in the front line, and enduring wet, rat infested quarters, managed to care for his charger, bolster his men's morale and remain deeply attached to his elder sister and her family.

Imagine the horror at home when the dreaded news arrived that he had been killed on the front line on 3rd October 1916. The son and heir of a happy marriage destroyed in an instant. A father's dream shattered! His Commanding Officer



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wrote of him: 'We all liked him so much. He had an extraordinary disregard of danger, and always set an excellent example to the men, with whom he was very popular. His last words to his men were, "Don't take any notice of the shells, they're only strays and not meant for you."

Charlie is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial in France, at St. John's Church, Rownham and in the Chapel at Caius College, Cambridge.

Anthony Cobbold
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