

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg
Nicholas Cobbold OBE

COL. RALPH PATTESON COBBOLD DSO (1869–1965) Aug 2012

It is doubtful whether such an adventure-packed life could be recorded in two books, let alone one. It is not the Trust's intention to try but we are avid collectors of all things related to his quite extraordinary life. Amongst many other items we hold his book *Innermost Asia* (1900) and a copy of his *Papers* housed in the Yale University Library. Anecdotal evidence suggests a colourful lifestyle which earned him the sobriquet 'Wicked Ralph' and tinges we straight-laced males with not a little touch of jealousy!

A page from *The Graphic* dated 8th April 1899 was acquired recently and gives us a taste of his experiences.

"Mr R P Cobbold is an English traveller who has just returned from a thirteen month journey in the Pamirs, during which he was arrested and detained for three weeks by the Russians, and was finally escorted by Cossacks across the Chinese frontier. Mr Cobbold visited several districts never before explored by Englishmen, and brings back with him, in addition to a fine photographic collection, much valuable geographical and political data.



It was while shooting in the Central provinces of India that he decided to go on an expedition to the Pamirs, and, visiting Kashgar and Yarkand, to make on the spot an inquiry into the condition of British trade in Chinese Turkestan. Mr Cobbold was arrested on the Bokharan frontier and detained until the commandant of the Pamirs district personally visited him. Finally he was given the option of remaining where he was, pending receipt of instructions from Marghilan or being escorted to the nearest point on the Chinese frontier. Preferring this to another month's delay he consented, and after three weeks' detention left with an escort of four Cossacks, and was released without a word of explanation.

Throughout the whole of Russian Turkestan, the tribesmen firmly believe in a coming conflict between the Power advancing from the south and the one marching from the north. This was a matter of common talk, and the natives always expressed the hope that one day they would come under British rule. In Chinese Turkestan, too, Mr Cobbold said the Russians were extremely active. He heard a good deal of the Sarikol question while he was in the province.

The Russian Consul at Kashgar discussed the question with him quite openly and said the British Government would not consider it worth while to protest, and added that in a short time the whole of Chinese Turkestan would be absorbed by Russia. 'Whatever', said Mr Cobbold in reply to questions, 'may be the views of the Imperial Government of St Petersburg, no traveller in these regions can ignore

the fact that the Russian officials in Central Asia would eagerly welcome orders for an advance'."

Ralph Patteson Cobbold assumed the additional name and arms of Sawle by Royal Licence in 1932. He is #316 on the family tree.