

Three Sons

February 2023

I have three sons and the thought of losing two of them is beyond horrendous; the agony experienced and the gaping void unfilled are unimaginable. But that is exactly what happened to **Rev. Robert Russell Cobbold (1853-1925)** #232 in WWI. He had married **Mary Elizabeth Wanklyn (1864-1936)** #233 whose cousin was to win a submariner's VC in WWII.

Being the eldest son of a man of the cloth it is not surprising that **Robert Henry Wanklyn Cobbold (1892-1915)** #375 won a classical scholarship to St. John's College, Cambridge having started his education at King's College Choir School and progressed with a foundation scholarship at Marlborough where he was head boy. We have a photograph of him in a group, The Eagles in 1914 whilst at St John's. (The Eagles started as a cricket club at St. John's but later became The Hawks Club, a non-collegiate internationally known club for Blues and Half Blues. It is worth observing that 60% of undergraduates are wearing waistcoats and there is not a beard in sight!). Later that year he was commissioned into the Rifle Brigade and was serving with the 2nd battalion when he was killed on 9th September 1915. In a letter to his parents **Major General Sir Havelock Hudson**, commanding 8th Division said "Your son had done excellent work whilst serving this division, and was a most promising officer. You have every reason to be proud of his gallantry and devotion to duty." He is buried in Y Farm Military Cemetery, Boisgrenier.

His younger brother **Edgar Francis Wanklyn Cobbold (1895-1916)** #378, who also went to Marlborough (a school which was founded to educate the sons of Clergy) was commissioned into the Cheshire Regiment in 1914 but transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in 1915, only a couple of years after its formation but before it became the Royal Air Force. He joined No. 16 Squadron which was based at an airfield in La Gorgue in France and which was flying very fragile pre-war planes. The history of No. 16 Squadron lists the loss of one of its aircraft on 12th January 1916 and this was certainly the date of Edgar's death which probably occurred in a French Farman Shorthorn MF 11 aircraft.

The story of No. 16 and other squadrons using La Gorgue airfield is comprehensively told by **Serge Comini** in his book "Abbaye Notre-Dame de Beaupré-sur-la-Lys, des Hommes sur les Terres...et le chemin des Dames", a copy of which is in the Trust library. The airfield was on the site of an abbey founded 1221 and archeological work has revealed much history. We were pleased to learn recently that the relics of the abbey and the history of the WWI

airfield are to be preserved officially in and by the township of La Georgue. Edgar is buried in the Cabaret-Rouge Military Cemetery.

The brothers are commemorated at Marlborough in their house and the Memorial Hall; in their father's parishes of Earls Barton and Hitcham and at St. Nicholas, Salthouse, probably because this is where they took their summer holiday as children. Edgar is also commemorated on the RFC Memorial at the Army Museum of Flying at Middle Wallop in Hampshire. That Robert was a classical scholar probably explains the rather 'larger than life' dedication written by **John Bain** at Marlborough:

IN MEMORY OF CAPTAIN R H W COBBOLD AND LIEUT. E F W COBBOLD. KILLED IN ACTION

In ran the boys, as purred a jewelled dame, / (Long e'er these days of guns) / "Where be thy jewels?" Quick the answer came, / "Thou see'st them there, my sons."

How fared thy jewels, Lady? "My sweet twain, / Tiberius and his brother, / Fought the good fight, and in the fray were slain - / Right proud am I, their mother."

O English mother, be Cornelia's pride / Thine, in thy stricken home! / For Freedom and for England thy sons died, / For Freedom hers and Rome.

For those who are struggling, as I did; **Tiberius** was Roman Emperor (42BC – 37AD). He expanded the Roman Empire into Germany. His brother was **Nero Claudius Drusus** (38BC – 9BC). **Cornelia** was mother to 12 children and after her husband died, she turned down the hand of **King Ptolemy VIII** to educate her boys

Anthony Cobbold.