

Moving the Cobbold Archive

July 2025

In the summer of 2021 The Cobbold Family History Trust Archive moved from its original home at Anthony Cobbold's home in Ivybridge, Devon, to Knebworth House in Hertfordshire. This unique collection of family history and memorabilia was packed into the modern plastic equivalent of tea trunks and transported to its new home on the borders of East Anglia, where the Cobbold family put down roots back in medieval times.

"I was concerned there wouldn't be anything left in Anthony's house", says Henry Cobbold, 3rd Baron Cobbold, current resident of Knebworth House, who has taken on the challenge of hosting and managing the charity and its precious collection. "Every room was lined with shelves, filing cabinets, pictures, paintings, objects of ephemera, every possible keepsake associated with the Cobbold family. It was an Aladdin's Cave of family history treasures. The collection surrounded us and I barely got the sense of any everyday household items. There must have been a kitchen sink that didn't come to Knebworth, as I recall Jill, the Knebworth House Archivist, and I were treated to a very warm welcome lunch after our long drive from Hertfordshire. We were bowled over by the collection and felt privileged to be becoming its new custodians."

The collection arrived at Knebworth in two deliveries: the first lorry load consisting of 9 filing cabinets and about 90 box files; and the second bringing another 6 filing cabinets, 85 box files, 30 plastic trunks, approximately 600 books and a collection of exhibition equipment. Every item had been diligently labelled with who it related to, and a reference to that person's family tree number.

Kevin, the Trust's first Knebworth Keeper, supervised and carried out much of the unloading, up a steep set of stairs into a mezzanine above a former squash/racquets court, that is home to various Knebworth House exhibitions. This tall, open, hipped-roof space has become the home of the Cobbold Family History Trust and its collection. There was not room for the collection in the Knebworth House Archive itself, as this currently remains lodged in a tight office space pending a new purpose-built facility that is planned for the future.

The Knebworth House Archive did, however, provide a new cataloguing system - MODES - into which over 1600 items in the CFHT collection have since been fully catalogued, with many more listed. A digitisation project is also underway to scan the papers in the collection. Kevin has been joined in the team by Knebworth House's Education Officer, Katherine - who has taken over as Keeper - and local volunteer Lorna. They meet in the Cobbold Archive every Tuesday to further catalogue, interpret, and grow this remarkable resource, and to answer your enquiries.

All hail the vision of Anthony Cobbold in creating the Trust, and great thanks to the Trust's supporters who made this move to a permanent home possible.