

# The COBBOLD Family History Trust

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## DR THOMAS SPENCER COBBOLD MD FRS FLS (1828-1886)

The arrival on my desk recently, thanks to my daughter-in-law, of a copy of Thomas Spencer Cobbold's obituary from the BMJ of 27<sup>th</sup> March 1886 reminded me of what an extraordinarily accomplished man he was. The obituary is rather too 'Victorian' in style for today's reader so I reproduce below his entry in the 2000 edition of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography by G T Brettany, revised by Peter Osborne.

**Cobbold, Thomas Spencer (1828-1886)**, helminthologist, was born at Ipswich on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1828, the third son of the Revd Richard Cobbold (1797-1877), novelist, and his wife, Mary Anne Waller (*bap.* 1801, d. 1876). He was educated at Charterhouse School, and in 1844 became a pupil of J.Green Crosse, surgeon to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. In 1847 he went to Edinburgh University, where he was assistant to professors Hughes Bennett and Goodsir; he graduated in medicine (as a gold medallist) in 1851.



After a short visit to Paris Cobbold returned to Edinburgh, where he became curator of the anatomical museum. While in post, in 1854 he attended the lectures of Edward Forbes, which further aroused his interest in natural history and geology. In 1857 he moved to London where he was appointed lecturer on botany at St Mary's Hospital. In 1861 he obtained a similar post at the Midd

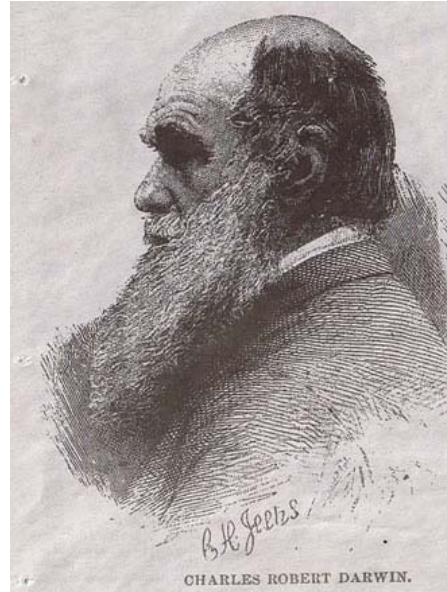
The following year financial considerations pushed Cobbold into medical practice in London but by specializing as a consultant on cases where the presence of internal parasites was suspected he continued to build his reputation in helminthology. In 1868 he was, through Sir Roderick Murchison's influence, appointed Swiney lecturer on Geology at the British Museum. His lectures proved popular and achieved a total cumulative audience of some 15,000 over the course of his five-year appointment. In 1873 he received an appointment as professor of botany at the Royal Veterinary College, which shortly afterwards instituted a special professorship of helminthology for him.

Cobbold's work, which was original and painstaking, successfully elucidated many obscure features in the history of animal parasites. His principal books included *Entozoa: an Introduction to the Study of Helminthology, with Reference more Particularly to the Internal Parasites of Man* (1864; supp.1869), *The Internal Parasites of our Domesticated Animals* (1873), *Tapeworms* (1866; 4<sup>th</sup> edn, 1883), and *Parasites of Meat and Prepared Flesh Food* (1884). He was also a contributor to numerous encyclopaedias and dictionaries, and to journals including the *Annals of Natural History*, the *Journal and Transactions* of the Linnean Society (of which he was a fellow), the Zoological Society's *Proceedings and Transaction*, and the *Intellectual Observer*.

Cobbold died of heart disease on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1886 at his home, 74 Portsdown Road, Paddington, London. He was survived by his wife, about whom nothing is known, and at least one son. In 1887 they offered to institute a gold medal in his memory at the Linnean Society, but the conditions were too restrictive and the society declined.

The Trust has copies of most of his publications and is able to expand somewhat on his life and family.

He seems to have been in great demand professionally for he was also Vice President of the Birmingham Natural History & Microscopical Society; Corresponding Member of the Academy of Science at Philadelphia and the Royal Agricultural Academy in Turin; Senior President of the Royal Medical Society, 1851-52 and Vice President of the Physiological Society. He was thought to be a clear if dogmatic lecturer who was widely admired for taking on a difficult and unattractive subject which required greater devotion and laborious attention for the solution of its abstruse and difficult problems than the majority would have been prepared to give. His knowledge was appreciated by Charles Darwin who consulted him in respect of parasitic worms and their exchange of letters, dated 1869 is held by Cambridge University.



Described as a kind and affectionate man he made and kept many friends. He was a popular after-dinner speaker and story has it that he sometimes, literally, sang for his supper in a fine high pure alto voice. He was married at the age of 24 by his eldest brother (Rev. Richard Wilkie Waller Cobbold, 1823-1884) to Frances Amys (1830-1906) daughter of John Amys who sadly died the year before his daughter's marriage.

They had 8 children together, 5 of whom died young or without issue. Mary Ann (1854-1903) married a doctor but they too had no children. The eldest child, Charles Spencer Waller (1852-1932) qualified MD at Würzburg in 1874 and MRCS in the same year and went on to be elected FRCP in 1885. He married and had 2 children both of whom also died without issue. Gertrude (1855-1936) married Noel Humphries, the Assistant Registrar General, who spent the greater part of his working life designing and developing the Census. They parented 5 children, 3 of whom went on to have families.