

# The COBBOLD Family History Trust

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## **PILGRIMAGE to MECCA by Lady Evelyn Cobbold**

Mayfair socialite, aristocratic owner of an estate in the Scottish Highlands, and accomplished deerstalker and angler, Lady Evelyn cut an elegant if eccentric figure on her frequent travels in the Arab world. In 1933, at the age of 65, she became the first British-born Muslim woman to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Yet the story of her adoption of Islam, her contribution to the literature of the Hajj, and her place as a female traveller have been inexplicably overlooked until now

It was a childhood of winters spent in North Africa and a chance meeting with the Pope that led her to declare that she had always been “unconsciously a little Moslem at heart” and that Islam was “the religion of common sense”. Like her notorious great-aunt Lady Jane Digby, Lady Evelyn sought solace for an unhappy marriage in her adventures in the lands of Islam. But it was a determination to maintain her faith on her own terms, rather than a taste for romance, that drew her to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

She showed herself to be a strong-minded woman, unfettered by the constraints of class and domestic life. Her many connections included T.E.Lawrence and the leading British Muslims H.St J.B. Philby and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. As an Arabic-speaker who felt at home in Muslim society, she gives a fascinating account of her Arabian journey in *Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1934). As much a record of an interior experience of faith as a conventional travelogue, the book is as remarkable for its sympathy and vividness as for its promotion of Islam. And it provides the first description by an English writer of the life of the women’s quarters of the households in which she stayed.



*Lady Evelyn COBBOLD (1876 – 1963)*