

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SGT. COBBOLD

January 2016

The story of Sgt. Sydney George Cobbold (1887-1916) #9999 on the family tree has recently been uncovered by a his grand niece, Sarah Cobbold assisted by Dr. James Wearn of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew and Mark Norris, the Education Manager at Newquay Zoo. The reason for this apparently unlikely combination of researchers will become apparent as we go along.

Sydney was born in the little Suffolk village of Woolpit, with which the Cobbold family had a long clerical connection many years previously, on 12th September 1887. He was one of eight children and first showed an interest in gardening by going to work for the local GP at the age of 13. In December 1895, now 18 he is working for C C Sibthorp in the grounds of his stately home, Sudbrooke Holme in Lincolnshire and by 1908 he has secured a job at Kew on the strength of glowing references from his previous employers who described him as 'a most respectable young man'. From here, having passed all his exams at the leading botanical institution in the country he went on to Worsley Hall Gardens, Moorfield and finally Capesthorpe Hall in Cheshire.



Sydney George Cobbold

Moved by his highly developed sense of duty Sydney enlisted in June 1915, was in France by December and had been promoted Acting Sergeant by August the following year. How he survived September with 8th Rifle Brigade, through hails of bullets, ‘friendly’ gas and horrendous casualties all around him is a mystery. His luck did not hold. The dreaded letter from his CO claimed him as one of his very best soldiers who knew no fear and was liked by all. His death had been instantaneous and he had known no pain. He and fellow Riflemen Farr, Kittle and Gordon and Sgt Aspden MM died together on 3rd October. Sydney lies among comrades at Le Fermont Cemetery beneath a headstone engraved at his father’s request ‘His *Country called – He Answered*’.



Le Fermont Cemetery

Sydney is rightly remembered on the Woolpit War Memorial.

