

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

WHAT WOULD FELIX THINK TODAY?

September 2020

It is 125 years ago this year that Christchurch Mansion was given to the people of Ipswich by Felix Thornley Cobbold (1841-1909) #201 on the web family tree. Over the years the Friends of Christchurch Park have done much to enhance the Park for people's enjoyment and, being a lively and highly active group, it will do still more in the future. I was privileged to be invited to speak at the anniversary AGM but sadly under pandemic rules the AGM was cancelled so I provided a little article instead which we reproduce for you here. Somehow, I was persuaded to answer Ten Questions. To my dismay, as I am not much good at self-publicity, these were recorded on the back page of the newsletter, Anthony.



Christchurch Mansion

The portrait of Felix
Cobbold that hangs in
Christchurch Mansion.

125TH
Anniversary
1895 - 2020

The Cobbold Gift to the People of Ipswich

by Anthony Cobbold

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Felix died in 1909 and in his will he left £20,000 to be used for buying art for Christchurch. In 2009 the Museum Service organised a trail around the Mansion rooms which identified 100 works of art which had been acquired either in whole or in part from the Felix Cobbold legacy.

The Cobbold's association with Christchurch probably started in 1832 when John Wilkinson Cobbold's daughter, Kate, married the Reverend Charles William Fonnereau.

In accordance with tradition they were married at the Cobbold's church, St. Clement's. Kate was an accomplished artist whose work was exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Her portrait of her husband hangs in the Mansion to this day. It was Kate's grandson, William Neale Fonnereau who inherited the Mansion in 1890 and had to put the whole estate up for sale in 1892 and it was bought by a property syndicate in 1894 for housing.

Some peripheral land (Bolton Lane and Park Road) was sold off immediately but there was great concern in Ipswich at the potential loss of this wonderful open space, so the property syndicate offered the whole estate to the Borough for £50,000.

This was a lot of money and the Borough decided to seek the opinion of the people, but they voted against the deal. This was the moment, in 1895, when Felix Thornley Cobbold, who was probably a member of the syndicate, stepped in and offered to buy the Mansion and donate it, if the Borough would buy the Park, for which the asking price was £15,000. The Borough agreed and

Christchurch Park and Mansion became the property of Ipswich with only the condition that the main structure of the house be preserved and that it be used as an Art Gallery or Museum.

The Borough's gratitude to Felix was shown by his being made Mayor for Queen Victoria's Jubilee year in 1896/7 despite his failing to meet the prior requirement that the Mayor be chosen from the body of Aldermen. The people's appreciation was shown by their subscription to the Hon. John Collier portrait which hangs in the Great Hall.

Felix died in 1909 and in his will he left £20,000 to be used for buying art for Christchurch. In 2009 the Museum Service organised a trail around the Mansion rooms which identified 100 works of art which had been acquired either in whole or in part from the Felix Cobbold legacy. The Cobbold family invited guests and 100 glasses were raised to toast Felix's generosity. More recently the family has donated to the Arboretum a Coast Redwood (2014/15) and a Cut-Leaf Beech (2015/16).

Felix's money was made mainly from the people of Suffolk in brewing and banking. It seems wholly appropriate that it should be returned whence it came, in effect with interest, as the Park and Mansion are an appreciating asset.

125th Anniversary Article

Ten Questions ... for Anthony Cobbold



1. What is your earliest memory of the park?

A peep through the gates in 1979 when I brought my elderly father on a nostalgic tour of Suffolk.

2. What is your favourite part of the park?

The Mayors' Walk because it commemorates 9 family members (5 Cobbolds and 4 others) who have served the Borough.

3. What park event is most memorable to you?

The unveiling of Felix Cobbold's blue plaque on the Reg Driver Centre, 8th April, 2011.

4. What is the biggest challenge you feel the park has faced in the past?

Development and neglect.

5. And what challenges do you see the park – or parks in general – facing in the future?

Lack of necessary funding due to misallocation of resources by Government.

6. What do you think Felix Cobbold would think of the park today?

He would be absolutely delighted.

7. What is your favourite film?

Tawny Pipit, 1944! Aged 9, I loved it so much I saw it three times round for 6d (as one could in those days). A beguiling wartime romance centred around a rare pair of nesting Tawny Pipits. Sheer English delight!

8. If you could meet anyone in the world – dead or alive – who would it be?

'Big John' Cobbold (1746–1835), 3rd generation brewer and Felix's great grandfather who had 22 children!

9. If you could change one thing in the park what would it be?

Parking.

10. What three words best describe yourself?

Obsessed Family Historian.



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10 Questions