

Preface

Norman's Autobiography has literally survived fire and flood. It was lodged in the library of the Norman family home at Bromley Common, the Rookery, the house where Norman was born in 1793, where he lived, and where he died in 1882. About sixty years later the house was requisitioned by the government, and taken over by the Royal Air Force for use as a fighter control centre. Enormous damage was done to the house, in order to create a vast operations room, damage which may well have made the house more vulnerable to fire. The RAF was still in possession of the house when it caught fire, and was burned down. The fire brigade, attempting to control the blaze, and aware that books can go on smouldering for weeks, raked the contents of the library out on to the lawn. When the Rookery was abandoned, and the Norman family moved to East Farleigh, the Autobiography was simply gathered up with other books and moved to the new home. There it remained, apparently unrecognised, until the 1960s.

In the 1960s I was editing the Correspondence of Lord Overstone, the papers of Norman's close friend and counsellor, Samuel Jones Loyd, which I had discovered at Lockinge in Berkshire while working on the Scottish economist J.R. McCulloch. A central thread in the Overstone Correspondence was the exchange of letters with George Warde Norman. I approached General Charles Wake Norman, at that time the head of the family, to enquire about the Norman papers, since these were clearly of considerable relevance to my work on Overstone. He kindly invited me to West Farleigh, and arranged to take me to Maidstone and introduce me to Dr Felix Hull, then the Kent County Archivist. However, before we left West Farleigh for Maidstone, I was shown the library there, and I immediately spotted a book which was not

a normal book. I had come across such volumes in the library at Lockinge, though I was certainly not conscious of looking for anything similar at West Farleigh. On examination the 'book' turned out to be the manuscript Autobiography of George Warde Norman.

General Norman very kindly allowed me to take the volume back to Queen's University, Belfast, where I was then working, to use in editing the Overstone Correspondence, for which indeed I found it most helpful. It was, after the fire and the fire brigade, clearly far too fragile to photocopy, and Queen's University generously provided funds to enable a typewritten copy to be made instead. But it would have been quite unreasonable to expect any secretary to cope with Norman's handwriting, deciphering of which required in any case some specialist knowledge. So I settled down with a Dictaphone, put the whole Autobiography on to tape, and a typist then produced a complete transcript of the work.

The transcript was necessarily imperfect, though this did not matter much to me, as I had managed to read all the bits that related to editorial work on Overstone's Correspondence, aided by the inside knowledge provided by the Correspondence itself. However Bromley Public Library subsequently asked for a copy, and in this imperfect form the Autobiography has become a source drawn upon by scholars in more than four decades. It was this typescript which provided our starting point in the preparation of the present edition.

But this was only the starting point. It was clearly not desirable that such an imperfect reproduction of Norman's words should be the last word. The present edition, though it may well still contain inaccuracies, and still contains a few words about which we are uncertain, is certainly vastly different. It is probably as accurate as it is humanly possible to make it, and we have provided it with detailed editorial information, in order to bring Norman's world to life.

To provide the editorial material for Norman's Autobiography has been a very demanding undertaking. We have of course drawn on a huge range of published sources, both printed and electronic, although we have found that such sources need to be used with considerable care. Even the august *Dictionary of National Biography* is not completely reliable, and one example

of this is indicated in the notes. In addition, dates of birth and death tend not to be completely consistent between different genealogical sources, and on one occasion a family which appeared to have died out according to one source was found, in another, to be flourishing.

The difficulties in editing a nineteenth century autobiography are extreme, even when compared with editing nineteenth century correspondence, of which one of us has first hand experience. The multiplication of names and places, the extraordinary range of references, the inevitability of elements of faulty recall, and the vagueness of some allusions, all combine to make work on almost every page extremely challenging. Indeed it is noteworthy that the majestic Toronto edition of the works and correspondence of John Stuart Mill began with a version of Mill's famous *Autobiography* which lacks even the briefest biographical footnotes explaining the allusions and references in the text.¹ Given that Norman's circle of acquaintances, and the spheres in which he moved, were both arguably much wider than those of Mill, and much less accessibly documented, this gives some indication of the magnitude of the task which we faced in editing Norman's *Autobiography*.

We have however been enormously helped by many individuals, especially perhaps some at local level, who have not only provided reliable information, often from parish records and church memorials, but who have managed to solve what were for us very difficult problems of identification. For Norman's text is littered with references to individuals who do not appear in works of reference, and who can only be identified by those with very specialist, and often highly localised, knowledge. In addition, given both Norman's handwriting and the vicissitudes of the manuscript since he wrote the *Autobiography*, it has often only been the result of painstaking research that has enabled us to identify a name at all.

Without the help of many individuals, such an enterprise could never have been brought to fruition. First and foremost we must thank Canon W.B. Norman for his help and encouragement at every stage. In particular

¹The references are confined to identifying literary allusions by Mill, and textual variants, with occasional names supplied for those to whom Mill alludes by description, notably his wife.

he arranged for the manuscript of the Autobiography, now sadly broken up at Maidstone for photographic purposes, to be loaned to me for the duration of the work, after we had experienced difficulties of liaison with the Centre for Kentish Studies at County Hall, Maidstone. This has proved invaluable, as it has been necessary to return again and again to the manuscript to check readings, especially as names proved elusive and we wondered whether we had misread them – as indeed we sometimes had. In addition Canon Norman has proved an invaluable source of help in dealing with aspects of family history which were unclear to us.

We must also thank Mr Stephen Norman, for making arrangements for a CD, containing digital photographs of the manuscript, and microfilm to be made available to us through the Centre for Kentish Studies. This has provided valuable back up, particularly when it has proved necessary to send, to those helping us, a copy of the manuscript, which cannot be photocopied in the normal way.

We are very grateful for financial support from the Houblon Norman fund of the Bank of England. We have also benefited greatly from the help provided by libraries. Apart from the facilities provided by Durham University Library, those courteously made available to us at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and the great National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, have been much appreciated.

It is a pleasure also to acknowledge the help of those who have responded to enquiries for information, often with great thoroughness. Some of these responses have been so crucial that we have acknowledged them separately in the notes. In particular we have appreciated the help of: Dennis Adams of Chislehurst and West Kent Cricket Club; Michael Anson of the Bank of England; Jonathan Armstrong of Kings Inns, Dublin; Simon Blundell, Reform Club; Peter Brears of Leeds; the Rev. Roger Bristow, Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Bromley Common; Forrest Capie of City University, London, and the Bank of England; Michael Carter, Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone; Wendy Cawthorne of the Geological Society; Joyce Cummings, Cheltenham Local History Society; Lena Emilsson; Miriam Farr at Surrey History Centre; Elizabeth Finn of the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maid-

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Record Office.

The portrait of George Warde Norman is reproduced on the front cover by kind permission of the Bank of England.

Finally, I have to offer heart-felt thanks to my wife Julia and my daughter Juliet, who have put up with an extraordinary degree of domestic disruption during what turned out to be a huge job, one far beyond what even the wildest imaginings could have foreseen, and some hint of which is given by the list of people whose help we have sought in completing the work. I promise never to do it again.

D.P. O'Brien