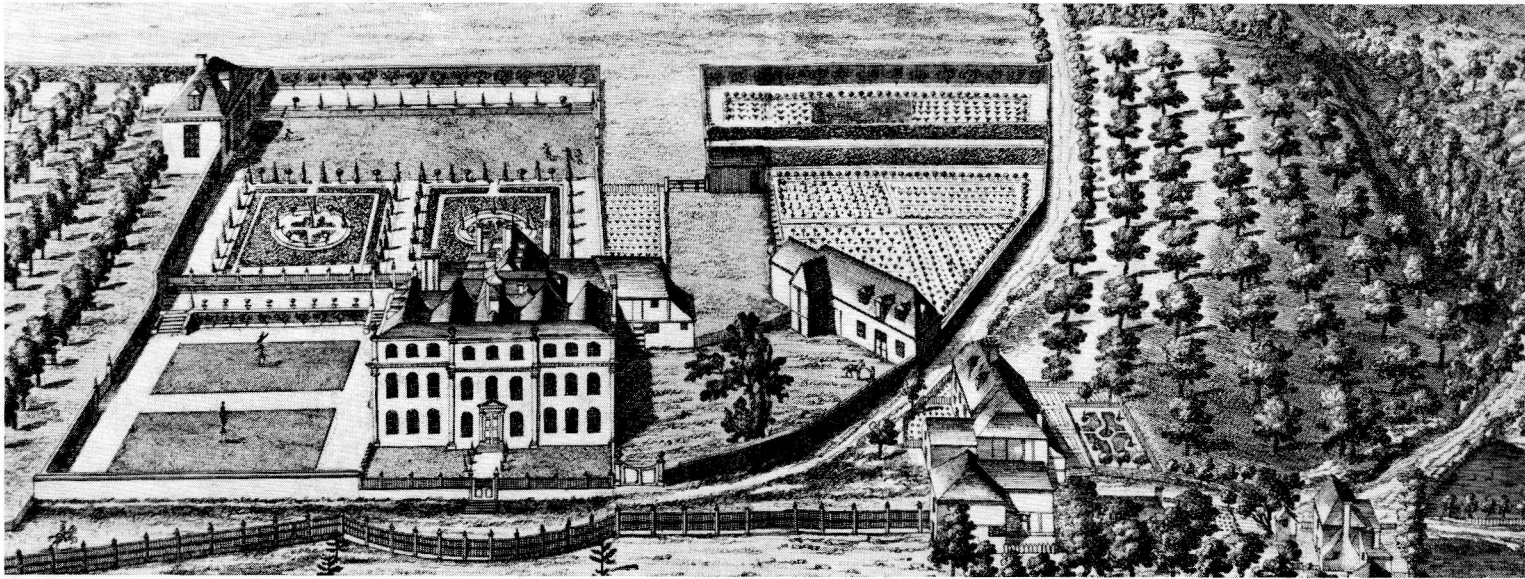


# WEST FARLEIGH HALL, KENT—II

THE HOME OF MAJOR-GENERAL AND MRS. CHARLES NORMAN

By CHRISTOPHER HUSSEY

*Built by John Brewer about 1719, the delightful garden retains its original layout. The contents of the house and many fittings come from a somewhat similar one at Bromley that was the home of the Norman family from the mid 18th century.*



1.—KIP'S PRINT SHOWING THE GARDEN AND SURROUNDINGS IN 1719

**K**IP'S view of 1719 (above), in which the delineation of the house was discussed last week, shows a garden layout that is virtually unchanged, allowing for topiary yews having become massive walls, and pleached hedges being replaced by broad herbaceous borders. But the Queen Anne house, besides lacking the top storey shown in the print, seems not to correspond with it at the back, which tails off into a muddle of low

roofs and additions screened now by trees from the terraced slope rising eastwards. And the north side (Fig. 16), though not so different from the front, is less carefully built and proportioned, with several blank windows and without the emphatic cornice, the scarlet apron-panels and cut lintels that enrich the façade.

There was always a lawn on that side, with a terrace rising where there is now a grass

bank along its south side. Above that, Kip showed parterres surrounded by yew pyramids and standard rose trees; one of these is the present rose garden (Fig. 2), consisting mostly of hybrid teas chosen for scent as well as colour. And beyond the north-east corner of its yew walls rises the roof of a garden pavilion. Kip shows this, or rather its predecessor, facing a bowling green southward and looking out north to a cherry orchard that is mentioned in



2.—THE ROSE GARDEN (NORTH-EAST OF THE HOUSE) AS IT IS TODAY. The roof of the garden house is visible over the yew hedge

several 18th-century wills and conveyances. The bowling green and the terrace overlooking it are still there (Fig. 4), though the terrace is now a delicious shrub-rose walk, and a huge old mulberry tree almost hides the garden house. Consequently the latter is seen best from the "orchard" (Fig. 3), the cherry trees having disappeared. So had the building itself, till replaced from Kip's plate by Sir Albert Richardson in 1961. It is mainly used now by the owners' grandchildren, and bowls are rarely played on the green, though General Norman is an exceptional bowler, in the sense of cricket, and has invented and built a machine for delivering the ball automatically, at adjustable pitch and velocity, for which a patent has been applied (Fig. 17). Since I first saw the prototype on the lawn at West Farleigh it has been made in steel, and can be towed by a car for use where required.

Mrs. Norman's rose walk contains some 70 varieties and is



3.—THE GARDEN HOUSE, SEEN FROM THE "ORCHARD". The house has been rebuilt in the form and position shown by Kip



4.—THE BOWLING GREEN, LOOKING TOWARDS THE GARDEN HOUSE. Shrub roses line the terrace above it

a spectacular sight in summer. Based on hybrid musks, there are big bushes of such old-timers as William Lobb, Celestial, and Tour de Malakoff, and a huge mound of Wedding Day, cuttings from which also climb high into neighbouring trees.

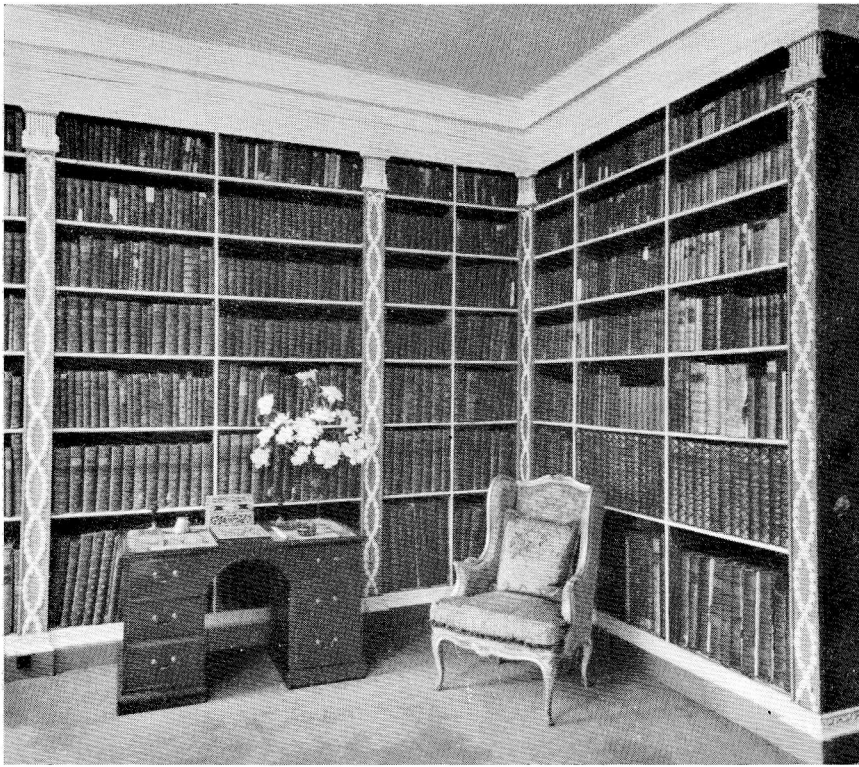
Kip shows a strip of paddock (or forestal), linked with the stable yard, between the pleasure garden on the north and the kitchen garden to the south. It now carries a group of bigish trees beneath which the axis of the bowling green continues as a broad grass walk between very deep borders. Looking south, as in Fig. 5, these are planted with blues, violets, and greys on the right, and hotter, sunset colours (softened by more greys) on the left, with a predominantly white section in the distance against the dark background of trees lining an old road. The luxuriance with which everything seems to grow certainly bears out the traditional reputation of this district as "the garden of Kent." While the survival of the early-18th-century layout is interesting in itself, the present planting in broad and well-defined masses is as effective as it is practical, and an object lesson in the value to a garden of good "bones," old though they may be.

General Norman acquired West Farleigh Hall in 1949. Until the war the family home

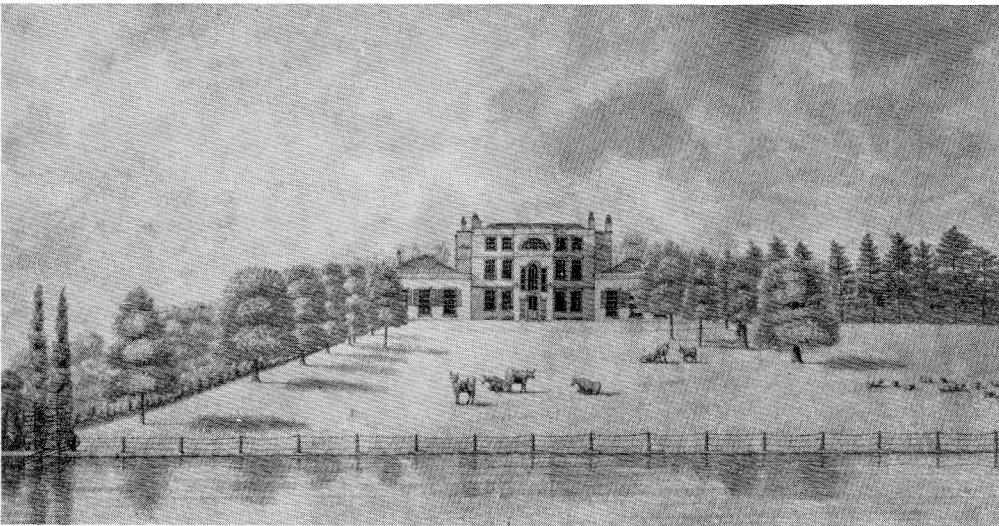


5.—WIDE HERBACEOUS BORDERS IN THE OLD KITCHEN GARDEN

had been for close on two centuries a handsome Georgian house at Bromley Common known as The Rookery (Fig. 8), the subsequent fate of which forms a sad little footnote to national history. In 1943 when a new control room was required by Fighter Command for the invasion of Normandy, The Rookery was selected for the purpose for a number of suburban residences, which their owners were ready to sell, because its internal dimensions appeared suited to the technical requirements without, it was explained, alterations which would have been apparent from the air. However, after the interior had been gutted, the staircase removed and the 18th-century plasterwork thrown out, it was found that the measurements had been wrongly made. So the Queen Anne back of the house was demolished and a large yellow brick extension added, with steel girders inserted to support the remains of the original building. Thus startlingly



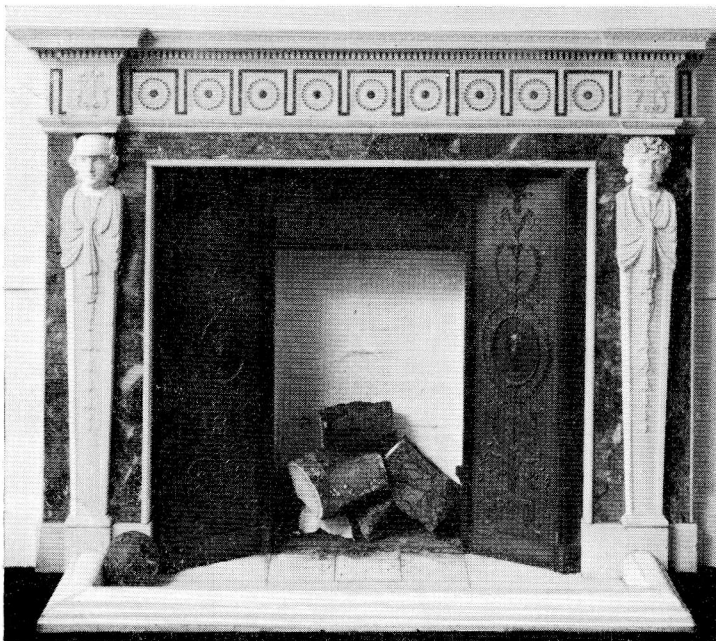
6 and 7.—LIBRARY SHELVING (ABOUT 1770), AND *BAS-RELIEF* PORTRAIT OF LOCKE, ORIGINALLY IN THE LIBRARY AT THE ROOKERY, BROMLEY COMMON



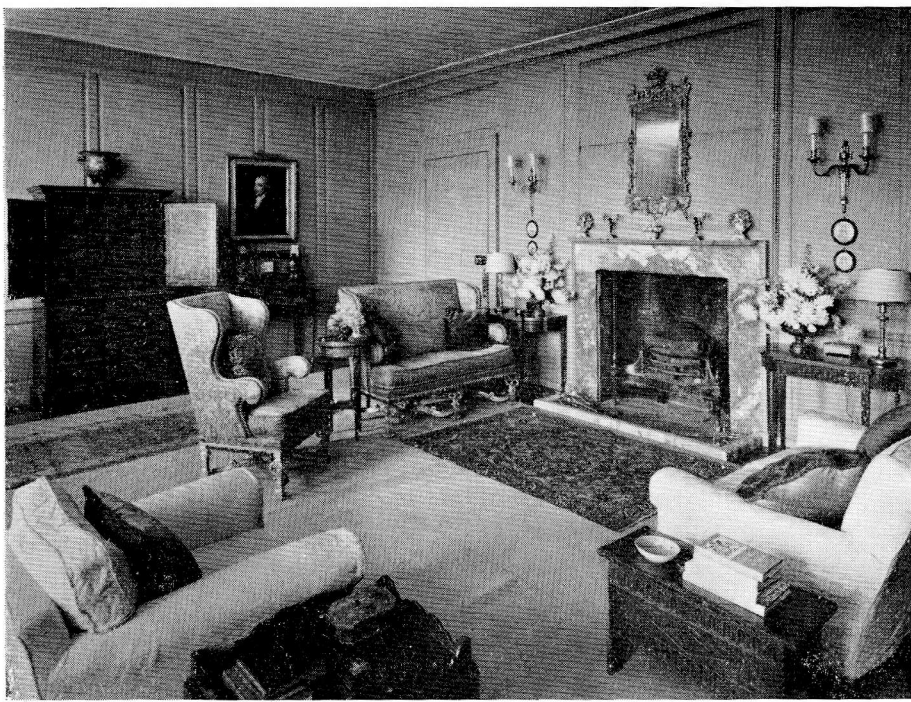
8.—THE ROOKERY IN 1825. It was the home of the Norman family between 1760 and 1939

transformed, the house made a vital contribution to victory. But representations made by the Georgian Group are believed to have been effective in preventing further destruction of the same kind elsewhere. So the fate of the old house may be said to have performed a second useful service. In 1946, while still in the occupation of the RAF, it was completely burnt out: a fortunate solution, in retrospect, of the problem it would have presented to the owner, though much regretted at the time.

James Norman had first rented The Rookery in 1755, buying it shortly afterwards; for until comparatively recently Bromley Common was attractive country—as indicated by the drawing (Fig. 10) of his son George, shooting there with Joseph Wolf the keeper (who died in 1809). But it was also within easy riding distance of the City. James Norman's flint-lock pistols and the blunderbuss carried by his servant on these journeys are preserved at West Farleigh. Since the 17th century the Normans had had various business interests in London which culminated



9.—CHIMNEYPIECE, ABOUT 1770, ORIGINALLY AT THE ROOKERY. 10.—*GEORGE NORMAN SHOOTING AT BROMLEY COMMON*: DRAWING BY W. HANCOCK, 1801



11.—WEST FARLEIGH HALL: THE DRAWING-ROOM. (Right) 12.—PORTRAIT MINIATURE, ONE OF FOUR DATED 1668-70, BY DAVID LOGGAN

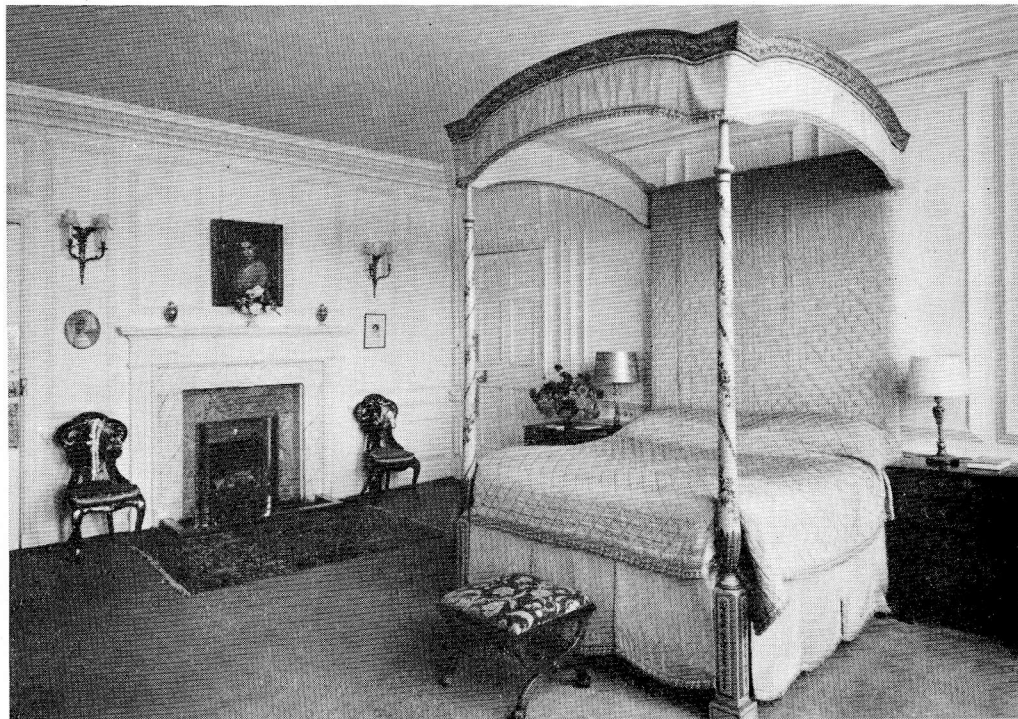
in Sir Montagu, later Lord, Norman's long Governorship of the Bank of England from 1920 to 1944.

The first of the family is given in the usual reference books as this James Norman of The Rookery. But a pedigree in the possession of General Norman takes it back two generations further to one Robert, of Rotherfield Greys, Oxfordshire, and his son Richard, "merchant of Blackfriars," died 1740. It also adds that James's second wife, Eleanor Innocent, whom he married in 1761, was niece and heiress of that William Emmett, eldest son of Wren's master bricklayer, Maurice Emmett, whose MS notes on architecture were referred to last week.

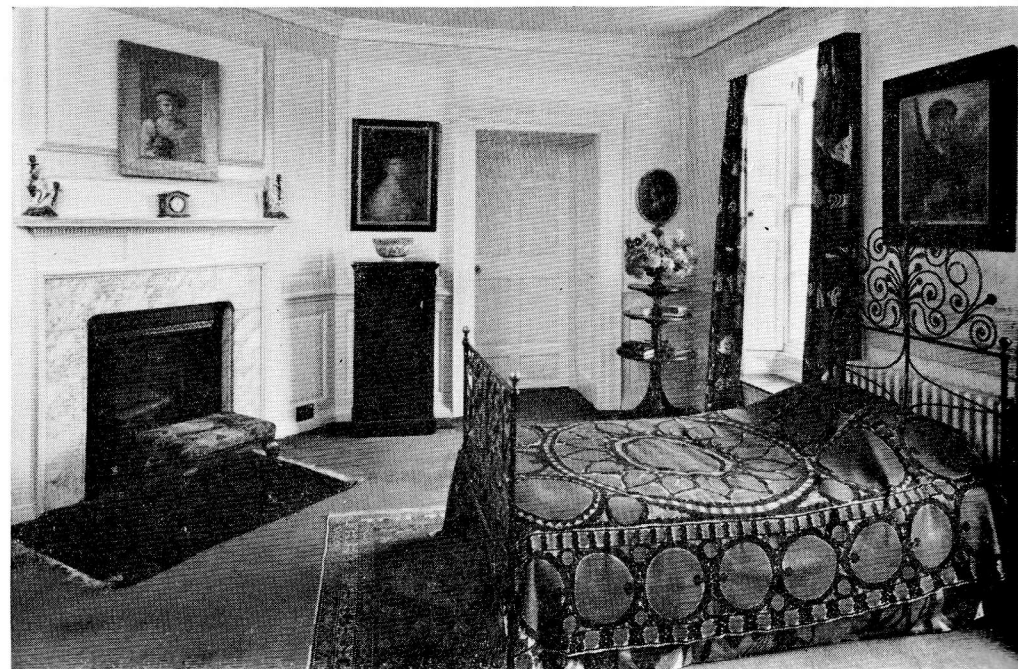
When looking up the Emmetts in the Wren Society volumes, I checked to see whether by any chance Richard Norman of Blackfriars might have had trade connections with the Board of Works, and found that Richard Norman and Partners supplied oak timber for the building of St. Paul's in 1690. The Norman and Emmett families could therefore have been known to one another for a considerable time. But William Emmett, who had rebuilt for himself a "large house" at Bromley about 1700, had died 20 years before James Norman moved there. Since the latter was already residing at The Rookery when he married Emmett's heiress, it cannot have been the house Emmett had built, as might seem likely.

His uncle, of the same name, had been a carver employed by Wren on several City churches. The younger William (1671-1736) was early given a clerkship in the Court of Exchequer, but retired in 1698 to take up art. He engraved portraits and, in 1702, two views of St. Paul's. His MS book (deposited by General Norman at Kent Archives Office) is virtually a learned treatise on ancient architecture, with analyses of the proportions and members of the classical orders, beautifully written in a clerky hand. His interest in the history of architecture is further evinced by the book's containing his copy of a letter offering to show to Lord Bolingbroke, William Benson and Dr. Clarke of All Soul's College a large drawing in his possession, which he believed to be a design by Inigo Jones for Whitehall Palace. Colin Campbell refers to this in *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1717) as lent to him by "William Emmett Esq. of Bromley."

The Rookery (Fig. 8) appears to have been a typical "Queen Anne" house to which single-storey wings were certainly added in



13.—A PRINCIPAL BEDROOM: A BED FROM THE ROOKERY. (Below) 14.—AN UNUSUAL JAPANNE BEDSTEAD

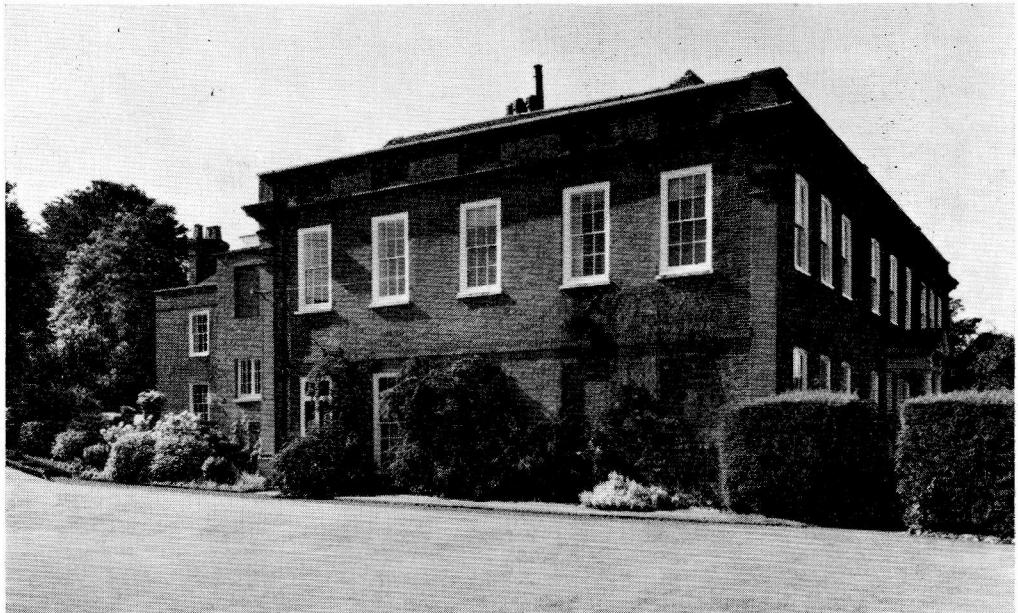




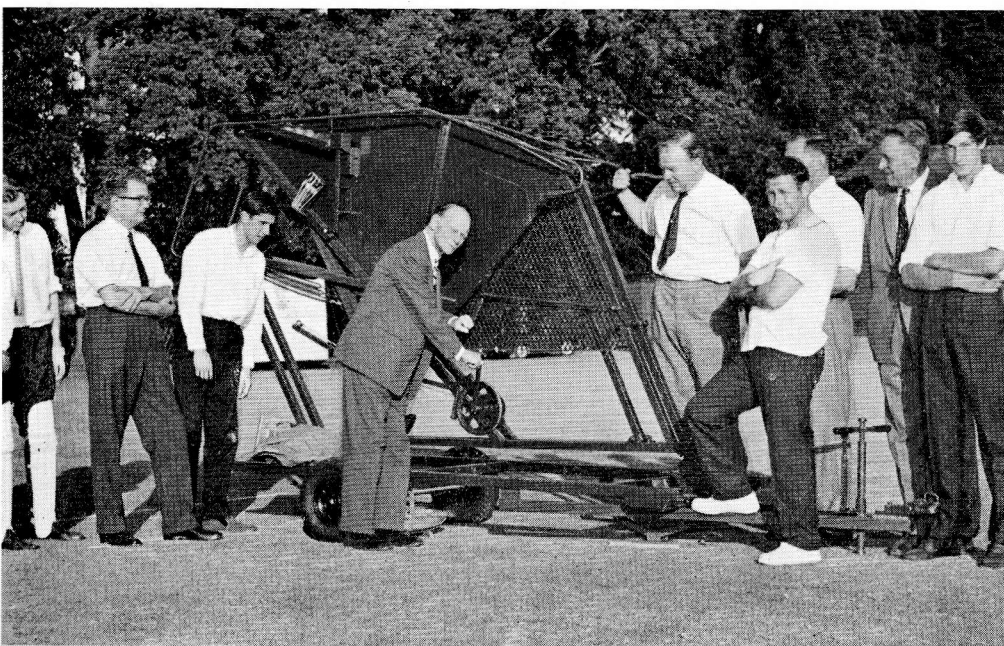
15.—THE DINING-ROOM AT THE WEST END OF THE HALL

1770–75 and the central bay remodelled. There are building accounts for alterations by James Norman in 1765 soon after it had come into his possession. Some of the decorative contents were salvaged and have been installed at West Farleigh. A handsome set of doors may be the “veneered mahogany doors” made in 1765 by Joseph Sale. But “a chimneypiece of veined marble with Siena tablet,” supplied by John Walsh for 31 gn., was destroyed in the fire. There is, however, a very fine one that survived (Fig. 9) which is 5 ft. high, having *verde antique* inlay and term figures of Mercury and Aphrodite. Typical of about 1775, it was in the library at The Rookery, a noble room of which some of the bookcases are seen in Fig. 6. There it was surmounted by the remarkable stucco relief portrait of John Locke that occupies the same position in the present library (Fig. 7). He is framed in a wreath of bays, with a chaplet of oak leaves above his head, all modelled free-hand. The style of the decoration is suggestive of the Wyatts.

This delightful little room, in the north side of the house, is reached from the hall through the drawing-room (Fig. 11) which had previously been the library. It then had



16.—THE EAST SIDE OF WEST FARLEIGH HALL



17.—GENERAL NORMAN'S BOWLING MACHINE

shelves projecting between the windows, and was lined from floor to ceiling with mahogany bookcases that looked from their late-18th-century character to have been installed by the bachelor, William Francis Perrin, suggesting that he was something of a studious recluse. The wainscoat, which appears always to have covered the blocked windows, is now painted that almost-green definable as “Eton blue.” On either side of the original chimneypiece hang four exquisite plumbago portrait-miniatures, unnamed but signed and dated by David Loggan between 1668 and 1670. To the right of the fine mulberry veneered tallboy in Fig. 11 is a portrait of the 3rd Duke of Dorset, ascribed to Gainsborough, balancing on the other side one by Romney of George Stone who had connections with Knole. His granddaughter married George Warde Norman of Bromley Common, the economist and director of the Bank of England (1793–1882).

From G. W. Norman's sons stem several branches of the family. The youngest, Frederick Henry, married the only daughter of Sir Mark Collet Bt., and thereby became possessed of St. Clere, Kemsing (COUNTRY LIFE March 1 and 8, 1962); he was father of “Monty” Norman, and of Mr. R. C. Norman (Chairman of the BBC 1935–39) of Moor Place, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire, (COUNTRY LIFE January 26 and February 2, 1956). The latter was father of Brig. Hugh Norman DSO, now of St. Clere, and of

Lt.-Col. Mark Norman, Treasurer of the National Trust and now of Moor Place. George Warde's eldest surviving son, Charles Loyd, of Bromley Common, married Julia Hay Cameron, daughter of the celebrated pioneer of portrait photography, and was grandfather of General Norman. The fledglings of The Rookery, one might say, flew well, and evinced a nice taste in nests.

The associations of these two very similar Kent houses add up to a domestic history of unusual interest, and they are combined in the present character of West Farleigh Hall. In the bedrooms of John Brewer's house one finds chimneypieces inserted by Perrin, the immigrant from Jamaica, as in Fig. 13, where the fine painted bedstead came from The Rookery. A pastel portrait of General Norman's father going out shooting, by Charlotte Wake, hangs above the iron bedstead (Fig. 14) that is unusual in being apparently designed in Indian taste, with flowers painted in silver on the black japan—a now very fashionable piece and contributing an Edwardian tail to the story that began with Thomas Brewer's heirlooms, “my great gilt cup and embroidered bed in the Great Chamber” of Smith's Hall.

Illustration 17: Kent Messenger.