

# Priscilla Norman

Born 1883. Suffragist and scooterist.

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## Contents

1. Introduction
2. The Women's Work Collection
3. The Autoped
4. The Gardens at Ramster Hall
5. The Many Lives of Ramster Hall

# 1. Introduction

*The following introduction was archived in 2024, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Wikipedia.*



*Bodnant Garden, North Wales. Now owned by the National Trust.*

Lady Norman was an active supporter of women's suffrage but not a militant. She held the post of Hon. Treasurer of the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union. Like her grandparents who started Bodnant Garden, Priscilla was a keen horticulturist. When she and her husband acquired Ramster Hall, Surrey she was instrumental in setting out rhododendrons and azaleas in the gardens. The gardens were opened to public view under the National Gardens Scheme from 1927 and continue to be opened under that scheme. Like her mother, she was active in the cause of women's suffrage through the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union and the Women's Liberal Federation. During the First World War, she ran a voluntary hospital in Wimereux, France with her husband. She was awarded the Mons Star for her services and created a CBE for her war services.

After the creation of the Imperial War Museum in 1917 she became chair of one of its subcommittees (the Women's Work Subcommittee) and was instrumental in ensuring that the contributions of women during the war were recorded and included in the museum's collections. Having an interest in mental health issues, she became the first woman to be appointed to the board of the Royal Earlswood Hospital in 1926. During the Second World War she was a driver for the Women's Voluntary Service in London.



## 2. The Women's Work Collection.

*Priscilla Norman played a major role in the establishment of the Women's Work Collection archive, created at the end of the First World War. It is described in this article by Dr Mary Wilkinson, which is archived with acknowledgement and thanks from the Archives Unbound website.*





In one of the more famous British recruiting posters of the First World War, a young girl perched in her father's lap asks: "What did you do in the Great War Daddy?" This image implied that all men would want to be able to tell their children about their military exploits during this extraordinary event. In many ways the Women's Work Collection, now being made accessible to so many, answers the question that a young child might have posed to his or her mother or aunt, neighbour or elder sister, "What did you do in the Great War?" The evidence assembled in this collection demonstrates that what women did in the Great War was nearly everything.

Those who compiled the documents that form the core of Women's Work Collection wanted to be able to tell future generations about women's impressive contribution. In addition to their enduring responsibilities in the home and for their families, millions of women in all participant nations also took on a diverse and significant range of roles and occupations for the duration of the war. By examining these letters and reports, pamphlets and newspaper clippings, researchers will be able to see the broad scope of women's activities and their growing acceptance by the wartime state.

When what would become the Imperial War Museum was established in 1917, the founders created a Women's Work Subcommittee under the auspices of Agnes Conway, and its members got to work in April 1917. Conway and Lady Priscilla Norman proved the most dedicated members of the committee, and both had performed war work that gave them some valuable insights into what women had done. Lady Norman had helped run a hospital in France in 1914, and Agnes Conway had been involved in aiding wounded Belgians. The overall committee took as its main objective the compilation of a thorough record of women's wartime activities. In practice, this meant collecting material from every identifiable women's organisation as well as from noteworthy individuals. In addition to assembling an archive of written matter, such as letters, reports and pamphlets, the committee sought photographs, badges, art work and other material emblems of women's wartime service.

For example, the Women's Work Subcommittee sponsored the first official British woman war artist in 1918, and that year Victoria Monkhouse began to sketch women who had taken on such previously all-male occupations as tram and bus drivers or window cleaners. Given the enormity of their task, the Women's



Work Subcommittee quickly created its own sub-sections on such issues as employment, relief work and medicine, and collectively they produced a voluminous and rich archive.

The bulk of what would become the Women's Work Collection was compiled by volunteer labour between 1917 and 1920, but the earlier war years were not neglected. Agnes Conway proved an invaluable aid to this effort. She wrote numerous letters to every organisation that especially for descriptions of what women had accomplished. As a result, the collection includes materials that reveal a great deal—although not everything—about what women did during the entire period between 1914 and 1920. Given that the organisers were working under the auspices of Great participation of British women. However, it would be a mistake to think that the collection could only tell us about them. It tells us an enormous amount about women in many of the participant nations and about the situation of women and men, soldiers and civilians in wartime society.



*An exhibition of women at war at the Imperial War Museum, 1924.*

The list of subject headings provides a glimpse of the widespread nature of the matter covered by the collection. These topics include those that focus on work done by, or on behalf of, a particular geographic region, ranging from Belgium to Serbia, Czechoslovakia to the United States. The most extensive heading covers "Employment" with a separate listing for "Munitions," but detailed records are also grouped under such categories as the "Army", "Benevolent Organisations", including everything from the National Canine Defence League to the Y.W.C.A., "the British Red Cross

Society", "Food", "Land", "Relief Funds", and "Welfare." Among the most under-utilized sources are the 460 pieces listed as "Local Records." Here the activities of women from nearly every locale in Britain, listed alphabetically from Abbey Wood (Kent) to York, have been preserved. Hidden among them all are doubtless many local stories with national implications waiting to be told.

The general subject headings not only prove a tremendous aid to finding material but also reveal something of the scope of women's contributions and what the Women's Work Subcommittee deemed important. However, the documents contained within them are the real gems. Students, researchers and future historians will find here materials ranging from the papers detailing government policy towards women's wartime labour to such things as the citations for all women decorated and honoured for their wartime service by the British government. The Women's Work Collection contains the records of more than a hundred separate voluntary charitable organisations, among them dozens devoted solely to aiding Belgian refugees. In addition, press cuttings on all aspects of women's wartime experiences and the personal reflections of such notable individuals as Dame Katherine Furse help put the official records in a much broader and, at times, more intimate context.

The essays in Resources shed detailed light on particular aspects of women's wartime experiences. Deborah Thom offers a thorough overview of women's waged labour, especially in factories and in the manufacturing of munitions. Both Joanna Bourke's and Kaarin Michaelsen's essays help illustrate the extensive geographical range and significance of women's medical services. Women's direct contributions to the armed forces are explored in Lucy Noakes's piece on women and military services, both official and voluntary. Two essays by Jacqueline deVries illuminate the enormous diversity of women's volunteer and charitable organisations as well as highlighting the often neglected role of women's religious groups and their support of the war effort. In addition, Laura E. Nym Mayhall places all of these activities in the context of women's struggles for political rights, especially suffrage, and Nicoletta F. Gullace shows how the entire collection reveals the complicated meanings of women's patriotism.

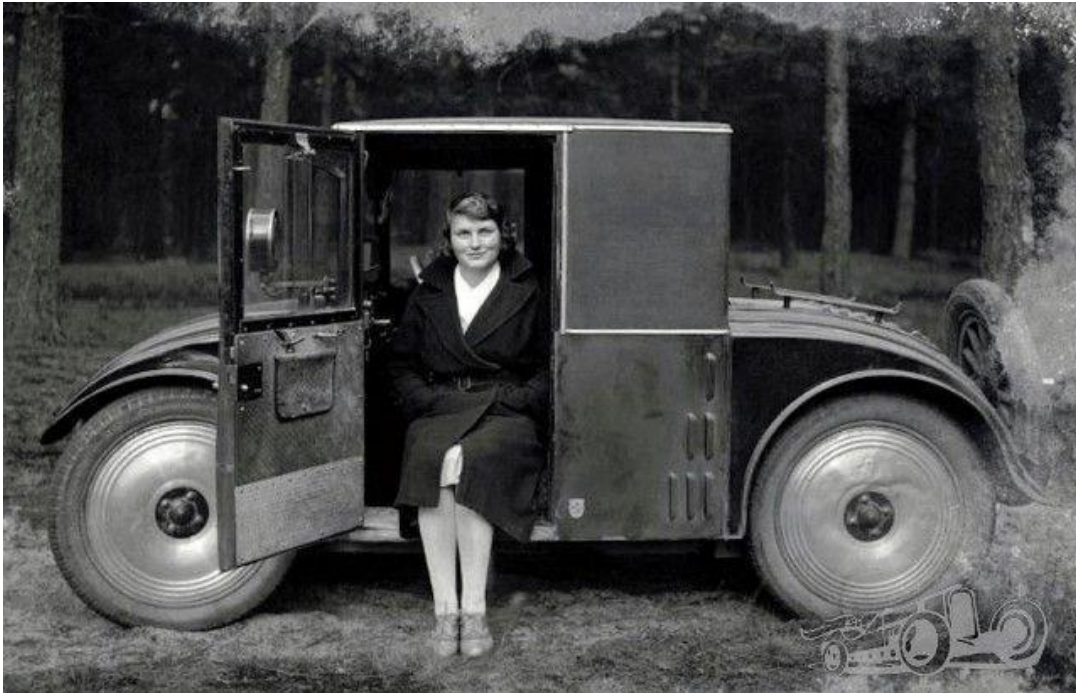
Nearly everyone who has researched any aspect of the history of British women during the First World War has relied on the Women's Work Collection. By helping to make this invaluable resource more widely available and providing new tools with which to search its content, this project will be able to aid those writing more general histories of Britain, World War One and women. The range of the collection also provides us with material with which to explore issues that continue to challenge us in the contemporary world, be they the status of women in the military, the plight of refugees displaced from war zones, the aid extended to the

dependents of those serving in the armed forces, or the most successful way to utilize the female workforce. These are subjects that take us well beyond Britain and the years 1914-1918.

War is still too often seen as a solely male experience and its history largely written as if it only involved combatants. Given how much changed with the first, modern, total war, neglecting the part played by women leaves out vital information and makes for an incomplete story. By showing us the women's part in the Great War, the Women's Work Collection offers a vital counterbalance, demonstrating how women both contributed and responded to this time of immense social, economic and cultural upheaval.

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### 3. The Autoped



As well as being a vigorous campaigner for women's suffrage, Priscilla Norman was something of a transport pioneer. The photo above shows her as a young woman with an unusual symmetrical motor car. The photo overleaf, taken in later life, shows Priscilla Norman zipping around central London on her Autoped. The story of the Autoped, which follows, is by Patrick Oh, and is archived with acknowledgement and thanks from the medium.com website:

In the bustling streets of New York City, USA, in 1915, a new and innovative mode of personal transportation was born — the Autoped. This compact, motorized scooter marked a significant milestone in the history of urban mobility, providing city-dwellers with a convenient and novel way to navigate the urban jungle. In this article, we'll take a trip back in time to explore the fascinating story of the Autoped and its impact on early 20th-century urban life.

The Autoped was the brainchild of a brilliant inventor named Arthur "Pops" H. Sturm, who, in 1915, designed and patented this groundbreaking personal transportation device. Sturm's invention was perfectly timed, as the early 20th century was a period of rapid urbanization, with more and more people flocking to cities and creating a growing need for efficient urban transportation.

The Autoped was a compact, motorized scooter that featured a unique design. It consisted of a small frame with two large, spoked wheels, a



footboard, and a handlebar with handgrips. The rider stood upright on the footboard and held onto the handlebars for balance. The heart of the Autoped was its small gasoline engine, which was positioned beneath the footboard. This engine powered the rear wheel and propelled the vehicle forward. The Autoped's simplicity and minimalist design made it easy to operate and maintain, which contributed to its popularity.



*Lady Norman on her Autoped.*

The Autoped quickly gained popularity among urban commuters, as it offered a convenient and affordable way to navigate the congested streets of cities like New York. This novel mode of transportation could reach speeds of up to 25 miles per hour (40 km/h), making it a practical and time-

saving choice for daily commutes. Early adopters of the Autoped included professionals, delivery couriers, and even postal workers, who used the vehicle to increase their efficiency in delivering mail.

The Autoped was also a status symbol for some, as it symbolized a forward-thinking approach to personal mobility. The ease of maneuvering through traffic and the ability to cover long distances with minimal effort attracted individuals looking for a practical and stylish alternative to traditional bicycles.

While the Autoped was a groundbreaking invention, it was not without its challenges. The small gasoline engine emitted exhaust fumes and noise, which contributed to environmental pollution and noise pollution, issues that have only grown more significant in modern times. Additionally, safety concerns arose, as the open design of the vehicle left riders exposed to the elements and traffic hazards.



*Riding an Autoped in New York City in 1915.*

Despite these challenges, the Autoped left an indelible mark on the history of personal transportation. It paved the way for the development of modern motorized scooters and electric kick scooters, which are now a common sight in many cities around the world. The Autoped's design principles and the idea of providing compact, efficient urban transportation have influenced the development of numerous personal mobility devices in the years that followed.



*New York City postmen on their Autopeds.*

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## 4. The Gardens at Ramster Hall

This account of the gardens at Ramster Hall in Surrey, the home of Sir Henry and Lady Norman, is archived with acknowledgement and thanks from the [britainexpress.com](http://britainexpress.com) website.



*Ramster Hall Gardens in April.*

A 20-acre garden featuring flowering shrubs, Ramster Hall Garden was created at the turn of the 20th century. There is colour year round under a canopy of oak and larch, and the garden features woodland walks, a bog garden, and a collection of hybrid rhododendron among other horticultural treats.

The Hall at Ramster dates to the early 17th century. It was built for a prosperous glass maker, at a time when the Chiddingfold area was at the centre of a thriving glass manufacturing industry. The house was a long hall, with a chimney running up through the centre of the building, featuring a pair of parlours, two floors, and a suite of service rooms.

That gives you the notion that it was a very luxurious residence for the time period! When the glass industry went into a decline in the late 17th century the Hall became a farmhouse, and a large barn structure was added onto the end of the Hall. Then in 1900 Sir Harry Wheeler bought Ramster and converted the farmhouse into a comfortable residence, fit for an Edwardian gentleman.

Wheeler called upon the local Gauntlett Nurseries of Chiddingfold to lay out the gardens surrounding the house. Gauntlett were known for Japanese

style gardens and their use of flowering shrubs and these features became the basis of the Ramster gardens.



*A lovely footbridge.*

Gauntlett did not simply plant in the Japanese style; they imported plants and garden decoration directly from Japan so Ramster is filled with original Japanese elements including stone lanterns, copses of bamboo, and an avenue of Japanese maple.

In 1922 Sir Henry and Lady Norman purchased Ramster. Lady Norman came from a strong horticultural background; her grandfather was Henry Pochin, who began the gardens at Bodnant, in north Wales. Lady Norman added the azaleas and rhododendrons that are one of Ramster's most impressive features.

Highlights include a woodland area at the top of the garden, planted with hardy hybrid rhododendrons. Over 170 different varieties of rhododendrons make the woodland burst with colour from April through June.

The main garden is at its best in May, when the rhododendrons and azaleas are at their peak of colour, and bluebells are still in bloom. There are water features throughout, and a bog garden where gigantic gunnera grows. A woodland walk winds down to a pretty lake where you might spot some of the local wildlife.

In 1927 Ramster became one of the first private gardens to open to the public under the National Garden Scheme (NGS). It still opens for the NGS each year, one of the very few original NGS gardens to remain open.





*'The Arch' - an Oriental gateway.*

The Hall itself is not open to the public and is used as a venue for weddings and corporate events. The gardens are open regular hours during the spring and autumn months; check the official website for current details.



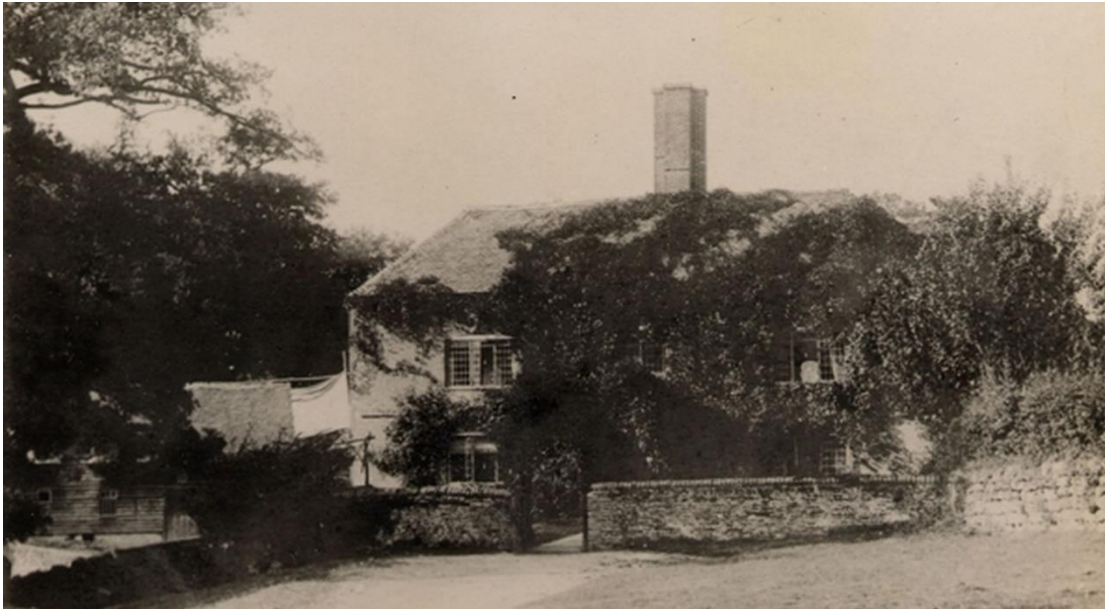
*Lush spring colour.*

Ramster Hall is located on the A283 roughly 1.5 miles south of Chiddingfold and about 4 miles east of Haslemere. The gardens are well signposted and there is a large, free parking area.

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## 5. The Many Lives of Ramster Hall



*Ramster Hall in the 1920s.*

Ramster Hall, the home from 1922 of Sir Henry Norman and his wife Priscilla, has had an interesting life. This account is archived, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the [ramsterevents.com](http://ramsterevents.com) website.

The oldest part of the house dates from the early 17th century, when it was built by a wealthy glass maker from Chiddingfold (Surrey), then the centre of the glass-making industry in England. It was constructed as a timber-framed, central chimney house with close studding. Even then, it was an important house for its time, with two parlours, an upstairs and service rooms. With the decline of the glass-making industry, it became a farm, and the Long Hall was built at the end of the 17th century as a five-bay barn opening onto the farmyard, now the Courtyard.

Rams Nest, as it was then called, continued a peaceful farming existence with the house being variously modernised and updated over the centuries, until in 1900, it was bought by Sir Harry Waechter, a businessman and philanthropist, who converted the farmhouse into an Edwardian country house, suitable for a gentleman of the period. He changed the barn into the present magnificent beamed and panelled hall, built the Great Drawing Room and the Brick Hall, and added the tower for good measure

The only son of Sir Max Waechter, he was educated at Clifton College and Trinity College, Cambridge. He also owned property in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (present-day Harare, Zimbabwe). Waechter was raised to the Baronetage in the 1911 New Year Honours. He is described in The Times article as "Henry Waechter, Esq, Managing Director of the firm of Bessler, Waechter and Co. Limited, Shippers and Ship owners of which Sir Max Waechter is Chairman. Has given generous support to the Territorial Force and Cadet Corps in Surrey. High Sheriff of Surrey in 1910 and Master of the Chiddingfold Foxhounds." In 1907, he instituted a Band Competition, held at Ramsnest. In 1912, he gave land in Woodbridge Road, Guildford to Guildford Borough Council, in trust, with cricket included in the objects of the Trust. This land is now the home of Guildford Cricket Club. Waechter served in World War I (1914–1918) in France and in Italy he received the Croix de Guerre. He was appointed a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George in the 1919 New Year Honours for his efforts during the First World War.

Sir Harry Waechter laid the foundations of the present garden; he created them out of the oak woodland. He was helped by the well-known nurseries Gauntletts of Chiddingfold, whose nursery adjoined the garden. Gauntlets were famous for their interest in Japanese plants and ornaments, and the Japanese influence is still maintained in the garden today. The stone lanterns, the cranes, now happily feeding in the pond, the clumps of bamboo, the masses of evergreen azaleas, and the avenue of maples are typical of the Japanese-style features used in the gardens they designed.

In 1922, the property was bought by Sir Henry and Lady Norman. She was the daughter of Lord and Lady Aberconway and granddaughter of Henry Pochin, who started the famous gardens at Bodnant in 1875. A very keen horticulturalist like her mother and grandfather, she greatly added to the garden at Ramster Hall, introducing many of the Rhododendrons and Azaleas for which it is famous today. Some of them were grown from seed brought back by the great plant collectors, and others were the result of her own crosses.

In 1927, the garden was first opened for the National Gardens Scheme and remains one of the few original gardens which are still open. Sir Henry Norman was a Liberal MP, cabinet minister, writer, explorer and amateur



scientist. He was greatly involved in the introduction of wireless telegraphy, and he conducted experiments in the garden. Many of his artefacts from his many explorations are in the halls today.

Now, in 2024, Ramster Hall has been re-furbished as a luxurious wedding venue, with the former barn as its centrepiece.

