This is the first comprehensive biography in half a century of John Locke — “a man of versatile mind, fitted for whatever you shall undertake”, as one of his many good friends very aptly described him. Against an exciting historical background of the English Civil War, religious intolerance and bigotry, anti-government struggles and plots, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Roger Woolhouse interweaves the events of Locke’s rather varied life with detailed expositions of his developing ideas in medicine, theory of knowledge, philosophy of science, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and economics. Chronologically systematic in its coverage, this volume offers an account and explanation of Locke’s ideas and their reception, while entering at large into the details of his private life of intimate friendships and warm companionship, and of the increasingly visible public life into which, despite himself, he was drawn — Oxford tutor, associate of Shaftesbury, dutiful civil servant. Based on broad research and many years’ study of Locke’s philosophy, this will be the authoritative biography for years to come of this truly versatile man whose long-standing desire was for quiet residence in his Oxford college engaged in the study and practice of medicine and natural philosophy, yet who, after years in political exile, finally became an overworked but influential public servant who is now seen as one of the most significant early modern philosophers.

Roger Woolhouse is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of York. He is the author of many journal articles and books on early modern philosophy, including The Empiricists, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and, with R. Francks, Leibniz’s “New System”.
Locke
A Biography

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To Shirley

sine qua non
“I believe you and your parts such that you may well be said to be *homo versatilis ingeniis*, and fitted for whatever you shall undertake”.

John Strachey to John Locke, 18 November 1663
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Preface

John Locke (1632–1704) has been the subject of various biographies, short memoirs, and biographical sketches. Some are by people who knew him: Pierre Coste (Coste 1705), Jean Le Clerc (Le Clerc 1705), Damaris Cudworth Masham (D. Masham 1704), and the third Earl of Shaftesbury (Shaftesbury 1705). Others were written at varying degrees of distance from him: Lord King’s Life and Letters (King 1884) is a rather random miscellany of transcripts of some original manuscripts; as H. R. F. Bourne, Locke’s first systematic biographer, commented, King “seems to have made no effort at all to string them [the available original materials] together in any order or to combine with them such information as he could procure from other sources”. Though King had available to him a huge amount of material which had come down to him from Locke’s cousin Peter King, to whom he left his manuscripts, this was unfortunately not available to Bourne; otherwise his two-voled Life of John Locke (1876), which he rightly claims to be “orderly and comprehensive”, would be even better than it is. In more recent times Maurice Cranston was not subject to these restrictions, and for his equally systematic John Locke: A Biography (1957) he had available the original materials (and more) belonging to Lord King. They (or most of them) had eventually been bought in 1948 from Lord Lovelace, one of King’s descendants, by the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

The raw material (whether in the Bodleian or elsewhere) which exists for Locke’s biography is remarkably extensive. Besides the letters and other documents which went out of Locke’s hands, the escritoire he willed to Peter King contained an amazing variety of manuscripts.
Alongside drafts of his serious writings there is material of a surprising kind, surprising not only that it ever existed, but also that Locke kept it (kept, rather than failed to throw away or lose) to the end of his days. Often with cross-references from one place to another, he recorded (with notes and quotations) his extensive reading on many topics, he collected recipes (both medical and culinary), and he noted his daily movements and purchases; he listed his belongings, his books, and the state of his various business affairs and investments. It may be something to smile at, but it is no joke to say that when he died he left behind him his laundry lists.

For general biographical purposes, perhaps the most important parts of this material are the letters sent or drafted by Locke and received by him. Cranston used these to very good effect, and his work with them must have been very onerous, since many of them existed only in manuscript. Since then, due to the absolutely invaluable and monumental labours of E. S. de Beer, these letters (more than 3600 of them) are readily and conveniently accessible in transcribed, translated, and edited form in *The Correspondence of John Locke* (db). (Though I have followed de Beer’s enumeration of them I have not, for reasons of copyright, always quoted from his presentation of these letters.) These eight (so far) volumes are part of the definitive Clarendon Edition of Locke’s works, which unfortunately does not yet contain what is another of the more important elements of primary biographical material, the journals which Locke kept from 1675, and of which only some parts have been transcribed and published (Aaron and Gibb, Dewhurst 1963a, Leyden, Lough).

There were two different calendars in use in Locke’s time: the new-style Gregorian calendar in much of Europe, and, running ten days behind this, the old-style Julian in England. With the occasional double date (e.g. 11/21 June), I have used the former when Locke was out of England. Sometimes the year was taken to begin in April (as the British financial year now does), so that dates between January and April were sometimes written with two years, e.g. “17 February 1692/93” (and, very occasionally, “17 February 1692” has to be understood as a date in the calendar year 1693). I have normalised all dates to the relevant calendar year. (Incidentally, there is no question but that for Locke, by contrast with the twentieth-century politicians who ushered in the new millennium at the end of 1999, the eighteenth century began in 1701, not 1700.)
The money of account in Locke’s time was pounds (£), shillings (s: twenty to the pound) and pence (d: twelve pennies to the shilling). Over his life a pound was worth almost one hundred times more than now.

Throughout this book, where appropriate, “he” is to be understood as “he/she”, “mankind” as “humankind”, and so on. In quoting from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts I have often modernised some spelling and punctuation.

The book contains two sets of notes. Those indicated with a numerical superscript are purely bibliographical; those indicated with an asterisk are discursive and further the exposition.

I am very grateful to the late Terry Moore of Cambridge University Press for his initial invitation to write this book. For their help and encouragement in the writing of it I want to thank Bruno Balducci, Janique Balducci, John Bradley, Laura Dosanjh, Bob Gutteridge, Gloria Gutteridge, Roland Hall, Shirley Hawsworth, Roma Hutchinson, Patrick Murphy, Bill Sheils, Clair Souter, Clive Souter, Tim Stanton, Jan van der Werff, Susan van der Werff, and an anonymous reader for the Press. The inter-library loan department of the University of York has as always been very helpful. Finally, I want particularly to thank the Leverhulme Foundation for the financial support of an Emeritus Fellowship (2002–2004), which enabled library visits and the purchase of microfilms.

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Other quotations from Locke’s correspondence are from Abrams (L75); Bonno (L2236); Bourne (L200, L240, L237, L238, L249, L259, L269, L270, L295, L328, L352, L374, L426, L475, L1121, L1773, L2124, L2301, L2327, L2426, L2603, L3275); Boyle 1772: Works, vols. 5, 6; L175, L197, L228, L335, L397, L478, L1422; Brewster, vol. 2 (L1517); Campbell (L3631); Christie, vol. 2 (L235, L255, L322, L620); Cranston (L751, L752); Dewhurst 1960b (L1785, L2219, L2224, L2227, L2956), 1962b (L1906, L1292, L2053), 1965b (L1290, L1299, L3299); Forster 1830 (L91, L993, L998, L1356, L2640); Forster 1847 (L4242, L2956, L3198); Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fifth Report, App. (L1776); King 1884 (L110, L176, L177, L180, L182, L186, L187, L204, L219,
Others (with grateful acknowledgement) are from manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: MS Locke c.19, fols. 116 (L307), 120 (L309), 141 (L389), 10v (L614), 147r (L618), 150r (L624), 112 (L653), 100r (L748), 111r (L1028), 40 (L1129), 101–102r (L1166), 10r (L1192), 159r (L1545), 161 (L1563), 96 (L1890), 85 (L2363), 178r (L2451); MS Locke c.22, fols. 173 (L51), 177 (L85), 175 (L105), 3 (L106), 5 (L115), 7 (L118), 15 (L155), 40 (L390), 42v (L645), 50v (L775), 55v (L889), 58v (L932), 61 (L957), 64v (L985), 69v (L1019), 71r, 72r (L1225), 82r, 82v (L1248), 85v (L1256), 86v–87r (L1266), 88v (L1277), 90r–91r (L1301), 92r, 93v (L1307), 94v, 95v (L1312), 81r (L1329), 115v–116r (L1378), 99v (L1403), 102rv (L1420), 104 (L1424), 121r (L1589), 125r (L1655), 20r (L1929), 144v (L2975), 152r (L3195), 159r (L3324), 161r (L3338), 166r (L3477), 168r (L3511); MS Locke b.8, no. 168 (L772); MS Locke f.6, pp. 34–35, 20 (L687, L696). Yet others (with grateful
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Locke’s birthplace, *circa* 1885; see p. 6. (Reproduced by permission of PFD on behalf of the Estate of Maurice Cranston.)
Example of Locke’s shorthand (trans. at Leyden: 257); see p. 57. (Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, from MS Locke f.1, p. 404.)
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Copy for writing designed by Locke; see p. 254. (Reproduced by courtesy of the University of Liverpool Library, from Thomas I. M. Forster, Original Letters of Locke, etc. 1830.)
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Page from Locke’s weather register at Oates; see p. 307. (Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, from MS Locke d.9, p. 486.)
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