

## *Introduction*

if parliamentary critics should oust him, as they had ousted Pett and almost ousted Penn. But although prosperous and successful, he was by no means free from care. He was just recovering from the effects of his wife's discovery in October 1668 of his affair with her companion, Deborah Willet. He was worried to distraction at times about his eyes, which since 1664 had been causing him such discomfort that at times they would 'ake, ready to drop out'. The trouble – which persisted to the end of his life – appears to have been a combination of long sight and astigmatism, for the latter of which there was no remedy available until the invention of cylindrical lenses in 1825. The eye-strain imposed by the hard work of the war years had not been eased by any of the remedies recommended by advisers and friends. Spectacles, paper tubes, bleedings, pills – all of them proved useless. Strong light now hurt his eyes acutely; the writing of the diary became so difficult that he convinced himself that he was going blind, 'which [is] almost as much', he wrote in his last entry, 'as to see myself go into my grave'. Sadly he drew the entries to a close at the end of May 1669. In the following autumn he took a long holiday in Holland, Flanders and France with his wife. A bare fortnight or so after their return Elizabeth died, at the age of 29, from a fever caught on the journey.

Pepys's marriage had survived the strains created by his infidelities, but principally because only one of them – the affair with Deb – had been brought to light. He had lavished attention on Elizabeth when she was unwell, but at other times had often been domineering and selfish. If she complained of loneliness and neglect, he would usually assume that it was enough to pity her, or to buy her a present, or to arrange for her to take lessons in music and drawing. Yet of his genuine affection for her there can be no doubt. Perhaps one of the reasons for his selfishness was that they had no children. At first, he had felt the lack of them; by September 1664 he seems to have become almost reconciled to childlessness, even glad of it.

As for the other members of his family, his mother had died in March 1667 at Brampton, the Huntingdonshire property left to Pepys and his father by Robert Pepys in 1661. Old John Pepys lived on there until 1680, made comfortable by an annuity paid him by Samuel. Paulina, Pepys's only surviving sister, seven years