

Introduction

continent during which he was to make many invaluable purchases. At times Pepys had not stirred out of doors for weeks and months on end, being now frail in health and anxious to put the finishing touches to his collection before it was too late. Last touch of all was the provision he made a fortnight before his death, in a codicil to his will, that the library after Jackson's death should pass into the possession of his old college at Cambridge, there to be preserved entire and unaltered 'for the benefit of posterity'.⁷ Few collectors have been so wise in their dispositions for the future.

In his last years he emerged only occasionally from these private concerns to give service to a few public causes. He took the lead, for example, as a Governor of Christ's Hospital, in reorganising its constitution, and in reforming the teaching at its mathematical school for the training of navigators which he had played a large part in founding in 1673. For this work he was given the freedom of the City in 1699. He was now content to enjoy a quiet and well-regulated domesticity, his household being presided over by Mary Skynner, with whom he had had a long and affectionate association, never consecrated by marriage but accepted as respectable by all his friends. Why he never married her is a puzzle that has never been solved. He refreshed himself, particularly after his health began to break down in 1697, by prolonged visits to Hewer's large and imposing residence in Clapham, and retired there finally in the summer of 1701. It was at Clapham, on 26 May 1703, at the age of 70, that he died after a long and painful illness, in the presence of Mary Skynner, Jackson and Hewer and a group of household servants. Since the Revolution of 1688 his ecclesiastical association had been with the High Churchmen who like himself refused to take the oaths to the monarchs who had supplanted the King to whom they had pledged their lifelong loyalty; and it was one of the most distinguished of them, the scholarly George Hickes, nonjuring Bishop of Thetford, whom he chose to attend him at his deathbed. Hickes administered communion and gave him the absolution of the church. He was buried beside his wife in the chancel of St Olave's, Hart Street. Among those who attended the funeral – apart from friends like John Evelyn – were the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, members of the Board of Admiralty, the Vice-President and several Fellows of the Royal