

Introduction

In 1678–9 his career was checked by sudden disaster. His old master the Duke of York was accused by the authors of the absurd ‘Popish Plot’ of being involved in a French-inspired Catholic conspiracy to assassinate the King, poison the Queen and take over England by force for the benefit of the Antichrist of Rome. Pepys himself was accused in the Commons of being a secret Papist and of having plotted with his colleague Sir Anthony Deane, the shipbuilder, to sell naval secrets to France. He was forced to resign in May 1679 and along with Deane spent six weeks in the Tower. On being released he responded by throwing himself into the preparation of a vast armoury of papers in their defence, some of them collected by agents he sent to Paris for the purpose.⁴ In the end no charges were preferred.

He now took up residence with his friend the wealthy bachelor Will Hewer, once his clerk, in a newly-built house in York Buildings, off the Strand. Occasional weekends he would spend with his old friend James Houblon, one of the greatest London merchants of his day, at a cottage in Parson’s Green, near Hammersmith. Though no longer employed by the government, he was still a welcome visitor at court and was occasionally consulted informally on naval affairs. In October 1680 he was at Newmarket with the King and took down, at Charles’s dictation, the story of his escape after the Battle of Worcester in 1651, during which he had hidden in the Boscobel oak.⁵ Two years later he accompanied the Duke of York to Edinburgh. For a few months in 1683–4 he served as secretary to the expedition sent to Tangier to supervise its abandonment. He then kept once again a shorthand diary, but its affinities with the great diary are few and slight.⁶ On his return, he was rewarded with employment. In June 1684 the King ended the inept rule of the Admiralty Committee appointed in 1679 and made Pèpys his Secretary for Admiralty Affairs, a new post which he continued to hold after the Duke of York succeeded to the throne as James II in 1685. In modern terms, he now combined the duties of a permanent secretary of a department with those of a Secretary of State. At Pepys’s suggestion James in 1686 temporarily suppressed the Navy Office and set up a Special Commission to perform most of its work. With its help Pepys set about restoring the navy to its former level of efficiency. In the only book he ever published, *Memoires*