

his temperament, and which shows itself in many forms – in his handwriting, his dress, his carefully arranged library and his taste for formality in the design of buildings and gardens. ‘No man in England’, Clarendon was once moved to say of him, ‘was of more method’. The diary, fully and regularly kept, had the effect of imposing a factitious order on the succession of often random events that made up each day’s experience. Besides the diary he kept other personal records, which already by the 1660s included letter-books, memorandum books, account books, a tale book and a book of vows. All were methods of canalising the stream of experience – the diary best of all because it was the most comprehensive and the most intimate.

His decision to start it seems to have been a response to the political excitements of December 1659. He began it immediately afterwards – with an entry for Sunday 1 January 1660: the start of a new week, a new month, a new year and (as he hoped) of a new political era. He bought a notebook bound in simple but rich brown calf, of the sort that stationers sold to customers who wanted something better than an everyday memorandum book, as a commonplace book of some kind. Its pages were ruled in red at the upper and outer margins. On loose sheets, or possibly in a separate book (he later refers to a ‘by-book’), he began to make the notes and drafts which often preceded the composition of the diary itself.<sup>9</sup> All this almost entirely in shorthand, in the Shelton system he appears to have learnt at Cambridge. His writing habits were not regular, but he continued to compose it in much the same way, making entries every day or every few days, while his memory of events was still clear and their impact still fresh. Although he had plenty of opportunity to alter his entries if he had chosen to, he refrained, not even filling the rare blank where at the moment of composition he had been unable to recall a name. Being a man of system, he left virtually not a single day without a substantial entry,<sup>10</sup> so that he reveals his daily life from rising to dinner, from dinner to supper and from supper to bed throughout the whole diary period. Moreover, he took the trouble to write in continuous prose. Even when hard pressed for time, he was never content in the final version to make do with mnemonic words and phrases.<sup>11</sup> In the sheer technique of diary keeping – quite apart from the value of what he wrote – he has no equal.