

Introduction

The year beginning in January 1662 with the issue of the Duke of York's Instructions to the Navy Board saw a marked advance in Pepys's progress as Clerk. He gave up his part-time work as Sandwich's deputy at the Privy Seal, redoubled his attendance at the office and took vows to protect himself against wine, women and plays. The diary for the spring and summer of 1662 speaks a new note: it chronicles the life of a single-minded official, learning a new pleasure – that of following his business. He remodelled many of the office books, he began to take frequent lessons from experts in shipbuilding, he learnt about the measuring of timber, and the stoving of hemp. From being a secretary registering the Board's decisions, he had become a leader: able to sway the Board, even against the arguments of Mennes and Batten, the Comptroller and the Surveyor, in the award of contracts; more knowledgeable than his colleagues on most matters, and the only one among them with a synoptic view of the office business. His growth in confidence and maturity is shown by his deliberately risking the loss of Sandwich's goodwill in November 1663. Sandwich had been openly conducting a love affair in Chelsea which threatened his family honour and had led to his neglecting attendance at court. Pepys, after much hesitation, wrote him a 'great letter of reproof'. His intervention earned him Sandwich's displeasure for a time, but the love affair was broken off.

'Chance without merit' had brought him into the navy, he told a friend on 1 November 1665; only diligence, he added, could keep him there. The test came in 1664–7 during the Second Dutch War, when the national effort turned on the navy, and when the scrutiny of parliament was fastened on the conduct of naval officials. At every turn the Board was hamstrung by lack of money. Generous though parliament was, it was not generous enough. Seeing so much at stake and so much going wrong, Pepys drove hard on colleagues, clerks and contractors. He roused the dockyards by surprise inspections, and rooted out some of the worst effects of corruption. Troubles mounted and multiplied; disaster and disgrace often seemed close. The war proved indecisive. The summer campaign of 1665 was fought to the accompaniment of the Plague; that of 1666 was followed in September by the Great Fire of London. 1666 saw also the loss of Pepys's patron: Sandwich was sent to Spain as ambassador in disgrace, having