

Introduction

Relating to the State of the Royal Navy (1690), he wrote a business-like account of his achievements. It remains a mystery why a public servant so eminent and so successful – and above all so close to the court throughout two reigns – was never knighted. It would have been out of character for him to have refused the honour if it was ever offered to him. But he had to be content with other honours – the Mastership of Trinity House (1676–7, 1685–6), the Mastership of the Clothworkers' Company (1677–8) and the Presidency of the Royal Society (1684–6).

He was in particularly close touch with James during his last days on the throne, one of his final services being to provide a yacht in which the infant Prince of Wales, whose birth had precipitated the crisis, was conveyed to France. Shortly after James's fall, Pepys fell too. He stayed in office for a few weeks in the Interregnum which followed James's flight, but resigned in February 1689, after William and Mary had accepted the throne. He never took the oaths to the new rulers. Apart from two abortive attempts in 1689 and 1690 to re-enter parliament, he now steered clear of politics. There were two brief periods in the same years when he was detained on suspicion of being a Jacobite plotter, but he fought off the charges without difficulty and settled down to enjoy the consolations of private life. He had moved house again in the spring of 1688 and was living next door to the house he had shared with Hewer. (Hewer himself moved to a splendid country villa he had acquired in Clapham.) Here he lived the life of an amateur of learning and a patron of the arts: conducting a large correspondence with the leading virtuosi of the time – Evelyn, Newton and Wallis among them – entertaining his friends with music and conversation, and above all attending to what was now his principal business – the improvement of his library. His collection, which included books, manuscripts, music, maps and prints, was vastly extended (he bought perhaps one-half of the total in these years of retirement), and with the help of his nephew Jackson and a clerk, Paul Lorrain, he put it all in order. Under his direction catalogues, tables of contents, and indexes were made, and written out in Lorrain's beautiful calligraphy; prints were sorted and pasted into albums; binders set to work, additional bookcases ordered. The climax came in 1699 when Jackson was sent off for two years on a Grand Tour of the