

PEPYS AND MONEY

by

F. E. Cleary, M.B.E., F.R.I.C.S.

There are many aspects in the life of Samuel Pepys that repay investigation—his education, his relationship with his wife, his diversions, his friendships, his ambitions, his career, his rehabilitation of the Navy, to mention but a few.

Today, however, I propose to confine my remarks to the Diarist's attitude towards and manipulation of money. As the Treasurer of the Pepys Club, it is only natural that I should interest myself in those qualities in Pepys that enabled him to increase a modest £40 in 1660 to a princely £9,000 in 1669.

Before examining in some detail this spectacular advance from rags to riches, I should first like to remind you of certain facets of Pepys's undoubtedly fascinating character. The inconsistencies in his make-up are most revealing. As the son of a humble tailor, he was brought up with a healthy respect for the value of money. Consequently at the beginning of his career as a naval administrator, we find him practising thrift, but as he became more prosperous, he proved he could be a lavish spender.

He was a physical coward, yet had an abundance of moral courage. He made vows to curb his self-indulgence and just as quickly broke them. He condemned his colleagues for accepting bribes, but calmly pocketed them himself. He was serious where business was concerned, but had a boyish capacity for enjoying life.

He had a modest disposition, but occasionally displayed his little vanities. Nevertheless, in spite of all these contradictions, Samuel Pepys became the Father, Oracle and Saviour of the Navy. Macaulay described him to be 'the ablest man in the Admiralty'. According to the Dublin University Magazine, he was 'the best man of business of his time'.

Tracing Pepys's progress through the Diary he so meticulously kept for a decade, one cannot fail to be impressed by the fundamental honesty of the man. His daily revelations are not coloured by the imagination of someone looking back on the past twenty-four hours and recording what *nearly* happened or what *ought* to have happened.

In a simple effortless style, not only in his Diary but also in his correspondence, he reveals with disarming candour the motives that lay behind his dealings with other people. If he sometimes emerges as one who is pompous, or unattractive, or faintly ridiculous, or even dishonest, it is because, as far as the Diary was concerned, he insisted on telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Whether or not he wrote with a view to subsequent publication is irrelevant. As he sat there penning his accounts of each day's events, Pepys was perforce writing for a reader who was not to be fooled—himself.

Those of you who share my admiration for this seventeenth century notability will readily appreciate why, for the purposes of this address, I have chosen to concentrate on those years in the life of Samuel Pepys that are covered by the Diary. I feel strongly that it is with the Diary that Pepys 'unlocked his heart'. Whatever we glean from those immortal pages bears the stamp of authenticity.

My story, then, of Pepys and money begins very fittingly on Sunday, January 29th, 1660, when he writes, 'Casting up my accounts, I do find myself to be worth £40 and more, which I did not think, but I am afraid that I have forgot something'.¹

On Shrove Tuesday, 6th March, 1660, shortly after accepting the invitation of his kinsman, Admiral Sir Edward Montagu, (later Earl of Sandwich), to go to sea with him as his Secretary, Pepys was already conniving in what would appear to be a minor spot of bribery. A certain Mr. Hawley, he writes, 'brought me a seaman that had promised £10 to him if he get him a purser's place, which I think I endeavour to do'.²

Then again, only two days later he was being advised at the Dog Tavern by Captain Philip Holland how to take advantage of his position as an Admiral's secretary. The ingenious captain proposed that Pepys should have five or six servants entered on board as dead men, give them what wages he pleased, and pocket their pay.³ There is nothing in the Diary to suggest that Samuel rejected the notion.

Ten days later, with the perquisites of office still coming in, Pepys recorded, 'I gave Captain Williamson his commission to be Captain of the Harp, and he gave me a piece of gold, and twenty shillings in silver'.⁴

Within a week Pepys received his warrant to be Secretary to the two Generals of the Fleet and on the same day he offered further evidence that the *quid pro quo* system was fully operational.

'Strange', he writes, 'how these people do now promise me anything; one a rapier, the other a vessel of wine, or a gun, and one offered me a silver hatband to do him a courtesy'.⁵

Later, on March 30th, he naively admitted, 'I was saluted in the morning with two letters, from some that I had done a favour to, which brought me in each a piece of gold'.⁶

Then, on April 1st he picked up another thirty shillings for services rendered to Captain Wilgness of the 'Bear', whilst a few weeks later Captain Cowes of the 'Paragon' paid Pepys forty shillings for some unspecified favour.

But these were only the beginnings. After a little over three months with the Navy, Pepys again cast up his accounts only to find that he had still no more than forty pounds in his purse. On the other hand, he had cleared all his debts.

May, however, must have been a good month for Pepys, for when he again worked out his financial position on the 30th, he found that he was then worth about £80, at which, as he piously adds, his 'heart was glad and blessed God'.⁷ A mere five days later he had occasion to bless his Maker once more. His savings had increased to one hundred pounds.⁸

The month of June continued financially favourable for Pepys, for in the space of a few days he was given a piece of gold by Major Holmes,⁹ five pieces by a Mr. Murford, five pounds in silver by Lady Pickering, (discreetly wrapped up in paper), and five pieces of gold and a silver can by Captain Curle of the 'Maria'.¹⁰

Towards the end of the same month he was even offered £500 by a merchant for his place as Clerk of the Acts,¹¹ a proposition which Pepys wisely refused, for within a fortnight his salary was raised to £350 per annum.

There can be no doubt that as the months passed by, Pepys was learning to appreciate the real value of his position as Clerk of the Acts. An offer of £1,000 for the post certainly made his mouth water, but the wily Samuel was not to be tempted.

At the end of the year his financial situation had improved to such an extent that he could write, 'I do live in one of the houses belonging to the Navy Office, as one of the principal officers and have done now about half a year . . . I take myself now to be worth £300 clear in money, and all my goods, and all manner of debts paid, which are none at all'.¹²

He cast up his accounts in September of the following year and to his delight discovered he was worth £600. By the end of the year this amount had dropped to £500 and Pepys was reproaching himself for his lack of thrift and his extravagance.¹³

It was at this time that he made a solemn vow to abstain from plays and wine. Although he tells us in the Diary that he was resolved to keep his oath, on the very next day he attended the Duke's Theatre where he saw a performance of Fletcher's 'The Spanish Curate'.¹⁴

It was perhaps this chronic inability to lead a more abstemious life that accounts for the fact that by the end of May 1662, he was worth only £530. Besides, as he tells us himself, he was spending a lot of money on clothes.¹⁵

Yet these proved only temporary setbacks, for he was able to record on June 29th that his credit balance stood at £650.¹⁶ By the end of August he praised God that he was worth £686.19s.2½d.¹⁷

Meanwhile bribes were still flowing into the Pepys account. On April 3rd, 1663, Captain Grove gave him a letter. Describing the incident, Pepys observed artlessly, 'I discerned money to be in it, and took it, knowing as I found it to be, the taking up of vessels for Tangier. But I did not open it till I come home—not looking into it till all the money was out, that I might say I saw no money in the paper, if ever I should be questioned about it. There was a piece in gold and £4 in silver'.¹⁸

It is not altogether surprising that the next time Pepys cast up his accounts, (on May 31st, 1663), he found himself worth £726.¹⁹ By the end of the year he had more than £800.²⁰

It must have been a great day for Pepys when he was able to record, on July 28th of the following year that he was worth £1,000 in cash.²¹ By the end of September this amount had increased by over two hundred pounds, notwithstanding, as the Diarist says, 'great layings-out, and preparations for laying-out'.²² At the end of the year he was worth £1,349. Pepys comments piously, 'by the great blessing of God'.²³

It is not surprising that, with so much money in the house, Pepys was frequently in a state of acute apprehension. His Diary entry for January 30th, 1665, is particularly illuminating.

'Now knowing', he writes, 'that I have a great sum of money in my house, this puts me into a most mighty affright . . . The truth is, my house is mighty dangerous, having so many ways to be come to; and at my windows, over the stairs, to see who goes up and down; but, if I escape tonight, I will remedy it. God preserve us this night safe! So, at almost two o'clock, I home to my house, and, in great fear, to bed, thinking every running of a mouse really a thief; and so to sleep, very brokenly, all night long, and found all safe in the morning'.²⁴

No wonder he was nervous. After all, on April 30th, 1665, Pepys declared he was worth £1,400.²⁵

On August 2nd Pepys records, 'Up, it being a public fast, as being the first Wednesday

of the month, for the plague; within doors all day, and upon my monthly accounts late. I did find myself really worth £1,900, for which the great God of Heaven and Earth be praised!²⁶

It is only fair to point out that at times Pepys turned down attractive offers. For instance, on August 7th, 1665, he refused to accept a piece of plate from Rayner, the boat-maker, and later he would not touch twenty pieces in gold offered by a man called Luellin in connection with supplies of planking.²⁷

Moreover, as with all recorded instances of Pepys being offered money or gifts, it should be remembered that at that time bribery was condoned by many eminent persons. Pepys shared the popular notion that services performed for others deserved some form of recognition. Besides, in Pepys's case, he very rarely accepted a bribe as a condition precedent to doing anyone a favour. If he did, then he would somehow fool himself that whoever gave him the bribe was merely expressing his admiration or acknowledging a past kindness.

In any event, as he took pains to point out, in all his transactions, dubious or legitimate, he invariably ensured that the King benefited first. For example, when he was paid £105, his profit on the victualling of Tangier, he estimated he had saved the King £5,000.

And so his little profits still poured in to such an extent that on August 13th he was worth £2,164.²⁸ Then, on December 30th, he was able to write in his Diary, 'I find myself, to my great joy, a great deal worth, above £4,000.' In fact, as he tells us on the following day, he raised his estate in that year, 1665, from £1,300 to £4,400.²⁹

In spite of heavy expenses, on April 30th, 1666, Pepys found he was worth £5,200, for which, as usual, he asked God to make him thankful.³⁰

The next significant entry in the Diary is for December 31st, 1666, when Pepys writes, 'To my accounts, wherein, at last, I find them clear and right; but, to my great discontent, do find that my gettings this year have been £573 less than my last: it being this year in all but £2,986; whereas, the last, I got £3,560. And then again my spendings this year have exceeded my spendings the last by £644: my whole spendings last year being but £509; whereas this year, it appears, I have spent £1,154, which is a sum not fit to be said that ever I should spend in one year, before I am master of a better estate than I am. Yet, blessed be God! and I pray God make me thankful for it, I do find myself worth in money, all good, above £6,200; which is above £1,800 more than I was the last year'.³¹

Five months later Pepys was worth £6,900, for which, as he reverently says, 'the Lord of Heaven be praised'.³²

It was only eight days afterwards that the disturbing news came through that the Dutch fleet was approaching Harwich. The situation rapidly deteriorated and with enemy ships in the Medway, it looked as if invasion was imminent. Pepys decided to take evasive action, at least as far as his worldly wealth was concerned.

He sent his wife and his father to his country house at Brampton. They took with them in their night-bag £1,300 in gold pieces which they were instructed to hide. At noon on the same day Pepys arranged to add a further thousand gold pieces to his rural reserves. As an extra precaution, as he himself tells us, 'I have also had made a girdle, by which, with some trouble, I do carry about me £300 in gold about my body'.³³

After Peace was signed at Breda on July 31st, Pepys was again soon busy building up

his fortunes. In the Diary entry for August 2nd, he tells us that Mr. Gauden, Victualler to the Navy, visited him. 'I received my profits for Tangier of him', Pepys writes, 'and £250 on my victualling score. He is a most noble-minded man as ever I met with, and seems to own himself much obliged to me . . . I had much matter of joy by this morning's work, receiving about £400 of him, on one account or other'.³⁴ A mere twelve days later our Diarist was paid the sum of £666.13s.4d., his share of a rich Canary prize lying at Hull.

As might have been expected, when Pepys thought it expedient, he went to Brampton to dig up his buried treasure. The disinterment of the gold, carried out at night by Pepys, his wife and his father, proved a far from easy task. Pepys, armed with a dark lantern, grew steadily angrier as the diggers failed at first to locate the spot in the garden where the gold pieces had been hidden.

By the time they *did* strike lucky, the Diarist's temper must have been badly frayed, especially when he discovered that the gold lay less than six inches below the surface. But the scene is best presented by Pepys himself who writes, 'I was out of my wits almost . . . I perceived the earth was got among the gold, and wet, so that the bags were all rotten . . . I was forced to take up the head-pieces, dirt and all, and as many of the scattered pieces as I could with the dirt discern by candle-light, and carry them up into my brother's chamber and there lock them up till I had eat a little supper'.

Even then Pepys's trials and tribulations were not yet over. When he had cleaned and counted the gold pieces, there were more than a hundred missing, a circumstance which, as Pepys writes, 'did make me mad'. Fortunately subsequent excavations unearthed a further seventy-nine pieces and Pepys pronounced himself 'pretty well satisfied'.³⁵

Among the numerous references to money in the rest of the Diary, perhaps the following are worthy of mention. On November 26th a Mr. Warren rewarded Pepys's co-operation in connection with a ship, presenting Samuel with fifty gold pieces.³⁶

Less than a year later Pepys bought a coach for £53 and eventually 'a fine pair of black horses'. At the beginning of 1669 he delighted his wife by agreeing that henceforward she would receive thirty pounds per annum to meet her personal expenses.³⁷

It is significant that towards the end of the Diary Pepys's periodic totting up of his accounts no longer figures among the daily entries. Indeed, after May 31st, 1667, right through to the end of the Diary two years later, we never again see the familiar words, 'cast up my accounts', although on January 23rd, 1669, Pepys says he is resolved 'to look into my accounts and see how they stand'.³⁸

Six or seven months previously he records a spate of minor expenses, including such items as milk, 6d; dinner at Stevenage, 5s.6d.; payment to guide at Oxford, £1.2s.6d.; barber, 2s.6d.; strawberries, 1s.2d.; bottle of sack for landlord, 2s.

There is, however, no indication how his account stood as a whole. Perhaps he had reached that stage in his life when he was taking care of the pence, secure in the belief that the pounds would take care of themselves.

Finally, according to the terms of his will, Pepys died believing the Government to be in his debt to the tune of over £28,000. In a codicil to his will he stipulated that his housekeeper, Mrs. Mary Skinner, should receive an annuity of £200. In a subsequent addition to the codicil Pepys left Mrs. Skinner £5,000, to be taken from the Crown money. Perhaps it is typical of the age in which he lived that the Crown declined to accept its responsibilities.

NOTES

All notes refer to: *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed, J. Warrington, 1966.

Vol. 1.	Vol. 2.
¹ p. 14.	²¹ p. 37.
² p. 30.	²² p. 54.
³ p. 31.	²³ p. 77.
⁴ p. 34.	²⁴ p. 87-88.
⁵ p. 35.	²⁵ p. 112.
⁶ p. 38.	²⁶ p. 146.
⁷ p. 68.	²⁷ p. 149.
⁸ p. 69.	²⁸ p. 151.
⁹ p. 71.	²⁹ p. 206.
¹⁰ p. 73.	³⁰ p. 251.
¹¹ p. 75.	³¹ p. 384-5.
¹² p. 124.	³² p. 474.
¹³ p. 220-1.	³³ p. 481-2.
¹⁴ p. 221.	Vol. 3.
¹⁵ p. 259.	³⁴ p. 30.
¹⁶ p. 269.	³⁵ p. 80-81.
¹⁷ p. 291.	³⁶ p. 115.
¹⁸ p. 371.	³⁷ p. 329.
¹⁹ p. 394.	³⁸ p. 340.
²⁰ p. 472.	