

A NEW PEPYS LETTER

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ANY unpublished letter by Samuel Pepys is of much interest. One such letter is in the collection owned by the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. The letter, it is true, is not written by his own hand, but the signature is genuine, and now deserves publication for the first time, although the subject matter is of no great importance. Certain elements in the letter arouse curiosity. It is not certain to whom it was addressed, and there is an apparent error in the date. The letter reads:

May ye 17th, 1689.

Sir: After congratulating you in your new Charge with no less respect or good wishes than (I persuade myselfe) you doe mee, in my late release from a troublesome old one; this comes only to tell you, that having devoted ye maidenhead of my leisure to the overhawling and sorting some of my particular bookes and papers which the service of the publike only hath for severale years prevented me in doing; I have mett with a parcel of Bookes belonging to the Chest wich I well remember to have long ago received from you, in hope (at that time) of rendering myselfe (by the peruseale of them) better able to serve those they belonged to. Wich hope being now finally removed, I thought it my duty to restore them to the hand that not only first lent them mee but is now (I hope) in a much likelier condition of (end of first page of leaf) compassing the end I aimed at by them than I ever was. In which and every good thing elce that this your first advancement may put into your way (as I am sure it has always been in your Desire) to doe. Wishing you good success and (in order to it) health,
I remaine, your affectte and old humble servant, S. Pepys.

A postscript is added in the following terms:

The Bookes within mentioned I have putt up in a little deale Box and sent to ye Navy Office adrested to you. From whence I hope it will meet with a speedy and safe conveyance.

This quaint expression "ye maidenhead of my leisure" is used by Pepys on at least one other occasion, and similar expressions denoting the first stage or first proofs of anything were common in the XVI and XVII centuries, as,—“maidenhead of my industry”. Sir William Petty used it in his *Political Arithmetik*¹ when he refers

1. 1691 Edition, Chapter I, page 20.

to "one sort of vessels and rigging where haste is required for the maidenhead of a market".

The date of the letter presents some difficulty. There is very little other correspondence bearing the date 1689. It can be well understood that, after the abandonment of the Throne by James II in December 1688, Pepys's mind was in a state of shocked bewilderment. He was forced to give up his Secretaryship in February 1689, and on March 9th had turned over all his papers relating to the Admiralty to Phineas Bowles, the newly appointed Secretary of the Admiralty.² The late Dr. J. R. Tanner³ published no letters written by Pepys dated 1689. R. G. Howarth⁴ publishes correspondence bearing his numbers 189-203 inclusive, of which only six are written by Pepys. The difficulty in accepting the date, May 17th, is that on May 4th, Pepys, together with his clerk, William Hewer, and Sir Anthony Deane, was arrested and held in the custody of Isaac Cotton, one of His Majesty's Messengers of the Privy Chamber. The warrant is in the *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1689-90*. Bail was not obtained until the 15th of June, as is shown by a letter from James Vernon, Shrewsbury's Private Secretary, addressed to Pepys.⁵

As to the holder of the office of Secretary of the Admiralty at any particular time in that year 1689, there is a good deal of uncertainty in the records to distinguish between the offices of Clerk of the Acts and Secretary of the Admiralty. There are somewhat indiscriminate references to Phineas Bowles, James Sotherne, and finally Josiah Burchett. On May 13th, 1690, Phineas Bowles addresses himself to the Commissioners of the Admiralty, complaining that he has been discharged from his office and asking for further employment.⁶ James Sotherne is addressed by a number of writers as Secretary, while Clowes refers to Burchett's appointment as occurring in 1689.⁷ Sotherne resigned the office of Secretary as from July 31st, 1694, and Burchett associated with Bridgeman apparently took up his duties only in 1695.⁸ In any event, it would appear that the person addressed is not one of these three men.

Now Pepys was dealing with the matter of the return to the proper custodian of certain documents relating to the Chatham Chest. He could not at this time command the services of any clerk at the Admiralty. Hewer, his trusted clerk, could not deal

2. Catalogue of the Pepysian Manuscripts, "Sea" MSS., Vol. XI—(No. 2879)—p. 951.

3. "Private Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Samuel Pepys, 1679-1703"—2 volumes.

4. R. G. Howarth's "Letters and the Second Diary of Samuel Pepys".

5. "Private Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Samuel Pepys, 1679-1703"—Volume I, No. 17.

6. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1689-90*—p. 508.

7. "The Royal Navy", Volume II, pp. 230 and 231.

8. "Samuel Pepys's Naval Minutes", page 393.

with the matter, and there was no one at York Buildings (apart from Mrs. Skinner) except Mrs. Fane the housekeeper, in whom Pepys had no confidence.⁹ The "little deale box" referred to would not be entrusted to a porter to convey from York Buildings to the Navy Office, from whence it was to go forward to the person addressed. If Hewer transcribed the letter, then it cannot be supposed that his well-known conscientiousness and accuracy would allow him in this case to omit the superscription, which does not appear on either side of the single sheet of paper. This carelessness is too much to attribute to William Hewer. It may be accepted, therefore, that the letter was not written on May 17th.

The recipient must fit into two circumstances; the one being that he is custodian in matters relating to the Chatham Chest, and the other that he has received a recent promotion. It can safely be assumed that the letter was intended for Edward Gregory at Chatham. The date of the letter now has a bearing on Gregory's post. He became Commissioner of His Majesty's Dockyard at Chatham in the latter part of the year 1689. Clowes gives the date of this appointment as October 1689.¹⁰ A small piece of evidence that it was not later than this is contained in a letter from Charles Pepys, a cousin, written to Samuel Pepys on December 9th, 1689. Charles Pepys was a Master-Joiner at Chatham, and refers to his "supreme officers" as Commissioner Gregory and Master-Shipwright Mr. Lee. Phineas Pett had been Commissioner presumably up to October, and was probably dispossessed because of his being a King James man, and also in all probability because Edward Gregory had hastened the turning over of the Chatham Yards to King William's men early in January, while the fleet was still controlled by Lord Dartmouth who adhered to King James.

It would appear, then, that the date on which the letter was written was either in October or in November, when, once more enjoying his freedom and the leisure in which to collect his papers together, Pepys dispatches these documents to Gregory, and having heard of Gregory's promotion congratulates him upon it. For the two reasons above stated, Pepys could not have written the letter in May. The content of the text undoubtedly refers to matters connected with the Chatham Chest, of which Gregory as Clerk of the Check at Chatham was an active officer. References occur in the Diary to Edward Gregory as well as to another Gregory who served with Pepys under Sir George Downing in the Exchequer.

9. R. G. Howarth's "Letters and the Second Diary of Samuel Pepys."
10. "The Royal Navy", Volume II, pp. 230 and 231.

On July 5th, 1664, Pepys records: "Much discourse with young Gregory about the Chest business." And on May 3rd, 1666: "So I took Gregory to Whitehall, and there spoke with Joseph Williamson to have leave in the next Gazette to have a general pay for the Chest at Chatham declared upon such a date in June."

Pepys's interest in the Chest is in evidence throughout his correspondence, and may be summarized by his contribution to Camden's "Britannia"¹¹ where, under the chapter devoted to the County of Kent, he adds to his valuable contribution upon the shipyards of England by referring to the Chest in this fashion:

Here also is repositid (however unobserved by our industrious author) that solemn and only yet established fond of Naval Charity for the relief of persons hurt at sea in the service of the Crown, under the name of The Chest at Chatham, instituted an. 1588. When with the advice of Sir Francis Drake, Sir John Hawkins and others, the seamen then serving the Queen did voluntarily assign a portion of each man's pay to the succour of their then wounded fellows: which method, receiving confirmation from the Queen, has been ever since maintained, and yet continues. Nor is our author's silence any more to be overlooked in reference to the Hospital here also erected for the like pious use at the private costs of Sir John Hawkins in the thirty-sixth year of the same Queen.

It will be recalled that the Commission for establishing the Greenwich Hospital was erected by Act of Parliament of William III in 1695, and that Pepys was a member of that Commission. It is impossible at the moment to identify the actual amanuensis, owing to the difficulty of making a comparison with the handwriting of Hewer or Sotherne in letters extant but lodged in England. One possible explanation, of course, is that the letter was written in May, under instructions given by Pepys prior to May 4th, and then held for some months awaiting the time when Pepys would be free of his imprisonment. In that case, however, we should have to antedate the appointment of Gregory as Commissioner at Chatham. The substance of probability does not permit of this.

11. Camden's "Britannia"—Gibson's Edition of 1695, page 23f.