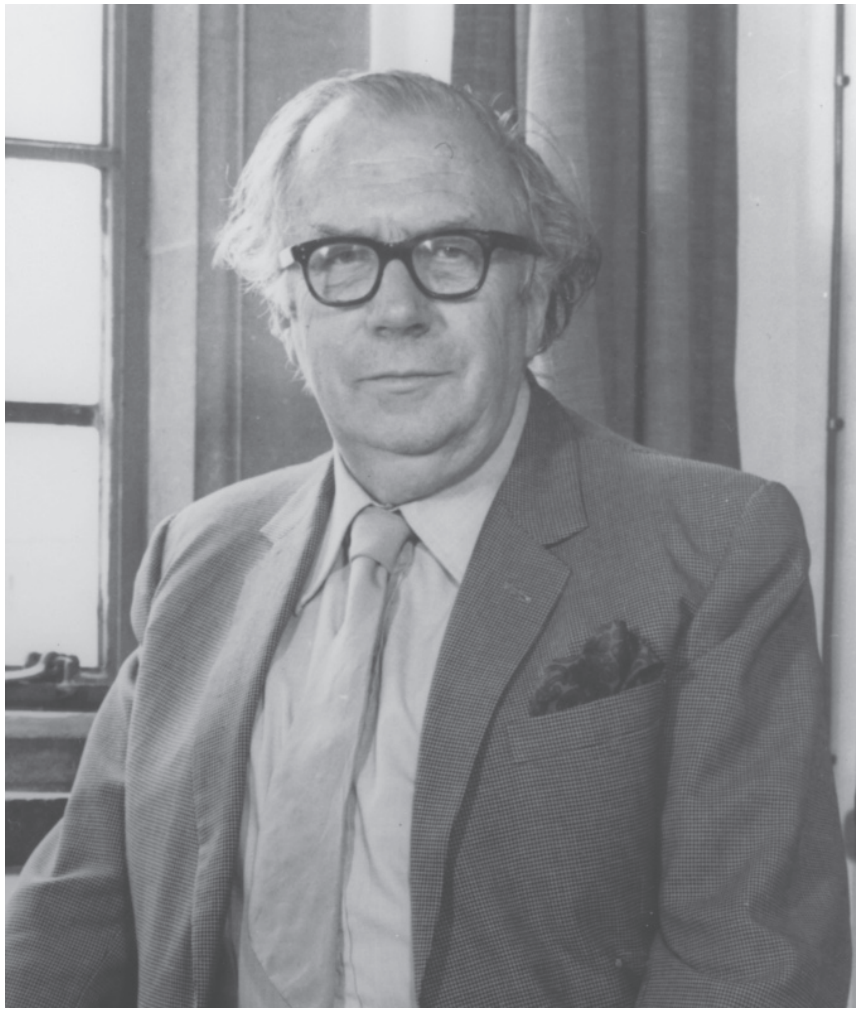

ROBERT LATHAM

Robert Clifford Latham
1912–1995

EDITORS AND CATALOGUERS rarely achieve public recognition, much less public celebrity. Robert Clifford Latham, CBE, FBA never wrote a monograph of his own, and published fewer than a dozen scholarly articles. But his life-enhancing work as editor of the definitive edition of the most vivid and revealing diary in the language will be remembered with affection and gratitude far beyond the world of learning, when the historical writings of most of his colleagues and contemporaries have been long forgotten.

Latham was born on 11 March 1912, in the bleak mining village of Audley, Staffordshire. His close-knit family were socially but not geographically mobile: Robert's sister and three step-siblings (he was the elder child of his father's second marriage) mostly stayed close to home, or returned there in retirement. Robert himself retained a lifelong loyalty to his unglamorous home turf, and to his youthful friendships. Latham's grandfather had been a miner, but his father, Edwin, trained as an accountant, became clerk to the mine, and eventually a local JP. His mother, Alice, was a farmer's daughter. The family's Calvinistic piety and membership of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion no doubt played a part in their social ascent and commitment to educational self-betterment. If so, however, the Nonconformist conscience exercised no discernible damper on Robert's ebullient and playful personality, and in later life his religion was staunchly Anglican. He attended Wollaston County Grammar School in Newcastle-under-Lyme, where he shone academically, excelling also at squash and tennis, and, especially, at music. Even as a teenager he was (and would remain) a gifted pianist. He seriously considered a musical

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career, before opting for a history degree and applying for a scholarship at Queens' College Cambridge.

Queens' customarily awarded only one history scholarship a year, and Latham's rival in 1930 was Philip Allen, a grammar-school lad from Sheffield who would rise to become Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office, and a life peer as Baron Allen of Abbeydale. The papers of both aspirants were so brilliant, however, that Queens' decided to divide the scholarship. Thus inducted as academic Siamese twins, the two men remained close friends for the rest of their lives.

Latham's studies at Queens' were directed by Robin (properly Robert) Laffan, a Europeanist specialising in the history of Serbia, who had achieved a degree of local notoriety by converting to Roman Catholicism, considered an outrageous step for a Fellow of a College in interwar Cambridge. In later life Latham was sardonic about Laffan's tuition, which he remembered as conducted mainly over lunch, during which Laffan consumed beer and sandwiches not shared with his pupil. One of Robert's party turns was a hilarious imitation of his old supervisor, declaiming the purpler passages from his hapless pupils' essays back at them through a mouthful of ham and pickle. He derived more conventional benefit from the mentorship of G. M. Trevelyan, who taught him that the key to successful research was the card-index. As editor of Pepys, the card-index would remain Latham's most treasured tool, and successive Latham homes were dominated by tens of thousands of cards in rows of battered shoeboxes.

Graduating from Queens' with a Starred First in both parts of the History Tripos, Latham took up an assistant lectureship in history at King's College London in 1935. Phillip Allen had opted for a career in the Civil Service, and the friends shared lodgings in East Sheen. When Allen married Marjorie Coe in 1938, Robert was best man. He had already met Marjorie's bridesmaid, Eileen Ramsay, a vivacious Montessori-trained teacher from Sheffield, when she visited Cambridge for a May Ball. Latham was not an *habitué* of Balls, and Eileen had thought him then a bit of a swot, wasting time working for a First when Cambridge had so much else to offer. Evidently she now reconsidered, and they were married in August 1939. They had planned a wedding trip to Italy: with war looming, they settled instead for a honeymoon in William Clough-Ellis's recently opened 'home for fallen buildings' at Portmeirion.

Latham suffered from a curvature of the spine which put military service out of the question. He remained at King's, therefore, relocating to Bristol when the College was evacuated there in 1940. The move was very nearly fatal. The Latham's flat in Queen's Square took a direct hit from a

Luftwaffe bomb, and Robert lost his entire library and all his research notes. Surreally, he remembered a tree in the Square outside into which the blast had blown a bicycle and its rider. His time in Bristol, however, provided the basis for an edition of *Bristol Charters 1509–1899*, published by the Bristol Record Society in 1947. Latham's preface characteristically warned that the charters made for 'dull and disagreeable reading' in 'bad Latin'. This workmanlike edition was to be his sole book-length publication until the appearance of the first volumes of the Pepys Diary, twenty-three years later.

It was also in 1947 that Latham left King's College for a readership in history at Royal Holloway College, at that time still a college for women only. One of the inducements for the move was that Latham was to be Dean of men students when Royal Holloway went co-educational, a development (and promotion) which in the event was delayed till 1965.

Women's colleges in the 1940s and 1950s could be claustrophobic places, with more than a hint of the boarding school about them. Latham would eventually come to feel he had spent too long at Royal Holloway. But he was an unusually conscientious lecturer and tutor, taking a close personal interest in his pupils (they included Dame Olwen Hufton, FBA), and offering tuition not merely on the substance of history but also on the logistics of essay and examination technique. He advocated arresting opening sentences to catch an examiner's eye—'Damn, said Lord Melbourne, another bishop's dead!'—and he offered his students analyses of recent publications—Paul Hazard's *Crisis of the European Conscience*, Charles Wilson's *Profit and Power*—to convince the examiners that they were up to the minute in their reading. His avuncular joviality could jar with students suspicious of patronage. Most, however, remembered him with gratitude as an outstandingly lively, caring and supportive mentor.

Beyond Holloway, he threw himself into work with graduate students at the Institute of Historical Research, and taught a History Special Subject on the Restoration: these activities linked him to the wider university scene. He quietly established himself as an authority on late Stuart England, and a number of distinguished Stuart historians—William Lamont, Alan Everitt, Henry Roseveare—would later acknowledge their intellectual debts to him. In due course Roseveare shared and eventually inherited Latham's Restoration special subject, and he was to be a valued collaborator on the Companion Volume to the diary.

In 1950 Latham at last found his subject. The six manuscript volumes of the diary of Samuel Pepys formed part of the magnificent library Pepys had bequeathed to his *Alma Mater*, Magdalene College Cambridge.

Overlooked for more than a century, they were first published in a much abbreviated and bowdlerised form in 1825. What became for long the standard edition of the diary, edited by the London antiquary Harry Benjamin Wheatley, appeared between 1893 and 1899. Wheatley's text was based on a transcription and earlier edition made from Pepys's shorthand by an invalid fellow of Magdalene, the Revd Mynors Bright, who had worked in rural retirement, far from the Pepys diaries themselves. The Bright/Wheatley text was both seriously inaccurate and incomplete, omitting, often without acknowledgement, a good deal of Pepys's text, and especially more than ninety erotic or scatological passages judged unfit for the eyes of Victorian readers. Wheatley also took it upon himself to 'improve' Pepys's plain text by adding occasional bogus archaisms. Both the College and Bell and Sons, the publishers of the *Diary*, were acutely aware of the need for a new scholarly edition, but for the first half of the twentieth century the project was dogged by amateurism and a marked absence of urgency on the part of those involved. From 1933 the projected new edition was formally in the hands of the Pepys Librarian at Magdalene, Francis Turner, a gifted but idle musicologist, with a good knowledge of Pepys's times and a considerable talent for cod Augustan verse. When he eventually surrendered the project and his working papers to Latham, however, they were found to consist of just seventeen folio pages of unreliable transcription.

Latham himself was drawn into the project at the invitation of Bell and Sons, looking for a Restoration expert to assist Turner with historical context and commentary, and almost certainly in the hope of galvanising the faltering project. When it became clear that the aging Turner would never produce, Latham suggested that the task of establishing an accurate and complete transcription should be handed over to William Matthews, a literary specialist in diaries and autobiographies, and the leading authority on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century shorthands. Matthews was a cockney autodidact who had entered academic life through a part-time degree at Birkbeck: he was then based at the University of California in Los Angeles, where Robert had a visiting professorship in 1955. He was duly contracted to provide the text. Latham himself undertook editorial oversight of the project as a whole. It was never a comfortable collaboration, and their working relationship eventually became impossibly fraught, though Latham was punctilious in giving Matthews credit for the magnificent text eventually published, a courtesy maintained even after his collaborator's untimely death in 1975. His private views were quite another matter. Latham thought Matthews woefully ignorant about late Stuart

England, arrogant, and 'incapable of learning the rules of courtesy without which collaborative work is impossible'. The transcription itself he thought 'slipshod', and he complained to their publisher that he had been obliged 'to revise it at all points in order to raise it to the required standard'. His bitterness at the labour involved was intensified by his acute awareness that, for the sake of the reputation of the edition, Matthews's deficiencies and the extent of his own remedial work 'has to be kept dark'.[1]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, therefore, Latham's energies were divided between his London teaching responsibilities and his increasingly devouring work on the diary. His wife had established herself as headmistress of a highly successful pre-prep school at Englefield Green, which numbered the future Duchess of York among its pupils. They acquired a charming house near Wimborne in Dorset, and Latham's two children were routinely pressed into service as auxiliary sorters of the rapidly accumulating Pepsyian index-cards. The project came close to derailment in the wake of the passing of the Obscene Publications Act in 1959, and the furore surrounding the publication the following year of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Uncertain of the legal implications of the new legislation, both Bell and Sons and some of the Fellows of Magdalene had second thoughts about the wisdom of printing the erotic material in the diary. Counsel's advice was sought, supporters like Sir Arthur Bryant volunteered to appear as expert witnesses should the College require it, but the decisive intervention came from the most distinguished of the college's arts Fellows, C. S. Lewis. Nursing his dying wife and unable to attend the key Governing Body meeting, Lewis sent the Master a shrewdly judged letter urging unexpurgated publication of what he called the 'curious' passages. Read aloud at the meeting, it carried the day, though the three Fellows voting against publication included a future Pepys Librarian.[2]

But by the late 1960s Latham himself was unsettled, finding Royal Holloway increasingly constricting, and disappointed that promotion had not come his way. In 1968 he accepted an invitation to a chair in history at the University of Toronto. His wife gave up her school, Robert consigned his pension, parked the now immense card-index in a spare room in his

[1] Letter from Latham to R. Glanville, Bell and Sons, 8 Nov. 1970: Matthews file, Latham Papers, Pepys Library, Magdalene College.

[2] Walter Hooper (ed.), *The Letters of C. S. Lewis, volume 3* (London, 2006), pp. 1163–5: Magdalene GB Minute-Book B/610, p. 20, 20 July 1960. The future Pepys Librarian voting against complete publication was Dr R. W. (Dick) Ladborough.

son's house, and the couple migrated. The plan was that they would stay in Toronto from October to May each year, leaving Robert the long summers in England for work on the Diary. It was not to be. Within weeks of the move his wife was diagnosed with inoperable cancer: by April 1969 they were back in England, by July Eileen was dead. Desolated by this sudden bereavement, Latham could face neither a return to their beloved house in Dorset, nor the resumption of his post in Toronto. He was left without job, pension, domicile or prospects. His working visits to the College had made him a familiar and welcome figure at Magdalene, and the Master and Fellows were sympathetic. Though theirs was the poorest of all the ancient colleges of Cambridge, they immediately offered him a roof over his head, and then (from 1 January 1970), election to a research fellowship, though on a stipend which must have seemed to a man of his seniority decidedly exiguous.

At this point, a chance meeting at a City dinner with an appreciative former Royal Holloway student, Susan Hare, provided a lifeline. Miss Hare had recently become archivist of the Goldsmith's Company. Learning from the despondent Latham that the first volumes of the Diary were now approaching readiness, and that he had held a Goldsmiths scholarship as an undergraduate at Queens', she suggested that the Goldsmiths might be willing to provide financial backing to enable him to complete the edition. The Goldsmiths duly obliged, offering the College a subvention to augment Latham's stipend as research fellow. The death of the Pepys Librarian, Dick Ladborough, in 1972, created a vacancy within the official Fellowship: Robert was the natural choice to succeed him, and was duly elected.

Throughout 1970, however, he was not only coping with bereavement, trying to organise his finances and seeing the first three volumes of the Diary through the press. He was also dealing with a bizarre stream of aggressive and at times abusive letters from his collaborator William Matthews. Aggrieved at the unsatisfactory financial arrangements both he and Latham had made with the publisher, Matthews launched a blunderbuss epistolary campaign, addressed to Latham, to Bell and Sons, to the College, alleging dirty doings on all sides, and copied the letters broadcast within and beyond Cambridge. In these letters he claimed the right to the lion's share of any royalties, denied Latham's key role in the edition, and challenged the College's copyright and even its ownership of the diaries themselves. For the sake of the edition, Latham was as emollient as possible, but the extravagance of Matthews's demands and his unpredictable mood-swings—abusive letters alternated with cheerfully friendly postcards from Hawaii—ultimately made any working relationship impos-

sible. In November 1970 Latham formally requested that Matthews be dropped from all further collaboration in the project.[3]

Matthews may have been driven in part at least by a sense that Latham had been unduly favoured in his adoption by Magdalene. In fact, Robert's initially precarious position in the College was not entirely comfortable. He was now anxious to see the Diary published at all costs, and maybe to bury himself in that work. Arriving as a waif of the storm in a small and poor institution, however, he had been invited to work his passage by taking on a number of not altogether congenial College offices, including that of lay Dean (the College's disciplinary officer). A small two-year grant from the Leverhulme Trust freed him from the need to undertake much teaching. Nevertheless, despite his bereavement, and his straitened circumstances, he threw himself into the life of the institution, gravitating naturally towards the younger fellows, whose high spirits he shared. His loneliness was lightened by expeditions in their company to the remoter Cambridge pubs and restaurants in search of real ale. His wit and sociability made him a natural focus of community, and he was instrumental in reviving the defunct institution of Fellows lunches, consisting of the traditional 'commons' of bread, cheese and Adnam's beer. Among the older Fellows (whom he irreverently dubbed 'the buffers') his closest friendship was with his genial predecessor as Pepys Librarian, Dick Ladborough, until the latter's death in 1972. Their easy-going companionship and comfortably padded figures earned them the nicknames Ratty and Mole.

In November 1970 the first three volumes of the Diary appeared, to an ecstatic critical and popular reception. Reviewers vied for superlatives: Richard Crossman declared that 'the editors have achieved the impossible', Pepys's biographer Sir Arthur Bryant spoke of the edition's 'complete perfection'. Latham's colleague and successor as Pepys Librarian, Richard Luckett, captures concisely the merits of the edition.

> Most Pepsyians have been instinctive antiquarians; Robert was not. To every footnote that he wrote he probably brought three times as much information as he eventually committed to paper. He practised above all the art of excision, and he enforced it on other people. He had an intense dislike of the redundant and unclear. His scholarly sense and his aesthetic sense coincided: one of the glories of the new edition is that it is never clogged with notes and its typography is superlative. … Robert's achievement was to create a Pepys Diary which would

[3] The correspondence, which makes painful reading but from which Latham emerges with dignity, is among the Latham papers in the Pepys Library, in a folder which begins with Matthews's *Times* obituary on 2 July 1975: it was labelled by Latham 'WM—latest—last'.

withstand the utmost academic criticism and yet prove a bestseller in the marketplace.

Latham's work was lightened from 1973 by the companionship and assistance of his second wife, Rosalind 'Linnet' Birley. They were introduced to each other with match-making intent at a picnic in the early summer of 1973 by Latham's friend Leonard Forster, FBA (then Professor of German at Cambridge). Latham proposed three days later, and they married in September. Linnet, a history graduate of Somerville, Oxford, had worked as a civil servant, but came from a totally different social world from Robert. Her family, though self-consciously liberal and left-leaning, were resolutely County, and the family home, 'Crowns', in the Essex village of Ugley, had many of the trappings of manorial grandeur. Till she married Robert, Linnet had never cooked a meal. More significantly, she had a long history of severe depression, which would ultimately prove fatal. But she was intelligent, energetic, strong-willed, and intensely interested in Robert's work. For the next seventeen years theirs would be a close and productive working partnership, as well as an affectionate marriage.

Publication of the nine volumes of diary text was to stretch over the next ten years, to a mounting chorus of critical and popular praise, culminating in 1983 with the *Companion* and Index volumes, volumes ten and eleven respectively. The *Companion* provided expanded annotation of the diary text, together with authoritative essays on aspects of Pepys's world by a team of specialists, benignly but ruthlessly dragooned by Latham—as he said of his own editorial methods, 'in order to get uniformity, (I) have interfered with everybody and everything'.[5] The Index volume was a masterpiece of exhaustive analysis and arrangement, a key to the labyrinthine complexities of the diary capable of being read for pleasure and enlightenment in its own right. The eight columns of entries on music, or the eight and a half on taverns and eating-houses, for example, amount to miniature 'telegraphic' essays on crucial aspects of London life in the 1660s. The six and a half columns on food provide a social history of the Restoration table, with their glimpses of the consumption of Tansy, Tench, Toast, Tongues (see Neat's Tongues), Tripe, Trout, Turkeys (live from Denmark), not to mention Udders and Umble pie. Thirty years of accumulation in the regiments of shoeboxes blossomed now among the

[4] Richard Luckett, 'In Memoriam, Robert Latham', *Magdalene College Magazine*, 39, 1994–5, p. 11.
[5] Robert Latham, 'And so to bed', *Books and Bookmen*, Jan. 1971, p. 5.

snowdrift of cards littering Latham's study, and yielded a glorious harvest. He and Linnet devised elaborate quiz-games to test the comprehensivess and clarity of the entries, which the unwary visitor was apt to be drawn into. And, conscious that no index is perfect, under the omnibus heading 'Diary', Robert created, with typical playfulness, a witty and at times moving nine-column epitome of highlights from the whole work, stitching together 'some memorable passages difficult or impossible to retrieve by the use of the rest of the index'. Few other indexes can claim to provide not merely a formidable scholarly tool, but perfect reading for bus, bed or bathroom.

The most remarkable exception to this exhaustive bid for comprehensiveness came in the matter of sex. Latham was not a notably prudish man (he was the author or at any rate the transmitter of some remarkable limericks). But despite Pepys's almost compulsive pursuit of women and the omnipresence of sexual references in the diary, the entry for 'sex life' was allocated a meagre ten and a half lines in the index, sketchier even than the entry for 'oysters', which got fourteen lines, while a mere place-name like 'Seething Lane' merited four whole columns. The same reticence about sexuality is evident in the decision not to offer translations of the curious polyglot lingo in which Pepys recorded his sexual exploits. In the same way, the *Companion* volume has separate essays or essay-length entries on matters as various as coffee-houses and cooking, plague and plays, but nothing at all on 'sex'. Pepys's unignorably compulsive behaviour in this area was dealt with instead in a short 'psychoanalyst's view' of the matter by Martin Stein, appended coyly to the article on 'Health'. It is tempting but probably mistaken to attribute this excessive reticence about Pepys and sex to the influence of Latham's wife and collaborator, Linnet: it may simply be that here at any rate Robert's childhood Nonconformist puritanism reasserted itself.

But even in this taboo area, Latham's natural ebullience would keep breaking in. The headings for the entry on Mrs Bagwell, a seaman's wife whom Pepys used his position to seduce, are in themselves a minor narrative masterpiece. They are worth quoting in full, since in them many of the characteristic merits of the index are on display.

> Mrs Bagwell, wife of William: P plans to seduce: visits: finds her virtuous: and modest: asks P for place for her husband: P kisses: she grows affectionate: he caresses: she visits him: her resistance collapses in alehouse: amorous encounters with, at her house, Navy office, tavern: assignations frustrated: P's Valentine: asks for promotion for husband: P strains a finger: she returns to Portsmouth: has sore face: returns from Harwich: servant dies of plague.

The wit on display in such entries epitomised the man. Latham was enchanting and hilarious company, who gave 'gossip' as his recreation in his *Who's Who* entry. He had a highly developed sense of the ridiculous, and he was a gifted mimic. A dinner-party imitation of Professor Nikolaus Pevsner reduced the company to helpless laughter, till one fellow-diner choked on a fish bone, and had to be rushed away in an ambulance. The essence of his humour lay not so much in his aphoristic wit as in the quickness and abundance of his jokes. When the College offered his Assistant in the Pepys Library the status of Fellow-Commoner, she asked Robert exactly what a Fellow-Commoner might be. 'Oh, just like a Fellow', he replied, 'only *commoner*.' On another occasion an actor was hired to impersonate Pepys for an entertainment after Magdalene's annual Pepys Dinner. It was decided he should dress in periwig and brown silk gown, as Pepys appears in the well-known Hayls portrait, used on the dust-jacket of the Latham–Matthews edition. A colleague volunteered the loan of just such a dressing gown. It was duly produced and unfolded, to reveal a large and embarrassing tooth-paste stain on the lapel. Without hesitation Robert placed his finger on the spot: '*Pepys*odent', he beamed. He himself adored dressing up: he regularly functioned as a benign Father Christmas at the Master's party for staff children, and on one occasion opened the village fete at Ugley convincingly disguised as Lady Mountfichet of Stansted: many of those present were unsuspectingly deferential to the impressively florid dowager.

The success of the Pepys edition brought Robert many honours—the CBE in 1973, election to the British Academy in 1982, an honorary Fellowship of Magdalene in 1984 and of Royal Holloway in 1989. But the edition did not at first benefit him much financially. Both he and Matthews had unwisely surrendered all rights to the publishers for a single payment, in Robert's case £3,000. As sales of successive volumes burgeoned Bells offered additional fees, but the injustice of the original deal became ever more apparent, and in 1977 Magdalene's Bursar, Denis Murphy, approached the publishers (now Bell & Hyman Ltd.) on Latham's behalf, to see if anything could be done. To his delight, Murphy found himself pushing on an open door. Robin Hyman, the firm's managing director, at once agreed that the existing arrangements were deplorable, and generously suggested a renegotiation. The College surrendered part of its own royalty to facilitate this settlement. Satisfactory royalty arrangements for a series of highly successful spin-off projects from the main edition, carried out jointly by Robert and Linnet Latham, put an end to the worst of his worries about money. The *Illustrated Pepys* was published in 1978, *The Shorter Pepys* (containing one-third of the complete text) in 1985, and a *Pepys Anthology* in 1987.

Even before the edition of the Diary was complete, however, Latham had turned his attention to other projects. The major work of these years was the multi-volumed catalogue of the Pepys Library, which would exhaustively list and describe the literary and musical manuscripts, printed books, pamphlets, ballads, prints, calligraphic samples and bindings that comprised the Pepys collection: it would also reproduce in facsimile Pepys's own manuscript catalogue. The catalogue, almost as ambitious a project as the Diary itself, had been begun in the early twentieth century, but had then stalled. Latham started again from scratch, recruiting and coordinating distinguished specialist editors in many different fields, and attempting to keep them all to a timetable. Most of these collaborations were amicable. But for all his geniality, Latham, a perfectionist himself, could be a demanding taskmaster: there were frictions, and occasional explosions. After many tribulations, he brought this complex project to a characteristically triumphant conclusion in 1994, correcting the final proofs and at last clearing his desk just weeks before his death. And 1995 saw the posthumous publication of his edition for the Navy Society of the 'other' Pepys diary, Pepys's official journal and other papers concerning the Second Dutch War, from transcripts by Matthews and the Magdalene-trained historian Charles Knighton.

The last phases of the catalogue were carried out in circumstances of great personal distress. Linnet Latham had always suffered from chronic depression, and in the late 1980s she became increasingly preoccupied by worries about climate change. A series of dry summers caused great cracks to appear in the Essex clay round Ugley, and her beloved garden there withered. In September 1990 she took her own life. Robert endured his loss with stoicism, supported by the love of his children and grandchildren (by his first marriage), even recovering something of his old ebullience. To crown his woes, he was diagnosed with cancer of the jaw, though the disease went into remission, and he was to have four more years of productive work on the Pepys catalogues. But he confided to a friend, 'When you kill yourself, it's not just *yourself* you kill.' He himself died after a short illness on 4 January 1995.

EAMON DUFFY
Fellow of the Academy

Note. I am indebted to Dame Olwen Hufton, Dr Ronald Hyam, Sir David Latham, and Dr Richard Luckett for their invaluable help in preparing this memoir.