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SAMUEL PEPYS AND DEB WILLET AFTER THE DIARY*

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ABSTRACT. *Samuel Pepys's affair with his wife's companion Deborah Willet is one of the most celebrated episodes in his journal of the 1660s. When Pepys ended his journal in May 1669, he also believed that he had ended contact with Deb. Unable to trace her in the historical record, scholars have been forced to accept this conclusion. However, new evidence shows that Deb Willet did not disappear from Pepys's life. Rather, she married soon after the end of the diary and her husband, the clergyman Jeremiah Wells, quickly became a client of Pepys. This article explores the evidence on the connections between the three in the 1670s, offering a case study of one individual's role in Pepys's patronage network, and reflecting back upon events in the journal.*

Samuel Pepys ended his diary on 31 May 1669 in a disconsolate mood. His journal had to cease, he wrote, because keeping it was contributing to his growing blindness. Besides, he could see little use for this private record 'now my amours to Deb are past, and my eyes hindering me in almost all other pleasures'.[1] He thus tied the conclusion of his diary to the conclusion of his relationship with his wife's maid and companion Deborah Willet. Pepys's infatuation with Deb, his wife's discovery of the affair, and the ensuing episodes of jealousy, separation, and pursuit constitute one of the most compelling narratives within the diary, and as such have consistently attracted the attention of Pepys's biographers.[2] As Claire Tomalin remarks, this was the only one of Pepys's affairs 'painted with the true colours of romance and tragedy'[3]. The romance of the account has been all the greater because, until now, nothing has been known of what happened to Deb; in Richard Ollard's words, it has seemed that she 'passes from the Diary and thus from history'.[4] However, it transpires that Deb did not disappear from Pepys's life. Her apparent vanishing act was of the usual kind performed by single

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[1] Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The diary of Samuel Pepys* (11 vols., London, 1970–83), IX, p. 564. Future references to '*Diary*' will be to this edition.

[2] Arthur Bryant, *Samuel Pepys: the man in the making* (London, 1933, 2nd edn, 1947), pp. 364–76; Richard Ollard, *Pepys: a biography* (London, 1974), pp. 175–80; Richard Ollard, 'Who was Pepys's Deborah Egmont?', *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 Feb. 1974, p. 164; Claire Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys: the unequalled self* (London, 2002), pp. 269–76.

[3] Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys*, p. 269.

[4] Ollard, *Pepys: a biography*, p. 178.

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women – in January 1670 she got married and thereafter appears in records as Deborah Wells. Deb's new husband Jeremiah Wells became a client and increasingly, it seems, a friend of Pepys. It is through Wells's activities and correspondence that we can follow Deb's life and Pepys's role in it. In the process we gain new biographical information on Pepys in the 1670s, insights into his patronage network, and a better understanding of events in the diary.

Pepys first met seventeen-year-old Deborah Willet on 27 September 1667 and was greatly taken with this 'mighty pretty' girl. 'She seems by her discourse to be grave beyond her bigness and age, and exceeding well-bred as to her deportment, having been a scholar in a school at Bow these seven or eight year', he wrote.[5] Over the next year his affection for her grew, and increasingly showed itself in hugs, kisses, and caresses. Deb seems to have accepted his advances, albeit with some reluctance. One evening in 1668, however, Elizabeth Pepys walked in to find her husband 'imbracing the girl con my hand sub su coats; and endeed, I was with my main in her cunny. I was at a wonderful loss upon it, and the girl also.'[6] Weeks of grief and rage followed. Elizabeth gradually extracted the full details of the affair from both parties. She compelled Pepys to swear never to see Deb again and to make plain his contempt for her. Pepys made some effort to comply but was quick to break the promises he made, obsessively tracking the elusive Deb around London. Elizabeth remained suspicious, on one occasion jealously threatening Pepys with hot tongs.[7] Vows had not kept Pepys from Deb, and red hot tongs, too, proved an insufficient deterrent. On 13 April 1669, Pepys spotted Deb by chance at Whitehall, succeeded in learning where she was lodging, and later persuaded her into an alehouse for another sexual encounter.[8] His next sighting of Deb – and her final appearance in the diary – was on 26 April when he spotted her at Temple Gate. Since Pepys was with his wife at the time he was unable to talk to Deb but, he wrote, she 'winked on me and smiled'.[9] Pepys later learned that Deb had gone to stay at a tanner's at Greenwich; he considered following her there, but on 7 May vowed to set aside such thoughts 'for the present'.[10]

Pepys last heard of Deb at Greenwich, but the first record of her after the close of the diary places her at Chelmsford in Essex. At the church of St Mary on 27 January 1670 'Deborah Willet of Bowe Singlewoeman' married Jeremiah Wells of West Hanningfield.[11] Deb could claim settlement in the parish of Bow through her time at school there. Her new husband had just been appointed rector of West Hanningfield in Essex, about thirty miles by road from London.[12]

[5] *Diary*, VIII, p. 451. [6] Ibid., IX, p. 337 (25 Oct. 1668). [7] Ibid., IX, p. 414 (12 Jan. 1669).
[8] Ibid., IX, pp. 518 and 520–1 (15 Apr. 1669). [9] Ibid., IX, p. 534.
[10] Ibid., IX, p. 543 (4 May 1669), p. 545.
[11] Essex Record Office, D/P 94/1/6, parish register of St Mary, Chelmsford. See also the marriage allegation of the same date: Essex Record Office, D/ALL 1669. Jeremiah Wells also appears in records as 'Jeremias' and 'Jeremy'.
[12] Richard Newcourt, using the diocese records, gives Wells's date of appointment as 8 Jan. 1669[/70]. The parish records show he was not admitted to the rectory until 3 Apr. Richard Newcourt,

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Presumably it was the measure of security provided by Wells's new benefice which allowed the couple to marry. It is unclear how they met, although Jeremiah Wells's parish of birth was St James Duke Street, close to Pepys's home in Seething Lane, so it is possible they knew each other through connections Deb had made while she was serving Elizabeth. Jeremiah Wells had been born on 17 June 1646, the third son of John Wells, a merchant taylor. Jeremiah was admitted to the Merchant Taylors' School in 1656, and then worked as a scrivener. In December 1664 he matriculated at St Mary Hall, Oxford, moving to St John's College in 1665 where he was a Founder's kin fellow. He was awarded a BA in February 1669.[13] Wells was something of an academic star – he was one of the speakers at the Encaenia during the grand opening of the Sheldonian theatre in 1669 and, according to Anthony Wood, was 'always accounted an ingenious man'.[14] A collection of his English and Latin works was published anonymously in 1667 as *Poems upon divers occasions, with a character of a London scrivener*. This contained some fervently royalist poems, including 'On the picture of King Charles the First in St John's Colledge Library Oxon'. Faced with lines such as, 'The mad Phanatick, seeing these thy rayes, /Struck with the light, falls on his face, and prayes', one early reader summed up the verse with the note, 'fulsom'.[15] An epithalamium to one of Wells's brothers provides some insight into Wells's views on marriage. He hails a policy of 'Prudence' and 'Affection' in choosing a wife, warning that a beautiful woman may prove 'A Pretty Carcass' if her mind is 'Foul' and she lacks virtue (pp. 38, 39). Jeremiah's concerns about 'foul' women suggest that he was drawn by Deb's 'grave' and 'modest' carriage, a demeanour which, ironically, had also attracted Pepys.[16] Yet, what we know of Jeremiah Wells and Deborah Willet suggests that in several respects they were a good match: while neither was wealthy, both had the qualities to improve their social status. Deb was both personable and accomplished – if reports Elizabeth had heard were correct, after Deb had left the Pepys household she was still capable of appearing very much the gentlewoman.[17] Jeremiah was a gifted scholar with a talent for making himself agreeable; already in possession of one source of income, he might be expected to acquire others.

Repertorium ecclesiasticum parochiale Londinense (2 vols., London, 1707–10), II, p. 310; London, Society of Genealogists, MF 488, Transcript of West Hanningfield parish registers.

[13] Charles J. Robinson, ed., *A register of the scholars admitted into Merchant Taylors' School* (2 vols., Lewes, 1882), I, p. 229; W. C. Costin, *The history of St John's College Oxford, 1598–1860*, Oxford Historical Society, new series, XII (Oxford, 1958), p. 153. *Alumni Oxonienses, 1500–1714*, ed. Joseph Foster, IV (Oxford, 1892), p. 1596.

[14] Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. Philip Bliss, III (London, 1817), p. 1199.

[15] [Jeremiah Wells], *Poems upon divers occasions, with a character of a London scrivener* (London, 1667), p. 6. The annotation appears in the Huntington Library copy, available on *Early English books online*, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home, accessed 10 July 2005. *The character of a London scrivener* was also published separately in 1667.

[16] *Diary*, VIII, p. 451; IX, p. 521.

[17] Ibid., IX, p. 395 (18 Dec. 1668), p. 480 (12 Mar. 1669).

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At the start of their marriage, however, the couple faced straitened circumstances. Jeremiah's 'University-follies, & later necessities' had put him in debt, so instead of living at West Hanningfield, he determined to hold his living by curacy and moved to lodgings in Angel Alley, Whitechapel.[18] This was a poor suburb east of the City, but it put the couple close to Jeremiah's birth parish and also just over a ten minute walk from Deb's old home in Seething Lane. On 30 December 1670, the couple's daughter Deborah was baptized at St Mary Whitechapel.[19] It was no doubt the need to provide for the new baby that prompted Wells's first surviving letter to Pepys of 6 January 1671 in which he explained the retrenchment of his finances and his desire for employment.[20] There must have been contact between the two families before this date because the letter was not framed as a letter of introduction. Years later, Pepys was to write that Wells had acquired his West Hanningfield living 'long before' the two knew each other.[21] Since Wells had only held his benefice for a year before his first surviving letter to Pepys, this comment was something of an exaggeration. It does, however, suggest that the men's acquaintance – and possibly Pepys's resumption of contact with Deb – began some months after Wells's appointment, in the latter half of 1670. Wells had decided to apply for a lectureship at the church of St Katharine Coleman. He therefore asked Pepys to solicit the support of wealthy parishioners such as the merchant Jacob Lucy, with whom he was told Pepys was acquainted.[22] A likely source for Wells's information on Pepys's acquaintance was, of course, Deb. We can certainly assume that she was the reason Wells felt able to apply to Pepys, and that she must therefore have given Wells a report of her former master which was at least encouraging.

Wells's application for the lectureship proved unsuccessful, but Pepys found another way to assist the couple through his post as clerk of the acts to the navy board. He helped Wells to the position of navy chaplain on board the *Dover*, a fourth-rate ship, in October 1671. As a dutiful client, Wells wrote to thank his patron on 8 November.[23] A second letter followed on 27 November, in which Wells again thanked Pepys, this time 'for your particular recomending me to M^r^ Martin's care', Martin being the purser of the *Dover*.[24] After the outbreak of the Third Dutch War in March 1672, Wells and many of the crew of the *Dover* transferred to the *Resolution*, a third-rate ship. This was, in effect, a promotion. The *Resolution* was heavily damaged in the Battle of Sole Bay on 28 May, losing 120 of

[18] Wells to Pepys, 6 Jan. 1670[/1], Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A. 174, fo. 187r; London Metropolitan Archives, X024/90, Registers of St Mary Whitechapel, (baptism) 30 Dec. 1670.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 174, fo. 187r.

[21] Pepys to Sir Robert Howard, 29 Aug. 1679, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 194, fo. 47r.

[22] Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 174, fo. 187r; London, Guildhall Library, MS 1123, Vestry minutes of St Katherine Coleman 1659–1727. Pepys's connection with Jacob Lucy dated from 1661; see *Diary*, II, p. 66 and X, p. 236. *Diary*, V, pp. 52, 66; Tomalin, *Samuel Pepys*, pp. 179–80.

[23] London, National Archives (NA), ADM 35/95, pay-lists of the *Dover*, 26 Oct. 1671; Wells to Pepys, 8 Nov. 1671, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 174, fo. 350r.

[24] Wells to Pepys, 27 Nov. 1671, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 174, fo. 347r.

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her 400 crew after coming to the relief of the duke of York's flagship. After this trauma, Wells had seen enough of warfare: he left the *Resolution* on 29 June 1672.[25]

Given Pepys's past obsession with Deb, his continued contact with her family inevitably raises some suspicions about the nature of their relationship. He had a reputation amongst his contemporaries as a generous patron and it is quite possible that he assisted Deb out of sheer benevolence. However, his wife had died in November 1669, Deb was living in tantalizing proximity, and Pepys knew her to be without her husband – indeed, Pepys had helped send him out of the way. Suspicion is further increased by a certain pattern of patronage which readers of the diary may recognize: this was not the first time Pepys had assisted one of his mistresses' husbands to a position on board ship. Samuel Martin, to whom Pepys recommended Wells, was in fact the husband of Pepys's long-term mistress Betty Lane. A sustained campaign by both Betty and her husband had persuaded Pepys to help Martin to a purser's job on an East India ship in 1666 and then to other posts.[26] On board the *Resolution*, Wells's next ship, was the carpenter William Bagwell, whose wife was another of Pepys's long-term mistresses. Pepys had won her over with promises of rewards for her husband, and the affair continued on the understanding that Mrs Bagwell was earning her husband's promotion.[27] With Deb's fortunes to a large extent dependent on Pepys's influence, she may not have been in a position to oppose him if he resolved to continue the affair.

During the 1670s Jeremiah and Deborah Wells were also helped by members of Pepys's extended household. Pepys's friend and chief clerk Will Hewer (one of the few people aware of Pepys's past relationship with Deb) collected Wells's navy wages for him when they were finally paid in September 1674.[28] Pepys's brother John lent Wells money in 1676.[29] After several difficult years, 1676 was a turning point for the Wells family. Jeremiah was awarded a lectureship at St Michael Cornhill in January and, at the same time, he also took up the position of curate at All Hallows Barking.[30] Deb's husband's new job placed her in very familiar territory, for All Hallows was the church at the bottom of Seething Lane. It was perhaps around this time that the couple moved to Tower Hill.[31] Wells partly owed this appointment to his shared interests with the rector of All Hallows, Edward Layfield. Like Wells, Layfield had attended the Merchant Taylors'

[25] NA, ADM 33/111, pay-lists of the *Resolution*, 25 Apr. 1672; John Charnock, *Biographia navalis*, I (London, 1794), p. 150; F. H. Blackburne Daniell, ed., *Calendar of state papers domestic series, December 1671 to May 17th 1672* (London, HMSO, 1897), p. 404; NA, ADM 33/111, pay-lists of the *Resolution*, entry for Wells (25 Apr. 1672).

[26] John Harold Wilson, 'Samuel Pepys and Samuel Martin', *Notes and Queries*, 205 (1960), pp. 68–9.

[27] *Diary*, V, pp. 301–2 (20 Oct. 1664).

[28] NA, ADM 33/11, pay-lists of the *Resolution*, entry for Wells (under 25 Apr. 1672).

[29] Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 182, fo. 468r.

[30] On 14 Jan. 1675/6, Wells subscribed to the Act of Uniformity on admittance to a lectureship at St Michael Cornhill and the curacy of All Hallows. Bodleian, MS Rawlinson B. 375, fo. 15r. See also Guildhall Library, MS 4072, I, part 2, Vestry Minutes of St Michael Cornhill 1647–97, fos. 287v–288r.

[31] Wells's only extant letter to Pepys after this period, sent in 1679, was subscribed from Tower Hill. Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 175, fo. 157v.

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School and St John's College; as a once persecuted royalist, he may even have appreciated Wells's poetry.[32] Pepys, now secretary to the Admiralty Commission, had moved away from the area to Westminster, but it appears that he too was involved in furthering Wells's career at All Hallows. A number of important parishioners there were navy officers and acquaintances of Pepys. They included Sir John Kempthorne and Sir Thomas Allin, both of whom signed a paper affirming Wells's orthodoxy, 'sobriety & modesty' on 17 July 1676.[33] This certificate is amongst Pepys's papers in the Bodleian Library, along with another testimonial of 1676 from members of Wells's old college.[34] It is unclear why Pepys should have these papers, but the most probable scenario is that he was trying to assist Wells to yet another employment.

Wells's relationship with Pepys improved over the course of the 1670s as Pepys's respect for the man grew. At some point in the latter part of this decade, Wells, at Pepys's request, composed a paper headed 'Some Reflexions on a Book, intit'led, Men before Adam'.[35] This manuscript was a response to Isaac La Peyrère's controversial work *Men before Adam*, which argued that scripture provided evidence for the existence of preadamites. A copy of the 1656 English translation of La Peyrère's book is in Pepys's library at Magdalene College, Cambridge.[36] Dedicating his 'Reflexions' to 'the Honorable S. P. Esq', Wells recalled how Pepys had lent him the book and explained that, 'in obedience to Your Commands', he had considered the author's arguments.[37] Wells's nine-page response concentrates on the first part of La Peyrère's work, based on Romans 5: 12–14, and makes short work of dismissing the thesis. The author, he maintains, mistranslates scripture from the Greek and fails to understand St Paul's intent in the passage in question. William Poole has recently argued that the mid-1670s saw renewed discussion of the preadamite question. The matter was debated in Robert Hooke's circle in 1675, and the attack on preadamism resumed in Sir Matthew Hale's *The primitive origination of mankind* (1677).[38] Pepys owned a copy of this work, which attracted the Royal Society's interest and was reviewed in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1677.[39] In 1676–7, Pepys was on the governing council of the Royal Society, meeting to talk with Hooke and others Fellows about the latest developments.[40] This context of learned and fashionable

[32] Costin, *The history of St John's College*, pp. 53–4. [33] Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 191, fo. 91r.

[34] Ibid., fo. 93r. This testimonial from St John's is undated but the signatories show it to be from 1676.

[35] Bodleian, MS Rawlinson, A. 183, fos. 1–6. This is bound in a volume of papers which almost all date from 1680 or later. Wells died in 1679.

[36] Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library, item 669.

[37] Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 183, fo. 1v.

[38] William Poole, 'Seventeenth-century preadamism, and an anonymous English preadamist', *Seventeenth Century*, 19 (2004), pp. 1–35, at p. 10.

[39] Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge, item 2380; *Philosophical Transactions*, 136, 25 June 1677, p. 917.

[40] Michael Hunter, 'The social basis and changing fortunes of an early scientific institution: an analysis of the membership of the Royal Society, 1660–1685', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of*

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debate may explain why Pepys solicited a review of *Men before Adam* from Wells. In response, Wells sought to offer Pepys a paper which would demonstrate both his gratitude and his expertise, and he no doubt hoped the arguments would circulate amongst Pepys's friends to his own credit. By the end of the decade, then, Wells was not simply one of the many people pestering Pepys for patronage, he was a member – albeit a peripheral one – of Pepys's intellectual circle.

The prospects of Jeremiah and Deborah Wells had begun to improve in 1676, but Deb did not long enjoy the benefits. She died at the age of twenty-seven and was buried at All Hallows on 30 March 1678.[41] There is no suggestion in the registers that she died in childbirth and, given that the couple appear to have had no children after 1670, it is possible that she had been ailing for some time. Neither Whitechapel nor All Hallows was a healthy parish. On 24 February 1679 Jeremiah married again. His new wife was Lady Frances Minn, the widow of Sir John Minn and the daughter of the rector of All Hallows, Edward Layfield.[42] The friendship between Pepys and Wells continued after the latter's remarriage and, during the political crisis of the Popish Plot, Wells found a new way to repay Pepys's patronage. As an adherent of the Catholic duke of York, Pepys was a target for the allegations of informers. In May 1679 he was sent to the Tower, accused of involvement in the plot and selling naval secrets to the French. From gaol Pepys set about researching the past of his chief accuser Colonel John Scott, using the network of contacts he had built up over his career. His investigations revealed that Scott had an extensive criminal history, having brazenly swindled colonists in New England, cheated Native Americans in Long Island, committed bigamy and forgery, stolen the funds of his Dutch regiment, and spied for the French.[43] Early in these investigations, on 26 July 1679, Wells wrote to Pepys 'to add a little to the Legend of Coll Scot's life' – a phrase which suggests he was on a sufficient footing with his patron to be confident that mockery of Scott would not go amiss. The contents of the letter were gratifying to Pepys. Wells reported information he had gathered from a friend at a coffee-house who knew of Scott's career in the West Indies. Scott was renowned there as 'an errand Coward, & a great Rogue'. In a 'notorious' piece of cowardice while fighting on St Christopher's, Scott had ordered his company to advance, 'pretending y^{t} he would stay behind to take care none should run away … but indeed hiding himself behind a Rock'. He had also narrowly avoided execution for murder in New England. Wells promised to visit Pepys 'with news larger', after he had returned with his wife from a trip to Essex. Pepys preserved the original of this valuable letter and also copied it into his collection on Scott's misdeeds.[44]

London, 31 (1976), pp. 9–114, at p. 94; Henry W. Robinson and Walter Adams, eds., *The Diary of Robert Hooke* (London, 1935), p. 264.

[41] London, Archive of All Hallows Barking, AH/RR/A1/3, parish registers 1676–1751, p. 160.

[42] Guildhall Library, MS 4063/1, parish registers of St Michael Cornhill, 24 Feb. 1678[/9].

[43] Arthur Bryant, *Samuel Pepys: the years of peril* (London, 1935), pp. 203–9, 269–302.

[44] Wells to Pepys, 26 July 1679, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 175, fo. 157; copied into Pepys's 'Book of Mornamont', Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys Library, item 2882, pp. 1065–6.

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Wells's efforts on Pepys's behalf were, however, cut short. He died on 23 August 1679, a few weeks after this letter was written, and was buried at All Hallows the next day. Pepys's patronage of Wells was evidently well known, for he was immediately solicited for Wells's living at West Hanningfield.[45] 'M^{r} Wells was indeed one I wished very well to, & did receive some small benefits from My friendship', he replied, but went on to explain that he had not known Wells when he received his Essex living, and indeed did not know its name: 'y^{e} little kindenesses I shewed him in his function, haveing y^{e} same scene with my owne Trade, y^{e} Sea, where he passed two or 3 voyages as Chaplain on some of y^{e} king's Ships'.[46] The fact that Pepys did not know the name of Wells's Essex living indicates that, though the two were friendly, they were not on intimate terms. However, given the evidence of the contact between the two in Pepys's papers, and particularly the presence of testimonials from All Hallows and St John's College, it is clear that Pepys was modestly downplaying the extent of the support he had offered to Wells over the preceding eight years.

What does this new information about Deb Willet and her husband add to our knowledge of Pepys and his concerns? In the first place, it confirms that Pepys was a generous patron and employer, a man who continued to assist his valued servants after they had left his household. Deb's experience in this respect mirrors that of Pepys's maid Jane Birch and clerk Tom Edwards whom Pepys supported throughout their lives. This generosity won him loyalty in return: having received Pepys's aid at a difficult stage in his career, Jeremiah Wells was amongst those who supported Pepys when his life was in danger during the Popish Plot. Wells provides an example of how a promising individual could be absorbed into and rise within Pepys's patronage network. His initial links with Pepys were, at least on the surface, extremely tenuous: he was only the underemployed husband of Pepys's deceased wife's ex-companion. We know from the diary, of course, that Pepys's attachment to Deb was far greater, and it is possible that Wells unwittingly owed some of his success to Pepys's desire to continue relations with Deb. However, there is also no doubt that Wells earned his rise through his own talents and diligence. By the late 1670s he was recognized as a skilled preacher whose opinion on theological controversies was worth knowing. Before Wells's death, Pepys had begun to make use of the clergyman's expertise in order to keep up with contemporary debates. There is a parallel here with his behaviour in later years, when he would similarly request papers on religious matters from his close friends Sir William Petty and Dr Thomas Gale.[47] Finally, developments in the 1670s provide some clues for interpreting Pepys's earlier journal. Pepys was

[45] Bartholomew Wormell to Sir Robert Howard [27 Aug. 1679], Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A. 181, fo. 42r, forwarded to Pepys by Howard; Archive of All Hallows Barking, AH/RR/A1/3, parish registers 1676–1751, p. 162.

[46] Pepys to Sir Robert Howard, 29 Aug. 1679, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 194, fo. 47r, replying to Bartholomew Wormell's request for the living.

[47] For example, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson A. 171, 'Notes from discourses touching religion', fos. 217–21, and William Petty, 'Liberty of conscience 1687', fos. 274–5.

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convinced that his advances to Deb were not wholly unwelcome and that they had parted on good terms. Given his obsessive and sometimes predatory interest in Deb, he is not a particularly reliable witness on this score. However, that Deb seems to have been prepared to forward contact between Pepys and her husband confirms the impression that the affair was not, for her, a deeply unpleasant experience. While her financial situation may have made continued contact with Pepys desirable, she must at least have felt that he could be trusted to keep their past discreet and to exert his influence on her family's behalf. In turning Pepys's attentions (whether past or present) to serve her best interests, Deb Willet can therefore be ranked with a number of other pragmatic women in the diary whom, as Faramerz Dabhoiwala has noted, made sure that Pepys did not conduct his affairs solely on his own terms.[48] We now know that at the close of his diary Pepys was under a double misapprehension, not only wrong in thinking that he was completely losing his sight, but also in thinking that he had completely lost Deb. His situation was, in this sense, less tragic than he believed – although there was other tragedy to come in that both Deb and her husband were to die early deaths. Discovering what happened to Deb Willet may take away some of the romance of the journal; yet this is replaced with the knowledge that she set about making a new life for herself, and that Pepys had an influential part to play in it.

[48] Faramerz Dabhoiwala, 'The pattern of sexual immorality in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London', in Paul Griffiths and Mark S. R. Jenner, eds., *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester and New York, 2000), pp. 86–106, at pp. 89–90.

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