

# OF DIARIES AND DIARISTS

## Mary Ann Auckland

During these extraordinary times many people have taken to writing a diary, recording their own story of the pandemic. Wilhelm Widenmann got in touch to remind MLS members about Samuel Pepys and his diary. He writes: "Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) is known for his graphic but heart-touching description of the Plague (1665) and especially of the Great Fire of London in 1666. However the diary, begun in 1660, the year he was appointed 'Clerk of the Acts' to the Navy Board, unveils a man with many facets. He was a devoted music lover, a keen book collector and a well-versed, critical theatre-goer. He also liked scientific experiments and diversions. On Sunday 19 August 1666 Pepys recorded: 'But by and by comes by agreement Mr. Reeves [a prominent instrument maker and optician], and after him Mr. Spong, and all day with them, both before and after dinner, till ten o'clock at night, upon opticke enquiries, he bringing me a frame he closes on, to see how the rays of light do cut one another, and in a darke room with smoake, which is very pretty. He did also bring a lanthorne with pictures in glasse, to make strange things appear on a wall, very pretty.'



1. Samuel Pepys by John Hayls (1600-79), painted in 1666



2. Thomas Henshaw by T. Athow (early 19th century), a family portrait. On the border: "from an Original Portrait painted in Italy, in the possession of Mr. Simco."

"A few days later, on Wednesday 22 August 1666, Pepys bought the 'lanthorne' and commented: '... and so home, and there find Reeves, and so up to look upon the stars, and do like my glasse very well, and did even with him for it and a little perspective and the Lanthorne that shows tricks, altogether costing me 9l. 5s. 0d.'" This was a hefty bill – about £1,000 today, and equivalent to around 130 days' wages for a skilled tradesman. Pepys stopped writing his diary in 1669, fearing he was going blind (he never did).

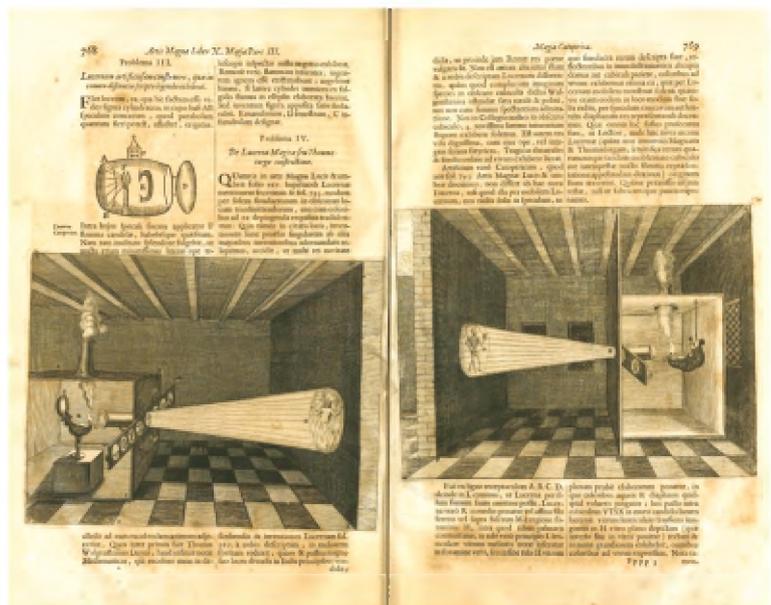
The other great English diary writer of the age was John Evelyn (1620-1706). While doing some 'lockdown' research into one of my ancestors, Thomas Henshaw (1618-1700) (some members may recall me showing my great-grandmother Julia Henshaw's slides of the Canadian Rockies, TML 5) I discovered he was a lifelong friend of John Evelyn. In 1691 Evelyn wrote in a foreword to one of his books, dedicated to Thomas Henshaw, "our now ancient friendship, which contracted first abroad, has continued both there, and since at home, through so many vicissitudes and changes, as we have seen and surmounted". They shared many interests, including natural sciences, books, prints, antiquities and gardening.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Henshaw came from a scientific background. According to Samuel Hartlib (c.1600-62) "His father is dead a great chymist, and so is his Mother who is yet alive."<sup>2</sup> Thomas studied at University College, Oxford, then further maths with William Oughtred at Albury. At the beginning of the English Civil War (1642-51) he joined the Royalist forces at York but was soon taken prisoner in London. He was allowed to leave England provided he did not rejoin the King's army. While in exile he met John Evelyn and the two travelled together in Europe. They arrived in Rome on 4 November 1644 and soon after visited Father Athanasius Kircher who had been based there since travelling from Avignon in 1635.

Kircher showed Evelyn and Henshaw around the Jesuit church of Gesù, an important Baroque building, taking them to the dispensary, laboratory and gardens. Then they went to Kircher's study and here, according to Evelyn: "with Dutch patience show'd us his perpetual motions, Catoptrics, Magnetical experiments, Modells, and a thousand other crotchets and devices." Kircher was known for making good use of his visitors and the two men did some research for him on hieroglyphics but in Kircher's eventual publication Henshaw receives only a passing mention and Evelyn none at all.

Now 'catoptrics', as mentioned by Evelyn, deals with the phenomena of reflected light and image-forming optical systems using mirrors. Less than two years after the visit, in 1646, Kircher published *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* ('The Great Art of Light and Shadow') with its description of a primitive mirror-projection system.<sup>3</sup> The 1671 edition included the well-known first printed images of a magic lantern but, by then, people like Pepys already had one. Did Henshaw and Evelyn see some sort of mirror-based projection system among Kircher's 'crotchets and devices'?

When they returned to England both Evelyn and Henshaw were involved in the founding of the Royal Society, were on its first council in 1663 and became Fellows. Henshaw served as one of its secretaries for six years and vice-president in 1680, shortly before Samuel Pepys became president from 1684-86. Perhaps Pepys gave them a magic lantern show – I hope so.



3. Kircher's diagrams from the 1671 edition of *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*

### REFERENCES

1. Gillian Darley, *John Evelyn – Living for ingenuity*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2006
2. The Hartlib Papers, *Ephemerides*, 1650, held at Sheffield University. Samuel Hartlib was a polymath of German origin who settled in England. He set out

to record all human knowledge and make it available for the education of all mankind.

3. See David Robinson, Stephen Herbert, Richard Crangle (eds), *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*, Magic Lantern Society, London, 2001, pp.152-53