

News and Views

The Pepys Tercentenary

ON February 23 the tercentenary of the birth of Samuel Pepys was commemorated in London and at Cambridge. The London celebrations included a lecture by Mr. E. Chappell arranged by the Society for Nautical Research at the Clothworkers' Hall; an address by Mr. A. Bryant to the Women's Section of the London Municipal Society at Admiralty House, and a commemoration service at the Church of St. Olave, Hart Street, where Pepys was buried and close to where he lived and worked. The service was attended by the Lord Mayor and sheriffs of the City of London and the address was given by Prebendary Wellard, chaplain to the Pepys Club. During the service a wreath was placed on the Pepys monument. At the meeting of the Royal Society in the afternoon, the fellows stood in silence as a tribute to the memory of Pepys, and the president, Sir F. Gowland Hopkins, recalled that they met on the actual date of Pepys's birth, three hundred years ago. Though Pepys, he said, was not an investigator, it was clear his business acumen and his general interests in their problems had put him high in the estimation of his contemporaries, as he was thrice elected to the council and ultimately to the presidential chair. The references in his "Diary" to the Society showed his appreciation of the privileges of a fellow and his interest in the Society's work. The commemoration at Magdalene College, Cambridge, was attended by Sir John Simon, who proposed "The Immortal Memory of Samuel Pepys".

Samuel Pepys and the Royal Society

It was recorded in NATURE of February 18, p. 229, that Pepys, after an interval of non-service, re-entered the council of the Royal Society at the anniversary meeting on November 30, 1681, Sir Christopher Wren being president. At the anniversary meeting in 1684, Pepys became the Society's president, and it is of interest to note the frequency or otherwise of his attendances at council meetings, or at the general gatherings afterwards in Gresham College, for discourse, or for experimental purposes of the kind then possible. When presiding at councils Pepys did not always remain for these later meetings, and the reason may doubtless be found in his numerous public duties, but, as substitute, Dr. Gale, Sir John Hoskyns, Dr. Lister, and Sir Joseph Williamson were often called upon in turn. Pepys was not present at the Society's meeting on December 3, 1684, but he attended the council on December 10, as well as presiding at the subsequent meeting of fellows. From the following January 7, until September 18, he attended three councils and one meeting. He was continued on November 30, 1685, in the presidency for another year, and during that period he attended eight council meetings and three ordinary meetings. On November 30, 1686, the Earl of Carbery was made president, and Pepys a vice-president. Opportunity may here be taken to record that Sir Anthony Deane, the eminent ship designer,

and co-adjutor of Pepys in naval matters, who was made a fellow of the Society in 1681, was elected to the council on November 30, 1682. At the anniversary of 1684, when Pepys became president, Sir Anthony Deane re-entered the council; thus the two were colleagues. We may, perhaps, believe that Deane owed his entry to Pepys's recommendation.

Number 60 in Time Measurements

A CORRESPONDENT has sent an inquiry as to the origin of the division of a day into twenty-four hours, each divided into sixty minutes, and these into sixty seconds. The preliminary observation may be made that the numbers five and twelve are both marked out naturally by the fingers on our hands and the months in the year; it is not surprising that their product should be selected as a convenient number. Sixty is also twice the number of days in a month, the length of the average lunar month being a little less than thirty days, and that of the average solar month a little more than thirty. John Williams, on p. 17 of his "Chinese Observations of Comets", describes the Chinese reckoning of time by cycles of sixty years and smaller cycles of sixty days, the same system of names being used for the individual years and days of a sixty-fold cycle. Possibly they used the divisor sixty again in forming smaller time-intervals. It is, however, probable that our present subdivisions of time are derived from countries less remote than China. The independence of ancient China from western nations is shown by the completely different division of the stars into constellations that was adopted there.

DR. J. K. FOTHERINGHAM gave some details of the divisions of time in use in ancient Mesopotamia at the November meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society (*Observatory*, December 1932). There were twelve months, each of about thirty days, in an ordinary year. The Sumerians divided a day into twelve *beru*, each *beru* into thirty *uš*, thus following the analogy of months and days; incidentally, this gives the origin of the division of the circumference of a circle into 360° , or twelve signs of 30° each. Dr. Fotheringham states that the Babylonians afterwards divided day and night each into twelve hours, which changed in length with the seasons. The Egyptians also followed this arrangement. Moreover, sixty was an important number in the Chaldean system of numeration, so that it was natural to use it in subdividing the hour into sixty minutes, and, at a later date, in dividing the minute into sixty seconds. The latter unit was unimportant until fairly accurate clocks had been constructed.

Gift to Herbarium of University of Bristol

MR. J. W. WHITE, the Bristol field botanist, who died on October 26 last, bequeathed the whole of his British and Continental herbarium and a hundred valuable books to the Botany Department of the University of Bristol. The whole herbarium is made up of about 15,000 sheets of which those