

## THE DISMANTLING OF CONWY CASTLE

by *Arnold Taylor*

When the Rev. Robert Williams (1810-81) published his *History of Aberconwy* in 1835, he printed a letter from the third Lord Conway and Killultagh to the Deputy Lieutenants of the three shires of Gwynedd, dated from Ragley on 6 October 1665, assuring them that the recent removal of the timber, iron and lead of Conway Castle was in accordance with his instructions, and that his servant, Milward by name, had orders to dispose of the timber and ironwork and to ship the lead to Ireland, where he hoped it would be more serviceable to the king than it had been in Wales.<sup>1</sup>

Milward was Lord Conway's agent, and some weeks earlier he had been sent from Ragley, the Conways' seat in Warwickshire, to supervise the dismantling of the castle, which his grandfather had acquired in 1627 together with the title of Viscount Conway of Conway Castle, in return for a payment of £100 to the Commissioners for the sale of the King's lands. When Milward reached Conwy he found every obstacle placed in the way of carrying out his mission, and the purpose of the letter to the Deputy Lieutenants was to give covering authority for his having effected the spoliation of what was locally still held, albeit somewhat disingenuously, to be a royal castle. Only five years earlier local opinion had eagerly welcomed the dismantling of Caernarfon, "conceiving it to be for the great advantage of ourselves and posterity to have the Castle of Carnarvon and the strengthes therof demolished".<sup>2</sup> One may suspect, therefore, that the opposition which faced Milward may have been due not so



Conwy Castle from Benarth Hill, by *Moses Griffith*, c.1810.  
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much to the local community's devotion to the interests of the crown, or to any regard for the castle as a cherished institution, nor even, as they alleged, to the respect they owed Lord Conway, but rather to their resentment that its materials should be stripped and disposed of by a stranger without reference or benefit to themselves.

Among the State Papers in the Public Record Office are preserved the originals of three letters which Milward sent back to his master from Conwy, describing his reception there and the hazardous nature of the work he was doing at the castle. The vividness of their narrative, and the light they throw on this declining phase of the castle's history, seem to the writer to give them a claim to wider acquaintance. They are accordingly now reproduced *in extenso*, and are offered to our President, Gwynedd's Lord Lieutenant, in gratitude both for his championing of the cause of the heritage at large, and, on one occasion, of that of Conwy in particular.

**Note:** In the transcripts which follow, modern usage has been introduced in the matter of capital letters and punctuation; the spelling is that of the original.

### I

#### William Milward to Lord Conway. Conway, 27 August 1665<sup>3</sup>

My Lord, . . . youre lordshipp doth expect and . . . proceedings since I lefte Raggelye uppon. . . I mett with Mr. Rowney att Birmingham, where . . . my pretending to take . . . money . . . from him . . . agreement and . . . hath . . . a bond of 400 li. for the perfecting of the land to me betwixt this and Christmas next. Uppon the Satterday after,<sup>4</sup> I came to Sir Henrye Conways,<sup>5</sup> with thought uppon Munday<sup>6</sup> to have gone to the place where I now am, but was perswaded by Sir Henrye to stay a day or two with him, and hee would send a messenger to Sir Robert Williams<sup>7</sup>, to know where wee might give him the meeting if he thought fitt to make and end of the difference betwixt youre Lordshipe and him, or else to give him notice that youre Lordshippe doth intend to goe to triall with him the next Assise, and that youre Lordshipp had sent me over to that purpose. And uppon curtisie hee sent to . . . notice be sent there . . . anye further . . . he had writt . . . would be content . . . youre Lordshipp. And accordinglye hee sent . . . Monday morning, but he was not att home, and uppon Twesday evening<sup>8</sup> hee sent to the place where hee was, and his answere was hee would come or send to Sir Henrye before Thursday night.<sup>9</sup> And whether he came or sent, as yet I have not heard from Sir Henrye Conway, who told me when I came from him that, if hee found him desireous of an end, he would come over with him unto me att Conway, which I doe expect everye

day. I came unto Conuay uppon the fayre day,<sup>10</sup> and could not gett any to worke untill Friday.<sup>11</sup> Wee began to take of the lead, which I find to be a verye difficult and dangerous peece of worke; the timber is soe rotten, the boards under the lead are worth verye littell. The timber is . . . and when it is downe it is troublesome to be gott out of the castell without . . . charge. I feare I can have noe workman here that knoweth how to doe it, but I here there is one at Blewmarris that hath taken downe one or two castels alredey,<sup>12</sup> and tomorrow I doe intend to send to gett . . . I . . . I hope by the next I shall give youre Lordshipp and accounte of what lead there is. I doe intend as soon as I can get it of to have it weighed. I am informed by some that such lead in this cuntrye is worth betwixt 12 li. and 13li. a tune, and when youre Lordshipp hath considered of the price and the charge in sending this lead over into Ireland, whether youre Lordshipp thinke you may not buy it cheaper there, I intreat to know youre Lordshipp's mind by youre first letter. I hope there will be a considerable quantitye of it. There hath been verye much taken away, and they are redye to throw this over the . . . but that I . . . is all taken away, the iron taken out of the windows . . . hookes and hinges beat of the dores and windowes, and all the iron work taken away that is worth anything. Sir Henrye Conway did aske me to buy the whole timber of the castell and some of the leade, & I told him that youre Lordship had given me orders to send it into Ireland, & for the timber I thought I should take it down & sell it by parcells. He desired that he might deale for it other way. He hath had 22 hundred of lead away formerly; whether it were by your appoyntment I cannot tell. Here are some have discouraged the workmen drom working any longer, and have told them it was the King's castell and that they would be questioned and . . . his man to the castell gate. I seeing them stand there . . . to them. He asked what order I had to pull down . . . I asked him if he had any power to question me . . . I answered him that I was not bond to give him . . . a Welshman. I told him your Lordshipp did not like it should stand in such a beggerly cuntrye, you would pulld downe and sett it upp in another place. The gent was angry att my answere and soe questioned me noe farther. His man had his pistoles before him and a portmantell, but poure harses. Since, I have not beene questioned by any; and I suppose he might be sent by some of the towne, thinking to beat of the workmen, for many were misgrieved att the taking of it downe. I have made inquiry to know who he was, but cannot understand as yett. I have nothing els att present but as the world goes one.

. . . . . I rest mye Lord, Yr most obedient and humble servant  
Will Milward.

Auguste  
27th 1665.

## II

**William Milward to Lord Conway. Conway, 5 September 1665<sup>13</sup>**

My Lord, Since my last letter to youre Lordshipp, I have had Mr. Hoockes, a Justice of Peace, with Mr. Bayleife and the Magistrates of Conway with me, who told me there busines was that, out of what respect they owe unto youre Lordshipp, they came to demand of me by what power I did demollis the castell, and how they should be assured that it was by youre apoyntment. I gave them such reasons that I thinke that they were verye well satisfied that it was by youre Lordshipp's comand what I did. The night they came to me, they sett a very strict watch at everye gate, with fire lockes, and, as I here, sent two men to watch att the castell gate, for feare I should have sent the lead away that night; and, if I had not given them the more satisfactorie answer, did intend to have secured me. But I haveing had some notice of it beforehand, I did not spare to speake to them. The persons whome they caused to be upon the watch were those persons that worked att the castell, and fetched most of them out of their beds, for mallice because they worke att the castell, and, as I perceive since, doe what they can to fright them, that I should gett none att all; and some tell them that it is the Kings castell and that they shall all answer for what they have done, and allthough I have taken up the lead, I shall not carye it away, but shall come to and acount and them to. I doe encourage them what I can and promise to secure them from all danger, and sometimes give them ale, and with verye much adoe I have yett kept what I had in despite of them all; which vexeth manye of them, that I, coming upon such and acount, should have soe much favor amongst them. The towne and cuntrye are murmuring verye much att the taking downe of the timber and leade, although it be some of it downe and the rest all redie to fall, and soe rotten that the men are redye to be spoyled everye day, and a great part of it scarce worth anye thing att all. The boards which should have brought most money as was expected, now the leads are taken of that they come to be seene are for the greatest part worth nothing but for the fire, scarce worth the takeing of. I have had a verye knowing man from Blew Morris which doth most of the best worke in Angelsea, and hath hopen to take downe a castell or two alredeye and to sell the timber.<sup>14</sup> And wee have veiwed everye roome and taken the perticulers of everye roome and vallued it, and we canot judge it standing to be worth a hundred pound; and to take it downe he askes 50 poundes—the worke is soe dangerous that it must be lett downe by engines—and will not venter his life unlesse he may be well paid. They doe begin a littell to inquire after it, and if I can sell it

well I will indeavour to sell it standing. If I canot, I will try some other workmen to take it downe. If I can have it done uppon indiferent terms, I doe and shall indevour what lies in me to sell it att the best advantage I can; but if it doe not amount to soe great a some as youre Lordshipp doth expect, I canot helpe it, and I doubt not but youre Lordshipp may be sattisfied when you come to Conway againe that it is not for want of care in me. I canot a yett give youre Lordshipp a perfect account what lead there is. Wee are now weighing it, and I hope by the next to give you and account of the whole, I hope betwixt 20 and 30 tun. I here nothing from Sir Robert Williams yett. I have not beene att Sir Henrye Conways since nor dare not goe yett. Here is manye speak high what they will doe, but I doe beleeve it will be but wordes. The generall report is that the leiftenants of the countye have sent to His Majesty about it and doe every day expect and answer, and then they doe intend to take courte with me because I would goe one such a designe and not acquaint them with it. But I doe not much feare chem. I doe beleeve they will snarle long before they will bite. By the next I hope to give youre Lordshipp a more full account of my proceedings. In the meane time present my humble service to yore Lordshipp, and ever rest

Your Lordships most obedient servant  
Will Milward.

September 5th 1665

For the Right Hon<sup>oble</sup> and My Verye  
good Lord Edward Lord Viscount  
Conway and Killulta, Barron of  
Ragglye.

Leave this at the Post House in Coventrye  
to be sent by the foote poste to Raglye in  
Warwicksheire.<sup>15</sup>

### III

**William Milward to Lord Conway. Conway, 14 September  
1665.**<sup>16</sup>

My Lord, Yours I received the 8 of September, and was veyre glad to here from youre Lordshippe. I have weighed youre lead and have here sent youre Lordshippe a note of the perticulers, how many peeces there are and what everye peece weigheth, & doe intend tomorrow to goe to Blew Morris to see if I can gett a shipp to carrye it away. I am veyre fearefull lest any of it should be stolen. I found the last weeke a great deale that was throne into a house of office. and some that was hid in another place. I have secured all places where I can judge to be any

danger, and some nights have had men there great part of the night, and sett up great lights that the cuntrye might take notice that there was men lay in the castell. Sir Henrye Conway desired me to wright to youre Lordshipp to know whether youre Lordshipp would be pleased to spare him 4 or 5 tun of lead. Hee says he had some discourse with youre Lordshipp about it, and youre Lordshipp made him a promise of some, and woonders (he sayes) that youre Lordshipp should soe much forgett him. He says he will be content to give as good a rate as the cuntrye will aford. Here is verye littell inquiringe after the timber yett. Mr. Bagnoll<sup>17</sup> sent one to me who offered 60 li. for it. The farmers of the countrie and the meaner sort would buy, but they have noe money, and the rich will not buy unlesse they have a bargaine. And to take it downe and sell it by parcells wilbe a great charge and will require verye much time, and whether it will over and above pay the charge more than it will be sold for standing I am not able to judge. I doe beleeve in a fortnight time I shall partlye see what wilbe done. The gentrye are most att the sises att Blew Morris, and I doe here there is some doe intend to come to looke uppon it when the sises is done. If youre Lordshipp hath not sent a letter of attorney, I think it may be forborne, for they are all very silent now, and offer to be and assistant to me in what them lieth, and would buy some of the materialls of me. There is yett a littell lead untaken upp, which canot with conveniency be done for the present. If there be any mistake in casting upp of the lead, I intreat youre Lordshipp to excuse me, for I have had scarce time as yett to spare to wright to youre Lordshipp but a nighte; for the perticulers I hope are right, for I took them with all the care I could. I here nothing from Sir Robert Williams yett. My Lord, I have found a verye troublesome and dangerous peece of worke in takeing upp of this lead, which I did somewhat foresee before I came, and I find it proves according to my expectation; but I shall take all the care I can to make the best of it for youre Lordshipp, and ever rest

Your Lordshipp's most obedient and faithful servant  
Will Milward.

#### IV

#### Lord Conway to the North Wales Deputy Lieutenants. Ragley, 6 October 1665<sup>18</sup>

Honoble friends, I have had the honour to receive your letter of the 20th September, in which you are pleased to enquire of me whether my servant Milward doth act by my order for the taking down of the lead, timber and iron of Conway castle; in answer to

which question, I do by this acknowledge it to be my act and deed; and that the said Milward is employed by me to dispose of the timber and iron, according to such directions as I gave him; and to transporte the lead into Ireland, where I hope it will be more serviceable to his matie then it was in this country. And having this opportunity of addressing myselfe to you, I humbly beseech you to take off the restraint which you have put upon his proceedings, and to affoord him your favour in it; for I am already prejudiced by the losse of shipping, and an opportune season for transportation of the lead: yet I shall esteeme this as a particular obligation upon mee, and be ready to expresse it by all the service in my power to every one of you, that you are pleased to grant this att my request; which otherwise may put me to some trouble and delay. And I doubt not of meeting occasions to testifie my being,

Honoble Sirs,  
Your affectionate and obedient Servant  
CONWAY AND KILULTA.

Ragley in Warwickshire,  
6th October 1665.

For the honoble Thomas Bulkeley, Esq;  
Colonell Wynn, Hugh Wynn, Esq;  
Thomas Vaughan, Esq; his maties  
Deputy Livetennants in North Wales.

V

**Viscount Bulkeley to Viscount Conway.**  
Conway "y<sup>e</sup> 17th" [October] "65".<sup>19</sup>

My Lord, Your commands brought me heer, and in obedience to your Lordships desire I have discussed with most of the deputie Leifts., who assure me they made or caused noe restraints on y<sup>e</sup> leade. But by some other circumspection in these dangerous tymes, they apprehend that the Owner (hired by your servant), being formerly a pestilent fellow, was desirous to shelter him-selfe under your agents interest, on your Lordships accompt; but so readie they were to pay theire respects to your Lordship that they writt to your Lordshipp that there was a person that pretended to be your agent hadde taken downe y<sup>e</sup> leade and other materialls belonging to this castle, for further then his word they had noe assurance that he belonged to your Lordship, nor could they easily be brought to beleive that this fort should be demolished without some more formall way. But when I assur'd them it was by your Lordships directions, they were readie (as they doe) to acquiesce. I have inform'd your servant so much.

If your Lor: will part with sixe or seaven tunnes, I shall be your Lor's chapman, but hope that it will be at a reasonable rate; else I shall wish you better sale. Your servant demands too too much.

My Lord, I have onely to add, that I begg that my humble service may be tendered to yore most excellent Lady, and that your Lordship would esteeme of me as off

My Lord,  
Your Lordships most faithfull & reall servant  
BULKELEY.

My Lord, this worthy towne affords noe better paper, so that I hope your Lordship will pardon me that I addresse my selfe in noe better.

#### NOTES

1. R. Williams, *The History and Antiquities of the town of Aberconwy and its neighbourhood* (Denbigh, 1835), 67-8; the letter was first printed in Thomas Pennant's *Tour of Wales in 1773*, Appendix xxi, and is reproduced here (no. IV) as being directly related to Milward's letters to Lord Conway.
2. *Hist. MSS. Commn. 6th Report*, p.473, quoted in C.R. Peers, 'Caernarvon Castle', *Cymmrodorion Transactions 1915-16*, p.27.
3. P.R.O., SP 29/131/36 (précis in *Cal. State Papers Domestic 1664-1665*, p.536). The paper of this letter is much perished, making many unavoidable gaps in its transcription.
4. Saturday, 19 August 1665.
5. i.e. Bodrhyddan.
6. Monday 21 August 1665.
7. For Sir Robert Williams of Penrhyn, son of Sir Gruffydd and grandson of Archbishop John Williams, see A.H. Dodd, *Studies in Stuart Wales* (Cardiff, 1952), 175; *A History of Caernarvonshire 1284-1900* (Caerns. Hist. Soc., 1968), 437.
8. Tuesday, 22 August 1665.
9. Thursday, 24 August 1665.
10. According to Robert Williams, *op. cit.*, 88, Conwy's four annual fairs were held, before 1830, on April 6, September 4, October 10 and November 8. But the 'fair day' on which Milward arrived in the town was evidently Thursday, 24 August, i.e. St. Bartholomew's Day; the Bartholomew Fair held at Conwy and the SS. Simon and Jude Fair held at Deganwy had anciently been the borough's only fairs (E.A. Lewis, *Mediaeval Boroughs of Snowdonia* (London, 1912), 171, 194).
11. Friday, 25 August 1665.
12. Possibly an oblique reference to the demolition, which must otherwise remain a matter of inference, of the internal buildings of both Caernarfon and Beaumaris castles during the early 1660s; if so, it is of considerable interest.
13. P.R.O., SP 29/132/29 (précis in *Cal. State Papers Domestic 1664-1665*, p.551). See note 12, above.
14. Remains of seal in red wax.
16. P.R.O., SP 29/132/94 (précis in *Cal. State Papers Domestic 1664-1665*, p.563).
17. For the Bagenalls of Plas Newydd, see Dodd, *Studies* (1952), 80, 179, 212; for other activities of 'Mr. Bagnoll' at this time, see W.J. Smith (ed.), *Herbert Correspondence* (Bd. Celt. Stud., History and Law Series, No. XXI, Cardiff and Dublin, 1963), p.196.

18. See note 1, above.
19. P.R.O., SP 29/129/47 (précis in *Cal. State Papers Domestic 1664-1665*, p.521). Lord Bulkeley's letter is headed "Conway y<sup>e</sup> 17th 65", but the month is not given. In the *Calendar of State Papers* the letter is assigned to August 1665, but the reference it makes to causing no restraints on the lead suggests it must be subsequent to Lord Conway's letter of 6 October to the Deputy Lieutenants (no.IV). It is accordingly here tentatively assigned to the 17th of that month.