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INTRODUCTION

CONOLLY PAPERS

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Conolly Papers (D2094, D1062/1, D663, T2825 and MIC435)

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Summary

The Conolly papers derive from the Conolly (note the single 'n') family of Castletown, Celbridge, Co. Kildare, which was founded by William Conolly (1662-1729), Speaker of the Irish House of Commons from 1715 to 1729. They cover (unevenly) the period c.1600-c.1900, and are now scattered over a variety of locations, mainly Irish archival institutions. In 1965, Castletown was sold by the 6th Lord Carew, who had inherited it from his maternal uncle, Major E.M. Conolly. Just prior to this, all or some of the papers there had been the subject of a 'National Library of Ireland Report on Private Collections' (No. 314); and in the following year, Lord Carew distributed them as follows:

1. The 18th century political and personal correspondence (but including much estate correspondence, 1683-1900, and also Castletown account books, 1763-1893) to Trinity College, Dublin (MSS 3931-84: microfilms in PRONI, MIC435).
2. The 18th century estate papers (rentals, accounts, etc) for the Conolly estates in Co. Londonderry to PRONI (D2094).
3. The same in respect of the Ballyshannon estate, Co. Donegal, and other estates in the now Republic of Ireland, to the National Archives, Dublin (M.6917).

These three categories overlap at almost all points due to shortcomings in the original 'sort' made in 1966.

However, the more serious shortcoming in this well-intentioned plan (apart from the doubtful principle of making a division in the first place) was that c.1,000 papers formed no part of it, having been accidentally left behind in the house. There they were found at some point subsequent to the Hon. Desmond Guinness's purchase of Castletown in 1967. By his permission they were microfilmed by N.L.I., on its own behalf and that of PRONI. The N.L.I. microfilm reference number is p.6951; PRONI's, MIC244; and PRONI's print-outs are T2825. The arrangement of T2825 does not correspond to that of the originals or the microfilms. This fourth section of the archive has been given the name 'Castletown papers' and comprises:

4. Deeds and other papers mainly relating to or deriving from Speaker Conolly, c.1600-1849.

In addition to the Conolly papers which were at Castletown in the mid-1960s, there is a certain amount of surviving Conolly material of different provenances, as follows:

5. A solicitor's collection of Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry, estate papers, 1734-1900, in PRONI (D1062/1).

6. Some isolated Conolly correspondence, lease-books, maps, etc, in N.L.I. (MSS 5751, 17302, 15550 and 22005).
7. The Newtownlimavady corporation records, 1659-1806, in PRONI (D663).
8. A bundle of political letters to Thomas Conolly, 1796-1800, in PRONI's Register of Irish Archives (Pakenham Papers, G/2/20).
9. Letters and papers, 1817-1820, of Richard Staples as agent for the Bellaghy estate, in PRONI (D1567/F/11 and 2/11 and 17).
10. Some further Bellaghy estate papers, 1817-1842, copied by PRONI (T3110).
11. A survey of the Grocers' Proportion in Co. Londonderry, c.1760, in private possession in Co. Londonderry.



Family history

The object of this description is, not only to clarify the position with regard to the now fragmented Conolly archive, but to draw on and, where appropriate, extend the biographical information on the 18th century Conollys already available, in print, though in a similarly fragmented form.

The printed sources drawn on, and in most cases extensively quoted, are as follows:

J.G. Simms, *The Williamite Confiscation in Ireland, 1690-1703* (London, 1956), pp. 125-7 and 150.

The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1754--90 (eds. L.B. Namier and John Brooke, 3 vols. London, 1964), ii, 242-3, and ... 1715-54 (ed. Romney Sedgwick, 2 vols., London, 1970), i, 571.

L. Boylan, *Castletown and its Owners* (Irish Georgian Society guidebook, published c.1970), passim.

DW. Hayton, 'The Beginnings of the "Undertaker System"', in Hayton and Thomas Bartlett (eds.), *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690-1800* (Belfast, 1980), pp. 47-52.

Draft entry under Conolly for the 'Leading Interests in Co. Londonderry' section of the 'History of the Irish Parliament, 1690-1800' (PRONI, ENV/5/HP/18).

E.A. Currie, 'Fining Down the Rents: the Management of the Conolly Estates in Ireland, 1734-1800', in *The Journal of the Derry Diocesan Historical Society* (1979), pp. 25-38.

Detailed attribution to these principal sources, and to the others drawn on in this description, is made in the notes at the end of the Introduction to PRONI's list of T2825.



William (Speaker) Conolly (1662-1729)

William Conolly was born in 1662 in the town of Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. His father, Patrick Conolly, was attainted by King James's Irish Parliament of 1689: otherwise little is known of Patrick Conolly and his wife, Jane, except that they owned an inn or alehouse and must have conformed to the Established Church some time before Conolly's birth. Old Irish christian names like Terence, Phelim and Thady, predominate among his relatives.

Conolly appears to have been the oldest of the family, and was early apprenticed to the law in Dublin. In 1685, when his sister Jane was only one year old, he was already qualified as an attorney and attached to the Court of Common Pleas. At the same time his friends were making representations to Capt. James Hamilton, Master of the King's Alnage and Keeper of Irish Lighthouses, to employ him as agent. Conolly eventually secured the position in 1692 and continued in Hamilton's employment until 1700.

In 1694, Conolly married Katherine Conyngham, daughter of Sir Albert Conyngham, a Williamite Lt-General of the Irish Ordnance, and sister of Henry Conyngham of Mount Charles, Co. Donegal. She brought him a marriage portion of £2,300, in return for which he settled on her and/or on the issue of their marriage the first estates purchased by him in Ireland. They were the lands of Rodanstown (near Kilcock), Dollanstown, Batterstown, etc, stated as containing 1,427 acres in the barony of Deece, Co. Meath. His marriage allied Conolly to some of the most influential families of the North: the Leslies, Montgomerys, Hamiltons, Gores, Corrys and Knoxes, and to some useful friends in high places, for example James Bonnell, who married Jane Conyngham, Katherine's sister, and was later Comptroller and Accountant-General of the Revenue. Around Conolly in Co. Meath, where he continued to live until he moved to Castletown, his relatives subsequently established themselves. For example, Brigadier Henry Conyngham (his wife's brother) purchased the manor of Slane and other adjacent lands forfeited by Christopher Fleming, Lord Slane, and by King James II himself.

Conolly, too, having a considerable income from land and from his various agencies and employments, made even more substantial purchases of forfeited estates; and, his rise from obscurity can be ascribed mainly to his trafficking in the forfeited estates (although he had been sufficiently prominent by 1689 to be included in the Jacobite Act of Attainder). In 1691, he is referred to as agent for the mayor, commonalty and citizens of Londonderry in connection with a lease of Lord Antrim's forfeited estate. In 1692 he appears as agent for the farming of Sir Patrick Trant's forfeited estate; he complained that as a result of prejudice he was forced to bid unnecessarily high for it. The report of the Inquiry Commissioners of 1699 into the disposition of the forfeited estates states that Conolly and an associate 'took vast quantities of lands and in great measure governed the bids (few daring to bid against them)'. Conolly also became agent to Lord Albemarle, one of King William's Dutch favourites and a leading grantee of forfeited estates in Ireland, and admitted taking money for himself from purchasers of Albemarle's grants. On his own account he bought between eight and nine thousand acres from Albemarle, for which he claimed to have paid £3,000.

He was also on bad terms with the Trustees of the Forfeited Estates appointed in 1700, who had made strenuous, but unsuccessful, efforts to prove that he had abetted a fraudulent claim. In the proceedings over this claim, he was described in one case paper as 'a cunning, intriguing spark'.

After King William's grants of forfeited estates to (mainly Dutch) recipients, like Lords Albemarle and Athlone, were annulled in 1700 by an Act of Resumption of the English Parliament, it transpired that about a hundred purchasers had between them paid these grantees £60,000. They included many of the leading figures in Irish public life, and as a group they were known as the Protestant purchasers, although they actually included two Catholics. The largest was Conolly. The Protestant purchasers represented their case while the Resumption Bill was before Parliament, and met with a qualified response. A clause was included in the bill providing that £21,000 be allotted as compensation to be divided proportionately among purchasers who should prove before 10 August 1700 that they had made actual payments to the grantees. Another clause enjoined the grantees to repay the money they had received and declared that the purchasers might take legal action to recover the amount.

The Protestant purchasers regarded £21,000 as very poor compensation for an investment of £60,000; they do not seem to have thought much of their chances of recovering the balance from the grantees. In any case they did not wish to lose the lands which they had secured at advantageous prices and on which they claimed that they had already spent considerable sums for improvements. Accordingly they began an agitation, in which the leading part was taken by Conolly, and which was not without results. A further Act was passed which allowed the purchasers to buy the lands from the Trustees at thirteen times the annual rent and, in addition to their share of the £21,000 previously allotted, gave them credit for one-third of what they had paid to the grantees. This in effect credited them with two-thirds of their outlay, but in some cases their original bargains had been so favourable that they still had very considerable sums to pay to the Trustees. Conolly was one of the principal purchasers under this dispensation, his acquisitions in 1703 totalling approximately ten thousand acres. The price paid was often less than £1 per acre, and in some cases Conolly paid only one-third of the purchase money and the rest in what were called 'Protestant purchasers' debentures'.

His most celebrated purchase, the Castletown estate, Co. Kildare, was made in 1709. Castletown had a particularly complicated recent history. Its previous owner had been William Dongan, Earl of Limerick, whose entire estate, totalling 26,480 acres in several counties, had been granted to Lord Athlone in 1693. But Lord Limerick's younger brother, Thomas, had served the crown faithfully and incurred heavy losses as Governor of New York. On the death of his brother in 1698, Thomas Dongan assumed the title Earl of Limerick and returned to Castletown to claim his inheritance. Pursuant to a special Act of Parliament for his relief, Thomas, Earl of Limerick's claim and title to his brother's estate were admitted, but under stringent conditions. Accordingly, on 21 September 1709 he and his cousin, John Dongan of Castletown Kildrought, sold the Castletown estate to Conolly for £15,000, £9,000 of which was allocated to Thomas, Earl of Limerick in acknowledgement of 'his great and loyal service to the kingdom of England'. A contemporary rent roll, specially

drawn up for the benefit of intending purchasers, has survived, and states the acreage as 1,730 and the rental as £975.

The lands acquired by Conolly were not limited to those declared forfeit as a result of the Williamite War. In Ulster the descendants of many of those who received grants or made purchases after the forfeitures of O'Neill and O'Donnell in 1608 were gradually finding themselves in financial difficulties and/or were anxious to sell their estates. The Limavady estate, Co. Londonderry, granted to Sir Thomas Phillips at the Plantation, was sold by his descendants to Conolly in 1697. The estate of John Kingsmill in the manor of Castlefin, Co. Donegal, was sold by his descendants in 1711. In 1718 Conolly purchased for £52,000 the profitable estate of Lord Folliott in and around Ballyshannon with the fisheries of Lough Erne; the yearly income from this estate was £2,000, and £450 from the fisheries (although the fisheries were the cause of much subsequent litigation, which lasted almost up to the time of Conolly's death).

Conolly's next purchases were, again, of land in Cos Dublin and Kildare. From Philip, Duke of Wharton, he purchased in 1723 the estate of Wharton's grandfather, Adam Loftus, in the manor of Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin, for £62,000, and from Matthew Plunket, Lord Louth, the estate of Killadoon, Celbridge, in 1725. In 1738 Conolly purchased from John Whyte, for £11,883, the manor, town and lands of Leixlip, and the chief rent belonging to the manor. Excepted from it were portions of the estate which were later purchased in 1731 by Conolly's nephew, namesake and successor, who came to live at Leixlip after the death of his uncle in 1729. William Conolly Junior also completed his uncle's last purchase in the North - that of the Vintners Proportion at Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry.

It was generally acknowledged that Conolly was the richest man in Ireland. He early established himself as a capable developer and administrator of his estates and became a legend in his own lifetime; one petitioner wrote 'whatsoever you undertake God prospers'. Swift commented in his Drapier's Letters that, if Wood's Halfpence became current, Conolly would require 240 horses to bring his half-year's rent from Dublin to Castletown, and two or three great cellars in his house for storage.



Conolly the politician

In political life Conolly's advancement was equally spectacular. In 1692 he succeeded in getting elected to William III's first Parliament as a member for the borough of Donegal. On 2 May 1698, he received his first public employment, that of Collector and Receiver of Revenue for Londonderry and Coleraine. In those years he was practising as an attorney on the North-West Circuit and building up a reputation for industry, shrewdness and ability. In 1703 he was returned to Parliament for Co. Londonderry, which he continued to represent until his death.

In April 1709, he was appointed a Commissioner of the Revenue, but was dismissed from office along with many Whigs in September 1710. With the death of the Tory Queen Anne and the accession of George I, in 1714, Conolly was restored to the Revenue Board, of which he became de facto First Commissioner; and in the following year, 1715, he was unanimously elected Speaker of the House of Commons. In 1717 he was also named one of the three Lords Justices chosen to administer the government of the country in the absence of the Lord Lieutenant. The nomination of an Irishman of such humble origin was greatly resented in some quarters, but Conolly subsequently served as one of the Lords Justices on nine further occasions and continued to remain 'at the head of his country's interest'. He steadfastly opposed the appointment of Englishmen to posts in the Irish administration and recommended to successive Lords Lieutenant those of Irish birth who were qualified. In a letter to the British Secretary of State written in February 1728, Hugh Boutler, Archbishop of Armagh, paid Conolly the grudging tribute: 'He is a person of abilities and a fair character, but as determined a supporter of the Irish against the English interest here as anybody, though with more prudence than many others'.

The political dominance of Conolly derived, not just from his personality and ability and from the unique combination of crucial offices which he held, but also from any important changes in the political system in Ireland which took place immediately after the Hanoverian succession. In Anne's reign the conflict of Whigs and Tories had tended to swamp all other considerations governing political behaviour. Ties of kinship or patronage, for example, might count for little against the pull of party. With the disintegration of the two-party system these other factors became more important, and principle no longer exercised the most powerful influence on men's conduct. One of the most important effects produced by this change on the government's method of parliamentary management was simply to decrease the number of managers or 'undertakers' involved. The Whig and Tory parties had each been directed by a caucus of politicians, and any negotiations with the Viceroy were conducted by the leadership as a whole: the replacement of the Whig and Tory parties by smaller factions narrowed the circle of political leadership and meant that now there were two or three principal managers at the most to see that the government's business was transacted, and usually one of them was pre-eminent. The existence of this presiding individual was the most notable characteristic of the 'undertaker system' of the mid-18th century, and it had appeared before the end of George I's reign.

Conolly achieved pre-eminence as a parliamentary manager through holding his three important offices, which had never before been held simultaneously by one man. The Speakership enabled him to influence the proceedings of the Commons, and it made his goodwill vitally necessary to the government. If the occupant of the Chair favoured the interests of the ministry he could make things go well; if not, there was certain to be trouble. The office of Lord Justice was coveted for the prestige it conferred: it carried no patronage of its own (although the Lords Justices were consulted by the English government before the appointment of new judges and bishops), but Conolly's nomination served to show that he retained the trust of the ministry. The 'First' Commissionership of the Revenue was in a way the most important post of the three, providing Conolly with a source of patronage which he was able to use much as he liked. Just how valuable this patronage was as an engine of political power can be deduced from the fact that the Revenue Service was the fastest-growing department of state in Ireland, with several hundred officers in its employ (the majority of whom were appointed by the Revenue Commissioners themselves) and an expenditure on salaries alone of almost £50,000 a year. The concentration of these offices in Conolly's hands owed something to his ability and something to chance. Conolly, as one of the foremost men in Parliament, was able to overawe his colleagues on the Revenue Board; added to which, he was of a hard-working disposition, while the other Commissioners were for the most part absentees. Additionally, the wholesale dismissal of Tory officers from the Revenue service after Queen Anne's death gave the new Whig Commissioners more vacancies to fill than they would otherwise have had and temporarily increased the amount of patronage at their disposal.

Conolly established his position as the leading government manager in the Commons as early as 1715, but he had to wait until 1725 before he became the principal and unrivalled 'undertaker', following the enforced resignation of his enemy Lord Midleton, formerly Alan Brodrick, a Whig politician who had been raised to the office of Lord Chancellor of Ireland in 1714. Conolly did not enjoy his pre-eminence for long, as ill-health obliged him to retire from public life in 1728.



Conolly's will and inheritance

Conolly died at his house in Capel Street, Dublin, on 30 October 1729. He had no children, but to his own and his wife's relatives, he was a generous benefactor. In his will, made on 18 October 1729, he left to his wife all his estates in North and South Wales, his mansion house in Dublin, his mansion house and manor of Castletown and all his manors, lands and tenements in Cos Kildare, Meath, Westmeath and Roscommon. After the death of his wife, they were to pass on to his nephew, William, to whom he bequeathed direct his estates in Donegal, Dublin, Fermanagh, Wexford and Waterford. To his wife's nephews he left his Limavady estate (which, as a result of their childlessness, was to revert to his great-nephew, Thomas Conolly, in 1781). Katherine Conolly was 67 years of age when her husband died. She was to survive him for 23 years, living at Castletown or in the great house in Capel Street which Conolly had purchased in 1707, and which had been the centre of his political activities. Mrs Conolly had always shared her husband's political interests and after his death people continued to flock to the Capel Street house to enlist her support. She died at Castletown in 1725, and was described by Mrs Delany as 'a plain and vulgar woman in her manner, but [who] had very valuable qualities'.



William Conolly Junior

William Conolly Junior was the son of Speaker Conolly's only brother, Patrick, on whom the Speaker had settled £2,000 in 1705. In 1720 Conolly obtained a sinecure employment, the Cursitorship of Chancery, for his nephew. In 1727 William Conolly Junior was elected M.P. for Ballyshannon and continued to represent that borough until his death in 1754.

In 1734 he made a grand English marriage, to Lady Anne Wentworth, eldest daughter of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford. In the same year, Conolly was returned to the British Parliament for a vacancy at Aldeburgh, where Lord Strafford had influence. Voting consistently with the government, he called himself 'an incorrigible Whig'. He decided not to stand for Aldeburgh in 1747, when he was returned for Petersfield (where Speaker Conolly had owned property in the mid-1720s). His marriage was the cause of great happiness to old Mrs Conolly, who shared Castletown and her Capel Street house with the newly-weds, until Leixlip Castle was ready for their reception.

Late in 1744 the Conollys moved to London, where they remained until 1748, returning to Leixlip at intervals or to Conolly's English country house, Stretton Hall, Staffordshire. After Mrs Conolly's death, they and their seven children moved into Castletown. Two years later, in 1754, William Conolly himself died. He was succeeded at Castletown by his only son, Thomas, who was then under age. Lady Anne moved to Stretton Hall with her family, and Castletown was for the time being deserted.



Thomas Conolly (1734-1803)



Lady Louisa Conolly

On 30 December 1758, when he was 24 years of age, Thomas Conolly married Lady Louisa Lennox, third daughter of the 2nd Duke of Richmond. Lady Louisa's older sister, Lady Emily, had married James, Earl of Kildare in 1747, and was living at Carton, while her eldest sister, Caroline, had eloped with and married Henry Fox, later Lord Holland. The Lennox daughters were remarkable for their beauty and intelligence, although a younger sister, Lady Sarah, considered by all her family to have the greatest share of beauty, had not an equal amount of common sense. Lady Louisa and Lady Sarah had been living at Carton with their sister Emily, Lady Kildare, since 1751. Under the influence of her husband, James Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, later 1st Duke of Leinster, they had developed a real affection and sympathy for the country of their adoption. After spending seven months in England, during which time Lady Louisa was presented at Court and made her debut in London society, the Conollys settled down at Castletown in October 1759.



Thomas Conolly's inheritance

Conolly's Irish estates were valued at £15,275 per annum in 1758. They covered a wide area ranging through Donegal, Derry, Leitrim, Fermanagh, Roscommon, Westmeath, Meath, King's County, Kildare and Dublin, but were heavily encumbered, being subject to his father's debts and his sisters' portions – in all amounting to £124,000. By 1773 this load had been reduced to about £43,000 by the sale of leases and lands not entailed. However, Thomas Conolly had added £42,000 of his own debts, so that the total was now £85,000. This expenditure was incurred in buying up new property, as well as houses in Dublin and London. £25,000 had been spent on improvements and alterations to the house and demesne at Castletown, work in which Lady Louisa played a prominent part. The total rental, on the other hand, had also increased at this stage to £21,000 per annum.

Some idea of the far-from-satisfactory economic state of Conolly's inheritance may be obtained from the particular instance of his Co. Londonderry property. He was a more considerable landowner in Londonderry than in any other county, and for the unusually long (though not quite record) period of forty years – 1751-1800 – he represented it in Parliament, '... faithfully ... [discharging] the duties of that station with credit and advantage to his constituents, and with a dignified spirit becoming a man at the head of the landed interest of Ireland. ...' The 'landed interest' in Londonderry itself, on the strength of which he (and Speaker Conolly) sat for that county in Parliament, was threefold: the Phillips family's manor of Limavady, purchased in 1697; the Grocers Proportion at Muff, alias Eglinton, leased in 1713 and renewed in 1760; and the Vintners Proportion at Bellaghy, leased in c.1718, and purchased at the end of Speaker Conolly's life, in 1729.

In 1697, the year of the sale by William Phillips to Speaker Conolly, the Limavady estate had the highest valuation in the county - £900 a year (a figure greatly in excess of the then rental). The rental stood at £591 at the time of Speaker Conolly's death in 1729, and £1,529 in c.1800; by 1782, the acreage had dwindled to 1,795 (Irish). The explanation of the low rental and contracting acreage is, undoubtedly, perpetuity-leasing – a process which must have begun under the Phillipses and been continued by Speaker Conolly. On the Speaker's death, Limavady – as has been seen – passed to his wife's nephew, Colonel Henry Conyngham, later Earl Conyngham. Conyngham seems to have been only tenant-for-life under the terms of Speaker Conolly's will, because on his death, childless, in 1781, Limavady reverted to Thomas Conolly. The Conyngham interregnum militated against efficient management, as the tenants cannot have been unaware that Conyngham and Conolly were on bad terms, the more so after they publicly came to blows in 1765, over the parliamentary borough of Newtownlimavady, which was on the estate. On the other hand, the Conyngham interregnum at least arrested the process of perpetuity-leasing.

The Grocers Proportion, the lease of which was acquired by Speaker Conolly in 1713, almost marched at its eastern extremity with the Limavady estate, and lay between it and Derry City, bounded on the north by Lough Foyle and on the south by the Berntullet River. In c.1760, in Thomas Conolly's day, the 'Manor of Muff' was

surveyed at 8,799 Irish acres – a figure confirmed by a survey made for the Grocers in 1820, when the Conolly lease at last expired; in 1820, 5,053 acres out of the then computation of 8,877 were described as arable and pasture. The rental was £476 in 1729, c.£1,000 in 1759 (both subject to a head rent of £200 to the Grocers), and £4,650 in 1820.

The third major component of the Conolly estate, the Vintners Proportion, resembled the Limavady estate in that it was freehold and was acquired outright (subject only to a chief rent of £200 a year). It was centred on the town of Bellaghy, and was bounded on the north by the Mercers Proportion, on the south by Lough Beg, on the west by the barony of Keenaght, and on the east by Co. Antrim. The lessees prior to Speaker Conolly were the 2nd and 3rd Viscounts Massereene, to whom the Vintners had granted a 61-year lease in 1673, subsequently extended by about ten years. Conolly seems to have bought the Massereene lease, possibly in 1718, prior to buying the Proportion in fee farm in 1729 for £15,000 plus the chief rent. (This latter transaction was conducted on his behalf by an intermediary, Conolly being 'a little too big to cringe to a company of mechanics or their clerks, to which there's an absolute necessity'). The rental of the Proportion was a mere £317 in 1701 (although the 1697 valuation had been £600), £594 in 1718, £714 in 1729, £1,843-plus in 1734, £2,688 in 1775 and £3,117 in 1791. A totting-up of the acreages of the townlands comprising the estate in 1775, produces a figure of 28,628 statute acres: again, perpetuity-leasing explains the discrepancy between this and the contemporary rental of £2,688. There had been seven 'freeholders' (which in this context means perpetuity-tenants) on the estate in 1718. In 1734, William Conolly Junior granted away most of it in almost 80 perpetuities – no doubt because £10,000 of the purchase price of £15,000 became payable in that year. Ruinous in the short term, this ploy seems not even to have succeeded in the short, because in 1737 he had to raise £10,500 on a mortgage of the estate. Even this did not stop the process of perpetuity-leasing; 65 more perpetuities were granted between 1740 and the death of Thomas Conolly in 1803.

Thomas Conolly's economic and political position in Co. Londonderry was therefore compromised by three factors: his Grocers estate was held on a terminable lease; his Limavady estate was in other ownership until 1781; and a high proportion of both the Vintners and Limavady estates was let in perpetuity. Yet another complication was Conolly's already-mentioned debts; from the early 1790s it appears to have been fairly widely known that he contemplated selling Limavady. The Bellaghy agent, John Spotswood, complained in 1797 that the creditors were pressing him for payment and even threatening law. Simultaneously, his Dublin bankers, La Touche & Co., were pressing Conolly to reduce his borrowings from them (currently standing at £47,667) which he had not done for years past. To meet this crisis he attempted to raise money off the estate quickly by encouraging the agent to get tenants to take perpetuity leases and fine down their rents to earlier levels. Following his death in April 1803, it was discovered that he had '... anticipated by drafts all his income, and Lady Louisa will have at least £10,000 of interest to pay with the half year's rent of this [the Ballyshannon] estate, £4,000 ...'. It was even feared that Castletown House itself would have to be sold.



Thomas Conolly the politician

The defects of character implicit in his handling of his difficult but still dazzling inheritance, had early been apparent to contemporaries. Lady Caroline Fox (later Lady Holland), the most discerning of his sisters-in-law, found him on first acquaintance 'free and easy and good-humoured' and, what pleased her more, in love with his wife, but later complained that he was 'immensely silly' and 'a tiresome boy'. According to Lady Kildare, writing on 11 November 1762, Conolly 'talked a vast deal of nonsense about politics in order to make me think him mighty cunning, and that he knew the way of the world as well as anybody.' Conolly's political debut was made in England, as M.P. for Malmestoney (where Henry Fox had influence, 1759-1768, and then for the Duke of Richmond's borough of Chichester. He spoke occasionally in the British Parliament, mostly on Irish affairs, but made no mark in English politics – owing, it was later remarked, to 'the radical defect ... of having a wrong head'. In Ireland he was, inevitably, much more important, although there he seems for some time to have been overshadowed by his Irish mentor, Kildare/Leinster. In 1775 a government list of the members of the Irish Parliament said of Conolly: 'He is so capricious and unsteady, that there is very little dependence to be had on him, and it would be better for government that he was a declared opponent of its measures.'

To some extent Conolly's political vagaries can be explained on the ground that he was an independent country gentleman, who considered it a merit rather than the reverse to be influenced by the course of events and of parliamentary debate. Moreover, he was an English-type Whig, seeking always to hold what he considered a correct balance between Crown and People. Another factor was his situation as member for an open, county constituency. Londonderry was more precocious in its political awareness and activity than most counties, and in terms of effective landownership Conolly was a less influential landowner than many county M.P.s. He therefore could not afford to neglect his popular standing in the constituency. His own family and personal connections were also important in determining his political course. They probably were a principal inducement to him (and to the Duke of Leinster) to oppose the Absentee Tax of 1773, and they were at the very least a complicating factor in the important period 1777-1780, when his brother-in-law, the 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire, was Lord Lieutenant.

What follows is a brief resumé of Conolly's political stance on some of the major issues of the day. His attitude to the Volunteers was ambivalent. It was he who proposed in the Irish House of Commons in 1779 the celebrated vote of thanks to the Volunteers, Leinster following suit in the Lords; but, basically, while recognizing the military necessity for them, Conolly saw no justification for their involvement in politics. Later, during the debates on the Dublin Police Act of 1785, he was at pains to pay tribute to the way in which the Volunteers had accepted the authority and direction of parliament by their peaceful withdrawal from public affairs. He was unenthusiastic about the modification of Poyning's Law and the repeal of the Perpetual Mutiny Act - in effect, about the Constitution of 1782. In November of that year, he likened the British indulgence of the Irish demands to the spoiling attitude of a nurse towards neglected children. In September 1783, he was described by a

friend as 'croaking [i.e., pessimistic] as usual' about the second Volunteer Convention at Dungannon, to which he was a delegate and at which plans were laid for the National Volunteer Convention to be held in Dublin in November for the purpose of concerting a plan of parliamentary reform. He did not attend the National Convention, although exhorted privately by the administration to do so and do what he could to exert a moderating influence. When the resolutions of the Convention about parliamentary reform were laid before the House of Commons by Flood, Conolly was loud in denunciation of this attempt of an armed body to overawe Parliament, and was the proposer of the motion to 'preserve our present happy constitution inviolate at the risk of our lives and fortunes'. When the Commercial Propositions were first laid before the Irish Parliament early in 1785, Conolly supported them. However, like many other Irish M.P.s, he saw much to object to in the Propositions as revised and returned by the British Parliament in the summer.

In one respect Conolly's political thinking was entirely consistent: he steadfastly opposed the practice of successive Lords Lieutenant of maintaining power by corruption. Nevertheless, he held aloof from the new and ostensibly reforming administration of the Marquess of Buckingham (1787-1790). In 1789, he was in the forefront of the opposition during the Regency crisis. He spoke in favour of Grattan's motion in February that the Irish Parliament should vote an immediate address to the Prince inviting him to an unrestricted Regency of Ireland; and when the Lord Lieutenant refused to transmit this address, Conolly was one of the M.P.s selected for the deputation to wait personally on the Prince. He was a founder-member of the Whig Club, which was set up during the aftermath of the Regency crisis, and in the limited 'internal' and 'economical' reforms advocated by that body, reached what was probably his *ne plus ultra*. However, the fast-moving events of the early 1790s did not allow him to stop there. For Conolly, as for many Irish M.P.s, the session of 1793 was disruptive of past political conduct and decisive of future. At the start of it, he gave notice that he would bring forward what he had hitherto opposed, a measure of parliamentary reform. This was a reaction to, indeed a retaliation against, the Catholic Relief Bill prefigured in the Speech from the Throne. Conolly had strongly supported Luke Gardiner's Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1782; but his support for political concessions to Catholics was grudging and constrained. In the same session, he declared strongly in favour of the Convention Bill, but said he would not desert his friends, particularly Leinster and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, to vote with the administration. He voted for the Militia Bill, accepted the Colonelcy of the Co. Londonderry Militia, and declined that of the Derry City Militia in favour of his brother-in-law, Colonel George Napier (Lady Sarah Lennox's second husband). In 1794-1795, he supported the short-lived administration of Lord Fitzwilliam, and subsequently spoke against Fitzwilliam's recall in the debate on the subject in the House of Commons. He also opposed the coercive measures of the administration of Fitzwilliam's successor, Lord Camden, and in 1797 resigned his commission in the Kildare Militia (not in the Londonderry) in protest against the disarming of Ulster. Between February and July of that year he was involved in an abortive approach to the Prince of Wales which had as its object the appointment of the Prince as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.



The Union and Conolly's demise

By this stage Conolly was becoming increasingly disillusioned with Irish politics. The Duke of Richmond found him favourable to the idea of a Union when it was discussed between them, in 1797. In 1796, Conolly had sold the parliamentary boroughs which he controlled, Ballyshannon and Limavady, to two of his numerous connections by marriage, Lords Belmore and Londonderry (for £12,000 each); and when he eventually retired as M.P. for Co. Londonderry, in 1800, he effectively transferred his seat for that constituency, too, to Lord Londonderry's family. This was indicative of the increasing influence over him which Londonderry's son and heir, Lord Castlereagh, had gained. Castlereagh, who as Chief Secretary, 1799-1801, was to be responsible for carrying the Union, had married Conolly's niece in 1794.

The rebellion of 1798 cast a gloom over Castletown, for the Conollys had relatives on both sides. Renewing his pledge of 1796 to Lord Camden that he would uphold the monarchy with his life and fortune, Conolly wrote to the new Viceroy, Lord Cornwallis, in June 1798, begging leave to offer his unconditional service, and ardently supported '... the consolidation of the strength of both islands in one legislative Union. If this can be done, in spite of the private interest of one set of men and the nonsensical noisy clamour of the other, I shall die content. ...' The Union extinguished Conolly's political career. His health was not good; and his general depression following the troubles of 1798 was greatly aggravated by a troublesome lawsuit with his sisters and the executor of his mother's will (she died in March 1797) over settlements due to them out of his English estates. Essentially generous and kind-hearted, Conolly felt the irritations which emanated from all those events. The Conollys wanted to settle in Sussex or Devonshire, but the existence of an Income Tax in England at the time seems to have decided them against it, although they did spend much of 1801-1802 in England. On 27 April 1803, Conolly died at Castletown.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that, though more 'right-headed' than is commonly supposed, he was deficient in both the ability and stability requisite for the position of leadership he had inherited.



The papers

There now follows a description of the components of the Conolly papers which are uniquely or conveniently available in PRONI.



The Castletown papers copied by PRONI (T2825)

The Castletown papers comprise c.1,000 letters and papers, c.1600-1849, mainly relating to or deriving from William (Speaker) Conolly (1662-1729). This part of the Conolly archive is varied in content, reflecting William Conolly's varied activities as an attorney and estate agent, a landowner in Cos Kildare, Dublin, Meath, Westmeath, Londonderry, Fermanagh and Donegal, and an important political figure. Included are a series of rough figures for the Alnage duties (on the sealing of woollen goods) of Ireland, 1690-1695; letters and papers about Derry City and County, with particular reference to the Irish Society, the Foyle fishery, etc. 1687-1701; a large number of title deeds, legal papers bearing on title, and rentals of the Conolly estates of Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin, Leixlip, Co. Kildare, and of other properties in Dublin City and County, Co. Meath, Co. Westmeath, etc, 16th century-1780s; title deeds, leases, legal case papers, rentals, accounts and agents' correspondence about the Conolly estates in Cos Londonderry, Fermanagh and Donegal, with some references to the political affairs of those counties, 1609-1849; and correspondence between William Conolly, as Speaker of the House of Commons or a Lord Justice, with Lords Lieutenant, Chief Secretaries, etc, 1719-1729.



The TCD papers copied by PRONI (MIC435)

This section of the Conolly papers (the originals of which are in the Manuscripts Department, T.C.D.) comprise c.2,000 documents and volumes, 1683-1900. They include: political, personal and estate correspondence, including details of local politics in Co. Londonderry and in the boroughs of Limavady, Co. Londonderry, and Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal, 1709-1900; personal and Castletown household, demesne and farm account books, 1758-1893; and rent accounts for property in Cos Kildare, Meath, Dublin and Roscommon, 1781-1792, together with a survey of property in Drumhome, Co. Donegal, 1770. There is also a copy out-letter book of a Dutch merchant in Dublin, 1683-1685.



The Lord Carew papers in PRONI (D2094)

This section of the Conolly papers comprises c.100 documents and volumes - title deeds, leases, rentals and legal papers, 1612-1802 - relating mainly to the Limavady estate, which had originally been granted to Sir Thomas Phillips. In addition to a good series of 18th century Limavady rentals and abstracts of leases, there are also: title deeds to the manor of Castlefin, Co. Donegal, 1707-1728, with a rental of 1721-1724; rental and survey of Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal, including Newporton, Co. Fermanagh, 1718, with rent accounts, 1729; rent account for Thomas Conolly's estate at Newporton, Co. Fermanagh, 1774; rentals and rent rolls, with gaps, for the Vintners Company lands at Bellaghy, 1729 and 1775-1793; rental for the manor of Grocers, 1729; instructions from the Earl-Bishop of Derry about work on churches at Tamlaght and Maghera, Co. Londonderry, 1775; an examination by Thomas Conolly's agent, of signatories to a petition from Tamlaght Finlagan parish, Co. Londonderry, published in the Freeman's Journal, 18-21 June 1774, protesting against the act which excluded Dissenters from voting at parish vestries; a map of Aghaderrard, Co. Leitrim, by William Starrat, 1731; Patrick Roe's map of Limavady mill, c.1781; and a map of Carrowclare, Co. Londonderry, c.1800.



General

The D1062/1 section of the Conolly papers comprises 16 boxes of a Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, solicitor's archive (relating to the Vintners/Conolly/Earl of Strafford estate at Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry. (Lord Strafford was descended from one of the co-heiresses of Thomas Conolly.) The boxes contain title deeds, leases, maps, accounts and correspondence relating to the estate, c.1700-c.1940. The leases begin in c.1730 and there is a composite volume of 29 maps and surveys, 1743-c.1837, together with a separate map of Bellaghy town, c.1750.

The D663 section of the Conolly papers comprises c.40 documents and volumes relating to the corporation and parliamentary borough of Limavady, including a complete run of four Limavady corporation minute books, 1659-1808. In addition to these papers of Conolly provenance, the following small runs of correspondence, one in family possession in Co. Westmeath and one in PRONI, relate to the estate and other affairs of Thomas Conolly and have been sorted and listed by PRONI.

The papers in Co. Westmeath are at Tullynally Castle, Castlepollard, and comprise (PRONI: Register of Irish Archives, Pakenham papers, G/2/20), a bundle of political letters to Thomas Conolly, 1796-1800, one of them a long letter from Henry Grattan. These concern the case against coercive measures for Ireland, wrangles over the colonelcy of the Co. Londonderry Militia, and the Union. They are present at Tullynally because Conolly was succeeded in the major part of his estates by his connection-by-marriage, Edward Michael Pakenham, son of Admiral the Hon. Sir Thomas Pakenham.

The first cache of papers in PRONI are part of the Staples archive (q.v.), D1567/F/1/11 and 2/11 and 17. These comprise letters and papers, 1817-1820, of Richard Staples relating to the Vintners Proportion at Bellaghy, the joint property of the heirs of Thomas Conolly, whose sister, Anne, had been the first wife of Richard Staples's father. In view of this family connection, Staples appears to have had some involvement with the administration of the estate prior to 1819, in which year he was appointed agent for it. The correspondents include his half-sister, Louisa Pakenham (wife of Admiral the Hon. Sir Thomas Pakenham, whose son, Edward Michael, was the principal heir of Thomas Conolly and assumed the name of Conolly, in lieu of Pakenham), Lord Castlereagh (later 2nd Marquess of Londonderry, whose wife was one of the minor co-heiresses), George Hutchinson (the Dublin attorney or man of business for the Conolly estate), John A. Smyth of Londonderry, etc, etc. There are also letters, 1819-1822, to Richard Staples's brother, the Rev. J.M. Staples, about Richard's death (which took place in 1820, not 1819, as stated in Burke's Peerage), about the condition of the agent's house at Bellaghy, about arrears of rent on the Bellaghy estate, etc.

The second cache of papers in PRONI are letters, legal case papers, rentals, etc, (13 documents), 1817-1842, relating to the Vintners Proportion at Bellaghy, part of which had been willed by Thomas Conolly to his niece, Lady Emily-Anne Hobart, wife of Lord Castlereagh, on whose death it passed to her eldest half-sister, Lady Harriet Hobart, Marchioness of Lothian (T3110: originals in the Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, Norwich.) ▲