Between the Speaker and the squire: the Anglo-Irish life of William Conolly II

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Making his will in 1803, Thomas Conolly stipulated that his heirs must assume the Conolly arms and name and, moreover, that they should be resident in Ireland, 'as their ancestor, Mr Speaker Conolly, the original and honest maker of my fortune, was'.[1] This requirement points to two key themes of the Conolly family history – their dynastic failures and their self-mythologising about their identity as an Irish family. In this desire to perpetuate the family name even in unpromising situations, they were not unique. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had witnessed a demographic crisis within the British elite leading to increased instances of inheritance by cadet branches of elite families, while the strategy of adopting the family surname by distant relations was frequently deployed to make such transitions more seamless. Emphasising spatial and territorial connections and the obligations these brought was also part and parcel of such elite strategies and allowed continuities to be outwardly presented where the reality of the situation was more complex.[2]

This was undoubtedly true in the case of Edward Michael Pakenham's assumption of the name Conolly to claim inheritance of some of his wife's grand-uncle's estates in 1803. Similar strategies were also central to Thomas Conolly's own attempts to secure his late uncle William Wentworth, 2nd Earl of Strafford's English earldom and Yorkshire estates in the 1790s. Anthony Malcomson has superbly dissected this complex episode in an important essay, which demonstrates the significance of the English connections of Thomas Conolly's mother, Lady Anne Wentworth, to the history of the Conolly family and their fluctuating fortunes, even mischievously arguing that the Conolly marriage alliance with the Strafford family was more significant than Thomas Conolly's marriage into the ducal Richmond family in 1758.[3] This article builds on Malcomson's work but

1 – Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757), William Conolly (1706-54)
1727, pastel on paper, 57 x 44.5 cm (© Castletown Foundation)

focuses instead on the first of the English Conollys, the Speaker's nephew and heir William James Conolly of Dunton Basset in Leicestershire. His journey from provincial English obscurity to becoming the heir of Ireland's largest fortune, political interest, and of course most important country house, allows us to gain a greater understanding of this neglected figure in the history of Castletown, one whose life embodied the hybrid and complex identity of a true Anglo-Irishman, equally comfortable (or indeed uncomfortable) on both sides of the Irish Sea. This article moves beyond older and out-dated clichés of 'absenteeism' to explore the complex realities of eighteenth-century British and Irish gentry life.[4] It shows that the Conollys' interests were never entirely insular but were instead at least partly orientated towards Britain from the 1720s onwards, even as they outwardly stressed their Irish patriotism in stone and scarves.[5]

William James Conolly (hereafter William Conolly II)[6] first came to public attention as the Speaker's designated heir in March 1721 when the London press reported his appointment to the Irish sinecure office of Cursitor in Chancery. Newspaper reports described him as a student at Greenwich academy and as a nephew of 'the famous Conolly of Ireland'.[7] His life before that is somewhat obscure. He was born in 1699 the only son of the Speaker's only brother Patrick and his wife Frances Hewett, a younger daughter of a minor Leicestershire gentry family, resident, confusingly, at Great Stretton, a property almost identical in name to the later Conolly property at Stretton in Staffordshire (for which see below).[8] This marriage, like the Speaker's own career, reminds us that the Conolly family background cannot have been as obscure as contemporaries and some later historians have suggested.[9] His parents were resident in Worksop in Nottinghamshire at the time of William's birth, though were living in London in 1705 when Speaker Conolly settled £2,000 upon them 'in consideration of the great love and affection I have for my brother'.[10] Patrick Conolly died in 1713, leaving – as his wife had predeceased him – two orphaned children, William and his elder sister Frances, 'described as a pretty solitary girl' of sixteen.[11]

Following Patrick's death, guardianship of William, but not Frances, was entrusted to the Speaker and his wife Katherine, causing some friction between the Conollys and the Hewett family, who no doubt assumed the much wealthier Conollys would provide for both children.[12] The Conollys, though childless themselves, already had some experience of such a role, having been entrusted with the education and upbringing of the three children of Katherine's late brother General Henry Conyngham, who was killed during the War of Spanish Succession in 1707.[13] Central to their role as guardians was the provision for the young Conynghams of an education suitable to their station in life. Thus Williams, the eldest son, was sent off on a grand tour in 1718 where, rather than developing an appreciation for European culture, he contracted venereal disease, ran through his allowance, and made an unsuitable marriage to a Dutch woman.[14] Meanwhile his younger brother Henry was provided with an officer's commission, allowing him to follow in the military footsteps of his father and grandfather, both distinguished soldiers. Finally, Mary, the Conynghams' only daughter, was found a suitable husband, Francis

2 – PL Ghezzi, Caricature of William Conolly on the Grand Tour 1727, drawing on paper (© Castletown Foundation)

Burton, of Buncraggy, county Clare, and was married at Castletown in 1720.[15] While the Conynghams, especially Williams, were not always appreciative of their Conolly relations, it is clear that William and Katherine took their role as guardians seriously, seeking to provide their charges with the best education, connections and opportunities to prosper in British and Irish elite society.

They may have learnt some lessons from their experience with Williams Conyngham by the time they came to oversee the education of William Conolly II. Indeed, even before Patrick Conolly's death he was being advised by the Speaker and his English friends to move to Nottingham to be near a public school to secure a good education for his children.[16] A suitable education was deemed essential for an elite gentleman in this period, with either attendance at public school, university or another high-status institution increasingly common both as a means to familiarise himself with the classics and as an entry point into the social and political world he would be expected to inhabit in adulthood.[17] Greenwich Academy met these requirements. Although only established in 1712, it was already a fashionable place for the sons of the nobility and gentry to study, while its scholarly credentials were confirmed by the school's close links with Greenwich Observatory.[18] After Greenwich, the young Conolly was 'ordered' by his uncle to attend a riding school, again suggesting the care been taken to give him the accomplishments of a gentleman. He was also advised of the perils of 'keeping bad company' and of the dangers of gambling.[19] The young William then virtually disappears from view following his nomination in absentia to the office of Cursitor in Chancery in 1721, a post that brought with it an income of £200 a year as well as entry into the world of official Dublin, dominated by his uncle. There is, however, one tantalising glimpse of him in 1720 in the only letter which survives from him to his uncle, whose advice he seeks about investing his small inheritance from his parents in the then rising South Sea Company.[20] Sadly the Speaker's response has not survived, but it seems likely from other sources that the younger William, unlike some of his Conolly relations, did not invest his small fortune in the infamous bubble.[21]

Increasingly central to a young man of fortune's education was the Grand Tour. Foreign travel, it was believed, would forward the cultivation of the mind as well as the development of a greater appreciation of the European cultural inheritance that was becoming so important in shaping elite identity in this period. The Grand Tour could also allow the tourist to build up a collection of paintings and sculpture to furnish his country house, and it could be used as an entrée point into elite, even royal, society. Conolly II seems to have had two separate tours, both presumably funded by the Speaker's largesse.

He landed in Leghorn, Italy, in December 1726, and visited Florence and then Rome, where the Italian artist, P.L. Ghezzi sketched his portrait in late spring/early summer (Plate 2). Interestingly the text associated with this drawing described him as 'Monsieur Conolly Irlandese'.[22] It is probable that the pastel portrait by Rosalba Carriera now at Castletown (Plate 1) was also painted at this time, but there is no direct evidence of this, or indeed of any purchases being made specifically for Castletown – then, of course, in the process of being furnished.[23] In October 1727 he was reported to be just back from his 'foreign travels' when he was presented at court to the new king, George II, by the Duke of Grafton, himself formerly a close associate and supporter of Speaker Conolly. Conolly II's presentation at court indicates not only that his education and travels had succeeded in polishing the boy from Dunton Bassett, but also that he, and more importantly, his uncle, 'the great Conolly of Ireland', were held in high esteem within elite circles in Britain, an especially impressive feat considering that the elder Conolly had never himself been out of Ireland except for a brief and enforced absence during the tumultuous period of the Glorious Revolution in 1688-89.[24]

It is possible that Conolly II's travels were interrupted by the accession of the new king and by the calling of a parliamentary election in Ireland. This electoral contest gave Speaker Conolly the opportunity to return the younger William as MP for the Conolly's ancestral hometown of Ballyshannon (pictured in the background of his portrait by Anthony Lee (Plate 3), allowing him to begin his political education in the Irish parliament, where he was joined by the two Conyngham brothers, both newly elected for the neighbouring constituency of Killybegs.[25] Following the end of his first parliamentary session, Conolly returned to the Continent to continue his travels, which this time took him to Hanover and then on to Italy by way of Dijon.[26] His trip to Hanover, like his earlier presentation to George II, was intended to give him an entrée to the royal court, this time to that of the heir-apparent to the throne. But this stratagem misfired, because by the time he arrived, Frederick, Prince of Wales had already departed for London.[27]

Shortly after William Conolly II's return from his grand tour, in October 1729, his uncle, Speaker Conolly, died following sporadic bouts of illness during the preceding year. The younger Conolly now came into his inheritance, or at least part of it. The Speaker's will divided the Conolly estates between his widow, his nephew, and Williams Conyngham. Katherine, his widow, received a life interest in Castletown and the Conollys' Dublin town house in Capel Street, as well as in estates in counties Dublin, Kildare, Meath and Roscommon, and outright ownership of a small estate in Wales. Williams Conyngham, meanwhile, inherited the Conolly estate at Newtown Limavady in county Derry, together with control of its two parliamentary seats, although this must have been small consolation for someone who had hoped, and had been widely tipped, to inherit the entire Conolly fortune.[28] The remainder of the vast family patrimony, including estates in Donegal, Derry, Dublin and Westmeath passed to Conolly II, making him, at a stroke, one of the richest men in Ireland.[29] He was also due to inherit Castletown along with the rest of the Conolly property, with the exception of the Welsh estate, upon

3 – Anthony Lee, Portrait of William Conolly, M.P. (1699-54)
c.1727, oil on canvas, 119 x 91cm (detail) (© National Gallery of Ireland, currently on loan to Leinster House)

the eventual death of Katherine, who was already in her 67th year. No-one, not least the younger Conolly, could have expected that she would live into her ninetieth year, thereby delaying his enjoyment of the full benefit of his uncle's fortune. In the immediate term, he was saddled with the responsibility of paying the Speaker's generous legacies to other less fortunate relations out of his portion of the estate.

With great wealth came great responsibility. Conolly II, though still a young man (he was 30 in 1729), was expected to take over the management of the Conolly estates as well as his uncle's political interest in the Irish parliament, though in reality this passed to the Speaker's established parliamentary lieutenants, Marmaduke Coghill and Sir Ralph Gore. It was anticipated that he would remain resident in Ireland, where he was made a member of the Privy Council in succession to his uncle, 'the late memorable patriot', and that he would settle down, but initially he seems to have preferred to 'ramble abroad', leaving the management of estate affairs to his uncle Thomas Pearson, the husband of the Speaker's sister Jane.[30] During the 1730 summer season, Conolly II was the toast of Tunbridge Wells, with one woman writing longingly, 'We all desire to marry Mr Conolly'.[31] His departure for Ireland, or that 'wretched country', was much lamented, with one anonymous poet bemoaning the loss of 'so much excellence'.[32] This reaction, if rather overblown, suggests the young Anglo-Irishman had made an impression. He was similarly active on the London social scene in the summers of 1731 and 1732, hunting with the Royal Family, attending balls, and promenading with other young men and women at court.[33] It is notable that his associates in England included few other members of the Irish upper class, suggesting both the ease with which he entered the English elite and his lack of familiarity with the established Irish interest at court.[34]

This rambling spendthrift lifestyle disappointed his Conolly relations. In April 1732 his uncle Thomas Pearson reported a conversation with Conolly about the latter's marriage intentions, writing that 'though he tells me he now designs it, yet I fear his thoughts are more intent upon rambling'.[35] Pearson further declared that he had stipulated that Conolly's future place of residence must be in Ireland. It is unclear how Conolly reacted to this conversation, but by November 1732 he had proposed to Lady Anne Wentworth, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Strafford, whom he had met in London. Six months later they were celebrating their marriage at Strafford's London house in St James's Square.[36]

Conolly's marriage to Lady Anne brought him further into the orbit of the English aristocracy. A god-daughter of Queen Anne, she was the daughter of Thomas Wentworth 1st Earl of Strafford (of the second creation), the head of a famous (or perhaps infamous) family. He was a grandnephew of Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford (of the first creation), Charles I's controversial Lord Deputy of Ireland, who had been executed at the beginning of the English Civil War. Lord Strafford, Lady Anne's father, had spent some of his youth 'wenching and wining' in Dublin while a Trinity undergraduate, before becoming a distinguished soldier and diplomat, through which service he regained the family earldom in 1711, but not the family estates, which had descended to his cousin,

Lord Rockingham.[37] Shortly afterwards, following the death of his patron, the Tory Queen Anne in 1714, his public career came to an abrupt end, and he devoted the remainder of his life to building a country house in the German-Baroque style on his estate at Staineborough in Yorkshire, which he later renamed Wentworth Castle. The degree to which his aesthetic sensibilities, clearly in evidence at Wentworth Castle and his improvements in the landscape there, influenced his daughter and son-in law's contribution to Castletown remains difficult to prove. Strafford's fall from grace, from a position where he and his socially ambitious wife were successfully negotiating their entry into London's 'beau monde' to his genteel retirement to his Yorkshire estates, may have made the marriage of his eldest daughter to an arriviste Irish commoner more acceptable than it would otherwise have been. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Conolly was not the first Irishman who had been under consideration as a possible match for Lady Anne.[38] Nevertheless, despite the somewhat tainted nature of the Strafford name, thanks to the earl's Jacobite associations it was an advantageous match for the socially ambitious Conolly. It was also, of course, advantageous to Lord Strafford, who was able to provide his daughter with a relatively low marriage portion considering the bride's social status. While Strafford might have benefitted initially from his daughter's marriage, her jointure of £3,000 per annum paid throughout her long widowhood up to her death in 1797 was a significant drain on the Conolly finances in later decades.

Despite its importance in the history of the Conolly family's fortune and future, frustratingly little evidence has survived about the reaction of either Katherine or any of Conolly's other Irish relations to the marriage, or, indeed, to the bride. Katherine's brief correspondence with Lord Strafford in 1734 after the birth of William and Anne's first child, a daughter, Catherine, suggests that she recognised him as her social superior, even allowing for the Straffords' travails since 1714 – a reversal in fortune that was precisely in contrast to the rise of the Conollys, who were the great Irish beneficiaries of the Hanoverian succession. Her deferential role in their relationship can be glimpsed in her delighted reaction to Lord Strafford's acceptance of the gift of a print of her late beloved husband, an exchange that also highlights the importance of gift-giving in maintaining familial relationships between people who never or rarely met.[39]

Conolly, for his part, seems to have been delighted with his marriage. In a letter to his new father-in-law he earnestly described his love for his new wife: 'You have made me as completely happy as my wishes could have done in giving me Lady Anne and though this is wrote in the honeymoon I believe I shall be able to say as much in seven years hence...'[40] These lines, written on the morning of his marriage in 1733, were echoed in other gushing letters written during the first years of their relationship, which described his delight when his wife's 'big belly' or pregnancy first became apparent, and then at the births of his first daughter, Catherine, and sons William and Thomas. The first son, much to his parents' and especially Katherine Conolly's distress, died soon after birth.[41] There would be five more daughters born, but all was not entirely rosy within the Conolly household. In December 1738 it was reported in London that their marriage was in trouble,

while Dublin gossip suggested that he had been 'presented' with a child three years earlier.[42] The marriage did however survive these trying times, partly because the couple gradually abandoned their rather peripatetic lifestyle involving constant shuttling back and forth across the Irish Sea.[43]

This lifestyle had been in many ways an inevitable consequence of Conolly's marriage, which brought with it new opportunities in England to add to his Irish responsibilities. Most obviously his connection with Lord Strafford allowed him to enter the Westminster parliament as an MP for Aldeburgh in Suffolk, the Strafford family borough. Strafford facilitated this election despite their diametrically opposed political views. Conolly described himself as 'an incorrigible Whig', and he quickly became known as a reliable supporter of Sir Robert Walpole's administration in London.[44] His father-in-law, meanwhile, as a Tory with Jacobite sympathies – he had been involved in the 1722 Atterbury plot which sought to implement regime change in Britain and Ireland – was a constant if lonely opposition voice in the House of Lords. Conolly would remain an MP at Westminster until his death, sitting first for Aldeburgh and then, from 1747, for Petersfield in Hampshire, thus initiating a Conolly association with the Westminster parliament which would survive intermittently into the late twentieth century.[46]

Conolly's parliamentary career at both Westminster and College Green was rather undistinguished, especially perhaps when compared to that of either his uncle or, indeed his son, the often unfairly derided Thomas Conolly.[47] He was a consistent supporter of government, and indeed earned some opprobrium in Ireland for not adhering to the patriot principles of his late uncle. In London, at least, it was the associated social scene that most attracted the Conollys during parliamentary sessions. They were regularly present at court and were sufficiently well known for regular rumours to circulate that Conolly was to be ennobled either as Lord Aldeburgh, Lord Stretton (his English seat) or even Lord Castletown.[48] Such rumours of advancement in the peerage came to nothing, although this was a reflection more on the virtually closed nature of the peerage during the reign of George II than of Conolly's lack of the requisite qualifications.[49] Such rumours do indicate that the Conollys were increasingly orientating themselves towards England, and their frequent appearances on that side of the Irish Sea over a period of eleven years suggest there was some truth in them.

The Conollys' orientation towards England had been apparent since 1733 when, on the eve of his marriage, Conolly purchased an English country house and estate at Stretton in Staffordshire (Plate 4). Purchased for £15,000 from the indebted Congreve family, it provided the newly wedded Conollys with an English base conveniently located on the road to Ireland.[50] The best description of the house comes from one of Lady Louisa Conolly's letters, where she describes her first impressions of the early eighteenth-century seven-bay, two-storey house to her sister, Emily, Countess of Kildare: it 'is really a sweet dear, lovely, pretty place as ever was. The house is charming comfortable.' Going on to describe the interior, she explains how, in addition to four 'very good bedchambers ... to put anybody in', there was 'a green damask drawing room, where there is just such

4 – Anon., STRETTON HALL
c. 1760-90, watercolour (detail) (© William Salt Library, Stafford, Staffs)

a bookcase as one of them at Castletown'. Meanwhile, on the ground floor there was a 'very good hall', a wainscoted dressing room for Mr Conolly and a wainscoted drawing room, as well as a 'pretty India-paper drawing room that looks to the garden'.[51] This decorative scheme is partly attributed to Lady Anne, and raises intriguing questions about their influence on Castletown's decorative scheme in the same period, as well as the inspiration for Castletown's later green drawing room. The acquisition of Stretton, together with the leasing of successive London properties in the fashionable West End, was presumably designed to allow the Conollys to cut the figure in English society which had been so fleetingly enjoyed by the Straffords in the early 1710s.[52] It is notable in this regard that when Conolly was first rumoured to be raised to the peerage in autumn 1733, it was to be as Baron Stretton, suggesting that possession of an English property was a prerequisite to achieving such an elevation.[53]

Stretton Hall was not, however, the only country residence purchased by Conolly. In 1731 he bought Leixlip Castle in county Kildare, adding it to the manor and town purchased by his uncle three years earlier.[54] The purchase of Leixlip gave Conolly his own independent establishment in Ireland, while his aunt, Katherine, remained chatelaine of neighbouring Castletown. Its purchase suggested the dual nature of his Anglo-Irish family, and it was where he settled with his new bride soon after their arrival in Ireland in 1733. First it needed some refurbishment. As Conolly informed Lord Strafford, it was not 'without amendment so fit for a family as a single man'.[55] The links between Leixlip and Castletown were confirmed by the commissioning of Joseph Tudor to paint a view of Leixlip in Castletown's grand entrance hall in the 1730s.[56] Tudor's visual representations were complemented by the poetical imaginings of the local rector (and poet), Samuel Shepherd, in his 1739 work, *Leixlip, a Poem*, which describes a walk along the river Liffey with Conolly, which concludes at 'the gay pile' Castletown.[57] It was at Leixlip that

Lady Anne gave birth to her Irish-born children, including their eventual heir, Thomas Conolly, born there in 1738. Leixlip was the newly arrived Conollys' first home, though we know very little about their work there, or indeed about Lady Anne's initial impressions of her Irish castle.

We do however know something of her initial impression of the other Conolly houses. Coming from the 'palatial splendour' of her father's Wentworth Castle, the young Lady Anne was not overly enamoured with Castletown. She described it to her father thus:

> As to Castletown it is very unfinished without doors. I don't think the place very pleasant, though the house is really a charming one to live in. The front is quite without ornament of any sort, not even so much as a pediment over the windows, and the offices are separated from it by very handsome colonnades, that altogether it looks very well. At least here it does, where there is but few places that are anyway like a seat and so they have all one fault and that is the want of trees, by which reason every place looks horrible raw and cold.[58]

The undecorated façade compared unfavourably with the ornamented pediments and pilasters visible at Wentworth Castle, while the lack of landscaping was in contrast to her father's contemporary improvements in Yorkshire, which included an obelisk devoted to the memory of his patron, and Lady Anne's godmother, the late Queen Anne.[59] Her description of Castletown echoed that of another astute contemporary English visitor, Mrs Delany, who, likewise, commented upon its plain style: 'It is a large heavy building, a vast deal of room in it, but not laid out with a good taste, the furniture good, but not disposed to the best advantage, the situation very fine, and the country about extremely pleasant, some wood and pretty winding rivers.'[60]

Their views warn us that Castletown in its original incarnation was not necessarily the 'ornament to the country' envisaged by Speaker Conolly in the 1720s. Indeed, Lady Anne much preferred another Conolly property, Rathfarnham Castle, in south county Dublin, which she praised rather fulsomely:

> I was a little while ago to see Rathfarnham, which is a place I own I think the best of any I have seen in this country, the house is an old castle with square towers of each corner and has much the air of an English nobleman's seat the gardens are neat and pretty and the park is vastly well wooded ... it is really a sweet place and though not so grand, yet in my mind is more agreeable than Castletown.[61]

Lady Anne's letters to her father betray a certain sense of wistful isolation. This is not surprising as she was a young woman in a foreign country, living with a husband who was not quite a stranger there, though not quite a native either. They did, however, enjoy excellent relations with Katherine Conolly, dining regularly with her at Castletown, while the presence of other Wentworth relations, including Lord Strafford's sister Mrs Donnellan, in Dublin gave Lady Anne a further entrée into the upper echelons of Irish society.[62] However, the strength of both Conollys' desire to return to London can be gauged from

their surviving correspondence. In August 1734, for instance, only a year after her arrival in Dublin, Lady Anne told her father: 'My living absent from my friends is to be sure not what I should choose but as I know it is Mr Conolly's affairs not his inclination that keeps him here, it would be monstrous in me to be dissatisfied at it.'[63]

Further hints in Lady Anne's correspondence suggest that her husband found it difficult to adjust to the different style and mode of Irish politics, not least its hard-drinking, convivial elements. On one occasion she mentions how 'His head has not been enough settled to do anything, for drinking as you know does not agree with him, he must practice it a little at his first coming into the country or he would not please.'[64] Conolly was not alone amongst English-based politicians in finding the Dublin parliamentary drinking culture difficult to adjust to; the Earl of Orrery made similar complaints in the mid-1730s. As James Kelly reminds us, alcohol often played a central role in the sociable practice of politics in this period,[65] and in other, more important respects, too, Conolly II failed to live up to the perhaps impossible expectations placed on his shoulders that he would inherit his uncle's political role in Ireland. While possessing the Conolly fortune, he lacked the attention to detail necessary to cultivate an electoral following, leaving Katherine Conolly to continue to deal with the minutiae of Donegal and Londonderry politics.[66] She also continued to act as a political hostess in her own right at Castletown, utilising the house in the ways in which the speaker intended but rarely fully managed himself.[67] Conolly II also lacked the advantages of high office, with its access to deep wells of patronage, which had been so essential to the elder Conolly's success as a parliamentary manager. Finally, he seems not to have inherited the political guile and cunning that characterised the Speaker's political actions in the Irish parliament. What little we know of his personality suggests that he was 'a kind sober young man' best known for his philanthropic activities, whether as a builder of roads at Rathfarnham, supporter of Dr Steevens' Hospital, or as a distributor of famine relief in counties Kildare and Donegal, and for his good manners rather than his skill as a political operator.[68]

This failure to follow in his uncle's footsteps was a source of disappointment to his relations and to others who hoped Conolly II would assume the leadership of the former Conolly party in parliament. An anonymous but well informed account of the Irish political scene in the 1730s described him thus: 'Young Conolly, who inherited the speaker's great estate, was seldom upon the spot, and when he did appear, drew to him respect rather for his private qualities than for his political capacity: his politics seeming to centre in profound submission to the government.'[69]

So concerned was Katherine about this situation that she took the unusual step of writing to an old friend in Whitehall, seeking his intercession with the prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, to get Conolly II appointed to the Irish revenue board, a body her late husband had once dominated.[70] Her letter not only stressed her nephew's qualities, which included not only his landed and political interest in Ireland, but also his status as an 'Englishman by birth and education'. This latter description may have been intended as a strategy to curry favour with the pro-English policy then favoured by the British min-

isters when making appointments in Ireland, but it also reflected the reality of her nephew's dual position.[71] In the end her influence failed to ensure Conolly II's appointment, and he instead spent even more time living in England, where he attended the Westminster parliament, voting regularly for the government but serving without great distinction. Occasionally he seems to have been considered useful by the government there as a representative of metropolitan policy in Ireland thanks largely to his good personal relationships with key political figures, including the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the 3rd Duke of Devonshire, who stayed at Castletown in early 1738 as Conolly's guest (his son, the 4th Duke – and Lord Lieutenant 1755-57 – would later rent the house in the mid-1750s after Conolly's death) and the future prime minister, Henry Pelham.[72] Indeed, Conolly was expected to play a key role in defending the administration during the controversial Money Bill Crisis of 1753, but his final illness deprived the government of his support in the Commons, much to their disappointment.[73] His intended behaviour during this key political and constitutional crisis can be contrasted with that of his uncle, who, while a loyal government supporter, knew when and how to distance himself from unpopular measures, such as the introduction of Wood's Halfpence in the mid-1720s.[74] In the end, circumstances conspired to save the younger Conolly from betraying his 'patriot' tradition, although it is also probable that the government in London had overestimated his influence in the Irish parliament.

While Conolly II's Irish political career never took off, it is clear that he paid more attention to his other inherited responsibilities on this side of the Irish Sea. His concern for his tenantry during the harsh winters of 1739-40 is well attested to, and it is revealing that he caught the cold that ultimately killed him while out on his farm in the Dublin Mountains (presumably near Rathfarnham) in 1753.[75] His forced inactivity through illness during this politically turbulent year was even more unfortunate on a personal level, as it was only in mid-1752, with the death of the venerable Katherine, then in her 92nd year, that he succeeded to his full inheritance and its attendant revenues. Illness and his untimely death deprived him of the opportunity to enjoy his tenure as master of Castletown, and his intentions for the house and indeed for his personal and political future whether in Ireland or England must, of necessity, remain obscure.

Certainly his widow was not anxious to prolong her time at Castletown. Together with six of her seven children she returned to England. The only child to remain in Ireland was the eldest daughter, Catherine, who shortly after her father's death married Sir Ralph Gore, 6th Baronet, later Earl of Ross. The others, including the Conollys' only son, Thomas, who was then still a schoolboy at Westminster, departed from Castletown, leaving it to be let to a succession of tenants until he came of age and returned from his grand tour.[76] Upon leaving Castletown, Lady Anne might have pondered the fate of another great house in Kildare, which like Castletown had been built to impress.

Jigginstown, near Naas, had been built by her ancestor Lord Deputy Strafford in the 1630s, and had remained unfinished following his execution. In 1734 Lady Anne had told her father of her desire to visit it to pay homage to her illustrious if flawed ancestor,

whose portrait after Van Dyck was hung at Castletown during this period.[77] We do not know if she did visit Jigginstown, but she was certainly aware of the fragility of such seemingly enduring structures. Castletown, upon her husband's premature death, like Jigginstown upon Wentworth's, faced an uncertain future. His career and connections had opened to the Conollys prospects and ambitions beyond Ireland; it remained to be seen in 1754 whether his children would prosper in the land of his birth or in the land of his inheritance. As it turned out, his only son, Thomas, married the daughter of an English duke. Together they restored the fortunes of Castletown, while simultaneously maintaining a dual Anglo-Irish identity, which in time led to Thomas Conolly's unsuccessful pursuit of the Strafford earldom upon the death of his Wentworth uncle – a pursuit which demonstrated the durability of that earlier English connection. Two more of his daughters married into Irish families (with mixed results), while the remaining three married into significant English families, thus extending the integration of the Conollys into elite British society.[78] Their advance into the upper echelons of English society were aided by the generous marriage portions (£8,000 each) provided for them in Conolly II's will, although these took a very long time to be paid out, and together with other (overly?) generous provisions of Conolly II's 1733 marriage settlement contributed in no small part to the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diminution of the Conolly estates, including the sale of Stretton Hall in 1787. These stories and the complicated disputes over the family inheritances in Ireland and Yorkshire have been chronicled elsewhere, but they too demonstrate the complex dual Irish and English identities of the Speaker's successors. These competing identities, symbolised by his purchase of the houses at Leixlip and Stretton, were the legacy of William Conolly II.

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ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

BL	British Library
IAA	Irish Architectural Archive
NLI	National Library of Ireland
OPW-MU	OPW-Maynooth University Archive and Research Centre at Castletown
PRONI	Public Record Office of N. Ireland
TCD	Trinity College Dublin

1 National Archives of Ireland, T17412, Will of Thomas Conolly, 27th May 1799.

2 James M. Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order: English landed society, 1650-1750* (London, 1998) 14-19: 19.

[3] A.P.W. Malcomson, 'The fall of the house of Conolly 1758-1803', in Allan Blackstock and Eoin Magennis (eds), *Politics and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1850: essays in tribute to Peter Jupp* (Belfast, 2007).

[4] This literature had its origins in Thomas Prior's famous 1729 *List of Absentees*, which estimated Conolly II's absentee fortune at £1,000. The most important revisionist work on absenteeism is A.P.W. Malcomson, 'Absenteeism in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Economic and Social History*, I, no. 1, 1974, 15-35. See also Toby Barnard, 'The Irish in London and The London Irish, ca.1660-1780', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 39, no.1, 2015, 14-40:18-22.

[5] A particular kind of patriotism was central to the ways in which the death of Speaker Conolly was marked. See Patrick Walsh, 'Politics, Patriotism, and Posterity: The funeral of William Conolly in 1729', in Lisa Marie Griffith and Ciaran Wallace (eds), *Grave Matters: death and dying in Dublin 1500 to the present* (Dublin, 2016) 115-28. Linen scarves of Irish manufacture were famously distributed to mourners at Speaker Conolly's funeral, helping initiate a custom designed to boost the local economy.

[6] He is often referred to as William Conolly junior but this is both anachronistic and inaccurate as he was not the Speaker's son.

[7] *Daily Post* (London), 27th March 1721.

[8] On Conolly's place and date of birth, which contradicts other published sources, see OPW-MU, Conolly Papers, uncatalogued MS, Thomas Seagrave to William Conolly, 8th February 1714, and William Conolly II to William Conolly, 30th August 1720, where he anticipates his coming of age at 21 during the following November. On the Hewetts of Great Stretton, see J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, 4 vols (1795-1811) II, 581.

[9] On the Conolly family's origins, see Patrick Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy: the life of William Conolly, 1662-1729* (Woodbridge, 2010) 11-16.

[10] IAA, Castletown Papers, 97/84, G/4/1, Settlement by William Conolly of £2,000 upon his brother Patrick, 1705.

[11] OPW-MU, Conolly Papers, uncatalogued MS, Thomas Seagrave to William Conolly, 4th November 1713.

[12] *Ibid*. Penelope Hewett to Thomas Seagrave, 3rd November 1713, enclosed in Seagrave to Conolly, 6th November 1713. TCD, Conolly Papers, Ms 3974/2A-D, William Conolly to Rev. [Seagrave] 13th and 15th April, 6th and 20th September 1714. Interestingly Frances Conolly was one of the very few Conolly relations not provided for in Speaker Conolly's will. She married a London merchant, William Rewse, and died in 1733. Frederick Teague Cansick, *A collection of curious and interesting epitaphs copied from the extant monuments of distinguished and noted characters in the cemeteries and church of St Pancras, Middlesex* (London, 1872) 226.

[13] Toby Barnard, 'A tale of three sisters: Katherine Conolly of Castletown', in *idem*, *Irish Protestant Ascents and Descents, 1641-1770* (Dublin, 2004) 266-89: 276-77.

[14] NLI, Smyth of Barbavilla Papers, MS 41,579/1, Adamina Wilhelmina Conyngham to Jane Bonnell, 18th April 1718; Williams Conyngham to Conolly, 18th April 1718.

[15] For Henry Conyngham, see his entry in Edith Johnston-Liik, *History of the Irish Parliament*, 6 vols (Belfast, 2002) III, 483, while for Mary Burton's wedding see Henry Downes to William Nicholson, 2 June 1720, in John Nichols (ed.), *Letters on various subjects literary, political, and ecclesiastical, to and from William Nicholson, D.D., successively Bishop of Carlisle, and of Derry; and Archbishop of Cashel...*, 2 vols (London, 1809) II, 522-25.

[16] OPW-MU, Conolly Papers, uncatalogued MS, Patrick Conolly to William Conolly, 23rd May 1713, see also Thomas Seagrave to William Conolly, 4th November 1713.

[17] Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order*, 35-39.

[18] H.D. Turner, *The Cradle of the Navy: the story of the Royal Hospital School at Greenwich and at Holbrook, 1694-1988* (York, 1990) 5.

[19] OPW-MU, Conolly Papers, uncatalogued MS, William Conolly II to William Conolly, 2nd March 1721.

[20] *ibid*., William Conolly II to William Conolly, 30th August 1720.

[21] East Sussex Record Office, Frewen Family of Brickwall Papers, MS 8283, Assignment of Mortgage of 460 from William Conolly to William Rewse and Frances Rewse (née Conolly), 12th April 1721; Patrick Walsh, *The South Sea Bubble and Ireland: Money, banking and investment, 1690-1721* (Woodbridge, 2014) 99-101.

[22] John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701-1800* (Yale, 1997) 234.

[23] S.R. Drumm, 'The Irish patrons of Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757)', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, VI, 2003, 202-25. I am indebted to Anthony Malcomson for discussions about the provenance of this portrait previously thought to have been of the Duke of Richmond, Lady Louisa's father.

[24] *Daily Post*, 11th October 1727. For a rather pejorative commentary on the elder Conolly's lack of personal familiarity with London, see Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the Duchess of Queensbury, 28th August 1731 in David Woolley, (ed.) *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, 4 vols (Frankfurt, 2003) III, 427-28.

[25] Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, 22.

[26] *Daily Post*, 21st June 1728.

[27] National Archives (UK), Irish State Papers, SP 63/389/179, 183, Katherine Conolly to Charles Delafaye, 3rd and 6th December 1728.

[28] When he was presented at court in 1719, George I had enquired whether he would inherit his 'uncle's fortune', Polly Molesworth to John Molesworth, 1st December 1719, in *Historical Manuscript Commission – Various Collections* (London, 1913), viii, 282.

[29] National Archives of Ireland, T92, Will of William Conolly, 18th October 1729.

[30] Universal Patriot, 17 Feb. 1730; NLI, Smyth of Barbavilla papers, Ms 41,580/24, Thomas Pearson to Jane Bonnell, 16 Mar. 1730.

[31] Miss Chamber to Miss Howard, 27th July 1730 in John Wilson Croker (ed.), *Letters to and from Henrietta, countess of Suffolk, and her second husband, the Hon. George Berkeley: from 1712 to 1767* (London, 1824) 374. See also *Daily Post*, 10th August 1730 where Conolly is listed alongside three duchesses and two earls amongst the persons of distinction at Tunbridge Wells.

[32] Anon., *Tunbridgialia or Tunbridge miscellanies for the year 1730* (London, 1730) 12.

[33] *London Evening Post*, 27th March 1731 and 3rd August 1732. William Wentworth to Ld Strafford, 25th May 1730, same to same, 27th May 1731, in J.J. Cartwright (ed), *The Wentworth Papers, 1705-39* (London, 1883) 461, 463.

[34] On this 'Irish interest', see Barnard, 'The Irish in London', 18-20.

[35] NLI, MS 41,580/24, Thomas Pearson to Jane Bonnell, 27th April 1732. For Speaker Conolly's similar concerns about Williams Conyngham spending his time and fortune in England in the 1720s, see Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, 19.

[36] *London Evening Post*, 24th April 1733; *Universal Spectator*, 28 April 1733.

[37] J.N.P. Watson, *Marlborough's Shadow: the life of the first Earl Cadogan* (Barnsley, 2003) 3; L.&M. Frey, 'Thomas Wentworth, 1st earl of Strafford', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, http://www.oxforddnb.com (accessed 15.6.2017).

[38] On the newly ennobled Strafford's aggressive pursuit of status in fashionable London society, see Hannah Greig, T*he Beau Monde: fashionable society in Georgian London* (Oxford, 2013) esp. 36-40. There are some similarities in the way they were judged by contemporaries with the treatment of

the Conollys in polite Dublin society. On the latter, see Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, 12-15. For Lady Anne's first Irish fiancé, Matthew Montgomery, who died tragically from a fall from a horse, see Jennifer Downey, 'Unlocking the history of Castletown house through the Conolly portraits', diploma thesis, Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers, 2016, 22.

39 BL, Wentworth Papers, Add Ms 22,228, f.170, Katherine Conolly to Lord Strafford, 28th February 1734. See also BL, Add MS 22,228, f.102, Anne Conolly to Lord Strafford, 29th January 1734.

40 BL, Add MS 22,228, f.77, William Conolly to Lord Strafford, 2nd May 1733.

41 BL, Add MS 22,228, ff.85, 87, 104 and 108, Conolly to Strafford, 18th October and 24th December 1733, 3rd and 23rd February 1734; Katherine Conolly to Jane Bonnell, 9th December 1734; same to same, 14th November 1737, in Gayle Ashford and Mary-Lou Jennings (eds), *The Letters of Katherine Conolly* (forthcoming Dublin, 2018).

42 Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Diary of John Viscount Perceval, first earl of Egmont*, 3 vols (London, 1920) II, 518, entry for 22nd December 1738. Marmaduke Coghill to Edward Southwell, 11th November 1735 in D.W. Hayton (ed.), *Letters of Marmaduke Coghill, 1722-38* (Dublin, 2005) 175.

43 This endless movement can be tracked through contemporary newspapers, which reported by name those passengers on the Dublin yacht they deemed worthy of their readers' attention. See for example *Daily Advertiser*, 10th July 1731 and 29th July 1732, S*t James' Evening Post*, 26th May 1733, *Daily Journal*, 26th June 1735, and *Daily Gazeteer*, 9th January 1736.

44 Quoted in Romney Sedgwick, 'Conolly, William', in *idem* (ed.), *History of Parliament, 1715-54*, available at www.historyofparliamentonline.org (last accessed 15.6.2017).

45 Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: the Tory Party, 1714-60* (Oxford, 1982) 188, 198.

46 Patrick, 7th Baron Conolly-Carew sat in the House of Lords until the abolition of the hereditary seats in the Lords, while successive Conollys represented County Donegal in the union parliament from the 1820s through to the 1870s.

47 See Malcomson 'Fall of the house of Conolly'.

48 *London Evening Post*, 6th September 1733; *Daily Post Boy*, 25th April 1735; *General Evening Post*, 20th September 1735; *London Evening Post*, 14th October 1735; *The Craftsman*, 14th October 1735; *London Daily Post*, 8th October 1739; and *London Evening Post*, 28th January 1744.

49 John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: the peerage of eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1984) 19-26. It should be noted that Henry Bromley, one of those whose names were regularly mentioned in dispatches as likely to be raised in the peerage alongside Conolly, was created Baron Montfort in 1741 thanks to a bribe paid to the King's mistress, Lady Yarmouth, *ibid*., 25.

50 For details of the purchase of Stretton Hall, see TCD, Conolly MS 3794/17-28, 10th July 1732 – 20th July 1734. Conolly later added further property to the Stretton estate, *London Daily Post*, 18th November 1738.

51 Lady Louisa Conolly to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 1 March 1759 in Brian FitzGerald (ed.), *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 1731-1814*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1949-57) III, 2-3. Unfortunately Stretton was remodelled in the late eighteenth century, removing most traces of the Conolly occupancy of the house.

52 On Stretton, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Staffordshire* (London, 1974) 271. On the Straffords' attempts to penetrate the beau monde, the informal elite of London society, see Greig, *The Beau Monde*.

53 *London Evening Post*, 6 September 1733.

54 IAA, Castletown Papers, E16/15, Bond of agreement between William Conolly and John Whyte, 7th August 1731, for the purchase of Leixlip Castle for £1,770.

55 BL, Add MS 22,228, f.81, Conolly to Ld Strafford, 12th September 1733.

[56] Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, 'Note on a newly discovered landscape by Joseph Tudor', *Studies*, 65, 1976, 235-38.

[57] Samuel Shepherd, *Leixlip, A Poem* (Dublin, 1739) 12.

[58] BL, Add MS 22,228, f.89, Anne Conolly to Ld Strafford, 3rd November 1733.

[59] *ibid*., Pevsner Architectural Guides, *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire the West Riding* (2nd ed., London 1967) 546-48.

[60] Lady Llanover (ed.), *Autobiography of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*..., 6 vols (London, 1861) I, 343.

[61] BL, Add MS 22,228, ff.120-21, Anne Conolly to Ld Strafford, 5th May 1734.

[62] Katherine Conolly to Jane Bonnell, 28th May 1734, in Ashford and Jennings (eds), *The Letters of Katherine Conolly*; BL, Add MS 22,228 ff.89-91, Anne Conolly to Lord Strafford, 3rd November, 2nd December 1733.

[63] *ibid*., f.134, Anne Conolly to Lord Strafford, 17th August 1734.

[64] *ibid*., f.120-21, Anne Conolly to Lord Strafford, 5th May 1734.

[65] James Kelly, 'The consumption and sociable use of alcohol in eighteenth-century Ireland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: archaeology, Celtic studies, history, linguistics, literature, vol. 115C, food and drink in Ireland*, 2015, 219-55: 246-47.

[66] Katherine Conolly to Jane Bonnell, 6th July 1737 in Ashford and Jennings (eds), *The Letters of Katherine Conolly*.

[67] It may not have been Katherine's intention to overshadow her nephew, but her force of personality seems to have been hard to resist, Barnard, 'A tale of three sisters', 280-83.

[68] *London Evening Post*, 18th January 1735 and 29th September 1737; *London Daily Post*, 22nd January 1740; Shepherd, *Leixlip, A Poem*, 1.

[69] Anon., *Ireland Disgraced: or the Island of Saints become an Island of Sinners Clearly Proved*... (London, 1758).

[70] TCD, Conolly Papers, MS 3794/30, Katherine Conolly to Charles Delafaye2nd June 1736. It is noteworthy that Conolly's name was not mentioned by other prominent figures when the vacancy at the Board was being discussed, suggesting he was not seriously considered for it. See Patrick McNally and Kenneth Milne (eds), *The Boulter Letters* (Dublin, 2016) 409-10.

[71] On this policy, see Patrick McNally, '"Irish and English interests", national conflict within the Church of Ireland episcopate in the reign of George I', *Irish Historical Studies*, 29, 1995, 295-314.

[72] *Daily Gazetteer*, 5th January 1738. Barnard, 'A tale of three sisters', 282. On Conolly's connection to Pelham, see PRONI, Chatsworth Papers, T3158/250, Pelham to Devonshire, 7th November 1743, and Wilmot Papers, T3019/1231, Bellingham Boyle to Weston, 28th December 1748.

[73] PRONI, Chatsworth Papers, T3019/2182, Lord George Sackville to Henry Pelham, 10th October 1753 and T3019/2012A, Thomas Waite to Robert Wilmot, 3rd January 1754. On the Money Bill crisis, see David Dickson, *New Foundations, Ireland 1660-1800* (Dublin, 2000) 98-100.

[74] Walsh, *The Making of the Irish Protestant Ascendancy*, 173-77.

[75] PRONI, T3019/2197, Sackville to Robert Wilmot, 4th November 1753.

[76] For Thomas Conolly's grand tour, see Malcomson, 'The fall of the house of Conolly', 109, and Conolly-Carew Papers, private collection, accounts of William Conolly's executors with Arnold Nesbit, 3rd July 1755 – 7th July 1758.

[77] BL ,Add MS, 22,228, f.120, Anne Conolly to Ld Strafford, 5th May 1734.

[78] The only Conolly marriage to end as an unambiguous disaster was that of Thomas's sister Jane, who married the infamous 'Fighting' George Fitzgerald, a well-known duelist who died on the gallows after a scandalous life.

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