

## John Williams, Archbishop of York, 1641-46

H F Summers in his account of the Old Palace of Southwell of 1911 [FS198] records that John



Williams was the last occupant of the throne of York to be resident in the palace. At the commencement of the Civil War, he fled into Wales and garrisoned Conway Castle in the cause of the king.

Why Conway and the castle? A visit to the castle [and its guidebook] provided the answer:

Williams returned to his birth place in 1642, aged 60, a year after his enthronement as archbishop, and resided in a large house in Chapel Street [only demolished in 1950]. As a royalist, Williams was determined to defend the castle and the area for Charles I against the forces of parliament, organizing a local militia and procuring supplies by sea from Ireland. In 1643, the king wrote to the archbishop: 'you having begun at your own charge to put the same into repair; we do heartily desire you to go on in that work, assuring you that whatsoever moneys

you shall lay out upon the fortification of the said castle shall be repay'd unto you.' The king also promised that no other officer would be set over Williams until his debts had been repaid. For this reason, the archbishop was gravely affronted when, in January 1645, Sir John Owen was appointed governor of Conwy. Owen's high-handed manner instantly brought the two into conflict, when he and his soldiers broke into the castle and, despite the archbishop's protests, confiscated the stores, including chattels left there for safe keeping by local sympathizers.

Disenchanted with his fellow royalists, Williams now turned to the parliamentarians, who had previously mocked the spectacle of an armoured archbishop in their pamphlets. In August 1646, it was with information from Williams that the parliamentarian commander, Major General Thomas Mytton attacked Conwy. The town was soon taken, but the castle held out until November; even after Charles I had permitted its garrison to surrender. Conwy was one of the last three castles in the country to be taken.

A family tree of the Penrhyns of Penrhyn Castle [a truly vast Victorian pile – also well worth a visit], show that John Williams, born 1582, was a descendent of this local Welsh gentry and there is a monument to his mother in the parish church of St Mary's, within the walls of Conwy. John was very proud of his ancestry and after graduating from St John's Cambridge was appointed the King's chaplain. His rise under James 1 was rapid becoming successively Dean of Salisbury and then Westminster, Bishop of Lincoln, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal and finally Archbishop of York. He was the last bishop to act as Lord Chancellor. However, neither his clerical nor his parliamentary roles were without controversy and conflict. His relations with Charles 1 were equivocal even when appointed Archbishop of York, probably encouraging his retreat back to his homeland at the start of the Civil War. His switch of allegiances in 1646 led to his removal as archbishop, although he continued to live quietly and well on his estates in Carmarthenshire until his death in 1650.

The position of Archbishop of York was vacant until Accepted Flewen was appointed in 1660 at the Restoration.