

When I was appointed in command of 'Conway' in September 1934, Britain was beginning to recover from the world wide trade depression. For the previous few year shipping lanes had been badly hit and the Directors were unable to offer good prospects to boys wishing to take up the sea as a career, with the result that there were few applications. Conway was simultaneously hit and the number of cadets on board during the Summer Term 1934 had fallen to 106.11During the 27 years since I had left Conway as a cadet, there had been few additional facilities for training and I found that the ship's structure had deteriorated badly. I immediately submitted plans for the renewal of classroom furniture, main deck class rooms to be properly portioned to make them sound proof and new seamanship and Royal Navy Class rooms to be made with a laboratory to be built on the upper deck. With the valuable assistance of Mr Lawrence D. Holt, Chairman of the Committee of Management, arrangements were made for the Conway to be towed to the Victoria Dock, Birkenhead, for refit in 1936 and 1937. During these, approximately 60% of the ships side above the water line was renewed, the heads and boiler rooms were dismantled and renewed, a forecastle deck extending right across the upper 1st deck and so far aft as the galley sky light was added. The galley was fitted with modern cooking ranges etc and new cabins built for the galley staff.11During the second refit, the new figurehead of Nelson sculptured by the Carter Preston of Liverpool and subscribed for by the Conway Club was filled. Great pains were taken to ensure that the uniform and famous signal were correct in detail. The result, fashioned from three and a half tons of dovetailed teak and thirteen feet in height was unveiled by Dr J Masefield, DM, an old Conway, who also wrote a poem for the occasion, when the ship was alongside the Liverpool landing stage. Incidentally, this was the only occasion of a wooden wall being secured alongside the stage.11Before 1936, there was no entrance examination to the Conway. In that year, it was made compulsory which was much to the liking of the new Board of Education which body was becoming more and more interested in the ship. In the peacetime, the complement of cadets was steadily increasing and the general standard of education much improved.11In 1938, it was decided to dry dock the ship and under the supervision of Mr W H Dickie of Messer's Alfred Holt and Company, this was successfully accomplished in December, in 1st Birkenhead. This was no mean achievement, for to decide whether the ship, which was then 100 years old, was strong enough, caused a lot of anxiety and thought. She had a hog of 2' 6" which had to be considered when she took the blocks, and, in addition, many of the oak stanchions and beams were thought might be strengthened and would split. As a precaution, all the decks were shored up with 12" square baulks of timber. When the ship was safely in dock and secured, I landed to watch the dock being pumped out. As she was taking the blocks a foreman called out from the Lower Deck gangway that the ship was creaking badly and he feared she would break in two. Mr Dickie, who was standing next to me, quickly replied "Good, it is the ship that does not creak that I am afraid for". Creaking shows that there is plenty of life left in the timbers. Suffice to say that she spelled on the blocks safely and with the hog taken out of her the original lines returned, showing her to be a thing of beauty. Her previous dry docking had been in 1896 and in the 42 years which had elapsed the underwater portion of the hull had deteriorated but slightly. The copper sheathing had perished and required 1st renewal, but only one 28' x 12" x 12" oak strake had to be replaced on the port side just below the waterline and a small piece near the stern port.11We were fortunate to get as much work done during these three refits for it was intended to effect further repairs and additions at Birkenhead in 1939 but the war intervened and little did we think that the Conway's long years at the Rock Ferry anchorage would soon be ended and she would have to seek pastures new to continue her valuable work. By this time, 1939, we had 180 cadets under training which was then considered to be the full complement, but this was shortly to be increased. At the outbreak of war, the Headmaster,

Chief and Second Officer were called up and later several of the masters volunteered. This made us shorthanded but all pulled their weight and the curriculum was fully carried out: I had to assist in the teaching of nautical subjects but as time went on, we were able to complete the staff. In October 1940, the Whale Factory Ship Hektor, 13,000 tons and with a full cargo of whale oil, dragged her anchors and drifted out to our port side, smashing the out head, lower boom decks and many boats. For some time, she could not free herself and together we dragged Conway's mooring towards the Rock Ferry beach. Eventually, she got clear and left me in a precarious position, demanding a tug to tow our stern to the eastward at the time of the tide to prevent us from grounding on the Rock Ferry side of the river. The collision occurred at midnight and by the following afternoon arrangements had been made for us to be towed to the Victoria Dock, Birkenhead, to repair the damage. Here facilities for exercising the cadets were difficult and we had to make use of the local park for football and the docks for boat work. However, the air raids and fire watching kept everyone alert until we left in March 1941. During the five months we were in Victoria Docks, we were fortunate to escape damage from bombing but the day after we left, the street adjoining the dock was badly damaged and the cargo shed alongside where we had been was damaged. We were glad to return to our moorings for we imagined that only direct hits would sink us, but when the enemy commenced to drop parachute magnetic mines into the Mersey our anxiety increased for one lost accurate positions of them due to the strong tides rolling them along the bottom, and one under ours, in spite of our strong hull would, if it exploded, quickly bring to an end our usefulness to the country, for it well appeared that Conway has no watertight bulkheads. Conway, with her immensely strong timbers, could stand quick near misses from bombs which exploded on contact with the water. She shuddered and quickly settled down again when a stick of three bombs fell close to the starboard side and another occasion, one on the port side. The explosives were quite near enough to have started rivets in a steel ship. In March 1941, thirteen days after returning to our moorings, two parachute magnetic mines fell into the Mersey, one ahead of the "Tacoma City" which was anchored abreast of us, and the other floating down slowly, its progress retarded by the parachute, just missed the Conway's main trunk and fell into the water about 12 yards abreast of our starboard gangway. * This was just after midnight and as there was a strong flood tide running I hoped that the parachute would keep the mine from making the bottom until it was well clear of our stern. I considered the cadets and staff. * The plane which dropped the mines was flying over Rock Ferry towards South Liverpool. I should be got ashore as soon as possible for I realised that if the mine exploded where she dropped or anywhere from there to the stern, the ship would sink in a very few minutes. I therefore gave the order to 'abandon ship' and the Instructor called the hands Heave O, Heave O, Heave O, a mine is under the ship and will explode in ten minutes, Heave O, Heave O, Heave O. The cadets were excellent, and for once were really quiet. They dressed quickly and went to the stations. Within 20 minutes from the time of calling, just over 200 cadets and staff including my wife's Siamese Cat, which made more noise than anyone or everyone, were on the Rock Ferry Pontoon, from where they made their way to Conway House, Royal Rock Hotel and the Royal Mersey Yacht Club House where they were kindly entertained and housed. Number 1 Motor Boat and crew remained alongside the ship. At about 1.30 pm the "Tacoma City" was changing over her dynamos, little realising that the mine which fell ahead of her had drifted down with the tide and had grounded under her bottom. Unfortunately, she stopped a dynamo before starting up another and so for a moment the degaussing current ceased, but sufficiently long enough for the magnetic mine to explode, sinking the ship in a few minutes but happily with small loss of life. I saw the explosion and sent No. 1 motorboat, with Lt. Brooke Smith in charge, too the scene of the disaster and was able to pick up forty-five members of the

crew. The other mine which dropped by the Conway's starboard gangway had drifted approximately under our stern and had grounded about fifty feet under our stern and slightly to port. At daybreak, I had reported the position of the two mines to the Officer commanding minesweeping flotilla, Liverpool, and was told that a minesweeper would be sent later in the day. At about 3 pm, my wife, against my order, had managed to get a passage off to the ship, and before sending her ashore I was giving her tea in the aft cabin when suddenly through the port after gunport, I saw a minesweeper lowering its wire sweep pass close by our stern from ahead. It was too late to get out of the quarters and so I told her that if she wished to see a mine explode she could see one now. At that moment it did and water from the explosion thoroughly washed down the stern walk. The old ship rose to the explosion and then settled down again with no damage done. I then recalled the cadets on board. Arrangements were made with the headmaster of Mostyn House School Parkgate, to accommodate the cadets for a few days. We were most grateful to him for it caused him a lot of inconvenience. The cadets took their hammocks and kit and in charge of Command "Monty" Douglas stayed at Mostyn House for two days when it was decided to send the cadets home. Further discussions found that training could be better carried out in peaceful surroundings and so it was decided to send the ship to the Menai Straits where there was an anchorage off Bangor which would suit us. The air raids on Merseyside were intensified and it was not until well into May 1941, the beginning of which saw the hardest we had ever experienced, that the moorings could be laid by the Trinity House ship "Beacon" and tugs were available. Eventually one afternoon about the middle of May, we slipped our moorings at 1500 hours and 24 hours later secured to our new ones off Bangor. The tow to the Bar Light Vessel, 17 miles from the Sloyne, took nine hours, nearly seven of which were against the flood time, so that we could better keep her under control. A fresh to strong north wind was blowing with a moderate beam sea. Unlike the escort vessel and tugs movements, the Conway was perfectly steady and I doubt whether a pencil would have rolled off a table during the whole of the passage. On previous occasions, when in tow, I had noticed the Conway's grip on the water and realised how important this was when she was under sail. This is entirely due to her deep bar keel. We averaged 7 knots over the ground from the Bar W Vessel to Puffin Is when we stopped until nearly high water when we negotiated the Channel. This was uneventful but the S bend in it between No 1 Buoy and Beaumaris required quick alterations in course with only two feet of water under our bottom. Under these conditions the best method of towing Conway is to shorten in the two ropes as much as possible when she will answer immediately to any alteration in course. On sighting Conway as she rounded Gallows Point, my daughter Rosemary, who was acting as my secretary, sent telegrams to all cadets to rejoin the ship. To make up for the lost time, the Summer Term was extended well into August so during the whole of the war not a day was lost to the cadets. By this time there was a marked improvement in the standard of education on board and from 1941 until my retirement in 1949, a Conway Cadet was placed first in all the annual Royal Navy Direct Entry examinations. To extend our service to the country the complement of cadets was increased to 250 and arrangements were made for Gordonstorn School, then at Caersws, Merionethshire, to take cadets for one year of training in our curriculum. The Conway moorings were laid in a position approximately that occupied by T. S. "Clio" which was placed alongside a now dismantled jetty on the south west side of Bangor Pier to be broken up in about 1917. The anchorage was exposed to heavy squalls, gales and seas, especially at High Water, and on several occasions we dragged our anchors. There was a great difficulty in securing a field for recreation. We did obtain the Bangor City Football Club's ground for four years but on cessation of hostilities, we had to give it up and use a field on the Bulkeley Estate, Beaumaris. This was four miles from the ship, which, with changing into football kit, meant an hour and a half from

the time of leaving the ship until a game had started. However, what a marvellous training ground we were in. Excellent boat sailing, swimming from the ship, and an entirely new recreation for us, mountaineering. In the Mersey, every Easter term we had an influenza epidemic on board, with as many as ten cadets down at a time. At Bangor during the eight years we were there we did not have one. To overcome the loss of 'shipping environment' of the Mersey, frequent expeditions to Messer's Cammell Laird and to ships of the Liverpool shipping lines were included. These trips were undertaken seriously and every cadet had to write an essay on the visit which required his alertness and much observation on his part. The only drawback was lack of playing fields, and as the ship's complement was likely to increase it was agreed that if suitable fields could be found together with a shore establishment, the ship would remain in the Menai Straits. I was instructed to search for such a place and eventually I visited the Marquess of Anglesey, two thirds of whose house, Plas Newydd, was unoccupied since the United States Intelligence Corps had returned home after the end of the war. This part of the house, in wonderful condition, could accommodate 100 cadets and staff and provided excellent dining rooms, kitchens, etc. There were stables which could be converted into classrooms, laboratories, gymnasium, etc. There was a boat dock, sports pavilion and playing field with ground suitable for more football fields and tennis courts. With Snowdonia only a few miles to the south, I thought the site and prospects ideal, so with the Marquess's agreement, I took the plans of the house to the Committee of Management which body was pleased but wanted to know whether it was possible to take the Conway through the Swellies, that dangerous stretch of water between the Menai Straits and Tabular Bridge, and if so, was there an anchorage with sufficient swinging room near the house. The anchorage would have to be near enough for a quick passage to the boat dock by motor boat but far enough to thoroughly exercise the cutters' crew when rowing. 11The Admiralty was approached with a view to undertaking the survey but unfortunately no vessel 1 or surveying officer could be spared to undertake the work. Having had experience in hydrographical surveying, I undertook to do the work. Obviously my first object was to find out if the ship could get through the Swellies for it if could not it would be useless to carry on with the project. I first ascertained that the Menai Straits Suspension Bridge was 100 feet above high water ordinary springs and the Tubular Bridge 101 feet, and by striking my stump topgallant, and top masts the height of the masts above the waterline was 96 feet but as the Bridge heights were calculated on a Liverpool 29 feet tide and I reckoned on getting through on a 31 feet tide, I estimated 2-3 foot when I passed under the suspension and 3-4 under the Tubular. 11From the suspension bridge to Prices Point I anticipated no difficulty but then it was necessary to take a four point turn to port as soon as we cleared the Swelley Rock in order to get the Tubular Bridge Transit Beacons in line. On this transit I could run down to the narrowest part of the channel at the SW end of the Goredd Is where I would have four feet under my bottom and soundings showed there was a width of 84 feet between the 1 22 feet contours (Conway's draft aft) which, as the ships beam was 54 feet, would give me 15 feet clearance each side. In the Swellies, slack water occurs 1 hour 20 minutes before High Water and the stand of the tide at Extraordinary Spring Tides is 13 minutes extending to 18 minutes at neap. At these former times streaming 9 knots in the Conway Pinnacle, I could not pass Price's Point when trying to make the passage to the South West. From Prices Point of the end of the Goredd Is so I consider the tide at half flood to be 10 knots. To be safely towed though, the Conway would have to be at the Menai Suspension Bridge 1 hour 20 minutes before high water at the beginning of the stand of the tide and make the passage during the 13 minutes it lasted. I considered this possible and accordingly informed the Committee of Management and to enable them to come to an agreement over the house etc I also stated that after a preliminary examination that I was sure of a safe anchorage.

I discovered one in the stretch of water running north and south between the house, Plas Newydd and Port Dinorwic. It afforded the facilities and distances we required and the heavily wooded bank on the Anglesey side gave excellent protection from westerly prevailing winds. I made the chart to a scale of 1: 2500 with the assistance of one of the masters, Mr M Woods, BA, Lt Brooke Smith (2nd Officer), and several cadets, who did all the sounding by Douglas machine, handled the motor boat and did the tide recording. They all gave me valuable help. The centre ring of the mooring was in 44 feet Low Water Ordinary Springs and there was sufficient swinging room to be considered safe. This anchorage had one drawback but it had to be overcome. The nature of the bottom was rock and stones, bad anchoring and holding ground under normal conditions and methods. I therefore decided to bury four five ton Admiralty Pattern anchors NE, SE, SW and NW from the centre mooring ring. Two of these were the spare Conway anchors which had remained so long on the forecastle bill boards. These were slung between two of the cutters and towed through the Swellies to the positions between the high and low water contours and dropped in the water as near as possible by eye. The other two were received at Penrhyn Dock and were treated likewise. Smooth calm water was necessary when the anchors were being transported for the cutters had only about 1" - 2" freeboard and towing had to be steady. Fortunately, all other boats stopped when they saw us as their wash might have swamped the boats. It now remained to transport the cable and this was done by building a platform between the two cutters and flaking down on it two shackles each trip. On arrival these were dropped and shackled to the anchors and stretched along the banks between the high and low water contours to wait the Liverpool Salvage Associations Ship "Ranger" to connect it to more cable she was bring from Liverpool. The "Ranger" under the charge of Comdr Smith, Old Conway, did excellent work and when finished, with the four legs hauled taut, the centre mooring ring was only 30 feet north of the position I had anticipated it would be. The ground legs consisted of 9, 11, 11 and 13 shackles of 2.5" cable. All this work with the exception of the Ranger's part, was done by the cadets under my guidance and indeed it was valuable experience to sling anchors between cutters, transport them to positions six miles away and through difficult water and such that in all probability, they will never do again in their sea careers. The time taken over the surveys and getting the moorings back took approximately a year and now everything being ready, I decided to make the passage on April 12th 1949, when there was a 31 foot Liverpool tide. Unfortunately, a strong south west wind was blowing that day and after several fruitless attempts by the tugs to get heaving lines aboard, I decided it was too risky to make the passage. April 13th was a 30' 6" tide and a boisterous fresh wind blowing from the south west, but I decided to go. I got under way two minutes late and this gave me twenty eight to get to the bridge. I had previously instructed the pilot on the tug to do this part of the journey in half an hour. The tug took forty minutes and by the time I was under the bridge the ebb tide had commenced to flow. I think Odysseus had much the same feelings as I when he passed under Scylla's eyrie and with Charybdis waiting to do weird things with the tides. However, the bridge did not obstruct my main trunk there being about 3' clearance and I was soon abreast the Platters where we altered to close under the Caernavonshire Bank before hauling out again to pass between Price's Point and the Swelley Rock. These two negotiated safely there was a four point turn to port to get her on to the Tubular Bridge Beacon's transit. Unfortunately, a squall on the port bow slowed the turn and the ebb tide took the ship towards the Gored Is. I signalled the tug to head over to port but for five minutes we were towed alongside the island, within five feet. However, we gradually got clear and at the beacon before the Tubular Bridge we had got over the transit line, alerted course for the centre of the south arch, passed under it with a good clearance and then into deeper water. Conway was the deepest draft-vessel, 22 feet

aft, and the largest ever to have passed through the Swellies and I was glad when it was accomplished.11The remainder of the passage was uneventful and we were soon alongside the "Ranger" to take over the moorings. The time taken to pass through the Swellies was 18 minutes. It created a lot of interest amongst the North Wales seafaring fraternity who had declared the undertaking to be a foolish one. I think my experience as a hydrographical surveyor and the desperate need to get her through to open up the Conway Shore Establishment made me decide it was possible. In any case, having been done once it can be done again by other ships of similar draft if necessary. There remained a survey of the boat dock at Plas Newydd and with the help of the cadets I made a plan for the necessary alterations to be carried out later. These were effected and the dock is indeed a valuable addition to the many amenities provided by the estate.11For the Easter and Summer term 1949 there was 275 cadets on board, the highest complement in the history of the ship.11The Summer Term 1949 was my last and during this the work of altering the stables to house laboratories, class rooms and gymnasium and of filling the part of Plas Newydd allocated to us to accommodate the 100 cadets and staff was managed and supervised by Mr A Wilson, the indefatigable Honorary Secretary who made a great success of it. Our project was accomplished and Conway was given a new lease of life.11During the fifteen years of my command of Conway, the ship had received many alterations and had been moved about a lot. The number of cadets and their standard of education had improved and so I am satisfied in thinking that definite progress has been made to keep Conway abreast of the times. There were most interesting occasions on which I have not dwelt, but the one which impressed me most 11was the memorial service and unveiling of the Roll of Honour and Honours Board by our Chief Marshall Sir Richard E C Purse KCB, DSO, AFC, RAF an old Conway, during my last term.11The aft part of the lower deck was altered to take the Honours Board of the 1914-1919 and 1939-1945 wars with a painting of Nelson between them.(The memorial service was held on the lower deck and was conducted by the Bishop of Bangor. The Roll of Honour was fitted to the athwartship bulkhead of the cabin just above the starboard gangway. With lights in the deck head shining on these boards the scene during the silent hours appealed to me as something to be most solemn, and I am sure that these emblems of gallantry and sacrifice will impress upon the generations of cadets under training that the creating of the Conway tradition demanded, most fully the price of admiralty and the necessity and duty to live up to the ship's motto "Quit Ye Like Men, Be Strong".1(Citations of the exploits of the 4 VCs, 1 GC and the ace submarine officer Cmd. G C Hunt DSO, bar DSC bar etc, were framed, and hung on the lower deck bulkheads, aft, add to the impressiveness of the scene.