

LUKE MILLAR

HARD TIMES IN THE VALE: LETTERS FROM AN ESTATE STEWARD

1827 - 1830

This correspondence, which casts a brief but vivid light on aspects of life in the Vale of Glamorgan in the 1820s, came to my notice while researching the history of an oak arm-chair which, remarkable in itself, also bears the following inscription:

W EAGLETON C

1816

Llantrithyd

Local researches have identified the owner as William Eagleton who, with his wife Catherine, had seven children baptised at Llantrithyd between 1815 and 1824; also, that he was steward to the Aubrey estate. In 1826, his annual salary was ²£100. The Aubreys had acquired estates also at Dorton in Buckinghamshire and Boarstall in Oxfordshire, and by the end of the 18th. Century were virtually absentee landlords, paying only an annual visit to Llantrithyd. Early in the 19th. Century the Sixth baronet, Sir John Aubrey (1739 - 1826) abandoned the great house, Llantrithyd Place, after the death ³there of his only son "under very painful circumstances". William Eagleton appears to have held the Llantrithyd stewardship under the overall supervision of a Mr. Biedermann, but also to have been in contact with his brother, John, who was steward at Dorton.

Despite researches, the family history of the Eagleton brothers remains obscure, but it seems that John was the senior. He enjoyed a close trust and friendship with Sir John Aubrey, who bequeathed him property in Oxfordshire and, in his will, appointed "...the said Charles Earl of Tankerville James Scott John Forster and John Eagleton executors of this my will and

I appoint the said John Eagleton one of the Trustees and Executors of my will in the persuasion that from his knowledge of my affairs he will relieve my other Trustees and executors of much trouble in the execution of the Trusts of this my will..."⁴

After Sir John died in 1826, William wrote a letter to his brother and a number of letters to John Forster in their capacity as executors, concerning debts outstanding to the estate, and other matters.⁵ I have given the letters in full, including William's creative and varied spelling; they speak for themselves, bringing us almost with a shock into intimate contact with the minutiae of the times.

John Eagleton Esq,

Brill Farm

near Thame

Oxfordshire

Bonvilstone Feby. 20th 1827

Dear Brother,

I received your letter of the 15th. instant yesterday relating to some welsh affairs and I here send you the explanation of the items contained therein, Mr. Biedermann's accounts with respect of the arrears are correct, but they chiefly are now standing very old arrears^a and were contracted years back in the very bad times, particularly that of Charles Bassett of St. Mary Hill, Evan Morgan of peterstone supper Ely and John Williams of Llantrithyd formely of the Aubrey Arms, and John Rosser of St. Mary Hill, you may recollect my calling there several times when you was in Wales but to no effect; what I think and beleive will be paid and which

are to the greatest amount secured by notes of hands, are as follows

to be paid by installments Vizt. Charles

Bassett of St. Mary Hill 128 19 0

Your tenant John Rees of the same place 64 0 0

These two sums above are secured by notes of hands drawn by Mr. Thomas Bassett and will be paid by installments half yearly. Lord Talbot's and Earl Dynevor's, will be paid by Mr. Bould of Brecon in the summer as he then will attend at Cardiff to receive their rents, and I will then call on Mr. Bould for the Amount of 2 15 2 Thos. Williams of Llanblethian and Henry Miles of Peterstone will also be 1 2 0

paid, and I don't expect any more will ever be got

As for the other tenants are very poor and 196 16 2 chiefly on the parish where they receive

parish relief, therefore, out of the arrear of 244 13 10 only expect to receive the sum of 196 16 2

The ballance of $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{\textit{s}} \\ 47 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{\textit{s}} \\ 17 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{\textit{d}} \\ 8 \end{smallmatrix}$ is the only sum I expect to be lost. 47 17 8

Charles Bassett and John Rees will pay $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{\textit{s}} \\ 25 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{\textit{s}} \\ 10 \end{smallmatrix}$ $\begin{smallmatrix} \text{\textit{d}} \\ 0 \end{smallmatrix}$ each every six months untill their arrear is paid, it would have been impossible for those arrears to have been got any otherwise than by installments, without distressing and actually ruining 8 very large familys, which have been many years under the late Sir John Aubrey, and I understood from Mr. Biedermann that Mr. Forster did not wish that to be the case, upon the whole I think the arrears have come in very well,

much better than I expected owing to the badness of the times on farmers lately.

With regard to the sum of £2 10 0 stated by Mr. Biedermann to have been paid to me for the intrest of £50 due to the poor of Llantrithyd - is namely this, about fifty or sixty years back a lady of the name of Lougher, left many legacies to several parishes and amongst the rest of her charitys she left £50 to "the most industrious poor of Llantrithyd" for them to receive the intrest of £2 10 0 for ever and to be divided by the Churchwarden & overseer every year on St. Thomas's Day, and about 44 years back, or thereabouts, it appears by a certain note of hand, drawn on plain paper by old Sir Thomas Aubrey, then living at Llantrithyd place, that he then taken the £50 in question and, while living, paid the intrest of £2 10 0 yearly and since his death the intrest has regularly been paid by the agent of the late Sir John Aubrey and it is now paid up to St. Thomas's Day last, I have paid the intrest many years myself, on the late Sir John Aubrey's account which you can see by the rentals, I should think this £50 had better be paid off or the overseer and Churchwarden must have some other security for it, for Llantrithyd poor, they have spoke to me on the subject; should Mr. Foster approve of it, I can pay it off in July next, with the money I receive in arrears and forward the note of hand to him; The note which old Sir Thomas Aubrey gave for the £50 is now in the iron chest in Llantrithyd Church, so that it can be got at any time the money is paid.

Accident - a very industrious man was smash'd to peices

and kill'd on the spot last week by hawlling hev'y timber
 (near) Llantrithyd park, he has left a wife and eight children
 to lament his loss, we have had a very severe frost in this
 country for some time and still continues; the fodder for
 the cattle his very scarce oweing to the dryness of last
 summer. I heard from Mrs.Collins (late Mrs.Sash) a few days
 back she appears to like her change in life much; my wife
 and children are all well and join me in kind regards to
 both yourself and Mrs.Eagleton, my aunt and Mrs.Coles and
 all enquiring friends

I am your affectionate brother

William Eagleton

Mr.J.Eagleton.

John Forster Esq.,

Bonvilstone March 1st 1827

H.H.Oddie's Esq., Carrey Street

Lincoln's Inn

London

Sir,

I have just received a letter from my brother desiring
 me to send you a copy of the note of hand given by the late
 Sir Thomas Aubrey for the £50 charity money which I referred
 to in my letter to my brother some days since, it is as follows
 (viz) August 20th 1782 Received of Mr.Robert
 Savours fifty pounds belonging to the poor of Llantrithyd
 for which I promise to be accountable for the interest at
 the rate of five pr.cent.

Thos. Aubrey

I have the honour to subscribe myself

Sir

your very obedient humble servant,

William Eagleton

John Forster Esq.

John Forster Esq

Carey Street,

Bonvilstone Janry. 31st. 1828

Lincoln's Inn

London

Sir

Yesterday I received a letter from my brother in answer to one I wrote to him some days since, respecting a sum of money I had received being part of the arrears due to the Executors of the late Sir John Aubrey Bart. and which sums by my brother's direction I have inclosed to you, by a check for £ 82 6 0 being the amount I have received of the different

tenants as follows viz	£	s	d	Disbursements on acct. of the
Received of Lord Talbot	2	10	0	Executors of the late Sir John
Do. of Earl Dynevor	0	5	2	Aubrey Bart. by cash paid the
Do. of Henry Miles	0	14	0	overseers of Llantrithyd a years
Do. of John Rees of				intrest of a note of hand for
Gelly Garn	35	0	0	£50 drawn by the late Sir Thomas
Do. of Charles Bassett				Aubrey Bart. up to St. Thomas's
of Do.	40	19	0	day last
Cash collected being				poundage for collecting
part of the arrears	79	8	2	79£ at 1/- in the pound
				3 19 0

Cash received on account
of the trustees of Mrs.

Ricketts 9 9 0

The whole amount recd. 88 17 2

Disbursements deducted 6 11 2

amount of check £ 82 6 0

Do. cash paid for receipt stamps

0 2 2

Disbursements & 6 11 2

The above money I have received since I settled with Mr. Biedermann in January last 1827. There still remains a sum about one hundred and seventeen pounds unpaid of the arrears, which are to be paid by installments half yearly and will be nearly two years before the whole is completed for the largest amount his on Charles Bassett and he is poor but I believe that he is honest, I mentioned to my brother the arrears that would never be paid, whether my brother gave you account of their names and their arrears I cannot say, but they are as follows viz

	£	s	d
Lancarvan John Williams	19	0	0
Llantrithyd Moses Shields	1	16	8
Peterstone Super Ely Evan Morgan	12	6	0
Gelly Garn St. Mary Hill Thomas Jones	5	5	0
Moses Mathews of Do.	1	5	0
John Rosser of Do.	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>

The above sums will be entirely lost as neither of them will ever have a chance of paying a single shilling for they are all very poor, and the man named Rosser probably will be sent out of this country for he is in Cardiff gaol for sheep stealing.

The above account I send I hope you will find correct and any other information you may require, I shall at all times feel most happy in sending you,

I am Sir
 your most obt. humble servt.,
 William Eagleton

J. Forster Esq.

Bonvilstone Feby 3rd 1828

Sir

I was this morning favored with your letter of the 1st. instant respecting the nine guineas which I recd. on account of the trustees of Mrs. Ricketts, the particulars relating to that sum are as follows (viz)

Received of William Evan 6 6 0 for a years rent due Michms. last for a messuage and lands in the parish of Llanfithyd called the Standeliad, containing 9a 1r 00p bought of Lord Dynevor in the year 1799. The said premises are under a lease for lives.

Received of John Jenkins 3 3 0 for a years rent due on the 2nd. day of August last, for a field called Erwrr' Shortlands in the parish of Lancarvan, containing 2a 0r 11p bought of Thos. Williams of Newton Esq. in the year 1823 by the late Sir John Aubrey Bart.

There was half a years rent of the above premises paid with the arrears in Mr. Biedermann's last account, with you, about a year back, should any further information be required on the above premises, I shall feel most happy in forwarding them to you,

I am sir
 your most obt. humble servt.,
 William Eagleton

J. Forster Esq.

Bonvilstone June 26th 1830

Sir

I have to inform you that I have at sundry times by small payments rec'd on acct. of the old arrears due to the Exct. of the late Sir John Aubrey Bart. £ 60, and I have accordingly too your directions paid off the note of hand given by the late Sir Thomas Aubrey Bart. for £ 50 with the interest up to this time, and I have sent you the note and the receipt signed in the presence of Mr. Thos. Bassett by the churchwarden and the overseer of the poor of Llantrithyd, the parishioners have placed the £ 50 on the Rumny Bridge and Gate Trust, and it will bear the same interest as was paid by the late Sir John Aubrey Bart. On the other side I send you the account since my last remittance to you in Janry. 1828 which I trust will be satisfactory,

and have the honr. to subscribe myself

Sir

your most obt. humble servt.

William Eagleton

John Forster Esq.

(Over page)

William Eagleton in account with the Executors of the late Sir John Aubrey Baronet, 1829 & 1830

Dr.	£	s	d	Cr.	£	s	d
Received of Mr. John Rees				1830 June 25th by cash paid			
the whole of his arrear	29	0	0	the churchwarden and overseer			
Received of Mr. Charles				of Llantrithyd for a note of			
Bassett on account of				hand given to them by the late			
his arrear of Rent	31	0	0	Sir Thomas Aubrey Bart	50	0	0
	£	60	0				

To 2½ years interest on the			
same note of hand	6	5	0
paid for receipt stamps	0	2	0
To poundage for receiving			
the arrears	3	0	0
Ballance now remaining in			
my hands	0	13	0
	£	60	0 0

Bonvilstone July 2nd 1830

Sir

This morning I was favoured with your letter of the 30th. ult. And in answer to the question of the arrears which now remain due to the Exct. of the late Sir John Aubrey Bart. is about £ 57 13 0 out of which sum I dont expect to be able to collect more than £ 43 and that will be from Charles Bassett, but he his very poor and will require some time to pay the money,

I have the honr.to subscribe myself

Sir

Your most obt. humble.Servt.,

William Eagleton

John Forster Esq.

NOTES

1. Llantrithyd Parish Registers and Aubrey M.S., Glaomorgan Record Office.
2. Buckinghamshire Record Office; accounts for the Aubrey's Llantrithyd estate, 1826. Ref. D/AF 122/219
3. Archaeologia Cambrensis, journal of the Cambrian Archaeological Society, July 1864.
4. Sir John Aubrey-Fletcher; personal correspondence.
5. Buckinghamshire Record Office, Ref. D/AF 122/164

The hardships suffered by farmers as a result of the collapse of grain prices and other social problems, exacerbated by bad harvests, after the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, come poignantly through to us in these letters. William Eagleton clearly belongs to that class of "foreign" servant which took an increasing part in the management of the great estates as they grew and became remoter from their Welsh roots. Of his seven children, only one son, William (1817 - 1897) stayed in Glamorgan to marry; he is buried in Llantrithyd church yard.

William senior was evidently assiduous in his duty of collecting debts, encouraged no doubt by the "poundage" of one shilling per pound which he took as his commission. It is tempting to see compassion in the Executor's tolerance in allowing collection by instalments, but this may have been realism as to the possibility of actually obtaining the money. As steward, William must have played an important role in village life, hence his involvement with the poor villagers' investment income. We can perhaps regard him as a mediator between the poor people he saw daily and the more remote authority of the Aubrey Estate.

Acknowledgements.

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