

BAGENAL'S CASTLE

A Shared Learning Project (As Peter Laslett Intended)

Robert Louis Stevenson said: 'To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive', but in the case of our SLP, I'm not sure if I agree with him.

I've reported on the Northern Ireland Bagenal's Castle (Newry, Co Down) project in this publication before. I can now say that we have indeed arrived and although the journey getting there was great fun we are delighted to have successfully reached our goal.

The photo was taken on 6 June in the Banqueting Room of the Castle after a performance of a play based on the elopement of Mabel (in blue), sister of Sir Henry Bagenal, Queen Elizabeth's English Marshal of the army in Ireland (in the black hat), with one of the leading Irish chieftains, the Great Hugh O'Neill.

I'm about to present our completed folder, the result of nine months of intensive research into the Tudor period in this part of Ireland, to Noreen Cunningham, curator of the Newry and Mourne Museum, standing at the end of the table.

The educational pack contains the work of members of two U3As, a team of seven from North Down and Ards and four from Newry. The Mayor of Newry is in the centre of the group.

Presentation Day is a great occasion for SLPs and ours was no exception. We started with a tour of Elizabethan sites in the area including the family grave of the O'Neills in Creggan Churchyard (pictured) and St Nicholas's Church near the castle, resting place of its founder, Sir Nicholas Bagenal.

The tour was devised and organised by Newry U3A and a leaflet describing the route was included in the pack. Also included were illustrated workcards, an accompanying teachers' book, a copy of the play and a compiled tape of Elizabethan airs to be used as background music, all contributed by North Down and Ards U3A.

The aim was to provide a colourful introduction to the Tudor period to be used by junior secondary school pupils and their teachers after visiting the castle.

The material covered fits in well with the National Curriculum. In addition to profiles of the main characters involved, aspects of the contrasting English and Irish ways of life are included, including a section on the Elizabethan fortified town house, common in Ireland at that time.

Much of the resentment felt in some parts of the Irish community today could be explained by a study of the vast differences between English law imposed by the settlers on the native Irish who already had their own well-respected but different legal system known as the Brehon law.

A clear explanation of a significant but little-understood turning point in Irish history, the Flight of the Earls, is the subject of the last workcard which asks some thought-provoking questions.



**Team Leader Joyce Gibson
North Down and Ards U3A**



After a few weeks the museum staff summoned us to another meeting to hear their verdict. Two of the North Down team travelled the 50-mile journey yet again but were delighted with the outcome.

We were given a hearty welcome. The atmosphere had changed and we received glowing praise for our endeavours.

We had arrived!

Our work is to be accepted largely as it stands and adopted as a full part of the Museum's education programme for schools. With our consent, a few improvements will be made such as a little professional editing and the addition of more illustrations in the teachers' book, previously unavailable to us owing to copyright restrictions.

Some omissions will inevitably be necessary but the pack will be as we intended. The work of the two U3A teams will be given recognition and another much larger scale presentation will be staged by Newry and Mourne Museum and Newry City Council in October.

This time Northern Ireland's Minister of Education John Dowd and Commissioner for Older People Clare Keating will be invited. We hope that some official representatives of the U3A in the UK and perhaps other guests will also be there.

The project has had a splendid outcome – one beyond our wildest dreams.

Peter Laslett, one of the founders of the U3A in 1982 envisaged in three of his principles (6, 13 and 14) that:

'U3As should collaborate with institutions such as museums, galleries, libraries, in learning partnerships in which the U3As and the institutions may benefit through research, advancement of knowledge and mutual respect for capabilities'

We consider we have done so 'par excellence'.

Long live Shared Learning Projects and grateful thanks to all who participated.

