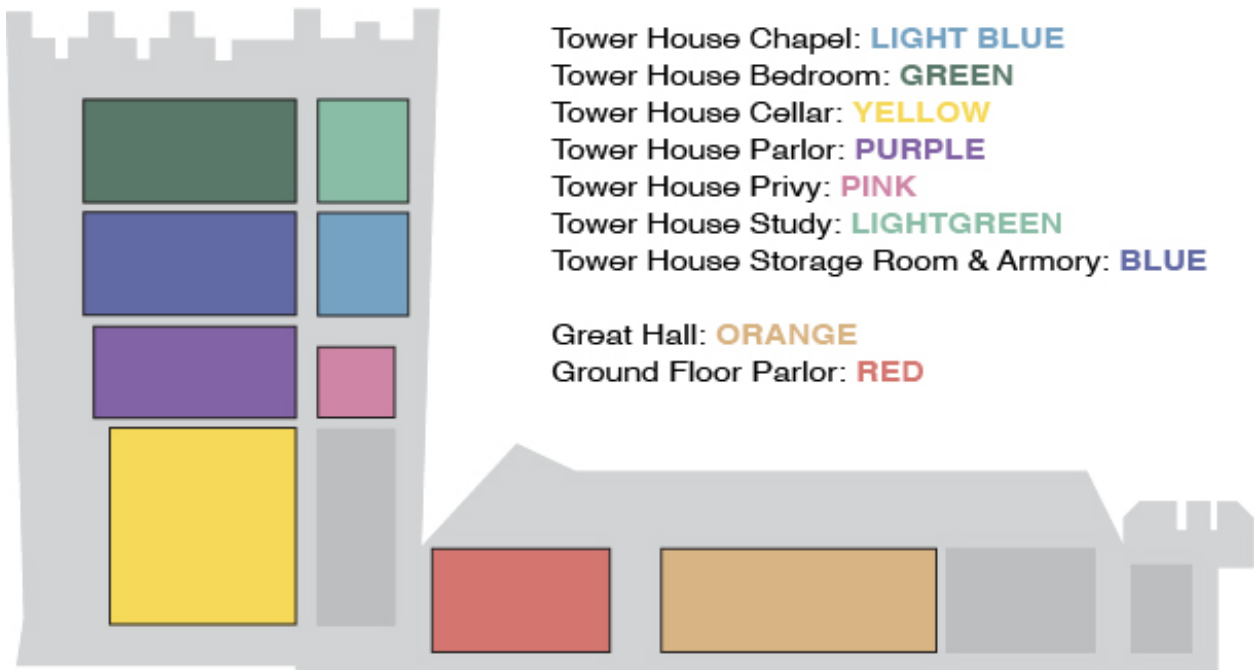
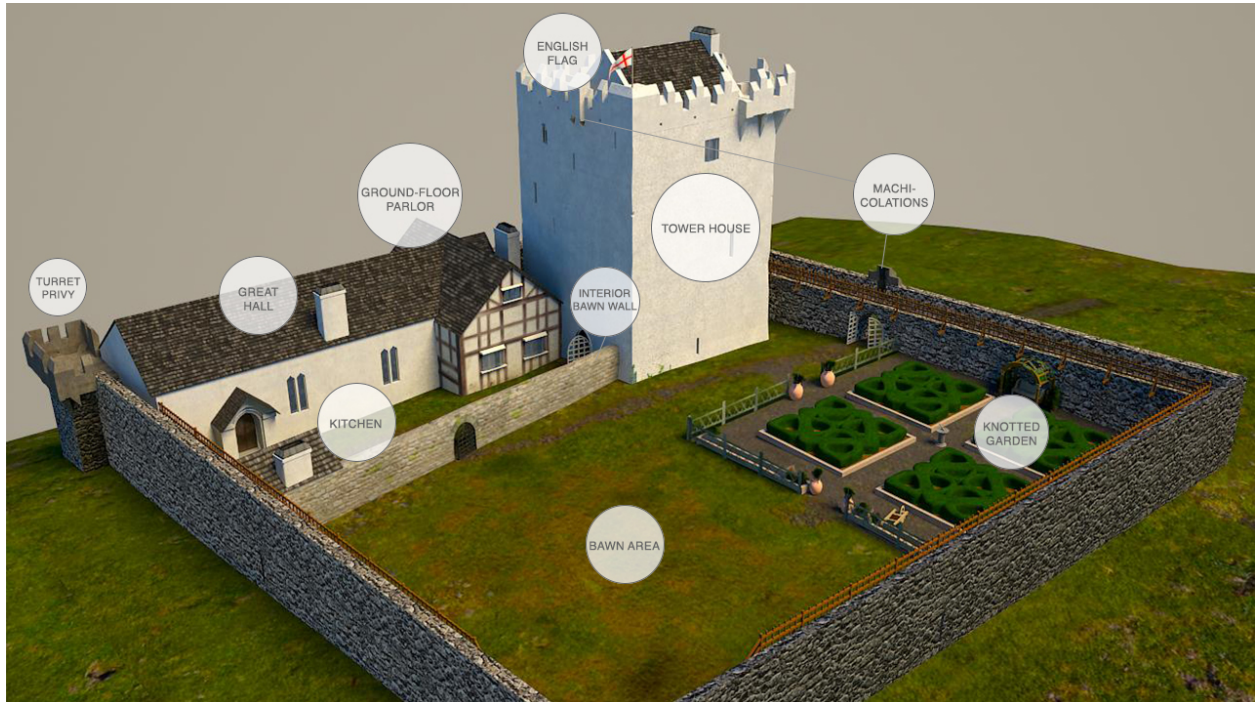


Tower House Bedroom Teacher Pack



1. Introduction: Gaelicisation and Women

The focus of the bedroom is Gaelicisation and women. Since the twelfth-century arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland, there was great concern exuded by English observers and writers

about the Gaelicisation, or “degeneration” of the original “English” colony. Gaelicisation was a process of acculturation and assimilation which occurred over generations through interaction with the native Irish population. It led to the adoption of certain customs, like fosterage and military exactions, literary and musical traditions, bilingualism, and the hybridization of laws, particularly along the Pale frontier and within those lordships which were more distant from the centre of English administration in Dublin. Women, particularly Irish women, were regarded as the chief conduit for this cultural decline because, as wives, mothers, and wet-nurses, they had great influence in the household. They could determine the first language a child spoke, patterns of patronage and religious practice, as well as strengthen relations between her family and her husband’s.

Students should navigate the room by starting with the table, which will introduce them to Gaelicisation. The next station, the bed, discusses intermarriage between the Old English community and the Irish. The crib explores early modern childbirth and the average English household. And finally, the rocking chair addresses wet-nursing and the Irish custom of fosterage.

2. Extra textual context and sources

The Table: Gaelicisation

On the room tour, students are presented with an excerpt from the Statutes of Kilkenny (1366), a piece of legislation by which the crown administration in Dublin endeavoured to enforce English social and cultural norms. Repeated attempts to compel cultural conformity failed, as is evident in the passage below by Fynes Moryson.

- a) This is an excerpt from an unpublished section of Fynes Moryson’s (1556-1630) *Itinerary*. Moryson was a travel writer who served as Lord Deputy Mountjoy’s secretary in Ireland. Moryson kept detailed records of the final stages of the Nine Years War (1593-1603), which included official correspondence to and from Mountjoy. In 1617 Moryson published his *Itinerary*, a three-part account of his journeys through Europe and the Middle East which detailed the histories, governments, peoples, customs, and societies he had encountered. Ireland featured throughout this work but, compared to most European societies, Moryson portrayed Ireland as less sophisticated and more superstitious.

“I will say for the English Irish* ... But as horses Cowes and sheepe transported out of England into Ireland, doe each race and breeding declayne worse and worse, till in a fewe yeares they nothing differ from the races and breeds of the Irish horses and Cattle. So the posterities of the English planted in Ireland, doe each discent, growe more and more Irish, in nature manners and customes, so as wee founde in the last Rebellion diuers of the most ancient English Familyes planted of old in Ireland, to be turned as rude and barbarous as any of the meere Irish lords. Partly because the manners and Customes of the meere Irish giue great liberty to all mens liues, and absolute power to great men ouer the inferiors, both which men naturally affect. Partly because the meere Irish of old overtopped the English Irish in

number, and nothing is more natural yea necessary, then for the lesse Number to accommodate it selfe to the greater. And espetically because the English are naturally inclyned to apply themselues to the manners and Customes of any forrayne nations with whome they liue and Converse, whereas the meere Irish by nature haue singular and obstinate pertinacity in retayning their old manners and Customes, so as they could neuer be drawne, by the lawes gentile government, and free conversation of the English, to any Ciuility in manners, or reformation in Religion.”¹

* English Irish is another term used by contemporaries for the Old English population

The Bed: Intermarriage

English authors, like Edmund Spenser and the anonymous author of “The Supplication of the Blood of the English” were unanimous about the cultural consequences of intermarriage with the Irish and they blamed much of the supposed degeneration of Old English families on Irish women who married Old English men. Intermarriage was widespread, but Richard Stanihurst, an Old English Catholic from Dublin, denied that it was common practice.

- a) Written shortly after the 1598 overthrow of the Munster plantation, the anonymous author of “The Supplication of the Blood of the English Most Lamentably Murdered in Ireland, Cryeng Out of the Yearth for Revenge” blamed Irish mothers for undermining the political loyalty of their Old English children by raising them to dress, sound, and act like Irish people.

“What hath made the Garaldins, the Lacyes, the Purcells, to alter the nature of themselves from the nature of their names, but their former Irishe matches? what hath made the neighborhood, the sight, nay the thought of an Englishman soe hatefull unto them, but such Irishe matches? what hath turned them from Englishe w^{ch} they sounde in name, to Irishe w^{ch} they appeare in nature? from men to monsters? but their Irishe matches? They were in the former tymes, as wee are now, meere Englishe in habite, in name, in nature. They nowe retaine nothinge of that they were but the bare name. Our apparell is scorned of them; o^{re} nature hated; o^{re} selves abhored. And why? because the blood of their Irishe mothers, hath wasted away the naturall love they bare to their mother England; the aleagance they swore to their prince; the dewtie they ought to god.”²

- b) This excerpt is from Richard Stanihurst’s “Two bokes on the Histories of Ireland”, published in Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1577). A member of the Catholic Old English community, Stanihurst was a staunch defender of Old English privileges and loyalty. He went so far as to claim that Old English culture and language was a purer form of English than that spoken in England. In defending the purity of his own community’s “Englishness”, Stanihurst passed censure on many Irish customs and made the false claim that the leading Old English families shunned intermarriage and cultural exchange with the Gaelic Irish.

¹ Fynes Moryson, *Shakespeare’s Europe*, ed. C. Hughes (London, 1903), p. 481-82.

² W. Maley (ed.), ‘The Supplication of the Blood of the English Most Lamentably Murdered in Ireland, Cryeng Out of the Yearth for Revenge (1598)’, *Anal. Hib.*, No. 36 (1995), p. 33.

“... these Anglo-Irish whom we have been describing have cut themselves off so completely from the old Irish that the humblest of the colonists in the English province would not give his daughter in marriage to the noblest Irish lord. Moreover they have traditionally reinforced their internal communal ties through marriage, so that there is a strong pattern of interrelationship. This is also a feature of life in the cities and towns which I have mentioned. The townspeople live in accordance with the laws and customs of the English and they administer their communities by the authority and will of English law. They speak English, and Irish also because of their daily commerce with their Irish neighbours. They bind themselves together through intermarriage and they reject Irish suitors with the utmost contempt.”³

Why did Richard Stanihurst claim that intermarriage was rare when many of the Old English lords he praised had taken Irish wives?

Rocking Chair: Wet-nursing and fosterage

The customs of wet-nursing and fosterage could overlap and the relationships formed through these practices were life-long. In addition to the practical political and military bonds these relationships nurtured, foster children were often beneficiaries in the wills of their foster parents and some foster parents contributed to the doweries of foster-daughters. The material benefits of fosterage went both ways; foster children often gave generous gifts of land, housing, goods, or money to their foster parents or brethren.

- a) Edmund Spenser believed that Irish wet-nurses were largely responsible for the Gaelicisation of their charges because babies learned their first words from those who were closest to them.

“I suppose that the chiefe cause of bringing in the Irish language, amongst them, was specially their fostering, and marrying with the Irish, the which are two most dangerous infections; for the first the childe that sucketh the milke of the nurse, must of necessity learne his first speach of her, the which being the first inured to his tongue, is ever after most pleasing unto him, insomuch as though hee afterwards be taught English, yet the smacke of the first will allwayes abide with him; and not onely of the speach, but also of the manners and conditions. For besides that young children be like apes, which will affect and imitate what they see done before them, especially by their nurses, whom they love so well, they moreover drawe into themselves, together with their sucke, even the nature and disposition of their nurses: for the mind followeth much the temperature of the body: and also the words are the image of the minde, so as, they proceeding from the minde, the minde must be needes be affected with the words. So that the speach being Irish, the heart must needes bee Irish: for out of the abundance of the heart, the tongue speaketh.”⁴

³ Colm Lennon, *Richard Stanihurst the Dubliner, 1547-1618: A Biography with a Standard Text On Ireland's Past*. (Blackrock, 1981), p. 145.

⁴ Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland*, Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (eds.), (Oxford, 1997), p. 71.

- b) Fynes Moryson also commented on wet-nursing and fosterage, but his description of these practices was probably based on secondhand information rather than his own experiences or observations of Irish household routines.

“They seldom nurse their own children, especially the wives of lords and gentlemen (as well mere Irish as English-Irish). For women of good wealth seek with great ambition to nurse them, not for any profit, rather spending much upon them while they live, and giving them when they die sometimes more than to their own children. But they do it only to have the protection and love of the parents whose children they nurse. And old custom is so turned into a second nature with them as they esteem the children they nurse more than their own, holding it a reproach to nurse their own children. Yea, men will forbear their wives' bed for the good of the children they nurse or foster, but not nursing their own. Yea, the foster-brothers – I mean the children of the nurse and strangers that have sucked her milk – love one another better than natural brothers, and hate them in respect of the other. ... The worst is that these nurses with their extreme indulgence corrupt the children they foster, nourishing and heartening the boys in all villainy, and the girls in obscenity.”⁵

2(a). Additional Resources

Below are some resources about aspects of early modern women's history not covered in this course. Students can use these to form a more comprehensive understanding of some women's lives during the early modern period.

Grace O'Malley

Podcast link: Grace O'Malley episode on BBC, *You're Dead To Me* podcast series:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p095dkp7>

- To date, the lives of early modern Irish women have been underrepresented in histories of the period. Gráinne Ní Mháille, anglicized to Grace O'Malley and popularly known as the “Pirate Queen”, is one of the most famous women in Irish history. She is also one of the most famous pirates in early modern Europe. This podcast explores her life and reputation.

Women's Writing

The Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing, 1550-1700, is a Digital Humanities project led by Marie-Louise Coolahan at NUI Galway. Students can use this resource to explore early modern women's writing and the impact they had during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. <https://recirc.nuigalway.ie/>

3. Bibliography

⁵ Fynes Moryson, *The Manners and Customs of Ireland*, p. 318-19 (<https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T100073.html>)

Clare Carroll, “Representations of Women in Some Early Modern English Tracts on the Colonization of Ireland,” *Albion*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1993)

Steven G. Ellis, “‘More Irish Than the Irish Themselves’? the ‘Anglo-Irish’ in Tudor Ireland,” *History Ireland*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1999), pp. 22-26.

Gillian Kenny. *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Women in Ireland c. 1170-1540* (Dublin, 2007).

Gillian Kenny, “Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Marriage Laws and Traditions in Late Medieval Ireland,” *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 32 (2006), pp. 27-42.

Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O’Dowd. *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1991).

James O’Neill, “Spouses, Spies and Subterfuge: the Role and experience of women during the Nine Years War (1593-1603)”, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 121C (2020), pp. 1-24.

Alexandra Shepard, “Family and Household”, in Susan Doran and Norman Jones (eds.), *The Elizabethan World* (New York, 2014), pp. 352-71.

Tim Stretton, “Women”, in Susan Doran and Norman Jones (eds.), *The Elizabethan World* (New York, 2014), pp. 335-351.

Clodagh Tait, “‘Kindred Without End’: Wet-Nursing, Fosterage and Emotion in Ireland, c. 1550-1720”, *Irish Economic and Social History*, Vol. 20, No. 10 (2020), pp. 1-26.

4. Teaching Plan

Students should consider how cultural exchange and accommodation occurs over time. They should also contemplate why colonial officials were so concerned about the supposed “degeneration” of the older English colony.

Class Discussion Questions

- 1) What is Gaelicisation and how did it occur?
- 2) Why were crown officials and English observers so troubled by Gaelicisation?
- 3) Why was intermarriage forbidden by statute? And why did families continue to practice intermarriage even though it was prohibited?
- 4) How practical is legislation that enforces English culture and language?

- 5) Compare Richard Stanihurst's excerpt on marriage to those by Spenser and "The Supplication". Why does Richard Stanihurst deny that leading Old English families intermarried with the Irish?
- 6) What does the passage by Fynes Moryson on childbirth reveal about ethnocentrism in the work of early modern writers? Is his description of Irish women and childbirth convincing?
- 7) Explain the social and political functions of wet-nursing and fosterage.
- 8) How did English observers explain fosterage? Do you think their arguments are fair?
- 9) Overall, how significant are women to the process of Gaelicisation?
- 10) To what extent does cultural exchange or adoption within the domestic sphere influence attitudes and behaviour in the public sphere?
- 11) Can different societies and cultures living side-by-side coexist? Is conflict unavoidable?
- 12) Can people adopt new customs and still maintain their original identity?