# Teacher Pack Tower House Parlor





Tower House Chapel: LIGHT BLUE
Tower House Bedroom: GREEN
Tower House Cellar: YELLOW
Tower House Parlor: PURPLE
Tower House Privy: PINK
Tower House Study: LIGHTGREEN
Tower House Storage Room & Armory: BLUE

Great Hall: ORANGE
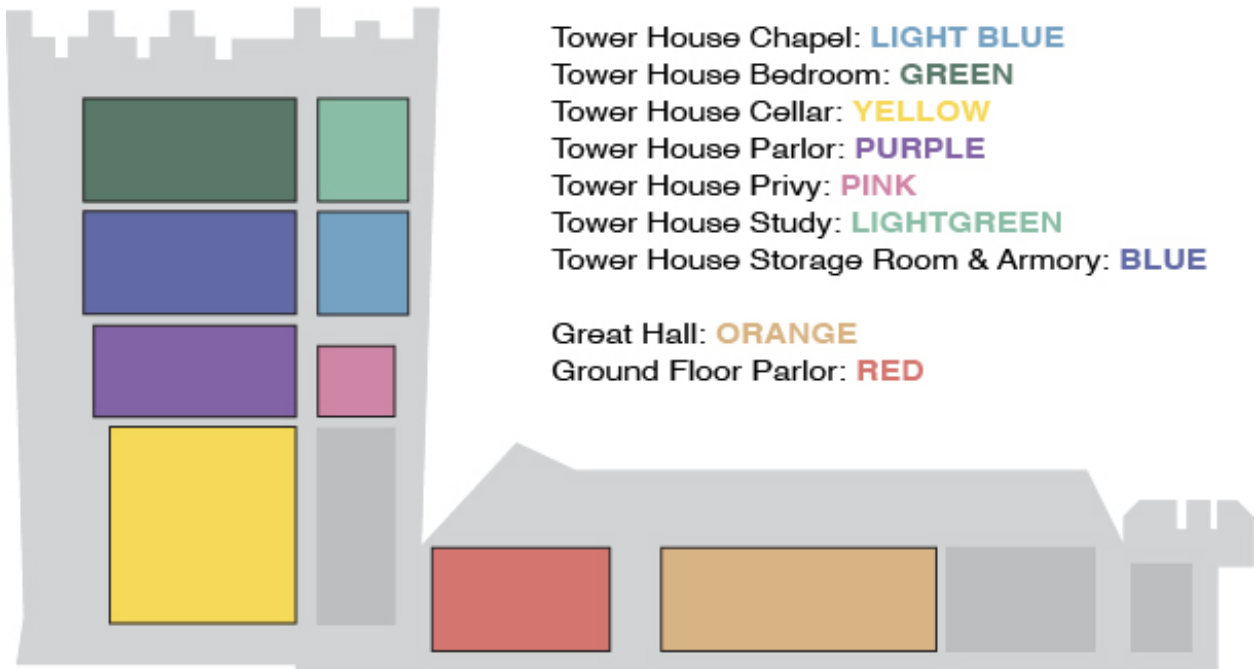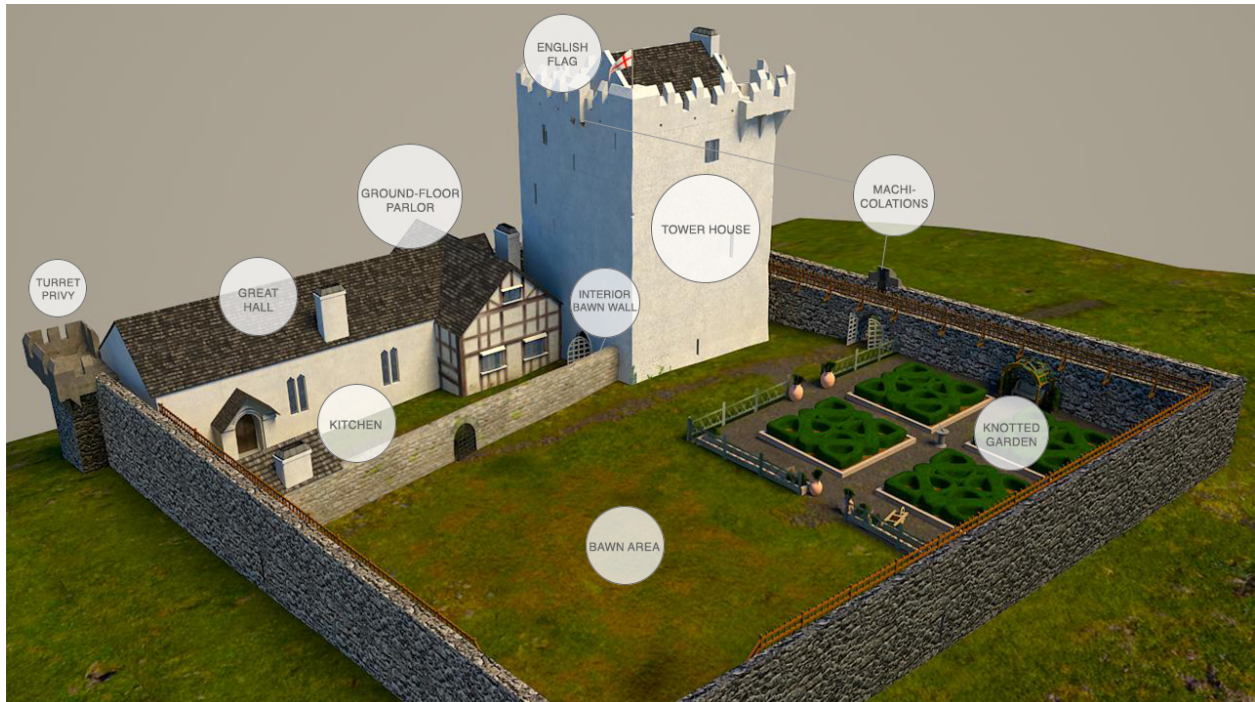Ground Floor Parlor: RED

## 1.  Introduction: Aspects of a Plural Society

The tower house parlor presents aspects of a plural society in which different ethnic groups and cultures encountered one another.  The first two stations, the dining table and the harp, address

feasting and entertainment in Gaelic Irish society.  These served important social, political and cultural functions in Irish society, yet they were often misrepresented as barbaric and uncivilised by English commentators.  The portrait of Edmund Spenser discusses Spenser and his career in the wider context of New English adventurers who arrived in Ireland during the second half of the sixteenth century.  Finally, the hypothetical portrait of Elizabeth Boyle offers an assessment of married women's rights under English common law compared to those under Irish brehon law.

## 2.  <u>Extra textual context and sources</u>

**The Harp: Poets, Harpers, and Rhymers**

a)  Richard Stanihurst, an Old Englishman from Dublin, described entertainment at Irish feasts.  His description of this, like many other aspects of Gaelic Irish society, was exaggerated and not entirely accurate.  Students need to be conscious of the audience for which he was writing and the message he wished to convey.  Crucially, Stanihurst wanted to portray Old English society as staunchly English and he intentionally denied centuries of cultural exchange and adaptation within his community.  Students should therefore consider the accuracy of Stanihurst's comments on Irish musicians.  Were harpists "often blind"?  Were Irish musicians really "unlearned in musicianship"?

"During supper there is present a harpist, often blind, who relaxes the reclining guests by striking his strings (which are woven from iron or bronze threads and not from sinews as other strings).  He is unlearned in musicianship.  He produces sounds by his curved fingernails and not with a plectrum.  Although he observes neither musical measures, rules of harmony nor the accent of sounds, the whole audience takes delight in his rough melody.  (This is despite the fact that the screeching of a saw is offensive not only to the ears of the musically expert but to all classes of people.)  If the harpist sees that your ears are wandering while he is playing, or if you case the slightest aspersion on his prowess, you will see him ranting and raving furiously.  For he not only asks but demands that you praise his skill."[1]

## 2(a). Additional Resources

<u>Irish language</u>

*Léamh* (Learn Early Modern Irish) is a digital humanities project based at the University of Connecticut.  To date, Irish language sources have been underutilised by scholars of early modern Ireland.  This is partially due to limited learning materials and programmes for Irish language acquisition.  Léamh offers innovative materials and techniques to help scholars learn early modern Irish and make greater use of the wide variety of early modern Irish sources. https://léamh.org

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[1] Colm Lennon, *Richard Stanihurst the Dubliner, 1547-1618: A Biography with a Standard Text On Ireland's Past*. (Blackrock, 1981), p. 150.

<u>Irish poetry</u>

This short YouTube video by Mícheál Hoyne for the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies discusses the bardic poetry tradition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7aFv-TBd0k ()

<u>Irish Marriage</u>

This article by Donnchadh Ó Corráin details some of the key laws relating to marriage in medieval and early modern Ireland.[2]  It is freely available on *Corpus of Electronic Texts* (CELT): https://celt.ucc.ie//marriage_ei.html

## 3.  <u>Bibliography</u>

Nicholas P. Canny, 'Edmund Spenser and the Development of an Anglo-Irish Identity', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 13 (1983), pp. 1–19.

Patricia Coughlan, "Edmund Spenser," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*

T.J. Dunne, "The Gaelic Response to Conquest and Colonisation: The Evidence of the Poetry," *Studia Hibernica*, No. 20 (1980), pp. 7-30.

Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 296-322.

Andrew Hadfield, "Edmund Spenser," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

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)

Kenneth W. Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland in the Middle Ages* (Dublin, 2003)

Catherine Marie O'Sullivan, *Hospitality in Medieval Ireland, 900-1500* (Dublin, 2004)

Katherine Simms, "Guesting and Feasting in Gaelic Ireland," *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Vol. 108 (1978), pp. 67-100.

Katherine Simms, *Gaelic Ulster in the Middle Ages: History, Culture and Society* (Dublin, 2020)

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[2] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, "Marriage in Early Ireland", in A. Cosgrove (ed.), Marriage in Ireland (Dublin, 1985), pp. 5-24.

## 4. __Teaching Plan__

Class Discussion:  The statement, "history is written by the victors", raises many questions about how we understand the past.  Students should consider how and by whom history has been written.  For instance, are some national histories more accurate, or fairly represented, than others?  Are some sources more reliable than others?  What happens if large amounts of historic evidence have been lost, like in the Irish Customs House fire of 1921?  Scholars of early modern Ireland have relied heavily on English sources; has that affected our understanding of Irish history?  A huge amount of Irish language material exists in the form of poetry and annals; could greater use of these sources change how historians write about early modern Ireland?

Class exercise: Much of the evidence used for this course has come from the pens of Englishmen.  But how would Irishmen have judged or recorded aspects of English society (i.e. clothing, food, music, law, marriage, etc.)?  Working in groups, students should pick an aspect of English society or culture and, by comparing it with Irish customs, consider how Irish people would have interpreted it.  Students will need to research how the custom they have chosen was practiced in both English and Irish societies.

Class exercise: In groups, students should identify three New Englishmen who lived in Ireland during the sixteenth century.  They should identify how each individual fit the New English "stereotype" as well as how they did not.  Things to highlight are what did those individuals say about Ireland (if such records exist)?  How did they acquire their knowledge of Irish society and people?  How did their career represent that of a New Englishman in Ireland?  When were they in Ireland?  What did they do there?  Did they have personal relations or contact with any Irish or Old English people?  How did these experiences influence their outlook on Ireland?