The Evidence for Bagenal’s Castle

- In-depth and extensive research – both documentary and archaeological – has been undertaken over a period of nine years which substantiates the antecedents of Bagenal’s Castle.

- After identification of the older building enveloped within McCann’s Bakery, the site was inspected on numerous occasions by staff from Environment and Heritage Service, independent historical and archaeological consultants such as academics from Queens University, Belfast, Trinity College, Dublin and University College, Dublin and Archaeological Development Services as well as independent consultants from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The consensus agreed upon was that the building enveloped within McCann’s Bakery was Bagenal’s Castle.

- This conclusion has been further verified by excavation and archaeological survey. These investigations prove the standing remains closely resemble the original plans of the building, dating from circa 1568 and which were known to historians and archaeologists and preserved in the National Archives in London (formerly the Public Record Office).

- These maps and plans, along with maps of Carrickfergus also dating from the 16th century, are the earliest known surviving plans of a remaining castle and town layout in Ulster, perhaps in Ireland.

Primary References:

- In 1550 Nicholas Bagenal was granted “The Newry” by the Crown, encompassing the rights and privileges formerly enjoyed by the Cistercian Abbey. This is clearly recorded in the Calendar of Patent and Close Rolls and the Calendar of State Papers, a collection of 16th-century state documents and correspondence. Not long after this, Bagenal was appointed Marshall of the Army in Ireland. He was subsequently often referred to as “the Marshall” or as “Mr. Marshall” in the Calendar of State Papers.

- Original plans of “the Towne of Newrye”, drawn by engineer, Robert Lythe c. 1568 and elevation drawings illustrate “The New Castell” beneath which is the name “H Bagnall”. The position of the castle on this map accords with the position of the building currently undergoing restoration. The name of “H Bagnall” is written in a different hand, suggesting that it was added slightly later. This is further suggested by the name being “H Bagnall”, rather than “N Bagnall”. Nicholas Bagenal died in 1590 and was succeeded as Marshall by his son, Henry.

- Local tradition has long stated that Nicholas Bagenal upon his arrival in Newry, lived in the Abbot’s House of the former Cistercian Abbey. To date, no direct documentary or archaeological evidence has been found to connect the Abbot’s residence with the building that now survives and is known as “Bagenal’s Castle”. The maps of 1568 refer to this building as “The New Castell”. It should be noted that during this period, the terms “castle”, “house”, and “fort” were interchangeable. This continued until the 18th century. For example, the 17th century Richhill Castle would be regarded today as simply being a large house. Documents relating to the Plantation of Ulster in the early 17th century use the term “house” and “castle” synonymously to describe the same building.

- Throughout the Calendar of State Papers from the 1550s to 1590s there are numerous references to the presence of both Nicholas Bagenal and his son Henry in Newry. Some of these are letters written by them from Newry. The documents also refer to the garrison at Newry. Some of these references are detailed below:

- In July, 1567 Queen Elizabeth wrote to the Lord Deputy of Ireland that “forts [are] to be erected at Coleraine, Castle Toome, Massareen, the Newry, Strangford etc.”.

Documentary Evidence

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In 1570, a ‘Note of Remembrances for Ireland’ which lists certain points for reminder, states that “the Marshal [is] to continue his buildings at the Newry.”

In March 1571, engineer, Robert Lythe who had been commissioned to produce a map or “plat” of Ireland, wrote to Lord Burghley, Queen Elizabeth’s Chief Minister in London, declaring that “the map is begun . . . Refers to plats already completed of the lands of the Marshal, viz., the lordships of Coley, Omech, Mourne and the Newry.” This is a reference to the drawings of 1568, referred to above.

In 1574, the Earl of Essex stayed for a time in Bagenal’s residence in Newry. Several letters in the State Papers were written by him from Newry. In July of that year he wrote to the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Fitzwilliam that “I find so small a part of the house at Newry is appointed to me as I cannot long live there with any commodity”. In October, 1574, Nicholas Bagenal wrote a long letter to the Privy Council concerning Essex: “thinking no house so meet for all purposes as mine of the Newry, you request that for some convenient time I would be contented to move to some other house of mine near hand and leave the Newry house to Essex.” Bagenal refused, arguing “my own poor state, charged now with a number of young, motherless children, and having no other place to shroud ourselves in” as well as his fears that “my absence would make my neighbours hold me for a stranger and so neither esteem of me nor mine.”

There is also a reference in the Calendar of State Papers to the number of men garrisoned at the “new fort” in Newry in 1575.

In 1575, Sir Henry Sydney, the new Lord Deputy of Ireland, visited Newry and described with approval the condition of the town as well as the hospitality of Nicholas Bagenal, “his house lyeing in the open highway.” (quoted in Historical Sketch of Newry, 1875, pages 61-62). He also referred to a meeting with Turlough Luineach O’Neill in Newry – “He brought above £400 sterling to the town, and spent it all in three days. He celebrated Bacchus’ feast most bravely and as he thought, much to his glory, but as many hours as I could get him sober I would have him into the castle.” (quoted in A Viceroy’s Vindication? Sir Henry Sidney’s Memoir of Service in Ireland, 1556-78, ed. Ciaran Brady)

A collection of correspondence relating to Lord Deputy Sidney is preserved in “The Sydney Memorials of State”. It includes a letter written to him by Nicholas Bagenal entitled “A Declaracion howe and in what Manner the Towne of the Newrie, in the Realme of Irelande, maye be fortified by the Queene’s Majestie . . .” He begins his letter by describing how he has erected a castle and Towne upon the River of Carlingford and that this town, Newry, has already been “trenched and fortified with a Rampire of earth”. Bagenal continues, requesting £40 000 from the Crown to help “walle the said Towne with stone … and to buylde two or three Churches, a Jayle, a Court-house . . . and a stone bridge over the Ryver.” This money was subsequently refused (quoted in Historical Sketch of Newry, 1875, page 63-4).

A 1575 Rent Roll details Nicholas Bagenal’s estate in Newry, Greencastle and Carlingford and the rents paid by his tenants. The introduction to the listing of these rents is termed ‘the preamble’ and states that “these lands were granted unto Sir Nicholas Bagenal, Knight Marshall of Ireland, by King Edward the sixth at which time the said lands (in effect) was possessed with rebels, and since by his building of a town, and a castle at the Newry, with the good people, the town is changed to that perfection as dutiful subjects, content to get the living by manurance of the ground there.” (quoted in ‘A 1575 Rent-Roll, with Contemporaneous Maps, of the Bagenal Estate in the Carlingford Lough District’, Harold O’Sullivan, County Louth Archaeological Journal, Vol xxi (1985), pp 31-47)

In May, 1582, Chancellor Loftus wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham in London: “This good old Knight, Sir Nicholas Bagenall to be recompensed for his great charges in keeping the fort of the Newry, the only bar that has stayed Turlough Lynagh from wasting the Pale.”
Secondary References:

- In 1635, William Brereton travelled through Ireland and in Newry found “much land there is about this towne, belonging to Mr. Bagnal, nothing well planted. Hee hath a castle in this towne, but is for the most part resident in Greencastle.” (quoted in Historical Sketch of Newry, 1875, page 126). This “Bagnal” would have been Arthur, Nicholas’ grandson.

- In 1744, Walter Harris published the Antient and Present State of the County of Down, in which he described how Newry “owes its Rise to Sir Nich olas Bagnal, Knight Marshall of Ireland”. He continues, “He re-edified the Town, and erected the Church, on the Outside of the Steeple whereof we find the date (1578) cut in Stone, with the Bagnal’s Arms; about which Time he built a strong Castle for the Defence of the Town.” (page 89)

- The Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland, Parishes of County Down, South Down, 1834-36 refers to a building “situated in Castle Street” and that “is at present occupied as 2 dwelling houses.” It continues, “the walls are extremely thick and strong, and the alterations in the building, which have been made in modern time, were attended with great difficulty.” (page 63) References are also made to the “massive stone staircase outside the building” which was taken down “within the last 60 Years.” This quotation refers to the Castle remains.

- The Picturesque Handbook to Rosstrevor, Warrenpoint, Carlingford Bay and the Watering Places in the Vicinity (1846) specifically mentions that the “ruins of the old Abbey” in Newry “were removed about fifty-seven years ago” (c. 1789). Some fragments of stones “with heads and figures” from the Abbey “are to be seen in some of the adjacent buildings”. Furthermore, in a description of the castles of Newry, the author refers to “another castle, which still stands in Castle Street . . . This was the residence of the Bagenal’s” (page 151) It also refers to the “massive stair outside the building” which “had to be blown up with gunpowder”, “within the last ninety years” (i.e. from the 1750s onwards).

- In the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map (large scale edition of Newry) of 1861 the area surrounding the current building, located at the top of Hide Market, is called Castle Square, which stands on Castle Street, in which is Castle Lane and the site on which the building remains is “Castle Place” This strongly suggests that the entire immediate area around McCann’s Bakery was named after a Castle which was built on the site.

- Alexander Knox’s History of County Down (published in 1875) refers to the map of the Castle and Newry dating from 1568 on which the name of Sir Henry Bagenal (Nicholas’ son) appears underneath the drawing of the castle building in “Burghley’s autograph”. As referred to above, this is likely to have been added sometime after the map was actually drawn, and not until after the death of Nicholas in 1590. Initially, Burghley – Lord William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth I’s Chief Minister – had written the name of Patrick Cooley underneath the castle. It is believed that this was the “Patrick Crely” to whom Nicholas Bagenal had sold the townland of Carneyhough and who had also built a castle in Newry situated in what is now Mill Street, in the latter quarter of the 16th century. This castle remained until the 1960s. Cooley/Crelly’s name was initially mistakenly attributed to this castle by Burghley before Burghley rectified his mistake by adding the name of Henry Bagenal. The fact that Lord Burghley himself clearly attributed the castle to the Bagenals in his own distinctive handwriting, in the late 16th century, proves that “The New Castell” was specifically associated with them at this time.

- A Newry magazine published in 1901-2, The Open Window, mentions that “Sir N. Bagenal built a castle at Newry, adjoining an abbey belonging to the Cistercian Order” and that “not a trace of this abbey now exists, except the name of “Abbey Yard”, while “a few portions of Bagenal’s Castle still remain.” The following description is worth quoting in full: “As the visitor stands beside the well-built and thoroughly modern bakery building in Castle Street, he can discern, although greatly altered, the remnants of two of the original gables of Sir Nicholas Bagenal’s Castle.” (page 69).
On the centenary of McCann’s Victoria Bakery, in 1937, a local newspaper, The Frontier Sentinel, reproduced a photograph of a house in Castle Street, which was later used by McCann’s Bakery. This was “the 2 dwelling houses” referred to in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland, Parishes of County Down, South Down, 1834-36 and quoted above. In this photograph can be seen the original hood-mouldings above the windows and part of the machicolation - these can be easily identified on the 1568 elevation drawings of Bagenal’s Castle.

In the years following the 1930s, knowledge of the castle’s whereabouts seems to have been forgotten, at least by those who did not work in McCann’s Bakery. No record was made of the castle’s location on the 1930s Ordnance Survey Maps. Therefore, the Archaeological Survey of County Down, HMSO, 1966 categorized the tower house built by “Nicholas Bagnall” about 1568 under the “Destroyed Monuments and Lost Sites” section, assuming it no longer stood. It did however also refer to “some excellent plans” of the castle which “are preserved in the Public Records Office, London.” (pages 262-3)

Local historian, Myles Gilligan wrote in the 1950s, “Bagenal lived at first in the Abbot’s House, but later he built a stone castle on the same site; its remaining walls, some five feet thick now form part of McCann’s Bakery. On the opposite side of Castle St., stood the Meal Market, now converted to a Public Hall, with its arcaded lower-floor filled in, and the thatched roof replaced by slates.”

The history of McCann’s Bakery was recounted in Five Generations of Baking in Newry, Peter Makem and Gerry Murphy (1988). When McCann’s bought the present site in 1894, the property was described in the deeds as “Castle, Orchard and Garden” (page 35).

Although there is a strong local tradition that Bagenal converted his castle from the Abbot’s House, there is no archaeological or primary documentary evidence to support this opinion. Secondary sources written in the last 100 years refer to the building as the Abbot’s House but earlier contemporary sources – including the Calendar of State Papers which gathers state correspondence from the 16th century – do not. Neither do several written accounts of tours of Newry in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Archaeological Evidence

The surviving structure, in its layout and features, combines features of both a medieval tower-house and 16th-century fortified houses which were beginning to appear in Scotland and northern England in that period. The remains of the latrine turret and the stair turret (shown on the 1568 plans) resemble turrets found on 15th-century tower-houses in counties Down, Louth and Meath. The presence of a kitchen with a large fireplace on the ground floor is a characteristic of a fortified house. Tower-houses and fortified houses had a defensive function but were also built to articulate status and prestige, aspirations which led Nicholas Bagenal to build a castle in Newry.

Survey of the surviving building has located many features shown on the 1568 plans including gun-loops, fireplaces, chimney-breasts, joist holes from original floor levels and a corbel (projecting stone) on the exterior face. Archaeological excavations have revealed remnants of the original cobbled flooring. The foundations of the dividing wall on the ground floor were found to be particularly massive, supporting the evidence for the vaulted ceiling of the smaller ground floor chamber depicted on the plans of 1568. Scientific analysis of the window jambs has identified the stone as sandstone. It is not local, and has been identified as being imported from either Cumbria or the Isle of Man. Survey of the standing remains of the building and archaeological excavations have not so far recovered any feature dating from the Cistercian Abbey.

As Nicholas Bagenal sought to consolidate his authority in Newry and the surrounding area, it is more than probable that he would have chosen the site of the Abbey and the Abbot’s lodgings on which to build his own castle. This would have signaled to the population that the authority, status, rights and privileges of the Lordship of Newry were now firmly in Bagenal’s grasp. This reuse of
the site no doubt accounts for the later confusion which has arisen, which has led to a belief that the remaining building dates from the time of the Cistercian settlement. **There is however no archaeological, architectural or primary documentary evidence to support this.**

- It appears conclusive from both the physical and documentary evidence that the building in question is the **Castle built by Nicholas Bagenal in the late 16th century**. The primary documentation includes letters and descriptions from the 16th century and the map and elevation drawings dating from 1568. Archaeological and architectural investigation has proved the accuracy of these plans and indicates that much of the building depicted in the 1568 drawings survives today. Finally, the survival of “castle” in many of the street-names surrounding the area adds additional support to this already compelling case.

**Kilmorey Papers at the Public Record Office Northern Ireland – D/2638**

**Castle Street leases referring to the castle and its grounds**

Spelling and punctuation as in original manuscripts.

**D/2638/B/12/4**
21st August 1734
Counterpart lease from Robert Nedham, junior, of Newry, Esquire, to Robert Gordon, of Newry, Merchant, of Warren’s Tenement in **Castle Street** for three lives renewable.

Leases ‘all that Tenement Situate on the East side of Castle Street in the Town of Newry aforesaid known by the name of Warren’s Tenement containing in front One Hundred and five foot or there[outs] and extending backwards One Hundred and Twenty seven foot and containing in the rear One hundred and eighteen foot bounded on the East with the Castle Gardens on the West with the Street on the North with the Tenement wherein Mr Robert Hutcheson now lives and on the south with the Castle Court’.

Rent £15 per annum (releases £5 36s.) = £9 16s. 6d per annum.

Renewals attached to lease show that Robert Gordon was dead by 1st May 1752 when this tenement descended to his three daughters (co-heirs): Jane (married William Ogle of Newry, merchant), Susanna (married George Walker of Newry, gentleman) and Alice (unmarried in 1752 but had married James Atkinson of Newry, merchant by 15th April 1761).

**D/2638/B/12/5**
21st August 1734
Counterpart lease from Robert Nedham, junior, of Newry, Esquire, to Alexander White of Newry, Merchant, of his tenement in Castle Street in the Town of Newry for three lives renewable.

Leases ‘all that Tenement or plot of Ground situate on the West Side of Castle Street in the Town of Newry aforesaid now in his possession containing by estimation Thirty two foot in front and extending backward to the old Town ditch Two Hundred foot by the same more or less bounded on the East with the Street and the West with the Town Ditch aforesaid on the North with Mr Matthew’s Tenement and on the South with Allan Anderson’s Tenement’.

Rent £4 per annum

**D/2638/B/12/10**
12th May 1746
Counterpart lease from Robert Nedham of Newry, Esquire to Robert Hutcheson of Newry, Merchant, ‘of the castle of Newry with the garden and Meadow behind the same’ for lives renewable.

Leases ‘all that Tenement or Plot of Ground in Castle Street in the Town of Newry aforesaid whereas the old Castle now stands Containing in front One hundred and fifty five feet with the Backside Garden and meadow behind the same as laid down in Map hereunto annexed and
THE EVIDENCE FOR BAGENAL’S CASTLE

Updated August 2005

Containing by the said Map and Survey thereof Two Acres three roods and thirty five perches plantation measure or thereabouts by the same more or less’.

Rent £20 per annum.

Hand-drawn map attached to lease shows representation of the castle with gardens and meadow and names of holders of neighbouring tenements.

Map: ‘A Plann of that part of Newry where Robert Nedham . . . Castle and office houses. Stands the hagayaard and Nurserie Gardin Improven Gardin and meadow Tayning laid down by enscale of ten pads in one inch and twenty one foot in perch Containing tow acres three roods and thirty five perches Plantation measure. Survey 8th day of April 1746. [Signed] P Hugh Reid

Reference for the Plann

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Renewals attached to lease show that Robert Hutcheson had died instate by 9th December 1755 and that lease was renewed to his son John Hutcheson of Cooley, Co Louth.

List of Sources

Primary Sources:

Maps of “the Towne of Newrye ” and plans and isometric elevation drawings of “The New Castell” Robert Lythe, c. 1568 (TNA, MPF 82-84).

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