

St Mary's project is full of local drama

By CLODAGH O'LEARY

LIMERICK children are set to bring to the stage the exciting story of the Norwegian emigrant ship, The Hannah Parr, which docked unexpectedly in the city in 1868.

As part of a project run by Island Theatre Company and St Mary's Community Development Project, a group of 16 children from St Mary's Park have been taking part in drama workshops since last October.

The children have researched the story of The Hannah Parr, which was bound for Quebec, Canada, and was forced to make an emergency docking in Limerick, after it got into difficulty in the Atlantic.

"Over 400 people aboard the ship made an unexpected stop in Limerick, and were docked here for two months, which would have been a big



Orla Wallace, Shauna Cahill and Rebecca Coughlan

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deal back then. I took the kernel of the idea from that, and from there we generated stories and came up with the script," explained Niamh Bowen, a Drama and Theatre practitioner and co-ordinator of the project.

During their stay in

Limerick, three Norwegian children died and were buried in St Munchin's graveyard in King's Island, where Island Theatre are currently based.

The children taking part are aged between 10 and 12, and Ms Bowen is

impressed with their work so far.

"They are amazing, it is so fantastic, it is much more difficult than bringing a play from the page to the stage. Playing Norwegian children is a challenge in itself, and added to that is that it is set 135

years ago," said Ms Bowen.

To make sure the play was historically accurate, Ms Bowen got in contact with the great grandson of one of the people who were aboard The Hannah Parr.

"He is 70 years old, and living in Minnesota and has been in regular contact with me. He has given great advice, and has sourced some great material for us. He has also provided us with recordings of Norwegian accents and music to give the play a really authentic feel," she said.

And four local women were trained as drama facilitators and will help to stage the play next month.

The project will culminate in two performances at St Mary's School, Kings Island on April 20 and 21 next.

"Because of the strong local ties with the play, we want to stage it locally in the King's Island, and the children are really looking forward to it," said Ms Bowen.



Some of the children who will be taking part in The Hannah Parr by Island Theatre Company and St Mary's Community Development Project at St Mary's School, Kings Island, on April 20 and 21

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