

Debate on 'keep her lit' origin flaring up



David Young from the Press Association takes a look at the past week in his political diary

STEVEN Agnew looked a bit like a wedding guest who had been seated beside a volatile old

flame.

The Green Party leader's body language certainly didn't project comfort as he spent his first day in the assembly chamber with his new bench mate Jim Allister.

However, it seems the 31-year-old Stormont rookie will be seeing a good deal of the TUV leader in the next five years.

As well as a reserved seat beside the unionist hardliner, the North Down member has also been allocated an office adjacent to the outspoken QC on the second floor of Parliament Buildings.

The Greens have been asked to move from the office they occupied last term when Brian Wilson was their sole MLA to one suspiciously located between Mr Allister and the Sinn Fein rooms.

"I think they want me to act as referee," Mr Agnew said.

But despite their political differences he expressed hope that he and Mr Allister could work together on some issues to provide a constructive Stormont opposition.

Given the TUV's views on whether mankind is responsible for global warming, the environmentalist may be being a tad optimistic.

"Jim's a climate-change denier too so maybe the common ground won't be that big after all," he joked.



TALKING of old flames, Barry McElduff's reputation was on the line as academia challenged the origins of the 'keep her lit' phenomenon.

The West Tyrone MLA has become an internet sensation after urging the BBC's Noel Thompson to do just that during a live election broadcast.

But with fame comes increased scrutiny and Mr McElduff's status as flame-sustainer-in-chief has been called into question.

He insisted he was the natural heir to the title after claiming it was first used four centuries ago to address another Tyrone figurehead – Hugh O'Neill.

In the history of Ireland according to the McElduffs, Corkmen were so impressed at O'Neill's heroics on the battlefield as he fought the English at Kinsale they told him to 'keep her lit' as he journeyed home.

But University of Ulster historian Dr Billy Kelly, with his tongue pressed firmly in his cheek, has countered the Sinn Fein man's rigorously researched hypothesis, declaring: "Barry is wrong.

"In 1608 Sir Cathair O'Do-



herty initially intended to have a barbecue with some friends in the new plantation city of Derry but matters got out of hand after the consumption of some, actually copious amounts, of uisce beatha.

"Half-lit by this stage one of his followers, Phelim Reagh McDavitt, accidentally set fire to a house in the town.

"When he asked Sir Cathair should he put it out, the young lord saw his opportunity to revenge himself on the hated governor Sir George Paulett and shouted to McDavitt, 'Naw, keep her lit big man'. The town was burned to the ground."

The Ulster Scots expert put forward another theory that riled Mr McElduff yet further.

"It may also have been used by Williamite troops who were defending Londonderry during the Great Siege 80 years later," he said.

"They yelled, 'keep her lit big man' as they fired on the Jacobite forces outside the city

"[Williamite troops] yelled, 'keep her lit big man' as they fired on the Jacobite forces outside the city with the famous Roaring Meg cannon"

Dr Billy Kelly, left

with the famous Roaring Meg cannon."

But the MLA is holding his ground, pointing out that even if Dr Kelly was right, Tyrone's boundaries were much more expansive four centuries ago, taking in much of Derry.

"The Tyrone men are laying claim to the phrase and if Dr Kelly feels anxious about this I'm prepared to battle for the right," he said defiantly.

"This matter may have to be referred to an international academic forum for further scrutiny before we reach a resolution.

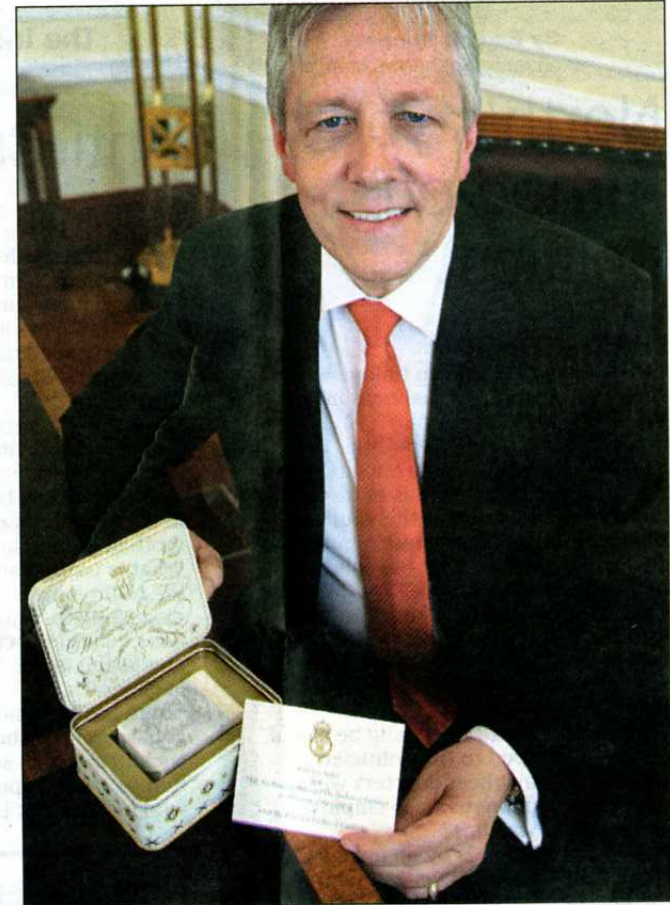
"But in the interim I would urge Dr Kelly to sustain the flame."



MARIE Antoinette told her people to eat cake and ended up with her head in a basket.

Peter Robinson wasn't about to repeat her folly when a special delivery arrived at Stormont Castle.

It was an ornate presenta-



■ NOT FOR EATING: First Minister Peter Robinson with a slice of Prince William and Catherine Middleton's wedding cake

PICTURE: Paul Faith/PA

tion tin containing a slice of the most famous cake in the world at the moment, Prince William and Kate Middleton's.

As a guest at the royal couple's wedding, the first minister was one of the lucky few to be sent the Windsor-style doggy bag.

But he made sure to clarify that this cake was not for eating.

"Too much history to digest," he explained.



BELFAST City Council's first nationalist majority isn't the only reason Alex Maskey is

missing the place.

The MLA was bemoaning his luck at stepping down from the chamber just before councillors landed their invites to the MTV Europe music awards.

As chairman of the development committee, his nephew Conor played a role in securing the event this November.

Not that Alex is in any way jealous.

Reflecting on his confrontations with the DUP's Rhonda Paisley in City Hall over the years, he grumbled: "I had to spend 20 years with Rhonda and he's there for three years and ends up with Rihanna."