

Grace O'Malley - the Irish Pirate Queen.



Grace O'Malley lived in the 16th century and was principally a trader. At the height of her career, she controlled much of the Irish west coast. She traded with Spain, Portugal and Scotland, and fought rival clans as well as English forces sent to bring Connacht under control. At one stage she held 11 castles and a fleet that included captured Turkish corsairs.

O'Malley coat of arms: *Terra maris potens* – “powerful by land and sea”

Grace O'Malley or Granuaile came from a wealthy family. She inherited her father's fleet of ships and estate, as well as land her mother had owned. Amongst her fortune she had at least one thousand cattle and horses, a sign of great wealth in those times.

Galway city leaders complained to the English Council in Dublin that O'Flaherty and O'Malley ships were behaving like pirates. The O'Flahertys, led by Granuaile, decided to charge taxes like the ones imposed by the city leaders from ships traveling in waters off their lands. Granuaile's men would board the trading ships and demand either cash or a portion of the cargo in exchange for safe passage the rest of the way to Galway. Resistance was met with violence and even murder.



In 1576, when Granuaile sought to rest at Howth Castle during a trip to Dublin, she was refused entry and the Castle gates were shut to her. She reacted by kidnapping the lord's son. As ransom, she demanded that the gate be always left open to visitors and an extra plate to be set at every meal. These conditions are observed at Howth Castle to this day. According to legend, during an attack by the English on

Granuaile's Hen's Castle, she poured melted lead from the rooftops onto the heads of the attacking soldiers. To summon help during the fight, she sent a man to light a beacon on the nearby Hill of Doon and the English were beaten back, never to attack the fortress again.

In the late 16th century, English rule steadily increased in Ireland and Granuaile started to lose her power. When her sons, Tibbot Burke and Murrough O'Flaherty, and her half-brother, Donal-na-Piopa, were taken captive in 1593 by Sir Richard Bingham she sailed to England to petition Elizabeth I for their release.

Elizabeth apparently took to Granuaile, and the two women reached an agreement that Elizabeth grant her requests provided that Granuaile end her support of Irish rebellions and piracy against England. The negotiations were carried out in Latin as Granuaile did not speak English and Elizabeth I did not speak Gaelige.



Granuaile maintained her dominance into old age. She died in her seventies in 1603, and was buried in the abbey on Clare Island.

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