

## Granuaile (Grace O'Malley) 1530 - 1603

*She lived at a time when a woman's role was to marry and look after her husband and children. But she led her own fleet of ships and controlled the seas in the west of Ireland, in spite of efforts by the English to subdue her.*



Grace O'Malley was born in Mayo in the West of Ireland in 1530. Her nickname was Granuaile, which in English means "Bald Grace". Grace was a tomboy and loved to be on the sea sailing. She was the daughter of the important chieftain, Owen Dubhdara O'Malley. He taught her all about seafaring as they received most of their wealth through sea-trading.

Grace was married twice, first to Donal-an-Coghaidh (*Donal of the Battles*) with whom she had three children. When he was killed in battle, she avenged his death and became leader of his clan. She returned home and took control over the sea around her home with her father's ships and a private army of 200 men. Her fame as a leader grew.

In 1565 she rescued Hugh de Lacy from the sea and he soon became her lover. When a neighbouring clan killed Hugh, she took a terrible revenge.

When the English government started to push into Mayo, Grace married Richard-in-Iron Burke. As soon as she moved into his castle, Rockfleet, she divorced him and took over his castle, but they reunited later.

Her son Tiboid was born aboard her ship. Immediately after giving birth to him she had to defend her ship and her son from an attack by Barbary Pirates.

With Grace's help, Richard-in-Iron became the leader of the Mac William clan in Mayo, but they were under threat as Queen Elizabeth of England's power grew. Determined that Richard wouldn't lose his position, Grace impressed the English with her military capabilities.

Grace then attacked Desmond, in the south. The Earl of Desmond captured her and imprisoned her in Limerick. He handed her over to the English who threw her into the dungeons of Dublin Castle.

Richard-in-Iron raised a rebellion to free Grace and she was eventually released. Continuing her fight, Grace plundered English ships and defeated the army sent to capture her castle.

The English were no match for Grace and Richard and so they agreed to make a deal with them, but even afterwards Grace and Richard had to resist the encroachment of the English on their power and lands.



Around the time that Richard-in-Iron died, Sir Richard Bingham was appointed as the new English governor in Ireland. He was ruthless and immediately set out to destroy Grace and her family.

Bingham killed Grace's eldest son Owen. Grace was furious but when Bingham lured Grace to his headquarters, pretending to offer a truce, Grace went. While she was there, Bingham declared her a traitor and condemned her to death. Before this could be carried out, her son-in-law freed her.

Grace fled to Ulster in the north of the country to consult with the chieftains there. The Northern chieftains planned to unite the Irish clans, and with the help of the Spanish king, drive the English out of Ireland.

When the Spanish Armada arrived in 1588, they were driven back by bad weather and so the rebellion did not happen. Bingham declared war on Grace and vowed to get revenge on her.

Bingham convinced Grace's second son, Murrough, to join him. Grace then attacked her own son for abandoning her, and stepped up attacks on Bingham.



1591: Bingham finally defeated Grace. He seized her ships and left her powerless.

In desperation, Grace wrote to Queen Elizabeth asking for her lands and property back. Meanwhile, Bingham captured her son Tiboid, charged him with treason and sentenced him to death.

When Grace learned this, she decided to go to the Queen herself. In September 1593 Queen Elizabeth received Grace at her court in Greenwich, London. They spoke in Latin and, impressed, Queen Elizabeth granted Grace back her lands and her property, freed her son and

allowed her to continue sailing. Bingham was also recalled to England.



Ripples in the waters of the rock-pool sun,  
and the boats are in for winter.

Donal-an Cogaidh will you sail with me,  
from here to far Coruna.

Ripples in the rock-pools, ripples in the sea,  
Ripples in the sand dunes rolling into  
Connemara

At the age of 67, Grace was still leading her men on raids and attacks on the Scottish coast. She died in 1603. At this time the English finally broke the power of the Gaelic chieftains. Today her statue stands in Westport House, Mayo, where some of her descendants live.

Rugadh í in iarthar na hÉireann 1530.  
Bhí sí pósta faoi dhó. Nuair a fuair a fear chéile Donal-an-Cogaidh bás í troid, thóg sí an ceannaireacht agus bhí cáil uirthi mar cheannaire. Fuair sí a saibhreas trí tráchtáil ar an bhfarraige. Gabhadh í agus cuireadh í. Ligeadh saor í ach lean sí ag troid í gcoinne na Sasanaigh. Theith sí go Cúige Uladh. Sa deireadh thug sí cuairt ar banríon Éilis agus fuair sí a thaite ar ais agus lean sí ag seoltóireacht. Fuair sí bás 1603.