



## *The Castle of* **Grace O'Malley** *on Clare Island*

(image: irelandxo.com)



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**Grace O'Malley was an extraordinary woman who lived, fought and survived during a period of Irish history that saw the collapse of the old Gaelic order and the ruin of Ireland's ruling elite.**

She was the daughter of Eoghan O'Malley, lord of Umhall, now the barony of Murrisk. She was a wild and spirited child. Once, when her father refused to allow her to sail with him to Spain, she cut her hair short to look like a boy, earning her the nickname Gráinne Mhaol or Grace the Bald.

In 1546 Grace married Domhnall an Cogaidh O'Flaherty, and had two sons and a daughter. Grace's husband wanted to become the chief of the O'Flaherty tribe, but his efforts were thwarted when his cousin took that position. Soon after he went to war with the Joyce's for control of Hen's Castle on Lough Corrib. Sometime later he was killed while out hunting above the lough. The Joyce's, thinking that Grace would surrender to them, attacked the castle, but she defeated them and made them retreat. Grace returned to her own lands on Clare Island, following the death of her husband.

In 1566 Grace married for a second time, to Rísdeárd an Iarainn Burke (Iron Richard), his nickname thought to come from his ironworks in Burrishoole where his castle was. They had one son Tibbot na Long or Tibbot of the Ships.

Grace became a feared sea captain alongside her husband, where she used her galleys to harass the ships using the seas. Her raids attracted the attention of the government and they unsuccessfully lay siege to her castle, Rockfleet in Clew Bay.

Grace O'Malley was a clever politician and diplomat when the need arose. When a tax collector came to her lands demanding payment she gave him 300 cows to pacify them, while also bargaining with the government to cancel her debt. Sir Richard Bingham, the governor of Connacht was at odds with O'Malley since he took office, and they clashed in 1586 when she helped members of the Burke family to escape after they had beaten off Bingham's attack on their castle on Lough Mask.



**This bronze statue of Grace O'Malley stands in the grounds of Westport House**  
(image: waymarking.com)

# GRACE O'MALLEY

## *An Extraordinary Woman*

Later she was arrested and threatened with hanging. In 1589 John Browne, the sheriff of Mayo was killed by the Burkes, and this led to a rebellion of Catholic nobles. Grace supported them and used her ships to supply the rebellion with Scots troops. Two years later the rebellion had ended but Grace fought on, plundering the Aran Islands. She finally made peace but by now Bingham's ships were undermining her dominance of the sea and ability to earn money.

In July 1593 Grace petitioned Queen Elizabeth 1 for redress against Bingham, who had arrested her son Tibbot Burke. She was summoned to Greenwich Castle where she made her case to the queen. An inquiry was instigated into Bingham's behaviour as Governor of Connacht. By 1595 with Grace's fortunes waning, she attempted to obtain her widows share of the O'Flaherty estates, but his heir had no intention of losing a third of his land to her.

She continued to try and make a living on the seas, and even sided with the government during the Nine Years War, for which she received £200.

Grace O'Malley is thought to have died about 1603 and was buried on Clare Island, off the Mayo coast. Westport House, the seat of the Brownes who are direct descendants of her, has a statue of her on display there.

Behind the myths and legends of this woman, pirate queen and icon of Ireland, stands a proud and courageous woman, determined to ensure that she and her family received their rights.

Sources  
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[www.dib.ie/biography](http://www.dib.ie/biography)  
[www.wikipedia.org/](http://www.wikipedia.org/)



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