

## IRELAND'S WARRIOR QUEEN

In Irish history there appear many a famous warrior queen. The first is Scotia, the Queen Mother of the Danaans. She is followed by Macha of the Golden Hair, and then Queen Mab who reigned ten years single handed after the death of her husband. The list is lengthy, however, Granua Uaile (or anglicized, Grace O'Malley) the last of the warrior queens is perhaps the most colorful of them all.

The renowned Granua Uaile from County Mayo "ruled triumphant over the whole western coast, and was able to defeat, in a naval battle, the sheriff of Galway and all his forces." This last queen of Erin maintained a fleet of ships and fought with enemies both by land and sea.

Her father was Dubdair O'Malley, chief of the country all around Clew Bay. All the O'Malleys had been sailors from time immemorial and she as a young girl often went with her father on naval excursions. So she learned to love the sea passionately, and at an early age acquired skill and courage in seafaring. This made her the idol of her clansmen and the greatest Captain in the western seas.

She married, first Donal O'Flaherty. The people of Galway fervently prayed "From the ferocious O'Flahertys, Good Lord deliver us." This prayer is inscribed over the western gate of Galway. Donal was the Prince of Iar-Connaught, the Chief Lord of all Connemara, and so it was said to be a worthy match.

Granua's chief fortress was a castle on Clare Island, where she moored her larger ships. Her smaller craft were kept at Carrigahooly, where she had another stronghold and usually resided. A hole was to be seen in the ruined seawall of her chamber through which a cable was passed from her ship to her bedpost, so that she might be ready for a sudden alarm. On her galleys she flew the seahorse of O'Malley and the lions of O'Flaherty.

The young queen went to live with her husband at Buncuan Castle, his chief seat; but Donal was killed in battle shortly after their marriage, and then their eldest son was treacherously murdered by Sir Richard Bingham. Granua took refuge on Clare Island.

One of her daughters married Richard Burke. The English called him "the Devil's Hook" in a miserable attempt to translate the Irish sobriquet of "the Demon of the Hook."

From Clare Island she pirated various parts of the coast in revenge of the murder of her dead son. Then she took Doona Castle and the English made peace with her. Her next marriage was to another Burke called Richard of Iron because he always wore a mail coat. In 1576, Granua offered her services to Sir Henry Sidney, the Deputy. He knighted Iron Richard and Granua became Lady Burke. She didn't remain friendly with the English long though, because she continued pirating.

When her husband died, she was deprived of his lands. From his castle on Clare Island she sailed to England. On this voyage she had a posthumous son. In August of 1593 she reached England. It is reported she was not dazzled in the least by the queen's court. The English Queen made Granua's son an Earl and from him are descended the Viscounts Mayo.

Granua (Grace O'Malley) Uaile died at peace with all her neighbors and was buried on Clare Island having reached the age of 60. So lived the last of the Great Irish Warrior Queens.

Source: The Romance of Irish History