

Some believe that the survivors of the Spanish Armada who managed to reach Ireland's shore were the ancestors of Ireland's black-haired population. Nothing is further from the truth. The original Celtic attributes were black hair and brown eyes as it is in today's Celtic descendants in France. In November, 2017, Ireland's archives verified this fact with an article from their archives entitled 'Spanish Armada Shipwrecks along the Wild Atlantic Way.' It revealed some facts about the ships and the estimated 6,000 men lost on the Ireland's west coast in September, 1588, in what was one of the worst North Atlantic storms ever recorded in Ireland. An article from Irish archaeological sources detail a horrifying end to the lives of nearly 1,100 of those Armada soldiers and sailors who wrecked in Sligo's Streedagh Bay, based on the written testimony of a surviving Armada officer.

To date, only the wreck of **La Juliana** has been researched; it lay with **La Lavia**, **Santa María de Visón** and 21 other Armada shipwrecks buried off the Irish coast from Antrim to Kerry. They are National Monument Sites protected by Ireland and no public diving upon the ships is allowed. As for La Juliana, she was researched by a government sponsored archaeological team. For the first time in 430 years, human eyes were able to see the superior forging of the bronze guns and the armorial crests of the families that forged the Armada cannons. Some contain markings signifying the 16th century Genoa, Italy, gun foundry of Dorino II Gioardi whose cannons were embossed with the figures and names of Saints Peter, John the Evangelist, John the Baptist and others. One Cannon, perhaps the most striking of those recovered, is emblazoned with motifs of flames and celestial images of suns and stars, capped by two ornate lifting handles shaped like dolphins and is a testament to the craftsmanship of the 16th century Sicilian gunsmith Federico Musarra. Bearing the figure of St. Peter holding the keys of Heaven and standing atop a scroll indicating the weight of the cannon and the year 1570 AD, it is truly a remarkable piece of ordinance. One cannon found was forged by 'Master Mustafa' of Turkey which had Islamic inscriptions on it. Since La Juliana had also taken part in the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, where Christian ships defeated the Muslim fleets of the Ottoman Turks, it is believed that cannon was taken as a spoil of war.

This was the Renaissance period and the ornate designs of these cannons was the norm, not the exception, for their time. Archaeologists are saying that this is the largest retrieval of bronze cannons so far and there are more yet to come. Today, these cannons lie on the coast of Sligo, but we can't forget the other 23 ships off the west coast that are still to be researched. This will take years and hopefully Ireland will create their first National Maritime Museum.

As for the Spanish sailors who made it to shore, Captain Francisco de Cuellar later wrote, as a survivor, that he found that *"the land and shore were full of enemies, who went about jumping and dancing with delight at our misfortune; and when any one of our people reached the beach, two hundred savages and other enemies fell upon him and stripped him of what he had."* This is a reference to the English garrison troops and Irish loyal to the Crown who stripped survivors of their jewels, possessions and clothing, keeping it for themselves before turning them over to the British for a reward.

There were also Irish clans who protected the survivors and, according to Captain Cuellar, they were *"O'Rourke of Breifne, McClancy of Rosclogher and Redmond O'Gallagher of Derry"*. They were doing so at the behest of the three Hughs – O'Neill, O'Donnell and Maguire – who safely returned the sailors to Spain in the hope of gaining Spain's aid in the upcoming rebellion that would become the Nine Year's War. Estimates run as high as 300 who reached the Sligo shore from the 3 ships and, like the other Armada storm survivors, they were stripped and executed; some officers, like Cuellar, were ransomed back to Spain. Virtually none survived the landing to settle down and marry Irish women; those few who did manage to escape detection were more anxious to get out of enemy territory and back to their own families in Spain.

So the next time you hear that the Black Irish are descendants of the Spanish Armada, you know the truth. It's the blonde, blue-eyed Irish who are descended from foreigners – like the violent Vikings and the peaceful Normans (descended from Vikings that settled in Normandy) and who eventually settled down in Ireland to become as Irish as the Irish themselves – **but never more Irish!**