

Information sheet no 008

Richard Grenville

Richard Grenville was born in June 1542 in Devon. His father was Captain of the *Mary Rose* and was killed when the ship sank in the Solent in 1545. Little is known about Grenville's early life except that he killed a man in a duel and was admitted as a student to the Inner Temple in 1559. At the age of 21, he inherited estates in Stowe, Bideford and Buckland Abbey and married Mary St Leger in 1565. He was elected a Member of Parliament in 1563 for Cornwall. He took part in the Emperor Maximilian III's campaign against the Turks in 1567 and in 1576 he was made Sheriff of Cornwall and knighted.

He began his maritime career in 1583 when he was employed as a Commissioner for the works at Dover Harbour. In 1585 he made the first of his two voyages to North Carolina to further the establishment of a colony there. On his homeward journey in October, he captured a Spanish galleon and brought it back to England. Grenville returned to Virginia in 1586 with stores for the colonists but they had already left with Francis Drake prior to his arrival. On his return journey he raided various towns in the Azores. By this time Grenville was a wealthy and influential ship owner. He was involved in the planning for the defence of the country from invasion by the Spanish Armada. He provided five ships for the fleet that was to watch for the imminent invasion.

In 1591 Grenville was appointed Vice-Admiral and second-in-command of a naval force under Lord Thomas Howard. His fleet was sent to the Azores to wait for a homeward bound Spanish treasure fleet. During this wait, Grenville's ship, *Renown*, had to land over half its crew of 250 men due to sickness. Unknown to the English, the Spanish had sent out a fleet to escort the treasure convoy. On their arrival on the 30 August 1591, Howard's force was too small to give battle. They only had time to embark the sick and escape from a greatly superior force. The *Renown* was cut off from the rest of the naval force. The ship tried to fight its way round the Spanish fleet but was surrounded. For fifteen hours, *Renown* battled against the Spaniards, sinking one ship and driving off another by inflicting serious damage. In the end, the ship was forced to surrender. During this action, Grenville was fatally wounded. He was taken aboard the Spanish flagship *San Pablo* and died three days later.