

## Be ready to repair straight to Valladolid, for it's there you'll find tidings of...

By Joe Linehan (wordlan2012@gmail.com), 28 July, 2020



As a result of a letter to *LagunCara* from the Valladolid-based **Hispano-Irish Association (Hi!)** and our Secretary David J. Fogarty passing it on for further action, on 15 July Cristina (my wife!) and I travelled to the capital of Castilla-León to meet *Hi!* president Carlos Burgos, and his Armagh wife, Claire. The idea was to discuss common interests between the two associations, possible joint ventures and, in particular, the ongoing quest for the remains of our XVI century leader, *Aodh Ruadh Ó'Domhnaill (Red Hugh O'Donnell)*.

Our hosts were charming and, importantly, open to ideas from *LagunCara* regarding future joint ventures. They were impressed by the events *LagunCara* organises and would be happy to attend the next one (?): St Brigid's, St Patrick's, Bloomsday... and, on the heel of this encounter is David F.'s excellent suggestion that *LagunCara* could meet in September with Basque Country-based Irish history bods to work out some sort of strategy/programme, on this and other initiatives. Ideas, please, to David at laguncara.elkartea@gmail.com

*Hi!* is not an association like ours at this point in time; basically it is Carlos himself and a small group, mostly archaeologists or historians, who are giving media coverage\* to and supporting the quest for the remains of our exiled leader of the late 16<sup>th</sup>/ early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Red Hugh O'Donnell\*.

Carlos and Claire showed us the current excavation of the "Capilla de las Maravillas" to the south of the city's Plaza Mayor where 12 skeletons were excavated last month. The original Franciscan monastery, with the chapel, was on a site now occupied by the Plaza's *Café de Norte* and, behind this, the offices of Banco Santander, and by a lane dividing the two. Coincidences of life: the



widow of the late Santander Bank CEO, Emilio Botín, is none other than Getxo-born Paloma O'Shea, whose brother, Iñaki, was a prominent Basque nationalist activist in the 1980s. The O'Shea's are descendants of Limerick-born Henry O'Shea who fought with Wellington against the French occupation in 1812-13 and founded a commercial/financial empire in Valencia and Madrid.

Our hosts in Valladolid also took us to Simancas Castle, the Spanish National Historic Archive where, alongside other sources, the archaeologists and historians have found documentation indicating Red Hugh was given a state-style funeral, his body being taken from Simancas (where he died on 10 September 1602) to be buried under the apse of the Franciscan chapel in the centre of the city (the site of the current excavation). The apse has yet to be excavated, all the indications being that Red Hugh is buried there. Fingers crossed and be ready to repair to Valladolid at short notice to give *Aodh Ruadh* a good Irish welcome -at least before the 20 million North Americans who claim Irish descent get there!

In September 2002 I accompanied Irish sculptor, Seighean O'Draoi (nephew of Ronnie Drew), to Valladolid for the unveiling ceremony of the dedicatory plaque to Red Hugh O'Donnell, the plaque being commissioned by Valladolid City Council. There is another plaque in Simancas castle.

However, correspondence with Seighean since our visit has revealed that his bronze plaque, with the O'Donnell crest, has been replaced by another without the shield, but maintaining O'Draoi's text! Seighean is searching for the 2002 photo of Vincent O'Donnell, Secretary of the O'Donnell clan, presenting his plaque to a descendant of Rory, brother of Red Hugh.

So, now a search is on for Red Hugh's remains and Seighean O'Draoi's missing plaque!

Joe Linehan

\*See their webpage [www.hispano-irish.com](http://www.hispano-irish.com) with photos of the excavation and recent press cuttings on the finds from Irish, UK and Spanish papers.

## Resumé of the history of **Red Hugh**

After 5 years' imprisonment, Red Hugh successfully escaped from Dublin Castle with his two brothers in January 1592 (the only escape ever from that fortress). In the harsh winter he found refuge with his County Wicklow O'Byrne allies, the Wicklow Mountains trek resulting in the loss of both big toes due to frostbite. He returned to Donegal to re-organise his Ulster army.

Red Hugh O'Donnell subsequently led the Irish army alliance in the Nine Years' War against the English in Ireland (1593-1603), including his victory in the Battles the Yellow Ford and the Curlew Pass in 1598 and 1599. He saw that their only chance of winning the war with the English was with the aid of a Spanish invasion. O'Donnell's army joined that of O'Neill and the Spanish under General Juan del Águila at Kinsale in early December 1601. During the Battle there on 5/6 January 1602, the combined forces were defeated by the English under Sir Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy.

O'Donnell fled Ireland and sailed to Corunna in Galicia where many other chieftains were already arriving with their families ("The Flight of the Geese"). There he was received with great honours by the Governor of Galicia and the Lord Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela, where an Irish College was founded.

He travelled to Valladolid, where the Spanish Court was located at the time, to ask for help from Philip III of Spain, who promised that he would organise a new invasion of Ireland. As a year passed and O'Donnell did not receive any news from the Spanish monarch, he left again for Valladolid but died en route and was buried at Simancas Castle in 1602.

O'Donnell's Last Will and Testament, written in his dying moments with his loyal retinue, is an extremely evocative and moving document. One original is preserved in Simancas and the other in the Chancellery archive in Valladolid.

He was buried in the chapter of the Franciscan monastery in Valladolid. The building was demolished in 1837, and the exact location of the tomb may now have been discovered, following a Spanish archaeological dig in May 2020.

JL

