

# Torquay Museum's Armada treasure chest is worthy of any pirate

**Torquay Museum's maritime-themed summer exhibitions on Pirates and the Titanic are coming to a close on Saturday, September 3.**

However, in a timely correspondence we received news earlier this year about the remarkable history of a familiar object in the museum's entrance hall.

The museum's donations box is a magnificent 'Armada' chest, a name applied to heavily reinforced strongboxes from around the 16th century.

Many have tales of being acquired from the shipwrecks from Spanish Armada fleet.

In reality, few have any such provenance and the museum has never really believed the story that this chest may have once been on board an Armada ship. Until now.

Research into the chest is still ongoing and it is hoped in the future a full history can be completed and the gaps filled in.

At the moment, all we can say is that the museum was contacted by the

**Barry Chandler,**  
engagement and  
collections manager  
at Torquay Museum

descendants of a Captain Morton Jack, who lived locally to the museum in Devon.

Morton Jack moved to Devon from Ireland and brought the chest with him.

He donated it to the museum in 1954 with a story about its provenance.

"This chest was originally in the possession of the O'Flaherty family of lar Connaught in Ireland.

"At the time of the Spanish Armada (1588), the chief of the clan was Murrough-na-Taugh who was active in the rounding up Spaniards shipwrecked on the coast of West

Connaught after the Armada. Since this chest is passably of Flemish origin and is of 16th century date or earlier this history tends to show that it was a treasure chest from one of the wrecked ships."

The current descendants have traced the chest to the museum and provided additional information about its provenance.

It appears that it is almost certainly from the Armada ship called the Falcón Blanco Mediano, which was wrecked in late 1588 on the west coast of Ireland, off Connemara.

At this time, 26 ships of the Spanish Armada were wrecked off the coast of Ireland but only six have ever been found.

The Falcón Blanco was a 300 tonne 'hulk' of 16 guns and a complement of no more than 100 men.

It was wrecked on a small island off Galway around September 25 and her survivors included Don Luis de Cordoba and his nephew, Gonzalo men of considerable rank.

For a time they were protected by the O'Flaherties but under threat from the Governor Richard Bingham, the



The Spanish Armada, July 1588, famous English captains at the bowling green on Plymouth Hoe. The legend records that Sir Francis Drake declared the match should be completed.

crew were delivered under guard to Galway town and all were eventually executed by hanging.

The corroboration of the story of the chest from the family gives this object an incredible back story, placing it in the Spanish Armada that faced perhaps the most famous of Devon privateers or pirates, known to the Spanish as 'El Draque', 'The Dragon' Sir Francis Drake.

So as you enter the museum and maybe drop a coin in our donations chest, consider its incredible 400-year story from a Flemish workshop to an Armada ship wrecked on the coast of Ireland during one of the most famous events in British history.

Discover more about the world of maritime crime and visit the Pirates! Fact and Fiction exhibition, which closes on September 3.



The 'Armada' Chest now the museum's donations box.

Credit: TORQUAY MUSEUM

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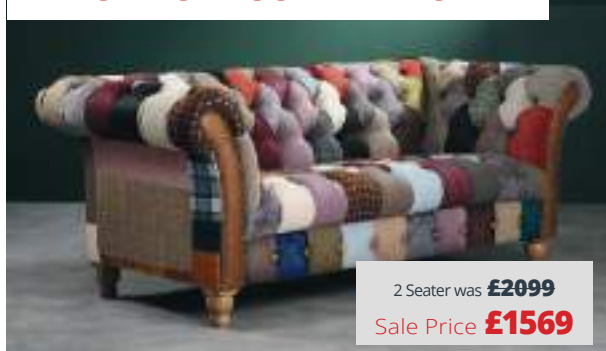
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