

Sir Francis Drake, England's Greatest Mariner [B2]

Sir Francis Drake è una delle figure più leggendarie della storia britannica. Capitano, esploratore, corsaro e cavaliere: c'è chi lo considera un eroe e chi un criminale.

Elizabethan England's most famous sea captain, Sir Francis Drake, used his brilliant navigational skills to become the second person in the world to circumnavigate the globe. His audacious attacks against the Spanish Empire elevated him to an almost mythical status, and brought immense wealth to England, [fuelling](#) a dramatic growth in the country's economy and maritime capabilities. He also participated in England's first steps as a [slave-trading](#) nation, [kidnapping](#) and transporting thousands of African men, women and children to the New World.

ENEMIES AND SLAVES

Drake was born around 1540 in Tavistock, Devon, the son of a [tenant farmer](#). Under King Henry VIII, England was becoming a Protestant country, making it a religious enemy of Catholic Spain, the most powerful country in Europe. Under Elizabeth I (1558-1603), England began to open up [trade routes](#) around the world. Friction was inevitable. English [privateers](#) began to attack Spanish convoys carrying tonnes of gold and silver from the Americas. Drake soon entered this world. He had spent his childhood with [relatives](#) in Plymouth, the Hawkins family, who were merchants and pirates. In 1567, he participated in one of England's first slaving voyages in a fleet led by his cousin, John Hawkins. Most of the ships were lost to a Spanish attack. Drake then took every opportunity to attack Spanish ships. In 1572, on a privateering commission from Queen Elizabeth I, he captured twenty tonnes of Spanish gold and silver!

CIRCLING THE GLOBE

In 1577, the English government secretly decided to attack the wealth of the Spanish Empire by raiding its settlements on the American Pacific coast. Rich investors, including the Queen, funded Drake on an ambitious expedition to circumnavigate the world. Drake reached the Pacific in October 1578 and started plundering Spanish ports on the west coast of South America. He then sailed west across the Pacific and arrived back in Plymouth on 26 September 1580. His ship, the Golden Hind, was filled with treasure and spices, and his fortune was made. Now a national hero, the 'Queen's Pirate' was knighted on his ship by Elizabeth.

There must be a beginning of any great MATTER, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished YIELDS the true glory.

THE SPANISH ARMADA

Drake's reputation spread around the world. Intimidated Spanish sailors thought he had a magic mirror which could tell him the position of any ship at sea. Drake then participated in the Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604), attacking Spain and its colonies. Spain's King, Philip II, prepared to attack England, with the important support of the Pope. To delay these plans, Drake led a royal fleet into the port of Cadiz in 1587 and destroyed thirty ships in thirty-six hours. He called it "singeing the King of Spain's beard". The Spanish Armada appeared in the English Channel in July 1588. Vice-Admiral Drake was playing bowls on the Plymouth Hoe. Reputedly, he said, "We have time to finish the game and beat the Spaniards too." Drake's naval and tactical expertise — and the terrible weather — helped defeat the Armada.

DEATH AND CONTROVERSY

In 1596, Drake and Hawkins decided to launch one last mission to the West Indies to attack Spanish [settlements](#). This time the Spanish were ready, and the mission was a disaster. Both Drake and Hawkins, and hundreds of English sailors, died of dysentery. Drake, in full armour, was buried at sea off the coast of Panama. Drake's place in history is controversial. For hundreds of years he was a heroic, almost mythical figure, protecting English [shores](#) from Spanish invasion and sailing to the four corners of the earth. But he also engaged in piracy, [raiding](#) and destroying peaceful Spanish [settlements](#) in the Americas. He was a key figure in the founding of the Navy and the British Empire, through his voyages of exploration and pioneering of [trade routes](#). And his maritime and battle techniques profoundly influenced naval practices.

DRAKE IN DEPTH

Drake was a classic example of a self-made man. His [humble](#) roots provoked [contempt](#) from some [courtiers](#) at the Queen's court, but this feeling was not shared by Elizabeth herself, who admired his bravery. The [motto](#) of his [coat of arms](#) was "Sic Parvis Magna" ('Great [achievements](#) from small beginnings'.) Drake was a [social climber](#) and liked to [show off](#) his wealth. He made a fortune investing in his own privateering and piratical adventures. The historian Robert Hutchison has spoken of Drake's "[reckless greed](#)". Some [courtiers](#) said he was actually the main cause of wars! [Fellow](#) sea captains found him [unreliable](#) and [self-seeking](#). The mariner was also [ruthless](#). He [fell out with](#) Thomas Doughty, his co-commander during his famous circumnavigation, and had him [beheaded](#). Three years before that he had seen service in Ireland under the [Earl](#) of Essex, during which time hundreds of civilians were [slaughtered](#) by English forces. His role is not clear. He was said to treat captured Spanish officers with courtesy and care. Were his attacks on Spanish galleons and [settlements](#) acts of bravery in the service of his Queen or simply acts of piracy? He regularly kidnapped whole communities in Guinea and Sierra Leone and sold them as slaves to the Spanish in the West Indies. The Spanish ambassador in England called Drake "the master-thief of the unknown

world.” The Elizabethan historian John Stow wrote of Drake: “He was more skilful in all parts of navigation than any ... He was also of a perfect memory, great observation, eloquent by nature.” The Spanish ambassador said Drake was “low of stature, of strong limb [with a] large and clear, well-favoured face and of a cheerful countenance.”

DRAKE'S DRUM

Drake's life produced many myths. One of the most famous surrounded his 'drum'. The drum, emblazoned with his coat of arms, reputedly accompanied him on his final voyage in 1596. The legend is that Drake, before his death, said that his drum should go to his home at Buckland Abbey in Devon. He vowed that if England were ever in danger, and the drum was sounded, he would return to defend his homeland.

Glossary

- **slaughtered** = uccidere, massacrare
- **tenant farmer** = mezzadro
- **privateers** = corsari
- **MATTER** = impresa
- **contempt** = disprezzo
- **Reputedly** = presumibilmente
- **Earl** = conte
- **kidnapping** = rapire, sequestrare
- **settlements** = insediamenti
- **knighted** = nominare cavaliere
- **bowls** = bocce
- **beard** = barba
- **achievements** = successi, risultati
- **Fellow** = colleghi
- **fell out with** = litigare con
- **raiding** = razziare
- **motto** = motto
- **greed** = avidità
- **self-seeking** = egoista
- **courtiers** = cortigiani
- **coat of arms** = stemma, blasone
- **social climber** = arrampicatore sociale
- **trade routes** = tratte commerciali
- **relatives** = parenti
- **sailed** = navigare
- **Hind** = cerva
- **humble** = umili
- **reckless** = sconsiderata
- **beheaded** = decapitare
- **drum** = tamburo
- **fuelling** = alimentare
- **slave-trading** = tratta degli schiavi
- **funded** = finanziare

- **shores** = coste
- **cheerful countenance** = espressione allegra
- **emblazoned** = decorare, abbellire
- **defeat** = sconfiggere
- **show off** = sfoggiare
- **unreliable** = inaffidabile
- **ruthless** = spietato
- **vowed** = giurare
- **plundering** = saccheggiare
- **YIELDS** = produrre
- **singeing** = bruciacchiare
- **limb** = braccia