



Portencross from Auldhill  
(Photograph by Alan Hodgkinson,  
courtesy of West Kilbride Civic Society)

## For Teachers

What is the evidence of a Spanish galleon having sunk in the Clyde near Portencross?

Do any local museums or libraries have records of this?

Could it have been a normal trading ship visiting the Clyde from Spain?

Find out about the McLean museum in Greenock for reference to a large cannon and some smaller ones.

What are the differences between primary sources and a secondary sources of historical evidence?

You might contact the maritime museum in Irvine. Or one in Spain.

Check the Portencross Castle website for the full report on the galleon.

Many other websites contain references to the Armada and its fate – the most disastrous event in Spanish maritime history.

How did divers in 1740 manage to bring huge cannon up to the surface? What science is involved in this?

## Curriculum for Excellence Links

### Literacy

- LIT 2-05a
- LIT 2-08a
- LIT 2-10a
- LIT 3-10a
- LIT 3-13a
- LIT 2-15a
- LIT 2-18a
- LIT 2-25a

### Social Studies

- SOC 1-01a
- SOC 1-03a
- SOC 2-01a
- SOC 2-06a

### Science

- SCN 2-08b
- SCN 2-15a

## About Portencross Castle

Portencross has been inhabited for thousands of years. An archaeological dig found evidence of an Iron Age settlement on Auldhill, just behind Portencross Castle. The Iron Age lasted from around 800 BC to 100 BC.



Portencross Castle was constructed in three phases starting in 1360. It was the home of a branch of the Boyds. The lands around Portencross were given to the Boyds of Kilmarnock by King Robert I as reward for their help at the Battle of Bannockburn. A number of Royal Charters were signed at the castle and it had close links with King Robert II during that period.

After the 1600s, it was occupied by local fishermen. The roof was destroyed in a gale in January 1739. By the 20th century, the Adams of Auchenames owned the castle. It became a scheduled ancient monument in 1955.

## Friends of Portencross Castle

This leaflet was produced by Friends of Portencross Castle (FOPC).

FOPC is a recognised Scottish Charity (No. SC028181) dedicated to conserving the castle and providing access to the building.

In 2007 FOPC was awarded grant support from The Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and the Architectural Heritage Fund. With additional support from local charities, North Ayrshire Council and many individuals, FOPC was able to raise just over £1 million pounds for the costs of the project.

Grant support does not include maintenance. As a result FOPC has to raise costs for staff, maintenance, education materials, website and overheads. We will remain open with the help of donations and by having events and functions at the castle.

**Please donate if you can. You can become a Guardian of Portencross Castle. Find out more from our website [www.portencrosscastle.org.uk](http://www.portencrosscastle.org.uk) or pick up details at the castle during opening hours.**



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# THE SPANISH GALLEON NEAR PORTENCROSS CASTLE



[www.portencrosscastle.org.uk](http://www.portencrosscastle.org.uk)



# Friends of Portencross Castle have evidence of a Spanish armada shipwreck near the castle.

## History and Politics

Sea power was important in the 1500s. Around 1580, Spain took control of Portugal. King Philip II wanted to overcome his rival, Elizabeth I of England, so that he could dominate world trade. His senior admiral, the Marquis of Santa Cruz, assembled an Armada of nearly 130 ships but died before it was complete. The Duke of Medina Sidonia led the Armada from Lisbon in May 1588. Its aim was to pave the way for a troop invasion of England.

Religious differences were also important at the time. Philip wanted England to be Catholic. The execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 may have been a factor in Philip making up his mind to invade England. The young James VI of Scotland remained neutral – he was promised a reward by Elizabeth if he did so. The Spanish also promised James a reward if he allowed a Scottish port to become a base for their ships. Religious attitudes also affected the fate of sailors wrecked from the Armada. Medina Sidonia warned all his ships to avoid landing in Ireland as this was under Protestant English control.



## The Spanish Armada

After various skirmishes between the Armada and English ships, a major battle took place off Portland Bill on the 2nd and 3rd of August 1588. The English then attacked the Armada at Calais. But poor weather from the 8th of August onwards forced most of the ships into the North Sea. They needed to escape around the north of Scotland, between Orkney and Shetland, and down the Scottish and Irish coasts, then home for Spain. By the time they got there, they had lost 20 ships or more.

They were now also short of food and fresh water. In mid August, as the ships were off the coast of Lewis, they were hit by wild south-westerly winds that stopped their progress. By this time, they had lost a further 17 ships.

Late in September, another 20 were lost along the coast of Ireland. We know that two reached Scottish shores – one sailed damaged into Tobermory Bay and another beached at Fair Isle. A Spanish vessel was discovered in 1999 near Kinlochbervie. Although this remains an unknown ship, we know it is more recent than the Armada. The West of Scotland folk helped Armada survivors and repatriated many sailors home to Spain.

## The Wreck

The UK Hydrographical Office describes the Portencross wreck as a Spanish galleon.

A description from divers recovering the canon in August 1740 pointed out how the 'country folk' gave the divers the location of the wreck. The divers made their way down ropes with lead weights holding the rope on the seabed. The wreck was described as being about 400 metres from the shore in around 20 metres of water. It was covered in sand. The divers lowered large gripping tongs and, with a great deal of effort, raised 10 iron and 10 brass cannon. The brass cannon were shipped to Dublin. The brass cannon were made in England, but had been sold to Spain via France as part of a thriving arms trade.

It may be that the wreck was initially kept secret to give the survivors a better chance to return to Spain. Alexander Boyd of Portencross, a supporter of Mary Queen of Scots, may very well have been sympathetic to the Spanish plight.

The Portencross vessel is possibly one of the following: the Santiago (but possibly sunk off Co Mayo); the San Pedro; the San Juan; the San Bartolome; the San Maria del Junca; the Barca de Danzig; or even the Santa Barbara.

In August 2007, the sea bed at Portencross was surveyed and researchers found some magnetic anomalies. No doubt in the future, we may be able to mount a further, more detailed search for the galleon and its secrets.

## Route of the Spanish Armada

Major Battles



## The Portencross Cannon

According to tradition, an iron cannon, one of a number salvaged from the Portencross wreck, was given to the villagers for their help at the time of the location of the wreck in 1740. A Spanish crown insignia was visible at one time, but has now been lost to corrosion. The cannon is of Spanish design.

In 1982 the Portencross cannon was moved to Hunterston Power station. In 1990, specialists attempted to conserve the cannon. They removed layers of tar, but their efforts failed. The power company returned a very rusty and decomposing cannon to Portencross village in 2003.

