

# Sir Christopher Hatton

and

## "The Golden Hind"



Sir Christopher Hatton was born around 1540 (birth date unknown) in Holdenby, the son of a Northamptonshire squire. After an education at St Mary's Hall, Oxford, where he studied law he became a Member of Parliament, first representing Higham Ferrers and then Northamptonshire. This allowed him to be noticed in the capital and to be drawn into the court circles of Queen Elizabeth where he quickly became one of her favourites. He was said to have caught her attention by his wits and skilful dancing. As a result he was made Vice Chamberlain of the Household, a Privy Councillor and given many other royal gifts which included the manor and other parishes in Wellingborough in 1576.

He knew everyone who was worth knowing and formed a strong friendship with Francis Drake. When Drake planned his spectacular exploit of circumnavigating the globe in 1577 Hatton became one of the many backers for this venture along with Leicester, Walsingham and other courtiers and with Queen Elizabeth holding the major share. Drake's inspiration was based on him being the first Englishman to sight the Pacific Ocean when he had crossed Panama during one of his many skirmishes with Spanish colonies in Central America. When his small fleet left Plymouth, Drake carried with him secret instructions from the Queen to attack Spanish colonies on the Pacific coast, something never before attempted.

His voyage and exploits are worthy of several chapters and having set sail in "*The Pelican*" plus four other ships (none of which for various reasons completed the circumnavigation) as he passed through the Straits of Magellen on the southernmost tip of South America he became the first Englishman ever to sail in the Pacific Ocean and in celebration and to honour his great friend, Christopher Hatton (who had yet to receive his knighthood in 1578), he changed the name of his sailing boat, or barque, from "*The Pelican*" to "*The Golden Hind*" representing the heraldic beast on the Hatton coat-of-arms. Sailing up the coast he encountered a number of Spanish ships laden with gold and silver which he captured to add to the plunder which he had already looted in the Caribbean and as he passed down the Atlantic coast of South America.

Heavily laden with the captured treasure, Drake eventually completed his journey, in 1580, after three years away from England and became only the second man to complete the circumnavigation of the globe (the first, of course, being Magellan). His return and the vast treasure he brought with him were subject to a vow of secrecy from all those involved as Her Majesty did not want to over-inflame the anger of the Spanish who hated the man they knew as *El Draque* (The Dragon). However, in 1581, Queen Elizabeth, after some hesitation, decided to ignore Spanish protestations and ostentatiously journeyed down to Deptford and knighted Drake on the deck of "*The Golden Hind*". A ceremony that was re-enacted in 1967 when, using the same sword used to dub Sir Francis Drake, Queen Elizabeth II knighted Sir Francis Chichester after he had completed the first "solo" circumnavigation of the globe.



When the captured treasure was divided amongst Drake's backers Sir Christopher Hatton received £2300 for his initial £50 stake - an enormous return and a substantial sum in those days. The Queen received, on the other hand, a share that was so large that it surpassed the rest of the Crown's income for that entire year! Hatton now had the funds he wanted to vastly expand Holdenby House and by 1583 it was said to be the largest privately owned house in the country and rivalled Hampton Court for size. Within it he built a whole suite of state rooms for the express purpose of enticing "Her Grace", as Sir Christopher affectionately called Elizabeth, to stay at Holdenby House. It was said that he refused to stay there himself until Elizabeth had stayed the night. She never came and the cost of alterations far exceeded his profits from the Drake expedition so that he spent the rest of his life short of money.

In spite of all this profligacy he retained the Queen's favour and was elevated to Lord Chancellor in 1587. Even though he was often called the "Dancing Chancellor" this obscured the reality of a highly astute politician and in his final days he was visited by the Queen in his London home in Ely Place where he died a few days later, on 20 September 1591. It was said that at his death he owed the Queen as much as £40,000 which shows the affection in which she must have held him to allow him so much credit! The house he built is no longer and was pulled down in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to be replaced by a Holdenby House which is about 1/8<sup>th</sup> the size but built in the same style and re-using many of the materials from the former house.

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