So, with the aim of overthrowing Elizabeth I and restoring Catholicism to England, as well as putting an end to privateering, King Philip II ordered a fleet of warships to be assembled, called the **Armada**.

In May 1558, 130 Spanish ships equipped with 2500 guns, and with 8000 sailors and 18,000 soldiers onboard, set sail from La Coruña on the north-west coast of Spain, led by the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Their intention was to first sail to Flanders (in now modern-day Belgium) to pick up 30,000 more Spanish soldiers, led by the Duke of Parma, before landing on the south-east coast of England.

What do you think of the King of Spain's plan of attack?

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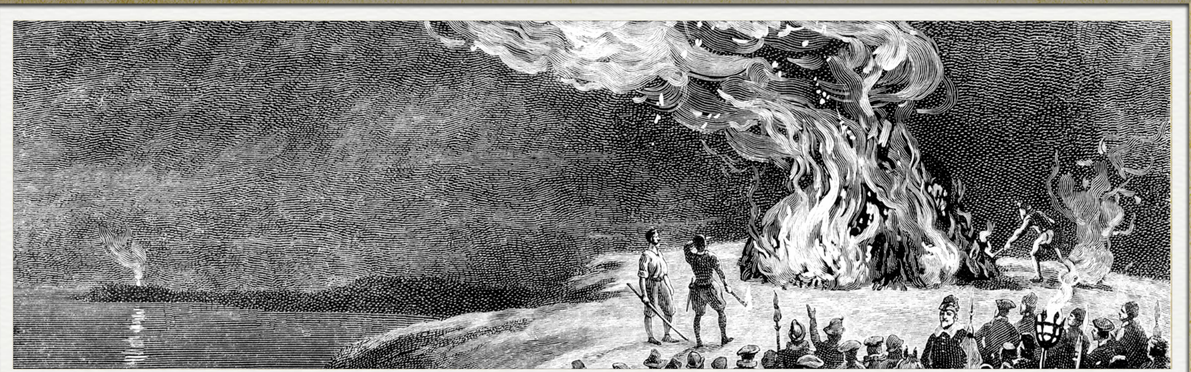
Unfortunately for the Spanish Armada, their ships were sighted off the coast of Cornwall on 19th July. Fire beacons were lit along the coast to spread the warning. The English were ready for an attack.



On 21st July, the English fleet based at Plymouth set sail to try to stop the Armada's passage through the English Channel. They were led by Sir Francis Drake, Sir John Hawkins, and Lord Howard of Effingham. They had 200 ships, but only half of the number of guns that the Spanish had.

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Can you tell the difference between the English and Spanish ships? How?

The Armada sailed in a **crescent formation.** The larger but slower galleons were in the middle of the crescent, and were protected by faster but smaller boats surrounding them. This made it difficult for the English to attack the fleet effectively. They inflicted some damage on the Spanish ships, but could not stop them from sailing through the English Channel.

Drake's ship was called *Revenge*. Why do you think this was?

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The Spanish Armada anchored off the coast of Calais, in France, to await news from the Duke of Parma about the 30,000 soldiers they were supposed to be joining in Flanders, before landing in England.

How do you think the **English** fleet was feeling at this point?

How do you think the **Spanish** fleet was feeling at this point?

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However, the Duke of Parma's army was delayed, and so the Armada had to wait. The English used this opportunity to their advantage...

At midnight on 28th July, they set alight eight of their ships, and steered them into the Armada. This created panic amongst the Spanish, and made them scatter. In doing this, they lost their protective crescent-shaped formation.

An artist's impression of the fireships being steered into the Armada.

How would you have felt seeing the fireships coming towards you if you were part of the Spanish Armada?

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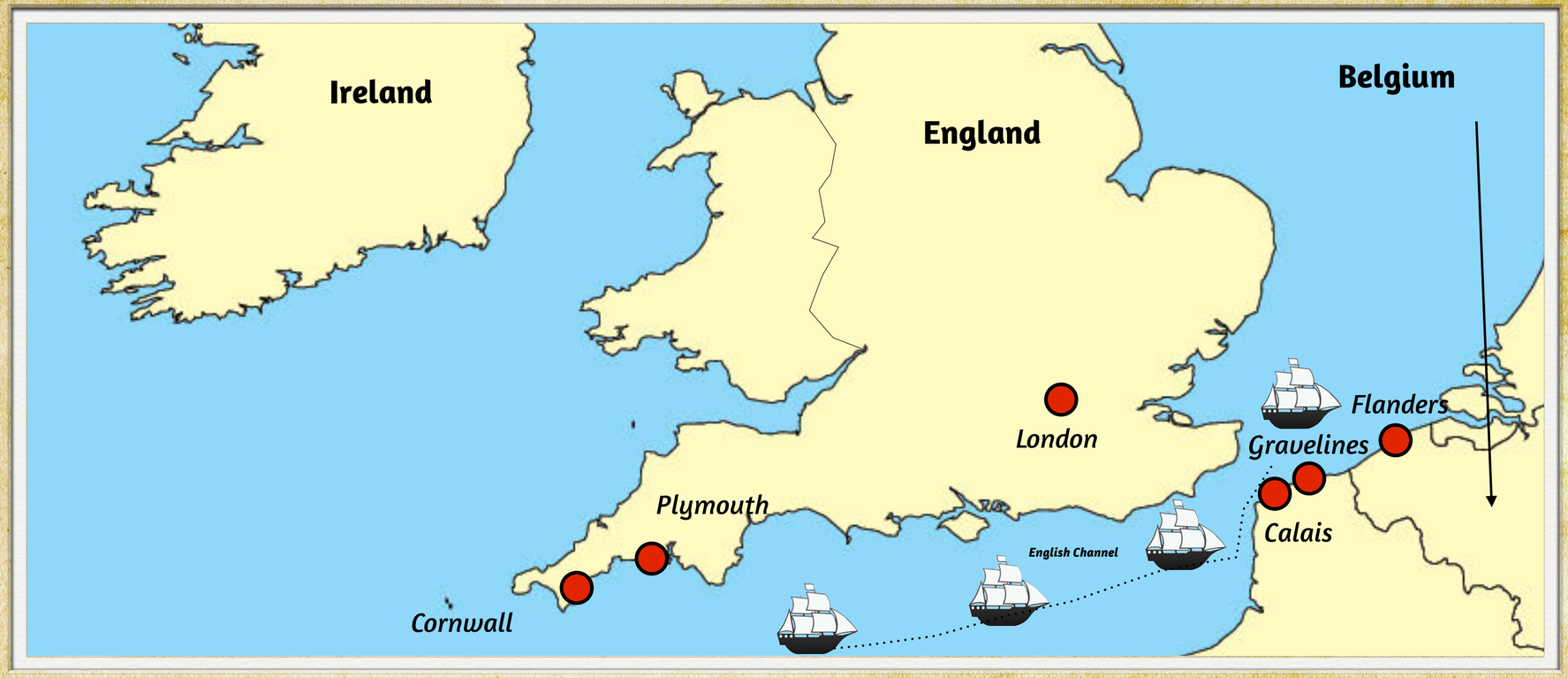
On 29th July, the English attacked the Spanish near the port of Gravelines off the north coast of France. The Spanish ships had the advantage in close-quarter fighting, but the English ships were faster and easier to move out of harm's way. They bombarded them from a safe distance with cannons.



This battle was disastrous for the Armada. Over 600 men were killed, 800 wounded and 400 captured. Five of their ships were sunk or captured.

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