

Carrucan? How do you spell it?

by Frank Carrucan



CARRUCANS from Ballarat.

Andrew b. 1976 (IT professional), Frank b. 1948 (Retired teacher), Kathy b. 1950 (Retired teacher) and Claire b. 1980 (Nurse).

The potato bagging print in the background looks Irish, but is actually French.

Carrucan? How do you spell that?

I'm very proud of my surname but in spelling it, you have to get the timing right or you know you'll have to say it twice at least.

Slowly. "C-A- Double R (pause) U (pause) C- A -N"

"Oh! How do you say it?"

"Carrucan," you say.

"Oh! That's an unusual name. Where does it come from?"

At this stage of the usual litany, if I'm not in a hurry, I give them the story, not only of Irish ancestry (they're expecting Yugoslavian), but also the legend, which is probably untrue but does make a good story.

My uncle Ivan had it researched. They told him there could have been a Carrucan on the Spanish Armada. When the Armada was defeated in the English Channel (Drake and his bowels, (whoops bowls) and all that), the ships that weren't sunk or burnt, made their way north around the top of Scotland to Ireland where many were wrecked on the west coast.

"And that's where the Irish colleens got their dark hair," I always finish.

The Carrucans came from Fanore, County Clare on the west coast so there are some possibilities.

I've read accounts of the Armada wrecks on the west coast (including *The Spanish Armada*, National Maritime Museum, 1988). Most of the survivors were clubbed to death in the shallows. In

Mayo, one Irish guy boasted that he had killed 80 in a day with his axe. Some Irish may have been in the pay of the English Government but others killed for loot. Other Irish robbed survivors and handed them over to the English. Then death was certain. In Galway the English took 300 Spanish prisoners to a monastery and killed them in front of the local people. Another 450 survivors of the *Trinidad Valencera*, were promised their lives by a group of English soldiers, but after putting down their guns, were stripped and killed. The English were afraid of Spanish Catholics raising rebellion among the Irish Catholics. Sometimes the Irish helped the Spanish and I suppose some survived and one could be an ancestor. Perhaps the Irish girls liked the look of some new men.

There were around 21 Spanish ships wrecked in Ireland, some in the north but mostly in the west. One ship (*name unknown*) was wrecked in Galway Bay and the *El Gran Grin* was wrecked a little further south, just off Fanore.

Or the researchers who were talking to Ivan, and linking the name Carrucan to the Armada, might have known the value of a good story also.

I like the story though and it gets people's attention, so I'll keep using it. It might be useful to research the Carrucan name in Spain.

Apart from being very careful when you spell the name Carrucan, to buy a raffle ticket or whatever, you have to listen very carefully when the name is read out off a list, because it could sound like anything.

My mother Clare told me a story about my dad Con when he was in the army in the Second World War. He was embarking by ship to New Guinea (or it could have been onto a train in Australia), and each soldier had to take his gear and go up the gangplank (or whatever) when his name was read. This was obviously to ensure they had the numbers right. The list reading finished and Dad was standing by himself. Dad was yelled at for not listening, but of course, the name Carrucan had been mispronounced by the caller in a totally unrecognisable form.

"Carry – can," or "Carra- can" is the most common pronunciation. I've overheard a grandparent asking a student of mine, out of my hearing supposedly, "How's he carrying his can?" Very amusing, of course.

Misspellings are frequent. Mary Dempsey tells the story of Jack Carrucan's luggage addressed "Mr and Mrs Koancan, Farm Bailiff, Lunatic Asylum, Beechworth."

As a teacher I've had some classics written to me on hastily scrawled absence or late notes by parents in a hurry. "Mr Currusion/ Mr Currakan/ Mr Carricorn/ and even Mr Maccarrucan", the latter being a mixture of Carrucan and McArdle, my mother's name, perhaps. I wish I'd kept a collection. The staff were vastly amused once when a little kid called me Mr Curriculum. I was Curriculum Coordinator at the time, so they reckoned I must have been doing a good job. I just told kids to call me Mr C and that usually worked, until I became Dr C and that raised further possibilities. I stuck to Mr C anyway most of the time; it was much safer and saved everyone a good deal of time.

What we need is for one of you Carrucans out there to become really famous, so we can stop having all these name hassles.

Don't become infamous though, because we're doing pretty well, really.