



At St James' Palace in London, there's a chapel that was built in 1623 by Inigo Jones. This was a present from Charles I to his fiancée, the Infanta Maria Anna of Spain, she was a devoted Catholic and so this was quite an appropriate present. Very sweet! But that was not all: the Prince of Wales, seeing that the negotiations for this marriage were slow, became impatient and decided to travel to Madrid incognito. How romantic is that? As a Spaniard, I'm sure that this not only impressed and delighted the Infanta but most of her fellow citizens, too. What else could a woman ask for than a prince coming from a far-away land, risking his life for her?

England and Spain had been enemies since the Reformation and this marriage could bring their differences to an end. But the truth is that this alliance was doomed from the beginning. Spain was a Catholic country. They were asking for freedom of worship for English Catholics or conversion of the Prince to Catholicism, and Spain in return was offering an enormous dowry. Was the English parliament going to allow this marriage when they didn't even approve of Catholics occupying public office?

But the Prince was young and he wanted to show that with his charm he could achieve what the diplomats had failed to do with words. So he decided to take matters into his own hands and travelled to Madrid in disguise to seal this marriage once and for all. How could they refuse him once he was there? The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Buckingham with fake beards, wigs, ordinary clothes and false names (Thomas and John Smith) embarked on an incredible journey of hope and adventure towards Madrid with no care for the possible perils they might find on their way there.

On March 7th 1623, after 16 days of travelling and multiple adventures, Charles jumped with joy upon his arrival to Spain. Three days later they were in Madrid, knocking at the English Ambassador's door, who, astounded and not knowing exactly what to do, hid them in his house.

Meanwhile in England, everybody was shocked. However, the King was pleased with the audacity of his son and his friend and sent them some smart robes, jewels and horses to make a good impression when presenting themselves at the Spanish Court.

Prince Charles was introduced to the court, where he enjoyed himself admiring Philip IV's collection, going to bullfights, parties and masks, hunting, picnics and enjoying the hospitality and generosity of the Spanish royal family. Spain's excited citizens celebrated by decorating the streets, composing and reciting poems and songs inspired by this amazing act of chivalry, as well as with fireworks and parties everywhere.

But the negotiations were going very badly, partly because of the stubbornness of the two negotiators, Conde-duque de Olivares and the Duke of Buckingham, and partly by the fact that Charles refused to convert to Catholicism and the Infanta was against marrying a Protestant. Without any progress and the clock ticking, the situation was getting awkward for both parties, with the Spanish Court having to entertain a prince with no reason to be there and Charles refusing to come back home without the Infanta.

Unfortunately, practicality, politics and religion got in the way and Charles's heroic act was fruitless, as he finally had to come back home without the Infanta. As a result, this mismatch accentuated the animosity between the two countries. But one good thing that came out of it was all the fun and partying that the citizens of Madrid enjoyed during this visit.



Ana Biosca runs Walk Lingua.

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