

# BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE  
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



CATTLE FAIR IN BRITTANY.

Illustration from Artistic Travel in Normandy, Brittany, the Pyrenees, Spain and Algeria, by Henry Blackburn. 1895. See the travel account from 1876 on page 16 which describes a scene to match.

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

No. 84

November 2002

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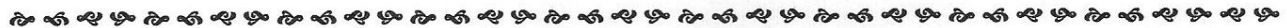
The **U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL)** was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. **Bro Nevez** ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly: February, May, August and November. Contributions, letters to the Editor, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor. Suggested deadlines for receipt of contributions for Bro Nevez are: January 20, April 20, July 20, and October 20.

The U.S. ICDBL provides Bro Nevez on a complimentary basis to a number of language and cultural organizations in Brittany to show our support for their work. Your Membership/Subscription allows us to do this. Membership (which includes subscription) for one year is \$20. Checks should be in U.S. dollars, made payable to "U.S. ICDBL" and mailed to Lois Kuter at the address above. Dues and contributions can also be sent electronically via the U.S. ICDBL web site – see below

*Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy.*

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**U.S. ICDBL website: [www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm](http://www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm)**



## FROM THE EDITOR

As readers know from the past issue of Bro Nevez, Diwan's integration into the public school system has met with a seemingly unmoveable road block. It appears that France is simply incapable of supporting linguistic diversity within its borders, and the French public education system seems unwilling to advance past the 19th century to a world where children can learn two or three languages in school and still remain good French citizens.

As you will read in this issue, Diwan has been going through a difficult transition in leadership. It is dismaying to see internal squabbles and the harsh exchange of words between people who are all working hard for Diwan's future. We here in the U.S. hope that unity can be found again in Diwan's administration to reflect the unity of feeling in Brittany about the importance of Diwan schools. Enrollment continues to grow, and school opened in September with for some 2,800 children enrolled in Diwan classes. As ever, finances are a challenge. While we don't have anyone with the wealth of Bill Gates among our membership, dig into your pockets and show support for Diwan as it continues provide children with a high quality education enabling them to make Breton one of the languages they master and use in their everyday life.

Lois Kuter

# THE SCHOOL YEAR IN BRITTANY

Statistics show that enrollment in Diwan, public bilingual programs (Div Yezh) and the Catholic school bilingual programs (Dihun) all continue to grow, despite financial challenges and difficulties in recruiting and training sufficient numbers of new teachers. The following statistics are drawn from Kannadig 81 (September-October 2002), the publication of Unvaniezh ar Gelennerien Brezhoneg. – Lois Kuter

<b><u>DIWAN</u></b>		Number of schools	number of students 2002-2003	number of students 2001-2002
Preschool	>	33 schools	1,066	1,027
Primary School		(119 classes)	1,073	1,010
Middle School		4	504	461
High School		1	137	111
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>2,780</b>	<b>2,609</b>

Increase of 171 students, up 6.55% from previous 01-02 school year

Distribution of students geographically – 2002-03 school year

	Pre & Primary	Middle School	High School
Finistère	1,126	315	137
Côtes du Nord	362	104	
Morbihan	329	85	
Loire-Atlantique	227		
Ile-et-Vilaine	95		

## **DIV YEZH** (Bilingual public school classes)

		Number of schools	number of students 2002-2003	number of students 2001-2002
Preschool	>	50 schools	1,525	1,425
Primary School			1,073	919
Middle School		12	268	222
High School		5	78	83
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>2,944</b>	<b>2,649</b>

Increase of 295 students, up 11% from previous 01-02 school year

## **DIHUN** (Catholic/private school bilingual classes)

		Number of schools	number of students 2002-2003	number of students 2001-2002
Preschool	>	45 schools	1,250	1,109
Primary School			1,053	504
Middle School		9	156	115
High School		0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>2,459</b>	<b>2,128</b>

Increase of 331 students, up 15.5% from previous 01-02 school year

## DIWAN, DIV YEZH & DIHUN – Geographic Distribution

Department	Diwan	Div Yezh (Public)	Dihun (Catholic)		
Finistère	1,578	942	901		
Côtes-du Nord	466	754	170		
Morbihan	414	761	1,251		
Loire-Atlantique	227	83	41		
Ile-et-Vilaine	95	404	96		
TOTAL	2,780	2,944	2,459	=	8,138

Increase of 797 students for all school systems from total of 7,386 in 01-02 year

## DIWAN Moves Forward

Anyone who has been following news of the Diwan schools in Breton newspapers or via internet exchanges knows that this organization for immersive Breton-language schools in Brittany has been going through some troubled times with a great deal of internal disagreement on leadership style and direction. At a specially called General Assembly of delegates representing teachers and staff, parents and students held on Sunday November 24, the discussion was tense—as expected after months of not always polite disagreement. A majority of delegates expressed favor for a change in Diwan’s Administrative Council, and the Council headed by President Andrew Lincoln resigned. A motion was made which tallied 85 votes in support for the opposition group called “Réunir Diwan” against 71 in support of the current Administrative Council (and one blank ballot). A new composition for the Administrative Council will be formed in the coming weeks and we hope that this group can mobilize a more unified movement forward for the Diwan schools in this very challenging year.

While still in initial phases there has been a glimmer of hope that France will take steps to decentralize some of its governmental functions. This could free up support for education and culture, and Diwan will be working on the regional level to try to get the public status that would significantly ease financial strain and allow for growth. Work continues as well to push for a change in the French Constitution where the infamous Article 2 stating “French is the language of the Republic” has been a block to Diwan’s admittance to the French public school system. As our report in the August issue of Bro Nevez explained, “immersion” teaching where Breton is the dominant language in teaching as well as in everyday school activities is very effective in insuring that children learn to use Breton as a living language, but is seen by the French courts to be anti-constitutional – thus, unless Diwan dilutes its use of Breton in school activity, it will not be incorporated into the public education system. While a constitutional change will be difficult to achieve (and seems highly unlikely in the short term), decentralization of decision-making powers to a regional level should work in favor of Diwan and other initiatives for the Breton language and culture.

## DIWAN NEEDS OUR SUPPORT

With an effort focused on obtaining integration into the public school system of France, energy has been diverted from fund-raising and Diwan has not succeeded in raising the funds it needs to meet its budget. Some 300,000 Euros (= approximately \$300,000) were expected to be covered by state integration and this sum needs to be raised by the end of December. Diwan has launched a fundraising campaign this fall but is still short by 140,000 Euros. Financial crisis is not new to Diwan and fundraising has always been a major challenge and key to insuring that the schools function as public schools, free of charge to whoever wants to enroll their children. There is no doubt that parents contribute a great deal to the fundraising – if not huge sums of money, certainly generous amounts of time. But in order to meet the needs of growing enrollments, basic building maintenance, and the opening of new schools, Diwan needs the help of everyone. That’s where we can do a part.



**WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Please use the attached 2003 Membership/Subscription renewal form to add an extra contribution for Diwan. Diwan has been a catalyst in moving bilingual Breton language forward in all the schools of Brittany, and continues to be the most effective means of insuring that children have the chance to make Breton the language of their everyday life—especially children whose parents speak little or no Breton.

While the money U.S. ICDBL Members have contributed for Diwan has gone to support the budget of the school system as a whole, we have also earmarked money for the following two schools.

#### **Skol Diwan Landerne**

Since 1992 when I was asked to become the school's maeronez (god mother), the U.S. ICDBL has had a close relationship with the Diwan school in Landerneau. This school has 58 children, three teachers and one assistant to the younger children. As is true for most of the Diwan schools, finances are tight and this year our school faces a new challenge with the loss of a teaching post. Thus, instead of four teachers, three are taking charge of the different age levels and classes.

Anne Caer has charge of 22 students in CE2, CM1 and CM2 (the 9 to 12 year olds)  
And she also serves as the school's Director

Luce Poho has charge of 17 students in what's called the Grande Section and CP and CE1 (6-8 year olds)

Annie Corlosquet has charge of 19 preschoolers (Petite and Moyenne Sections)

During the past year the school has been working on brightening up the appearance of the school with murals and plantings and our contributions have helped with this.

The school would love to hear from members of the U.S. ICDBL. If you plan to travel to Brittany let me know and we can set up plans to visit the school. And if you would like to send a note of encouragement to the children in "our Diwan school" here's the address. Breton is obviously best, but French and/or English is fine.

Annie Corlosquet  
SKol Diwan Landerne  
8 straed an Dorgenn  
29800 Landerneau

#### **Skolaj Diwan ar Mor-Bihan**

While not officially adopted by the school, the U.S. ICDBL has also developed an ongoing correspondence with the Diwan Middle School in Vannes which is now in its fourth year. The school has grown from 17 students in 1999 to 86 this year (of which 62 board at the school for part of the week. There are 12 teachers on staff. The school has all four levels of classes for middle school with 29 students in the 6th level class, 22 in the 5th, 21 in the 4th, and 14 in the 3rd level. This school draws students from all of eastern Brittany—including the department of Loire-Atlantique as well as Ile-et Vilaine and Morbihan.

This is a school which has worked particularly hard to raise funds to make up for the fact that it has not been able to get a "contrat d'association" from the State which would help greatly in funding for teacher's salaries. Normally a school has to be in existence for five years to qualify for such a contract. Between the costs for teacher and staff salaries and building renovations needed to properly house classrooms for the ever-growing school, the Skolaj Diwan of Morbihan has some hard financial challenges to meet.

# Breizh diouzh ment ar bed / Brittany, worldwide

Lois Kuter

Each year Skol Uhel ar Vro, the Cultural Institute of Brittany, organizes a one-day conference to precede the initiation of four new members in to the Order of the Ermine. This year's conference had the theme "Brittany Worldwide" and was held in Lannion on September 28. The theme of the conference was chosen in view of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first TV satellite transmission from the U.S. to Pleumeur-Bodou (1962). And the various roundtables held during the day offered interesting reflections on how Brittany has historically been open to the world and how today it remains so.

The first panel of speakers focused on Brittany as a country with a long history of contacts and exchanges with other countries, and a second session focused on Breton culture and its diffusion in other parts of the world – a culture with deep roots as well as a certain universality. A final session addressed Brittany's future in a new Europe and in facing the challenges of globalization. And there was one additional session in the afternoon that brought a few far away friends of Brittany to the conference via a cyber hook-up.

This roundtable included Elzbieta Solkolowska in Poland, Lore Listra in Estonia, Jean Le Viol, a Breton in the French Embassy in Mexico, and yours truly, Lois Kuter, on line in a video-conferencing center in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In turn, each of us had 10 minutes to answer a few questions. A "telephone" rang, and when the hook up was done, I could see my interviewers in Lannion on a TV-like screen in the office room in Philadelphia, and I was projected on a big screen in Lannion for everyone at the conference to see. Ten minutes goes by in a flash, and I was asked to introduce myself and my work for Brittany (the U.S. ICDBL and Bro Nevez). I was also asked about how Americans view Brittany (Britney Spears is as close as most get to any "Brittany"), and what it is about Brittany that would interest people in America (Breton music, culture, and the spirit of persistence). I was also asked if there were things about America and Americans that might surprise Bretons (we are a very diverse people who do not all drink coca cola and speak some 300 languages other than English). With questions provided in advance, I had the chance to synthesize some answers to big questions, and to rehearse some necessary French vocabulary that might not slip off my tongue.

I have to say that it was a thrill to participate in such an interesting event, and as a member of Brittany's Order of the Ermine it was moving to be able to be among some of my fellow honorees that day, if only for a few minutes, to contribute a few ideas and good wishes from America.

The video-conference was fostered by An Tour Tan, and on their website ([www.antourtan.org](http://www.antourtan.org)) those with more sophisticated computer capabilities than mine can witness some of the presentations and interviews done during the day, including the cyber-dialogs.

## THE ORDER OF THE ERMINE

First founded by Breton Duke Jean IV in 1381, the Order of the Ermine was an honorary order, unique in Europe for its election of women and commoners to its ranks in recognition of their service to Brittany (mostly the service of defending Brittany from attack by France). The Order was reestablished in 1972, and in 1985 the Cultural Institute of Brittany made it an annual event to select four new members. The Order of the Ermine today still recognizes exceptional service in support of Brittany and the Breton culture. The "collier" (medallion) given to each new member of the order is modeled after that of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and includes the inscription "d'am buhe" (Breton for "for my life"). Indeed, this honor recognizes Bretons (and a handful of non-Bretons) who have worked for Brittany during a lifetime—or in the case of younger inductees, will take on that responsibility for their life.

The following are the four individuals joining the Order of the Ermine this September 2002. (information translated from Skol Uhel ar Vro's fall publication of *Sterenn*)

### Henri Lécuyer

A native of Maxent, Henri Lécuyer showed signs of great scholastic ability; but his parents, small farmers, had no other choice but to send him to "les enfants de troupe" (soldier boys). He passed the bac and was accepted in July 1944 for the HEC exams. Without the finances to continue his studies, Henri Lécuyer engaged in the First Army.

After the war he served as an Attaché d'Administration. Entering the Affaires Etrangères of France in 1952, he became vice-consulat for France in Costa Rica in 1953.

Returning to France in 1956 he took a new turn in entering the Bureau d'études Economiques et Sociales de Force Ouvrière. At this period he also became aware of his Breton identity.

An administrator with Eurotom in Brussels in 1958, he participated in 1969 in the founding of the Amicale des Bretons de Belgique. In 1972 he became its president. Named principal administrative director for Regional Politics for the European Commission in Brussels, he became known as "Mr. Brittany." At the same time, as president of the Organisation des Bretons de l'Extérieur (OBE), Henri Lécuyer worked to make the voice of Brittany heard outside of France (for example in working with the ICDBL). Taking retirement in 1986, Henri Lécuyer continued his action as president of the OBE until 1993, and then as honorary president of that organization.

[Editor's note: Henri Lécuyer was key in encouraging the establishment of the U.S. Branch of the ICDBL and we owe him a debt of thanks for helping us as we were first getting off the ground in the early 1980s.]

## Michael Jones

Born in Wrexham (Wales), December 5, 1940, Michael Jones emigrated to become a student in history at Oxford (England), later becoming a professor there. His teaching career, begun in 1966 at the University of Exeter, has been spent primarily at the University of Nottingham where he was a professor of medieval French history from 1991 to 2002.

His is also a member of several societies: the Royal Historical Society (1971), The Société Archéologique de Bretagne (1972), the Society of Antiquaries of London (1977), honorary vice-president of the Société d'Études et de Recherches sur le Pays de Retz (1985).

His numerous works are focused especially on the Ducal period of Breton history. He has published most notably: La Bretagne ducal: Jean IV de Monfort (1364-1399) entre la France et l'Angleterre, 1988 (the published version of his doctoral thesis); Recueil des actes de Jean IV, duc de Bretagne (3 volumes), 1980-2001; Les Anciens Bretons des origines au Xve siècle, 1993 (with Patrick Galliou); Catalogue sommaire des archives du Fonds Lebreton, Abbaye Saint-Guénolé, Landévennec, 1998.

## Robert Omnes

Born in Dinan, February 26, 1930, he was interested at a young age in history and the Breton language. Fascinated by languages, he studied Spanish, linguistics and Celtic studies at the Université de Rennes. At the same time he was engaged in various activities in support of Breton culture: he participated in the founding

of the Jeunesse Étudiante Bretonne (1952), and the Cercle Celtique of Dinan (1952) and of Dinard (1954). He was secretary (1954) and then president (1961-64) of the Kendalc'h confederation.

With a CAPES diploma, he taught Spanish in Quimper from 1956 to 1969. Graduating in 1969, he taught at the Université de Bretagne Occidentale from 1969 to 1988. With a doctorate in linguistics in 1991, his research has concerned Spanish phonetics and phonology. He published several works and articles on the historical relations between Brittany and the Iberian peninsula. From 1982 to 2000 he presided the Comité Bretagne-Galice.

His action in favor of the Breton culture has not diminished: Mayor of Plomelin from 1965 to 1995, he welcomed the first Diwan school in Cornouaille, he favored the installation of Breton signs in his commune as early as 1968, and participated in the creation of the choral group Kanerien Sant Meryn (1983) and the theater troupe Strollad Yann an Aod (1999).

## Yves Rocher

Yves Rocher was born in 1930. At the death of his father when he was 14 years old, he decided to help his mother in the small family textile commerce.

An elderly healer confided in him the recipe for a cream of haemostatic figwort, and Yves Rocher decided to fabricate it in the family attic and sell it directly to users. Natural products and sales through the mail constituted the support columns for the cosmetics enterprise he founded in 1959.

In 2002 more than 13,000 employees and 200,000 franchises and salespeople worked in giving this Group an international name. 4,000 employees work in Brittany which Yves Rocher has promoted for the implantation of his industrial and logistical activities. Gacilly, his native village, is today the headquarters of a prosperous canton where Yves Rocher has been mayor since 1962. Passionate about the political and economic life of Brittany, he became a General Councilor in 1982 and a Regional Councilor in 1992.

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Since 1972 sixty-five individuals have been inducted into the Order of the Ermine (13 of which marked by an asterisk\* are now deceased): Anna-Vari Arzur, Vefa de Bellaing\*, Dan ar Braz, Jacques Briard\*, Herri Caouissin, Denise Delouche, Per Denez, Tereza Desbordes, Vetig an Dret-Kervella, Jean Fréour, Charlez ar Gall, Chanig ar Gall, Yvonig Gicquel, Pierre-Roland Giot\*, Glenmor\*, Pierre-Jakez Helias\*, Jean-Jacques Hénaff, Ronan Huon, Yvonne Jean-Haffen\*, Dodik Jégou, Michael Jones, Goulc'han Kervella, Riwanon Kervella, Lois



Kuter, Pierre Laurent, André Lavanant, Henri Lécuyer, Raymond Lebossé, Joseph Lec'hvien, Robert Legrand, Pierre Lemoine, Pierre Le Rhun, Pierre Le Treut, Jean L'Helgouac'h\*, Louis Lichou, Georges Lombard, Pierre Loquet, Lena Louarn, Henri Maho, Patrick Malrieu, Ivona Martin, Joseph Martray, Jean Mévellec\*, Rozenn Milin, Polig Monjarret, Rita Morgan Williams, Robert Omnes, Bernard de Parades\*, Gabriele Pescatore, Michel Philipponneau, René Pleven\*, Yann Poilvet, Jordi Pujol, Henri Queffélec\*, Maryvonne Quéméré-Jaouen\*, Yves Rocher, Loeiz Ropars, Naig Rozmor, Frère Marc Simon, Alan Stivell-Cochevelou, Pierre Toulhoat, Albert Trévidic, Jean Tricoire\*, René Vautier, Jean-Bernard Vighetti.



## Another Breton Honored: Gilbert Hervieux, Winner of the 15<sup>th</sup> Prix Hervé Le Menn

The Hervé Le Menn Prize was created in 1988 by the Entente Culturelle Bretonne and is awarded annually to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the Breton culture, especially the promotion of Brittany's rich oral tradition. It is named after Hervé le Menn (1899-1973) who was especially active in Paris with the emigrant community there. He was a co-founder of Kenveuriez ar Viniouerien in 1932 to foster the music of the biniou and bombarde and which was for forerunner for the Bodadeg ar Sonerien. Hervé Le Menn also collected music, worked on crafting biniou and helped to reintroduce Breton dances in the gatherings of Breton emigrants in Paris. The Entente Culturelle Bretonne was founded in 1954 by Le Menn to foster projects for the Breton language and oral tradition, and this group has supported the publication of a number of books and music collections and CDs among other projects (see the following web sites for more information about them:

<http://www.multimania.com/emgleo> or  
<http://membres.lycos.fr/emgleo/>

Gilbert Hervieux joins a number of eminent singers and storytellers, and "cultural militants" who have been vital in their role in enabling Brittany's oral traditions to continue to be passed down from one generation to the next. These are not the big "stars" on the Breton cultural stage, but the people who are watering the roots of Breton tradition. They are the heroes for those who love traditional music and oral traditions of Brittany.

The following biography of Gilbert Hervieux is loosely translated from the Press information I received by e-mail which was itself prepared based on an interview by Yann Le Meur in 2002 and an article which appeared in *Ar Men* (no. 11) in 1987.

Gilbert Hervieux was born in 1958 in Saint-Vincent-sur-Oust (near Redon). He became interested in traditional music at the age of 15 after a bombarde workshop at Ti-Kendalc'h. In 1977-78 he did his military service in the Bagad de Lann Bihoue with his future business partner Olivier Glet. In 1981 the Hervieux and Glet Luthier was formed in Rieux. They bought old machines and adapted them for wood working and completed an apprenticeship based on the inspiration of bombarde and biniou makers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as those still active in the 1980s such as Dorig Le Voyer or Jean Capitaine. Very soon, the two instrument makers would be working on new lower tonalities. These instruments permitted new possibilities for group orchestrations (the bagad especially) and succeeded in bridging a transition between the old and the new.

As a teen Gilbert Hervieux set off to collect tunes and songs of his countryside. He made his first recording in 1973 at the home of Marguerite Sébillet of St. Vincent-sur-Oust. He has expanded his collection today to studies of traditional furniture, costumes, various airs and dances of the Gallo Country of Morbihan ... and other field work always undertaken with great pleasure. Some of his work was published in *Dastum's Cahier No. 8* published in 1984 and in *Oust et Vilaine, Pays de Tradition*, published in December 2000.

At the same time Gilbert Hervieux has composed and introduced songs into traditional song repertoire, for marches or for the Rond de St-Vincent dance found widely at festoù-noz. He has also been active in the music school of Redon, the largest school for traditional music in Brittany with over 500 students during the 2001-2002 year. This is a school without a set place where teachers move to 16 different communities to give classes. President of the Groupement Culturel Breton since 1990, Gilbert Hervieux has been a major factor in the success of the annual Bogue d'Or song contests held in Redon since 1975.

Gilbert Hervieux is the youngest individual to receive the Hervé Le Menn Prize, and he is also the one who is closest to Hervé Le Menn in his work. He sets an example to be followed and applauded in his work to create and promote Breton music and in his work on an organizational level to insure the continuation of a lively and rich popular tradition in the Pays d'Oust.

Those are the facts to highlight some of Gilbert Hervieux's accomplishments. This biography fails to mention that he is one of Brittany's master "sonneurs de couple" (paired bombarde and biniou) winning the coveted championship of Brittany in 1995 with his frequent partner Jacques Beauchamp. And Gilbert is also a very fine singer, performing with the Chanteurs du Pays de Vilaine. From my personal acquaintance with Gilbert, I can testify that he is extremely modest about his talents and one of the most generous people you will



ever meet in sharing his knowledge. Gilbert has spent an enormous amount of time in the kitchens of older master singers, encouraging them to take pride in the gifts they have to pass along to younger generations. And he has had an important impact on those younger generations in inspiring them to learn from the masters and take root in the wealth of traditions found in the Pays d'Oust et de Vilaine. I can think of no one more deserving of the Hervé Le Menn Prize.

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## **A Loss for the Breton Culture: In Memory of Yann Poëns (1920-2002)**

by Roland Laigo

At the age of 82 Yann Poëns died of a heart attack this September and was buried on September 14<sup>th</sup> in Tremel, the town his parents and many other generations were from. Yann was born in Morlaix in 1920 but kept the ties Bretons always keep with the place of their ancestors and traveled back regularly to Tremel. For the "Tremeliz" or "tud Tremel" (people born and raised in Tremel) he was one of them. For the funeral service the church was packed with Tremeliz, and friends and relatives from all around – Leon, Kerne, Treger and even the Morbihan – Christians and non Christians.

Yann engaged for five years in the "Royale" (French Navy) in 1939 when World War II broke out and spent seven years on its vessels. He was in the Navy destroyed by the British at Mers-el-Kabir (Algeria) after fleeing southern France—Occupied France and the France of Marechal Petain. He had a strange sentiment toward the English when he saw his ship go down, as did so many others in France, but in 1942 he came to side with the Americans. When I first met him in the mid 1950s, like many Bretons of his generation, Yann was uneasy about what had happened in Brittany during the war and the collaboration of some in the Breton movement ("Emsav"). He loved Brittany, her seas, her land, her people, and the Breton language which was his native language. He enjoyed talking, singing and storytelling.

Yann was 50-something when I met him and when we spoke in Breton he asked me where I was from. I answered Prad Ledan, Kerber (St. Pierre), Rekouvrañs (north of Brest), and mentioned that my family was "gwenedourien" – from Morbihan. He also asked where my father was during World War II and I mentioned the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, Montgomery and the "Brits", the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army in Tunisia and Southern France and the FFL. While for many older Bretons in the post war period, talk about the

war was a forbidden topic, Yann had an open mind that he kept open until his death. We talked of the war for two or three hours that day. When a conference/discussion was organized on the topic of World War II in Morlaix at "Ti ar Yaouankiz" he and his friend Millour participated willingly and the discussion drew people of all generations and lasted three hours. Young and old (yaouank ha koz) took part.

My discussions with Yann continued. In the mid 1950s I came to tape a few things, especially stories – things that no one at that period cared about. It was not easy to start with, but we became friends. I knew that Yann must have heard stories (kontadennoù) when he was a youngster. And gradually, tape after tape, collection of part of a story and then another, the words would come back to him and a whole story would be rebuilt.

Yann liked to laugh and had a very keen sense of humor (Yann a blijedizhon farsal, ha fent a droe e spered). He didn't like dirty or obscene language in songs, but he loved songs that mocked fashions and our little hang-ups. Humor was his "ding" and you could hear his laugh far away – not loud, but wrapped around his words.

Yann helped many young people in Brittany to learn Breton, singing and storytelling, and he was very much involved with Dastum Treger. He also enjoyed sharing his knowledge at several evening events I organized in 1989 and 1991 for Americans who participated in trips organized by Keith and Rusty McNeil.

Yann helped create the Morlaix Diwan School and was one of the first on the "Skoazell (support) Committee" to give his time and money. He never missed a school open house (dor digor) or a skoazell dinner to support Skol Diwan Montroulez. He was present at one just this Spring of 2002 with his old friend Millour and Youenn Gwernig.

Yann was short – 5'1 or 5'2 and stout – ur c'haban war l c'hein, ur gasketenn martolod war e benn. There will be room enough for him in the paradise of story tellers, the heaven for singers and the one for sailors – Plas vo evitan awalc'h ba' paradoz ar gonterien, hini ar ganerien pe hini ar vartoloded.

Doue d'e bardono – God bless him in the heaven of the Celts – paradoz ar Gelted.

Plouyann, da'r 16ved a viz gwengolo 2002.  
Roland Laigo

# New Music From Brittany

Lois Kuter

## Gilles Le Bigot. Empreintes.

Keltia Musique KMCD 137. 49'39

Gilles Le Bigot was born in 1959 in St. Brieuc and began to play guitar when he was 13, picking up on a variety of styles until he began to delve into the Celtic pop phenomenon of the mid 1970s. In 1978 he founded the group Galorn with Jean-Michel Veillon and played at festoù-noz. In 1984 he helped found the group Skolvan with Youenn Le Bihan—a band which continues to stand out for its quality and creativity. From 1986 to 87 Gilles played with the group Kornog (touring here in the U.S. with them), and he was also part of the group Barzaz from 1988 to 1997. Gilles participated in the famous "Heritage des Celtes with Dan ar Braz from 1991 to 2000, and has partnered with a number of well known Breton singers and musicians-- the Bagad Kemper, Annie Ebrel, Didier Squiban, Manu Lannhuel, Gilles Servat and Denez Prigent—and has worked with a number of other Celtic artists—Davy Spillaine, Donal Lunny, Sharon Shannon, Gerry O'Connor and Carlos Nunez. Gilles has also been part of an Irish music band, La Lugh, and has played with a baroque ensemble for classical guitar. He can be heard on over 20 recordings but this is the first where he really takes center stage.

This is a CD that is no so much about Gilles Le Bigot as a solo guitar player, but as a composer and arranger who has allied his considerable skills as a musician with a number of other fine Breton performers. These are Bernard Le Dréau (saxophone and clarinets), Marthe Vassallo (song), Jean-Michel Veillon (flute), Erwan Volant (acoustic bass), Ludovic Mesnil (guitars), Stéphane Sotin (percussion), Ronan Pellen (cistre), and the string quartet Arz Nevez. Of the ten selections on the CD eight are his musical compositions.

This is a CD with a great deal of variety in moods and influences, although for me the slower melodies composed by Le Bigot are those that are mostly likely to leave imprints ("empreinte" is the title of

the CD). "The fisherman" is a melody composed by Gilles and recorded on the Skovan CD "Swing and Tears". A text in English has been composed by Eithne ni Uillachain who tragically died in 1999. Fortunately a recording of her singing was saved and used as the core in this arrangement to pay homage to her. Another newly composed text is also featured on the CD, this one in Breton called "An Distro" by one of Brittany's great young traditional singers, Marthe Vassallo. Set to a beautiful melody composed by Gilles Le Bigot, she starts the performance in the manner of a traditional gwerz with its free flowing rhythm which moves to a style where words are more closely wedded to instrumental accompaniment and a regular rhythm. The third song on the CD, "Marivonig an Dourdu" is a traditional ballad about a woman carried off by English seamen. She jumps overboard and is carried safely back to shore by a fish who swallows her. You have one of the best opportunities to hear Gilles Le Bigot in solo performance in the introductory portion of this ballad. The gradual addition of sax and electric bass to the acoustic guitar accompanying Marthe Vassallo's traditional rendering of this ballad is quite unique and adds a very nice dramatic effect.

There are two other selections of a slower meditative nature—compositions by Gilles Le Bigot called "Kerjacob" and "Gwerz evit ma zad" which evoke people and places of childhood. These include nice duets of guitar and tambura with wind instruments—the saxophone, clarinets and flute.

But, while Gilles Le Bigot can compose beautiful slow airs, he certainly knows how to dance as well! "An Damez kozh" is a suite of ridees in six time and "La Vagotte" is a composition in the style of "la gavotte swing"—a fusion of jazz and traditional Breton dance invented by musicians of the 1930s in Brittany. "La Chaîne" adds a Latin touch to two melodies for the dance plinn. Flute and voice (Veillon and Vassallo) carry the melody with a lightness that begs one to get up and dance. Percussion and strings give a remarkable feel for the tight formation of dancers in the plinn who grip each other's arms forearm over forearm.

While not exactly a "dance", the composition "La Funambule" is in cheerful contrast as well to the slower melodies of the CD. And Gilles Le Bigot also

includes a "Valse Finlandaise" composed by Juha Yli-Kotila. Breton musicians often pick up great tunes when on tour in other countries and this is an example of a melody brought back from a stop in Finland.

The notes to the CD include short and informative introductions to each piece and the text to the two composed songs: Marthe Vassallo's "An Distro" in Breton with a French translation, and Eithne ni Uillachain's "The Fishermen" Nice big photos of each musician at work are a welcome addition and add faces to the sounds.

Gilles Le Bigot is definitely among the greats on the Breton music scene today. This CD shows off not only his mastery of acoustic guitar and tambura, but his considerable talent as a composer.



**Hudel.** Hudel. Keltia Musique KMCD 253. 44'42.

Hudel is a new group formed just in 2000-2001, but the four musicians who make up the group are anything but new to the Breton music scene.

Guitarist Nicolas Quemener was born outside of Brittany in Beaufort en Vallée (49) and moved to Ireland in 1990 where he joined the group Arcady (which made eight tours in the U.S.). He stayed with that band until 1994 when he began a two-year stint with another Irish band—composed of Bretons and Belgians—called Orion. Nicolas joined the Breton group Skeduz from 1993 to 2000 and was part of Dan ar Braz's "L'Heritage des Celtes" (1997-98). Since 1996 he has played in duo with uilleann piper Ronan Le Bars and became part of the reformed band Kornog in 2000.

Pol Jezequel, flute, bombarde and biniou player, was born in Gouarec (Côtes-du-Nord) in a big family where everyone sang, played an instrument, or danced. In the late 1980s he began playing with a series of partners in bombarde-biniou pair playing: Didier Guilchou, Yvon Lefebvre, Loic Jaffré and Gwendal Berthou. Pol has been a member of the Bagad de Guingamp (1988-90), Bagad de Lann Bihoué for military service (1990) and the Bagad de Pontivy

(1991-93). He has been an instrument and reed maker since 1992.

Hilaire Rama, the bass player, hails from Martinique and since the late 1960s has played in a number of Caribbean dance bands and rock groups. From 1989-90 he played as part of Alan Stivell's band and since 1995 has played with singers Gilles Servat and Melaine Favennec and is also part of the Gaby Blues Band. From 1995 to 2001 he played in the Breton band Skeduz. Hilaire plays bass guitar in Hudel and sings for the closing song from Martinique on the CD.

Fiddler Laors Dacquay moved from Paris to Ireland to definitively make Brittany his home in 1990. From 1993-2000 he played in the group Skeduz (and you have probably noticed this common thread for these four musicians). He plays currently in the Irish Swing System which, as its name signifies, focuses on an Irish repertoire, and in duo with harmonica player Jean Sabot with a Cape-Breton repertoire.

Dances dominate this new CD and include a cercle circassien (an Irish import now found at almost all festoù noz), an dro, ridee in six time, scottish, laridé, and all three parts of a plinn. And you have a march, "Marche de charbonniers" which might also qualify as a dance since Breton marches have the swing of a slow dance.

There are two songs on the CD which offer a nice break in rhythm. Nicolas Quemener sings "Le Chant du vieillard", a song text of Llywarch Hen originating in 9<sup>th</sup> century Wales, translated into English by Celtic scholars and then translated into French by Breton singer Gérard Delahaye whose music and text are arranged here. Hilaire Rama closes the CD with a song from his native Martinique which adds a whole new swing to things.

This is a great quartet of seasoned musicians who are backed by a number of guest artists on four of the twelve selections. The dances dominating the CD are highly danceable—energetic, but with a nice relaxed pace. You don't find the speed contest in Brittany for traditional dances that you seem to find in Irish music. I found a bit of monotony in hearing the fiddle and flute almost always leading the melodic line, with guitar backing up. There was a certainly "sameness" to the mix if instruments



despite a great variety of rhythms. But this band has a great sound and a polish that makes for very pleasurable listening.



### **Dastum 30 ans/vloaz 1972-2002.** DAS 142.

As noted in the August 2002 issue of Bro Nevez, Dastum celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this October with concerts and gatherings and a campaign to continue the collection work it has been doing during all these years. And while collection is the heart of the work done by the thousands of Bretons who have contributed their time to this, the idea is not so much preservation as it is transmission. Songs and tunes pass from one generation to the next as musicians and singers meet in the process of recording and noting things down. To make music accessible to all Dastum has done some very impressive work in the edition of very richly documented recordings which present not only music but the people who make it.

To commemorate their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary Dastum has produced a CD of 22 selections from their recordings spanning from the 1970s to the present (with a majority from recordings of the 1990s). While this little cardboard folder with the CD tucked in an inner pocket does not include the rich information about the performers typical of Dastum productions, it does give a nice snapshot of the work Dastum does and quite adequate reference for each selection so that you can locate the recording from which each is drawn.

The selection includes singers of all ages as well as pipers, accordion players, and veuze—from all over Brittany. Since song is truly at the heart of traditional music in Brittany the lion's share of the CD goes to them and some of Brittany's great traditional singers are represented: Yann-Fañh Kemener, Erik Marchand, Le Mangeouses d'oreilles. Mélanie Houëdry, Maire-Aline Langedic & Lisette Floc'h, Eugénie Duval, Charles Quimbert, Albert Poulain, Annie Ebrel, Mme Bertrand, Sophie Le Hunsec, Roland Brou ...to name some. For those who want to get a flavor for the "roots" of Breton music, this is a wonderful selection to introduce you to just the tip of the iceberg of the treasures Dastum has helped preserve and make available for all.

## **HEARD OF, BUT NOT HEARD**

I have not heard any of the following recordings, but would love to! Thus the descriptions which follow are not from first-hand experience of the CDs, but based on information gathered from notes and reviews in Musique Bretonne 174 (Sept.-Oct. 2002), Ar Men 129 (July-Aug. 2002) and 130 (Sept.-Oct. 2002) and Ar Soner 364 (May-June 2002) and 365 (July-August 2002).

### **Bagad Brieg and the Shotts & Dykehead Caledonia Pipe Band. La boum Ecosse.**

Arcana SD CD 001. Distr. Keltia Musique. 2002  
For those who don't know what a bagad is, it is a unique blend of Scottish pipe band style bagpipes and drum section with bombardes with arrangements and compositions of Breton melodies and dances. It has become more and more common to see bagpipe ensembles from Breton bagadoù on Scottish turf, competing successfully in pipe band competitions. On this CD the Bagad Brieg shares a stage with Shotts & Dykehead for a concert at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall.

### **Bagad Cap Caval. Brezhoneg 'raok.**

Coop Breizh BCC 002. 2002  
This bagad might not be as well known as those that have won the bagad championship of Brittany, but it shares with them a ranking in the first division. Being among the top ten isn't shabby!

### **Bagad Lann-Bihoué. Fromveur.**

Byg Production. SAM 5086512. Distr. Sony Music. 2002.  
This is the latest from the bagad of the French Navy. French Navy or not, this is a band of Bretons, and while the performance is not up to the Division 1 bagadoù of Brittany, these guys are good.

### **Bagad Pays des Abers. Trouz en Aberioù.**

BPA 2002 01. 2002.  
This is the first CD from this bagad which has advanced to Division 2 in bagad competition after winning the title in the 3<sup>rd</sup> division.

### **BAS Penn ar Bed. Bombardes en fête.**

BAS Penn ar Bed CDBAS-29 001. 2002  
The bombarde is perhaps the instrument us foreigners most strongly identify as uniquely Breton.



In the 1960s musicians like Pierre-Yves Moign and Jean l'Helgouach encouraged bombarde players to break away from being paired with the binou and embedded in the bagad to try new things. Trios, quartets and quintets as well as ensembles mixing bombardes with all sorts of instruments were formed, and an annual contest has taken place since 1987 in Ergué-Gabéric (outside Quimper) to encourage creative bombarde playing. In celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gouel ar Vombardenn, the organizers of this festival/contest have issued a CD with selections of performances from 1994 to 2001, including bombarde masters and music of every genre from traditional Breton melodies to the Beatles.

**Roland Becker and Régis Huiban. Kof ha kof - Au café breton.** Oyoum Muzik OM 001. 2002  
Roland Becker on saxophone and Régis Huiban on chromatic accordion join for a mix of old style dance hall music as you might find it in the 1930s in Brittany. There is a certain swing to these gavottes.

**Duo Bertrand & neuf invités. Carte Blanche.** Label Ouest/L'Autre Distribution. 2002  
Thierry and Sebastien Bertrand are masters of the veuze, the bagpipe unique to southeastern Brittany and the Vendée. For this concert recording they invite a few friends for a very creative gathering: singers Roland Brou and Anne-Lise Foy; hurdy-gurdy, fiddle and cello player Thierry Moreau, accordion player Alain Pennec, Chapman stick (guitarist) Youenn Landreau, and percussionist Antonin Volson.

**Cabestan. Le best of.** Keltia Musique KMCD 132. 2002  
This fine maritime group has been at work for 20 years now, first in interpreting traditional maritime songs and music with Le Chasse-Marée (see below). A number of different musicians and singers have rotated in and out of the group, bringing new compositions as well as interesting arrangements of more traditional maritime tunes. No matter what the mix of the band, the music has always been interesting and enjoyable.

**Chasse Marée/Ar Men. 20 ans de musiques maritime et bretonne.** Chasse-Marée/Ar Men/L'Autre Distribution. 2002.

This CD includes an excellent selection of songs and instrumental pieces from the series of "Anthologies of Song and Music of Brittany" and "Anthologies of Songs of the Sea" produced by Le Chasse-Marée first as wonderfully documented 33 rpm lps. Songs and tunes from a maritime tradition long gone are recreated by some of Brittany's finest performers in a spirit of authenticity and creativity.

**Jean Cras. Quintette avec piano, quatuor à cordes.** Performed by Quatuor Louvigny & Alain Jacquon. Timpani IC 1066. Distr. Abeille Musique. 2002

Jean Cras (1879-1932) is a much-recorded Breton composer who was also a naval officer. Both of the pieces on this CD were composed on cross-ocean voyages- the string quartet in 1908 and the quintet for strings and piano a dozen years later. The music does not include Breton traditional melodies or rhythms, but is inspired by Brittany and ocean voyage. It is performed by the Louvigny string quartet from the Philharmonic Orchestra of Luxembourg and pianist Alain Jacquon.

**Yann Dour. Bal Gallo Vol. 3.** Coop Breizh CD 936. 2002.  
This CD features dances from the Gallo country of Upper Brittany (eastern Brittany) by a great button accordion player.

**Pascal Lamour. Er Miloér.** BNC Productions LA 05. 2002.  
Singer Pascal Lamour doesn't have the voice of a Prigent, Kemener or Marchand, but on this CD he blends traditional song with a pop-techno sound where bagpipes and bombardes meet electronic sampling.

**Jean-Dominique Pasquet. Oeuvres pour orgue.** Self-produced CD 27091951. Distr. Résonances. 2002  
Pasquet is an organist from Paimpol whose training in a more classical style for massive church organs has not prevented him from drawing on Breton roots. This CD includes a dozen compositions from the period of 1971-1995 inspired by traditional Breton melodies and hymns.

### **Pevar Den. Fest-noz.**

Coop Breizh CD 929-DB10. 2002

This is the first CD by a fest noz band that started up in 1995. The group includes guitar, flute, fiddle, bombarde and a veuze that gives wonderful spirit to the Gallo repertoire from eastern Brittany. Dances from the western repertoire—gavottes and plinns—are not likely to rouse dances, according to the reviewer of this CD.

### **Loeiz Ropars & Kanerien Pleuigner. Kan ba'n dañs.**

Keltia Musique KMCD 131. 2002  
With the organization Al Leur Nevez, Loeiz Ropars was very instrumental in reviving the fest noz in the 1950s and in bringing fine traditional singers out into public view again. A very fine singer himself, he has also championed the Breton language as a teacher. This CD features archival recordings of traditional singers from central-west Brittany (Poullaouen to Brasparts) in kan ha diskan song for dancing. The CD also includes newer performances by Kanerien Pleuigner, a group of men from the Vannetais country where the *an dro* rather than *gavotte* is king. This is a great collection of unaccompanied traditional song.

### **Soldat Louis. Escale sur la planète.**

Créon Music 812 2842. 2002.

Soldat Louis is one of Brittany's best known rock bands which draws on the bombarde and bagpipes to give it a distinct sound. This new CD includes 13 selections.

### **Solistes bretons de cornemuse.**

Coop Breizh CBS 01. 2002.

Scottish style bagpipes (cornemuse) are relatively new to Brittany - gaining a strong foothold in the 1950s - but they have been quite successfully adapted by Bretons to play Breton dances and melodies in pair with the bombarde (like the biniou koz) and in the bagad. There have always been a handful of Bretons who have learned the Scottish repertoire as well, travelling to Scotland to learn and compete. The interest in the piob mhor as a solo instrument has bloomed in recent years in Brittany, encouraged by contests such as the MacAllan Trophée at the Loreint InterCeltic Festival and organizations such as l'Association bretonne des solistes de cornemuses, and l'Association pour la promotion du pibroch en Bretagne. This CD includes

all 40 participants at a concert held in December 2001 in Brittany representing three generations of solo pipers with music from Scotland, Ireland, Galicia and Brittany.

### **Sonerezh Bro Rouzig - Musique traditionnelle du pays Rouzig.**

Alc'houederien Kastellin/Coop

Breizh CCC 001. 2002

This is a CD of song and music from the Rouzig country - a region around the town of Chateaulin just at the base of the Crozon peninsula in Finistère. A number of singers, biniou-bombarde pairs and an accordion player focus on the specific rhythms and melodies traditional to this region. It is rare to find a CD that doesn't mix music from all over Brittany, and it is even rarer to find music from the Bro Rouzig on CD.

### **Storlok. Stok ha Stok.**

Coop Breizh CD 930-DB12. 2002

This is the reedition of a classic 33 rpm lp recorded first in 1979. Sadly it was the only recording (other than a 2-title 45 rpm) the group Storlok made. This was Brittany's first true rock band featuring songs in the Breton language - provocative songs by Denez Abernot and Bernez Tangi which often had a political sting to them. The music and the texts are as relevant as ever and this remains one of my favorite Breton recordings of all time.



## **53<sup>rd</sup> Championship of Bagadoù**

For bagad lovers who might not have seen the results of this summer's championship, here are the results.

1. Bagad Kemper
2. Kevrenn Alre
3. Bagad Brieg
4. Kerlenn Pondi
5. Bagad Cap Caval
6. Bagad Saint-Nazaire
7. Bagad Gwengamp
8. Bagad Ar Meilhoù Glaz
9. Sonerien An Oriant
10. Bagad Quic-en-Groigne

# New Books from Brittany

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

**Yvan Guehennec & Mikael Keraotred.**  
**Geriadur Kevredi ar Yezhoù Predenek /**  
**Common Dictionary of the Brittonic**  
**Languages.** Preder No. 2/2. Mezheven 2002. 155  
pp. ISBN 2-910493-20-2. 15 Euros.

The unattractive plain white cover of this paperback book with stark black block print GERIADUR KEVREDIN AR YEZHOU PREDENEK would not entice any English speaker to pick it up and peek inside. This book is a simple “gwenn ha du” (white and black) production from cover to cover. But what an interesting little book this is for English speakers who are learning Breton, Welsh or Cornish, and for those just curious about the similarities of these three languages of the Brythonic branch of Celtic languages (Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic and Manx make up the Goidelic branch).

While called a “Common Dictionary of the Brittonic Languages” this is really more of a lexicon than a true dictionary since it consists of a listing of words with equivalents rather than a presentation of various meanings of a particular word, or various uses it may have. The bulk of the book is made up of four lists arranged alphabetically of over 1,000 words. The English list comes first with three parallel rows with the Breton, Cornish and Welsh equivalent. Then you have the Breton list with columns of Cornish, Welsh and English equivalents, and then a listing for Cornish and Welsh. Thus, speakers of any of these four languages can find a familiar word in his or her own language. One helpful addition for those who have very little familiarity with Welsh, Cornish or Breton would be to have headings at the top of each column at the beginning of each section to indicate which column represents which language.

As the authors state, this is not a grammar book to enable you to learn these languages. “This lexicon was written out of a simple idea: combining in a small book a set of terms common to three Celtic languages of insular and Brittonic origins that are

Breton, Cornish and Welsh.” And the book is just that simple. But the book provides a bit more with a brief note on the historical relation of the languages, a pronunciation guide, list of the alphabet for each language, and explanation of mutations. In the back of the book you find a short article on Brittonic place names and a few short lists comparing names in English, Breton, Cornish and Welsh for colors, days of the week, months, seasons, numbers and countries.

In just 155 pages this plain little book includes a wealth of information and is a wonderful reference for English speakers especially since materials to learn and understand Breton are limited. But, it is certainly a welcome new tool for Breton, Cornish and Welsh speakers themselves who want to better understand the commonalities in vocabulary.

The authors bring varied experience to this lexicon. Mikael Keraotred is a retired engineer who has taught Breton and helped in the production of grammars, dictionaries and lexicons—especially for new areas of vocabulary. Yvan Guehennec, a history teacher from Vannes, has had a long relationship with Wales and is a fluent Welsh and Breton speaker. He has published a Welsh grammar for Breton speakers: Kembraeg evit ar Vrezhoned (Preder 1997. 160 pp.)

**An Here. Geriadur.** An Here. 2002. 1,440 pp. 69 Euros.

The second extensively revised and augmented edition of the first all-Breton dictionary is now out. This is the work of the publishing house An Here which is best known for spearheading the edition of children’s books in the Breton language. This new edition of the Breton dictionary, Geriadur, is double the size of the first edition published in 1995. It includes 21,300 word entries with 46,250 definitions, 72,400 examples of word use and over 20,000 phrases, proverbs and special expressions in word use.



## Celtic Studies News

### 12<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Celtic Studies - Press Release

The 12<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Celtic Studies is to be hosted by the Department of Welsh, The University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and held in this attractive town on the Cardigan Bay coast from 24-30th August 2003. We now write to warmly invite you to register for this conference. As well as being home to the university, Aberystwyth is an important cultural center. The copyright National Library of Wales, with its unrivalled collection of Welsh and Celtic printed books and manuscripts overlooks the town, and other bodies active in Welsh cultural life are also located here.

The theme of the 2003 Congress is 'Crossing Boundaries'. Following an excellent response to our call for papers over 280 have now been accepted from individuals from over 20 countries. This augers well for a successful academic conference, but we hope also to ensure that you thoroughly enjoy every aspect of your visit. Excursions have been arranged to all parts of Wales and a Congress Dinner and Concert will be held to give you a taste of Welsh landscape, history, cuisine and culture.

Contact: Dr. Dana Edwards, Organizer of the Celtic Congress, Department of Welsh, Old College, King Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 2AX (celt@aber.ac.uk)

*For details about the congress, accommodations, and travel, as well as registration materials (which must be mailed in hard copy) look at the web site: [www.aber.ac.uk/celt](http://www.aber.ac.uk/celt). This will be updated with more information about papers and schedules as things move forward. I have also received copies of registration and housing information which I would be happy to copy for anyone interested who may not have access to the internet. - Lois*

## Celtic Studies Association of North America (CSANA)

From the Celtic Studies Association Newsletter No. 20.1, Samhain 2002

The 27<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of CSANA and the 25<sup>th</sup> annual California Celtic Studies Conference will be held in conjunction with the annual University of California Celtic Studies Conference on the UC Berkeley Campus on April 3-6, 2003. Our invited speakers include: Sioned Davies (Cardiff University), Patrick Ford (Harvard University), Sarah Higley (University of Rochester), Joseph F. Nagy (University of California, Los Angeles), Diarmuid Ó Giolláin (University College Cork), and Oliver Padel (University of Cambridge).

We encourage abstracts on a wide variety of Celtic topics, including the fields of anthropology, archaeology, art history, folklore, history, linguistics, literature, and music. Papers should be no more than 20 minutes in length. Please send abstracts of no more than one typed page to the address below. The firm deadline for receipt of abstracts is January 15, 2003. Contact: Maria Teresa Agozzio (Mabil), Celtic Colloquium Chair, Celtic Studies Program, 6303 Dwinelle Hall, MC 2690, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720 USA e-mail to [mabela@uclink4.berkeley.edu](mailto:mabela@uclink4.berkeley.edu)

CSANA is a non-profit organization with members in the U.S., Canada, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Europe, Australia and Japan. It produces a semi-annual newsletter with book reviews and details on Celtic studies conferences and events. CSANA also publishes bibliographies of Celtic studies (1983-87 and 1985-87 are available in print and a new electronic bibliography is available at the CSANA website: <http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~csana>.

Membership includes two newsletters yearly, access to the bibliography and an electronic discussion group CSANA-I, as well as an invitation to the annual meeting. A regular (sustaining) membership is \$25 and an Associate membership (students, retirees, unemployed, institutions) is \$15. Contributions at higher levels are encouraged to support CSANA projects. To join contact: Prof. Elissa R. Henken, Department of English, Park Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602 (e-mail: [enhenken@arches.uga.edu](mailto:enhenken@arches.uga.edu))



# Travels in Brittany in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The following travel article was printed in the March 1876 issue of the magazine Temple Bar, published in London (Volume 46). There is no author's name given for the article, but regular readers of Temple Bar may know who it is based on the note: "By the author of 'Patty,' etc." which follows the title. The text reveals that the writer is a woman, travelling with at least two men. Please note that original spelling and punctuation have been retained. While this is much longer than many of the excerpts included in past issue of Bro Nevez, this is a particularly interesting piece with nice detail of costumes and the events and scenes of the Pardon of St. Nicodème. Just two paragraphs towards the end of the article which were repetitive have not been included.

## The Fair of St. Nicodème (1876)

If any one wants to get on a sudden quite out of the nineteenth century, and to find himself so freed from the surroundings of modern improvement and culture, that he is included to rub his eyes to make sure he is not dreaming, let him take the express train from Paris to Auray, in Brittany, and next day find his way to St. Nicodème—always remembering that this next day must be the first Saturday of August.

There is no very direct access to the fine old solitary Church of St. Nicodème. The nearest station on the Auray and Pontivy line of railway is at St. Nicholas des Eaux; but even from here there is a tiring walk of some kilometres along the dusty high road, and for reasons which will appear, it is not pleasant to drive from St. Nicholas; it is really more direct, although less interesting, to go from Auray to Baud or Pontivy, and take a carriage from one or other of these places to St. Nicodème.

At Auray they seemed to know nothing about St. Nicodème or its fête, and even when we reached Baud, and asked for information, the stationmaster shook his head: "Yes, yes, there is a pardon—but when it occurs?—ma foi, it is some time in August, that is all I know."

This was discouraging, but as we found on the map St. Nicholas des Eaux looked close to St. Nicodème, we decided to go on there by rail, in search of more definite tidings.

We crossed the Blavet, a broad river here, running through a wooded valley. A little way from the station, up the côte, on the left bank of this stream, we came upon the quaint old village of St. Nicholas. It looks so primitive, so sequestered, that doubtless it is rarely visited; even Bretons seem to know nothing about it, and yet its position beside the lovely winding river, its straggling, irregular line of granite cottages, hardly to be called a street, running up from the river, shaded by huge spreading chestnut boughs that cross one another overhead, the quaint costumes of its people—nearly all the girls and women had distaffs in their hands—and the

utter isolation in which they seem to live, give it the attraction of novelty to the traveller.

The solid granite dwellings composing this village are mostly built in twos and threes, with circular-headed doorways, and sometimes only one small square window. The upper half of the door is set open to admit light, the lower half is generally kept closed and bolted. Looking over some of these, we saw that a portion of the space within was given to the family, the rest to the cow-stable; the floor, as usual, was of uneven earth, on which stood handsome armoires in dark oak. Outside against some of the walls leant hug brass pans, and brooms made of fresh green boughs.

Exquisite yellow-green vine sprays clung about some of the cottages, and had flung themselves on to the thatch as if they meant to reach the chimneys, and these wreaths in their grace and beauty were in strange contrast to the clumsy-looking, large-featured, coarse faces that stared at us from under the faded hoods of the women and the large hats and matted locks of the men.

A little way up from the river, on the right, a path led to the church, and as this was locked, we seated ourselves at the foot of a wooden Calvary just outside it, while a woman fetched the key.

A good-natured looking peasant, with her child and distaff, came up shyly, and seated herself beside us. She could not speak much French, and the child, who, she said, learned it at school, was too shy to talk; but the woman was anxious to learn what had brought us to St. Nicholas. We asked about St. Nicodème. "But yes, there is a fair and a pardon there to-morrow and next day; the angel will come down and light the bonfire; he has gold wings, the angel—ah! That is indeed a sight worth coming to see!"

We asked if we could sleep at St. Nicholas, but our friend shook her head doubtfully. "There is the cabaret beside the river," she said, -- "but—" and she shrugged her shoulders. We had already had a glimpse of this, and had decided not even to eat there.

The clumsy woman, who had gone to fetch the key, came back with a red swollen face, and large tears rolling down her cheeks—her Breton was unintelligible, but we learned from our friend that she was telling about a dying sister, who had suddenly grown worse—it was touching to see the sympathy created among the neighbours as the poor woman went back sobbing to her cottage—but they said the sister would linger some time yet.

A quaint group of women had now collected before the church, almost all dressed alike, black gowns—in some faded almost to green—the square opening of the under body trimmed with broad black ribbon velvet, velvet also round the cuffs of the tight-fitting black sleeves; down each front of the corset worn over the body was a row of silver buttons, set so close that the edges overlapped one another; the armholes of this corset were also bordered with very broad black velvet. The square opening in front of the body was filled by a white neckerchief fastened at the throat by a pin; this relieved the otherwise sombre garb; for, except for the apron and silver buttons, all the rest was black or dark blue, unless the wind, or any other accident, displayed the coloured lining of the hood. The aprons were of coarse woollen, of several colours; this stuff is spun and woven by the peasant women out of any woollen material they can get; they will even ravel out worn woollen stockings or an old petticoat and spin the wool so collected into fresh yarn.

The women seemed surprised that we should care to visit the church; the inquisitive traveller was clearly a novelty to them. It is an ancient chapel of the Priory of St. Gildas, the ruins of which still exist on the opposite side of the river. The interior of this church or chapel is very curious. Four praying figures project from the four central columns; below the waggon-headed roof is a richly carved wooden frieze, and in one of the transepts this carving is equally perfect and remarkable; grotesque heads are united by a waving border of serpents and dragons issuing from the carved mouths. The whitewashed beams, too, are carved, the ends fixed into huge dragon mouths, which project from the frieze. In one corner of the nave we saw a large bell; there was not a seat of any kind in the church; the whitewashed walls were green with damp, and the floor was of uneven clay; there was no sign of daily use about the place, and it felt so damp, that we were glad to get back into the golden sunshine outside.

A little way on beyond the church, down a narrow, green lane, still on the right, we came to a flight of broken, moss-grown stone steps. These led into a good-sized square enclosure, paved with broken flagstones and surrounded by ruined walls overgrown with trees and ivy; ferns and grasses springing from the joints of the stonework. In the centre stood a grand old fountain

going fast to decay; brambles flaunted great red arms from the ivy covered top, and between them showed a richly crocketed canopy, surmounting the empty niche of the saint of the fountain.

While we stood wondering whether this had not in former years been the bourne of some pilgrimage, a woman came down the steps carrying a pail in one hand and bearing a large brown pitcher on her head. She was dressed like the rest of the villagers, and had the same awkward, half-savage ways. She glared at us for an instant from under her hood, and then knelt down and filled her pail and her pitcher, but so clumsily, and with such waste of water, that she must have soaked her heavy blue skirts and filled her *sabots* with the splashing; she certainly wore no stockings to suffer by the wetting. It was strange not to find a trace of the adroit deftness of French women in these large-eyed, sad-faced, clumsy village Bretonnes; coquetry and grace seemed equally unknown to them; as a Frenchman said, "*il n'y a pas l'ombre de séduction chez ces femmes.*"

Coming down through the pretty little village again—wondering how it could be so near the world and yet so out of it—we found several women standing knitting at the cottage doors; they were evidently waiting for our re-appearance, but not one of them could speak French; a shake of the head, and a grin showing the long front teeth, and "*ja—ja*," was the universal answer to our questions. One of my companions opened his book to sketch a group of children perfect in their dress and attitudes, but after staring wonderstruck for a few minutes they all started away in dumb terror.

Now that we were sure about the fête, we resolved to go on to Baud and return next morning to St. Nicodème, for it was evidently impossible to stay at St. Nicholas; the cabaret was wofully dirty, and the mistress pointed out to us, with much triumph, a huge pile of dark-looking loaves on the filthy floor ready for the fair.

We asked if we could have a carriage, and she called a sulky-looking lad to answer us.

He came gnawing a straw.

"A carriage!" he said, contemptuously. "*Dame oui*, I should think so. If *messieurs et dame* will come with me I will arrange for them with Jean-Jacques."

We followed him up the road a few yards. At the door of a cottage sat an old beggar dressed in a ragged shirt, drab trousers, and gaiters. Long grey hair streamed over his shoulders, and his bare chest showed through his open shirt-front.

A colloquy in Breton, and then to our dismay we learned that this dirty old bundle of rags was the Jean Jacques who would drive us to Baud, and that he would be ready directly.

"But there is no other vehicle?" we asked.

The sulky lad's contempt was beyond endurance. "No, there is no other vehicle, and people should think themselves lucky to get this; it is quite possible that some one will arrive by the next train who will want Jean Jacques and his white horse, and then where will *messieurs et madame* be?"

After this harangue he ran away, and having settled the bargain with Jean Jacques, whose French was execrable, we walked disconsolately down to the river, Jean Jacques, in a very cracked voice, calling something in Breton, which a woman told us signified that he would be ready in five minutes.

We sauntered on to the bridge and enjoyed the lovely view up and down the river, but the five minuets grew into thirty at least.

At last we heard a shout, and turning round to look up the road, we saw our vehicle. On inspection it proved to be a miserable little cart, without any springs. Two sacks stuffed with bean-straw were laid across the seat, and a little white horse stood between the shafts.

Our driver was sweeping the inside of the cart most vigorously with a hug broom made of the green broom plant. He had washed himself, and had wonderfully smartened his appearance. The upper portion of his rags were hidden by a white flannel jacket trimmed with black velvet, and small brass buttons; he wore a large flat black hat, also trimmed with black velvet; but the horse was deplorable, small, with drooping head, and looking as if his bones were unset, and he was only held together by his dirty white skin.

We clambered into the vehicle with heavy hearts; but no anticipation could have prepared us for the reality. Directly we started the jolting was terrible; and, besides this, the horse had a perpetual zigzag movement which sent us from side to side of the cart, and double the length of our journey. We tried to speak to our driver, but he shook his head imperiously, and answered in Breton, or French, almost as incomprehensible. One might have taken him for a hideous old wizard with his gleaming eyes and flowing grey hair, but for his religious reverence. At every church and every Calvary we passed he slackened his pace, uncovered, and mumbled a long prayer, after which he always whipped his horse violently, and jolted us worse than ever.

That drive to Baud was certainly "like a hideous dream," though it lay through a picturesque country, the road on each side constantly bordered by tall, slender, silver birch trees, through which we got glimpses of the Montagnes Noires. The climax of our torture was reached when we rattled over the stones at Baud; we got down with thankful hearts at the little inn.

Next morning was full of sunshine; and, having secured an easy carriage and a good horse, we started at an early hour for St. Nicodème. We soon overtook vehicles of all kinds going in the same direction, chiefly long carts with three or four benches or planks set across them; and these were crammed with men, women, and children in holiday costume, the salient points in which were the white jackets and huge black hats of the men, and the long white *coiffes* of the women. Black was the prevailing colour of their jackets and skirts. There were also numbers of men and women on foot, trudging along the road, many of them driving their pretty little cows before them. Sometimes we passed an old woman struggling with a refractory pig.

The fine grey spire of the Church of St. Nicodème was visible for some time before we reached it. At last we came to a road or lane on the right shaded by spreading chestnut trees, and our driver stopped.

These Breton side roads have a character peculiarly their own. In the north they are deeply sunk between high brake and furze-covered banks, along the tops of which is often a concealed footpath; but in the south these banks are lower, and, as at St. Nicodème, huge trees grow between them, and send their branches across from side to side so near the road that certainly the lofty hooded waggons of Normandy would find no room to pass under the leafy roof.

Our driver told us this side road led to the church; and, indeed, without the information we should have guessed this, as people were hastening into the lane from all directions. Our driver added that the road was too rough for his vehicle to go over, so we dismounted.

The lane was full of strings of people, men, women, and children, hurrying towards the church. We found it necessary to walk heedfully, for the road was channelled with deep cart ruts, and these were filled with mud and water. At the end of the lane we found ourselves in a bewildering throng of carts, horses, cows, pigs, and people crowded in front of and against the low stone wall that fences in the church and its celebrated fountain. At the moment a man had quite blocked up further passage by calmly plaiting the long cream-coloured tail of his horse.

St. Nicodème is a handsome stone building of the sixteenth century, with a fine tower and spire; but it is its



situation that is so charming. It stands in a sort of hollow; the ground rising from it on every side is planted chiefly with huge chestnut trees. Under the shade of these, beyond and beside the church, we saw a great crowd of people, all seemingly farmers and peasants—there appeared no mixture of bourgeois element; but before going into this crowd we turned aside to see the fountain. A visit to this is evidently an important part of the duty of the day. Three or four old women came towards us at once with jugs and cups of the holy water to drink and wash our faces in, for which they expect a few centimes: the fountain is of rather later date than the church; in one of the three compartments into which it is divided stands the figure of St. Nicodème, on one side of him a man and a woman are kneeling—they offer him an ox. In the other niches are St. Abibon with two men, one on horseback, the other kneeling, and St. Gamaliel between two pilgrims, one of whom offers him a pig. These saints are all Jews.

Men, and women too, were bathing their faces and eyes in the fountain, and also drinking water eagerly—the water is said to have antiseptic properties. Standing and lying about were dirty, picturesque beggars, intent on exhibiting their twisted and withered limbs and incurable wounds to passers by.

The finely sculpted portal of the church was thronged with these sufferers—some of them eating their breakfasts out of little basins. One ragged child held out a scallop-shell for alms, keeping up a whine of supplication. Among these squalid objects a beautiful butterfly was hovering—a baby child stretched up its hand crying for the insect. The interior of the church had evidently been so recently white-washed that there had been no time to wash the stains and splashes from the dirty flagstone pavement, and, as there were no chairs, this was covered by kneeling worshippers. The high altar was a blaze of lighted candles; grouped round it were some really rich crimson and white banners worked in gold; at a side altar a priest was saying a litany.

There were most picturesque figures among the kneeling worshipers, and through the groups two girls wandered up and down with bundles of lighters for the votive candles; some old women, too, carried about bundles of these candles. Many of the kneelers pulled my skirts to attract attention to a wounded leg or arm, or to inform me in a whisper that they were ready to pray to the Blessed Virgin and St. Nicodème to give me a safe journey if I had a few centimes to give away.

It was so cool within the church that the air felt oven-like when we came out again, although the grey old building was surrounded by huge spreading chestnut trees. Close to the church, ranged under the green fan-like leaves, were booths hung with strings of rosaries,

crosses, medals, badges; rings, ornamental pins for fastening the chemisettes and shawls of the peasant women, and other jewelry, were displayed in cases. Pretty silver rings bearing the image of St. Nicodème were selling rapidly at a fabulously low price.

In other booths were set forth a store of large gaudily-coloured prints of various saints and sacred objects; chief amongst them was a gorgeous full length of St. Nicodème, wearing the papal tiara, a violet cassock, green chasuble, and scarlet mantle. Over his head, in a golden nimbus, a bright green dove descended on the saint, who stood between a tall poplar tree and a palm bursting into blossoms of various colours; there were hymns on either side of the paper. A carter with his whip under his arm the heavy lash twisted round his neck, knelt down reverently to look at this gorgeous print, and a withered old man leaned over him to explain the words, which were in French; to them it was plainly as impressive as if it had been a work of art. Further on, the open glen behind the church was crowded with people, buying, selling, eating, drinking—here were booths for clothes and crockery, and stands for eatables and drinkables. An old man was selling sieves, wooden bowls, and boxes heaped up on the grass—sieves are in great demand at this harvest season.

Near the church, against the ivy-covered trunk of an enormous chestnut tree, several men were seated, with lathered faces, two were being shaved; the others patiently waited their turn. The rapidity of the barbers was most amusing. Two used the soap brush and two the razor, and their labours seemed to be unending. We thought the edge of the razor could not be worth much, judging by the stiff, stubbly-looking chins. It is customary to let the beard grow some weeks before the festival of St. Nicodème, and then to be clean shaved in the early morning. We came upon many of these *al fresco* barber shops under the trees in different parts of the fair.

As we walked through the crowd we saw how varied and picturesque the dress of the men was; the jacket generally of white flannel cut square at the neck, trimmed with black velvet, with a row of embroidery thereon and strings of metal buttons; the outside pockets of these jackets were cut into seven or eight vandykes bound with black velvet, each of the points being fastened by a brass or silver button. The black beaver or felt hats were enormous in the brim, very low-crowned, and trimmed with a band of broad black velvet fastened by a silver buckle, two ends hanging behind. The trousers and knee breeches were chiefly blue or white linen, although some were of black and brown velveteen, loose, but without the bagginess so common in Lower Brittany. The older men wore black gaiters reaching to the knees and fastened by a close row of tiny buttons. Round the waist many of them wore a broad, thick, buff leather belt with quaint metal clasps.



This hung so low and loosely that it seemed worn only for ornament. We asked a tall Breton farmer with bare feet thrust into his *sabots* what was the use of this belt. "It has none," he said complacently; "I wear it for fashion's sake." The waistcoat was also white flannel, with so many rows of embroidered velvet that it had the effect of several waistcoats worn one above another; four or five dozen silver buttons were set in two rows down each side of the outer waistcoat so closely that the edges of the buttons overlapped. This costume was, perhaps, the most uncommon we saw. The older men wore their hair very long, hanging over their shoulders almost to their waists; their dark, gleaming eyes and thick, straight eyebrows gave them a fierce appearance.

Some of the men were tall, and they all stalked about among the women as if they were beings of a different order. Each sex herded chiefly in groups apart, except that the men took the centre of the fair as their right, and paced up and down like princes. There were no curious strangers present, except ourselves, and yet they took little notice of us. Even when we got farther up the glen and more into the crowds we saw no mixture of townfolk; it was a festival of peasants.

We were specially struck by the face of a fine old man with flowing white hair, but most malevolent black eyes, who stood fanning with his broad-leaved beaver hat a gridiron full of silvery sardines, frizzling and crackling over a pan of charcoal on the grass. When they were cooked, he speedily found customers for them. Close by was a stand covered with huge loaves of buckwheat bread, which were finding ready sale; and as we moved on we saw impromptu fireplaces in all directions. On one side a huge steaming pipkin hung from a tripod of sticks; from this a coarse *ragoût* of meat and potatoes sent out a not too savoury smell. Farther on a large pot of coffee stood on a glowing lump of charcoal. And now we came upon booths with cold eatables displayed on the stalls: sausages of all kinds, and a sort of cold meat pudding, in great request, but by no means of enticing aspect, the meat being stewed in a goose skin or a bladder with plenty of pepper. Farther back from the main avenue, under the trees, were carts full of immense cider-barrels covered with fresh green brake. A woman wearing the costume we had seen the day before at St. Nicholas stood at a table in front of one of these carts drawing cider as fast as she could into jugs, glasses &c.; and all round her were groups of men talking together, and getting less silent and morose as they drank glass after glass and toasted one another.

A low stone wall, overgrown with grass, divided this wooded glen on the left from the country beyond, and atop of this wall a pleasant-looking countrywoman in a well-starched, spotless white muslin *coiffe*, the two broad-hemmed lappets pinned together behind her head, had spread out her wares on a gay-coloured

handkerchief. Caps and collars, and chemisettes were displayed to the best advantage in this elevated position—she sat on the wall beside her goods, smiling and chattering with all who passed by, and driving a good trade too, though it was puzzling to know how her customers would dispose of such easily crumpled articles in the ever-moving crowd.

So far we had been struck by the quiet and decorum of the scene, it was really too quiet—there was so little jollity in it, none of the repartee and the merry laughter we have so often heard in a Norman market. Men and women alike looked serious and self-contained—the happiest faces where those of the dear little children toddling and tumbling about in all directions; some of these, in their close-fitting skull caps, thick woollen skirts, reaching to their heels, and large white collars, were perfect little Velasquez figures; others wore round hats, set on the back of their heads; almost all had clear complexions, and handsome, large round dark eyes.

Still farther on we heard a rather monotonous beat of drum. There was a performance going on; but it seemed only to consist in the explanation, in drawling recitative, of pictures exhibited by the showman. Behind this we found ourselves in the cattle-market, a part of the glen where the grass was less worn away and the trees more thickly planted. The sunshine here came in golden chequers and patterns through the broad leafy boughs on the men who stood about plaiting and unplaiting the long tails of their horses, and on women who dragged their pretty little black and white cows along, sometimes by a rope fastened to the horns, sometimes by the horns themselves, but quite as often they hurried on regardless of everybody, with the cow's head gripped tightly under one arm, chattering eagerly in Breton. Pigs were also being hauled about, filling the air with noise. One woman had got a pig by the tail and dragged it squealing through the thickest of the crowd; another had fastened a rope to her pig's leg and was coaxing it in a way that reminded us of the nursery story. There was plenty of noise here, rude rough voices, and much gesticulation, as they vociferated guttural Breton at one another; it was difficult to move, too, through the confused mass of people and animals. No one seemed to care or to look where he or she went—it was apparently assumed that every one would take care of himself or herself; lacking this, there was every chance of being knocked down and trampled under foot by the crowd or the cattle.

There had been an auction of beasts going on under the trees; groups of wild-looking men, with long hair streaming over their black embroidered jackets—they wore larger hats than any we had as yet seen—were talking fiercely about the cattle, with much gesticulation, and with flashing eyes. These were Finistère men, from Scäer and Bannalec. We were told that the design

embroidered on the back of their coats signified the Blessed Sacrament; they looked far more savage and determined than the white-coated men of Morbihan, and they were less sullen and silent.

There was abundant variety too in the costume of the women. We saw gorgeous green gowns, trimmed with broad, black velvet, both on the skirt and on the sort of double body which answers to the coat and waistcoat of the men. The black velvet was covered with gold and scarlet embroidery. The head-gear of St. Nicholas, with the brilliant green, scarlet, or yellow linings, was most abundant; but there was besides a large proportion of white *coiffes* and caps and quaintly-shaped collars. Most of the women wore gold or silver hearts and crosses, depending from a velvet ribbon round the throat. Few of them showed any hair on their foreheads, and it is perhaps the absence of this, added to the large, melancholy eyes, which gives so solemn an expression to the face of the Bretonne peasant. She tells you that she had her hair cut off because there is no room for it under the *coiffe*; besides, once married, women rarely show their hair; in reality, they sell it to the travelling barber who will give the best price for it.

Wherever space could be found among the trees long booths were set up, some of them garlanded with green boughs. Looking through one of the low-arched openings, we saw a striking rustic picture—tables running from one end to the other, covered with bottles and glasses, hard-featured men and women sitting alternately on each side. The men were evidently drinking cider hard, but at present, at any rate, the women had empty glasses in front of them, and were listening to the conversation their lords held with each other across the table—all looked as serious as if the fête were a funeral.

Formerly all the cattle of the neighbourhood, decorated with ribbons, were led in procession to the church to be blessed, drums beating and banners flying; but this custom seems to have been given up, through some animals are still offered to St. Nicodème, and these are sold afterwards at higher prices than the rest, as the presence of one of them in a stable is supposed to bring luck. The penitents go in procession barefooted and bearing lighted candles on the eve of the festival and receive absolution; and it is to be hoped that these were the visitors who left the fête early, for by three o'clock most of the men had been drinking hard.

Time was going fast, and we began to be curious as to the hour of the descent of the angel, which our friend at St. Nicholas said was the best part of the fête. Asking a smart young girl who sold lemonade, we learned that it would come down after vespers, and we made our way back through the crowd to the rising ground on the left of the church. Already the cider was beginning to take

effect: there was much more noise and chatter; the men stood about in groups, in eager discussion, using rapid, vehement gesticulation. The heat had become overpowering, the sun seemed to scorch us as we walked, but the chestnut trees on this hill side were even larger than those below, and so long as we could remain under them there was dense and most refreshing shade.

The interest was now concentrated on a large open space around the Calvary which stood on the rising ground. Close beside it was a tall pole, with a large heap of brushwood piled high up round its base. A man was going up a ladder placed against this pole, fixing on it, at intervals, hoops covered with red and blue paper, and finally he fastened a painted flag on top of all.

Presently we saw that a cord was being lowered from the top of the lofty church tower. Several eager watchers among the chestnut trees below secured the end of this cord when it reached the ground, and brought it in triumph to a post at the foot of the pole, about one hundred yards from the church. The cord was fastened securely below a square box set on the top of the post, and from this time a breathless suspense hung over the swaying, rugged-looking crowd, that is, the elders and the children. The younger men and women seemed to choose this time for walking up and down, in and out, through the groups of gazers, some sending saucy, others sheepish glances at one another, without the exchange of any words. We were especially amused in watching three young, pretty, and very gaily-dressed girls, who walked up and down, looking neither right nor left, but evidently considering themselves the belles of the fête. A little man with twisted legs, with a joke for everyone, seemed in universal favour. He was no doubt the *bazvalan*, the tailor match-maker of the neighbourhood. We saw his cunning dark face and keen, black, restless eyes in all parts of the throng, and, to judge by his long colloquies with some of the older matrons, he was doing a profitable business, for it appears that Breton peasant's marriages are still made by means of that worthy. He was almost the only man who seemed to talk much to the women.

All at once the bell rang out for vespers; the *bazvalan* and most of the women and children flocked into the church, followed by a few of the men.

Meantime the throng of men about us increased—those who had been drinking in the booths came across to the Calvary, and we had full opportunity of studying their dark remarkable faces.

There is no need for the Breton to disclaim, as he does, any kindred with the French; these peasants, especially the men of Morbihan and Finistère, are a race apart; with their long, dark, deep-set eyes gleaming under thick

dark eyebrows, their tangled hair spreading over the shoulders, and often reaching almost to the waist, their dark skins and long straight noses, and their quaint costume, they are wholly un-French. They are taller, too, and larger framed than the generality of Frenchmen are; they look more powerful, both physically and mentally, and they have a seriousness, amounting to dignity, which is wholly distinctive.

Even when he is drunk, and this is a too frequent occurrence, the Breton strives to be self-controlled and quiet. When he is sober, there is a touch of the North American Indian in his stolid indifference, and also in the contempt with which he regards his spouse; for the Breton peasant-woman, spite of her rich costume on Sundays and gala days, is after marriage a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water, the slave of her, too often, drunken, unfeeling, husband. It is possibly this slavery which takes away self-respect, and gives to the married Bretonne the clumsiness and half savage manner which must strike every stranger, as much as her want of gaiety and lightheartedness.

All at once there was a stir among the crowd. It had been impossible to stand waiting near the pole exposed to the full blaze of the sun, so we had taken shelter under the huge chestnut leaves; but we ventured into the sunshine now, for the excitement was contagious. Almost before we had reached the pole, we saw coming down the cord a pretty little angel about three feet high, with bright golden wings. It stood an instant beside the post to which the rope was fastened, and then went up again and remained stationary outside the tower. The only sound heard in the breathless silence of the crowd being the click, click of the wheels on which the little creature moved.

This was a trial descent, it being necessary to make sure that the machinery acted properly before the real descent took place.

We stood our ground bravely for another quarter of an hour in that scorching sunshine. The heat has grown so intense that the sticks and furze bushes piled round the pole in readiness for the bonfire, feel as if they came out of an oven. Suddenly the bells peal loudly, and a glittering procession comes singing out of the church, with lighted candles, crosses, and crimson and gold banners. First come the choristers, then the priests, and then a long train of men and women, chanting as they come. As soon as the procession has circled the hill, it halts; bang, bang, bang go the guns from the church-tower, and down comes the pretty little angel, this time very rapidly, its bright wings flashing in the sunshine; in one outstretched hand it holds a match, and touches first the box on the post, and then the bonfire—a peasant, with many coloured ribbons in his hat, who has been making all ready, helps the angel's work—there is

a loud, deafening explosion, then a discharge of squibs and crackers from the box, and then the furze and faggots of the bonfire ignite and blaze fiercely. The heat has made the piled-up faggots like touchwood; the sudden blaze is electrifying; long tongues of red flame leap up till they reach the first of the hoops on the pole—Bang, bang, bang! And off go the fireworks of which it is composed. The noise is tremendous and ear-splitting, and the flames go leaping higher and higher till all the suspended fireworks, including the flag at top, have exploded; blazing and banging, and dispersing themselves in shreds of flying fire above the heads of the excited crowd. ...

The whole scene seemed made for a painter; these tall black browed men, with their powerful savage faces and long, streaming hair, their white flannel coats and huge black hats—all faces upturned to the red ever-mounting flame; every now and then some man or boy dashed frantically almost into the swaying fire and snatched one of the flying shreds of burning paper to preserve it as a relic...

The heat of the sun was still so intense, though evening was coming on, that the men could scarcely bear to keep their hats raised above their heads as the procession wound once more slowly round the Calvary and returned to the church.

... We heard that the fête would last for two days; but as there seemed to be no preparation made for either dancing or wrestling, we preferred to leave St. Nicodème before dusk, for more drinking was plainly to wind up the proceedings of the day, and it was evident that the greater number of the crowd would spend the night on the ground, either in the carts which showed everywhere among the tree trunks, or on the grass under the chestnut boughs.

We found it very difficult to leave the fête. Around the booths and outside the church, carts and cattle seemed mingled in inextricable confusion; and even when we struggled through the leafy lane and regained the main road, it was thronged by groups as anxious to get away as we were; though several of these, seemed to have lingered too long in the cider booths. We saw men, women, and children fast asleep beside the road, with cows, and sheep, and pigs grazing, and bleating, and grunting around them—in some cases straying so far down the dusty road that we wondered whether the owners would succeed in overtaking them. We passed one man, on horseback—half-asleep—who, in happy ignorance of the ridiculous figure he cut, was seated with his face to the animal's tail, nodding and swaying from side to side so violently that he and his beast would certainly soon part.





# Letter from the ICDBL in Brussels Belgium to French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin

KUZUL ETREVROADEL  
EVIT KENDALC'H  
AR BREZHONEG



COMITE INTERNACIONAL  
PARA LA SALVAGUARDIA DE  
LA LENGUA BRETONA

+  
COMITATO INTERNAZIONALE  
PER LA DIFESA DELLA  
LINGUA BRETONE

COMITE INTERNATIONAL  
POUR LA SAUVEGARDE DE LA  
LANGUE BRETONNE

+  
INTERNATIONAAL COMITE  
TER BESCHERMING VAN DE  
BRETONSE TAAL

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE  
BRETON LANGUAGE

+  
INTERNATIONALER AUSSCHUSS  
FUR DIE ERHALTUNG DER  
BRETONISCHEN SPRACHE

ICDBL, 7 avenue des Tritons, B-1170 Brussels

Brussels, August 31, 2002

Mr. Jean-Pierre RAFFARIN  
Prime Minister - Hotel Matignon  
F 75700 PARIS

Mr. Prime Minister,

Founded in 1975 by non breton personalities, the International Committee for the Defence of the Breton Language (ICDBL), informs the international public opinion of the refusal of the French State to recognize this language and to put an end to the discriminations it remains the victim.

Actually, in spite of more than 30 statute proposals for the regional languages of France submitted to the National Assembly, all of them were barred from the agenda of this assembly. This denial of democracy inspired by an hostile central administration reduced thus to nothing the initiatives of the elected members of the nation.

The new approach which characterizes your appointment as Prime Minister encourages us to plead to you and your Minister for Education, Mr. Luc FERRY, the cause of the DIWAN's schools integration in the state body. Without this, they would be condemned to financial stifling. As a former president of the Atlantic Arc, your knowledge of France's backwardness towards regional languages might have been illustrated by comparing it with the liberal treatment enforced in favour of minority languages by the countries of this area.

The French "exception" in this field damages France's prestige, as your country excludes regional idioms of its territory from the positive treatment claimed outside for the French language.

With paraphing in 1992 the European Chart of regional and minority languages, France seemed to put up a good show at the level of the Council of Europe. This attitude proved, alas, to be a mere pretence. Indeed, a few months later, it modified its Constitution by adding that "solely French is the language of the Republic". Coincidence or duplicity : the government created thus himself the obstacle to the recognition of the regional languages. In this way was prepared the negative opinion of the State Council rejecting the later initiative of the Minister Jack LANG relating to the integration of the DIWAN schools.

Amazingly, some ultranationalist groups, pertaining to specific obediences of the national education system, refer to the secularity of the State, thus diverted from its true meaning, at the point that they liken teaching a regional language to a religious matter. This argumentation hides probably a less unselfish motivation, tied with the will to protect their monopoly. They hide the fact that the pupils of the DIWAN system obtain better school results than the average level. In an highly predominant french speaking environment, the alleged fear of seeing the French language weakened by teaching mainly in Breton reveals as much hypocrisy as intolerance. The dangers run by the French language cannot be imputed to some 2000 DIWAN's pupils...

Finally, the idea that French could blossom through eliminating the regional languages ignores the moral and political consequences of this process for the reputation of France on the international scene.

Hoping of your part a positive impulse in favour of this too long pending case, we assure you, Mr. Prime Minister, of our high consideration.

The President  
Pr. Claude STERCKX

The Secretary General  
Monique BLAISE

Attachments: 2

Copies to: - Mr. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic  
Mr. Luc FERRY, Minister of Education  
Mr. Josselin de ROHAN, President of the Regional Council of Brittany  
ICDBL branches in the world  
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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE  
BRETON LANGUAGE



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7/9/2000 (JPC036)

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