

BRO NEVEZ

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

GOUREN
breton wrestling
a sport for everybody



KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

No. 88

November 2003

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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.

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.

The **Canadian Branch of the ICDBL** was relaunched January 1998. For information about the Canadian ICDBL contact: Jeffrey D. O'Neill, 1111 Broadview Ave. #205, Toronto, Ontario, M4K 2S4, CANADA (e-mail: jdkoneill@sympatico.ca). Telephone: (416) 422-0748.

U.S. ICDBL website: www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm

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## FROM THE EDITOR

There's good news and there's bad news as school settles in this fall. The good news is that the demand for Breton language classes continues to climb at all levels in the public school and Catholic school bilingual programs. And the demand for Breton is climbing also for adult learners who squeeze in classes in the evening or weekends. It's never too late to learn Breton, even if the fluency that comes quickly to a Diwan preschooler immersed in Breton for play and learning is likely to elude adults who have a much more limited exposure.

The bad news is that for the first time Diwan did not grow this year, and is facing severe financial problems. Diwan continues to operate as a public education system to offer an effective means for children to master Breton as a living language (by its immersion program). This option is not offered in the State recognized public schools, and Diwan receives only a limited amount of public funding. The hard work of parents and teachers to do fundraising to close the gap is not sufficient. Other bad news is that there seems to be a number of politicians (at all levels of government) who are afraid of the Breton language and they are quite vocal in depicting those working for it (and especially the Diwan schools) as dangerous fanatics and isolationists. One has to ask why in the world anyone would be afraid of the Breton language? What possible threat does its survival and, dare we hope, expanded use pose to anyone? The answer is of course NONE. France has everything to gain in encouraging and supporting the cultural diversity within its borders. So why do Bretons have to constantly fight for the most basic resources they need to keep their culture healthy and growing?

## A New School Year for Diwan

This school year Diwan has 2,761 students enrolled in 33 schools found in 30 different towns and cities. For the first time in Diwan's history, enrollment is down. One might not think that having 7 less students than last school year is cause for concern, but while the high school and three middle schools have increased attendance there is a drop of about 100 children at the preschool level this year. Growth at the higher levels is as expected with younger children moving up through primary school to continue at middle school and high school. And students from the public and Catholic bilingual programs also transfer into the upper levels.

The drop in enrollment at the preschool level has Diwan staff concerned, especially since there has been growth at this level in the bilingual programs of the public schools and Catholic schools. The following statistics for Diwan and bilingual school program enrollments were provided by Ofis ar Brezhoneg and passed along to me by Canadian ICDBL Representative, Jeff O'Neill. And I also used statistics for 2002 from a report published in the September 2003 Kannadig of the Union of Breton Teachers. There is a slight variance in numbers between these two sources as enrollments settle in the fall, but the following chart will give a fairly accurate idea of where things stand.

|                              | Pre School | Primary School | Middle School | High School | Total 2003 | Total 2002 |
|------------------------------|------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Diwan                        | 951        | 1082           | 564           | 164         | 2761       | 2768       |
| Div Yezh<br>(Public schools) | 1662       | 1213           | 312           | 76          | 3263       | 2944       |
| Dihum<br>(Catholic Schools)  | 1387       | 1266           | 200           | 0           | 2853       | 2459       |
| TOTAL                        | 4000       | 3561           | 1076          | 240         | 8877       | 8171       |

The good news is that in the bilingual programs of the public and Catholic schools numbers continue to climb as families choose an option where their children have more than a token exposure to Breton. The bad news is that Diwan did not continue its growth at the lower levels this year. The loss in numbers for preschool enrollments is due to a number of different causes – some of which can be corrected. Diwan leaders identify a failure to invest time in recruitment of new families as a big factor. More work needs to be done to attract families to the unique immersion style of Diwan schools. Recruitment is challenging. The financial difficulties for Diwan do not inspire confidence in new parents, and limited budgets mean that school buildings are often substandard and in need of beautification and expansion. The need to travel a long distance to take one's children to the closest Diwan school can be an obstacle as well for some potential parents.

The changes in Diwan leadership and internal factions of the past year have drained the energies of parents away from work to promote their schools, but is not viewed as a major factor in discouraging new

enrollment. But, Diwan does have an image problem to conquer – a problem thrust upon it by those who fear the Breton language. The blockage of Diwan's entry into the public school system by the Council of State gives Diwan schools an air of "illegality". Diwan is in contradiction to the French Constitution. French politicians have increased attacks on Diwan, accusing its system of immersion teaching through the Breton language of being "isolationist," promoting a closed off view of the world. Parents who want their children to learn Breton are urged to consider the less "extreme" bilingual programs in the public and Catholic schools where French and Breton are balanced 50-50.

Such accusations and implications of "isolationism" are groundless. Anyone who has met a Diwan student (at any level of schooling) or who has visited a Diwan school knows that children are not being encouraged to isolate themselves from the rest of the world. Indeed, Diwan's immersion method of teaching Breton helps children master other languages more easily. By the time students reach high school they have already studied English (as

well as being fluent in both French and Breton) and are ready to tackle new languages. In choosing optional classes this year, 27 Diwan high school students are learning Arabic, 11 Spanish and 7 German, in addition to continuing English studies. As just one example of international outreach, one can look to Skol Diwan Kemperle where an exchange has been established with a French immersion school here in the U.S. In daily e-mail exchanges of news, the students practice the English they are learning as well as French and some Breton.

While a drop in enrollment at the preschool level for Diwan is cause for concern, it does not mean that Diwan does not continue to move forward in its work to help children learn Breton as a living language. The Diwan school continue to offer children a solid education – an education that is expansive and most definitely not isolationist.

## HELP!!

As an educational system, Diwan continues to flourish, but Diwan has a financial crisis and need to raise over 200,000 Euros by the end of 2003 in order to pay all teachers' salaries. Diwan has gone to the Regional Council of Brittany for some extra assistance but has been turned down. The Council felt it had already given enough and that parents needed to dig into their pockets to support the schools themselves. But, parents have already dug deep into their pockets and spend enormous amounts of time on fundraising activities for their schools. Some help from the rest of us is badly needed. YOU CAN HELP. If you have not already sent an extra donation to the U.S. ICDBL for Diwan, now is the time! Every little bit helps. Make your check out to the "U.S. ICDBL" and earmark it "Diwan contribution."

Send it to: Lois Kuter / U.S. ICDBL  
169 Greenwood Ave., B-4, Jenkintown, PA 19046

## EUROPE AND DIWAN

As you read in the August issue of Bro Nevez, Europeans are well aware of the French efforts to block expansion for Diwan. The article below (reprinted by permission of Eurolang) further underlines the irrationality of opposition to the immersion method of teaching Breton. And as you will read below, "Eurolang," a European on-line news agency, has also put out a call for donations to Diwan.

## EUROLANG 28/10/03

### State and union intransigence as Diwan Breton-medium schools face cash crisis *Bruxelles / Brussel 28/10/03, by Davyth Hicks*

The Diwan Breton bilingual immersion schools are facing a cash crisis and will not be able to pay their teachers until 2004. Speaking exclusively to Eurolang, Anna Vari Chapalain, Diwan Director, called on all those 'who believe that a language should be allowed to live and who believe in linguistic diversity' to make a donation to Diwan.

She underlined how 'Diwan is open to all, free of charge for parents, and operated like a public service. We have nearly 3,000 children at all levels of education and practice bilingualism in the schools'.

Diwan needs another 250,000 euros to tide itself over the coming months. The problem is expected to be overcome in 2004 as some of the newer schools are able to draw on public money after they have been open for five years. However, it still leaves little money for planning and development - essential for the Breton regeneration effort. Moreover, with most Breton speakers (there are an estimated 295,000 speakers) over the age of sixty, immersion education will need to expand rapidly in order to prevent a sharp decline in the number of speakers.

The Breton Regional Council, headed by Josselin de Rohan, was approached by Diwan in September for 195,000 euros, but yesterday, in a letter to Diwan, Mr Rohan stated that they would not be able to help.

Diwan have had to rely on voluntary parental contributions coupled with some state funding for their teachers, but there has never really been enough money to meet the increasing parental demand for Breton immersion education. The decision by the Conseil d'Etat in 2002 not to include the Diwan in the public sector, following complaints by trade unions such as the UNSA-Education and Federation des Conseils de Parents d'eleves des Ecoles Publiques (FCPE), struck a cruel blow against the schools.

This decision was in reaction to a plan drawn up by Minister for Education, Jack Lang, to integrate the schools allowing them to be funded by public money. It means that, while Bretons pay tax for French-medium education in Brittany anyway, if they want their children to go to a Diwan school they may voluntarily pay extra for this.



Eurolang spoke to Eddy Khaldi, a federal councillor for UNSA, to ask how they felt about the current crisis. He was of the opinion that the crisis was nothing to do with the UNSA even though they had co-sponsored the complaint that resulted in the Conseil d'Etat decision. He restated the UNSA position that it 'did not like the immersion method' and that such a method 'led to segregation'. While the UNSA is 'for the teaching of regional languages, it is also for national unity in the public sector'. He added that 'the Republic is not able to finance all the choices'.

Gilbert Lambrecht spokesperson for FCPE also spoke to Eurolang, he emphasised that they are 'in favour of regional languages' but that the Diwan schools 'must abide by the law'. He was referring to Article 2 of the constitution which states that French is the language of the Republic (established in 1992) and, by implication, publicly funded education.

'If people want to change the constitution they must create a lobby and have a large amount of public opinion behind them'. Asked why they decided to challenge Jack Lang's decision he said that 'they were politicians in a rush before elections, there should have been more consultation'. When UNSA and FCPE decided that the inclusion was against French law the unions saw fit to take the issue to the Conseil d'Etat, the highest court in the land.

Eurolang asked why, even though evidence from across Europe provides ample evidence of the success of immersion education, his union was so against this teaching method. He said that the 'immersion cannot be taken as a model' and repeated that 'Diwan schools must abide by the law if they wish to access public money'. He added that 'it would make little sense to have two schools in one town, one Breton-medium, one French-medium', despite parental demand.

Asked about the way forward out of the crisis he said that: 'Diwan can either change their teaching method or try to change the constitution'. Eurolang said that if Breton taxpayers wanted immersion education surely they were entitled to it, 'not if it's against the law', said Mr Lambrecht.

The Diwan schools teach bilingually, introducing French by the second year of primary school, but place emphasis on creating a Breton speaking milieu in the school, much like the successful Welsh and Catalan medium schools. Breton bilingual schooling makes up less than 2% of the Breton school-going population.

Breton MEP Bernard Poignant was contacted but was on holiday.

Donations to Diwan can be sent by cheque in euros made out to 'Diwan Breizh' to the following address:

Diwan  
Z.A. Sant Ernel  
B.P. 147  
29411 Landerne Cedex.

For more information about minority languages in Europe, explore the Eurolang web site: [eurolang.net](http://eurolang.net)

## **IMMERSION LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IN THE U.S.A.**

Here in the U.S., teaching students a new language by "immersing" them in it is widely recognized as an effective method to help children master languages. In an article published August 2003 on the internet as part of the Educational Resources Information Center's (ERIC) Resource Guide Online, the merits of immersion programs are clearly explained. This article is called "What Parents Want to Know About Foreign Language Immersion Programs" and was written by Tara W. Fortune (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota) and Diane J. Tedick (Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Minnesota).

They define the goals of a foreign language immersion program as follows: "The goal of immersion is to provide educational experiences, beginning in kindergarten and ideally sustained through Grade 12, that support academic and linguistic development in two languages and develop students' appreciation of their own and other cultures." Hey, that sounds exactly like what Diwan does!

They further note the specific advantages of immersion teaching: "Becoming bilingual opens the door to communicate with more people in more places, and many parents want to provide their children with skills to interact competently in an increasingly interdependent world community." Further ... "In addition to reaping the social and economic advantages of bilingualism, immersion learners benefit cognitively, exhibiting greater nonverbal problem-solving abilities and more flexible thinking." Hey! That correspond exactly with the reasons parents in Brittany send their kids to Diwan schools.

You can find the full version of this article at:  
<http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/0304fortune.html>.  
 For more information about immersion and bilingual language programs and research in the U.S., I recommend starting with the web site for the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL): <http://www.cal.org>

## FRENCH IMMERSION SCHOOLS IN THE U.S.

According to the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the U.S. (website [www.frenchculture.org](http://www.frenchculture.org)) there are some 40 French immersion programs in the U.S. – that is, 40 public school districts which offer instruction through a French immersion program. More than 100 actual schools are involved with 12,000 students and 600 teachers and assistants in 18 different states.

## OTHER LANGUAGES IN THE U.S.

Many U.S. readers probably saw an article in your local newspaper in October about non-English languages spoken in American homes. In my newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* the headlines read: “20 percent in U.S. use no English at home.” This rather alarmist headline is in fact incorrect. While 2000 census data reveals that nearly one in five people in the U.S. speaks a language other than English at home, this does not mean that they do not also speak English at home. For both the 1990 and 2000 census, the following question was asked concerning language.

11. a) *Does this person speak a language other than English at home?*

\_\_\_ yes  
 \_\_\_ no

- b) *What is this language?*

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(for example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese)

- c) *How well does this person speak English?*

\_\_\_ very well  
 \_\_\_ well  
 \_\_\_ not well  
 \_\_\_ not at all

It is important to note that this question was in a form of the census questionnaire sent to 15% of the population. The totals for languages spoken are derived using a mathematical formula; they do not reflect an actual head count of people speaking a particular language. Here are the top twenty languages besides English that the census found to be spoken in peoples' homes in the U.S., and the number of people 5 and older speaking them, according to the U.S. Census.

|               |            |
|---------------|------------|
| Spanish       | 28,101,052 |
| Chinese       | 2,022,143  |
| French        | 1,643,838  |
| German        | 1,382,613  |
| Tagalog       | 1,224,241  |
| Vietnamese    | 1,009,627  |
| Italian       | 1,008,370  |
| Korean        | 894,063    |
| Russian       | 706,242    |
| Polish        | 667,414    |
| Arabic        | 614,582    |
| Portuguese    | 564,630    |
| Japanese      | 477,997    |
| French Creole | 453,368    |
| Greek         | 365,436    |
| Hindi         | 317,057    |
| Persian       | 312,085    |
| Urdu          | 262,900    |
| Gujarati      | 235,988    |
| Armenian      | 202,708    |

Of a total population of 262,375,152 (people 5 and up), 215,423,557 speak English only at home (82.1%) and 46,951,595 speak a language other than English at home (17.9%). The total population of the U.S. (including those under 5) is 281,421,906. Of these 31,107,889 were born in a foreign country (11.1% of the population).

The specific languages spoken in the U.S. and the number of speakers are closely correlated to immigration. But numbers don't tell the whole story and need to be interpreted carefully. You can get the “facts” on the census website: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), but I highly recommend consulting James Crawford's Home Page and his “Census 2000: A Guide for the Perplexed.” He also has a wealth of information on languages and language education in the U.S.: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jwcrawford/>

## Two Losses for the Breton Language

### Ronan Huon (1922-2003)

Born to Breton speaking parents from Plourin-les-Morlaix in Finistère, Ronan Huon grew up in Lannion. He went on to do university studies at the Faculté des Lettres in Rennes where he earned a diploma in Celtic Studies. He spent a year as a teaching assistant in Wales (1947-48) to perfect his English and learn Welsh, and also spent time in the U.S. (1967).

Ronan Huon was a writer and poet, but is probably best known for his work to provide a means for other Breton language writers to publish their works. In January 1945 he founded, with Pol Le Gourrierec, the review called Tir na n-Óg which would later become Al Liamm/Tir na n-Óg in 1949. At that time Al Liamm also became a publishing house for books in Breton: collections of poetry or short stories, drama, novels, essays, etc. Al Liamm has published over 200 works, including Ropartz Hemon's dictionaries and learning materials which have been so important for Breton learners during the past 50 years.

Publishing the Breton language is not a vocation you enter to get rich, but a labor of love to promote Breton language literature and writing. In this work, Ronan Huon was also the founder and Secretary for Kevredigezh ar Skrivagnerion (Association of Breton Writers) which allowed writers to work together to support the development of Breton literature and publishing.

To encourage Breton learners, Ronan Huon was also active as the cofounder of Kamp Etrekeltiek ar Vrezhonegerien in 1947 which he directed for twenty years. This "InterCeltic Camp for Breton Speakers" continues to thrive today during three weeks of the summer, and is conducted entirely through Breton - an immersive experience offering those with some ability to speak Breton to practice it in all activities.

Earning a living as a high school English teacher in Brest, Ronan Huon was active as a writer himself, translating a number of poems from English and Welsh into Breton, and likewise having his poetry and short stories translated by others into Dutch, Italian and Welsh. Fifty of his poems are found in the collection Evidon van unan and short stories are collected in An irin glas, Ha mat e chom ar bed, and Ur vouezh er vorenn.

It is safe to say that without the work of Ronan Huon to publish Breton language literature in a period when there was low public esteem for the Breton language, we would be missing quite a few very fine books, and thousands of pages of shorter works found in the 340 issues of Al Liamm published to date. Ronan Huon's life-long efforts to support Breton language writers have ended, but all the seeds he has sown in encouraging Breton writers will continue to grow.

### Jakez Konan (1910-2003)

Jakez Konan was born in Perros-Guirec in Côtes d'Armor and was a journalist until 1952 when he emigrated to Canada, living in Laval-des-Rapides, Quebec, and earning a living as an accountant. He returned to live in Brittany in 1976.

While in Canada and Brittany he was very active as a writer, publishing plays, short stories, poems, and translations in Breton in journals such as Gwalarn, Al Liamm, Feiz ha Breiz, Arvor and Barrheol. His translation of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves into Breton was published by Al Liamm in 1953. Forty of his short stories were published as a collection in 1980 with the title Lanneven e kann. He also published a short novel, Ar marc'hadour a Vontroulez in 1981 and was awarded the Xavier de Langlais Prize for his translation of Edouard Ollivro's Picou, fils de son père (Pikou, mab e dad) in 1983.

Jakez Konan's 1986 novel Kenavo Amerika was also awarded a coveted Langleiz Prize. Set in Canada it warns of the disintegration of civilization as nuclear wars devastate much of the world.

## New Technology for Breton (and other Celtic languages) **KAD - Korvigelloù An Drouizig**

KAD is a non profit organization devoted to promoting the use of the Breton language in the new technologies area. We maintain a web site (see <http://www.drouizig.org/drouizig/>) and we offer several goods and services to the Breton community, basically:

(1) - We are the authors of a free Breton spell and syntax checker for Microsoft Office (2000/2002/2003). This software is free and we have now about 500 users in the world. (number of downloads since November 2002).

(2) - We sell a C'HWERTY computer keyboard compatible with MS Windows 2000 and XP. This keyboard is designed to suit Breton speakers' needs. Basically here are its main features (excerpts from the online documentation):

- Optimal user-friendliness for data input of Breton texts (new dedicated keys C'H, CH, Ñ and Û).
- Full labelling of meta-keys in Breton (Reol, Erl, ArErl, Enankañ, Souzañ, Ensoc'hañ, Arsav Dibuniñ, ...).
- Handling of all Celtic languages, access to all diacritics including  $\hat{w}$   $\hat{y}$   $\hat{y}$   $\hat{w}$  for Welsh, allonged s & r, "dot less" i and dotted letters for older Irish. As a bonus, numerous Greek, business (€ ¥ £ ...), science characters, and others.
- French AZERTY keyboard enriched to suit French speakers and Latin language speakers needs (keys or access to œ, Œ, æ, Æ, Ÿ, É, Ç, «, », á, í, ó, ú, ...).
- Coding of diacritics and new characters are compliant to the emerging norm UNICODE 16bits.

(3) - We do software translation (mainly utilities and board games). We translated recently AbiWord

2.0 which is a free but performing text editor. We also did a first computer version of the Celtic Chess Game, the « Gwezboell » whose interface is in Breton. Many other software are available for download on our website.

(4) - Last but not least, we maintain and distribute about 40 Celtic fonts that are compliant with all the Celtic languages (they include all the diacritic characters needed for all Celtic languages). They can be used with our keyboard or with any UNICODE compliant device.

Best Regards from Brittany,

Philippe B. Ar Gall,  
President of K.A.D.



## Deskomp brezhoneg! – Let's Learn Breton: A Campaign to Assist Adult Breton Learners

The Ofis ar Brezhoneg ([www.ofis-bzh.org](http://www.ofis-bzh.org)) has a number of projects in the works to encourage the presence of Breton in public spaces and the media. It has also worked to encourage adults in Brittany to take Breton classes as a way to connect or reconnect to their culture and as a way to encourage children – by example – to take an interest in the language. There are many options for adults to enroll in classes, including intensive week-long courses (that can be extended for any length), evening classes, and correspondence courses.

Ofis ar Brezhoneg is collecting statistics on adult learners, but in the past it has estimated that some 10,000 adults in Brittany are enrolled in various study programs.

Ofis ar Brezhoneg has published a simple flyer to help adults find classes, and I have reproduced on the following page the listing of organizations you can contact to find out about learning options, and to enroll. So, if you will be spending some time in Brittany and want to learn Breton, here are some places to start.



### Evit Breizh a-bezh Pour toute la Bretagne

**OFIS AR BREZHONEG**  
8, bis straed Félix Faure  
29270 KARAÉZ-POUGËR, CARHAIX-POUGUER  
☎ 02 98 99 30 10  
☎ 02 98 99 30 19  
✉ ofisk.bzh@wanadoo.fr  
www.ofis-bzh.org

**DAO (Deskiñ d'An Oadourien)**  
Hent Berrien - B.P. 24  
29690 AN UHELGOAD / HUELGOAT  
☎ 02 98 99 94 24  
☎ 02 98 99 94 57  
✉ dao.breizh@wanadoo.fr

### Kentelioù dre lizher Cours par correspondance

**SKOL OBER**  
Straed Louzaouenn an Hañv/  
Rue du Muguet  
22300 LANNUON / LANNION  
☎ 02 96 48 03 00  
☎ 02 96 48 03 01  
✉ skolober@brezhonieg.org  
skolober.com

### Stummerezh dibaouez Formation continue

**ROUDOUR**  
Hent Berrien - B.P. 24  
29690 AN UHELGOAD / HUELGOAT  
☎ 02 98 99 75 81  
☎ 02 98 99 76 01  
✉ roudour@free.fr

**STUMDI**  
Maner Keranden - B.P. 311  
29413 LANDERNE / LANDERNEAU  
☎ 02 98 21 39 94  
☎ 02 98 85 04 37  
✉ bzh.stumdi@wanadoo.fr

**MERVENT**  
Plasenn Amiral Ronarc'h - B.P. 29  
29270 PLONEOUR-LANVERN / PLONEOUR-LANVERN  
☎ 02 98 87 72 41  
☎ 02 98 87 72 41  
✉ mervent@wanadoo.fr

**SKOL AN EMSAV**  
8, straed Hoche  
35000 ROAZHON / RENNES  
☎ 02 99 38 75 83  
☎ 02 99 63 82 28  
✉ sae.bzh@wanadoo.fr  
http://perso.wanadoo.fr/skol.an.emsav

### Aodoù-an-Arvor Côtes-d'Armor

**BRO-DREGER / TRÉGOR**  
**AL LEVRIG**  
91, hent ar Marichal Joffre  
22700 PERROZ-GIREG / PERROS-GUIREC  
☎ / ☎ 02 96 49 80 55  
✉ allebrig@wanadoo.fr  
http://www.allevrig.com

**KREIZENN SEVENADUREL VREZHON**  
Plasenn Verdun  
22200 GWENGAMP / GUINGAMP  
☎ / ☎ 02 96 44 27 88  
✉ kreizenn.gwengamp@wanadoo.fr

**BRO SAINT-BRIEG / PAYS DE SAINT-BRIEUC**

**TELENN**  
19, ball Carnot  
22000 SAINT-BRIEG / SAINT-BRIEUC  
☎ / ☎ 02 96 94 19 18  
✉ contact@telemn.com  
www.telemn.com

### Penn-ar-Bed Finistère

**BRO-GARAEZ / PAYS DE CARHAIX**  
**SPERED AR YEZH**  
Kerouer  
29270 SAINT-HERN / SAINT-HERNIN  
☎ / ☎ 02 98 99 58 55  
✉ spered.aryezh@wanadoo.fr

**BRO-LESNEVEN**

**TI AR VRO BRO-LEON**  
Plasenn Europa  
29260 LESNEVEN  
☎ / ☎ 02 98 83 30 41  
✉ tiarvroleon@wanadoo.fr

**BRO-VREST / PAYS DE BREST**

**SKED**  
Ti ar Brezhonieg ha Sevenadur Breizh  
18, straed Duguay-Trouin  
29200 BREST  
☎ 02 98 80 26 71  
☎ 02 98 80 59 68  
✉ sked@wanadoo.fr  
www.sked.fr.st

### KERNE / CORNOUAILLE

**TI AR VRO KEMPER**  
18, straed Santez-Katel  
29000 KEMPER / QUIMPER  
☎ 02 98 90 70 43  
☎ 02 98 90 70 49  
✉ tiarvro-kemper@wanadoo.fr  
www.tiarvro.org

**BRO-VONTROULEZ / PAYS DE MORLAIX**

**KREIZ**  
Koad Grall  
29600 PLOUVANN  
MONTROULEZ  
☎ 06 84 39 23 60  
✉ kreiz@wanadoo.fr

**KREIZ PENN-AR-BED / CENTRE FINISTERE**

**PARK NATUR RANNVROEL ARVORIG /  
PARC NATUREL REGIONAL D'ARMORIQUE**  
15, place aux Foires - B.P. 17  
29590 AR FAOU / LE FAOU  
☎ 02 98 81 90 08  
☎ 02 98 81 90 09  
✉ sylvie.vigouroux@pnr-armorique.fr  
http://www.pnr-armorique.fr

### Il-ha-Gwilen Ile-et-Vilaine

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## GALLO - The other language of Brittany

In eastern Brittany you may have the good fortune to hear a language called Gallo, a language rooted in the Latin spoken in Brittany during the Roman occupation. It is a "Langue d'Oïl" like Normand, Picard and Champenois, but has been influenced by its own unique evolution and neighbors, and includes borrowing from the Breton language. More technically referred to as Britto-Roman, Gallo has been found in a written form for many centuries and today a modern literature is being developed. Like Breton, Gallo has been the subject of persecution in French schools and has been denigrated as a backward dialect to be discarded in the interest of progress and modernity. And like Breton, it has been in rural areas that Gallo has best survived and bloomed as a language for cultural creativity and the expression of one's basic identity. Today students can take Gallo in school. As has been the case for Breton, this takes perseverance on the part of students, parents and teachers. Although unique to Brittany, Gallo has suffered a second-class image. Gallo speakers have often been the first to say that the "real Bretons" are the Breton language speakers of western Brittany. This attitude is happily changing and Gallos are active organizing festivals to celebrate their unique culture, teaching their language, and publishing. The following is just one initiative to promote Gallo. The Gallo and French texts are from "Salamander Editions." The translation into English is my own - Lois Kuter

### Emóleriy au Sörgarr

Chaq votr bonjörn. Je sóm beneizz de vóz banni a tertót la naesauncz èz "Emóleriy au Sörgarr", unn Emóleriy-Consorteriy elijaéy pór le Galo, la langue de Haùtt-Bertaéyn.

"Lez Emóleriy au Sörgarr" est unn sóeitt orinaéy su la lei 1901. Lez Emóleriy au Sörgarr on taet meinzz subót asórfein de metr le monn qhi c'naeczaen poént le Galo a le decóvri e asórfein de metr le monn qhi le c'naeczaen deja a le r'decóvri d'unn melhórr sortt. Pór ela, j'avon daun l'idaéy d'ecrirr e d'emólae dez parchaéys e dez livr an Galo saun poént jamaen óblir lez ciun qhi n'an savaen pa Bén lon su notr laung. Par le faet j'avon au reinj d'eblussae le monn qhi vóraen raporr au Galo.

### Editions de la Salamandre

Bonjour, nous avons le plaisir de vous annoncer la création des "Emóleriy au sórgarr", une maison d'édition associative consacrée au gallo, la langue de Haute-Bretagne.

"Les Editions de la Salamandre" est une association loi 1901. Ces éditions ont été fondées dans le but de faire découvrir le Gallo à ceux qui ne le connaissent pas et de le faire redécouvrir à ceux qui le connaissent déjà. Pour ce faire, nous avons en projet d'éditer des documents divers en Gallo avec toujours à l'esprit une dimension pédagogique.

### Salamander Editions

Hello. We are happy to announce the creation of "Emóleriy au sórgarr" (Salamander Editions), a publishing house devoted to Gallo, the language of Upper Brittany.

"Salamander Editions" is a non-profit association. Its publications have as their goal to allow those who do not know Gallo to discover it, and to allow those who already know it to rediscover it. To do this we plan to publish various documents in Gallo with the idea of teaching always in mind.

Au jórñ d'anoet vóz póaéz  
comaundae deja:

- DRUJ la gazètt qhi tocz
- Le cóp de "p'tits Galo de póchètt" o dez motz e dez maenyaerr de dirr raporr a maintiunn sujet: Le co, la vivateürr, la rebaùbliy, l'amórauncz, la fizic e bén d'aùtr corr...
- Dez parchaéys de parolyaer e d'diriy e bén dou beneqa corr pór biaùzi votr livreriya e.... votr otè.

Je banisson etót pór l'antamat a la haùtt-saezon un p'tit roman-policyaer an Galo o a cotae la terlateriy an fraunczeiz e unn raczaèreriya m'naéy a Maùvv-su-Leirr e Saent-Marr (au Sòlaerr dou Paeiz de Nauntt a haùt de la Leirr)

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Au jour d'aujourd'hui, vous pouvez d'ores et déjà commander:

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- Les deux volumes de "Mon petit gallo de poche" contenant des mots et expressions en gallo sur une vingtaine de sujets tels que le physique, la nourriture, la fête, la drague, le surnaturel
- Des fiches de vocabulaire ....et bien d'autres choses pour embellir votre bibliothèque....et votre maison.

Nous annonçons aussi pour le début de l'été la sortie d'un petit roman policier en gallo, accompagné de sa traduction en français et d'un collectage réalisé à Mauves-sur-Loire et Saint-Mars-du-Désert (Est du Pays Nantais-Nord Loire)

Tous nos produits sont consultables sur notre site internet à l'adresse :  
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35150 Janzé / Bretagne

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Vous pouvez d'ores et déjà retrouver nos productions à: La librairie BRETAGNE ET MARINE (4 rue Vauban, proche de la place Royale) à NANTES ainsi qu'à la librairie LENN HA DILENN a Vannes.

As of today you can already order:

- DRUJ, a satirical magazine in Gallo
- The two volumes of "Mon petit gallo de poche" ("My little pocket Gallo") which contains words and expressions in Gallo on some twenty topics such as the body, food, celebrations, dredging [? = "drague"], the supernatural.
- Vocabulary posters .. and many other things to adorn your library ... and your house

We also announce for the beginning of the summer the arrival of a short murder mystery in Gallo, accompanied by its translation in French, and a collection of stories from Mauves-sur-Loire and Saint-Mars-du-Désert (east of the Nantes country and Nord Loire).

All of our products can be seen on our internet site at the address:  
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You can already find our publications at: The Bretagne et Marine bookstore (2 rue Vauban, near the Place Royale) in Nantes as well as at the Lenn ha Dilenn bookstore in Vannes.

# Gouren: Breton Wrestling & the Struggle for Cultural Continuity

Matthew Bennett Nichols

It is my honor and great pleasure to write the following piece for Bro Nevez, and it is my hope that this will be the first in a series of articles and updates on the traditional games and sports of Bretagne. My initial interest and introduction to Bretagne was due to my interest in Gouren, which is the traditional Breton form of folk-style wrestling.

The term *gouren*, in the Breton language, means “wrestling” in the generic sense; however, in front of the global backdrop of numerous traditional wrestling forms, Gouren denotes specifically the form of wrestling practiced in Bretagne today which has a history and lineage that is as ancient as Bretagne itself.

In America and much of the Western world the sport of wrestling has lost its former position of high regard, esteem, and respect. In America, what is popularly termed “professional wrestling” (the television ‘drama’ which is anything but true wrestling or sport), has made a mockery of Man’s earliest and most essential sport. This Hollywood perversion, which many of the ignorant and electronically captivated believe is real sport, has certainly taken a significant toll on the heroic name and noble art of wrestling.

I first became acquainted with Gouren in 1995. It was during a trip to Iceland while writing a book on the traditional Icelandic style of wrestling (Glíma) that I first learned of the existence of Breton wrestling. I was given a booklet entitled Celtic Wrestling: Our Culture, published in 1990 by the Fédération de Gouren under the auspices of the International Federation of Celtic Wrestling (I.F.C.W.). This short but highly informative booklet includes four “Celtic” styles: Gouren, Cornish wrestling, Glíma, and Backhold/Cumberland-Westmorland wrestling. The booklet is written in both English and French, in parallel text, and contains a number of very nice photographs and illustrations, as well as a concise and intriguing historical description of each respective style.

Gouren immediately seized my interest by the sleeve, and pulled me into the challenging bibliophilic ‘wrestling arena’ of searching for literature on Gouren. Literature on traditional wrestling styles, the European folk-styles in particular, are very few in number and extremely difficult to obtain. There are literally hundreds, or even thousands, of books on Japanese styles such as Sumo and Judo, as well as other Eastern forms of wrestling—but the European folk-styles are almost totally forgotten or absent in the lexicon of even the most ardent wrestling enthusiasts of today.

I eventually obtained a wonderful book on Gouren, skillfully written in the English language. This excellent book was both an historical and technical manual describing and illustrating, with a series of black and white photographs, the basic techniques of Breton wrestling. The book, Gouren: Breton and Celtic Wrestling, was written by Guy Jaouen and published in 1985 (in Bretagne). Jaouen is unquestionably one of the foremost authorities on the traditional sports and games of Bretagne. Eight years later (after my first learning of Gouren) he is a personal friend, confidant, and colleague. Almost all of the following information on Gouren, both historical and technical, I have learned from Guy Jaouen—whether from reading his books and writings, or through personal correspondences.

The official technical language of Gouren is Breton. The formal names of the techniques, the official refereeing commands, etc., all are in the Breton language. Therefore Gouren affirms the necessity of the Breton language, as well as perhaps vice versa.

I will briefly describe the basic characteristics of Gouren. Gouren is a standing only form of wrestling (i.e. there is no grappling or fighting on the ground, as seen in many popular forms of competitive wrestling). The modern uniform consists of a *roched* (special wrestling “shirt”) and a pair of *brag* (“trousers” that tie below the knee). The majority of the grips are taken directly on the



*roched*, a rugged short-sleeved tight fitting shirt made of a cotton/linen-blended fabric. The *roched* also has an internal belt that feeds through the shirt so that grips can securely be taken on the waist. No grips are permitted below the waist (e.g. on the legs or feet). Breton wrestling consists of a wide variety of lifting, tripping, sweeping, and throwing techniques—most of which are done using the feet and legs of the wrestlers.

The central object of Gouren is to throw the opponent to the ground and achieve a *lamm* (i.e. perfect ‘back-fall’ consisting of both shoulders touching the ground simultaneously), in which the bout formally ends. Traditionally, only the scoring of a *lamm* would achieve victory in a Gouren contest. This meant that wrestling matches could literally go on for hours, until that perfect result was achieved. Today the rules of Gouren have been codified and modernized, such that a point system and time limits have been introduced.

As a preface to describing Gouren in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I must first make light of the sport’s decline, both before and during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Bretagne prior to the First World War only three provinces retained Gouren: Trégor, Vannetais, and Cornouaille. WWI certainly had a profound negative impact on the sport. During as well as after this time sports such as football [soccer] and cycling began replacing the traditional ones, such as Gouren.

Today the sport of Gouren is widespread throughout Bretagne. It is at this point that I must mention the honorable name of Dr. Charles Cotonnec. Cotonnec, a surgeon from Quimperlé, was a fluent speaker of the Breton language and eminent patron of Breton culture. He had a particular fondness and respect for the sport of Gouren. He was instrumental to the adaptation and modernization of the sport of Gouren by codifying the sport and giving it an organizational structure. He did this to ensure its survival as a cultural asset for future generations. In hindsight Dr. Cotonnec was very successful in his endeavors.

In 1930 Dr. Cotonnec formed the F.A.L.S.A.B. (“The Federation of the Friends of Breton Wrestling and Athletic Sports”). This organization instituted

new rules and regulations while preserving the ancient spirit, integrity and cultural significance of the sport. These new rules which helped transform Gouren into a modern competitive sport included such elements as set time limits, a standardized wrestling dress, more regulated refereeing, and the establishment of different weight categories.

An essential feature of Gouren still retained today is the wrestling oath. Today the official oath is taken, first in Breton and then in French, before each sportive competition. The wrestlers face each other in two parallel lines, with their right hands raised with open palms as they take the oath. The oath is as follows (as translated into English):

*I swear to wrestle with entire loyalty  
Without treachery or brutality  
For my honor and that of my country*

*In testimony of my sincerity  
And to follow the custom of my ancestors  
I present to my fellow my hand and my cheek*

Each Gouren bout begins and ends with a standard Western handshake, and an accolade consisting of placing the cheek to the opponent’s cheek three times (as described in the last line of the official oath). The art of Gouren encapsulates the Western spirit of heroism, discipline and honor. It is this spirit that I value highest with regard to the sport, with the general esthetics and technical mastery of the art taking, perhaps, a secondary role.

Gouren is very similar to Cornish wrestling and most likely is a direct descendent of this south English style (Gouren is believed to have been brought to Bretagne by the Celto-Romano tribes which fled the Saxon conquerors in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. ). Centuries ago teams of wrestlers from Cornwall would compete against Breton wrestlers, in some cases in order to settle fishing disputes.

Cornish wrestling was once very popular, but in recent decades the number of wrestlers in Cornwall has dwindled so greatly that the sport’s future is uncertain. In Australia, however, Cornish wrestling is currently experiencing a revival. Soon the number of wrestlers in Australia may be greater than in the land of the sport’s origin. Another possible

scenario is that the sport may disappear in Cornwall entirely, only to survive in Australia or elsewhere [the latter scenario contains within it some interesting cultural implications that perhaps deserve a closer analysis at a later time].

To again return to my personal experience with Gouren, I will briefly detail my first trip to Bretagne. In July of 2003 I traveled to Brest, Bretagne, to meet with Guy Jaouen. We, along with a few colleagues, drove from Brest to Nice. From Nice we boarded a ferry and traveled to Corsica, and then to our final destination of Sardinia. In Sardinia we attended the 2003 European Traditional Wrestling Championships (sponsored and governed by the I.F.C.W.), in which Gouren is one of only two official styles of wrestling that the association currently uses for competition. The overall cultural experience was truly wonderful and provided me with my first real view of competition Gouren.

Upon our return to Bretagne, I finally was invited to attend an old fashioned, traditional, Gouren festival at Belle Ile. It is difficult to describe my inner feelings, for I was so overwhelmed by the beauty, chivalry, and cultural ambiance of the event. There was food, music, costumes, and sport—Breton culture in its purest and most kinetic essence and form.

It was at this event that I finally began to understand how the Japanese, in deep reverence and awe, viewed their national style of wrestling, Sumo. Gouren, as I noted in my journal on that enlightening day, is a Western counterpart to Sumo.

A couple days prior to the Gouren festival, at Belle Ile, I had been personally tested (upon my own request, for the purpose of certification) by several coaches belonging to the Fédération de Gouren. In all honor and humility, I became the first American to receive the certificate/degree of “Qualified Gouren Trainer”. The test required a sufficient knowledge of the Breton terms for the wrestling techniques, the basic rules of the sport, and of course a demonstrated proficiency in the Gouren techniques themselves. I have taken upon my own shoulders the task of trying to popularize the art of Gouren here in the United States of America.

In conclusion, the struggle for the preservation of the Breton language can be metaphorically viewed as a ‘wrestling match’ in a manner similar to which Gouren as a culture-specific form of wrestling can be viewed as a ‘language’ of physical culture—both existing as essential components of Breton culture. In actuality both are intrinsically related, and should be cherished and celebrated as such.

Philosophically, or politically, the survival of Breton culture should not be mistakenly conceived as ‘separatist’ in nature; rather, Breton culture should be viewed as constituting a vital organ of the much larger European organism. This struggle is merely one in the formation of the New Europe which is analogous to a forest in that it depends dearly on the diversity of all native ‘species’ in the wider ‘cultural ecology’.

*{For more information on Gouren please contact me at: [gourenclub@yahoo.com](mailto:gourenclub@yahoo.com)}*



### **The National Geographic Society does a disservice to Brittany**

National Geographic publishes hundreds of beautiful books to introduce readers to places and people of the world. A branch of National Geographic in France recently published Bretagne (Brittany) which cuts off the Loire-Atlantique department – thus excluding Nantes and a big chunk of Brittany which is historically and culturally Breton.

The Brittany presented in the National Geographic edition is the one created in 1941 when the Vichy government decided to separate what is today the department of Loire-Atlantique from Brittany. When most other guidebooks and “coffee table” books about Brittany recognize that this region is an integral part of Breton history and culture, it is odd that an organization as prestigious as National Geographic would ignore this and choose to follow strictly political borders. Bretons have been writing to the National Geographic Society to protest this choice, and to urge them to include Loire-Atlantique in any re-editions of the book. If you want to add your voice, here is the address to contact:

National Geographic Society  
P.O. Box 98199, Washington, D.C. 20090-8199  
[Ngsforum@nationalgeographic.com](mailto:Ngsforum@nationalgeographic.com)

## Four Bretons Honored for Life-Long work for Brittany The Order of the Ermine 2003

Each year Skol Uhel ar Vro, The Cultural Institute of Brittany inducts four new members into the Order of the Ermine. This offers us the opportunity to introduce four individuals who have made a significant contribution to Breton life and culture.

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 work for Brittany for their lifetime—not a light responsibility.

The following are the four individuals joining the Order of the Ermine this September 2003. (information translated from Skol Uhel ar Vro's publication of Sterenn (No. 20, 2003)

### René Abjean

Born in 1937 in Brest, he made his start in Breton music in the Chorale Plouguerneau in 1953. At the age of 17 he created his first vocal group, a men's choir, and participated in a number of early musical experiences that were precursors to the Breton "revival." These included the Ar Baganiz quartet in 1962 and the group An Triskell in 1969 for which he composed a number of arrangements. He was a cofounder of the Cercle Breton de Brest, then president of the Festival International des Cornemuses in Brest starting in 1969 [the festival which would develop into the InterCeltic Festival of Lorient]. In 1974 he published a monograph La musique bretonne, contributed to various magazines, and was the author of a chapter on Breton music for Histoire Littéraire et Culturelle de la Bretagne. In 1975 he took on the direction of the Chorale de Ploudalmézeau, and then in 1977 that of Folgoët, and in regrouping them with the Plouguerneau choir, he founded the "Ensemble Choral du Bout du Monde" which he directed with his friend Jo Le Gad until 1988. In 1977, with Pierre-Yves Moign, he founded the Centre Breton d'Art Populaire in Brest, and from 1979 to 1981 he was president of the Association Culturelle de Brest which was created to operate the Palais des Arts et

de la Culture. The following year he directed the beginnings of Radio-Bretagne-Ouest.

He wrote and recorded numerous liturgical and temporal works, Missa Keltia in 1975, the cantatas Ar Marc'h Dall in 1979, War Varc'h d'ar Vor in 1987 and Kan evit ar Peoc'h in 1989. In 1998 he published a collection of maritime songs, and rejoined the chorale Iroise and the group Marins d'Iroise. He has collaborated frequently with the men's choir Mouezh Paotred Breizh created in 1995 by his friend Jean-Marie Airault. In 1999 he created the cantata Une ville vers la mer on the text of Heather Dohollau, and worked with Christian Desbordes for the 2000 cantata Kalon ar Bed with the text by Job an Irien, and in 2000 the cantata Liñvadenn Ker Is for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kendalc'h.

He also has a doctorate in sciences and teaches physics at the Université de Bretagne Ouest in Brest. He received the Prix Bardet in 1975 for the advancement of spectroscopic methods and was a member of the Academy of Sciences of New York from 1997 to 1999.

### Angèle Jacq

Daughter of a farmer, Angèle Jacq was born in Landudal in 1937. A farmer herself, then sales representative, bank employee, union worker, and press correspondent over the span of twenty-six years, she divided the rest of her time in her native village between writing, gardening, and the defense of the Breton language. The fruit of 16 years of work, her first book, a historical novel called Les braises de la liberté, was published in 1995 by France-Empire. This was soon followed in 1997 by a collection of legends published by the same editor. Another novel, Le voyage de Jabel, published in 1999 (Ouest-France), was well received and her latest work, Ma Langue au chat, came out in 2002 (Editions du Palémon).

Parallel to her writing, Angèle Jacq leads a daily combat for the Breton language - which she speaks perfectly - and for the Breton culture. She participated in the launching of the Appel de Carhaix in 1999 and was part of the Breton delegation in 2001 who presented the cultural situation of Brittany to various European courts and institutions.

Her combat is also for the environment (treatment of wastes in Finistère) and in support of the Third World (support for an ONG in Senegal).

### Jean Louis Latour

Born May 25, 1935, in Morlaix, Jean Louis Latour is from an urban family of sailors (19<sup>th</sup> century), soldiers and business people. Married to Marie Christine, he is the father of four children: Kireg, Gaëlle, Nolwenn and Anaïg.



He was deeply marked by the war of 1939-1945 where his older brother, then 17 years old, was wounded in Normandy. In January 1943 during a bombing of Morlaix, a bomb fell on his school causing the death of forty children. Traumatized by this event, his parents decided to send him to live on a farm in Plouégat-Guerrand where he was immersed in the Breton language which he spoke at home by the end of 1943.

In October 1945 he arrived in Redon where he attended the Saint Sauveur school and discovered Gallo. He received his bac in philosophy from the Lycée Clemenceau in Nantes and completed military service from September 1957 to January 1960. While not going to Algeria he was trained by the FNSA (Français de souche nordafricaine), thus getting exposure to Islamic culture.

In 1957 he signed the POB (Projet d'Organisation de la Bretagne), and joined the MOB before becoming an education counselor with the National Education system from February 1960 to December 1971. In 1960, he met Albert Poulain and teamed up with him for a number of years, collecting and singing the traditional songs that they had collected. He also sang at festoù-noz and concerts until 1985. It's important to note that he produced the first record (lp) of traditional Gallo songs from the Pays de Redon which was awarded Bodadeg ar Sonerion's Prize for Breton Recordings at the 1976 InterCeltic Festival of Lorient. From 1965 to the present he has worked for tourism. He was president of the OSTI of Redon for 13 years and received the gold medal for tourism for his defense of Breton identity and culture.

Secretary of Kendalc'h in 1965, he participated in the construction of the Ti Kenadalc'h cultural center as volunteer director of the center with his wife Christine. In 1985 he took on the presidency of Kendalc'h and became a member of the Cultural Council of Brittany, succeeding Per Denez as its president from 1993 to 2003. In 1998 he joined the Economic and Social Council as a representative for Breton culture.

## Gilles Servat

Born February 1, 1945, in Tarbes, in a family originally from Nantes, he spent his youth in Nantes and then in Cholet until high school graduation. In 1969, he fell in love with the Ile de Groix and taken by the musical wave of the early 1970s he decided to become a singer, finding a way thus to express himself the way he wanted. He founded the recording label Kelenn which produced Tri Yann an Naoned. In 1972 he released his own first title, La Blanche Hermine, (gold record). The title track to this recording became a widely known hymn to Brittany.

He pursued his career with poetic and ecological themes to songs concerning Brittany and performed at numerous festivals and concerts. He was also a film actor (between

1973 and 1975) and performed in theater (two plays with the Théâtre de la Chimère in 1984 and 1985). In 1993 he presented his performance piece La Fleuve at the Tombées de la Nuit festival in Rennes, and the same year participated in the Héritage des Celtes experience with 74 other musicians. Then on the Sony label he released an album, Le Quais de Dublin, with the Bagad de Roñsed-Mor, Ronnie Drew, Andy Irvine and Rita Connelly. Always a militant for Brittany, in 1998 he produced the recording Touche pas à la Blanche Hermine ['don't touch the white ermine'] in response to a political party's usurpation of his song. Following the sinking of the oil tanker Erika he edited a new recording, Comme je voudrai!

Gilles Servat has more than one string on his bow, because he is also a writer (publishing a science fiction epic, Les Chroniques d'Arcturus) and a sculptor (presenting his works in Morlaix in 1986).

Editor's Note: While those reading this brief biography in Brittany will be well aware of Gilles Servat's influence as a "chanteur engagé" ("protest singer") in the 1970s, American readers of Bro Nevez may not appreciate this from the above account. Through his strong song texts (mostly in French but also in Breton), Gilles Servat has always spoken out in defense of Brittany and his performances have made Bretons very aware of their need not only to defend the Breton culture, but also to work for social justice and the environmental health of their country.



Since 1972 sixty-nine (69) individuals have been inducted into the Order of the Ermine (16 of which marked by an asterisk\* are sadly now deceased):

René Abjean, 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\*, Angèle Jacq, Dodik Jégou, Michael Jones, Goulc'han Kervella, Riwanon Kervella, Lois Kuter, Jean-Louis Latour, 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, Gilles Servat, Frère Marc Simon, Alan Stivell-Cochevelou, Pierre Toulhoat, Albert Trévidic, Jean Tricoire\*, René Vautier, Jean-Bernard Vighetti.



# THE RELIGION OF THE DRUIDS

By Natalie Novik

*"Honor the gods, be brave, do not commit evil".*

This was the doctrine of the Druids and their religion, which is usually called "druidism" in modern English, although there is no proof that such an "ism" ever existed. What we know in writing about the Druids comes to us second hand from Greek and Roman writers, who describe it either as a ferocious religion based on sacrifice or as a profoundly philosophic religion. The problem with those descriptions is that they contradict each other, and besides this, the authors try to compare the gods of the Celtic religion to their own, leading us to think they were similar to the Greco-Roman pantheon.

Actually, the Celts, located by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC in all parts of Europe from what is today Denmark to Greece and from the Black Sea to Ireland, were not a homogeneous group, but hundreds of separate tribes. However, they shared three common features: one language, one political order and one religion. Responsible for all three were the druids, whose name is sometimes thought to derive from the word "d'rw" or oak, a tree they held sacred, or perhaps from the words "dru" (strong) and "wid" (to know).

If we study the little literature left to us (mostly in Gaulish grave inscriptions, sometimes in poetry and songs in the old Gaelic and Brythonic traditions), a different picture emerges from what the Ancients were describing. The teachings of the druids were much more sophisticated than we would surmise from the observations of their contemporaries. Their science included divination, and therefore the use of a calendar based on the moon (the Coligny calendar). Their knowledge of the natural world was tremendous. Only the witch hunts in Europe of the 16th century could

destroy a 3,000 year continuum of knowledge about the virtues of plants and minerals. Their philosophy, kept secret among them and passed only to their disciples, was based on the idea of the spiral of life, the eternal renewal, and worlds beyond our world. These themes are amply represented in Celtic art and were passed down through poetry to the medieval concept of "Avallon", or "Tir na n'Og", the land of everlasting life, found in the west beyond the sea. The role of women priestesses leaves much to be desired in the descriptions left by the Romans and the Greek, but we know from later Celtic traditions that their role was extremely important.

There seems to be a multitude of gods, but they don't seem to have one definite function as with the Greco-Roman religion. The names and attributes of these gods vary, depending on the region and on the tribe. There are a few main ones, recognizable in all Celtic regions, like Lug (a war god, but also the god of travel, finance, trade, graphic arts), Teutates (the blacksmith), Ogmios (the god of eloquence), Taranis (the thunder god), Belenus the healer... Goddesses seem more localized, although Epona, the horse goddess, is found in many places, sometimes under a different name. But each tribe is placed under the protection of a higher god, who is generally not named, unless, under the Roman influence, it gets a Latin name in the latter periods. Some contemporary scholars like Regine Pernoud have suggested that, actually, the Celts believed in one God, never named (or named by Caesar "Dispater"), and also in the resurrection of the soul, a common theme in Celtic literature. This would actually explain the rapid spread of Christianity through Europe. And the multitude of gods would become the multitude of saints we know all over the Celtic countries.

The Romans were quick to condemn human sacrifices by the druids, forgetting they also had the same custom in the past. Celtic art features prominently human faces, sometimes heads, which has led many to talk about a cult of severed heads. There is no proof of that, and in a religion imbued with philosophy, it would not be surprising to find the head as a potent symbol of the human mind. Three-faced or three-headed sculptures are also found often enough to suggest that the Celts were representing the continuity of life: past, present and future.

Actually, from what we know of their religion, it appears that it was centered on nature, not sacrifices, and on agriculture, not war. The main holidays in the Celtic calendar are dedicated to the seasons, starting with the New Year celebration, or Samhain, November 1, the night when this world and the other world communicate, and when the dead visit the living, and sometimes the living set foot beyond this world. The following holiday, called Imbold, is celebrated on February 1st, when the light returns and the days grow longer. Then, the next highest holiday after Samhain comes on May 1st, on Beltain, the celebration of fertility at the start of summer, when the cattle go to pasture. And when summer reaches its peak, on August 1st, the Celts celebrated the god Lug, the eternal youth, whose celebration bears his name, Lughnasad.

Besides these calendar holidays, most Roman authors including Caesar describe a very important annual gathering of the druids from all the tribes in a sacred glade near Chartres in France. The gathering was held for ceremonial purposes, like mistletoe gathering, but also as a court of justice. In some lands today, the use of mistletoe to greet the New Year (not Christmas, as many would believe today) is a remnant of this practice. Mistletoe has healing properties (some think it might even have anti-cancerous characteristics), and was therefore seen by the druids as a sacred plant, a plant of renewal and rebirth.

A religion so close to nature could not fail to include rituals linked to animals, particularly horses, oxen and boars, all seen as sacred. And while we know those structures were built thousands of years before the Celts ever moved into Europe, such sacred places as Stonehenge, Newgrange, Carnac, also served as sacred sites for the Druids, who recognized their importance in the cycle of seasons.

Never naming their supreme deity, transmitting knowledge orally instead of writing it down, holding secret ceremonies at night in sacred places, and giving philosophy a major role in their thinking seems to better characterize the activities of the druids. Some other functions emerge also, such as advisers to tribal leaders, healers, and judges. In other words, the druids are in charge of the spiritual and intellectual world. Their functions and teachings were the same, no matter which part of the Celtic kingdoms they lived in.

It is this immense span over time and space which explains the hold of the druids over all the Celtic tribes and the legacy of their religion to our days. Of course, we have seen the renaissance in the 18th century of a "druidic order" complete with white robes and golden sickles, still very active today. But aside from these manifestations, we are all still influenced by older beliefs. We laugh at the idea of the fearless Celts, but would you not be fearless if you believed in rebirth? We still hold as sacred certain glades in the woods, certain springs or trees, certain stones, and Christianity has often marked them with crosses and chapels. In Europe, schoolchildren are still learning by rote, a tradition passed on from the druids and perfectly acceptable to the children themselves, the teachers and the parents. We are still holding the number three as an important one, a heritage from the druids. And we kiss under the mistletoe...

# BOOK REVIEW – The Battle of Plouvien, August 1944

Lois Kuter

**Louis Bothorel. Plouvien, août 1944 – Les civils dans la guerre, la bataille de Plouvien**. Plouvien: Skolig-al-Louarn. 2<sup>nd</sup> revised and augmented edition. 2003 ISBN 2-9516188-2-4. 177 pages.

Few American readers of Bro Nevez can imagine themselves living in a war zone, with bombs dropping around one, gun fire over one's head, family members or neighbors taken hostage, or summarily executed in front of one's home on suspicion of aiding the enemy. This book makes you a witness to the horrifying events of August 1944 when Bretons of the town of Plouvien and neighboring villages lost 33 friends and family members in the course of two days (August 8 and 9), as German and American soldiers and members of the Free French Forces waged war in their small streets.

There are many books about World War II, but few that bring the terror of war so vividly to life from the perspective of civilians. Plouvien is located just 15 kilometers north of Brest on a strategic route to that big port city where a German submarine base had been established in WWII. Brest was a strategic holdout for the Germans and a key target for the Allies. After taking Arranches in early August, some 15,000 men of the American 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division commanded by Major General Troy Middleton, (in turn part of General George Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army) moved into Brittany. Of these, approximately 5,000 were engaged in the Battle of Plouvien. An estimated 4 to 6,000 German troupes were also engaged.

Plouvien and its surrounding area at that time had some 2,500 inhabitants, swelled by another 500 to 800 refugees fleeing Brest. Some 450 lived in the center of Plouvien itself. As the Americans moved through, the German occupying forces moved out, but on August 8 the joy of liberation turned to dismay when German soldiers moved back into the town. As Americans fought the German troops, townspeople scrambled to find safety in dug out shelters they had made or fled across fields to the homes of friends or relatives in the countryside. Or they did their best to carry on and protect homes and families (and the refugees lodging with them) if they were not able to get out of harm's way.

The actions of scattered Resistance members who blended into the general population did not help in allaying suspicions on the part of the occupying Germans who sought "terrorists" around them in the townsfolk of Plouvien and surrounding villages. In the tension of those two days in August, it did not take much to trigger a German execution of men or women caught hiding in a shelter or taken by surprise on their way to help in harvesting crops.

In the detailed description and first-hand accounts of what happened on August 8 and 9, 1944, it is clear that there was a great deal of confusion, fear, and unnecessary deaths of innocent bystanders caught in this battle between retreating German forces and American troops. Along with the horror of seeing or learning about the execution of 33 neighbors or family members, was the anguish of seeing one's home, farm or business leveled or burnt to the ground, and seeing ones cows and horses killed in artillery fire. It was not until September 18, 1944 that Brest would surrender and war would be over for this part of Brittany.

This book is a frank and detailed account of the events of two days for the people of Plouvien and the surrounding area. The story of Plouvien is not unique, and civilians suffer horribly in every war. This book clearly shows this side of war. The town of Plouvien will not forget its citizens who died in August 1944 and has also not forgotten the 75 American soldiers of the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division who lost their lives in the Battle of Plouvien.



## New Books from Brittany In or About the Breton Language

The following short notes are based on information gleaned from a number of magazines: Bretagne Hebdo (nos. 60, 70, 72, 75 & 78, dating from May to October 2003); Bremañ (nos. 263, 264 & 265 September to November); Al Liamm (no. 340, September 2003); Ar Falz (no. 87, Summer 2003); Da Lenn (Ofis ar Brezhoneg) (Fall 2003); & Ar Men (nos. 134 & 135, May to August 2003)



**Yann ar Floc'h. Koñchennoù euz bro ar stêr Aon.** Al Leur Nevez / Emgleo Breiz. 326 pages.

"Tales of the Aulne Country" collects stories written by Yann ar Floc'h (1881-1936) before World War I for the magazine Kroaz ar Vretoned.

**Herve ar Gall. Piv a glevo?**  
An Alarc'h Embannadurioù. 2003.

This is the first novel by Herve ar Gall who is a teacher at the Diwan school in Kemperle. This novel is about a boy of northern Brittany at the time of the Algerian War. It won the prestigious Priz Langlais this year.

**Yann Bijer. Trêz ar vari-Vorgan.**  
Editions Brud Nevez. ISBN 2-86775-217-5.

This third detective mystery by Yann Bijer is set in Landerneau and features Commissioner Kaou Kemener.

**Auguste Bocher, Yvonne Bocher. Ar Yeodet – Bleunioù Yaouankiz 2.**  
Editions Celtics Chaden. ISBN 2-84722-027-5.

This is the posthumous publication of poetry by Auguste Boucher from 1909, taken from manuscripts collected by his daughter Yvonne Boucher.

**Albert Deshayes. Dictionnaire topographique du Finistère.** Coop Breizh. 388 pp. ISBN 2-84346-010-7.

This book presents place names of towns, villages, and some locations no longer inhabited of Finistère, giving official names plus former versions and dates these names were in use. This culminates twenty years of work with tens of thousands of names included.

**Albert Deshayes. Dictionnaire Etymologique du Breton.** Editions Le Chasse-Marée. 768 pp. ISBN 2-9142-08254.

This work presents etymological roots for thousands of Breton words – origins, evolution and variants, commonalities with other Celtic languages, etc. – a "genealogical tree" for each word. This is one of a number of essential resources by Deshayes who has also published work on Celtic and Breton family names and place names in Brittany.

**Per Diolier. Trema heolioù kuzhet – Vers des soleils cachés.** An Alarc'h. 2003.

This is a bilingual, Breton-French, collection of poems by Per Diolier (pen name of Per ar Bihan).

**Angela Duval. Quatre Poires** (translations by Paol Keineg). Editions Midgnoned Anjela. 124 pp. ISBN 2-9512668-2-0.

This is a bilingual collection of 64 poems by Angela Duval, including a biography of this famous "peasant poetess" and a bibliography. While there are a number of volumes of Anjela Duval's poems published there are few translations into French. There is no one better to do this translation than Paol Keineg, a fine poet himself who knew Anjela Duval personally.

**Espace et Patrimoine. Rochers des côtes de Kerlouan.** Syndicat d'initiative de Kerlouan.

A book about rocks? Oh yes, the rock formations of the Breton coasts (in this case of the far northwestern Pagan country) all have a history and names. This guide book maps them and lists the Breton names for the rocks with a translation and notes.

**Mgr. François-Mathurin Gourvès. Le renouveau de la culture bretonne: un défi pour l'église.**  
Diocèse de Vannes, 55 rue Mgr. Tréhiou, BP 12, 56001 Vannes Cedex). 2003.

This pastoral letter by the Bishop of Vannes is a 15-page bilingual Breton-French booklet which calls upon the Catholic Church to work to welcome the Breton language back into its life. Included in Mgr. Gourvès' "letter" is a description of the past and present place of Breton in church life, as well as a clear presentation of political and societal causes for the decline of the Breton language, and the work done to reverse this decline and promote the Breton language and culture. You don't have to be a Catholic to appreciate this eloquent call to action for Breton. You can find a copy of this document on the Diocese of Vannes website: <http://catholique-vannes.cef.fr>.

**Fañch Jestin. Interamant toñ zidor.** Skol Vreizh.

This is a collection of short stories – most of them humorous – inspired by real life, as well as from a highly active imagination.

**Tugdual Kalvez. Des noms de lieux à l'histoire de Saint-Nolf.** Glad Senolf. 204 pages. 2003.

Tugdual Kalvez is best known as a poet (and ardent defender of the Breton language), but here he turns his talents to the study of place names in the area of St-Nolf. This includes a detailed analysis Breton names and their evolution over time.



**Claude Le Gall. Bro va zad; Pays de mon père.**  
Skol Vreizh.

This is a bilingual Breton-French book about a man's search to discover the world of his father on the north coast of Bro Leon. Included are photos of the period and accounts from people about the lives of farmers, fishermen and seaweed collectors of this period.

**Ofis ar Brezhoneg. Anvioù bonneged Europa / Names of the Mammals of Europe.**  
Ofis ar Brezhoneg. 2003.

This booklet includes some 200 species of mammals found in Europe, not only in Breton and French, but also in English and Welsh (with the scientific name to ground them all). Termbret, a division of Ofis ar Brezhoneg, has edited a number of booklets for those seeking Breton vocabulary for specific topic areas. Six recent ones focus on music, clothing, bicycles and bicycling, the office, cars, fishes of the sea, and basic "indispensable" vocabulary. For more information: [www.ofis-bzh.org](http://www.ofis-bzh.org).

**Youenn Olier. Amzer an emdouell – deizlevr ar bloavezh 1965.** Imbourc'h. 2003/.

This is the fifth issue in a new series by the editor Imbourc'h. This one collects diary entries by Youenn Olier from 1965.

**Sav-heol. Je parle breton à mon enfant.**  
Sav-heol. 44 pp. 2003.

This is a book for parents to guide them in speaking Breton to their babies and pre-school toddler. As well as words and phrases for children it includes more adult vocabulary in Breton for early childhood topics.

**Sav-heol. Da c'houlenn.** Sav-heol. 50 pp.

This booklet focuses on words and expressions about the weather – always a big topic for conversation. Words are collected from a variety of print and media sources.

Editor's Note: I would be happy to send information to those who might be interested in ordering Breton books (in Breton or French). I receive catalogs and listings and would be happy to share information or help you find a book on a particular topic.

And keep in mind that the ICDBL website is a great place to look for information:

[www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm](http://www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm)



## A QUICK LESSON IN BRETON

By Natalie Novik

The Breton language is a Celtic language, belonging to the Brythonic branch like Welsh and Cornish. It shares many features with other Celtic languages, and in particular a complicated grammar. This is just an introduction to the language, to give our readers a closer understanding of this very ancient tongue.

Breton is spelled pretty much the way it is pronounced. But the spelling is actually the unification of four different dialects, one of which pronounces "h" when all the others say "z". Therefore, in order to accommodate these differences, you will find that words that contain "z" are written "zh", so that speakers of all dialects can recognize the words. And it starts with the word for Brittany itself: "Breizh", pronounced Breiz in the north and west and Breih in the south. The language is called "Brezhoneg", following the same rule; the "g" at the end is pronounced more like a "k", and with the stress on the second syllable.

Basic words:

Ti (like in T-shirt) house  
Tad (t-ah-d) father  
Mamm (m-ah-mm) mother  
Ya (yah) yes  
Nann (nann) no

Some grammar

"Ya" and "nann" are actually rarely used, perhaps more for political slogans than anything else. In Breton, your answers will be more like the English "I do", "it is", or "it isn't", "I don't" i.e. repeating the verb used in the question.

Breton, like all Celtic languages, uses mutations. Mutations are changes in consonants (sometimes vowels) that occur depending on the place of the word in the sentence and what words precede or follow it. In Breton, the first consonant of a word will change, and this makes it very difficult for beginners to find words in a dictionary, until they learn all the mutations by heart! So, for instance, if I want to say "my father", the word "ma" which means "my" will force a mutation on the first letter of "tad", and you will say "ma zad", not "ma tad".

## A New Book about a Famous Breton Piper

**Bernard de Parades (and Christian Morvan, Fañch Postic, Patrick Malrieu)**  
**Matilin an dall - Naissance d'un mythe.**  
Quimper: Les amis de Bernard de Parades. 2003.

Editor's Note: The following presentation is from the organization called "Les Amis de Bernard de Parades" which works to make sure that the work of this collector of (and participant in) traditional lore and music of Brittany continues to be shared with the people of Brittany. Much of this activity has been to make the materials archived by Bernard de Parades (1921-2000) accessible to all, and the new book described below is a perfect example of how this is being done.

### Matilin an Dall (1789-1859)

This work on Matilin an Dall, a blind piper of Quimperlé whose fame made him truly a mythological figure, is the culmination of a long twenty-five year quest undertaken by Bernard de Parades.

He retraces the different episodes of Matilin an Dall's life as reported in the local press and literature of the époque. This ranges from his musical training to his official meetings (with two princes, a king and an emperor), including public ceremonies and the creation of the first folklore festivals, or just the simple animation at more common celebrations (dances, weddings...)!

Thus in paging through this book, we discover the glory of this piper (through articles in his praise as well as through the high fees he was paid), then his mythification, especially after his death. During a century and a half all types of artistic expression would contribute to this: songs, poems, musical pieces, stories, plays, comic books, and paintings.

Then, after the War of 1940-45 came a period of commemorations: studies of the piper, plaques put up on the house of his birth, streets named after him, annual ceremonies in his memory, exhibits and conferences, and the naming of a contest for "sonneurs" in Lorient for the Trophée Matilin an Dall.

But beyond the life and glorification of Matilin an Dall, this book reveals the view the exterior world has of popular culture during these two centuries: romantic exaltations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a few precious and pointed testimonies from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the capacity of myth to generate new realities, steps to take back our popular culture in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the evolution of discussion of music ... Perceptions full of ambiguity in view of the particular character of this piper.

In fact if city-dweller Matilin was very much a traditional piper who played for rural weddings "thirty leagues around" a the sub-prefect of Quimperlé Romieu believed, he was also a violinist, player of bassoon, oboe, and clarinet who in this capacity was invited in "particular societies." A player of the Serpent, he was also a church musician. Invited to official ceremonies, he thus practiced politically correct patriotic tunes in style at that specific period of changing regimes. Finally, he was also a composer rooted in tradition so that he "composed airs of Lower Brittany which conserved the primitive spirit and rhythm, such that one believed that he played at the festival of the Duchess Anne."

So, a model of tradition for some, like the Colonel Bourgeois, he was suspected by others to be the route for the penetration of popular French tunes of the times. Commentators often remarked on his interpretations which were atypical of the

local styles ("a smooth sound," his "virtuosity"), but he was nevertheless appreciated by the rural peasantry who called on him for their weddings. A personality of multiple facets, Matilin is as plural as the Breton music of today.

To complete this study and give an idea of what the music of Matilin an Dall would be, the second part of this work provides a reedition of "Airs de biniou et de bombarde" by Colonel Bourgeois who tells us he transcribed the tunes played by our piper. This book is remarkable in that it is the first work, after "Antiquités du Morbihan" by Chanoine Mahé, to take an interest in the repertoire of the players of biniou and bombarde. Finally, this work had become rare and until now was known only through a single copy in the municipal library of Nantes.

In total this volume contains 250 pages, illustrated by a hundred photos and drawings, with a hardback binding.

For more information about the Amis de Bernard de Parades and to order a copy of this book (28 Euros plus shipping costs) contact: M. Hubacher, 140 route de Bénodet, 29000 Quimper.



## Travels in Brittany: A Dance described in 1910

From: George Wharton Edwards. Brittany and the Bretons. (NY: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1910)

From the chapter "The Two Pipers," pages 234-238 (original spelling has been maintained)

... As we walk along, a huge covered diligence approaches from which comes the drone of the bagpipe and the clear voices of women singing. The words sound strangely to the ear. It has been said that the Breton language closely resembles Welsh and that Welsh fishermen converse freely with the Bretons. The huge wagon passes rapidly, and inside it the peasants are closely packed. They gaze out at us curiously. Over the coifed heads appear the decorated black pipes of the biniou. A turn in the road hides the wagon from view, but long afterwards the mellow drone of the pipes strikes pleasantly upon the ear.

The hotel proprietor advised us to follow the peasants to Mellac [near Quimperlé] where there was to be a dance, and procured us a conveyance into which we crowded ourselves with some good-humored fellow travelers, who told us much that was of interest.

The woods at the top of the hill were filled with the shrill squeal of the biniou, and as we drew near, the shuffle of moving feet and the murmur of many voices was heard.

We came across the fields of stubble gleaned clean of almost every straw. In the bushes on the tops of the earthen walls which divide the different properties, patch-work-like, birds whistled, and against the dark belt of trees millions of yellow butterflies shone.

Before us on the road walked a knot of peasants in holiday attire. The coifes of the women seemed of a lambent violet against the sky, and the black jackets of the gang men embroidered in yellow seemed all the blacker in contrast.

At the top of the road shone the white walls of the Mayor's house, the front of which was hung with the tricolor and bunches of

ribbons, and beneath the hedge and sitting in long rows upon its top were young girls, their backs to the road. Above their heads rose a cloud of dust and the shuffling of feet sounded louder, but in rhythm with the scream of the pipes.

Suddenly the pipes ceased and the chatter of voices instantly began. From a gap in the wall a group of peasants burst, eyeing us askance.

Behind the wall the scene was like that of some opera bouffe. Here were nearly a thousand peasants in holiday attire, standing, sitting and walking about. Perched upon the heads of two barrels sat the pipers gayly decorated in broad brimmed, black hats festooned with ribbons. Between their feet were huge jugs of cider and thick lumps of freshly cut bread. One was old and one young. The elder had long gray hair and his clean cut face upturned to the leafy trees. He was blind.

All about beneath the large trees were tables laden with white china cups of cider from which the men and older women drank, seated upon branches. Carts lined with straw, their shafts tilted, encumbered the space, and the ground was wet with cider drippings from huge oaken casks.

The young women walked arm in arm, or sat apart talking with those who fringed the wall, the young men shyly watching them. Small children, dressed to the last detail like the elders, played solemnly about the carts and here and there very old men with long hair stood lighting their pipes with brands from the fire for the purpose, and exchanged experiences as to the harvest just finished. A warning scream from the pipes, and couples began to form for a new dance.

Before us came Guenn Rosel, the prettiest girl for miles around. So the Mayor said, with a

roll of his head and a wave of his fat hands. "Good day to you Guennie and you too Allanik. Send the day that you shall be man and wife, and that is my wish to you," and he slapped the handsome young fellow on the back and pushed him towards the girl, who saucily tossed her head and pretended not to hear.

A long line of peasants hand in hand stood motionless before the biniou, who droned softly for an interval. Then all at once the tune began, and in a moment the whole line had broken and formed into fours, moving in a stately manner in a sort of polka. The faces of the dancers showed no emotion whatsoever, save that here and there a mischievous gleam or challenge shot from eye to eye. On they moved before binious, down the lane and out into the road before the Mairie, then back again in turning, twisting, shuffling stamping couples.

The dust arose in suffocating clouds, through which the faces of the peasants gleamed dimly above thin dark garments, and the rays of the sun penetrated softly. It fell again upon the gathered multitude covering all with a yellowish powder and softening the contrast of the yellow embroidery upon the garments of the dancers, filling the cider cups with grit and blinding the eyes of the strange looking babies in the arms of the elder women. On they moved, up and down the clear space in the wood and upon the lane outside the wall, the young men stamping their feet to emphasize the time - or to attract the eyes of the stolid looking girls.

The soft purples, the blues and the dull greens of the girls' aprons became soon of one tone in the dust, and here and there couples dropped out exhausted, their faces streaming with perspiration. It was evident that the dance was one of endurance rather



than grace, for now the remaining couples were surrounded by the peasants who encouraged them with strange Breton exclamations.

Soon but two couples remained on the field, and these the peasants watched breathlessly. The struggle between these two was intense, and the pipers were well-nigh breathless, until finally after the dance had lasted for nearly three-quarters of an hour, one couple stopped. Immediately there was a surging movement towards the other couple, who panted and shuffled their feet and turned and swung each other. Then all at once there arose a shout, or rather a loud murmur, for these Bretons are subdued even in their boisterous moments. The Mayor pushed his way through the crowd followed by the successful couple to the space before the binious, and in a few Breton gutturals congratulated them, handing the girl, who panted violently, a crown of tinsel and flowers, which she immediately placed upon her coiffe, and the shining faced young fellow at her side a huge red handkerchief, or sash, I could not make out which.

Now, the cider ran in streams from the casks, and there was a great rattling of cups upon the tables, to the health of the happy winners.

The girls upon the turf wall began a sort of sweet chant, with a melancholy refrain, which was taken up by all the peasants and to this melody the fête in the woods came to an end.

Already the fat horses were being harnessed to the high curved carts, into which the women and children were climbing, and from the tower of the wayside chapel beyond on a hill, from which hung the bells like a bunch of grapes, came sweet sounds.

The sky was melting into a deep orange at the horizon, and above shone a few early stars.

At the calvary, beside the road, the peasants stood or knelt for the final prayer of the pardon, and even above the noise of the bells sounded the note of the cuckoo, at which we saw all cross themselves again and again. So we left them, and it was night when we finally reached the town.

AN ADDITIONAL NOTE - From the Appendix, pages 271-273

"The Pardon, and some notes of interest"

Pardons, it should be explained, are the yearly gatherings for religious celebrations of the day devoted to some saint, generally in the country at a fountain or wayside chapel endowed with certain miraculous characteristics. They usually begin with Vespers the night before the day of ceremonies, and the peasants gather in crowds, sleeping in the field and hedges, and sometimes in the churches where they change the livelong night. At daybreak they celebrate mass, then in the afternoon there is a grand procession with sacred relics and banners; after which they promenade, eat and drink, and finally depart to their homes in the evening.

Pedlars and vendors of strange articles esteemed by the peasants haunt these festivals, some of which are devoted to animals, who are blessed by the priests, and are in consequence highly sought by the pilgrims who believe that their farms will prosper if they possess a cow, a horse, or a rooster which has thus been sanctified.

Each Pardon has a distinct character of its own, and therefore to see one is by no means to see all. In the larger towns, of course, the

festival has lost much of its former quaintness. ... In the Morbihan the costumes are very curious. And here will be found a people who have preserved their characteristics to a marked degree. Likewise a strange people will be found in the mountain districts in the Arré and Montagnes Noires, where little save the Gaelic tongue is spoken. At some of the Pardons the ceremonies will take place in the evening, at which a procession of strange figures, often barefoot and at times clad only in shirts and bearing lighted candles in their hands, will march chanting along dark roads, amid a wailing chant from the kneeling pilgrims; at others there will be a huge bonfire of brushwood lighted by a figure which slides down a rope from the steeple or tower of the church. After which will come dancing in the woods to the drone of bagpipes, or binious, as they are called, played by "Sonneurs" (drone pipe of two or three notes) and binious (playing the melody). These men are as a rule blind, and they are held in great esteem by the people. The ceremonies often close with games and wrestling, at which the peasants delight to show their skill and strength to the assembled girls. As a rule, however, after the blessing by the priests, the peasants quickly disperse along the roads.

The favorite dance of the Bretons is the "Ronde" or round dance, a sort of gavotte, and is characteristic of the people. It is danced at every fête and gathering, every christening and wedding from Saint Malo to Nantes. Generally there are two musicians either one or both of which are blind. One plays the ancient Armorican ballads (biniou) and the other a sort of flageolet much carved and ornamented with bits of bone. Sometimes one or the other of the performers will lay down his instrument and sing in a curious nasal voice one of the Armorican ballads, which are held in great esteem. As a rule the

dancers are skillful and can keep step in good time, and a great number and variety of figures are employed in the dances, but it will always end in the "ronde" when they will join hands and sway in great precision with some show of grace. I noted that the women and girls assume a gravity which I am sure they do not feel, and cast down their eyes during certain of the figures with great demureness, which gives quaintness to performance, but as I say it always ends in what M. Souvestre calls the "grande ronde" which is rollicking and unrestrained, yet most orderly and regular in formation. ...



*Editor's Note: While many travel accounts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century provide accurate and detailed information based on sharp observation, this travel account is vague in detail, and some of the descriptions lead one to suspect that the author's generalizations are based more on stereotypes gleaned from other travel literature or popular authors of the time (Souvestre or Anatole Le Braz). Indeed, Edward's description of the biniou in pair with a "flageolet much carved and ornamented with bits of bone" leads one to wonder if he saw a bombarde or some other exotic instrument. The descriptions of the paired "sonneurs" are somewhat garbled but he emphasizes that "generally there are two musicians either one or both of which are blind." While there were some well known blind musicians and singers in Brittany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I see no evidence that the majority of pipers in the early 1900s when Edwards traveled were blind. Edwards' generalization about blind pipers may stem from the fame of Matilin an Dall (see the book note which precedes this account).*

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## The International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language *needs your support!*

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The Breton language is a Celtic language closely related to Welsh, Cornish, Manx, and Irish and Scottish Gaelic. It is the everyday language of an estimated 250,000 people in Brittany, the far western peninsula of France. But Breton is threatened with extinction. The Breton language is no longer forbidden in schools or totally hidden from public view, but France continues to withhold the resources necessary for its development as a healthy living language, despite demands from an ever widening Breton population for its support and growth in the schools and media.

The ICDBL was established in 1975 in Brussels, Belgium, to support the repeated demands of Bretons that their native language be given the recognition and the place in the schools, media, and public life it needs to survive. The Committee was founded by and continues to count on NON-Bretons, as well as people of Breton heritage living throughout the world, who testify to the international concern for the future of the Breton language.

The U.S. Branch of the ICDBL was founded in 1981, and has members in dispersed in over 30 States of the U.S.—from Maine to Florida, from Hawaii to California and even Alaska. The U.S. ICDBL is a non-profit organization with the aim to help Americans learn about Brittany and the Breton language and culture, and to support the development of Breton language education and culture in Brittany. Our central activity is the publication of a quarterly newsletter called Bro Nevez (which means “new country” in the Breton language). In 25 pages, this newsletter includes current information about what is going on in Brittany related to the Breton language, and short articles on a range of topics, from music and dance, to sports, travel, the economy, or history.

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