

INTRODUCTION

This area along the estuary, and which one day became St Brevin, has never been deserted. As it happens it appears to be a sort of spur moving forward towards the sea, a rocky outcrop in the middle of swampy areas at the mouth of the Loire River.

The palaeolithic era, the most distant epoch in the human history, was especially detected in the village of La Briordais. Needless to say that many other sites, which have been discovered in the "PAYS DE RETZ", allow us to corroborate the facts.

Around 50.000 B.C. the companions of our Neanderthal ancestor perpetuated the species on our territory.... Spear heads were to testify to that, along with signs of bivouacs dating back to the lower paleolithic (at the mouth of the Boivre River and in La Briordais).

St Brevin, which has been a rich farming area in the course of our nearest history came to know her very first farmer thousands of years ago (before that there was just picking, hunting and fishing).

It was the Stone Age when men and women were living on farming and breeding. They used to make tools to cultivate the land and shape other domestic implements meant to various uses including garments making. It was with this aim in view that they used stones (flint in general), animal bones and wood. That's the way a whole civilization was set up along with its exchanges and trading.

The commerce of tools (or bartering) was established on account of the deposits some sites had specialized in the making of products intended for export.

LA CROIX CHATRE, L'AUFROU and the current ERMITAGE are known as having been villages of that neolithic age.

Those ancient villages were converted to Christianity as far back as the 5th century.

From the Middle Ages to the French Revolution LA CHATELLENIE DE LA GUERCHE ruled all over the estuary and CORSEPT PAIMBOEUF and ST PERE EN RETZ as well.

From the revolution to these days the town kept growing and at the dawn of the third millennium she will have regained a size similar to the one which had been hers in the Antique Age at the time of the Celtic world.

I - THE ORIGINS

General remarks on History and Geography

Our standing stones and dolmens bear witness to our most distant past (1).

It's true that some of those remains have been preserved and nowadays they confirm the active and even industrious presence of people who came before us.

All that is not buried right in the heart of swamps or that didn't collapse at the same time as the cliffs, give evidence of that far off epoch. Those monuments : dolmen of les Rossignols, dolmen of the Douanier, dolmen of the MOULIN-CHEVALIER, PIERRE DE COUCHE, PIERRE COUCHEE, ROCHE DES PRES(2), PIERRE ATTELEE, MENHIR DU BOIVRE,...are the last witnesses of an old civilization.

But prior to saying more it must be understood that the Brevinian coast and its bank along the Loire River have been subjected to huge alterations in the course of the Millenia(3). During the ten latest centuries those alterations have buried, scraped or collapsed most of the sites where life had organized itself in olden days.

Swamps are the remains of vast aeras which had been flooded long ago. Sometimes they filled in and sometimes they dug themselves again, and it's in the inmost depths of them that a portion of our Prehistory is staying.

The mouth of the Loire River was making a sort of delta which stretched out from LA ROCHE BERNARD TO BOUIN and was made of dozens of branches. It also enclosed damp areas of various sizes. La BRIERE is one of the best testimonies.

The "overdigging" of the River is likely to have enabled the final forming of the estuary. Then the alluvial deposits gradually filled in the secondary branches(4).

The coastline which is deeply indented and made of significant cliffs saw its profile change several times. Sometimes the offshore bars lay far inland, other times far in the open sea according to whether they appeared to be rocky parts or low ones. Its true that for millenia, and without respite, the LOIRE RIVER has brought lots of alluvium that made the level of shores rise again as far as getting rid of the cliffs (see P18) and filling in the spaces located between the rocky platforms.

Moreover for the five centuries the invasion of sands turned the landscape into a vast uncultivated dune and covered the remnants of antique Gallo-Roman or Medieval activities.

Nowadays the Brevinian coastline seems to be straight. Long ago it was not the same. MINDIN was a rocky isle and futher south some high cliffs were followed by most indented coves plunged far into the inland.

REMARKABLE SITES

Two names enable us to imagine the past :

- on the one hand MINDIN whose etymology tells us that it is a “stony fortification”.
- On the other hand PENFOUR, stemming from PENFOC”H which means “point of the junction” and forms the projecting part of the current rock of the “POINTEAU”.

Of course MINDIN represents a support base for the defence of the Loire’s mouth. As for PENFOUR, it’s the landmark for entering the estuary zone. It points out the junction located a few cables’length away from it and gives access to the harbour of MINDIN. Those two elements show that the southern bank was of the highest importance.

It’s true that since the beginning of time the Loire River has been a way of penetrating the depths of France. And the trading activities have always been established on both banks of our estuary.

AN ANTIQUE HARBOUR

Greek geographer and historian STRABON as well as Arab geographer AL IDRISI evoke CORBILO (5) the very large commercial port on the northern bank (current area of St Nazaire) which was used, among other things, as port of call for sailors coming from the mediterranean world.

If we go back to the dolmens and menhirs (standing stones) one must know that they are made of sandstone (6) whereas the substratum granite stone is mostly made of gneiss which points to the importation and thus the trafficking of building materials.

It’s true that the southern bank too was of importance with the port of BODON (“refuge” in celtic language) which could take in its ria all sorts of barges given that at that time it was deeper than it is today. The ores of nonferrous metals were unloaded there and foundries set themselves up inland. No less than three Gallo-Roman sites can be counted around the area. While the Bodon river poured its waters into the Loire, the Boivre, farther south, flowed into the sea. Foundries set themselves up on its banks. Since it was more navigable than the Bodon, the Boivre allowed barges to sail fairly far upstream, as far as St-PERE-EN-RETZ.

Apart from the famous antique port named CORBILO and before PAIMBOEUF had become the important outer harbour of Nantes, with its old tradition of shipbuilding industry, our south bank played a leading role (7).

Its being luckily located at the mouth of the LOIRE was the determining factor in the choice of its role in the domain of barter and trade. In addition to this, the shelters formed by the Boivre and the Bodon were offering refuges to boats and barges. It was also on their banks that nonferrous metals ores were unloaded and dispatched to the nearby foundries (8). In other respects (and even until a recent period) those two rivers were meant to give way to the import and export of various materials (9).

Moreover, south of the Pointeau there was a cove that was closed by the rocks of Jouane. It was named Port-Jouane and provided shelter to boat. It kept playing its role until 1750 or so, then it was entirely sanded up.

Apart from the accounts given by the ancient authors we have no other evidences of the existence of the antique traces which, unfortunately, are buried in the heart of our subsoil. The upsurge of marshy areas and the lowering of the coast level and lastly the inexorable invasion of dunes, as early as the first centuries of the millenium, put an end to those activities which had already been harmed by the Saxon and Norse invasions that the estuary had been the scene of. According to a legend the city of Pontoise lay buried under our feet and “will be brought back to life when Nantes dies”. There probably is hardly any Pontoise and Mindin is all we need to write our history. Let’s go back to more liable elements and have a look at a bit of our geography.

OUR BORDERS

In the West, of course, lies a rocky coast including Le Pointeau, an outstanding site which in olden days was the main maritime landmark to entering the estuary and whose spur is named PENFOUR.

In the North is located the left bank of the Loire with Mindin and its “Nez de Chien”(dog nose).

In the East runs a small coastal river, Le Franchais, which flows into the Loire not far from La Pointe d’Imperlay, and determine our border with Corsept.

In the South is the Breneau which separates us from St Michel-Chef-Chef. Today this small river is practically dried up. Let’s add that in the past the big forest of La guerche was part of the eastern border. Nowadays it has shrunk drastically.

Four other rivers must be pointed out :

-The Bodon, running from South to North

-The “Grande Courance” and the “Petite Courance”, from East to West

-And finally the prestigious BOIVRE, formerly navigable, which has its source in the swamp of St Pere en Retz.

Those landmarks were most important in the past and marked out our territory which the Celts took possession of.

THE GAULS

The Celts occupied Europe from the Atlantic Ocean to Bohemia, making up a vast number of peoples; the Romans gave the name of Gauls to those who were living on the present French territory.

Locally they put us among the Pictons within Aquitania province whereas the estuary north bank was occupied by the Namnetes.

What was the Celtic people that had settled here? The answer is not easy to find (10) because in the region of Nantes, the Namnetes were competing with the Pictons. The former founded Portus Namnetus (on the site of Condivicnum) on the north bank, the latter founded RATIATUM (the town of the chiefs : REZE) to the South. But as far as we are directly concerned there was another people which was living in the south of the Pays de Retz. They were the Lemovices the trace of which name can be found in the the patronymics of Limoges and La Limouzinaire.

As for the Venetes, Who founded the Pays de Vannes, they fought strongly against the invasion. They beat Julius Caesar who had come with the intention to subject them but they were finally beaten by Caesar who had used all the necessary means to quell them. He rounded up a part of his warlike triremes in Mindin Harbour and made his legionnaires bivouac on our coastline before he went and got rid of the Venetian fleet once and for all.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Gallic people were practising an “openfield” – type agriculture that’s to say a rather extensive one which didn’t know the “bocage”(fields criss-crossed by hedges and separated by sunken lanes). The agriculture was flourishing because from time immemorial our lands have been irrigated by a lot of underground springs and sources(11).

Beekeeping was a widespread practice. The present district of La Bresse (12) through its name points to us the presence of apiaries(les bresches).

Fishing was a most practised activity on the Loire and an obvious wealth which was also a subject of commerce. The Gallic herring barrels and casks allowed the transport of all kinds of fish. The growing of alders and willows developed in view of making woven-osier straps intended for catching eels and salmons. For centuries La Saulzaie supplied an important part of raw materials.

Other swampy areas gave way to the creation of reed beds in order to obtain the reed devoted to the roofing of houses.

To The South, by the seaside, at the Rochelets or at the Ermitage, on the “Rocher Flamand” or on the Mouille-Cul (13) people did not collect oysters contrary to what was done at the Pointe-St-Gildas. In fact at those locations they collected mussels which they mainly used as a fertilizer for the soil or as food for poultry or even for families during the shortage periods (14). All those aspects of the antique life were perpetuated up to the modern days.

Now, one of the activities, and not the least, that vanished very long ago, was the sea salt gathering which was not performed the same way as it is nowadays at Beauvoir or Guerande but with much older processes.

They let the sea water concentrate in cavities which had been dug out on the coast. Then thatches or various vegetable shavings, were left soaking in them. Later they were left to dry out. Then they were transported inland by barge or by man. Then those salt-swollen vegetables were diluted and the resulting brine was collected. This brine was poured into jars made of baked clay that were put in a kil to heat up. The water evaporated and the salt remaining on the bottom was gathered (15).

Since there were no trees on the coast our ancestors had to set up their kilns where fuel was available (wood or dried animal excrement).

THE TOWN

Contrary to what was taking place elsewhere, the settlements were very early quite scattered. Indeed sources and other watering places were numerous. They determined a pretty regular geographical distribution in the whole area.

Since the islet of Mindin was sometimes cut off from the main land the actual town was not set up there. It was during the first centuries of our era that the Priory of origin was erected on the rock adjoining the plateau of the Pays-de Retz. Then followed the construction of St Brevin. What we call Le rocher du Bourg (the rock of the village) is an integral part of the mainland and the gneiss of its platform belongs to the hercynian primary massif. Towards the end the 19th century some bases of Gallo-Roman constructions were dug out all around the town, along with two Gallic camps.

II - THE FIRST STRUCTURES

Both Gallo-Roman centuries have left in our soils the traces of traditionnal activities :
Agriculture, seagoing, and commerce.

Then came the time of the Franks and Merovegians. Christendom settled in the "Pays Nantais" and little by little the estuary was converted to christianity during the 5th and 6th centuries. Then a priory was erected. It was consecrated to Saint Clair, the first bishop of Nantes. Gradually the Gallic traditions faded and left a clear field to the christian liturgy.

A DIFFICULT PERIOD

The Norse invasions took place and put an end to the fine politico-religious order. In the year 843 A.D. a flood of drakkars (longships) were seen as they were sailing up the Loire towards Nantes. This town was to perish under murders and lootings. A pretty hard period came next. The episcopal administration was wiped out. Therefore the local power was entirely allotted to the lord of the place who was the successor of the one who had been in charge under Charlemagne. Yet in those troubled times, the main ambition of the ruler was to live at his subjects' expense. He was quicker to handle the gallows rope than help the poor to survive. Even the priests were exposed to his condemnation. Plenty of them were removed from office or even put in jail as soon as they dared to express the slightest remonstrance. Occasionally the ministry of some of them didn't even last one week. The bishop could do nothing about it. It was the law of the strongest. Moreover the royal power had had a hard job with the invasions. From then on they had to hold in check the separatisms which were springing up again in Brittany. Charlemagne's grand-sons were fighting over the division of the empire, letting the local squires exercise their absolute power.

THE REVIVAL

Though Clovis had obtained the submission of the Armoricans in 497 and Dagobert I had asserted the Frankish rule over the Pays de Retz, in the meantime the Norse or Saxon invasions had sown anarchy. In 846 Charles Le Chauve (bald-headed) secured Peace by giving Brittany the status of an earldom and then Conan I was made Duke of Brittany. Moreover it was at that time that St Brevin came under the Breton rule (with regard to this we must note that the Breton language was in use on our lands as far south as Pornic between the 6th and 9th centuries.) (16) The feudal system re-formed and everyone set about to obey their Overlord again which allowed the return to Christianity.

The Monks from the abbeys of Saint Aubin in Angers allied with the ones from St Augustin in Canterbury (England) came and started evangelizing again the Breton coasts. They founded here, on our land, a new priory that they placed under the protection of an archbishop from Canterbury who had been canonized and whose name was SAINT BREGUVIN (17).

The church set the local life in order and the Seignior of La Guerche found rulers worthy of the name who governed their territory with justice and serenity.

The "Chatellenie" of La Guerche extended its jurisdiction as far as Paimboeuf, Corsept, St-Pere and a part of St Michel

Above the town stood the gallows where criminals were hanged "high and short" (C.F. the present "Chemin des Potences" (the lane of gallows)).

LA GUERCHE

La Guerche was the territory of the overlords who, for eight centuries, ruled St Brevin and its surroundings, including Paimboeuf.

If we refer to the meaning of the word Guerche of Frankish or German origin, it could be translated into “walled town” or “fortified setting”. But there is nothing surprising about that. Our Mindin, whose etymology is celtic, means “stone-built fortification”. In the olden days, the estuary was a place of the highest importance, the front door to the heart of Gaul. Sailing up and down the Loire was fairly easy. La Guerch was commanding the mouth of the river and since the Merovegian times (18) it was used as base of operations and protection against the Visigothic invaders flocking from the south.

In order to make the situation quite clear one must know that the word “Guerche” is a generic term depicting physically a fort likely to take in a garrison. Later on some of those ”Guerches” were turned into seigniories or “Chatellenies” as a reward for services rendered and their new owners were given the possession of them.

Within our current region Bretagne-Pays de Loire no less than thirty-five Guerche-named sites can be counted. They are located in an area bounded by Evron in the South, by the Channel border in the North and by the vendee boundary in the South.

The farthest site to the West is La Marche de Bretagne which is situated on the same longitude as Guingamp and marks the Frankish Kingdom borderline.

It’s true that the barbarian invasions were feared but one also hoped to restrict the territorial spreading of the Bretons who were flowing back from Great Britain. Let’s note that Clovis had received the armorican submission as early as 497.

As for the Brevinian “Guerche” it underwent all the unavoidable changes in the course of centuries, going from the wooden-walled-town-type fortication set up on top of its ”lump”, to a donjon with ramparts made of freestone (around 1307) and ending in a pleasure manor as it can be seen today. It is patently obvious that this feudal “lump”, in other words this hill-shaped mound crowned with defences, has known a time of fame. No doubt that all this did not gain the same importance as that of the great feudal sites but it has had its significance and played its role. Furthermore some traces of the ditches surrounding the peasantry-reserved lower courtyard have been unearthed (19).

Anyhow the “seignior” was held responsible for our “territory” and was entitled to collect taxes and administer Justice. It was also in charge of protecting beggars, weak persons and serfs.

THE CHATELLENIE

La Guerche was turned into a “Chatellenie” in 1040. The first of the Lords we have knowledge of was Alanus Dominus Guirche (20) whose name was revealed on the occasion of the handing over of the church to the monks of Saint Aubin of Angers in 1104. Until then it had been the property of a Dame (Lady) Barbota who in return for it, asked for her daughter Domeline to be given one third of the income provided by the sinecure. She also requested that her sons Evain and Daniel be assured of being made monks. Afterwards most of the profits were to be allocated to the Abbey of St Aubin. The guardianship of the Abbey was not to be lifted until the 15 th century.

Besides the farm land La Guerche was also made up of a vast forest which was covering the outskirts of St Brevin as well as a large part of Corsept and St Michel and which was spreading as far as the surroundings of the Clion (21). The latter was forming at the edge something like a vast clearing contrasting with the thick cluster of trees. Only lumberjacks had their cabins there, but some monks had also retired in the area (22).

In the course of centuries the income of the seignories was becoming less and less lucrative owing to the fact that the serfdom was disappearing gradually. But other resources were found : taxes on mills and kilns along with taxes which had to be paid by people each time they were crossing the Loire river. The transfers of goods were also the subject of a taxation. The Lords of La Guerche were not the last ones who became the owners of those collective tools such as the mills of La Hunaudaie, near St Pere, or the mill of La Corbinais as well as the water-mills set up on the Boivre.

Well known in Brittany or at court of the kings of France, some famous families followed one another at La Guerche.

- The Guirches from 1140 to 1320 – then the Tournemynes until 1604
- Then the La Mottes and the Rosmadecs until 1644
- The Rieux and the Foucquets from 1645 to 1677
- At last the Brucs from 1677 to 1794 , during which period the estate had been conferred the title of marquisate by Louis XIV.

At the time of the Revolution La Guerche changed into an ordinary private estate.

THE PARISH

Saint Brevin was run by the lord of the premises. As far as Religion was concerned the bishop appointed a prior to the church. His authority was strictly of a spiritual nature. He was the guest of the Chatellenie.

Things changed when the priory was managed by a rector in the first half of the 16th century. Indeed the population was increasing in St Brevin and in Paimboeuf as well as in Corsept (23) and Ste Opportune (24) (the Priory located on the bank of the Boivre at the borderline of St Pere) (25).

The church which had been built as far back as the 11th century, was gaining in importance with its rector (26) and curates. The other priories : N.D. de la Pitie (27) at Paimboeuf, St Martin at Corsept and Ste Opportune were to become its “Trêves” (branches). This event is worth reporting. Little by little the rectors were progressively playing an administrative role. As from the edicts of François I in 1539, their task was to keep officially under control the registry office including the registers of births (baptisms) weddings and deaths.

As a result the civil role it was playing was far from being insignificant.

All those changes were carried on during the 17th century when a parish council was established. It was in charge of making decisions as regards expenses and receipts. But gradually it turned into a sort of local council. It was even the beginning of a democracy which of course, was not universal but besides the seigniorial power a “debate” was emerging. The fact was worthy of note. “General” was the name of this council which was made up of local key figures. Later this council became of great use when the registers of grievances had to be compiled. Those registers were intended for the holding of the States general on the eve of the French Revolution. It used to meet in a room adjoining the church which was denominated “Chapitreau” (28) (chapter room).

III - THE REVOLUTION

The complaints were significant enough for a majority of Brevinians to find that reforms needed to be done.

REGISTERS OF GRIEVANCES

So, on April 2nd 1789 the men registered in the tax roll met in the room adjoining the church (chapter room), the one in which the “General” usually held their session.

Taxes were precisely the subject for the discussion. Of course those taxes were too heavy. A request was made in order that the nobility be taxed as well. As for the chores of keeping up the paths and tracks, people wanted them to be replaced with a tax paid by everyone, including Clergy and Nobility. One deplored the drawing lots intended for providing the Royal Navy with ratings and gunners which depopulated the rural areas.

People were bitterly complaining about the contributions the community had to pay for the subsistence of the illegitimate children and orphans all the more so since it was the Lord of the area who afterwards inherited their legacy without paying the slightest tax.

Many other questions were brought up for discussion, in particular : how to remedy the invasion of the sand dunes which were cutting down the arable land and were beginning to surround the town?

The register, in duplicate, was countersigned by the Merciers, the Guillous and the Martins.....as many patronymics in which a good many Brevinians still recognize themselves nowadays. The revolution was under way.

THE TOWN

St Brevin opted for the revolution. Rector Moret de la Touche who had been in charge of the parish since 1785, became a “constitutional” parish priest having accepted the lay constitution of the clergy. On February 3rd 1790 it was under his chairmanship that the very first mayor was elected. It was Claude Rousseau, the owner of the estate of La Gilardière (29). St Brevin had just risen to the rank of town (30).

On July 4th of the same year the National Guard was organized. It was made up of 26 volunteers divided into four companies. The Tree of Liberty was planted.

In 1793 the town changed her name into L'UNION (the union). This title was not usurped. It was a fact that during those hard times the Brevinians were able to keep silent about their differences of opinion. They were behaving efficiently for the common good.

A miller DAMIEN BOUTEAU ROUSSEAU succeeded at the head of the town, but he had to give up on the place quickly because he was implicated in a case of illicit grain shipping. A carpenter, RENE MERCIER, took over. He was helped in his office by Claude Rousseau, the former mayor, and MORET de la TOUCHE the parish priest. Both of them helped with their expertise and education.

Instead of fighting over gaining some power those three persons united in order that the local administration be equal to the events. Yet, it was no bed of roses.

THE DISTURBANCES

- SAINT-BREVIN had been renamed "L'UNION" (The Union)
- SAINT-MICHEL's new name was "LES SABLONS"
- SAINT-NAZAIRE became "PORT NAZAIRE"
- SAINT-PERE was called "FRATERNITE" (brotherhood)

The royalists didn't remain inactive. The Monarchy's fall and the execution of Louis XVI were quick to revive the vengeful hopes.

In the "Pays de Retz" the insurgents chose two chiefs : the knights Ripault de la Cathelinere (from Frossay) and La Roche Saint-Andre (from Fresnay). Following the example of the massacres perpetrated at Bourgneuf and Machecoul, both men attempted to recapture the estuary by spreading a deadly terror.

Paimboeuf resisted. Pornic fell under the blows of the famous Charrette de la Contrie. Saint-Nazaire was besieged by the Royalists who were shelling all ships sailing out of the estuary. The "Pays de Retz" fell into the insurgents' hands. The two Loire's guardians, Paimboeuf and Saint-Brevin had "their hearts in their boots".

Fortunately, "La Capricieuse" (the Capricious), a 300 man-and-50 gun frigate, was on watch in the estuary. It's true that in the open sea some English Vessels were on the lookout for the right time. This threat came in addition to the Royalist one.

Three thousand men belonging to the royalist troops were stationed between Frossay and St.-Viaud. Before they reached the town the mayor, Rene Mercier, got in touch with Captain Daniel Savary, the commander of La Capricieuse. All able-bodied men were taken aboard because it was well known that whenever bands of royalists entered villages they slaughtered all men systematically.

La Cathelinere and his troops invaded St.-Brevin but Savary landed and put them to route. Then he landed at St.-nazaire and sabotaged all the guns which were found there. Afterwards he rushed to Pornic and dislodged the insurgents from that town. The estuary would remain Republican (31).

On both sides the repression claimed victims in all the peripheral towns and villages. At St.-Brevin no casualties were counted. The well-thought-out wisdom of the mayor (Rene Mercier) and Jean Moret de la Touche (the parish priest) was largely responsible for it.

IV - THE 19 th CENTURY

During the whole period which came next Mindin held its position as “key of the Loire”. The English vessels kept being on the prowl in the open sea in order to attempt to land during all the conflicts which put France against England, particularly in the course of the continental blockade. But Saint-Brevin was not subjected to any invasion except that of the implacable sand dunes.

THE SANDS

In 1810, when St.-Brevin experienced its first cadastre it could be realized that the town was widely worn away by the sea and that a large part of its territory was invaded by sands. Countless houses had disappeared (32). Moaning over it didn't bring any solution to remedy this serious problem. The registers of grievances of 1789 had not reached the expected results about that kind of thing. Later in 1820 an order from the prefect stipulated that picking anything on the dunes was prohibited, particularly the couch grass which was supposed to keep up the soil. When the Duke of Clermont-Tonnerre sold La Guerche estate to Paul Pradal (33), the latter, who was learned in agronomics, decided to plant and sow holm oaks and scotch pines in the sands. It's worth making a note of the experience carried on by Nicolas Bremon tier in the Landes 30 years earlier which seemed to bear fruit.

But farmers were seeing things differently. They considered that a blow was being struck at their environment and devoted themselves to destroying the plants. In addition to this the parish priest had a poor opinion of Pradal who was a non-believer whose positivist mind was not making matters easier for him.

Charles Drouet, his successor at LA Guerche, was one of those who had decided to plant. At the end of the 1850s a few hectares of pine trees had succeeded in striking roots. Things had developed in the right direction and the validity of this action had been understood by everyone. But the State had decided to appropriate several hundreds of barren sand dunes looking upon them as if they were “lais de mer”(given up by the sea) and thus they were part of the maritime property. The mayors of the time sued the State. The legal proceedings lasted for more than a decade. They justified their stance by explaining that the sand dunes were covering expanses which long ago had been inhabited or cultivated.

Therefore they said that under no circumstances the ocean had withdrawn from there. Pieces of walls, showing traces of white-washing, were unearthed. The evidence was undeniable. The case was won. In 1859 a final plan, showing the division of the land between the State and the town, was drawn by Alphonse Padioleau (34), a surveyor from Paimboeuf. Then the town council became aware of the fact that it was necessary to fix the sand dunes, because, storms after storms, some agricultural land and houses were being invaded again and again.

Then the council hastened to sell the 664 hectares it had recovered. The Brevinans were given priority, but most of them couldn't afford it. It was mainly wealthy people from Paimboeuf and Nantes who purchased that land. Each owner was under an obligation to plant trees. The 664 hectares were located between Mindin and the town (round the present "avenue de Mindin") and as far as the banks of the Boivre. The current so-called "Zone de l'Emitage" (35) still was inhabited and partly cultivated. Partially possessed by people from outside St.-Brevin was going to have an other destiny.

THE PINE TREES

Therefore, from 1860 onwards the dunes were going to become systematically covered with oaks and pines. Thus they were consolidated and their tremendous advance was finally held up. The owners, who had only bought barren sands were gradually going to find themselves possessors of a magnificent forest to the North of the town and to the South as Well. Twenty years later the environment had changed. The forest had become more or less abounding in game. Some people had made the decision to build hunting lodges and second homes. Two factors combined favourably : pines and beach. The estates were very large (from 10 to 90 hectares). Imaginative property developers took things in hand. The idee of a seaside resort came into being in the imagination of some of them.

In 1882 the "Société des Bains de Mer" (sea bathing society) was founded. It gave birth to the name of the future resort : SAINT-BREVIN-L'OCEAN. Somptuous properties were built. Some of them deserve being named : La Fouilleuse, Le Semaphore, Le Château du Pointeau, Le Vieux Logis Most prestigious other ones appeared during the following years : La Tour Carrée (the square tower), Les Chênes (the Oaks), La Micheliere,

On either side of the road to Mindin, countless modern rich-looking villas blossomed as early as the end of the century.

The plantations were a complete success. Consequently, on August 3rd 1899, the council decided to change the name of the town. From then on her new name would be SAINT-BREVIN –LES-PINS (36).

SAINT-BREVIN-LES-PINS

Changing the name of this territory, which spread from Mindin down to the fringes of St.-Michel had not altered the socioeconomic data. Apart from the setting up of a seaside resort, some other events had combined. Since 1850, the regular crossing of the estuary between Mindin and Saint-Nazaire, had been contemplated. Of course there were already other servicings in water transport but at that time they took place between Paimboeuf and Mean. As it was no easy task to perform, most of the time the River crossing was taken care of by the fishermen. The village “lost in the sand” started developing a structure. The very first idea was to plan the construction of a North-to- South road linking up Mindin with the town. This idea started being thought over, as early as 1858. This construction lasted from 1863 to 1868. The “Route de Mindin” was born and the highways department named it “chemin imperial de grande communication” (Imperial way of great communication).

In the very place of Mindin it was decided to replace the old military site, dating back to 1754, with a modern powerfully –armed fort which was built in 1861 (37).

St.-Brevin was increasing in scale. The council had to decide to move the cemetery which, until then, had been situated around the church. In 1863 it was transferred to the surroundings of La Saulzaie (38). On that Occasion two Merovegian stone-built coffins were unearthed. For one century, the fast-developing sea transports, and particularly those of Colonial nature, contributed to epidemics. “Quarantines” were vital. Therefore it was planned to build a Lazaret Close to the estuary. At first it had been envisaged to have it built on St. Nicolas Island (39). But in the end it was Mindin that was select in 1862 (40). Finally one took on the relations with the North bank.

In 1877 a regular daily line opened up and carried out the crossing towards St.-Nazaire. It was served by steamboats.

So, in 1882 when the ”Sea Bathing Society” was founded, St.-Brevin had modernized and was ready. A forest had taken the place of the desert sand dunes. The town had developed a structure for a real growth.

V - THE SEASIDE RESORT

So, all the conditions had been put together. From North to South, the town would modernize And never stop expanding.

THE RESORT

Before Saint-Brevin-L'Océan was born some owners from Angers and Nantes had already had their holiday homes built. They would come and take advantage of the beach. Other people from St.-Nazaire had also invested, particularly in hotel business and catering.

From then on it was quite easy to get to St.-Brevin thanks to the development of the railway. As from the end of the seventies St.-Nazaire, then Pornic were served (41). The steadiness of the river crossing allowed profitable relations with the northern bank where the metallurgic and shipbuilding industries were becoming more and more important and renowned.

Two persons have been of major importance in the elaboration of the resort : Paul Carrere (also known as count of Nabat) and Henri Testard de Marans. They were the chief organizers of the scheme. De Marans brought together a lot of estates in order to give them some coherence, and Carrere brought the funds meant to carry out the basic house-building projects. The plan was selling plots within a vast building site strictly intended for holidays and leisure activities. A large stretch of land, reserved for hunting, fishing (lakes contemplated), walking, etc...was at planning stage. IN 1884 the building site of the "Casino de l'Océan" was the very first one being implemented. Carrere was the property developer of this building.

This "village" was also duty bound to provide room for religion. So the Chapel of Saint-Louis was built in 1889.

Yet the entire project was confronted with serious difficulties. One fact was significant : the Casino had to close down very soon because its construction was not excellent quality. In no time it became unexploitable. After squandering his fortune on this project, Carrere died in 1903 (42). As for Testard de Marans, he succeeded in playing his game well and from decade to decade, he kept selling plots, even if doing so was far from being easy (43). The big plan had failed but St.-Brevin kept growing and villas were following.

At beginning of the 20th century building works were in progress to the North and to the south as well. The "Val Coquet" (Charming Valley) was quickly becoming populated. In 1908 it was followed by the estate "Bois de Vila" (Wood of Vila) located between the Sylphes and Leray Avenue. Then it was the turn of the estate of La Michelière.

From year to year avenues had to be built up all over St.-Brevin-l'Océan. The Avenue of the Chalets (Roosevelt av.) and Central Avenue (Clemenceau Av. and La Forêt Av.) were cut. Large estates persisted with somptuous constructions : Le Semaphore, LA Fouilleuse, Villa Maud, Le Château du Pointeau, La Tour Carre, Les Chênes, La Micheliere, La Breviniere..... Hotels had appeared just about anywhere. The "Beautiful Resort" was born. Since 1898 "she" had a real post office set up on the road to Le Pointeau (Foch av.)(44). In 1901 "she" accomodated "her" very first pharmacy (45).

SOLIDARITY

Even if it's true that St.-Brevin did possess some doctors and a pharmacy, we must keep in mind the fact that the have-nots or the employees could hardly afford to call on them.

Like all other towns St.-Brevin had a welfare office. During each session of the council the list of needy people to be helped was very long.

Correlatively, in 1905, a local charity organization for mutual assistance was created. Its name was "l'Avenir de St.-Brevin" (the future of St.-Brevin). This organization was aiming at paying for medical treatments and medecines and at granting an allowance during the illness. Moreover the cost of funerals were also borne by it. A life annuity in view of retirement was proposed as well. The regulations pointed out that the medical "specialities" were also taken care of and that the patients were allowed to choose their doctors. This organization was taking more and more impotence until the "social security" took over after 1930.

In a more down-to-earth field concerning the bovine livestock mortality a mutual insurance was set up. The farmers could be paid back up to 80% of the loss sustained when one animal was ill or injured, even if this head of cattle had been slaughtered by administrative decision for sanitary reasons. Only cattle breeders were concerned. Cattle sellers were excluded from that measure.

Let us underline the fact that the "Union des Cooperateurs de Loire Inferieure" (Union of the Cooperators from the Department of Loire inferieure) installed a branch on the Avenue of the Gilardiere (poincare Av.) which was joined by lots of Brevinians.

The town had resolutely entered the age of modernity. In 1906 "she" had "her" public transport.

THE TRAIN

As early as 1896 the brevinians started wondering about one thing : was St.-Brevin going to operate a “steam tramway” ? The matter in hand was far from being simple; Ten years elapsed before it materialized.

The Inauguration took place on August, 20th, 1906. The very first train, decorated with garlands and flags, made its inaugural entry with its plumes of steam and its triumphant whistles.

This train was intended to link up the stations of Paimboeuf and Pornic via St.-Brevin, St.-Michel and Prefailles.

Coming from Paimboeuf a railway line had been built along the Loire river. This line went past the Lazaret (Avenue of Bodon). Near the landing stage there was a small station which maintained the connection with the boat to St.-Nazaire.

It would take the splendid Avenue de Mindin, get through the town (46) and stop at the station square (Robert Hamel square)(47). A special line had been cut through Mr Jules Rialan’s estate (last owner of LA Guerche)(48). It ran into Santomera square and dashed along the road to Le Pointeau and went as far as the Chalet Square at which place there was a stop. Then the train would climb up “Central Avenue” (clemenceau Av.), which had been widened on this occasion, and would stop at the “Ocean station”(Ouessant square). Then it would continue on its way along the avenue of La Forêt as far as the Neuville Square halt. Then, going at full speed strait ahead along the road to St.-Michel, it would finally reach the station of Les Rochelets which was the last one (49). Then it would go to the last halt at Le Menhir (50) before slipping away towards La Plaine, Prefailles and Pornic.

This train kept running imperturbably until 1938. To a great extent it had participated in the construction of the up-to-date St.-Brevin for the tourist expansion as well as for the transport of materials and goods.

Thanks to it large amounts of coal had been imported which allowed the construction of a gasworks that provided homes with town gas long before many other towns and villages.

This growing prosperity was totally called into question at the time of world war one.

Advertisement at the beginning of the 20th century

Seaside resort of Saint-Brevin-l'Océan

30 minutes from St.-Nazaire

The beach, entirely made of fine sand, with no shingles or silt, is the most pleasant and shadiest one in Brittany. It is over 2 miles long (3.5 km). Both ends are uneven with group of rocks. A gentle and even slope gives swimmers an absolute safety and allows them to go for a swim at any time of the tide. Salmon, mussels and shrimps are plentiful and can be caught throughout the year. The beach of Saint-Brevin-l'Océan is surrounded with a 200 hectare wood abounding in game and planted with various species of trees, notably pines.

It's Arcachon in Brittany. Park with ornamental ponds, hilly and criss-crossed by roads suitable for vehicles. Soil covered with a rich vegetation ; magnolias, camellias ; vegetable and fruit gardens bringing in a full yield. Remarkable meadows and trees. A 7-hectare vineyard producing a famous wine ; therapy consisting in eating a lot of grapes.

Thanks to the influence of the Gulf Stream, the climate encourages doctors to advise children and weak people to come and stay at St.-Brevin-L'Océan.

Family Chalets for hire at reasonable cost – DOMESTIC FOODSTUFFS FOR VERY LITTLE –

Close to the beach, 1,800, 000 metres of wooded land for sale from O F . 75 a metre.

People can go to St.-Brevin-L'Océan from Paris. 1) St Lazare station via CHARTRES, Le MANS, SEGRE and CHATEAUBRIAND. Departure : 9.15 P.M. Arrival at St Nazaire : 7.05 A.M. ; from St Brevin to Mindin crossing in 10 mn, O.F 30 per seat, regular service by steamers. From Mindin to St Brevin-l'Océan, local train from the Chalet Hotel, 20-minute trip, O.F50 per seat. 2) Line Orleans, Blois, Tours, Nantes and St Nazaire. 3) National railway company ; from Nantes, take tickets for St Pere en Retz ; all trains for St Brevin-l'Océan are slow ones (consult timetable), Hotel du Chalet à St Brevin l'Océan, considerably enlarged, 30 new bedrooms.

Accommodation and meals from F. 6.00 per day all inclusive, arrangement for families with children.

Municipal telegraph office and post box in the hotel.

Not to mistake for St Brevin-Le-Bourg (the town)

A detailed information is available at the station buffet of St Nazaire.

V I- THE 20 th CENTURY

Of course, as from August 2nd 1914, the town was to be affected by the vagaries of the war. Refugees from the North and East came flooding in from the departments where the front was rife. For the first time outsiders walked upon the Brevinian soil. They were workers coming from colonies. In the factories of Paimboeuf they took the place of those who had gone off to war. Coming on top of that, in 1917, the tremendous landing of the American forces took place at St Nazaire. Mindin and Paimboeuf became their rear bases for logistics.

NEW-DEPARTURE

As soon as Mindin was cleared of the hundreds of containers and the small train was back in the civilian life and the U. S. Officers had left the hotels and villas they had been staying in, St Brevin regained her peacefulness of former days.

The relaunching of her holiday calling was undertaken. But this time, rather than promoting a resort strictly reserved for a nearly aristocratic elite it was decided to emphasize tourism. Already in 1910-1912 an “association of owners, inhabitants and regular visitors” of St Brevin-Les-Pins and St Brevin-L’Ocean had been set up. Its goal was no longer to praise the merits of a utopian and stylish residential park but to promote St Brevin-Les-Pins as a whole with a view to welcoming as many people as possible. So, in 1920 this association published a new-type brochure which provided pieces of information about the possibilities for accomodation along with the various conveniences as regards leisure and shops, instead of attempting only to sell plots of land.

In no time this association turned into a “tourist office and centre for the defence of St Brevin”. Gradually and certainly with difficulty, hotels were built and modernized. Many boarding houses sprang up looking for a clientele less well off than the one they had previously been aiming at. The Northern part of the town, which had somewhat remained out of the way of the touristic expansion, got in tune. Up-to-date and dynamic establishments, such as hotels and retaurants, opened their doors.

Prestigious establishments, such as the “Casino des Roches” (casino of the rocks) or the “Hotel de l’Ocean”, gained a reputation which reached beyond the boundary of the town. The Brevinians themselves were the best “aficionados” on the subject since they were meeting the population’s expectations with their cinemas, concerts and dances.

As for St-Brevin-l’Ocean, some hotels such as Le Chalet, L’Hotel du Casino or L’Hotel de la Forêt were entirely rebuilt, integrating the new looks of the post-war life : tennis courts and garages completed the range of services to the clientele. Celebrations and parties were not forgotten. The “Pavillon des Fleurs” or “La Potiniere” were the meeting places for the holiday-makers.

THE EXPANSION

Selling plots of land intended for second homes was back and increasing in scale. The large estates were amply parcelled out. St-Brevin-l'Océan and Les Rochelets were kept being divided into plots. Moreover from 1925 onwards, under the leadership of Evariste Colombel (51) a great number of parcels were put up for sale in the district of l'Ermitage. The same way it had been done 70 years before, holm oaks and maritime pines were planted there. A great many "pied-à-terre" appeared just about anywhere under the management of various property developers.

Seeing that things were increasing in scale, a second tourist office was set up at Saint-Brevin-L'Océan proper in 1927. As early as the following year a tourist guide was published by this new office.

For its part the former tourist office of saint-Brevin-Les-Pins was remarkably modernized and in its turn it started publishing every year a promotional leaflet and went into the summer activities of the resort by organizing all sorts of events : motor races, fashion shows, beach contests, air-shows,, etc.... It was also carefully cultivating its image through the production of a remarkable advertising poster.

So doing St-Brevin was strengthening her vocation for holiday making and when the summer of 1936 had come it was an opportunity for the resort to enjoy a new boom.

This expansion was given concrete expression in July 1938 by the renovation of the Casino, which had been left dormant so far, and the official opening of its gaming tables.

NEW STRUCTURES AND FACILITIES

Following all this expansion in the twenties new constraints had to be faced. So, in 1923 a fire brigade was set up. This corps had become absolutely necessary by the very fact that the population had greatly grown, especially in summer. A Brevinian who had been a "Pompier de Paris" (military fire fighter in Paris) took obviously command of the brigade.

The beach, which was a major asset for the town, was calling for a special care. Therefore some volunteers created a local section of the "Hospitaliers Sauveteurs Bretons" (Breton hospitable rescuers). As a result, swimming was made safer and boating could find its place amongst the seaside activities.

The post office had settled on the avenue of Mindin in a lovely mansion everybody knows. But in 1927 a second office opened in the centre of St.-Brevin-l'Océan.

Furthermore a modern waste collection centre was organized as early as 1925 along with an obligation to sort out the whole waste (recyclable and not recyclable). Therefore the users were obliged to have two dustbins.

For a long time the Lazaret had no longer been intended for "Quarantines". It had been used as a military hospital and later on it had been turned into a sanatorium. The "Conseil Général" (Department General Council) bought it back from the State and had it turned into a "Departmental house for convalescence and rest". On her visiting card "St-Brevin gladly added that her good air was necessary for recovering from tuberculosis. Henceforth some private convalescent homes opened which motivated a great many doctors who came and settled there.

Though Saint-Brevin was already being supplied with town gas the inhabitants concerned themselves with installing electricity, and especially from 1932. So, in the same period two steam engines of the “small train” were replaced with two electrical ones. But catenaries didn’t come to clutter up the town since batteries were supplying the necessary energy. Every night they were recharged in turn at Paimboeuf and at La Plaine inside stations specially fitted out for this purpose.

Everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

But other worries were waiting for the Brevinians.

THE DANGER

The thousand-year-old nature cycle was reasserting itself. In fact, nothing serious had been undertaken in order to dyke up the inexorable advance of the sands which had started up again with a renewed vigour.

Of course the sand dunes had been fixed by the forest. They formed a three-to-four-metre high cord all along the coast-line and they didn’t advance anymore. Now a threat of equal importance had broken out. Ever since the Channel intended for navigation on the Loire had been switched to the North Bank the level of the sands on the shores was steadily rising. Consequently the breaking waves were more and more wearing away the coast-line. It’s true that this phenomenon was not something new but very soon it started progressing at a very high speed. Because of the fact that constructions had been systematically kept going on the seashore, the situation had become alarming. Nearly twenty plots of the land were lost in the “Bois de Vila”. The sea was gaining ground. During the famous storm of January 7th, 1924 not only all the coastal houses were flooded but some of them had to be abandoned.

An owner association was established which started looking for funds in order to find a solution for the problem. But the task was far too much important. From year to year the danger was becoming more and more threatening. A few wooden breakwaters were built, but the Brevinian population was strongly opposed to that kind of making which could be a great disadvantage to the tourists activity.

When World War II broke out nothing serious had been undertaken. Then the coast became a strictly-military zone during the German occupation. A multitude of defence works were set up along the coast line which, all things considered, were making things worse.

VII - THE END OF THE 20th CENTURY

The whole economical space and its tourist development, which had been set up by the town was in the balance again because of the declaration of war. Even worse, from June 21th the Germans had gained a foothold at St-Brevin which they turned into a stronghold in order to defend the estuary and the tremendous submarine base they were building at St-Nazaire. Prior to this, the town had been used as an asylum for a vast number of refugees.

THE WAR

In early 1939 masses of Spanish refugees were seen as they were rushing onto the coast. Then the "Prefecture" requisitioned holiday camps especially the "Manoir de l'Ermitage".

No sooner had the war broken out than other French or foreign families had come and found refuge in the area. So, the "College Stanislas" from Paris was decentralized. They rented the Casino premises in order to turn them into classrooms. It was the same about the "Cours Botzaris" which came and set itself up a little farther, in the villa "Beau rivage".

Very quickly the conflict gained in importance in the North and East. As it was during the Great War (W.W.I.) families surged back again towards the coast and set themselves up in the great number of Brevinian villas left unoccupied.

But from June 21th all the vacant houses and public buildings were occupied by the German forces. A four-year parenthesis was going to open. This period was to be made of acts of bravery and resistance for some people, but also made of close collaboration with the enemy for other people. And we mustn't forget all the acts of hospitality and generosity of spirit.

The "Army Rabble" was to rule over St-Brevin until May 11th 1945 which was the date when the German pocket of Resistance surrendered, three days after the Armistice was signed on May 8th.

POST-WAR YEARS

As soon as the Germans were gone the town had to accommodate again lots of refugees. This time the Nazairians were involved : their city had been practically razed to the ground. For two years the Allies had systematically bombed the submarine base and, as a result, Saint-Nazaire was totally wiped out.

As for Saint-Brevin, the town was practically intact which enable her to welcome families coming from the Northern bank while they were waiting for bungalows to be fitted out and blocks of flats to be rebuilt.

Primary schools appeared just about everywhere to provide all children with schooling.

The town was coming back to life. The Avenue of Mindin started covering itself with countless shops all over its length in order to meet the influx of the great number of customers. A new town council revealed itself. It was run by a young and dynamic mayor, Ely Merceron.

A bold and daring programme was implemented. Its accomplishment was to last about thirty years.

Little by little one tried to give a boost to the tourist operations which, at the time, were considered as being the main socioeconomic activity. The Casino reopened its doors and provided the bulk of the summer liveliness by offering up its halls to the local associations which were also attempting to bring the resort and the town back to life.

In 1948 a cinema, "Le Paris", was set up on the Avenue of Mindin. In 1950 it was followed by "The Brevinois" (The Brevinian).

But a question was left unsolved and it was not the slightest one : what was going to be undertaken in order to prevent St-Brevin from partly collapsing under the pressure of the sea ?

THE WALL OF DEFENCE

It was obviously true that the town alone couldn't conduct the venture by herself. Short-and-long term forecasts had to be made. And strong efforts were to be made in order to succeed in getting sufficient subsidies. But most of the public funds were devoted to the general rebuilding : railways, roads, bridges, houses,....At the end of the forties some houses collapsed and barns were covered with sand after the winter storms.

It was in 1955 that everyone agreed to launch a huge programme. The coast line was going to be encircled with a wall built of stone and concrete. While waiting for more substantial funds to be released, and since it was urgent to take drastic measures, metal structures and oak stakes were implanted in places which were most menaced (53).

Finally between 1959 and 1972, phase after phase, a protective wall succeeded in holding back the destructive frenzy of storms. This aim had been achieved thanks to the fact that the trade-union association of owners, founded in 1925, had been revived. Of course subsidies were paid but the owners had also to pay for it out of their own pockets. The town soaked up the last loans.

But in the meantime pieces of the coast kept collapsing, as it was the case at the "Val Coquet". In November of 1963 new attacks took place damaging houses which were coming near to falling down.

Today the danger is kept away. Paradoxically it is now necessary to protect the sand dunes which in olden days were a real scourge. The put-up defences have altered a centuries-old balance between the sea and the sand.

Anguish and doubts having been taken away, the town looked conscientiously into the modernization of her patrimony.

THE MODERNIZATION

Since the end of the war the town had kept growing but her general structures have remained just as they used to be. It was time to show concern about it.

In 1954 two modern school complexes got started, one at St-Brevin-L'Océan (Paul Fort School) and an other one at St-Brevin-Les-Pins (François Dallet school).

Then a secondary school had to be created. It was done in 1967 at the start of the new school year. During the following years a sports complex was built. A "Community Art Centre" was opened in 1969, then a swimming pool in 1976. At the end of 1967 the new town hall was inaugurated. Then the time came when the Industrial Estate emerged.

At the same time, the roads leading to the various villages were serviced and then macadamized during the seventies since the countryside was more and more filling with private houses which was bringing about a constantly-increasing road traffic.

The Religious building also entered the path of revival. In 1958 the "Chapelle du Rosaire" (the Rosary Chapel) was erected. Then St-Louis was rebuilt in 1963. In the end, in 1972 the church regained a youthful look.

When in 1975, the estuary bridge linked the two banks of the Loire, the town put a permanent end to her thousand-year-old isolation and inevitably entered the path of a new expansion.

By this very fact the "urban development plan", drawn up in 1967, had foreseen 10,000 inhabitants at St-Brevin by 1985 and 14,000 by 2000. But no one had anticipated that the toll bridge would have such a deterrent effect. In 1990, only 8,764 souls were counted. But as soon as the crossing became free, the town enjoyed at once a new-boom. It will probably be in 2010 that she will reach the goal set by the State.

A worthy-of-the-name Tourist Office was built in 1978. It was professionalized in 1987 when a "Resort Manager" was appointed to that post. In 1981 a music school opened. Then a Navy Museum was set up in the old fort of Mindin in 1983 (54). Later, in 1988, the centre of St-Brevin-Le-Pins was entirely renovated. In 1991 it was the turn of St-Brevin-l'Océan. A worthy-of-the name "Centre for Health Care and Social Welfare" was created in 1992. Then in 1996 a brand new music school opened its doors.

Saint Brevin wouldn't be late on entering 2001

CONCLUSION

Saint-brevin has got a great many plans for the future. From the top of her thousand years of age she is apparently looking at the century and the millenium to come with equanimity.

To fulfill her rebirth she will not wait for Nantes to “Perish” contrary to what is said in the very old adage one took pleasure to proclaim in the far-off times.

Of course farming and fishing are no longer so prestigious as they used to be in the past. But tourism and holidaying are establishing themselves with the same importance as the one they had been given at the end of the 19 th Century.

Since the bridge ousted the ferry, the avenue of Mindin doesn’t anymore enjoy the “leadership” as it used to in the past. But anyway it remains the brightest Avenue in the whole “Pays de Retz” with its splendid villas (some of them hundred-year-old ones) proudly lined up which have been listed by the “Direction Regionale de l’Action Culturelle” (Regional Management for Cultural Initiatives). It’s just what our patrimony can boast about.

Buildings and private houses are being built north and south of the town which augurs well for an harmonious expansion.

Saint Brevin is no longer alone. Not only has she developed fruitful relations with the north of the Loire thanks to an outstanding network of public transport, but her lot is also linked to the “Communauté de Communes du Sud de l’estuaire” (Community of the towns in the south of the Estuary) consisting of Corsept, Paimboeuf, St Viaud, St Pere and Frossay. With such a synergy there is no limit to what we can hope for.

The town devotes herself to preserving the patrimony she has inherited from “ Father Time” and men and, at the same time, she also tries her best to be equal to her ambitions in every field.

Rather than turning in on herself, St-Brevin, former key of the Loire river, is opening up to the world.

The esplanade of Mindin, which has been deserted and empty since the disappearance of the ferryboats, is going to take a new shape : walks will welcome the visitors amid exotic gardens each of them showing the picture of one of the three continents involved in the triangular trade (Africa , Europe and America) (55).

St-Brevin will be a party to the expansion of the Nantes-Saint-Nazaire metropolis.

The 21th century will see a second bridge over the estuary which will bring in all the routes leading to the airport of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, the big airport on the Atlantic shoreline of Europe.

As for her past, a “lieu de mémoire” (place of memory) has been created in which all the facts regarding her history are filed, listed and catalogued. Thus anyone who is in possession of objets or documents can deposit them or suggest that copies of them be made. Today, video tapes, CD roms, audio cassettes, books, various publications, posters, leaflets, records of associations (or private ones) are preserved. The people who will come after us will get an inheritance which enable them to find again part of their roots.

The present leaflet is intended for the British visitors who are in search of traces about the sinking of the SS Lancastria.

Repatriating civilians and wounded servicemen the SS Lancastria left Saint Nazaire on the 7th of June 1940. Within the following hour this English ship was set on fire and sunk by the German Air Force. More than 3,000 corpses were found on our coastline. Many bodies were buried just about anywhere along the “Côte de Jade” (Jade Coast) in isolated paths. Some of those graves can still be visited, in particular in the cemetery of La Plaine.

On the eve of that fatal day the SS Saint-Christophe (which was daily operating between Saint-Brevin and Saint-Nazaire) had landed an English regiment at Mindin with weapons, packs and vehicles. The whole unit set up for the night in a makeshift camp on the marsh of “La Prinais”. On the following morning they spent all their time destroying the vehicles before boarding back the SS St-Christophe and embarking on the SS Lancastria.

In 1980 the subaquatic club of St-Brevin dived on the wreck. A porthole was left in the care of the “Musée de la Marine” (Navy Museum) of the town.

The mausoleum of the Dresslers can be seen in the old cemetery. The members of this family who were supposed to board the SS Lancastria were late in arriving and missed the ship. Therefore their lives were spared and they helplessly witnessed the horrible shipwreck.