

CONTENTS

Map	8
Foreword	9
Introduction	11
Chapter 1 Breton Saints	
The Life of Saint Guérolé	
St-Hervé, St-Ronan and St-Gildas	23
Chapter 2 The Founding Saints of Brittany	
St-Brieuc, St-Samson, St-Tugdual, St-Pol,	
St-Corentin, St-Patern, St-Malo	51
Chapter 3 Saints and Other Animals	
Herbot, Eloi, Thélo and others	71
Chapter 4 Where Legend meets History	
Conan Meriadec, Conomor, City of Ys	88
Chapter 5 Legends in the Landscape	110
Chapter 6 Stories of the Sea and Shore	142
Chapter 7 Strange Creatures Great and Small	
Giants, <i>lutins</i> and <i>korrigans</i>	162
Chapter 8 Arthurian Connections	
Tristan, Arthur, Brocéliande, Merlin, Lancelot	185
Chapter 9 Death and the Devil	204
Chapter 10 Legendary Women	241
Chapter 11 Later Legends	277
Chapter 12 A Legend for Today	296
Index	302

THE LEGENDS OF BRITTANY

We may think of legends as tales of an imaginative world, but they can also lead us to the realities of the past. Stories enshrine a collective memory from distant times right up to recent events, and they indicate what people today believe about their own origins and about themselves as a community. In this way, legends are stories from yesterday for today and even for the future.

Introduction

Brittany's landscape and history are imbued with tales of saints, sinners, monsters, giants, mischievous imps, knights and ladies, products of a vast rich oral culture stretching back over many centuries. These stories go further than mere entertainment. They uphold beliefs about Breton identity that continue to exist in the present day, kept very much alive by the deeply-layered resource of traditional legend.

Through the efforts of folklorists in the last 150 years, the legends of Brittany have been preserved by collecting oral testimony - particularly from the older generation - all over the region, from Haute Bretagne in the east, where Gallo was the local language, to the Breton traditions of Basse Bretagne further west¹.

Old tales (*contes*) are now told in innovative ways, as each individual story-teller processes often well-known material through their own personal filter. Music and drama are important elements of the presentation of legends, as chants and theatrical pieces also present stories from the past. The *gwerz* (plural *gwerziou*) or dramatic ballad is today widely performed in Breton and French with songs based on popular traditions.²

Story-tellers (*conteurs/ conteuses*) perform in village halls and in churches, at festivals and across the landscape throughout the year

¹ See Map, opposite page 9.

² For example, those performed by well-known artists like Denez Prigent and Yann-Fañh Kemener whose work is widely available on CD.



Roc'h Trévézel

It was said that every 1100 years the rocky face of Roc'h Trévézel opened on the eleventh stroke of midnight and closed again on the twelfth. Inside dwelt a little old wooden saint. Whoever found the saint and rubbed his head would be granted whatever they desired. But the only way to get him out was to use an 11 year old boy to get through the crack in the rock at the appropriate time.

One day a curious old man enlisted the help of such a boy and went to the rock when the 1100 years period was up. Sure enough, the rock opened on the eleventh stroke of midnight and in went the boy. In the first room he saw a pile of delicious-looking apples, but nothing else. He went on into a second room where there was an even greater pile of even more enticing apples. He picked one up and took a bite. Then another. The crunch of the apple obscured the