



## **Wendy Mewes' book launch - Huelgoat**

Elaine So, Wendy, can you tell me how your new book, 'Legends of Brittany', came to be written and put together?

Wendy It's really the third link in a chain that started in 2010 with a competition organised by the Parc Armorique to write a legend to explain the disappearance of the nuclear power station. So, you had to write in a traditional, legendary style, but about something very modern. So, I wrote a story which was translated into French for the competition, and I was one of the prize winners, and I decided to publish a, a collection of short stories giving modern twists to traditional stories from the Monts d'Arrées, very famous Breton stories but to give them a, a slightly, look at them from a different angle. And that was published as a dual language French and English text, eh, in 2011 called 'The Shape of Mist', or 'Lambeaux de Brume' in French. Um, I decided to finally tackle a huge pile of material I've collected about legends over the years, and to write a book, 'The Legends of Brittany', but not just the stories themselves. What interests me as a writer, as a historian, far more, is about legends: how they originated, what they signify, who wrote them down, how do we know about some and others have been lost. And, so, it's a book of legends set in their context.

Elaine Was it difficult to decide which legends to include and which, perhaps, to leave out?

Wendy Well, tremendously. So...

Elaine (laughter)

Wendy Not only do you have

Elaine (laughter) you must have hundreds to.....

Wendy Hundreds of thousands of those, but each legend has several versions,

Elaine Exactly.

Wendy So it's very much a, a, a question of selectivity. I've gone to many events where conteurs have been speaking. Because legends were essentially from the oral tradition. Breton was essentially an oral language. Uh, so, legends written down is never the same as legends told live. But, also, you've got to think, out of all the the hundreds of thousands of legends, certain legends have been handed down. And often it's because they have some significance beyond their entertainment value. They say something about what Bretons believe about their past or themselves.

Elaine Was there any one particular, uh, legend that that you were investigating, that you were looking in to, that actually became more sort of compulsive perhaps?

Wendy Well, for me, I think it's the, er, what's is called in Breton the gwerz, the ballad, the lament, the historial song that tells of an event, but it's given a completely different twist in its legendary form. The great folklorists, they made a point of getting hold of this oral tradition and writing it down.

Elaine So how long would you say it actually took you to put the book together to the moment last week when it was actually launched?

Wendy Well, it's been in the making, you could say it's been in the making for ten years ....

Elaine Right

Wendy In terms of collecting material.

Elaine Yes.

Wendy I suppose I spent about eight months of absolutely solid work to put it together, but I have been thinking about it for a very long time.

Elaine So, what, what are you going to do now? What is, uh, next on your cards?

Wendy Well, for the rest of this year, 2012, I'm working on a project to develop, um, a walking circuit designed to attract British visitors, and for British residents, based on themes that connect Brittany and Britain. The first phase of this trail will cover Roscoff, Morlaix, Lannion, walking round the coast because it's to be a continuation of the

Cornish Saints' Way. The idea that the Saints travelled across Cornwall, avoiding sailing round Land's End.

Elaine So, do you ever get a chance just to sit down and, and read a book yourself?

Wendy No, never.

