



Brittany in Recent times

Brittany was badly scarred by the terrible destruction of the war. Brest, Lorient and St-Malo lay in ruins and other towns were badly damaged. Road and rail communications had been hard hit and the agrarian way of life of most of the population was in a state of disintegration. The Marshall Plan provided funds for development to get Europe on its feet again, and in 1950 the important organisation CELIB was set up specifically to bring investment and new sources of employment into Brittany.

In 1957 the war-time arrangements of the Vichy government to separate Nantes and its surrounding industrial area from Brittany were confirmed, with the newly named department of Loire-Atlantique becoming part of the Pays de la Loire. This loss made it crucial to attract new industry into the now depleted Brittany, and big companies like Michelin, Citroën and Alcatel began to arrive in the 1960s and 1970s. In Quimper in 1969 General de Gaulle announced large investment in the Breton road system to facilitate economic development.

The greatest leap forward came in agriculture in the 1970s, when modernisation was aided by the implementation of Common Market benefits. Larger-scale farming and well-organised co-operatives really took off with huge increases in the production of grain and especially pork and chicken. Vegetables are also prolifically cultivated, mostly in Léon, north Finistere, where Brittany Ferries began in 1973 to take these products to Cornish markets. The food industry and all its concomitant activities is one of the region's economic strengths today.

Brittany is also France's prime fishing area, although this industry has declined in numbers here as elsewhere in the last fifty years. The history of places like Douarnenez, Le Guilvinec and Concarneau are inextricably bound up with the successes and disappointments of their fishermen. Shellfish and seaweed remain two staple marine products of the region.

Research centres, particularly in the context of marine life and the environment, marine technology and ship-building are all thriving in modern Brittany, which is also home to large-scale telecommunications centres. The consistently high educational standards of the region are well-known, with universities of fine repute in Rennes and Brest.

Post-war Brittany has had its share of disasters. In 1978 the Amoco Cadiz wreck brought Brittany to the world's attention, when hundreds of miles of coastline were desecrated by the oil spill. The grim reminder of the ship's

anchor sits today on the quay at Portsall. The south coast suffered the same fate twenty years later with the fuel-tanker Erika breaking in two in severe weather.

In 2007 France's first marine park was established in the Mer d'Iroise, covering the Atlantic islands and a long stretch of Breton coastline. Its aim is to develop scientific research, conserve marine heritage and oversee sustainable development in economic and touristic terms.

Tourism remains vital to the economy with Brittany's unmatched reputation for sailing and other water-sports, as well as the recent development of long-distance Green Ways walking and cycling trails in the interior.

Brittany retains its special allure of a land of legends, Celtic language, strong religious heritage and colourful festivals as well as showing a remarkable capacity to adapt to the demands of the modern world. This redirection of considerable social, economic and cultural energies into new ways of communicating a unique and powerful identity is a real success story.

