



Musée Milmarin 2 - the future

Elaine: I'm still at the Milmarin museum with Richard, but meantime, we have travelled sometime into the future. So, Richard, can you tell us about this very contemporary museum that we're now in?

Richard: The other museum that's located here in Milmarin is a museum devoted to the history of the merchant marine here in France, and particularly, the merchant marine since World War II. The merchant marine in France really comes to a halt during World War II; most of it is destroyed during the Second World War, and it's recreated almost from scratch after the end of the war when the Americans give the French their "liberty ships." The Americans had constructed liberty ships at an astounding rate of speed to transport men and material across the Atlantic, and they really didn't need the ships at the end of the war, so they gave many of them to the French, and that was the beginning of the modern French merchant marine. The first question is: Why would you have a museum devoted to the history of the merchant marine here in Paimpol? And the answer is that for many, many years, Paimpol had one of the schools devoted to preparing officers for the merchant marine here. That school played a very important part in the economy of the city, because these young men were going to become officers and would have wonderful salaries and wonderful retirement. So, families with eligible daughters made sure that their eligible daughters met these promising students, and the city, to set this up, would hold every year what was called Bal de l'école, the dance for the school, and there, every family would dress up their eligible daughters and of course try to link them up with a future merchant marine captain. Very often, when these captains or officers retired, they came back to Paimpol to live so that the wife could live close to her family, and this added a great deal to the prosperity of the city. So, that's a long way to explain why Paimpol has a long history with the merchant marine, because for many years, a very significant portion of the officers in the French merchant marine did their training here in Paimpol.

Elaine: So, I've noticed that the museum where we're in at the moment, the inside where—which is very, very interactive—all the little different things that you can ... look like shipping containers. Is that a deliberate idea?

Richard: Absolutely. The museum shows in a series of wonderfully interactive displays how the merchant marine changed from the—technically from the 19th century with sail ships—but primarily in the 20th century, the move to the modern container ship. And the modern container ship revolutionises the merchant marine. It makes it possible to load and unload ships much faster than they had been done before. But it changes the look of the ships. It changes the way they're done. Several of the displays here also explain that another element that changed radically in the last several decades in the merchant marine was that because the various maritime laws were changed, it became cheaper for companies to have their ships registered in what we once called "Third World Countries," such that whereas even, say in 1950, most of the ships in the world's merchant marine were registered in England, the United States, France, other major industrial countries, now most of them are registered in places like Panama and Turkey, because it allows for economies of, of shipping. As a result, whereas a lot of the officers still train in the big industrial countries, most of the crew, in fact, do not, and that has changed the nature of the merchant marine a great deal in the last several decades.



Elaine: And also, the thing that is fairly obvious here and that we do see as well, is the size of these merchant ships now, in that they are almost the size of a town. Therefore, this must have an effect on ports that they can get into.

Richard: That's a – there's a wonderful display here that shows that. It is because these ships get larger and larger, the traditional ports simply weren't large enough to handle them. And so, you have a few cities in the west, like Rotterdam for example, who have built completely new ports further out to sea to handle these ships, but a lot of the major shipping ports for the merchant marine these days are in places like China, where they have built ports from scratch to accommodate these truly mammoth ships.

Elaine: Well, thank you very much, Richard. It's been an absolutely fascinating visit, going from the one, which is so important in history, to this, what is the future. So, we've traversed many, many years, and I think, in a way, that is a shame to see some of these beautiful sailing ships disappearing and being replaced by, what look like, as I said, more than double-decker buses, trains on afloat. It must be fascinating for you to be involved with –

Richard: I love it. I absolutely love it, it is truly fascinating.

Elaine: Well, I'll let you go off, because I think you've got a little group waiting for your guidance in French. Thank you very much for your time.

Richard: My pleasure.