



Diane - Éditions Plessix, Dinan, the English Colony

Diane Editions Plessix was created in 2014 when I was publishing my grandfather's diaries, my grandfather being the historian Mathurin Monier. The name came from Yffiniac which is my grandfather's home town and Plessy was the maiden name of my great-grandmother and it was decided that we would use the Editions Plessix as a kind of badge. It's a non-profit organisation which aims to produce books in a very limited edition on Dinan and its relationship with the English-speaking world. That's been one of my passions.

My grandfather was Mathurin Monier – he was the author of a whole load of history books on Dinan and the region between 1947 and his death in 1974, and it was after my mother died in 2007 that I found my grandfather's diaries which gave me a completely different aspect to the way I knew my grandfather, and it was quite an epiphany.

Rob His diaries were an inspiration to you, did it lead you to be a historian in your own right?

Diane Yes definitely and I think that the diaries, as I said earlier, they were a key to this and I think historical research can be quite genetic as well, and just reading about the passion that he had for the detective work required in historical research gave me, definitely, the impetus and desire to follow in his tracks albeit in a more modest fashion.

Rob Dinan is a historical town, you've chosen a particular group of people who were living in Dinan at the time.

Diane Definitely, and I think that's because I was brought up in a bilingual house. My mother was French, the daughter of Mathurin Monier, and my father was British and I was brought up speaking both French and English at home and so having one foot in France and another in Britain gave me that interest in the Anglophone society or community that lived in Dinan in the 19th century and that's developed itself into a book which I called the English Colony, that was published just over two years ago now.

Rob What were the English doing here?

Diane Right, well that's an interesting question. The book I wrote is La Colonie Anglaise in French and I've done an English version, so there are two versions of the book and the word Colony is the name that they themselves gave themselves – they referred to themselves as the English Colony, and I've even got the example of a Scottish man called Mr Pringle who very happily referred to himself as being a member of the English colonies. So I thought well if Mr Pringle is happy with that, then my readers will be as well.

Rob What sources did you have for your research then? It wasn't your grandfather's diaries.

Diane It was indeed, because in his diaries he mentioned a very good friend of his, an Englishman named John de Sargé and John de Sargé was the grandson of a Franco-British gentleman, Cosmé de Sargé, who lived in Dinan with his English wife in the 19th century and he too, for over fifteen years, kept a day-to-day diary of what life was like in Dinan in the midst of this English-speaking community. There were quite a number of reasons why they settled in Dinan and who they were, I think that's a question that a lot of people ask me is who were these people and what did they do here? They were drawn to Dinan because at the time it was a spa town. A lot of these people came from colonial India. A lot of these



people had been Indian army people. They'd been accustomed to living in beautiful villas and surroundings in India with servants and everything else. They left India and found themselves in Yorkshire where they couldn't rent such amazing properties, where they couldn't find servants, where it was pouring with rain. Then they heard about this little settlement of English-speaking people in Dinan which, on top of it, was a spa town and they could take the waters. It was ideal, there were beautiful big houses up for rent at very affordable prices. The British people who settled in Dinan, they were very grateful to their French hosts and the French, although to start with were a bit suspicious of these people and wondering are they going to take our jobs, what are they doing – all this is happening in the wake of Waterloo. Thanks to a very Anglophile mayor of Dinan in the 1870s – we're looking at a man called Henri Flo(?), he was all for the presence of this Anglophone community and he was saying to the locals, so hang on, you know they're renting our houses, they're employing our people, they're not taking jobs, they're bringing money into the country, let them be.

Rob It sounds very much like the state of affairs nowadays, you must be thinking about the parallels with the British population in Brittany now?

Diane Oh absolutely. Yes. Although I wouldn't call the current British settlement, well I can't call it a settlement, the current set up really, it's not a colony because they built their own church, they had their own gentlemen's club, they really settled in Dinan. They even had a tennis club. So you'd find the working class people in the quartier de la rue Saint-Malo, then there was indeed the garrison. This flourished in the 1870s onwards and there were a lot of beautiful new villas that were being built in this particular area so you had a lot of well off British people who moved into these villas, and then of course you had the quartier de la rue Beaumanoir which was the crème de la crème. You had sumptuous villas there and people who were very well off would settle there so there were these three hubs and they built their own Anglican church, Christchurch, which the building still stands but has been disused for quite a long time.

Rob If people were to visit Dinan, would they find other traces of this English colony? You mentioned the club for example, can you still find that place?

Diane There is a plaque in front of the club which is at 5 Place du Gueclan right near the tourism office. The tennis club, well that long since gone, but if you go to the Jardin Anglais, which was named in honour of the Anglophone community and which was landscaped in a very British way, you will see another plaque there which mentions the presence of the English-speaking community and there is a plaque outside the church as well. It's an interesting thing to go on a little trail, you know, in search of where the Brits were.

Rob They obviously lived here, but they also died here.

Diane Ah yes, there is, what I refer to as, the English cemetery and is known locally as the CimIrière Anglais, which is within the municipal cemetery but it is its own area, and I spent a good eighteen months researching completely that cemetery working out who was where and who was who.

Rob Anybody stand out in particular?



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Diane Well, how about the stepmother of Lord Kitchener.

Rob Lord Kitchener was living in Dinan?

Diane He lived in Dinan as a very young man. His father had re-married and they moved to Dinan. The young Herbert Kitchener would come on holiday and stay with his stepmother and father in Dinan. He even fought for the French before he passed his exams at Woolwich and was severely reprimanded on his return to Woolwich, but he said "I wasn't a fully fledged soldier, I could fight for the French then if I wanted to" and the stepmother, therefore, Mary Kitchener lived in Dinan right up until her death and was buried in the English cemetery, so her grave is there. It's a beautiful place. It's very poetic.

Rob Diane Monier-Moore thank you very much indeed for your introduction to the English colony in Dinan.

Diane Thank you.