



Éditions Plessix part two

Rob: And I'm back with historian Diane Monier-Moore, who is going to tell us a bit more about the publications of her Éditions Plessix. Your latest publication, Éditions Plessix is an adaptation of some journals, if I'm not mistaken.

Diane: Yes, it's the memoirs of an English-speaking lady called Molly Magee who lived in Dinan in the 1920s and 30s and it was as a result of my research for my book on the English colony that I became aware of the existence of these memoirs and I wasn't quite sure what to expect. When I read through the memoirs and realised just how good they were, Molly writes with such wit and a sense of fun and joie de vivre, it's just fantastic. I knew that this was a book that would appeal to the Dinan readership so I started work, again, this is a labour of love and translated the whole of the memoirs into French so that we could then produce a bilingual book with the left page in original English and the right-hand page in French. And once I had finished translating the book I then recruited a very good friend of mine, Jean-Yves Ruaux, who is a journalist and has worked with both French and English for years to get him to reread my work because the last thing I wanted to give a readership would be a book in Français. When you're working quite intensely with two languages that could happen. So he became absolutely hooked as well on the diaries, the memoirs, so we spent most of the summer going through all of the last proofs and I put together over a hundred period photographs, many of which had never, ever been published before so I was searching for them left, right and center. Again, I annotated the book as well and published it in October last year here in Dinan, and we had a very responsive audience and the sales so far have been extremely good.

Rob: You talk about memoirs. What's the difference for you between a memoir and a diary?

Diane: Um, well a diary is something you write everyday while it is actually happening, so you're telling your reader or yourself what you've done that particular day. The memoir is something that is written much later and Molly wrote her memoirs when she was an elderly lady and what's absolutely fantastic with her is her amazing memory for names. She remembered the names of all the people living in her street and I double checked these people and indeed they had existed at exactly those places in that street and, you know, in my last interview I spoke of the three hubs of Dinan where the Anglophones settled, Molly was brought up in the quartier de la rue Saint-Malo, which is the oldest part of Dinan, where to this day there is a mayor of the commune who is not a politician, it is what is known as a commune libre, a free commune where they have old feudal traditions that are maintained to this day. Of course, the citizens vote for the proper government, however, there is a tradition that the mayor of the commune is someone who is chosen by the commune and remains mayor for life. So when we published Molly's book, we did one presentation at the library which was the official presentation, but then the next day we went to the foyer de la commune libre, where in the presence of Monsieur Gouault, the mayor of the commune, we did another much more informal presentation, and it was a lot of fun doing that, and I think that Molly's family who came over specially for the presentations really loved the atmosphere in that part of town as well. We did a proper walking tour as well to show Gay Doggart and her family where her ancestors had lived and what they did, Molly and her family.



Rob: You talk about the English community, I am guessing now that Molly Magee, that's not terribly English, it's a bit Irish isn't it?

Diane: Well, what's interesting is a lot of people have asked me if Molly Magee was Irish. Molly wasn't even her real name, everybody called her Molly. But it was a family where everybody had a nickname, and of course doing research it meant that that was sometimes a little confusing whereby Molly's mother was called Alice, but known as Queenie, Molly's real name was Jean. As for the Magee surname I would certainly say that somewhere down the line there is Irish ancestry, definitely.

Rob: But she was an English woman of the bourgeoisie, or...

Diane: Yes, yes very much so and her parents moved to Dinan for a number of reasons. Her mother, Alice (Queenie), had been educated in Dinan as a young child and so when they decided as a family to move to Brittany with their young children, Molly and her brother, Dick, it was again with education in mind because education was a lot cheaper in Dinan than in the U.K. and they had extremely good bilingual lessons here. There was an English school, that's something I bring up in my book on the English colony. There was an English-speaking school, specifically aimed at the children of the colony with the formidable Miss Brown as the first principal to be followed by the equally formidable Miss McCallum who was an extremely strict lady and Molly recalls lessons with Miss McCallum in her memoir and as I said, she writes with a lot of wit. You see that the older Molly often writes through the eyes of the child that she was, but then at other points writes through the memory of an older lady looking back at episodes, and she certainly writes about Miss McCallum's lessons with a lot of wit.

Rob: Did she spend the rest of her life in Dinan? Is she buried here, for example?

Diane: No. It was just before the outbreak of war that the family decided to leave Dinan and move back to the mainland and indeed, most of the British families did leave the town especially when the Germans invaded, although some did remain, and that's a project I am looking at for something else to do.

Rob: How can people get hold of this memoir of Molly Magee?

Diane: Yes, well all my books are available at Librairie le Grenier, in Dinan itself. They have a web site, and you can order online from their web site, and they are by far the best stockists of all of these books.

Rob: So let's talk about your future plans.

Diane: Well, as I said, I am looking into what happened to the Brits who decided to stay on in Dinan in 1940. It's quite sad reading, but it's a fascinating area of research as well so that's what I'm looking at at the moment.

Rob: Diane Monier-Moore, thank you very much indeed for explaining so many

