THE BIGOUDEN AWAKENING

WELSH METHODIST MISSION IN BRITTANY

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2020
Major Locations in the Narrative

From S. Bourguet
SOME BACKGROUND

There is no original research in this article. The information in it is derived from the writings of others in print and on the Internet – see For further Reading at the end – and from emails sent to me by Jean-Yves Carluer, History professor at the University of Brest. Other than from the emails, I have derived the information solely from the books and websites listed at the end of this article: I have not compared what they say with original archival material in English, Welsh, French or Breton. I have no reason to believe that any of the writers were mistaken in what they wrote, but it would be prudent for anyone with a deeper and more comprehensive interest in these events to make the necessary inroads into the original archives.

It might be worth starting by saying what a bigouden is. Geographically the name le Pays bigouden denotes the country along the Bay of Audierne, south-west of Quimper, in the département of Finistère, France. Originally the word denoted the tall hats traditionally worn by women of the area. By 1900 it had extended its meaning to include the women themselves, and from there it expanded its meaning further to denote all the region’s inhabitants.
I owe the title of this article to Jean-Yves Carluer who has an article in his website under this web address http://protestantsbretons.fr/histoire/etudes/methodistes-calvinistes-et-parlant-breton-3/ entitled *Le temps du Réveil (1883-1914)* which includes a section under the heading 1898-1914 : *Le « Réveil bigouden »*. The word *réveil* can be translated as *awakening* or as *revival*. The reader will, I think, agree that the events described in the following narrative did not amount to a revival; but that there was certainly a spiritual awakening among the Breton people of the Bigouden region at that time is, I believe, indisputable.

And first we turn to events which preceded that awakening.

Missionary outreach from Wales to Brittany predates the nineteenth century work by many centuries. St Samson, a native of Wales born around the late 480s AD to parents from Dyfed and Gwent, landed around 548 AD in order to plant Christianity in the region. He is attested historically by his signing of the acts of the Council of Paris in about 555 AD. He and his companions built monasteries around which villages were established, and numerous chapels throughout Brittany were dedicated to him. He became the Bishop of Dol, where he died in about 565 AD. The photograph on the next page shows the Chapel of St Samson near Landunvez, built in 1785 to replace an older one.
Baptists

A little background to Welsh work in Brittany can be briefly gleaned from a glimpse at the early Baptist work there, for Baptist ministers in Monmouthshire gave the first impetus to evangelistic work in Brittany in 1821. In 1834 the first attempt to found a mission in Brittany was made by Baptist ministers from Glamorgan and Monmouth, and they sent Rev. John Jenkins to Morlaix.
It was Rev. David Jones who drew Calvinistic Methodist attention to the needs in Brittany. He visited France in 1824, and the British and Foreign Bible Society asked him to attempt to discover if any parts of the Scriptures had been translated into Breton. He found there was no part of the Bible available in Breton either in manuscript or printed. The preparation of a translation was entrusted to Jean-François Le Gonidec, a Breton scholar. Le Gonidec (1775-1838) was born at Le Conquet, and a monument to him was erected in the cemetery at nearby Lochrist, financed by Welsh Evangelicals, in the presence of Pastor Jenkins of Morlaix. Le Gonidec, a Roman Catholic, translated the New Testament from the Latin Vulgate, which contains some false renderings of the original Greek, but the translation proved to be too classical in style for simple Bretons to understand. Many words in it were close to French, and the language was learned, which made it almost incomprehensible to peasants and of little use in evangelism. According to wikipedia, the Roman Catholic Church refused its publication, and when it was eventually published in 1827 by the British and Foreign Bible Society, the resulting "Protestant" translation was placed on the Index of Banned Books by the Catholic Church.
Excursus: Bible translation

A résumé here of translations might be in order to assist understanding of various references in the course of the missionary and colportage narrative. It must of necessity be a little complicated, a complexity augmented by the fact that there were four Breton dialects, with Vannetais being so different from the others that there is no translation of the Bible other than a few passages with illustrations – and there were also no Protestant missionaries. This Vannetais translation, the work of Jean Marion (1759-1824), had as its purpose to make the principal events of the Old and New Testaments accessible to everyone. It was published in 1802.

According to the website https://www.bible.com versions/1799-jen1897-ar-bibl-santel-jenkins-1897 the Baptist John Jenkins recommended a revision of the New Testament, which he was commissioned to do in 1838. He suggested to the British and Foreign Bible Society a revision of the BFBS text. He simplified the language and revised it by reference to the Greek, Welsh and English texts. From 1845 until 1847 Jenkins was assisted by the Breton writer Guillaume Ricou (1778-1848), who ensured it
was in understandable language. The first revision was printed in Brest in 1847.

After Ricou died in 1848, further revisions were made with the help of the Welsh Calvinist Methodist missionary James Williams. Jenkins and Williams continued to revise the New Testament, and it was republished and revised a number of times.


Guillaume Le Coat suggested that a new translation should be undertaken, from the original Greek and Hebrew. As the British and Foreign Bible Society wished to use up its stocks of Le Gonidec’s translation, Le Coat (who became independent, and developed the
missionary centre at Trémel, near the boundary with Finistère) prepared a translation which was less elegant but more understandable to Breton peasants, and which became by far the most widely dispersed. Le Coat’s great advantage was that from his childhood in Trégor in the Côtes d’Armor he had, as Carluer puts it, "crié sur les vaches en breton" (shouted at the cows in Breton). Le Coat’s was published by the Trinitarian Bible Society, and sales amounted to 100,000 New Testaments and 20,000 Bibles, published respectively in 1883 and 1897.

The photograph on the next page shows John Jenkins in about 1860.
James Williams, 1842-1869

But to return to the narrative of events, the Baptist John Jenkins was not the only Welsh missionary in Brittany after 1842. After the Calvinistic Methodist missionary society was founded in 1840 it seemed to be taken for granted that a mission in Brittany would follow. James Williams was born in 1812 in Laugharne (Talacharn, or simply Lacharn), Carmarthenshire. Till the age of 25 his trade was as a blacksmith. He became a student at Bala, and married Catherine Jones, a Bala minister’s daughter. He had it in mind to go to France, and was accepted as the first missionary to Brittany, and the couple landed in St Malo in March 1842.

Quimper

Achille Le Fourdrey, pastor of the Reformed churches in Finistère from 1834, had organised colportage throughout Brittany. Williams was unable to get liberty to preach in a number of villages nearby, and at the end of 1843 Le Fourdrey advised him to transfer to Quimper or to Lorient where there were already Protestants. Williams moved to Quimper in March 1844. On first Sunday of June he
preached his first sermon, in French, in Brittany to a congregation of fourteen.

Quimper was the main town of Finistère with a population ca 17,000, and was described as the city most under the influence of Roman Catholic priests in all Europe, a cathedral city, with a lot of Roman Catholic institutions including a training institution for young priests. Roman Catholic influence was felt in every aspect of life, and in every place he visited. His coming aroused great anger in the priests, and they swiftly began to attack furiously him, his books and his teachings from the pulpit and everywhere else, describing the “Protestant” New Testament – presumably John Jenkins’s translation, which was published in 1847 - as a bad book, blasphemous, and full of the most dangerous heresies.

Soon after his arrival in Quimper he and the small flock under his care had to leave their chapel because of a plan to build a new market on the site. To ensure the missionary wasn’t disturbed in his work if he rented another room or building for his ministry, the Mission’s leaders decided to build a chapel and house at the expense of the Mission. When this became known the priests began to use every influence they possessed to hinder the missionary from getting land. Having failed in this, they tried to attract, or else to frighten away, the workers, visiting every day and reproaching them for helping the
heretics to spread their dangerous errors. The chapel was formally opened in May 1847.

About the same time the bishop published a sharp attack on the Protestants. Williams promptly published a reply, which was so effective that the bishop wrote a second pamphlet to defend himself. One accusation he made was that the Protestants were spreading erroneous copies of the Scriptures, whereas the Roman Catholic Church weighs every syllable and letter of the Scriptures before placing them in the hands of the faithful. This gave the missionary the opportunity to disclose a deliberate mistranslation in the recent publication of the New Testament, in Mark 10:33. Instead of “And they handed him over to the Gentiles” it gives the shameful translation “And they handed him over to the Huguenots.”

A new and grievous storm broke out when the Baptist Jenkins published his translation of the New Testament in 1847. James Williams’s burden was to reach the Roman Catholic population, and he travelled the countryside with the New Testament and John Jenkins’s tracts. He travelled through every part of the province of Finistère, but everywhere he went the priests thundered and warned the people not to buy the bad books. One priest asserted that whoever bought a Protestant book, his oxen would die, and another suggested that an excellent weapon to drive the wolf from the land would be a stout cudgel. However much the opposition and threats worsened, he sold a good
number of New Testaments and had proof that they would be read as well, for a number of people wanting one came under cover of night in their search for more light.

From 1847, the year the chapel was opened, there were several converts, including a Swiss from Grisons (Graubünden), Jacques J. Planta, who later became pastor at Lorient, and Charles Le Bescont, a seminary student originally from Léon and native of Finistère. Early in 1847 these two young men proposed their service as helpers to the missionary. Le Bescont had begun to prepare for the Roman Catholic priesthood but saw the
errors of Roman Catholicism and joined the small Protestant church. Soon after, with military conscription in operation, he had to join the army, and the priests opposed all efforts to gain his release. After twelve months he managed to find someone to take his place, the leaders of the Mission providing the money to buy his freedom. Le Bescont worked in Quimper till 1851. But his enemies made life unbearable for him in Brittany and he crossed to America. The second man, Jacques Planta, was sent to further his education in Geneva, which he completed in 1851 when he was appointed to work at Lorient.

In 1848, for the second time in its history, France was embroiled in the commotion of revolution which led to the clergy having supreme influence. One of the first effects of these changes for Protestants was a law in connection with selling books, to prevent more strictly the spread of Protestant Scriptures. A period of severe difficulty now began. Throughout France every kind of obstruction was put in the path of Protestant ministers and it was almost impossible for them to fulfil any aspect of their work without falling into one of the snares which their opponents placed to catch them.

In January 1850 or 1851 the mayor of Loctudy complained to the authorities in Quimper about this “illicit distribution of propaganda” and the public prosecutor sent Williams and Le Bescont before the correctional tribunal
charged with unauthorised colportage of anti-alcohol tracts. At the last minute two solicitors who had promised to defend them withdrew their promise because of the priests’ influence on their wives. Rev Achille le Fournidrey (pastor of the Protestant church in Brest) hurried to help them. He had been a barrister before his conversion from Roman Catholicism. The case was put before the court by the public prosecutor in a long speech, and he declared that the books which were distributed were of a harmful nature with the tendency to lead their readers to disobey the laws of the land. When his turn came, Le Fournidrey requested permission to read part of the distributed book: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. … Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed” (Romans 13:1, 7); &c &c. The words produced a deep impression on the court and to the surprise of the accused they were judged innocent. However the matter was not allowed to rest there. The prosecutor appealed for another trial in Vannes, eighty miles from Quimper. It was obvious from the first moment that the court had already decided. The prosecutor spoke for an hour and a half. The two were at once found guilty and were fined £8 and the cost of the two trials making £28 (50 francs each plus costs).

For several years thereafter it was forbidden to distribute the Breton tracts of John Jenkins, and even the Breton New Testament was censured in Finistère Nonetheless the affair aroused considerable interest and gradually there
was a return to a certain degree of liberty.

The difficulties of the work increased from year to year. There was bad feeling between Britain and France on account of events connected with Tahiti and the missionaries and all Britons were viewed with suspicion.

It was impossible for the missionary to get the desired permission to sell Bibles. It was argued that the government needed to be careful about the distribution of literature as Anarchists were also distributing a similar amount – a contention which made no distinction between Protestant ministers and lawless rioters.

Another law of about the same time prohibited any kind of gathering of more than twenty people except in licensed premises. This made it impossible to sustain ministry in villages and in the open air (which the Protestant missionaries were accustomed to hold).

**Lorient**

The increasing difficulties made the work impossible in Quimper, and Williams began to turn his sights upon Lorient where, during a visit in 1845, he had found the authorities less inflexible than in Quimper. In 1847 the Reformed Protestants of Lorient had already asked Williams to minister to their religious needs. He agreed, and divided his efforts between Quimper and Lorient until
1851, when the Calvinistic Methodist missionary committee decided upon the evangelisation of Lorient, and stationed him there in July 1851. The train journey between Lorient and Quimper took two hours in those days, and after his removal to Lorient, Williams continued to take an interest in events in Quimper, but seldom went there in person.

Williams and Planta had their greatest success at Lorient. The local Protestants and the missionaries united in their efforts to get a chapel built, and the first stone was laid in July 1862. It was necessary to build a chapel at Lorient, but the insecurity caused by the Second Empire (1852-1870) made the mission directors hesitate for a long time, and when they did decide, they encountered serious difficulties. The law was very strict, and it was four years after the first application that permission was granted, and during the construction the authorities often interrupted the work with further inquiries, such as where the money came from, where the minister was from, who paid him. The chapel was finally opened on 22nd May 1864.

In January 1865, J. Planta left after fourteen years of fruitful ministry in Lorient. In fact – to suspend the narrative for a moment – cooperation between the Welsh missionaries and the best workers who were raised up through their ministry failed a number of times, including with Planta and Le Coat, and such ruptures had severe consequences for the mission.
Planta had been growing apart from James Williams for a number of years, and relations between them were tense. Planta wanted more autonomy in the work at Lorient, but Williams still felt himself responsible for it and wished to keep control. On the one hand the Breton ministry was maintained financially from Wales, and Williams had to give account for it, whilst on the other hand Planta liked to be regarded as a native, indigenous pastor.

This friction between Williams and Planta was in fact the first of a series which seriously weakened the cohesion of the Protestant work in Lower Brittany: it proved to be an Achilles’ heel for the Welsh missions, which were unable to retain several of their best co-workers.

Jacques handed in his resignation in February 1865 and some time later moved to Switzerland, where he continued his ministry there under the auspices of the national church. His departure was a loss to the Breton work, for up till that time he was the only worker who had taken the gospel to working class society, and this field of activity was left aside for long years after.

Planta was replaced by a young pastor from Fontainebleau, Racine Braud, who, one year after his arrival, supplied the following figures of the state of the church:

- Adult Protestants: 52 (12 Bretons, 18 French, 10 Swiss, 9 English, 2 American, 1 German)
- Children: 30
Adherents: 50 (almost all Roman Catholics)
Communicants: 20
Converts: 12 (9 Bretons, 3 French)

Braud did not know Breton and consequently could not reach the population; he was a pastor more than a missionary. In 1890 the station was given over to the Société Centrale d’Évangélisation.

James Williams spoke Breton well, but French less well. He did not restrict his work to Quimper. He also began a work in Quimperle, to the north of Lorient; but there, at the end of two years, the influence of the priests proved too strong and the workers were unable to keep the room they rented.

It is hard to understand the distress of the Protestant situation in France in those years. Spies were placed to observe all the movements of the missionaries in Quimper; “earnest seekers” came to tempt them to sell books. The enemies’ cunning was met with the missionary’s harmless cunning: the law forbade selling and giving a New Testament, but did not forbid lending it, and many were lent. During this whole period, opposition from the priests in Quimper led to the dismissal of workers by employers and the loss of customers from businesses. Rumours spread that Williams was a spy, a criminal, or a man sent by Victoria with bags of gold to pay people to become Protestants. Two of his children died whilst the family were in Quimper, where their
mortal remains now await the resurrection at the Last Day. He himself suffered frequently from neuralgia, a pain that feels like a stab or like burning, caused by a damaged nerve. Twelve whole years passed before Williams received the permission he so earnestly sought to distribute the Word of God among the Bretons.

After quarter of a century of diligent and anxious work Williams’ health was suffering. It became more and more difficult for him to exercise his ministry in Quimper, partly from the constant violent opposition of the clergy, and partly from the worsening of his own health. He had sought in vain, from 1866, for a young missionary from Wales to replace him, but two Breton co-workers supported him more and more. The first was Pierre-Joseph Rouffet, a former history teacher at the college in Quimper, born in the South of France, the second was Pierre-Mathurin Le Groignec, a former Carmelite monk, who had spent a time also in a Trappist monastery. Soon after his conversion he became a British and Foreign Bible Society colporteur, in 1869, and a preacher.

Thus, although there was no missionary in Wales to send out, Providence provided these two Breton men to carry the work forward. Rouffet, a young teacher in Quimper College, was initially drawn to the Protestant faith through a pamphlet or book written by Williams, by which he grew suspicious of the claims of Rome. The whole town was stunned when the young and learned
teacher joined the Protestant church at the beginning of 1868. As in the case of Le Bescont, he too fell under the legal obligation of conscription and once again it was necessary for the leaders of the Mission to supply the necessary funds to free him. In June 1869, a month before Williams’ departure from Brittany, Rouffet became a helper to him, and was ordained two years later.

About the same time Rev Racone Braud, who had followed Jacques Planta in Lorient in 1865, sent interesting news about the other man, Pierre le Groignec. Born in 1838 in Plœmeur, he became a Carmelite then a Trappist novice monk, but hated certain aspects of what he observed of monastic life. He heard about Protestants and decided to find out what they were ‘protesting’ about. Having listened to the Gospel from the lips of Braud, he was convinced of the truth and joined the church in Lorient. Soon after this he went into the service of the Bible Society as a colporteur.

Because of the deterioration in his health, James Williams returned to Wales in 1869. He said, concerning the main qualities for working among Bretons, that what was needed was a man witty, cheerful, playful, grave, sensitive, and lively. He composed and published a series of “Sacred Songs” to well known Breton tunes, telling the life, parables and miracles of Christ, which proved remarkably popular, and the words were sung all over the land. He translated the Book of Psalms into Breton,
published by the Bible Society in 1873. He loved Brittany, and visited more than once after leaving, having worked and suffered there for 27 years. He died in Chester in June 1893, and the mortal part of him was buried at Bala.
INTERLUDE: the 1870s

The war between France and Germany in 1870 stopped all missionary work in France and made the position of Protestants more difficult than before. The priests asserted that Protestants shared the feelings of the Prussians, being of the same faith. Le Groignec was taken into custody more than once on the fabricated accusation that he was a spy, and he and Rouffet were obliged to join the army.

That was not the end however. Le Groignec served as a colporteur – enduring much opposition - till 1876 when he was taken into the service of the Mission as an evangelist, and in 1878-1880 Rev Hugh Roberts, formerly of Khasia, worked in Quimper. However, financial support from Wales was conditional on the coming of a missionary, and the Breton mission was thus put in jeopardy. Towards the end of the 1870s Rouffet accepted a pastoral call in Paris. Therefore, the Welsh missionary society contacted the Reformed consistory of Brest, in order to entrust to them the churches in Lorient and Quimper, at least provisionally. It was thus because of the scarcity of workers, and because there was no evangelist other than Le Groignec still in the field, that the decision was taken in 1879 to hand over the work in Quimper and Lorient at least provisionally to the care of the Brest
presbytery of the existing Protestant church., to whom the two chapels, Quimper and Lorient, were let.

Le Groignec alone remained in the service of the Welsh missionary society.
The work of evangelism in Quimper was always disappointing, for it was difficult to develop Protestantism so close to the Cathedral of Saint Corentin, first bishop of Quimper, and the power of Rome was enormous. The chapel continued to be attended by Huguenots who had been in Finistère for some time, and there were officials (who had been settled for some while in Quimper) who included administrative staff from the female teachers’ training college. These were functionaries of the French State – the female director of the teacher training college, employees of the Prefecture, and others. Such officials were often transferred from Huguenot regions of the South of France in those days, and under the Third Republic, that is, from 1870, many Huguenot functionaries were transferred to regions of the North which lacked chapels. Many such functionaries, often liberal from the start, abandoned the Faith in the large towns, which was injurious to the future of Protestantism, but in other cases, they helped the emerging Protestant communities and sometimes were even converted.

But by 1903 the converted Bretons in Quimper numbered only ten among a community of about seventy, plus about fifteen sympathisers.
That was the situation when a young Welsh pastor responded to the wishes of the committee. William Jenkyn Jones was born in New Quay, Cardiganshire, on 29\textsuperscript{th} March 1852, to pious parents; his father was a cobbler. He felt the call to missionary work at the early age of 10. At the age of 19 he enrolled at the teacher training college in Bangor, and after two years was appointed headmaster at a school in Ystrad Gynlais. He worked there for six years, often preaching as well, and then resigned his post and entered Aberystwyth University to study Theology. He had his sights on the Indies, but was advised against going there for medical reasons, and his mind turned to Brittany.

In January 1882 he visited Brittany with James Williams, and some weeks later was accepted by the missionary society for service in Brittany. He spent some weeks with Pastor Kissel in Lorient, and studied Breton and French, before returning to Wales in August for ordination at Cardigan. He spent several months at the side of Le Groignec in 1882.

It was as if the Methodist mission had to start again from scratch, although the new missionary did not lack advantages. Le Groignec contributed both his experience
and his address lists, and there was plenty of printed material, for there were already scriptures and tracts in Breton, including Alfred Jenkins’s new translation of the New Testament. Furthermore, from now on the Republic permitted liberty for religious propaganda, and a part of the population were able to detach themselves from Roman Catholicism. In addition, W. J. Jones’s winsome personality made him the most effective and well-loved of all the Welsh missionaries.

It was necessary to decide where to begin. At first he was content simply to accompany Le Groignec, and thus to gain a knowledge of the country and to make progress in the Breton tongue, or to assist Pastor Kissel in Lorient and thereby to perfect his knowledge of French. It was too late to reverse the transfer of the work at Lorient to the Reformed church, but in any case, like James Williams and John Jenkins, he regarded taking charge of French-language churches as the least congenial part of his ministry. He started meetings in Rosporden, lasting for eighteen months from March 1883, and then spent some weeks at Concarneau doing mainly colportage work before taking up similar work in Quimper.

He spent the two years 1884 and 1885 living in Pont l’Abbé, where he began meetings on 2nd January 1884. A hundred and fifty persons attended the first services, and the number settled at about a hundred. During the same year meeting rooms were also opened on Douarnenez and
Tréboul, but the influence of the priests, and people’s fear of persecution, made it impossible to open rooms for meetings elsewhere.

Le Groignec was appointed as evangelist for this section of the work, railway links were opened between Quimper and Pont l’Abbé and Quimper and Douarnenez, and Jenkyns made Quimper the centre of their missionary operations, moving there himself on 1st January 1886.

From Quimper he continued to make frequent visits to Pont l’Abbé, Rosporden, and Douarnenez, the new rail links making the journey possible in about an hour. Following their conversion, the innkeeper and his wife at Rosporden broke their bottles, closed the inn, and moved to Quimper, which brought the meetings at Rosporden to an end.

The developing situation had put a question mark over the previous agreements with the Reformed Church. It was unnecessary to make the pastor from Lorient come each week to Quimper, and the chapel along with the presbytery remained the property of the Methodist mission. At the start of 1886, William J. Jones, in agreement with the Brest consistory, was appointed pastor of the Protestant church in Quimper. On Easter Sunday, 25th April 1886, he presided at the Lord’s Table for the first time in French. For a while Jones was given the use of a boat in which meetings were held in Douarnenez and Concarneau, and the novelty attracted large numbers.
However, such ministry was expensive, and the owner took the boat back to England.

Jones was called, through the work of a colporteur, to the fishing port of Audierne. The colporteur had been well received and the people requested a visit from the pastor. Jones was also well received, but, from fear of persecution, no one was willing to let a room for meetings till finally one man did agree to allow meetings in his home. However, he was promptly evicted by the owner, and the house converted into a *cabaret* (a pub or night club). Some while later another room was found, and the work continued despite lively opposition. The beginning was difficult, and sometimes only five or six people turned up. Several of those who came attended in order to create noisy disturbance.
Le Groignec, settled as evangelist in Douarnenez, was seeing similar results to Jones’s, and barely two years after the arrival of W. J. Jones the Welsh committee had a
choice between several projects for the creation of churches, each of which deserved to be attempted.

The team was strengthened by the arrival of William Jenkyn’s brother Evan at the end of spring 1886. Born 1839, and thus older than his brother William Jenkyn, he nevertheless remained for twenty-four years and became his brother’s right-hand man. He settled at Pont l’Abbé. In December 1886 W. J. Jones married Fanny Wilhelm who was living in Quimper, and in 1887 and 1887 they had two daughters. Their home was a place of warm hospitality, including to drunks.

The photograph below shows the couple together.
In 1888 W. J. Jones opened a room for working-class meetings which were attended by a numerous audience. The talks, in French and Breton, alternated with classes for children. Some Quimper people were converted, as well as some officials and sailors passing through. Soon a second location was added not far from the barracks. Although interest did not last more than a few weeks, it was always possible that a small core of more interested hearers could form the basis of a future church.

A church was founded in Douarnenez in 1889, and in Pont l’Abbé in 1891. In 1892 a room was rented for meetings at Concarneau. Nonetheless priestly opposition continued, and folk were told that the greatest and most fearful torments of hell were reserved for Protestants and Jews. In Concarneau there were tumultuous meetings, at one of which Mrs Jones’s hands were bloodied by stones thrown while she was playing the harmonium.

The most fruitful area for the work was on the coast. Evan Jones was now living at Pont l’Abbé, and there and at Douarnenez the Methodist work was both effective and vigorously resisted by the clergy.
There was nothing original in the hiring of rooms near the ports for meetings, nor in the systematic distribution of literature, but W. J. Jones added a social dimension, in the form of anti-alcohol action. Nowhere else in Breton Protestantism was abstinence from alcohol associated with evangelisation, but when Jean-Marie Guégaden, the
future colporteur, was converted in Pont l’Abbé in January 1891, he committed himself to drink no more alcohol, and a local teetotal society was created the very same evening. He was born in 1847 at St Jean Trolimon, near Pont l’Abbé.

A number of Bretons were brought to Protestantism by the change observed in an individual. An alcoholic typically risked deteriorating social relations, heavy debt, bad fatherhood, and local censure, and deliverance from alcoholism requires, not temperance, but total abstinence from former drinkers, for both medical and psychological reasons. Protestantism was the last lifebuoy for a man wishing to escape from it, and if he fell back into alcoholism, he automatically returned also to the religion of his forebears. There were some resounding cases of success, and this wrought more effectively than all the evangelistic meetings. In 1891 W J Jones described one such convert as a flesh and blood sermon pointing to the grace of God, and the worst drunkards often became the best Christians. In the mission’s reports the term *rechute* (relapse, backsliding) meant either returning to Roman Catholicism or to the consumption of strong drink. The two were generally linked, without it being plain which was primary.

The whole dimension of family life, together with the role of women, was significant. Wives would follow their husbands into Protestantism, but very often it was the
wives who initiated the change, as in the case with Jean-Marie Guégaden. As the Roman Church could traditionally rely on women and girls, the Protestant anti-alcohol work loosened the hold of that Church in the community. The priest at Plobannalec reported that numerous Catholic wives were advising their husbands to become Protestant, in order to end their drunkenness.

The Methodists also began Sunday School classes for children – and a sewing course in Douarnenez.

From 1889 there were seven meetings a week in Pont l’Abbé including three public and three events for children. William Jenkyn Jones kept a pied-à-terre there. The Welsh gained converts there more rapidly than was usual in Brittany: five commitments from 1886 to 1890, four in 1891, six in 1892, and more than thirty signed up for the teetotal society. In 1894 Jean-Marie Guégaden was appointed as a colporteur and evangelist with the mission and remained a faithful helper to the work till his death in 1921. In fact several other converts from the Welsh work became colporteurs or evangelists in various parts of France.
Guégaden
In 1896 William J. Jones published a collection of seventy-seven Breton hymns called *Telen ar C’hristen* (The Christian’s Harp), of which twelve were from James Williams’s collection whilst others were written by Jones himself or translated by him from Welsh, English or French.

The fishing ports of the Bigouden country, along the Bay of Audierne south-west of Quimper, remained the flagship of the Methodist work. Beginning from nothing in 1885, by 1913 the Methodist community exceeded a hundred persons at Lesconil and was approaching about fifty at the small port of Le Guilvinec. Together with the sympathisers, more than two hundred people were making more or less a profession of Protestantism along the coast, and the number could be doubled or even tripled if the regular hearers were included.

The photographs on the next page show open air meetings at Guilvinec (top) and Lesconil, with W. J. Jones (with the white beard) preaching.
What could explain such progress? The fishing ports of southern Finistère were expanding rapidly. The development of canning factories, followed by the rail links, generated an economic explosion in the region in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Thousands of maritime fishermen had settled on the coast and manned the sardine fishing boats, while their wives worked in the canning factories. This migration largely broke up the parish network, with priests and churches remaining in inland, in small rural towns, whilst the new arrivals lived near the shore. Thus the coastal communities were partly cut off from their traditional religious framework, whilst social life developed largely centred on the multiplying outlets of drink. Sailors had travelled more than land workers, and from the experience gained tended to have become more independent minded, and sailor and fishermen were not dependent on keeping the approval of a land-owner, as farm workers were, for the retention of their employment and their cottages. There were considerable social problems in these new, overpopulated villages without hygiene: epidemics (cholera claimed numerous victims in Le Guilvinec), seasonable unemployment, death at sea, and all the risks associated with fishing.

Canon Le Floch, diocesan archivist of Quimper, believed that the Protestant success in the Bigouden ports was essentially due to the willingness of the sailors to break with the peasant milieu from which many of them had
recently emerged. Carluer (1996:226) mentions historian Maurice Lucas’s comments that a left-wing political orientation was linked with disaffection with the Roman Church; that in the Bigouden area, whilst lack of religion was rare, anti-clericalism was common; and that the simplicity of the Methodist chapel buildings and of the services, and the focus on a way of life in this world, held strong appeal. In addition, of course, preaching that touched the uncertainty of life in a society where death was a daily possibility, and a way of life ravaged by immorality and drunkenness, must be adduced as explanations for the success of the mission.

The work in Douarnenez, Pont l’Abbé, Concarneau, Lesconil, Léchiagat, Saint-Guénolé and Le Guilvinec, beginning in 1889, has been called *le réveil bigouden* – the Bigouden revival.

Lesconil

In 1894 W. J. Jones opened meeting rooms in Lesconil and Léchiagat, places marked by their prevalent drunkenness and in 1897 in Le Guilvinec and Saint-Guénolé,. Lesconil responded more eagerly than the others to the combination of tract distribution, anti-alcohol efforts, and preaching. By 1900 there were fourteen converts and about thirty sympathisers, and in 1902 a church of about fifty members was formed,
including children, and became the mission’s most flourishing church. In 1903 thirty-five Bretons had been converted, largely young couples, and the children numbered about fifty. In 1907 the forty-two converts and their sixty-four children were already too many for the meeting rooms, as a similar number of hearers also needed to be added. In 1910 fifty-four converts formed the basis of an assembly of a hundred and forty people.

Some of the best educated and most ambitious members left the area, but as the new families were well embedded in the local economy – some owning fishing or other
businesses - and as young men could easily find work, the weakening effect of young people moving away affected Lesconil less than it did some other Breton communities. As a little leaven leavens the whole lump, so the Protestant presence affected society in Lesconil, whose sailors gained a reputation for sobriety. Even the priests spoke sparingly about the ministry to the local population, not daring to find fault with the Protestant work.

*Léchiagat, Kérity*

The work in Léchiagat was slower and the numbers were smaller, but despite being blessed with success but at Lesconil, by 1903 seven people had been converted, and with children and sympathisers there were about forty people attending the services. It was felt that a small chapel was needed, the more so because the local people refused to let premises to the missionaries. In about 1903 Jones a building which consisted of an old school and a house just beneath the lighthouse which aligned with the port of Le Guilvinec. It was converted into a meeting room and, the house part, into his pied-à-terre where he lived with his family during the summer. Some years passed before the work developed, with the largest number of conversions coming in 1910.
Towards the beginning of the 19th century W. J. Jones and his colleagues began a work in Kéirty-Penmarch, in the Bigouden region, but no lasting work was established there. It was abandoned when the Calvinistic Methodist churches were affiliated once more to the Reformed Church of France, as will be told below.

Services were also begun a few kilometres from Lesconil, in the fishing ports of Le Guilvinec and Saint-Guénolé. Several families were converted at Guilvinec, and as the village is separated from Léchiagat only by a narrow arm of the sea which, at low tide, is reduced to a mere stream, the Protestants of Guilvinec and Léchiagat united into one church and held their meetings in Léchiagat. By the eve of World War 1 there were twenty-five converts and eighty regular participants in the Léchiagat-Le Guilvinec area.

By 1903 there were no longer problems with acquiring meeting places, and no one was trying to disrupt the meetings except maybe the priests at Concarneau a few times. Jones’s report for 1903 expressed the desire that Wales would not forget Brittany in its prayers. By the end of 1904 there were churches in Quimper, Douarnenez, Pont l’Abbé, Lesconil, and Guilvinec-Léchiagat, and other places with regular meetings: Audierne, Concarneau, St Guénolé, and the room in the working-class part of Quimper. Numbers including children and adherents were as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quimper</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pont l’Abbé</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douarnenez</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesconil</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilvinec/Léch.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all there were about seven hundred regular hearers, despite migration to the towns and young people going to sea.
1905-1914: CONSOLIDATION

The missionaries reported that in 1894 attendance at services had passed three hundred, had increased to five hundred and fifty in 1900, seven hundred in 1903, and nearly a thousand in 1913, but from 1904 they were deepening and consolidating of their previous work more than starting new congregations. During 1905 W. J. Jones was sometimes discouraged, for he had hoped for a powerful work of God’s Spirit. His fervour did not diminish, nor did he grow wearing in sowing the Word of God, and despite some defections conversions continued at Lesconil and most of the converts were enthusiastic and firm in their faith. The influence of the priests declined and the authorities were more favourable towards the ministry. However, in 1908 Jones’ daughter Lita died, and in 1910 his brother Evan after 24 years of service. He was a quiet and unassuming man, and had gained great honour from the people among whom he worked so diligently. Le Groignec, by now aged and infirm, retired at the age of 70 in 1908 and died in 1914, and was replaced at Douarnenez by a former Roman Catholic surnamed Dilasser, a young Breton from Morlaix, who had been converted and become a local preacher at the Methodist Church in Le Havre, but he died six years later, which represented a great loss of the work.
In 1910 Jones published a second collection of Breton hymns. J. Gerlan Williams was sent to replace Evan Jones. Born in Gerlan, a village near Bethesda, in 1870, he trained at the theological college in Bala and in 1898 was ordained and married to Fanny Rees of Bala. They went first to India as missionaries, but returned to Europe for health reasons, and arrived in Brittany in January 1911. Williams was an intellectual rather than an evangelist, and remained nostalgic for India all his life: indeed, Jean-Yves Carluer found a Sanskrit Bible in the loft of the chapel in Lesconil! He learnt both French and Breton in order to preach in them.

Gerlan and Fanny settled at Pont l’Abbé and took charge especially of the nearby stations. The meeting room became too small in Lesconil, with 153 members, adherents and children plus a considerable number of additional regular or occasional hearers. by 1908. There were usually fifty to sixty children and young people at the Sunday School, which adults also attended.
A new chapel was needed, and W.J. Jones made a trip to Wales to raise funds for its construction. Named Bethel, it
was opened on 18th August 1912, at a cost of £450. The number of converts in that year numbered 57, and the hearers and children 132. Local believers took more and more responsibility, and in 1913 the newly elected elders were able to lead some of the meetings and to free the missionaries for evangelism in other villages.

Two evangelists were also taken into service of the Mission, M. Droniou and M. Buannec, but Gerlan Williams was the only Welsh missionary after the
departure of W. J. Jones, travelling by car to visit the various branches of the work.

A new station was opened in the small fishing port of Kéirty in 1914, attracting numerous and attentive hearers; and the work in Concarneau was handed over to the Société Evangélique. The church at Douarnenez entered a long period of crisis.

Dilasser attempted to begin a ‘Brotherhood’, but because of the poor fishing at the time a large number of young people left the town for other ports, or joined the navy. At the same time, Dilasser’s health deteriorated, and he died in September 1914. There was no evangelists stationed in Douarnenez for the whole duration of the War, although William J. Jones held regular meetings attended by a core of faithful believers; yet they also left after the War. Thus, Jones had no helper, and the meetings stopped for several years.
The situation had changed significantly in 1906, when France abolished its political relationship with the Pope. The Roman Church lost much of its influence and religion as taught by Rome lost its appeal, but after the war he future dangers were materialism and atheism. After the first world war the Methodist work in Brittany suffered from the scarcity of workers and a lack of rooms in which to maintain religious work. In some villages where there were signs of success, they were obliged to give up the rooms because they were to be made into houses.

The church in Quimper had always consisted of mobile people – Protestant officials, strangers or foreigners in the town for a while, in the war soldiers and refugees, but always frequent departures - and after the War the congregation decreased rapidly. Some time after the War some converts from Roman Catholicism were received into the church.

In Audierne the meetings were interrupted for similar reasons to those at Douarnenez. At Lesconil people still attended but the numbers were not increasing. At Léchiagat about sixty children were coming to meetings, and in the season of fine weather there were encouraging open-air meetings at Le Guilvinec.
In almost all the stations the work was passing through a crisis due to the effects of the War, departure of the best educated, most enterprising Protestants, pursuit of money among adults and of pleasure among young people, and increasing unbelief, not only in Roman Catholicism but in all religion.

The missionaries began holding more open-air meetings, and their reports from the early 1920s record usually well-attended services with attentive hearers. They used a portable harmonium, and after selecting their place to hold the meeting they began singing, taught the hymns, preached the gospel, and announced the time and place of the next meeting – at which people would often gather before the time announced. Meetings in a dozen places often attracted two- or three-hundred hearers, including Quimper, le Guilvinec and Pont l’Abbé. It was rare that no listeners came; sometimes it was but a handful. Preaching was in French and Breton, and Scriptures were sold. The authorities recognised the good that these open-air meetings were achieving, and authorised them even though they were not strictly legal.

The photographs on the next page show open-air meetings at Kérity (top) and Saint Pierre en Penmarch.
William J. Jones wished to go also to the fairs, markets and villages of the interior. However, back in Wales there was a feeling that the results were not good enough, and the question was raised whether the Breton mission should be brought to a close as a Methodist work and handed over to the Baptists or the Reformed Church. A delegation of three was sent to Brittany in 1921 to come to a judgement on this matter. Jones declared he would remain whatever their decision might be. However, the delegates observed the success of the work and perceived the urgency of continuing it, and began to seek for a new missionary for Douarnenez, so that there would be one resident in Douarnenez, one in Quimper, and one in Pont l’Abbé. They also wanted to find a Breton or French evangelist for each of the three areas, a nurse to undertake medical work, a car for each missionary, and funds to build meeting rooms where the lease was only short-term. It was not possible to achieve all of this, and they urged the missionaries to seek to develop a spirit of giving in the Breton believers themselves.

In May 1921 Guégaden died, and was replaced later in the year by a new evangelist named Droniou. In 1922 Le Buanec was taken on as evangelist. At the age of 72 William J. Jones finally received the car, and went to towns and villages in the interior of Brittany together with a colporteur, Gerlan Williams or an evangelist, and usually Mrs. Jones. They aimed to visit places where the Gospel had not previously been preached, to attend fairs
and markets, and to sell Scriptures. In 1924 they sold 670 scriptures in one day at Châteaulin. Jones remained in good health, jovial and vigorous with unabated ardour, and was planning future ministry.

It is appropriate here to look at a few of Jones’s core beliefs. He believed that man’s heart and conscience bore witness to the divine inspiration, goodness, and power of all the Scriptures. He saw sin not as a disease to be pities but a transgression demanding justice, as rebellion against God. He taught that on the Cross at Calvary Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many: he took our place, and suffered the punishment of our sins. This is the teaching a sinner needs. No fact of history is, he said, more certain than the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and without it we would have no gospel to proclaim.

His denomination was Calvinistic Methodist, and his view of predestination was that of a moderate Calvinism. The doctrine, he said, cannot be removed from the Bible, but he spoke very little of it and almost never entered into discussion about it, except among his friends. Asking why it is so widely rejected, he adduced the tendency to exaggerate it and erroneous ways of explaining it which hide God’s love, and turn God into a capricious despot. He said that God refuses his grace and his help to none, but rather strives to bring man to himself. In an undated sermon, probably from 1905, he quoted the words of God
recorded in Ezekiel 33:11: “As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”

He did not believe in ‘double predestination’ or a decree of reprobation: the teaching that God not only predestined the salvation of some, but also the damnation of others; what Charles Wesley called ‘the horrible decree’ in his 1741 poem by that title in *Hymns on God’s Everlasting Love*:

> Ah! gentle, gracious Dove,  
> And art thou griev’d in me,  
> That Sinners should restrain thy Love,  
> And say, ‘It is not free:  
> ‘It is not free for All:  
> ‘The most, Thou passest by,  
> ‘And mockest with a fruitless Call  
> ‘Whom Thou has doom’d to die...

*The God of Love pass’d by  
The most of them that fell,  
Ordain’d poor Reprobates to die,  
And forc’d them into Hell.*

Jones taught rather that we shall be judged, he said, on the basis of our choice between loving or rejecting the good, opting for life or death: this, he taught, is the moral
government of the world. He was, in short, a moderate Calvinist, and not a logician but an evangelist with a heart of passion for lost sinners.

In 1923 Jones published an *Etude sur le Catholicisme* which described the principal religion he encountered in Brittany, and which is printed in full in Bourguet, pages 172 to 183. I do not know whether Jones knew John Newton’s hymn which contains the words below, but they point directly to the heart of what he wrote in his Study in his section which begins, “Quelle est la vraie croyance de l’Eglise romaine concernant Jésus-Christ?” [What is the real belief of the Roman Church concerning Jesus Christ?]:

*What think ye of Christ? is the test*
*To try both your state and your scheme;*
*How can you be right in the rest,*
*Unless you think rightly of him?...*

*Some call him a Saviour in word,*
*But place their own work in the van,*
*And hope he his help will afford,*
*When they have done all that they can;*
*If doings prove rather too light,*
*A little they own they may fail,*
*They purpose to make up full weight,*
*By casting his name in the scale.*
Whether he was familiar with these words or not, they convey the pith of his comments on the view of Christ which he discovered in Brittany and the view he himself held and preached.

He states that the Church did not deny Christ’s humanity or his deity, but left him in the shadows and often ignored him in their preaching. It was as if the fundamental truths about him were forgotten rather than denied, or that secondary points of doctrine or morality were given exaggerated importance, with the result that essential truths lost their power and authority. And this was the case even more when it was errors that were spread.

Scripture portions about the life and words of Jesus were read on Sundays in church, but they were in Latin. In preaching, the name of Jesus was sometimes mentioned, but not centrally to the theme. It was thus very difficult to discover what the people really thought about Christ.

In church Jesus was always portrayed as an infant in the care of his mother and under her authority, and it was said that “he cannot refuse anything to his mother.” He was called “Little Jesus” (ar Bugalig Jesus). Thus his deity was obscured. His humanity was equally obscured by the practice of referring to him not as Jesus Christ, but as The Good God, or The Lord God (an Aotrou Doue) – expressions used also to describe the Host at the mass.
As a result of all this, most people knew little about him save that he was born in a stable and died on a cross. He was not the Saviour, but a Saviour: not the living, ever-present Christ, always ready to listen to the sinner’s call. He was not the Mediator, not even one of the mediators, for the Church had created a number of mediators, not between us and God, but between us and Christ: Mary, and the numberless saints, some of whom are not even certain to have existed, and priests. Setting aside the mediation of Christ, the Church had thus increased the distance between us and God.

The doctrine of sin as usually taught was that Christ had expiated original sin, and man himself expiates his individual sins committed after baptism by good works and penances. According to the teaching of supererogatory works - that is, acts of penance and devotion beyond what was required - the saints were believed to have bequeathed a legacy of good works which the Church placed at the same level as the expiatory death of Christ, and such works were kept in reserve, as a treasure, for the benefit of others, according to the whim of the Pope. When a person was truly convicted of sin, the priest did not how to guide him, but would recommend penances, pilgrimages, prayers, or frequent communion; but the priest never taught that Jesus is the sufficient Saviour and that the Cross is all-powerful over sin.
Towards the end of 1924 Jones’s strength finally declined. His last services in Brittany were Communion at Quimper and at Léchiagat. After a short illness, he died on 10th February 1925, a few weeks before his 73rd birthday. He had spent 22 years in Brittany, and there was no end to his interest in the people, language and antiquities of the land. Throughout France he was considered a high authority on Celtic knowledge and was elected to be a member of the Société Archéologique. In cooperation with teacher Le Braz he translated Genesis into Breton and shortly before his death he began a revision of the New Testament. He published a collection of hymns Telen ar Cristan which became very popular. In 1922 the University of Wales presented the degree of MA to him in recognition of his work. His enthusiasm and hope continued strong to the end, despite the difficulties he met, and in the course of his work in Brittany he was instrumental in establishing eight new churches and preaching stations, and the number of adherents almost reached 400. He was greatly admired for his character and his work.

* * *

Et puisse la vie de William J. Jones être un exemple, un stimulant pour tous ceux qui aiment la Bretagne, croient à la possibilité de l’œuvre de l’Esprit dans l’âme bretonne, et travaillent de tout leur cœur à son salut. – Samuel Bourguet
[And may the life of William Jenkyn Jones be an example and stimulant for all who love Brittany, who believe in the possibility of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Breton soul, and who work with all their hearts for its salvation.]

William Jenkyn Jones

In 1930 there were chapels and rooms belonging to the Mission in Quimper, Douarnenez, Kérity, Lesconil and
Léchiagat, and a recently built a mission house in Pont l’Abbé.

William Jenkyn Jones’s widow, of Swiss provenance, who was a good deal younger than he, remained in Quimper. The work at Léchiagat was in serious decline; young people no longer wanted songs and preaching in Breton, and the congregation was ageing. Mrs Jones, together with Gerlan Williams, proposed a mission there to the Pentecostals. They contacted Douglas Scott, who arrived in Le Havre in 1930 as a Pentecostal missionary and by 1932 had established the first Assembly of God in France, and whose ministry initiated a significant Pentecostal movement. In response to the appeal from Mrs Jones and Gerlan Williams, Scott sent two of his young co-workers, André Nicolle (aged 20) and Arthur Maret (aged 22) in 1935, and at first the Methodist work was reinforced by the Pentecostal mission.

However, it was not long before the Pentecostal ministry in Léchiagat led to the birth of the third oldest Pentecostal assembly in France. A division, with both cultural and theological causes, arose in the course of the 1930s. In 1937, called “Assemblée de Dieu de Léchiagat-Lesconil”, the Pentecostals decided to build a room as a place of worship, and André Nicolle became the first pastor from 1937, yielding the responsibility temporarily to Daniel Guillaume in 1938.
Excursus: Wesleyans in the North of Brittany

Methodists in the north were Arminian in belief, Wesleyan in association, and were largely established by believers from Jersey and Guernsey. The language used was French.

At Saint-Malo and Saint-Servan, about a hundred Protestants held services in French from 1875, maintained by the Reformed pastor of Rennes. In 1879, some Methodist preachers originally from Jersey began meetings with the Roman Catholics in mind, and at Easter 1880, sixteen converts were admitted to the Lord’s Supper.

In 1886 the Protestant church in Saint-Servan took a decisive step when the “Gibson Mission” – an independent work with close links to the French Methodist Conference - took charge of all the French-language Protestants and built a chapel in the Place du Naye. This community detached itself progressively from the Reformed Church and was organised under the ministry of Pastors Gallienne and Guiton.

A parallel evolution took place in Saint-Brieuc, where there was already a small Protestant community. The Protestants were progressively taken under the wing of a Baptist pastor from the mission at Morlaix from 1865 to 1884, then by the Reformed church at Rennes
till 1904. In that year the French Methodist Conference, supported by the Mission Populaire Evangélique, decided to support Pastor Jean Scarabin (1876-1974), a Breton from Guerlesquin, who had been converted to Protestantism under the influence of Guillaume Le Coat, and who very quickly enjoyed success in his ministry.

This link gives more information about Scarabin as well as this photograph of him at his work in Le Légué in 1924: http://protestantsbretons.fr/protestants/jean-scarabin/

In 1908 Jean Scarabin began a series of evangelistic campaigns in the north-west of the Côtes d’Armor, touching similar working-class maritime contexts as in the Bigouden country, with success comparable to that of W. J. Jones.
From 1914 the Methodist mission employed several pastors at Saint-Brieuc, Le Légué, Perros-Guirec, and Lannion, where chapels had been built. Regular meetings were held at Locquémeau, L’Ile Grande, Saint-Quay-Perros, Ploumanach, Trébeurden, Servel. These works were in relationship with the new Baptist communities which had been raised up at Plougrescant and Paimpol under the leadership of British pastors like Charles Terrell and Caradoc Jones.
THE END OF THE METHODIST WORK?

1938

By 1938 the economic situation in Britain made it difficult if not impossible for the Methodist work in Brittany to be financed from Britain. Hence, in 1938, both branches of Methodism, Calvinistic and Wesleyan, were integrated into the Reformed Church of France.

They gradually lost their Evangelical identity, and ceased all proselytism. Today they are part of the Eglise protestante unie de France (the EPUDF).

Others at Léchiagat remained in the Methodist work, which was affiliated in 1938 to the Reformed church. Their church at Léchiagat continues to advertise services two Sunday mornings a month from October to June, and every Sunday in July, August and September.

Thus there are now two chapels there, the Reformed (known as “the English” but originating from the Welsh Methodist work) and the Pentecostal, known as the “French”, where Breton was not spoken. For several years it remained the only Pentecostal community in Brittany.

A former pastor from Léchiagat, of Swiss origin, Freddy Andérès, settled in Brest in 1938, where there is now the largest Pentecostal work in Brittany.
In 1943 Lorient was evacuated due to American bombing and the community was scattered to Concarneau, Pontivy and Vannes. The church building was totally destroyed in 1944, the only document surviving being a history of the church, which had been hidden in a metal tube.

A new chapel was built in 1954, affiliated to the EPUDF by Pastor Albert Trubert, associated with a Blue Cross anti-alcohol centre, in a different part of the city. Albert Trubert, who was installed as pastor in 1951 and died in 2010, published his memoirs under the title *Le pasteur de Rawa* (Éditions de La Cause). He was deported in the War, and became the unofficial chaplain in the Nazi concentration camp of Rawa Ruska in the Ukraine.

The church in Quimper advertises a service each Sunday morning. The church at Douarnenez is now Baptist, and has not succumbed to Liberal theology.

Further Protestant expansion came from the other Evangelical networks, especially Pentecostal. A contributory factor to the development of the network of Pentecostal churches from 1938 was the secession of Evangelicals for whom affiliation to the Reformed Church was unacceptable.

Clément Le Cossec (1921-2001), was born to a poor Roman Catholic fishing family in Léchiagat. His native tongue was Breton, and his father was a lighthouse keeper. His family had known the first meetings of the Welsh
missionaries, but had never been converted. After his father was transferred to the Cap d’Antifer lighthouse in Normandy, at the age of 14 Clément, together with his whole family, was converted during an evangelistic mission led by Pentecostal evangelists Douglas Scott and another evangelist in Le Havre. He went on to found the Pentecostal churches in Saint-Malo, Saint-Brieuc and Rennes, developed the one at Brest, and has been called l'Apôtre de la Mission Évangélique Tzigane (the Apostle of the Evangelical Gypsy Mission) which according to Carluer was responsible under God for 100,000 conversions in France, and a million worldwide.

Although not a convert of the church in Léchiagat, he returned for holiday every year and attended the Pentecostal assembly led by his cousins Yves and Maurice Charlot.
Outside the Pentecostal church in Léchiagat in about 1955. The two men on the left, in dark suits, are the leaders (the Charlot brothers), the old man with the beard is Pierre Nicolle retired pastor at Rouen, founder of the Assemblies of God of France, who likewise spent his summer weeks at Léchiagat.

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The Welsh Methodist work in Brittany therefore had ended, either extinguished or given over to others to continue in a different livery. However, I would like to make two final comments:
Job, the servant of God, states in Job 14:7-9 that “there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its roots grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant.” The work has passed into the hands of Pentecostals, Baptists, and (if or where they are Evangelical in belief) of the United Protestant Church, but the root goes back to the Welsh work, and it is still budding and putting forth branches.
In Ecclesiastes 3:14 the Preacher declares, “I perceived that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people may fear before him.” Through the preaching and other ministry of the missionaries and their co-workers in those years, many people came to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By now they have doubtless all finished their earthly life, but they are safe for ever, having been redeemed and given eternal life by the Lord Jesus Christ in whom they believed. Whatever God does endures for ever.

To him be the glory - Iddo ef y bo’r gogoniant –
Ra vo dezhañ ar gloar
FURTHER READING

A good deal more information about Welsh missionary work in Brittany could be gleaned from a study of the Calvinistic Methodist and Baptist missionary society archives, and doubtless also from archives lodged in France. These would no doubt be in Welsh, English and French, possibly also in Breton. It would be a fruitful, absorbing and worthwhile area of research for someone with the required linguistic knowledge, time, and funds for sojourns in Britain and France, and I hope this small booklet may prompt someone to undertake such a study. Meanwhile, here are some suggestions for any reader who wishes to pursue the matter for further details than I have included here.


Carluer, J-Y (1996) Protestants et Bretons (La Cause: Carrières-sous-Poissy)

Carluer, J-Y blog in protestantsbretons.fr


https://eglise-lechiagat.com/


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http://bibliotheque.idbebzh.org/data/cle_35/KanaouенноA_Kristen_ha_Toniou_Koz_Breiz_Izel_.pdf

Morris, John Hughes (1930) *Ein Cenhadaeth dramor* (pp. 89-99 *Pennod VIII Llydaw*) (Liverpool, 1930)

David Young was born in Basingstoke and began preaching in the Basingstoke Methodist Circuit in 1965. He holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge and Chester, was minister at the Baptist chapels in Hadlow and Llay, and served for 25 years as director of the Albanian Evangelical Mission.

He lives in retirement in Wrexham with his wife Margaret, and preaches frequently in the Wrexham Methodist Circuit, and occasionally in the South Cheshire Circuit.

His books Primitive Methodism are *The great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868; Change and Decay: Primitive Methodism from late Victorian times till World War 1; Primitive Methodism 1919 to 2020;* and *Primitive Methodism in North Wales.* They are reviewed on the website www.primitivemethodism.com.

www.primitivemethodism.com