

## A SHORT HISTORY OF CONCARNEAU

BY LOIC HASCOET

Some people say that the first settlement on the tiny island of Concarneau was established by the Picts from Scotland. We know for sure that the monks from the Abbey of Landevennec near Crozon arrived with Saint Guénolé and built a counter with some walls. Later on, Vauban, the military architect of King Louis the Fourteenth had those tall defensive walls built. The French feared the British fleet as well as the pirates, who fought against their Marine Royale. During the wars of religion, a Protestant community tried to settle here but the Duke of Brittany sent troops to slaughter them.

Napoleon's youngest brother Jérôme was commanding a vessel coming back from the Caribbean, but he was chased by the ships of His Majesty, and his ship nearly fell at the hands of the British Navy, but a sailor told the ship's captain that he knew how to reach Concarneau safely by navigating through the reefs of les Glénan. When Napoleon IIIrd (the third) came to inaugurate the railway station in Quimper, and he wanted to see where his uncle Jérôme had berthed his ship 40 years earlier. At the time of the 2nd Empire Professor Coste founded the sea laboratory, and they created the first oyster farm. Nowadays the lab is still researching in the domain of ocean biology.

The main fishing activity developed around the sardine and the tuna. Concarneau became prosperous but suddenly the fish changed their routes and it caused dire starvation and misery among the inhabitants. Thanks to the initiative of a group of painters, the first folklore festival in Brittany was created to help the people of Concarneau. Along the seafront you can see some beautiful stately houses. They belonged mostly to Parisian owners, The writer George Simenon lived downtown and he wrote a couple of famous thrillers inspired by local life.

When the second world war started, the government thought of moving to Quimper, so as to be able to escape to Great Britain over Concarneau harbour. A meeting between Mr Churchill and General de Gaulle was scheduled. Eventually they chose Bordeaux. However, one carriage transporting gold from the Banque de France ended up in Concarneau. It later vanished into thin air.