



## PARDON BANNERS IN BRITTANY

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### INTRODUCTION

A colourful medieval flag tradition survives in Brittany of the annual Spring and Summer processions, called “The Pardon”, of local religious flags and banners from villages across Brittany. These flags and banners lead pilgrims from different Breton parishes, praying for forgiveness through the intercession of their patron saint. Vexillologically, this custom transcends religious belief as part of Breton cultural patrimony.

Comparisons of these flags and banners are also shown with similar parades in other parts of the world – predominantly in Europe), such as Russian Orthodoxies, Northern Ireland and Spain and the Christian minority in Syria.

To finish off these Breton cultural parades, an examination is made of how these flags and banners are carried by their pole bearers.

Down Under you may not know but Brittany is the centre of the world though Sydney could be it too. However don't be surprised that we have a wonderful patrimony of vexillology. I'm not talking today about the flags we usually raise and carry, but another way of bearing emblems in Brittany; I mean the Breton Banners, to be more precise, religious Banners.



As vexillologists, we are used to displaying flags with the staff or mast on one side (mainly on the viewer's left). In Brittany, there is another way: we have a very long tradition of vexilloids, where the staff is in the middle of the emblem, used on a special occasion known as the *PARDON*.

### WHO DOES WHAT, WHEN, WHERE AND WHY IN A *PARDON*

A *Pardon* in Brittany is a Catholic religious procession around the local parish, held once a year - sometimes more often - in which pilgrims honour their local Saints and seek their protection for the following year, seek forgiveness for their sins (hence *Pardon*).

For the parish, the Saint's Feast Day is the most important of the year. The procession usually starts from the main church of the parish and ends at the Patron Saint's chapel, led by the Saint's Banner. Banners from neighbourhood and other parishes under the patronage of the same Saint are also carried.



I propose to take you through a very important Breton Pardon ceremony to illustrate and explain religious banners used in Brittany.

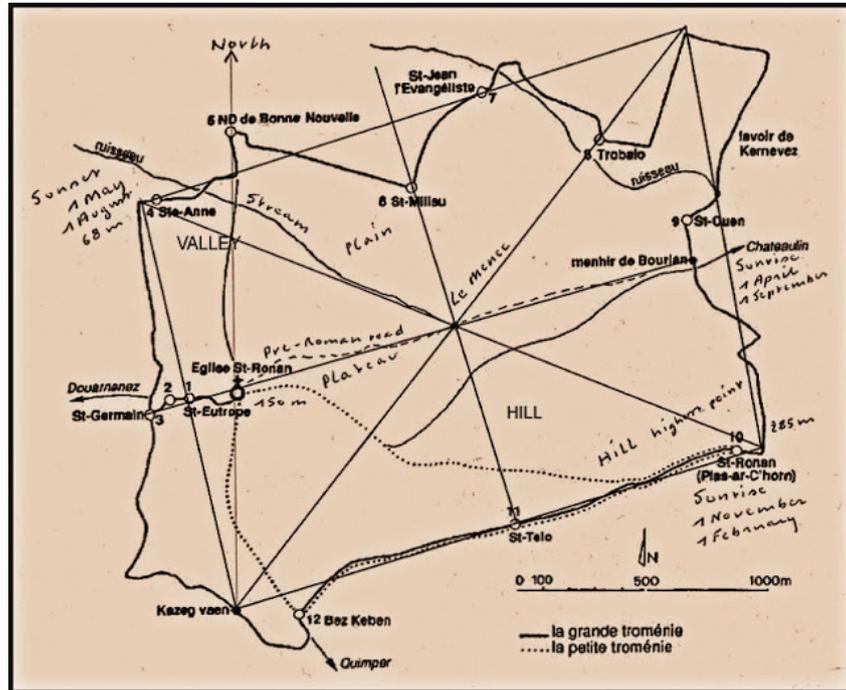
### “LA GRANDE TROMÉNIE DE LOCRONAN”

Locronan (or *Loc Ronan* - in Breton “the Hermitage of Ronan” (René in French, i.e. “Born Again”) where the Irish monk and Saint lived some 1000 years ago. *Troménie* is a Gallicised rendition of the Breton *Tro Minihi*, i.e. a monastery tower. *Grande* in French means Big (there is also a *Petite* (Little) Troménie).

Locronan is in south-west Brittany, just a few kilometres west from Quimper, capital city of Breton Cornwall. Its architecture dates from 1200-1700 in the main, and a stunning setting for such films as Roman Polanski’s *Tess*. The Troménie covers a whole week from second to the third Sunday in July. The Grande Troménie occurs only every six years, the Petite is celebrated every year between.



The initial and closing Sundays are the most important. The last Grande Troménie was in 2013 (above): the next will be from 14-21 July 2019.



## DESCRIBING A BANNER

Banners can be described and explained in a manner similar to a full Coat-of-Arms.

The main field usually depicts the Saint honoured.

Ropes attached on each side allow helpers and the bearer keep the banner upright in the wind. Some more recent banners include the equivalent of such cords in the field design, with vertical stripes of ermine, inscribed with the dates and names of the designers.

A Banner has two sides, front and back, usually different, not a reverse image, as in a flag.

On top are the Helmet and Crest – a horizontal bar from which the banner is suspended. Above the bar there is usually a cross – though sometimes no device as the finial may have disappeared or been broken over the years of usage. Some banners are more than 400 years old.



The Slogan (above the field) names the parish or more often the Saint, while the Motto (below the field) outlines the prayer made to the Saint. Both are usually written in French, Latin and Breton. French is used in the French speaking part, mainly east, of Brittany. Latin is also not so rare, as some banners were created when Latin was the official language of the Catholic Church. Breton, a living language, is more often used in western Brittany.

On bottom, some banners are gonfalon shaped and sometimes it offers us interesting information about the banner itself.



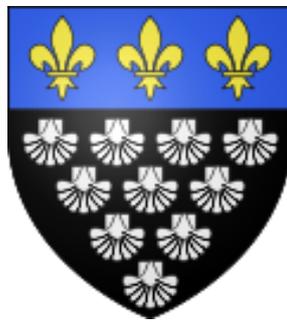


The first example is the Banner of St Mikael, patron saint of the city of St-Brieuc – the banner is actually a gonfalon, with the scalloped segments at the lower edge. The front side depicts St Mikael slaying the dragon; the Latin slogan (*Quis Ut Deus* – Who Is Like God?), the French motto: *St-Michel protegez-nous* (St-Mikael protect us) The reverse depicts St. Anne with her daughter the young Holy Virgin with again the French motto *Ste Anne, priez pour nous* Pray for us !

The curves of the gonfalon depict 6 different coat-of-arms, 3 in front and 3 others at back – and these provide the clue to its age and provenance on the front, left to right are the Arms of Pope Leo XIII, Mont St. Michel, and Bishop Fallières of St-Brieuc. On the reverse are those of Brittany, France, and Saint-Brieuc.



Pope Leo XIII 1878/ 1903



Mont St-Michel



Bishop Fallières 1889/ 1906

Leo XIII was Pope from 1878 to 1903, and Fallières bishop of St-Brieuc from 1889 to 1906: the banner can be dated to 1889 and 1903. So we can say this banner, created by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the spiritual reigns of Pope Leo XIII and local Bishop Fallières (their ecclesiastical coat-of-arms) is dedicated to St-Mikael church (the saint and coat of arms) at St Brieuc city (coat-of arms), in Brittany (Ste Anne, patron of Bretons and ducal coat-of-arms) in France (old royal coat-of-arms)

As Napoleon said: a good picture is worth a thousand words, so let's look at some examples mainly from that Procession of Locronan (pictures from 2007 and 2013).

Locronan, 12km, 6 hours walk, 12 stations of praying, more than 50 banners in Procession. Just to make you discover the large panel of possibilities.



photos of  
Locronan  
procession





## ELSEWHERE IN BRITTANY

There are 1,500 municipalities in Brittany. Not all of them have a banner or banners, and not all of them have *Pardons*. However, it is said that more than 400-500 Pardons are held each year, with some 1,500-1,600 banners unfurled all over Brittany. Here are some illustrations:

Sainte-Anne d'Auray: Patron of Brittany, *Pardon* on 26 July as many Banners as Locronan, but more pilgrims, estimated around 30.000.

At Sainte-Anne (mother of the Blessed Virgin, there are all year round pilgrimages of any kinds, such as Veterans because of the Memorial Cenotaph for 240,000 Bretons dead during WWI; such as Scouts too.

*Tro-Breizh* is a revival of a medieval pilgrimage around Brittany, joining the 7 Cathedrals dedicated to the 7 Founding Saints of Brittany. This "tour of Brittany" covers some 650km but today, pilgrims do the walk in segments, year by year (one full week in August per year over the 7 years). The costumes have changed but the spirit, the faith and banners remain.



Even small parishes holding a Pardon follows the same ceremonial. An example is the village of Plouha (less than 500 people). Plouha means Parish of Adam, though the local church is dedicated to St. Peter and the banner on the picture here is dedicated to Notre Dame de Kermaria (Our Lady of KerMaria).

## ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

There are similar banners and procession in France, though not as concentrated as in Brittany.

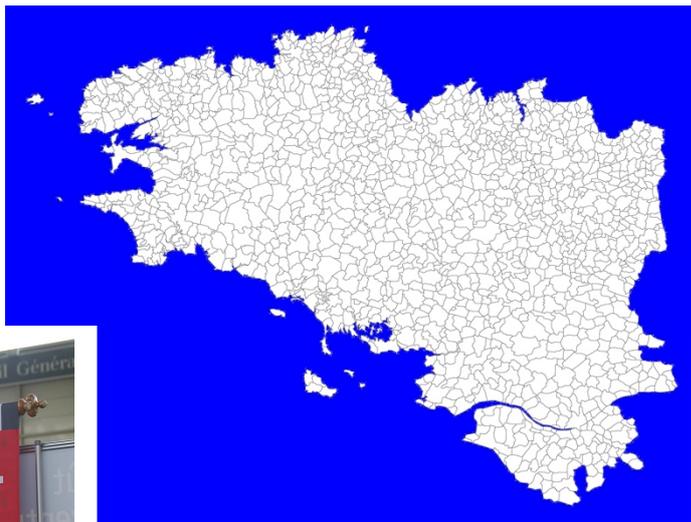
I also found that in others parts of the world, similar banners are used either for religious reasons as in Russian Orthodoxy, even in wounded Syria, or in Spain. Or in North Ireland, as Orange marchers in Ulster, but that is more political.





### OTHERS BANNERS IN BRITTANY

In Brittany, we can find others reasons to use such central stick banners, such as the Breton Druids or the Pueri Cantores, for example, the banner of Choir school of St-Brieuc, with 7 black cloth rings on top bar to remind the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit; the wolf with its seven-flamed breath (the same 7 gifts). Why the wolf? Because a legend of St-Brieuc said he tamed a wolf (some statues of this saint shows a sleeping wolf at his feet).





Obviously, they have been influenced by religion, but not always, such as this one seen yearly at Music Festival ‘Les Vieilles Charrues’ in the centre of Brittany (named Old Ploughs in opposition to Old Gaffers festivals we often see on Breton coasts). Besides the joke, it’s interesting to note this festivaler bearing his vexilloid on using the Banner style to show up his funny mood about our Gwenn-ha-Du.

### CURIOSITIES ABOUT THE BRETON BANNERS



Why are there so many people behind the banner?

Carrying a banner is a team effort. A Banner is made of strong wood, rich velvet and silk embroidery. Not forgetting the metal cross on top, the whole thing is heavy. When a bearer is exhausted, there is somebody to take his place.



At the beginning of a *Pardon*, before the Procession starts, neighbourhood banners salute the Host Banner. And it became an honoured charge to be the main bearer of a banner, so that people created a traditional sport, imitating the banner salute, “Lifting the pole”. At the origin, this parish championship was to select the Bearer for the year for each banner. Nowadays, it has become a traditional sport championship. More the cursor is at the top of the bar, more it’s hard to stand it up straight, without the bottom to touch the ground. It has been calculated that cursor at top is equivalent to lift more than 500 kg. If you want to try in your garden, get an iron perch 6 meters long, weighing about 25 kg, put a 14 kilograms cursor at top.



## CONCLUSION

There are three formal ways to display a flag in Brittany.

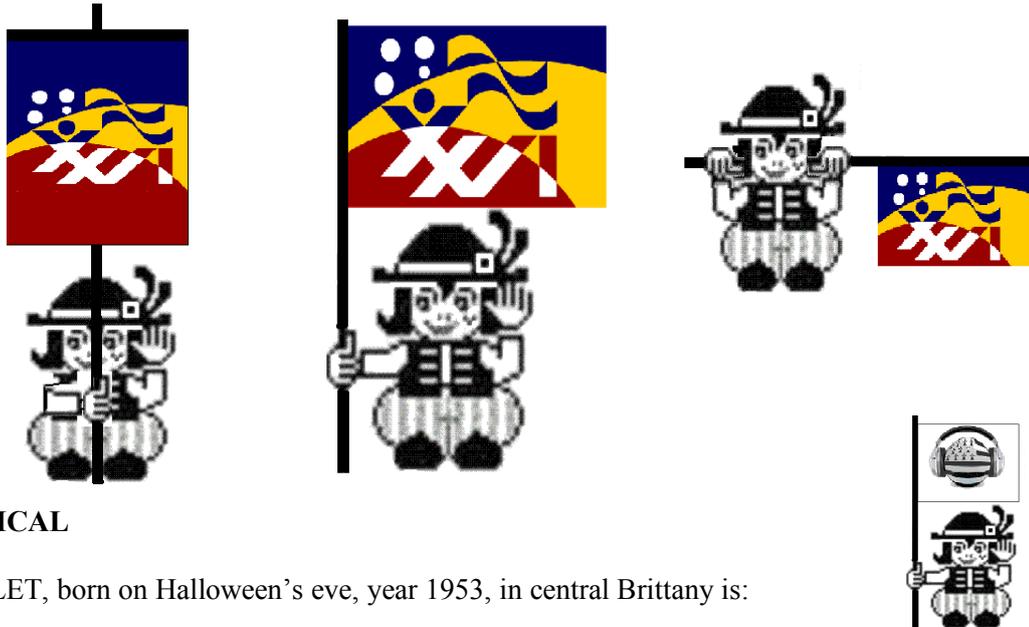
The first is the familiar staff at *dexter* – the viewer’s left. Bretons use this universal method for national, military and political flags.

Today you have learnt of a different method, with the staff in the centre - similar in fact to the ancient Roman display of their military vexilla, but now used mainly in religious banners.

The third is to carry the flag on a horizontal staff, sometimes carried across the shoulders, as below. A cultural custom.

To end what could have been much longer, I hope you have enjoyed discovering Brittany through this unusual aspect of Vexillology.





**BIOGRAPHICAL**

Alain RAULLET, born on Halloween’s eve, year 1953, in central Brittany is:

- Single and living at Saint-Brieuc, north Brittany.
- Working at Loudeac as team manager of 50 technical civil servants of that centre of Brittany city of 10,000 inhabitants since 2001.
- Before, worked as Civil engineer in Iran, and later oil services engineer in England, Guatemala and Brazil (years 1978 to 83).
- Back to Brittany, working team manager in road building company (1988 to 96).
- and civil servant from 1998 until to-day.
- Interested with flags since childhood (when started reading Dictionaries at first back of cover page)
- Reader of *Flag Bulletin* since 1980
- Attendee of all ICV since Melbourne XIII, on September 1989)
- Created SBV, KVV, Breton society, in 1996 with Philippe RAULT.
- In charge of Breton society, *Breton Flag Bulletin* (Ar Banniel)
- Vexillology radio broadcaster in the world since 7 September 2006 (already 9 seasons and 370 broadcasted chronicles)
- Fellow of the Federation (FIAV) on 9 August 2013 at Rotterdam ICV25.

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