

Archival Review: The Archival Holdings of the Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique

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The Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique¹ (CRBC for short, Kreizenn an Enklaskoù Breizhek ha Keltiek in Breton) is a research center established in Brest (Brittany, France) in 1969. Associating scholars from various academic fields, a research library (the Yves-Le-Gallo library) and a publishing team, the CRBC specializes in the study of the Celtic nations and specifically of Brittany.

The Yves-Le-Gallo library (named after the first director of the research center) is a unique institution: monitoring publications in France, it aims at collecting copies of every published material related to Brittany as well as the other Celtic nations. Its specificity also lies in the numerous private archives it preserves, which are key to understanding the history of Brittany and of the Breton language and culture.



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The foundation of the Yves-Le-Gallo library and the coincidental origin of its archival holdings

The Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique was primarily founded as a hub for interdisciplinary research on Brittany and the Celtic nations. Under the guidance of the Université de Bretagne occidentale, in which buildings the center is now located, the CRBC aimed to unite academics



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in archeology, ethnology, history, linguistics and sociology. But, for such multidisciplinary studies to succeed, it quickly became clear that the research center also needed to provide its own documentary resources.

As a result, in 1969, the CRBC opened its library with its first acquisitions, the private collections of two prominent figures with a known interest for Breton culture and language: Daniel Bernard, scholar, and Francis Even, notary and bard involved in the Parti national breton. The acquisition of Even's private library was a key moment for the Center as it also offered the opportunity to preserve Even's personal papers, which became the library's first archival fonds.

In time, 69,000 books (mainly in French and Breton, but also in other Celtic languages) were collected. Together with the various studies led in Brittany by CRBC's researchers, this active gathering of documents has drawn the Yves-Le-Gallo library into an active network of people involved in Breton language and culture.

Consequently, owners of archival documents have found the insurance that their material will be studied and made easily accessible to both the academic community as well as the general public if preserved by the library. The library's specialization and its location at the heart of the city of Brest and inside the University's premises are often seen as key strengths for the preservation of specific archives. And although the library was not meant to become an archive, many private donations were and are still made every year, leading to the slow but steady growth of the library's archival holdings. In 2021, there were approximately 150 archival fonds either donated, preserved for keeping, purchased or digitized by the CRBC.

A glimpse in the archives

The aims of the CRBC's name to include both Brittany and the Celtic nations notwithstanding, the archival fonds preserved in the library focus mostly on the social and cultural history of Brittany, although links to other Celtic nations (such as Ireland and Wales) can also be found in the documents. Through the archives of political activists, writers, scholars or journalists, researchers and the general public can access a great variety of material ranging predominantly from the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century.



For example, the cultural history of Brittany can be explored through the archive of Anatole Le Braz, a folklorist who published collections of traditional tales and songs in Breton, taking part in the rising interest for Breton language and culture in the nineteenth century. Contemporary approaches to Breton language and identity can be found both in the archives of writers, such as Pierre-Jakez Hélias whose work on the social shift in Brittany in the twentieth century echoed that of other French rural areas, or academics, such as Donatien Laurent, a sociologist in whose archive audio recordings of Breton language made between the 1950s and the 1970s can be found. A more political history of Brittany can be accessed in the fonds of Célestin Lainé, which gives a unique insight into the national Breton movement and its military collaborationist actions during the Second World War. Some archives also concern the social and environmental movement of the 1970s, which prevented for example the implementation of nuclear power plants in Brittany.



The chronological span of archival fonds is not only relevant with regard to the study of Breton language and identity, it also highlights the great variety of media which the Yves-Le-Gallo library is working to preserve. While the majority of archival fonds is made of paper (textual and iconographic documents such as maps, posters or postcards), the library also holds many audiovisual archives.

The CRBC preserves photographic collections showcasing Brittany and its changes throughout the twentieth century as well as audio records such as wax cylinders (early twentieth century) or magnetic tapes with recordings of Breton language. In that respect, the archival holdings showcase a multitude of approaches to Breton language and culture through diverse themes and ideas along with a variety of technologies and techniques.²

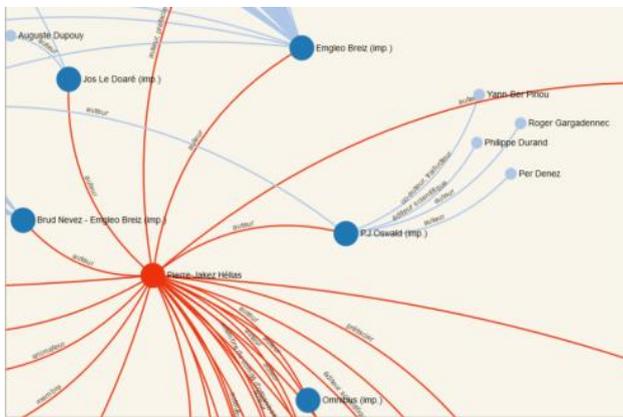
Archives and research: the growth of digital access

While physical access to the archives requires the submission of a motivated letter to the Director of the CRBC³, the library is actively working to share the content it preserves through digital technologies.

The CRBC Open Science project contains a variety of databases focused on promoting the library's archival materials or the information held within. The aim is to give greater digital access to research sources while also providing in-depth and informed descriptions of them.

Many archival documents have thus been made accessible online via the research center's digital library⁴, thanks to the library team working alongside researchers tasked with providing a thorough description and contextualisation of the digitized resources. CRBC Dataset⁵ is another iteration of the online promotion of archives. It is an open data aggregator which allows for the query of the CRBC finding aids as well as of multiple databases created by the center's researchers and built from information found in its holdings and that of partnering institutions.⁶

The *Projet de recherche en littérature de langue bretonne* or Breton-language literature database (also known as PRELIB⁷) can be considered a prime example of such databases, highlighting the research opportunities enabled by the specific framework of the CRBC. The project, led by two academics with the support of a database engineer, endeavors to showcase the networks of identified actors in Breton literature (individuals or collectives) based on information found in



either published or archival documents. Through various means such as lists and graphs, the project structures for each actor a combination of sourced facts linking back the material to where the information was found. It has become a fruitful

resource to explore and understand interactions inside the Breton literary sphere, from its first manifestation in the Middle Ages up till today.⁸ This still ongoing project was made possible thanks to the substantial relation between researchers and information professionals within the CRBC.

The relevance of the collections preserved by the library and the work led by the library team in relation with researchers has been increasingly recognised on a national level. While the Yves-Le-Gallo library has been a mixed research unit of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) since 1983, it was recently awarded the Collex – Collections

d'excellence⁹ label. This label acknowledges the value of the preserved heritage, both in terms of books and archival fonds. The research center has shown throughout the years the importance of its existence both as an academic hub and as a heritage institution working toward the preservation and communication of historical sources on Brittany and the Celtic nations.

Bibliography

S. Jean-François (ed.), *Le CRBC : 40 ans au service de la recherche sur la Bretagne et les pays celtiques* (Brest, 2009).

Y. Tranvouez, *Ici c'est Brest ! Une histoire du Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique (1969-2019)* (Brest, to be published).

Endnotes

¹ Website: <https://www.univ-brest.fr/crbc/>

² A complete list of the archival fonds can be found here: <https://www.univ-brest.fr/crbc/menu/Biblioth%C3%A8que+Yves-Le+Gallo+%28UMS+3554%29/Fonds+d%27archives>

³ For more information on access, check the website. The staff can also reply to enquiries and guide users in their search (contacts: bibliothequeCRBC@univ-brest.fr).

⁴ Digital library: <https://bibnumcrbc.huma-num.fr>

⁵ CRBC Dataset: <http://crbc-dataset.huma-num.fr/>

⁶ The CRBC has been working with many different institutions: public libraries and archives in Brittany, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Institut

national de l'Audiovisuel or more recently the CIRDOC-Institut occitan de cultura.

⁷ Projet de recherche en littérature de langue bretonne (PRELIB) - Breton-language literature database: <http://mshb.huma-num.fr/prelib/>

⁸ For a more detailed presentation:

N. Blanchard, J.-B. Pressac & M. Thomas, 'Quand l'informatique soulève des questions épistémologiques dans le domaine de la littérature de langue bretonne : l'exemple de la base de données PRELIB', in: *La Bretagne Linguistique* (2017) <https://doi.org/10.4000/lbl.315>

N. Blanchard, J.-B. Pressac & M. Thomas, 'PRELIB: A new digital tool for apprehending Breton literary networks?', in: M. Byrne & S. Kidd (eds.) *Liontan Lionmhor: Local, National and Global Gaelic Networks from the 18th to the 20th Century*, (Glasgow, 2019): 213-227.

⁹ Collex-Persée, research infrastructure: <https://www.collexpersee.eu/>