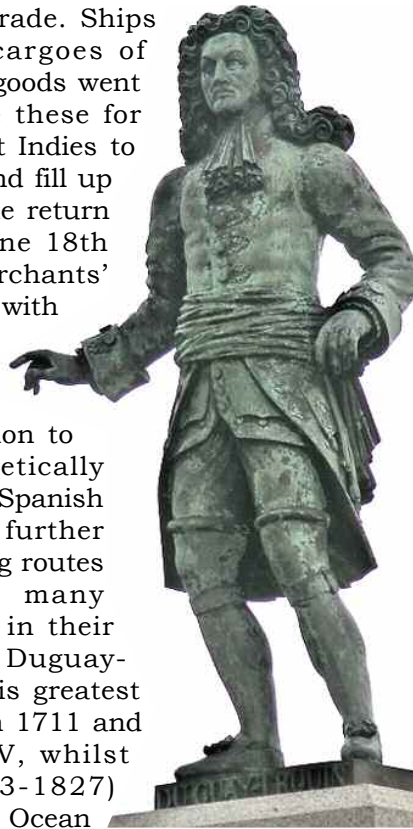


now came from the slave-trade. Ships which left Nantes with cargoes of weapons, fabric and cheap goods went first to Africa to exchange these for slaves and then to the West Indies to off-load this cheap labour and fill up with sugar and coffee for the return journey to Brittany. The fine 18th century architecture of merchants' houses in Nantes was built with the proceeds of this 'triangular trade'.

The Malouin corsaires (those with official permission to 'course' the enemy) energetically harried Dutch, English and Spanish ships in the Channel and further afield, protecting vital trading routes for France and taking many hundreds of foreign ships in their remarkable careers. René Duguay-Trouin (1673 -1736) had his greatest success at Rio de Janeiro in 1711 and was enobled by Louis XIV, whilst Robert Surcouf (1773-1827) famously ranged the Indian Ocean a century later.

Economically, however, St-Malo, suffered something of a decline from 1720, when Lorient was still enjoying a monopoly of the eastern trade, but the latter became a military port after the demise of the French India Trading Company in 1769.



René Duguay-Trouin



Brest

Ship building at Nantes and St-Nazaire remained important, whilst from 1680 Brest was a great military port. The Arsenal there had 5,000 workers before the Revolution, in addition to the naval base.

The bottom had been knocked out of the Breton linen trade by Colbert's swingeing increases in duties on imported English linen and the restriction of its entry to ports outside Brittany. In return England boycotted Breton linen from 1678-1685. Breton deputies appealed to the king in vain against this destruction of their commerce, and it was never to recover fully from the blow. Consequences for the region of Léon were severe, but trade in fine linen and hemp from the Quintin area continued, with sail cloth from Rennes and Vitré fulfilling the demands of the French navy.

The tobacco trade flourished in Morlaix, with factories established along the river in 1736. 25,000 hundredweight a year was produced just before the Revolution and 750 people were employed in 1788, in an enterprise which survived into recent times.



Tobacco warehouses, Morlaix

Grievances

In addition to a progressive stagnancy in trade, peasant grievances against the nobles were increasing. Higher taxes and rents were demanded, and large areas of land once used by peasants were passed over to wealthier farmers. In much of Haute-Bretagne, peasants remained under the feudal system, whilst in Basse-Bretagne, the 'domain congéable' was a common system whereby the noble owned