The Shared History of Wales Cornwall and Brittany

Wales, Cornwall and Brittany have more in common than their ancestral languages. Before the rise of the Roman Empire, most of Europe was occupied by Celtic peoples. When the Roman Empire collapsed at the beginning of the 5th century the Celtic regions, we know today started to develop their identities.

In the southern part of the island of Britain the local Celtic inhabitants were worried about attacks from Ireland, Scotland and further abroad so they invited people from what is now Germany to help defend them. These people together with other invaders from areas in Europe and Scandinavia became the English, and they expanded to control a great deal of the island. The people of Wales and Cornwall were soon separated by English territory so they began to develop separate languages and cultures.

Around the same time emigrants from Britain particularly Cornwall, settled on Brittany. The name Brittany is understood to mean "Little Britain". There is a region of Brittany called Cornouaille which is essentially the same word as Cornwall.

The Breton, Cornish and Welsh languages have all faced difficulties over the centuries. Cornwall was subsumed into England by the Norman invasion of 1066. Wales became formally subject to the English Crown in the first half of the 16th century. Brittany became part of France around the same time.

In all three cases the language of the English and French rulers was privileged over the local languages.