

Brexit

# Long, slow walk to promised land of an independent Britain



**Patrick Freyne**

Hardcore Brexiters remain steadfast on the Leave Means Leave march

In the car park of a garden centre in Towcester about 200 people are gathering around a big white bus bearing the legend "Stop the Brexit Betrayal". They're all part of the "Leave Means Leave" march which has been moving steadily from Sunderland to London since March 16th. They're marching the 12 miles from Towcester to Padbury and the big Brexiteer star attraction is Wetherspoons founder Tim Martin.

Martin has been on a "100 pubs" media tour talking about Brexit and he is not heartened by the series of indicative votes taking place in parliament today. "The middle syllable is 'dick'," he says. "I think that says a lot."

He believes the fact that Britain isn't leaving the EU tomorrow is a betrayal of democracy and that being in the EU means rule from abroad. "And as anyone in Ireland knows, who you're ruled by is a very emotional issue."

There are a hundred core marchers who've been to every location along the way with another hundred or so day-trippers joining just for the day. Most of the people here are middle-aged and older. They wear sensible walking shoes and wave Union Jack flags. The original bits of the march were almost 20 miles long, PR man Christopher Carter tells me, "but we made it shorter due to the age of the marchers."

"I shall go as far as I can,"

...fudge, an attempt to make it look like we're leaving when we're not." Is he worried about leaving without a deal? "Not at all. German car manufacturers... and French and Italian wine providers will be lined up at the docks with nowhere to go... Why would they hurt themselves to hurt us?"

Does he worry about the Irish Border? "The Good Friday agreement is sacrosanct," says Wathen. "The only worry would be that European immigrants would cross into Ireland and go into Britain."

He thinks that could be solved by a sea border.

At this point, Leave Means Leave founder Richard Tice ascends to the top of the open-top bus and introduces Tim Martin. Martin delivers a short speech, the gist of which is that the EU is terrible and Westminster is terrible. When he mentions that this is Andrea Leadsom's constituency, everyone boos. When he says, "Parliament has not fulfilled its promise!" a man cries, "Lying toads!", and everybody laughs.

Then 200 people hit the road, waving their banners and flags. As we walk through Towcester, John Knight, who has his Union Jack on a long telescopic pole, finds he has to avoid overhanging wires. "I didn't anticipate this being such a problem."

The man leading the parade holds a big sign asking motorists to "Hoot for Brexit" and many cars do. As everyone crosses the road, at one point, there's some angry over-and-back between one Union Jack draped marcher and an impatient motorist.

"He's a remainder," says one woman. "I'm surprised he slowed down."

**Curb migration**  
Jeff Wyatt has a "Parliament versus the People" sign hanging on his back. He wants to leave the EU for reasons of "sovereignty" and to curb immigration. As a businessman, he says he's seen prices of European products go up but he believes that this is down to the currency manipulations of remain-inclined city traders.

He is angry with the lack of progress on Brexit. "The ballot paper said 'leave' or 'remain' and what the traitors in parliament are trying to do is hijack the vote... It's a coup. It's treachery."

Fellow businessman Alex Moody is also angry. "The people who want to ignore the votes, they're the anti-democrats, they're the fascists... They need to honour the vote. Nothing else will do. If parliament doesn't do that and the government don't that. It will be serious. There will be trouble. There will be violence and that would be right because if the people are not respected what other tools do the people have? We voted to leave."

Glasgow-born Nigel Birrell agrees with Moody about the potential for violence if Brexit doesn't happen. He wouldn't condone that himself, he says, being a Christian and an advocate of non-violent protest ("like Gandhi") but things are looking bleak for hardcore Brexiteers.

He has just been reading news that former campaign leaders like Johnson and Rees-Mogg might be willing to support May's deal. "I thought they were going to fight to the end, but perhaps not... If our leaders leave the battlefield, are we right to still be there? Yes, is the answer."

Farm worker Kevin Russell is wearing a Union Jack poncho. He says he doesn't know enough about farm economics to know what the implications of Brexit are for British farming, but he's been a leaver since the start. "I had 'vote out' painted on my van," he says. Immigration is an issue for him, he says, particularly "after the Germans opened the floodgates to all those migrants."

Mandy Childs can't believe that the country isn't going to be out of the EU by tomorrow. "I'm ashamed of our prime minister," she says. "And I'm ashamed of your prime minister, strutting on the stage there, thinking he's one of the big boys. But they'll eat him up and spit him out. He's very useful to them, at the moment, but his little ego has got the better of him."

Like everyone else I speak to today, Childs refuses to believe that the Irish Border will cause any difficulties. "As Yanis Varoufakis said, the EU will always find something that's a

red herring and the Border is a red herring."

Hilary Baxter tells me how positive it is to see "the Irish talking about Ireland as an independent nation again".

This is yet another positive consequence of Brexit, she says. She shows me a laminated sheet of anti-EU points she has hanging around her neck. She talks about bureaucratic red tape and youth unemployment across Europe and the "stagnant Eurozone". She believes that any problems caused by Brexit would ultimately be worth the trouble.

"In a hundred years the world will look back and this will just be a five- or 10-year blip."

Richard Tice and Tim Martin speaking from the bus at the Towcester leg of the Leave Means Leave march.

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# Weekend Review

Saturday, March 23, 2019 Editor: Conor Goodman Phone: 01-6758000 email: weekend@irishtimes.com



**Pianist of Yarmouk**  
The Syrian street musician who became a YouTube star.  
Page 6



**Becoming a nun**  
Emma Brady on joining St Mary's Abbey in Waterford.  
Page 4



Maureen and Brian Gilmartin

“We were all for it on the terms that were told to us, but the goal posts have moved,” says Brian. “I don’t think we were told enough really,” says Maureen.



Nicole Elizabeth

“I didn’t understand it well enough to vote.”



Wendy Lumley

“Britain should take control back from Brussels and stop giving them so much money.”



James Jefford

“Nobody knew what the positives were and what the negatives were.”

## WHAT BREXIT BRITAIN THINKS NOW

In the days following the 2016 referendum, Patrick Freyne interviewed people in towns and villages across Britain. Today, he re-visits some of those locations to see if people's views on Brexit have changed



Patrick Freyne

Driving across the UK this week – from Holyhead to London – has been a strange experience. As the radio shouts about cliff edges and late-night press conferences and troops being put on standby, people drive to work and school, buses follow their time tables, and life goes on.

The last time I went to Stratford-upon-Avon in the west Midlands and Reading in the southeast was in 2016, the week before the UK referendum on EU membership, and while some people had strong views then, many seemed strangely disengaged or even apathetic. Now, in contrast, everyone I speak to seems worn out and, in many cases, angry.

Some leave voters are still gleefully insistent that the Brexit utopia is around the corner. Most are frustrated that the process

isn't easier, a few going so far as to say they would vote differently now. Others say that, although everything is terrible, “democracy” must out and the referendum result must be respected.

Remain voters, in contrast, seem saddened, scared and desperate for reprieve. Both leavers and remainers, are united in a belief that their politicians are a disgrace and that everything is awful. They all emit an almost identical world-weary groan when asked about Brexit. You should imagine this groan before each of the conversations recounted below.

### Stratford-upon-Avon

Danish Sophie Clausen and Italian Manuela Perteghella were so dejected in the aftermath of the referendum that they set up Stratford-upon-Avon's “Brexit Café”. This is a semi-regular event that allows people from both sides to respectfully talk about their views as they drink coffee.

For their first gathering they invited the Brexit-inclined Conservative MP Nadhim Zahawi. Another event was inaugurated by a London-based group of leave voters eager to set up a similar group. “I think they felt isolated in London,” says Perteghella.

“There were so many social media attacks and newspaper headlines [but] I don't think people ever met face-to-face to discuss it,” says Clausen, who has lived in the UK since the 1990s. “It was about trying to understand each other's points of view.”

Perteghella and Clausen are not non-partisan. They are members of Stratford for Europe (the group's logo is a picture of Shakespeare inside the 12 gold stars of the EU flag) and they want people to know how much this referendum, in which they couldn't vote, hurt them.

Perteghella, who is also the local co-ordinator for the 3 Million, an advocacy group for EU citizens living in the UK, notes the red tape EU citizens face in order to remain in the country or change jobs.

“We've lived in fear and anxiety for the last three years,” says Clausen. “We have no idea what our status will be. Will we be degraded to second-class citizens? ... I feel the country I came to has completely changed. I always loved this country and I was grateful, but I no longer feel welcome.”

Nearby, Rachel Deatry, the remain-supporting day manager in a café called El Greco's, tells me that Brexit makes her feel bad for her colleagues and that she feels more European than British. There are three Britons among the 15 employees of El Greco's.

Everyone there is fed up with Brexit but they make jokes about it, says Deatry. When people leave work for the day, they say “I'm doing a Brexit”.

Stratford for Remain campaigner Mark Cunliffe tells me that the local service industry is heavily staffed by mainland Europeans and that restaurants are already finding it harder to get staff. He says that big employers such as Jaguar Land Rover are planning a long shut down in production at the start of April. He says he lost £50,000 (£58,140) due to currency fluctuations hitting his renewable energy-related business. He laughs. “I was on local TV recently and they asked me to stop looking down the camera so angrily.”

Jean Haslam in the Deli Café, which she owns and where I met her three years ago, is still an enthusiastic leave voter. Why? “We're saturated. Polish, Romanians, all drawing on resources.”

What about the majority of Europeans who've been here for years, adding to the British economy? “I don't think anything is going to happen to them,” she says, confidently.

Her sister, Violet Jordan, voted leave too but now thinks it was a mistake. “How could we win against all these countries?” she says.

Haslam thinks everything will be fine, that post-Brexit there'll be more money for the National Health Service and that talk about food shortages or factory closures is “scaremongering”. So why hasn't it gone smoothly? “Parliament are a disgrace.”

She introduces me to four older women who meet in her café every month.

“I voted leave but now I've switched to remain,” says Jackie Bell. “I voted remain and now I'd vote leave,” says Jennifer Taylor.

Maddie Putt and Wendy Bailey, in contrast, high five each other over their unwavering support for leave.

Taylor initially voted to remain because

she believed in the post-war union of nations. But the European Parliament's behaviour since the referendum has turned her off. She calls them “tossers”.

Why did Bell change to a remain position? “Because of all the bother... I'm bored with it. I don't understand it all.”

They admit that none of them realised it would all get so complicated. “We just thought it was going to be a simple thing,” says Putt. “I mean if you want to change your job you just put your notice in.”

At a neighbouring table I meet Ricky Roebuck. He's a carer for his disabled 10-year-old daughter but back when he was looking for work, he says, he was competing with Polish people happy to take minimum wage in order to save money for houses back home. So, he voted leave.

He doesn't have any problem, he adds, with people like his business-owning Albanian next-door neighbour who came to stay and “makes a massive contribution”.

But what if Brexit makes it difficult for people like him? He sighs. “Okay, it might be horrible to say it, but at the end of the day we're British and have to look after ourselves.”

Next door to Shakespeare's childhood home, Sir Stanley Wells, the Shakespearean scholar and honorary president of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, tells me that he's “vigorously opposed to Brexit... I feel our cultural intellectual ties with Europe are so important and I deplore anything that might break them down”.

It's also probably not something that Shakespeare would have wanted. Wells once wrote a paper called “Shakespeare, Man of the European Renaissance”, and he points out several places where Shakespeare's plays reference Ovid, Petrarch and Montaigne. “Shakespeare was soaked in European culture,” he says.

So why does he think people voted to leave? He talks about Britain's insular streak and distrust of foreigners, but first he just laughs and says, “because they're ignorant buggers”.

Across the road in the year-round Christmas-themed Nutcracker shop, I meet Steve Bartlett. Nearly three years ago, listening to the same Christmassy mix tape, Bartlett told me he was looking forward to leaving the EU. Now he sounds despairing. “I can't believe what a fiasco it is. If I could find somewhere to run away and hide, I would.”

What did he think was going to happen? “I thought it would be more organised. I thought it could be a new start where we could stand up on our own.”

What would his friends and family vote? “Fifty-fifty,” he says. “It was a class argument as much as anything else. The ones... who were struggling, wanted to leave. The ones who were doing all right, the middle class and richer, they wanted to remain.”

Would he vote differently if there was a second referendum? “I don't think I'd even vote. That's how downhearted I am. I don't think I'll ever vote for anything again.”

### Reading

In a Caffe Nero, Anthony Rixon is talking to tattooed Franciscan Brother Adam Lee about potentially joining his order, when I come over and ask them about Brexit.

“I'll take my hand off the bible for a moment to say, ‘it's bollocks,’” says Brother Adam who really does take his hands off his bible to say this.

He voted to remain. Rixon voted to leave. Reading, in which 58 per cent of voters chose remain, is the first city in which I keep bumping into leave and remain voters hanging out together.

“I wanted us to govern our own country,”

Residents of Reading in England give their take on Brexit.

PHOTOGRAPHS: RIC MILLIS

says Rixon. “But now I'd vote to stay just to get it over with.”

Brother Adam voted remain because he didn't think there was enough information. “I thought it was unrealistic. Lies like the £350 million for the NHS overshadowed everything for me [a leave slogan read “We send the EU £350 million a week. Let's fund our NHS instead”]; and the border with Ireland wasn't even mentioned before the vote.” (We mentioned it in Ireland, I point out.)

“I just didn't want to be ruled by Germany,” says Rixon. “Immigration was a bit of an issue for me, but I don't mind people coming from Syria whose lives have been ripped apart or other people who come for good reasons.”

They both agree that it's a mess now. “I'm just hoping they get it over with,” says Brother Adam.

“I hope there's not another referendum because I think it would damage the country,” says Rixon. “But if there is, I'll vote to stay. I'll start speaking German. I don't care anymore.”

Bill Millis, a staunch leaver, is sitting near a statue of Queen Victoria with a younger remain-voting relative, James Jeffords. “We should come out on March 29th deal or no deal,” he says. “Europe has too much control over our country. They make our laws.”

A tiny percentage of the laws come from Europe, I point out. “But they still make them,” he says.

“We get a lot of economic benefits from Europe though,” says Jeffords, who works for the NHS. “It creates jobs. And we recruit people from abroad to do jobs that British people won't do. And the hard border goes against the Good Friday Agreement. I'm an ex-soldier myself and I was over in Northern Ireland.”

They usually never talk about Brexit, and I'm worried for a moment that I'm causing an argument, but they quickly agree on several things – that the current fiasco would never have happened under Margaret Thatcher, that Tories are greedy, that a second referendum would be an affront to democracy and that it's all a big mess.

“Nobody knew what they were voting for,” says Jeffords. “Nobody knew what the positives were and what the negatives were.” “They still don't know,” says Millis.

Outside the old Town Hall, Andrea Rixon, the inventor of the Omy (“a hands-free intimate stimulator for women”), tells me she wants to leave because “we've been dictated to so much by Europe”.

In what way? “Nothing I can think of on the spot but it's about taking back control.”

She thinks the EU has been making the Brexit process so onerous because Britain leaving might spark the end of the union as a whole. She insists that the business dangers are overblown and she isn't worried about a no-deal Brexit. “It's like a divorce. In a divorce you wouldn't be beholden to an ex-partner.”

Remain supporter Pietro Riccio also uses



Anthony Rixon and Brother Adam Lee

“I'll take my hand off the bible for a moment to say, ‘it's bollocks,’” says Brother Adam Lee. “I wanted us to govern our own country,” says Rixon. “But now I'd vote to stay just to get it over with.”



# IRISH IN BRITAIN: 'I'D LIKE TO STAY'

We asked Irish people in Britain to write about Brexit. Here is a selection of the 140 responses



Ciara Kenny

As the Brexit referendum result became clear on the morning of June 24th, 2016, emails started to trickle, then pour in to The Irish Times Abroad inbox from readers living all across Britain. Shock, dismay, devastation and anger were words repeated over and over again as they described their reaction to the outcome. Some worried for their job security; others for their investments or property. Many mentioned feeling no longer welcome as an immigrant, a status some hadn't necessarily ascribed to themselves before as an Irish person in Britain. Even in those early hours after the announcement, some were already saying they could no longer stay living there, and were making plans to leave. Almost three years later, the situation is almost as uncertain as it was on the morning of the results. More than 140 people living in Britain responded to a call-out on irish-times.com in recent weeks when asked for their views on Brexit, and many of the same concerns were raised. Here is a selection of responses we received.

## Alan Flanagan

**London**  
I moved to London six-and-a-half years ago after having spent a few years in Toronto. My grandparents, both from Galway, met in the north of England and my Dad was born here, so there's a long history of moving around in the family. While the city can be a bit of a beast on first arrival, I quickly found my feet, especially with friends old and new who'd also moved to London around the same time. I've always found British people to be warm and polite, and London to be the perfect mix of cultures, sexualities, backgrounds, basically everything you move to a big city for. But the Brexit vote brought out an attitude that I had assumed long gone: anti-Irishness. I found myself standing in a bar while an old woman told me off for being Irish. Friends of mine had a similar experience on the bus. Has it dampened my love for London? No. Because the things I love about London are the things that the worst elements of Brexit hate – the diversity, the freedom, the belief not in birthright but in rich rewards for hard work. But Brexit has reminded me that the things that make countries good don't come automatically – they have to be fought for, and backsliding has to be checked. It's also strengthened my connections to Ireland, not as an escape route but in defiance of people who claim that you must be one thing or the other but never both. I love the UK because, in every ounce of its history and its culture, it is not Brexit. It just needs a whack across the back of the head and a stern pint to remind it of that fact. So I'd like to stay. To, in some small part, be the one who does that.

## Antoinette McGovern

I moved to London because Ireland in the late 1980s was a dreary place to be young, female and single. So, when my mother spotted an advert looking for qualified Irish teachers in London, I jumped at the chance. I only planned to spend a short time here! But here I am, 31 years later,

married to a second-generation Irishman, three kids, a house, a mortgage and a cat. I consider myself a Londoner. But beyond the London bubble, I feel as alien now as I did when I first arrived.

Do I see my long-term future in Britain? No! These are dark days thanks to a decade of austerity and the uncertainty of Brexit. I am angry at the politicians who gambled away this country's prosperity to satisfy the hard-right populists. I feel disappointed that decades of progress towards a more tolerant society have been undone. Sadly, after three decades in London, I want to go home.

## Valerie Busher

**Dundee**  
I am living and working in Scotland for 35 years this year. I came to be here "by accident", I had never intended to stay away from Dublin but personal circumstances led me to make the decision after a week-long visit, to stay in Scotland for one year and avail of a non-contested divorce. A choice that would never have been available to me should I have stayed in Dublin in the 1980s.

That year led to another and then another; my life moved on and I ended up staying in Broughty Ferry just outside of Dundee City, with a lovely Scottish man. We had a son and married when our son was five-years-old.

Sadly my husband was diagnosed with a recurrence of cancer and died before our second wedding anniversary. With my son's trauma and having gone through the trauma of his father dying, I felt unable to uproot him and return to Ireland. As far as Brexit is concerned, I voted to leave because I have every faith that the UK could go it alone. Strangely enough that's in opposition to most of my friends in Scotland. I voted to leave Europe and earlier I voted for an Independent Scotland.

## Flora Faith-Kelly

**London**  
Having grown up between Northern Ireland and Donegal, and having possessed an Irish passport for the majority of my life, I had always considered myself Irish, but also possessed an awareness of, and partial involvement in, British culture as well. It was a shock, then, to find that when I moved to England for university in 2015, it was apparently not in fact my choice to determine what nationality I was. Northern Ireland was part of Britain, and therefore I was British, according to the more patriotic Brits who cared enough to let me know.

With hindsight, I see a foreshadowing of the Brexit referendum result in how I was treated during my first year in England. The term British and Irish could not co-exist as one part of a person's individual existence.

Since moving to London this year to complete my master's degree, I feel this imposition of British opinion on how the Irish or Northern Irish should present, behave, think and speak grows stronger, highlighting the dangerous side of domineering British pride, perhaps the remnants from a conquering colonial history. I had hoped moving to the more diverse capital, and throwing myself into the impressive academic realm, would provide relief from stereotypes and ignorance with regards to the British Irish experience, yet I find myself time and time again fighting to be understood and taken seriously.

Worryingly to me it seems that, as I have found through exhausting discussions with the supposed most educated in Britain, the scope for empathy or interest beyond British horizons appears to be shrinking rather dangerously. Tensions between Britain and Ireland heighten, and with it so does my longing to return home.

## Gerry Breen

**Chelmsford**  
I qualified as an English teacher from Queen's University, Belfast, with a BA degree and a PGCE in 1973. In 1977 my sister who was teaching in the North East of England told me about an English job in a large Catholic Comprehensive in Hartlepool and I decided that it might be interesting to go for a few years before returning to Belfast. That two years became extended to the present day.

My early experiences in England did have some unpleasant aspects and my accent was picked up on numerous occasions by people with a very jaded view of the Irish. On one occasion I was physically assaulted by a total stranger who just didn't like my accent and he was thankfully successfully prosecuted for the offence. Generally however the story has been much more positive, especially in London where I always felt welcome and appreciated. The Brexit debate I believe has seriously divided the UK and unfortunately is centred around racism and ignorance. I hope Brexit will not destroy the great liberal tradition and open nature of this country or blight its future!

It's noticeable how there are fewer people from Europe here now, which is sad. It's not hard to hear stories of people packing up and going back home – for their sakes or their children's. I don't know what the future holds for us here. We have decent jobs with decent money and we recently moved into our own place, after two years of flatsharing. Brexit may well put all of that in jeopardy, but for now, I'm hanging on to my belief that if life hands you the keys to happiness you should take them.

## Colm Fitzgerald

**London**  
I moved to London in October 2016, undeterred by the Brexit vote a few months previous. I feel a bit of a cheat to be Irish in London now – having an Irish passport means that at least in the current context of what's been promised under the Common Travel Area – I'm still expecting to be waved through when I fly home to Shannon, and can still join the EU passports queue in Europe.

It's noticeable how there are fewer people from Europe here now, which is sad. It's not hard to hear stories of people packing up and going back home – for their sakes or their children's. I don't know what the future holds for us here. We have decent jobs with decent money and we recently moved into our own place, after two years of flatsharing. Brexit may well put all of that in jeopardy, but for now, I'm hanging on to my belief that if life hands you the keys to happiness you should take them.

## Fiach Whelan

**London**  
The United Kingdom has always been a place for Irish people to go and experience a society 10 times the size of our own, with a diverse culture and world-leading opportunities. But with Brexit, like a palpable tension you can feel, see and hear the division on topics, circumstances and beliefs that Brexit has brought about, not to mention the seething anger in some cases that lies beneath it all.

I work specifically moving Irish talent to various locations around the globe. I have seen the change shift significantly first hand, in terms of where people are moving from Ireland for the opportunities abroad. Likewise, since 2013 there has been a steady trickle in the level of Irish returning from the UK to Ireland, this is partially to do with the "Celtic phoenix" rising from the ashes of Ireland's economy but this trickle has turned into a steady flow since 2016.

If there is a no deal Brexit I can see this steady flow turning to a whole out exodus of Irish returning to Ireland or heading further afield in search of opportunities that at one time were a 50-minute flight away. As an Irish immigrant to the United Kingdom myself I can't help but be worried for what will happen next.

## Denise Power

**Oxfordshire**  
I am part of the research community in

Oxford, a community changed by uncertainty and despair about what will happen after 29th March. Our biggest concern is funding, and it being taken away.

Brexit, if it happens, will severely jeopardise all future EU-sourced funding. If we (Oxford University research community) get cut out of future research collaborations with our European consortia it will be a disaster for the UK from the joint perspectives of financially, scientifically and academically. So we wait.

At best, it's like a distilled, but even worse, version of Waiting for Godot where nothing happens for five acts except uncertainty. The funding cuts haven't happened and may not happen but, in some ways, the waiting is worse than knowing that they will.

We're ashamed by how the rest of the world is perceiving the government's willful, foolhardy and steadfast adherence to the popular vote. It makes us and them look stupid.

The British government has said that it will underwrite and honour all existing grants up to March 2020 as part of Horizon 2020 but this is no guarantee that it will happen. The loss will be catastrophic for global research.

## Audrey Eager

**London**  
I moved to London from the French Alps to continue my career in travel back in May 2012 and landed a dream job working on the London Olympics. In April 2016, I took up a short term contract taking a massive risk to work on the Liberal Democrat Brexit referendum campaign and their MEP, Catherine Bearder. Professionally, I've not stopped since. It's been exciting. It's been fruitful. It's been rewarding. Time has just whizzed by.

However, for all of that, every time a commentator or a politician makes some assumption about Ireland whether it be that we should know our place, or the Irish should be starved to get us to obey, I should end up having to have a conversation about how complicated Anglo-Irish relations have been. I'm not some mad Irish Republican but I hear myself sounding like one as so many people are completely unaware over here of their own country's history.

If there's one thing that I have taken from all of this experience is how much more I appreciate our system in Ireland. Our political system. Our education system. History needs to be kept as a core subject. Our level of engagement. Our citizenship. Ireland may be far from a perfect place but by God, it's got a hell of a lot going for it!

## Philip Behan

**London**  
With my life broadly divided in two, the first 22 years living in Ireland, the second 22 in the UK, I very much view both countries as my home. I have always felt very welcome in the UK and believe London to be the greatest city, after Dublin of course, in the world – certainly the most genuinely cosmopolitan and tolerant city.

Even if Brexit happens, I can't imagine that changing. A lot of my business is international and to-date, whilst we as a company have fully prepared for a no-deal Brexit, it has been surprising just how little concern it has raised when constructing European cross-border deals.

I remain convinced that Brexit will simply not happen – or certainly not a hard Brexit – and I don't believe that is an affront to democracy – it was simply never feasible in the form it was put to the people. There may be a shift-change in the UK-EU relationship, but ultimately, those who want to be friends and work together on a human level, will continue to do so.

## Eve Redmond

**Manchester**  
Although I have lived in the UK since 1988 and there is a huge Irish population here, I have spent the last 31 years skillfully avoiding them. Although I am proud to be Irish I have always loved living abroad and feeling a little bit different to everybody else. I suppose growing up in a small town where everyone knew your business was enough to get me running to a big city. I met a Brit, set up home with him, had a kid, got a permanent lecturing job and also run my own business, so I guess I'm pretty settled here. Manchester is my home, but in my heart I feel European and am hoping lots will improve in the world. Brexit is a mess, the Tories are vile. I voted

■ **Top row:** Alan Flanagan, Antoinette McGovern, Flora Faith-Kelly and Gerry Breen. **Above:** Colm Fitzgerald, Fiach Whelan, Denise Power, Aoife Mulderrig and Geraldine Fahy

To Remain and am hoping Labour will get back in power soon and prioritise jobs and living standards, build a close new relationship with the EU, protect workers' rights and environmental standards and work for the many and not the few.

## Geraldine Fahy

**Kent**  
The overt racism encountered on a daily basis since Brexit is overwhelming. It almost feels like I have to apologise for not being British every time I walk outside the door. The impact on my family is also far-reaching; my husband is French and therefore is still in Brexit-limbo. Although our son has an Irish passport I worry about him growing up here being bilingual. Therefore my husband and I are actively searching for work in Ireland (not easy as I'm having to completely change my career). We want our son to grow up in a country that values his unique Irish-French culture.

## Michael Connole

**Maltby**  
I was born in 1962, number eight of 13 children, of Irish descent in Maltby, a small mining community on the outskirts of Rotherham. My father was born in Doonagore, in the parish of Liscannor, Co Clare in 1923. He came over in the construction industry and then went to the mines where he worked until his retirement at the age of sixty. My childhood was a happy one, a little too religious as was the times, we schooled at a local Catholic school, built and paid for by the Irish community. We also had 10 pubs and clubs, the Catholic Club being again the one built by and on behalf of the big Irish community. The club was and still is called "the bomb throwers club" by some in the village. This bigotry gradually disappeared with the Good Friday Agreement, and so did heavy industry. Brexit has appeared like a shock to the system. I now hear the words my dad would have heard, go back to f\*\*king Ireland, by people I grew up with, who know I was born here, who should know better. I recently got my first Irish passport and will be pursuing citizenship and passports for both my children. The UK is now a poorer place to be.

## Aoife Mulderrig

**London**  
I moved to the UK in 2010 - I was 24 years old and planned to stay for one year to earn my teaching qualification. Nine years later and I wonder where the time has gone. I have been lucky to experience this country both as a student in Canterbury, a traditional English city, and as a young professional in London, one of the most diverse and vibrant cities in the world. There are some that come here whose social circle doesn't extend further than first generation Irish. That was never my intention - most of my closest friends here are English, I lived with English people and made sure my socialising extended further than the local Irish pub.

England is a country I love. It is also a country that has oppressed Irish people for centuries. For my generation, these are facts that are difficult to reconcile. I have felt nothing but welcome, friendship, kindness and integration here - I have met friends for life and will always consider English people my comrades.

Living in London, I have felt more protected from the repercussions of Brexit than possibly other parts of the country. London overwhelmingly voted to stay in the EU and people of all nationalities feel welcome and accepted in this city. I certainly haven't been told to "go back home" but I definitely feel like my opportunities here have narrowed. Something has shifted here. It is extremely sad that Britain is turning its back on Europe and isolating itself.

My partner is also Irish and we have decided to make the move back to Ireland this summer. This was not particularly due to Brexit, I had always intended to move back to Ireland at some point. The future of post-Brexit UK may be uncertain but this is a country that I will always love, always come back to and will always feel like my second home.

# What Brexit Britain thinks now

From page 1

a divorce metaphor, but he uses it to make a point about compromise. "In a divorce one person doesn't get everything. There has to be a negotiation."

He first arrived from Italy in 1974 just as the UK was entering the common market. He's been "killing" his lever friends Tony and Sapia Wyatt with Brexit conversation for an hour. He feels people were lied to and that Brexit is disastrous. The Wyatts disagree. "I wanted to leave the day after the vote," says Tony. "I wanted the trade to be better for this country, without all the red tape you have in the EU."

Are these debates a strain on their friendship? Riccio laughs. "No," he says. "At the end of the day who's going to suffer? People like us, the middle class."

Retirees Maureen and Brian Gilmartin just laugh when I mention "the B word". "We were all for it on the terms that were told to us, but the goalposts have moved," says Brian.

"I don't think we were told enough really," says Maureen.

Would they vote the same way again? "Probably, on condition that we were put in the picture of what we were going to do and what we were not going to do," says Brian.

Why did they vote to leave? Immigration was part of it, says Maureen. "I have no issues if they come in and work and support themselves. . . We can only support so many people."

But don't European citizens bring in more money than they take out? "It depends where you are," says Maureen.

## Decided not to vote

Nearby, florist Nicole Elizabeth is chatting to her friend, Smiths-playing busker Dan Curtis. She has British parents but was born and raised in Spain. She wants to stay in the EU.

That said, neither of them voted. "I didn't understand it well enough to vote," she says. "I don't think people should vote on things they know nothing about. I think that was the problem."

She rattles off the talking points of both sides. She knows the arguments better than a lot of people I've met who actually did vote. "I think people just voted for a drastic change," she says. "None of the promises politicians made for years have come true. The people got sick of it so the one time they were asked to make a big decision they decided to vote for the unknown."

Her mother, Wendy Lumley, who is visiting from Spain, believes Britain



Kieran Genius  
"People's racism has been endorsed by Brexit."

should leave the EU. She has no problem with immigration, she says, because, well, she's an immigrant herself, but she does believe that Britain "should take control back from Brussels and stop giving them so much money".

She adds that Brexit might yet affect her residency rights and ability to receive healthcare in Spain. "But I'm taking the high ground."

Kieran Genius ("A hard name to live up to") is a 24-year-old charity worker and aspiring journalist who voted remain and spent a lot of time trying to change the mind of his half-Jamaican mother who was voting leave. She has an issue with eastern European immigration, he says.

His friends, on the other hand, are largely remainers, but a lot of them didn't vote. "They regret it now."

He believes Brexit has unleashed some formerly-repressed racism. He spent time going door-to-door for a charity in London and, after the referendum, there was a big increase in people saying, "We don't want to give any money to Africa, we want to keep it for Britain. . . People's racism has been endorsed by Brexit."

Dragos Gostian is a bit worried about his own future in the country. "There's talk of people who earn less than £35,000 (€40,730) not being allowed to stay here. But an economy needs all kinds of jobs."

Britain, he says, has been good to him until now. At home in Bucharest he couldn't afford to live on his high-school teacher's salary but here he can pay rent, eat and send money home on his earnings as a Deliveroo cyclist.

Beyond his own interests, he thinks Brexit is a big mistake for the UK. "I think to balance the US and China we need a big market in Europe. It's not the time for the UK to leave that."

Later that evening my car's front-left tyre bursts on a slip-road on to the M4 and I am relieved to be bailed out by a kind and friendly Brexit-voting man from a free, car rescue service.

As we drive, he laments the European Commission's "dirty tricks", Europe's ingratitude to Britain for saving them during the war and says that Britain wants to protect Ireland from the in-transigent EU's hard border.

I am so grateful to be rescued, I don't contradict him once.

# Weekend Review



## The Costa Irish

Tens of thousands of Irish people live in southern Spain. We pay them a visit. Page 4



## My vegan week

Jennifer O'Connell tries the plant-only lifestyle. Page 6

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“ I have colleagues who voted to come out whose jobs are 100 per cent European-funded” – Alun Roberts



“ The EU has been a negative, not a positive” – Shaun Redmond



“ My initial view was we need to come out. In hindsight, we were led like lambs to a slaughter” – Helen Evans



“ I don't think it will affect me. We don't talk politics in the shop” – Irene Edwards

# HOLYHEAD ON BREXIT: 'WE WERE MISLED'

The Welsh port, in Britain's poorest region, voted Leave in 2016. Now, some residents are having second thoughts. Others remain staunch Eurosceptics



Patrick Freyne

In Holyhead, even Santa voted to leave the European Union. Santa's other name is Richard Burnell. He's 78 with a long white beard and he formerly worked in local government. This Christmas he will dress in a red suit and give presents to children on the Stena Line ferry.

“I think the idea of the EC [European Community] common market was fine,” says Santa. “But when it got to the stage that they wanted to rule the country, to govern us, I think this is what the people of Britain have kicked up against. We've got our own laws which go back hundreds of years.”

Burnell's friend Beryl Warner also voted Leave. “In my opinion we were misled,” she says. “I've been doing voluntary work all my life, especially in the hospitals ... We were told we would have £30 million more for the NHS, and that's what really prompted me to say leave. I would change my mind now.”

Burnell is more optimistic. “There was a big fishing community in Holyhead,” he says. “When the EC was formed, it vanished. And when we do get back to Britain we will have our trawling waters back ... It's going to be a challenge, no doubt about it, but it's a big world out there. We can trade with the rest of the world.”

Do people discuss Brexit? “No,” says Warner. “No. I think that we didn't know enough about it. We didn't understand what was happening. Well, I for one didn't ... Did you get the gist of it all?”

“No,” says Burnell. “There were so many different stories going around, you just had to pick the best bit out of all the stories and hope for the best really.”

Would he still vote the same way? He would, he says. “When you see what's happening in Europe now, all the immigration and what have you.”

But Santa knows no borders, right? He laughs. “No borders at all. Those reindeers fly under the radar.”

I didn't want to bring it up, but if there's a no-deal Brexit next year, Santa and his reindeer will be subject to customs checks along with everyone else. The fear for Welsh politicians – Leavers and Remainers alike – is that, faced with such checks, Holyhead will be swamped by unsustainable traffic jams.

This would lead, they fear, to Irish

hauliers going via Northern Ireland to Scotland or from Dublin to ports with larger hinterlands such as Liverpool, or, at worst, bypassing the UK “land bridge” entirely to ship directly to Europe. Holyhead is the second busiest roll-on, roll-off ferry port in the UK.

About two million passengers, 423,000 lorries and 500,000 tons of cargo pass through each year.

## ‘Everyone's had enough of Brexit’

And yet the people of Holyhead voted to leave. In fact, local Plaid Cymru councillor Vaughan Williams tells me that without Holyhead's strong Leave vote, Anglesey as a whole would have chosen Remain.

Alun Roberts works with the community owned regeneration organisation Mon CF and is chair of the Holyhead Business Forum. “It's very, very weird,” he says. “I have colleagues whose jobs are 100 per cent European-funded who voted to come out. And I ask them why and they say, ‘I couldn't tell you. Just gut feeling.’”

In general, he says, people in Holyhead don't talk about Brexit. “When we go to the local shops it's not the topic of conversation. It's the weather. It's the impact of developments on parking, street lighting ... They're the things that pop up on a regular basis, not the impact of Brexit, which is a strange anomaly.”

Roberts thinks that when the European Social Fund money dries up, people will notice. Hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of European money have gone into the town in the past few decades, he says. “If you told local people they'd be staggered.”

Much of this went into the port, but it also went into roads, the Celtic Gateway footbridge and local regeneration projects.



“ If they brought back duty-free, it'd be brilliant” – Ian Ashworth

“I just cannot explain [Brexit] to you,” says Roberts, before taking us to visit a couple of local business people. “Maybe it's the psyche of local people. Economically this town, if you take the port out of the equation, has been deprived for quite some time now ... We're really isolated and we've got the lowest value economy of any county in the United Kingdom and have done for a very long time.”

“What does coming out of Europe mean? Probably people think it won't make any difference because it can't get any worse.”

“I think everyone's had enough of the word ‘Brexit’, to be honest with you,” says the postmaster, Ian Ashworth. “You tend to switch off or turn over the page when something is about Brexit ... No one really knows what's going to happen. We're getting reports that there are going to be queues all the way up the A55. Whether that'll be the case, who knows?” He also notes that before the election the Remain side predicted plummeting markets and Armageddon. “That never happened.”

How did he vote? “I was 50-50 but in the end I wanted to stay in Europe because I believe Wales benefits massively from European funding,” he says. “I don't think that will be made as readily available from Westminster as it was from Europe.” He gestures towards the street. “The shops that you see have been done up and all the fronts have been done up ... They've been helped with EU funding.”

## ‘In all honesty, it's a mess’

Why did Holyhead vote to leave? “I think in the beginning, it was all about immigration, wasn't it? And realistically that boat has sailed. These people were in this country 20, 30 years ago. They've had children here. To say we're going to throw them all out is unrealistic.”

Despite his own quibbles, he now thinks there might be some benefits to Brexit. “I think if they brought back duty-free it would be brilliant for us from a business point of view. The amount of people it would bring over from the crossings to Ireland.”

What would happen if they ran the vote again? “My father voted to get out and now he says he'd vote to stay in only because he wasn't made aware of the discussion of the hard border.”

But this time Ashworth would cancel him out. “I voted to stay in but [if] we had another vote out of principle I'd vote to get out because you can't keep voting ... Let's make it best out of three. Let's make it best out of five.”

He shrugs. “It's a mess isn't it? In all honesty, it's a mess.”

■ Above: residents of Holyhead on Anglesey, Wales give their take on Brexit and the possible impact on the town. PHOTOGRAPHS: ENDA O'DOWD

Across the road in the craft shop LL65, Helen Evans says nobody really talks about Brexit any more. “People seemed to lose interest.”

How did she vote? “My initial view was, yes we need to come out for the sake of the country. Really, I think we've kind of been misled by the press. You watch the news and they were telling you that Britain has all these illegal immigrants flooding over here ... It was on the news every night in the run-up to the actual voting and I was thinking, ‘Surely we've got no choice if we want to save our NHS?’ In hindsight, I do feel that we were led like lambs to a slaughter.”

Why? “Because from what I can gather I don't think they thought it was going to go through. I mean the next day the prime minister stands down ... What sort of message is that sending to people? It's just going to send them into panic, which I think they've been in ever since.”

## ‘Thave changed my mind, yeah’

Did she think about how it might affect the port? “You know what? No. Not at all ... We would have a lot of people coming through who come on the ferry and would come into town in the car and then have a cup of tea and have a quick look around the shops.”

So she changed her mind? “I think I have, yeah, and I think a lot of people have changed their minds ... People are panicked again because now it's like we really don't know what's going to happen any more. It's gone from one type of panic to a different type of panic.”

So now she's not so worried about immigration but she worries about the future of the port. She worries about peace in Northern Ireland. She worries about the NHS not being able to recruit necessary people abroad.

She tells me a little about her life and her shop. She is a fashion and textiles graduate and always wanted to do something creative. Then she did an evening class in jewellery making, started making pieces out of sea glass and set up this business eight years ago with the help of a programme called the Empty Shops Initiative.

This project was delivered in its later years by Mon CF, the partly EU-funded organisation that Alun Roberts works for. She laughs. “I know it's crazy,” she says. “I think that's the thing. You only have to

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# England turned the EU into a Monty Python sketch – now it's stuck in one



Fintan O'Toole

Brexit is the outcome of a decades-long game of journalistic spoofery by Britain's media

In February 2016, just as the Brexit referendum debate was getting going, the *Evening Standard* columnist Anthony Hilton wrote that "I once asked Rupert Murdoch why he was so opposed to the European Union. 'That's easy,' he replied. 'When I go into Downing Street they do what I say; when I go to Brussels they take no notice.'"

At the time Murdoch did not deny this but later that year, when his bid to take over all of Sky made his political power a sensitive subject, he insisted that: "I have never uttered those words. I have made it a principle all my life never to ask for any-

thing from any prime minister."

Hilton, in turn, stood by his story and said the remarks were made in the early 1980s, when Hilton was city editor of Murdoch's *Times*.

Proof will never be available either way. But what is undoubtedly true is that, for the billionaire press barons used to wielding such immense influence in London, Brussels is infuriatingly impervious. The EU is largely indifferent to them.

That is one of the reasons they have promoted a relentless campaign of lies about it. The other reason is simpler: Brussels is boring. Most of what it does is pretty tedious – if you want to sell papers, making up luridly entertaining stories is much more effective than reporting the truth.

What we have to remember, though, is the astonishing reality that this lying is the bedrock of Brexit. Britain could not have been brought to its current state had a majority of its citizens not been convinced of one "truth": that the EU has been interfering non-stop in every part of their daily lives, from the way they have sex to what they eat and drink, from what they wear to what happens to them when they die.

If the consequences were not so serious, there would be a pure fascination to this long-term propaganda campaign. It is made up, not of one big lie, but of an



■ If the consequences were not so serious, there would be a pure fascination to this long-term propaganda campaign by the English media

endless succession of little lies, each in itself so absurd as to seem harmless, yet cumulatively amounting to a profound distortion of public reality.

What was distorted was the English perception of influence. When Scots and Welsh people were asked in 2012 to identify which layer of government had most influence over their lives, just 8 per cent and 7 per cent respectively cited the EU. This was very much typical of responses in regions throughout Europe from Bavaria to Brittany.

The great exception was England, where 31 per cent of people cited the EU as the most influential layer of government. Why? Because the English have been lied to by most of their press and made to believe that "Brussels" is a factory for mad schemes to meddle with their lives in ever more



ludicrous ways.

What has made this lying so effective, though, is that, viewed piece by piece, it is comic, absurd and amusing, a saucy sitcom in which the implied soundtrack is a camp "oo-er, Missus!" and a mockney "would you Adam-and-Eve it?"

It is competitively inventive: the journalists get great fun out of thinking up the next outrage. And at its most vivid, it conjures visual images that lodge in the brain.

For example, there is the *Sun* headline of October 19th, 1994: "EU to push for standard condom size"; "Brussels is set to produce a standard Euro condom, whilst refusing to implement the subsidiarity principle so that Member States can take into account the different national characteristics of the male organ. The resultant compromise is simply not large enough to

house British assets."

There's the punning on "member states", a boring Europhrase turned into a reference to the erect penis, and an assertion that our blokes have bigger mickies than the Europeans. But there's also an invitation to form in the mind a ridiculous image of the well-endowed Anglo-Saxon trying to fit himself into a tiny continental-size condom.

**Brussels legislation**  
Or: "Circus performer must walk tightrope in hard hat, says Brussels" (the *Times*, July 23rd, 2003); "A tightrope-walker says that his career has been placed in jeopardy by legislation originating in Brussels which dictates that he must wear a hard hat to perform."

Or: "EU's plan to liquify corpses and pour them down the drain" (the *Express*, July 8th, 2010).

Or: "Shake 'n back – EU tells women to hand in worn-out sex toys" (the *Sun*, February 4th 2004); "Red-faced women will have to hand in their clapped-out sex toys under a new EU law. They must take back old vibrators for recycling before they can buy a new one."

Or: "Get netted: we won't play Ena Sharples, fishermen storm at Europrats" (*Daily Star*, October, 1992), the claim being that the EU was forcing fishermen while working at sea to wear hairnets like that sported by the *Coronation Street* character.

Or: "Shellfish (especially mussels and oysters) must be given rest breaks and stress-relieving showers during journeys of over 50km" (the *Times*, January 29th, 1996).

This is a distinctive genre of English fiction – one of the tragedies of Brexit is that it will become redundant. It covers a range of comic forms from seaside post-

cards (the condoms and sex toys) to Pythonesque gender confusions (the butcher fishermen in their hairnets might as well be singing "I'm a lumberjack and I'm okay") to the deliciously grotesque (those liquified corpses) to Dadaist surrealism (oysters being given rest breaks).

But each of these vignettes – and hundreds more – has a common quality: memorability. It creates a visual image that lodges in the brain. And it is the accumulation of these images that expresses itself in every vox pop on Brexit from an English market town. These repeated pantomimes have congealed into a history play.

**“What has made this lying so effective, though, is that, viewed piece by piece, it is comic, absurd and amusing”**

When English people say they are sick of Brussels interference, it is these crazy little yarns that are weighing on their minds.

It is hard to think of anything quite like this in history, where perniciously effective propaganda has come in the form of such extravagant daftness. It used to be claimed that Britain's destiny was shaped on the playing fields of Eton, but here we have a country in thrall to a different kind of sport, a game of knowingly outrageous mendacity, a decades-long spoofing contest in which journalists – to serve the interests of an elite of super-rich media owners – dared each other to come up with the most outlandishly ingenious fabrication.

And this is also why Brexit has proved so hard to give a rational shape to. If you turn political reality into a Monty Python sketch, it is very hard to take it seriously again, even when you really, really need to.

# HOLYHEAD ON BREXIT: 'WE WERE MISLED'

From page 1

look around Holyhead to see how much of it is EU-funded. It's everywhere you look."

On the walls of WG Edwards fishmonger shop, there are photos of WG himself manning a harpoon on the whaling ship he helped crew in the 1930s. His daughter, Irene, oversees his shop now.

Balancing on a walking stick, she tells me about the whaling crews that left Holyhead in the 1930s when there was very little work in the town. Her grandsons still work on the boats. She wonders if fishing might make a comeback in the aftermath of Brexit but she didn't vote and says she has no view on it. "I don't think it will affect me," she says.

When politicians come around, she says, she warns them, "We don't talk politics in the shop."

Irene Edwards is not the only person who's disengaged with politics. Out on the street I meet a Leave supporter who didn't vote ("It was raining and I had a few beers in") and a similarly unmotivated cafe owner who is now concerned for her business. "You probably think I'm terrible."

I meet a young man named Hwyl Hughes attaching a poppy pin to his long black trench coat as he leaves a British Legion shop. "I'm marching for Remembrance Sunday," he says. "I did three years in the army. I've lost fellow comrades."

He didn't vote either, but he feels "we should have left a long time ago. I think it will give those who are unemployed a better chance to work. I'm unemployed and it's very hard for me."

Does he really think it will help? He laughs. "Well, no. It's probably not going to give us anything we need. I just hope it does."

Someone calls him from The George pub across the road. "Matrix!" shouts the man. "Come here, Matrix." I follow Hughes over to where a man with a tattoo of a panther on his neck tells me he won't give me his name but that I can call him "Sir".

"But I'm having an interview about Brexit," says Hughes.

"Here's an interview," says his friend. "How about, 'I don't give a f\*\*k? I don't vote. I don't believe in it ... I don't like politics.' So instead we talk about his relatives who live in Drumcondra."

In the town people talk more about the proposed Wylfa Newydd Nuclear Power Plant than that will, if approved, employ thousands in its construction phase, than they talk about Brexit. The port, in contrast, employs only about 500 people, and the economic benefits don't always flow into town, with much of the traffic bypassing it almost entirely. The town itself has also suffered, like many others, due to out-of-town shopping centres.

But there are other signs of growth that locals keep pointing towards – port expansion, new giant ferries on the Dublin-Holyhead route, a new Premier Inn across the road from the Roadking Truckstop where I'm staying, not to mention a 78-room hotel extension to that truck stop. And several people look forward to the return of the duty free.

In many ways Holyhead looks healthier than it has looked in years.

world eat the huge "Megga Breakfast".

The owner Fred "Betfred" Done is gung-ho about how Brexit will be good for business. The managing director, Nicholas Whatmore, is a little more measured, acknowledging that a hard exit could be damaging but notes that this could be offset by the development of the nuclear power plant. "Wherever there's chaos there'll be opportunities," he says.

After a night's sleep in a tiny room, I eat a fraction of my Megga Breakfast and talk to three Dutch truck drivers. John Koolhout is wearing a Union Jack T-shirt and a baseball hat. He laughs. "When I leave, T-shirt comes off. Then maybe I buy an Irish T-shirt with shamrocks on it."

What do they make of Brexit? "Nobody knows what is going to happen," says Koolhout. "I have heard a story that in Holland they make a new harbour direct to Dublin."

They are Eurosceptical in their own way. They think the EU is too big and should go back to being a smaller pool of countries but they think Britain's choice to leave is self-destructive. "They've got nothing," says Koolhout. "No car industry any more. Huddersfield is in the past. Everything is gone."

Do the truckers ever spend time in the town? "You can't park," says Koolhout. "And it's too far to walk."

"We're not made for walking," says a younger driver, Donovan Verschoor.

"Just to the beer tap," says Koolhout, throwing his thumb at the bar.

**'We pay £300m a day into the EU'**

The Edinburgh Castle pub stands just outside the ferry port and benefits a lot from passing port traffic. The London-born owner, Hugh Williams, sits near a stove and tells me how he built his business with carvies and karaoke and by letting rooms for ferry travellers. He voted Leave.

Why? "We need somebody in government who stops giving our hard-earned money away," he says. He tells me of a list he's seen on Facebook that itemises how much money the UK gives to other countries while, he says, the NHS struggles. "I only know what I'm told," he says. "But we pay £300 million a day into the EU."

I suggest that this is inaccurate but also that any investment into the EU arguably frees the way for more money to be made in trade. He laughs. The Germans won't stop selling their cars to Britain, he says, and he tells me about the various developments happening around the town – expansion of the Roadking truckstop, the new Premier Inn, the proposed nuclear power station.

Would he not miss EU funding for the town? He's not really aware of any. He thinks they were offered some money a few years ago but turned it down.

Do they talk about Brexit in the pub? "I call it 'the fly in the ointment'. I say, 'Let's talk about Brexit' and they say 'Ah, here we go.' Then I say, 'Now religion'. He chuckles. "It's just a thing I do. Entertainment value. I had two guys ranting at each other one day about Israel."

"Everyone we speak to wants out," says his wife, Marcia, who has joined us. "The locals are very much for putting the EU money back into the NHS, into the schools, into the police, into everything that's important to us."

What if a hard border results in reduced port traffic? "I don't see it," says Hugh.

The Juice Box vape shop is a hub of political debate by any standards. I thought people didn't talk about Brexit in town. "He does," says tattooed shop-owner Rob Hartin, pointing at his customer, 48-year-old



■ The port town of Holyhead, Wales. Below left: Welsh Assembly member Rhun ap Iorwerth gives a talk about politics to Tristan Griffiths's Year 9 English class at Holyhead High School. PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY & ENDA O'DOWD



Anglesey, which has a non-UK-born population of about 3 per cent (though that doesn't stop immigration being a key issue for some people I speak to).

So why did people vote to leave? "I think it was a 20-year campaign of propaganda against the EU," he says. "Holyhead was typical of many of the places that voted to leave and didn't give consideration to the practicalities. It's an EU border frontier town but that didn't really matter. It's the kind of place that felt it had been left behind economically, the kind of place that wanted and felt that it had good reason to protest against – the best way to put it is 'things' – and voted to leave."

I arrive at the tail end of a meeting of a Holyhead Port Users group meeting held at the seafarmer headquarters of the Sea Cadets. It involves local politicians, port manager Wyn Parry, ferry operators, lifeboat operators, people from the marina and representatives from the unions. All but the politicians rush off into the rain before I can pigeonhole them.

Rhun ap Iorwerth introduces me briefly to Welsh Labour MP Albert Owen, who shares the general bafflement of most Remain-inclined politicians. "There were people working in the ports who voted to leave," he says. "Seriously, there were households split down the middle."

Local independent councillor Shaun Redmond is a firm supporter of Brexit. "I firmly believe that the European Union has been a negative rather than a positive overall ... We're losing our democracy as a country. We've become subservient to Europe in virtually everything."

But what if there's a customs border between the UK and Ireland? "There's no need for a hard border with Ireland," he says. "Technology can deal with all the issues. I firmly believe the nations of Europe will come to their senses." Those countries need UK trade, he says.

Indeed, he sees huge opportunities for the port. "Without the restrictions of Europe, we can develop the port of Holyhead into a far more international port and bring in goods and services from the whole world rather than just being restricted by European traffic."

Is that realistic? He smiles. "If you haven't got any ambition you'll never get anywhere."

## 'My nan wanted to make Britain great'

At a classroom at Holyhead High School, Rhun ap Iorwerth gives a talk about politics to Tristan Griffiths's Year 9 English class. They're all roughly 13 years old. They have prepared topics to discuss and Griffiths gently encourages them from the sidelines when necessary.

Here's what they have to say about Brexit: "I'm angry because I might not be able to travel now," says one girl.

Jacamo, who wants to be a travel writer, says he worries about medicines not being delivered to the NHS.

"I think it's going to affect Holyhead, because of our route to Dublin with the ferry," says a second girl. "It's going to affect food and company links and all that."

I ask them what they have heard other people saying about Brexit. "[My mum] thought we'd get the money we'd have to spend if we stayed in the EU," says one girl.

"My mum voted Remain because she's a nurse and she thought would be better for hospitals," says a girl called Carla.

Ellie's mum voted Leave "because there'll be less terrorism and we'll be more secure and have more money to spend on the NHS."

"My nan voted to leave because she wanted to make Great Britain great again," says another girl, "but I don't really know what she meant by that." Everyone laughs.

We take a show of hands to see who in the class supports Remain. All of them put their hands up.

## 'If there's chaos there's opportunity'

The Roadking Truckstop lies just outside Holyhead on the A55, and for the past three years most of the truck drivers bypass the town and go straight there to eat, sleep and refuel. Paintings of ships and trucks grace the walls of the dining room, where truck drivers from all over the

electrician Craig Mansell.

"Everyone else has given up," says Mansell.

Hartin and his business partner, Daniel Sargent, voted to leave but have lately changed their minds.

"I call them my 'converts'," says Mansell, and then he begins an analysis of Brexit. He talks about how the UK government always had control over immigration despite the EU. He talks about how the Belfast Agreement might be jeopardised by a hard Brexit. He talks about Arron Banks and the illegal campaign activity of his Leave.EU campaign. He talks about how the NHS is under pressure not from immigrants but from underfunding. He references Fintan O'Toole of this newspaper. He concludes, with a flourish, "For crying out loud, when will people wake the f\*\*k up?"

At this point Sargent and Hartin are shaking their heads and laughing. "So he talks about it," says Hartin.

Why the widespread disinterest? "Anglesey has its own little climate going on," says Mansell. "They don't really look beyond the bridge and when they do look beyond the bridge it's Spain for a holiday ... This island has suffered from a lack of investment for years."

Hartin and Sargent are Corbyn-supporting former Lexiteers (left-leaning Brexiters). They don't care about immigration but they do lament the Lisbon treaty, worry about an encroaching European super-state and, on a more personal level, dislike how the EU has legislated vaping products.

Mansell, in contrast, has a business selling drones, and 80 per cent of his

customers are in Europe. "If I lose that market, my retirement is gone."

Both Hartin and Sargent would vote Remain if they were given the opportunity to vote again. Why? "Because it's a sham, because it's a sham."

Sargent says that initially he thought the government were "purposely cocking Brexit up" in order to manipulate people into being more EU-friendly. "But as it gets closer and closer I start to think, 'No, maybe they're just being stupid.'"

And Mansell is angry. "I did my stretch for beating up a copper during the poll tax marches. I don't give a damn and I will quite happily stand and I will do it again over bloody Europe," he says. In the meantime he has a T-shirt that he's been forbidden to wear at work. What does it say? "Bollocks to Brexit."

**'People will suffer no matter what'**

Anglesey is, according to the Office of National Statistics, the poorest part of the UK with the lowest GVA (gross value added) figures in the country. They've seen major industries come and go. It used to be a centre for ship building. The once biggest employer Anglesey Aluminium stopped operations in 2009.

The food bank on Thomas Street is open for three days a week to cater to people who have fallen between the cracks or been "sanctioned" and had their benefits stopped. In the food bank they don't talk about Brexit. They talk instead about how the new universal credit welfare policy

might further disadvantage people.

Richard, one of the volunteers, is out of work himself. He has the symbol for diabetes tattooed on his arm but never had it coloured ("It's not a colourful illness, is it?"). He was a Leave voter. "Because I am British," he says. "I'm not from Brussels. We should have our own laws, our own rules. I don't think Britain should be governed by another country."

Does he think politicians have handled Brexit well? He does not. "They're all in a major panic now."

But he doesn't regret his vote and he doesn't think Brexit will make a difference to people at the food bank. "People will suffer no matter what."

Fellow volunteer Gwyneth Hewitson, a retired teacher, despairs of the Leave vote. She thinks people were swayed by propaganda on the sides of buses but didn't have access to real information. "Before the vote I kept telling people, 'We got this because of Europe, we got that because of Europe.'"

She says that it's not a wealthy town and that people's horizons are narrow. "We took some children for a holiday for a week," she says. "When we got to the bridge leaving Anglesey they asked were we at Dover."

According to Welsh Assembly member Rhun ap Iorwerth, a passionate Remain campaigner who would like to see a second referendum, there was no real local campaign to leave. "There was a Ukup shop on the high street for 18 months but I don't think I ever saw anyone there."

Even the main referendum talking point, immigration, has little relevance for

**Video**  
Enda O'Dowd meets the people of Holyhead  
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