

# The symbolic freedom of the all-Ireland rail pass

The fourth book in our Bite-Size book series 'Brexit and Northern Ireland: Bordering on Confusion?' has now been published and is available for you to enjoy! We're celebrating the book's release by giving you a sneak peek at Raymond Snoddy's chapter...

Solving the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has proved intractable in the Brexit process. The issue of the Irish border and backstop could potentially derail an agreed Brexit creating significant economic damage to both parts of the island as well as undermining the peace achieved by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

Edited by ex-BBC journalist John Mair and Dr Steven McCabe from the Centre for Brexit Studies at Birmingham City University, as well as Leslie Budd from the Open University and Neil Fowler, the book includes a foreword from long-standing Northern Ireland commentator Malachi O'Doherty and an afterword by Daily Mail journalist Peter Osborne.

The book examines the range of questions about Brexit and Northern Ireland from a wide variety of perspectives and is a major contribution to the debate about the issues.

Enjoy your sneak peek below...

## **The symbolic freedom of the all-Ireland rail pass**

The Monday club in the village of Ballygally, Co. Antrim is a loose gathering of around a dozen people of a certain age who are free enough from work to have very long lunches or dinners.

They used to meet in each other's homes but now it's more likely to be in the Ballygally Castle Hotel, the Scottish-fortified house built in 1625, which comes complete with the ghost of Isabella Shaw, the original tragic wife of the castle who fell to her death trying to escape from a cruel husband.

The Monday club also goes on tour in Ireland, even using their free all-Ireland rail cards and have travelled to the splendid Inish Meain restaurant on Inishmann in the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. The visitors from Northern Ireland were all amazed to find that their rail cards also covered the cost of the ferry from Galway.

In the run up to 2016 Referendum on UK membership of the European Union there were passionate, alcohol-fuelled discussions about the issue.

It quickly became clear that there were four passionate Brexiteers, four equally determined Remainers, while most of the rest were holding their cards closer to their chests in the way of canny people who live in small Irish villages who do not want to fall out with their friends and neighbours.

After all, they will continue to meet them all again regularly on the way to Ballygally's only shop, or at nearly Cairncastle Presbyterian Church.

The other four were however almost certainly also for Remain as a number were happy to acknowledge privately – making an unscientific two-thirds majority that is out of kilter with the voting record of their East Antrim constituency.

## **DUP stronghold**

The nearby town of Larne is a stronghold of the pro-Brexit Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the local Westminster MP, Sammy Wilson, is the DUP's Brexit spokesman who makes frequent appearances on television.

Broadcasters also come frequently to the Port of Larne to investigate what Brexit will mean for the frequent roll-on roll-off car ferries to Cairnryan in Scotland and the heavy lorry traffic involved.

On a 65 per cent turnout East Antrim, once the constituency of the late Reverend Ian Paisley, voted 22,929 for Leave with Remain on 18,616.

Overall Northern Ireland voted 56-44 per cent for Remain with the Remain votes heavily concentrated in areas close to the Irish Republic and the more affluent parts of Belfast.

John Garry, professor of political behaviour at the Queen's University Belfast, has investigated the motivations of the Ulster electorate and reached clear, if unsurprising, conclusions.

Religion, sense of cultural identity, education levels and attitudes to immigration produced strong indicators of the propensity to vote Remain or Leave in Northern Ireland. Eighty five per cent of those brought up as Catholics were in favour of Remain with 60 per cent of Protestants backing Leave. In a similar way 63 per cent of those self-identifying as British supported Leave while those who saw themselves as Irish were 83 per cent for Remain.

Those who attended a grammar school were 71 per cent Remain while the Remain majority dropped to 53 per cent for those who had not.

Attitudes to immigration provide even stronger indications. Eighty five per cent of those who 'strongly agree' that immigration to Northern Ireland has been good for the economy and society favoured Remain. Seventy six per cent who 'strongly disagree' were Leavers.

As an occasional visitor to Ballygally from London it is impossible to divine accurately how things stand now amidst the current sense of political controversy over whether the UK is going to face a no deal – or further delay in leaving the European Union.

The topic is hardly mentioned in the Ballygally shop, amid the usual talk of the weather and Brexit does not often seem to grace the pages of the local paper, the Larne Times.

As for the Monday club it's better now not to raise the issue – because it appears too divisive.

Ballygally is of course surrounded by largely DUP-supporting farmers whose finances could be severely hit by no deal.

## **Anecdotes and real life**

What is very noticeable, at least at the anecdotal level, is the number of farmers interviewed on local television who admit that their businesses may collapse if the UK reverts to World Trade Organisation rules and tariffs.

Then, extraordinarily, some happily admit that they voted Leave, and that despite everything that has happened since, they would do so again. One said he did not want to be a beggar dependent on EU subsidies. The spirit of no surrender is alive and well in the DUP farmlands of Ulster.

Leave aside tradition and political allegiances, geography also plays a part in influencing attitudes or at least the pressing nature of the issues.

Ballygally is almost as far away from the Irish border as it is possible to be – 116 miles away from Belcoo in Co. Fermanagh to the west where the unmarked border is in the middle of the bridge over the local river, 76 miles from Derry/Londonderry to the north and 70 miles to Dundalk to the south.

For Ballygally, which looks out to the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland, even the Troubles seemed to be something that happened on TV, almost in another country unless you commuted to work in Belfast.

But what of the larger problem, for everyone, not just the Ballygally Monday club?

The Northern Ireland backstop is still the main reason preventing a deal with the EU and was certainly the reason why hardline Brexiteers scuppered the withdrawal agreement negotiated by Theresa May, which ultimately brought down her Premiership.

In fact, the Northern Ireland problem is a remarkably simple one to understand as long as a fundamental premise is accepted – that there is no good solution to the Ireland and Brexit problem, which does not disadvantage someone and that does not have consequences.

The British trade specialist David Henig has set out the available options succinctly and explained how they cannot possibly satisfy everyone at the same time.

“Ireland-EU border checks (bad for Ireland), Ireland-Northern Ireland checks (bad for nationalists) and continued UK-EU alignment (bad for Brexiteers),” notes Henig.

At the same time the trade specialist, who is director of the UK Trade Project, has exposed a number of the myths put about by ill-informed politicians about Ireland and the backstop.

**Enjoy the rest of the chapter, as well as a whole host of contributions, by purchasing *Brexit and Northern Ireland: Bordering on Confusion?*. The book is available NOW in paperback and in Kindle. Find out more [here](#).**