



FLYING VISIT: Former North Belfast MP and newly-ennobled Nigel Dodds, right, and First Minister Arlene Foster met Prince Charles at Hillsborough Castle this week

PICTURE: Kelvin Boyes/Press Eye/via PA

Will Lord Dodds still be driving DUP's Brexit bus?

WHEN Prince Charles visited Hillsborough Castle this week most media attention focused on the attendance of Michelle O'Neill, who gave a faultless peace process performance. Less noticed was that Arlene Foster chose to bring along Nigel Dodds, ennobled as Lord Dodds of Duncairn just a fortnight ago.

The former MP for North Belfast has been out of the limelight since losing his seat to Sinn Féin last year but he remains a major figure in the party, which has important implications.

Dodds was an original architect of Brexit, not just within the DUP but for UK politics as a whole. He was a founding member of the Leave campaign, sat on its board during the referendum, drove a progressively harder Brexit afterwards and left the Commons with his views still apparently unchanged. Despite the epic mistake this represents he remains a skilled political operator – head and shoulders above DUP colleagues. So what influence will he continue to have on the party's Brexit position?

Sammy Wilson's face-mask and Ian Paisley's expenses are trivial questions by comparison.

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BREXIT observers have puzzled for years over the promise, issued from Brussels as well as London, that Northern Ireland can benefit from both UK and EU trade deals.

Although the Withdrawal Agreement implies this in theory, experts can only see problems with it in practice.

Stormont's economy committee is the latest to scratch its head over the issue.

Civil servants have told it that if the UK's new trade deal with Japan allows in some Japanese goods below EU standards, the EU will not want those goods entering Northern Ireland.

The EU would have no concerns about Northern Ireland exporting to Japan. However, the Japanese might object to our goods if we cannot take theirs.

Firms here should still have some potential to benefit from EU and UK deals but the best of worlds is starting to look more like a trip around the multiverse.

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CORONAVIRUS restrictions between Donegal and Northern Ireland have excited that charming group of people

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who see the epidemic as a constitutional competition.

Hopes or fears of a new partitionism are a bit of a stretch, from any perspective.

The Republic has had county-by-county measures for two months and Northern Ireland has had postcode and council area measures for one month, so having a section of border running between them is politically incidental.

Attempts to smooth over differences are more of a problem. The executive has announced an 11 o'clock curfew for restaurants and bars that looks suspiciously like a compromise between the 10 o'clock curfew in England and the 11.30 curfew in the south. The result is that nobody is happy. Belfast venue The Limelight has asked to see "any medical, scientific or behavioural evidence in favour of such curfews", which is doubly awkward for Stormont, as the UK government has admitted its decision for England was largely symbolic. Can you justify a curfew as a gesture based on a gesture?

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MYSTERY surrounds a claim by the Northern Ireland Landlords' Association that the Holyland area of Belfast has never been a family neighbourhood, so residents "trying to hold back the tide" of students should just

give up and move out.

"Going back decades, the area was full of rooming houses, with tradesmen living in a house with a landlady," a spokesman told the BBC.

"It was never the situation that there were lots of families with 2.2 children, as the residents can sometimes suggest."

Quite apart from the arrogant non-sequitur of this 'argument', it should be clear it is nonsense from the large primary school that has stood in the heart of the area for over 80 years and is still full of children from surrounding streets.

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FORMER billionaire Sean Quinn has expressed dismay that the managers of his one-time business, Quinn Industrial Holdings, are renaming it 'Mannok'.

"Where they see the right to rebrand the company that they weren't even part of putting together is hard to believe," he told the *Irish Times*.

Perhaps even more unbelievably, the word Mannok only appears to have had one other use before in any language, on the Pacific island of Guam, where it means 'chicken'.

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THE Executive Office has published the latest Public Appointments Annual Report, along with the striking claim that the gender of 18 per cent of applicants and 4 per cent of successful candidates is unknown.

Everyone's gender has always been known in previous years and the executive had a 50:50 gender equality target for this year.

Inside the report, the confusion is blamed on "a change in the data collection process", leaving statisticians dependent on equal opportunities monitoring forms, which 18 per cent of applicants did not submit.

However, people who do not submit monitoring forms often have their 'community background' inferred from other details, such as schools attended. Why could this not be done for gender, using names and titles?

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Bank Raiders' Suitcase Bursts

A SUITCASE with a faulty lock almost cost three bank raiders – and the girl driver of their getaway car – a £5,000 haul in Strabane yesterday. For as the hold-up men raced to the car, which sat with engine running and with the girl at the wheel outside the Strabane branch of the Belfast Bank, the suitcase carried by one of them burst open and bundles of notes scattered in the street.

As one of the men menaced an onlooker with a revolver, another scooped up the money but left £412 behind. Pursued by two RUC cars, the raiders sped for the Lifford border and escaped.

Gardai were immediately alerted and the search was concentrated on the Southern side, but with close watch also being kept by police and Army patrols on the Northern side to forestall any move to re-cross the border. Two shots were fired during the raid but no-one was wounded.

An RUC spokesman said that it was a well-executed hold-up, but that it almost came unstuck because of the use of a suitcase with a faulty fastener. The raiders got away with £4,600. The bank manager and cashier were 'coshed' during the hold-up and four clerks were ordered to lie on the floor. The raiders were all young.

Mr J H McCurdy, the manager, said he was on his way to the safe when a boy jumped over the counter onto his back.

'I tried to hold on to him, but he hit me over the head with a revolver a couple of times, but not too hard,' he said.

'Another boy then came and they put me in the strong-room and closed the door.'

Arms Trial Sensation as Judge Resigns

MR JUSTICE O'Keeffe yesterday ordered a re-trial of four men accused of arms offences after defence counsel criticised his conduct of the trial. He discharged the jury and ordered a re-trial before another judge and jury. He said he had taken the decision with the greatest reluctance.

Accused, who include Charles Haughey, former Minister of Finance and Captain James Kelly, are charged with conspiring together and with others unknown to import arms into Ireland. They have pleaded not guilty.

The judge said that before the lunch adjournment Mr Ernest Wood, counsel for Albert Lukyix [a Belgian businessman] had made allegations about the trial judge. Mr Wood had accused the judge of 'having unnecessary personal details strutted out' about his client. Mr Wood added: 'I strongly suspect this is because my Lord thinks this will hurt my client.'

"This is illustrative of the rather unfair tone in which your Lordship has conducted the trial."

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