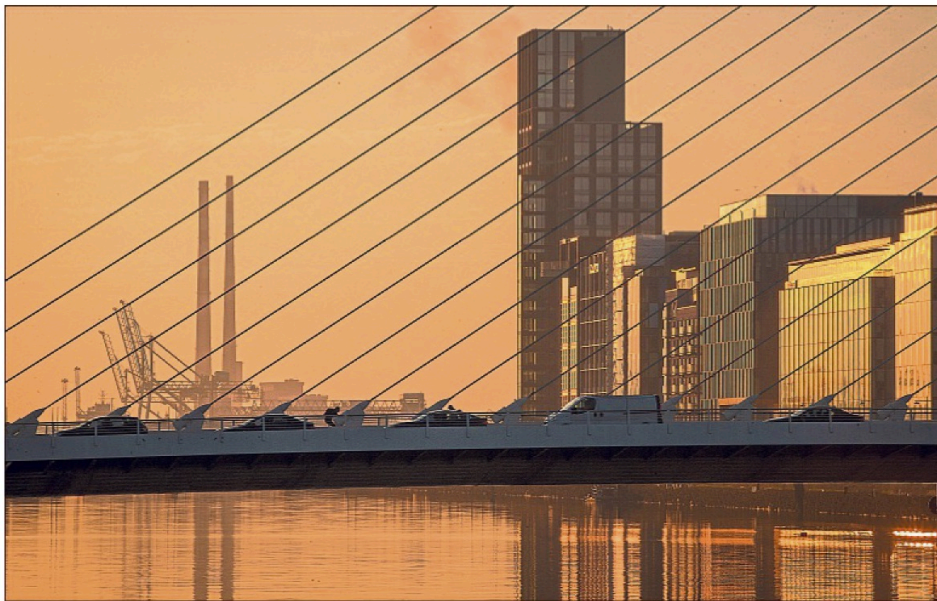




ARE WE ALL COMFORTABLE?: Sunrise on the banks of the River Liffey in Dublin

PICTURE: Mai McCann

United Ireland? I wouldn't like it but my kids might

THERE are moments when I think I should feel Irish. My adoptive parents were born before partition: into an Ireland that was united, albeit as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

My Dad, born in 1906, had family in Sligo and happy memories of spending time with them—before and after 1921. It hurt him when tensions between north and south in the late 1960s/early 70s slowed his regular cross-border visits down to a trickle: and then a full stop.

I remember some of those visits to Sligo and further-afield trips to Cavan, Meath, Monaghan, Leitrim, Galway and on down to Cork and Waterford.

Farms and beaches were my favourite places, but I have lingering memories of how laid back everyone and everything seemed to be. But, as I said, the visits stopped.

Long after my dad died I asked Mum what had happened.

She told me it was because he was an Orangeman and member of the Ulster Unionist Party and just felt increasingly uncomfortable with what he described as the 'border mentality' of those he once regarded as friends and boyhood neighbours.

As she put it, he had a growing sense he was now regarded as an outsider, an enemy of those who wanted to unite Ireland again.

He wasn't. He was fascinated by 'Irish' culture and even spoke the language reasonably well. He read *The Irish Times* until his final illness made it too difficult for him to read.

He was an expert on the drawing of the 'line of separation' – as he described the border – and often told me of the damage it had done to communities where Protestants, Catholics, nationalists and what eventually became 'Ulster' unionists had lived reasonably peaceably before 1921.

He was born in a united Ireland and had no difficulty in recognising the Irish dimension of his identity.

But never once have I felt Irish.

Alex
KANE



I never describe myself as Irish, or even Northern Irish. That said, I have no hatred, or even dislike of Irish: culture, language, history, or people.

I may not have liked some of the decisions taken by Irish governments on Northern Ireland, and I always had difficulty with the seeming reluctance to extradite suspected members of the IRA; yet those personal dislikes and difficulties have never embraced the Irish people or Irish society and culture as a whole.

But as I've got older and as demographics and political circumstances have changed (particularly post-Brexit), I've found myself wondering how I would cope if Ireland were united again.

I think it's fairly likely a border poll will be held within the next decade or so and that will force me to think about what a 'new' Ireland would look like.

It would also force me to think about what advice to give my children.

I'll tell them what my dad told me when, in 1973, at the age of 18 and casting my first vote, I told him I supported Brian Faulkner's willingness to cut a power-sharing deal with

the SDLP (then regarded by many unionists as a front for the IRA).

I wondered if he'd mind. His answer was, as ever, honest and straight to the point: "Don't carry my political baggage with you. You'll have enough baggage of your own when you get to my age."

The Ireland he stopped visiting in 1972/73 no longer exists. The Ireland I've heard unionists and loyalists talk about for most of my life doesn't exist any more. The Ireland of bumpy roads taking over from the solid northern roads when you crossed the border has gone. The Ireland of Rome rule and crushingly inhibitive social conservatism has gone. Dublin often feels more British than Belfast. The poor-looking-over-its-shoulder-in-envy-at-its-cross-border-neighbour Ireland has gone.

Could I imagine my children living in and being comfortable in a 'new' united Ireland? Yes; but only if they don't carry my baggage and my memories.

And that's because the 'new' Ireland would be as new to them as it would be to everyone else living in it.

Hopefully most of them wouldn't insist on carrying someone else's baggage, either, for that's the only way to bring both parts together and create an entirely new whole that will be something that can grow and build its own history and story.

And me? My sense of identity is deep and entrenched. Too many of my memories are nudged by the shadow of the pain and grief that touched too many lives for far too long. My personal baggage fills too much of my hallway to embrace something entirely new and I don't think I could just leave it behind me at this point.

But if Ireland is united again I hope we'll collectively learn from all of our mistakes since 1921 and achieve genuine reconciliation and common purpose.

■ This essay is from the just published anthology, *Being Irish: 101 Views on Irish Identity Today* (published by The Liffey Press).

The Ireland of Rome rule and crushingly inhibitive social conservatism has gone. Dublin often feels more British than Belfast

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 22 1921

Arms for the UVF

THE Daily News says: 'The situation in Ulster has taken a decided turn for the worse with the decision of the Unionist leaders to reorganise the UVF. It is evident that the Unionists have made up their minds not to agree to any reasonable peace terms in the belief that Mr Lloyd George will at the last moment yield to them. It is clear that the diehards are now 'upper dogs' in the North-East and that the "leaders" will dance to their tune. Obviously, the Ulster Volunteers would not be reorganised if there were not plenty of arms at their disposal.'

The [liberal] Westminster Gazette states: 'It is of incalculable importance that the truce in Ireland should be meticulously observed for on its maintenance depend, not only the temporary security of the Irish people, but also the prospects of the [Peace] Conference. ... Yet when we hear that the Ulster Volunteers are to be reorganised, we are compelled to face the possibility of appalling calamities for Ireland in the future. As for the Ulster Volunteers, they were a partisan organisation formed during a threat of rebellion. ... Their revival at the present juncture would be disastrous.'

Bishop on Irish Freedom

AT a meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin last night Bishop Joseph MacRory said: 'We are all hopeful that a new day is dawning for Ireland (applause) – I, not only hopeful, but determined that, come what may, it shall dawn and that as far as in us lies it shall reach even its noonday splendour. ... Ireland is about, I hope, to gain political freedom.'

Ballycastle and Partition
AT THE meeting of the Ballycastle (Co Antrim) Rural Council on Tuesday, a discussion took place on a resolution by Mr McAlistair, protesting against the excessive expenditure of the Northern Parliament and against the partition of Ireland.

The chairman (Mr Black) said he would not allow any political or religious questions. Mr McAlistair asked why he accepted a resolution in 1916 condemning the Easter Week Rising. 'That was a national calamity,' replied the chairman and Mr McAlistair retorted: 'The Northern Parliament is more than a national calamity. They haven't enough money to pay for the sweeping of the floors.'

CONCERNED that the British government might make major concessions to Sinn Féin at the Treaty negotiations, Craig matched his hardline rhetoric against any interference with the six-county area with a general revival of 'Carson's Army' across the North. Meanwhile Bishop MacRory of Down and Connor, a firm anti-partitionist, became the first senior Catholic churchman to endorse independence. The future cardinal was close to both de Valera and Collins.

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