



*Jules Hudson*

# COUNTRY ESCAPE

After a monumental month in the arena of European politics, Jules ponders the brave new post Brexit world we as a nation are stepping into

**J**ust a few months ago I wrote of General Patton's guiding phrase: 'Lead, follow, or get out of the way'. That seems like a long time ago now, as we head into a very different world post the referendum on our future relationship with Europe. But those words might well describe the beginning, middle and end of our EU membership.

In making sense of it all, one thing struck me about everyone I met and talked to about the debate prior to the vote. Few, if any, felt much confidence in the institutions of the EU and, as I travelled the country filming, those in favour of leaving revealed themselves more readily than those who wanted to stay. Most remainers, it seemed, based their view on the fear of financial uncertainty – as it turns out, with good reason.

Curiously, there was an energy about the leavers that was far more palpable. By chance, during those frantic few weeks of the campaign, I found myself in three fishing communities in Hampshire, Cornwall and South Wales. The fishermen were in no doubt their future interests were best served by leaving and, as I looked out upon deserted ports that once thrived, I took their point. Quotas and regulations have emaciated once prosperous fleets, whilst those who had hung on in the business told of such proscriptive limits on their catch in favour of Spanish and French boats that it was proving virtually impossible to make a living. One pair I set sail with off the coast of South Wales had sold their boat to Norway just two years ago, trading it in for a smaller craft that now kept them busy with sport fishermen and divers.

In the press, it's become fashionable to portray the leavers as jingoistic fools of a certain age who've derailed the future prospects of the country. Whilst brilliantly observed and undeniably funny, the Radio 4 comedy slot currently occupied by the Dead Ringers team is a case in point. In fact, it seems few in the media are making the case for optimism – something we as a nation now crave so dearly.

Whichever way you voted, none of us could have foreseen the political chaos that followed. Both at the time and now, the debate has brought out the very worst of arguments. Bugged down in claim and counter claim, these made it hard for

people to see the right from the wrong. And the beaching of this slanging match upon the reef of immigration not only missed the point, it did the nature and value of immigration a great disservice.

As an historian, I readily recognise the story of Britain is one of both immigration and emigration. From the earliest hunter gatherers that crossed the ice bridge from Europe to Britain, to the Romans, the Saxons, Angles and Vikings, through to the Normans and late Flemish traders of the Middle Ages, our nation would not exist without the import of thousands of people. As a country that once sought to rule the world through trade and empire, we've also made our mark overseas, welcome or not.

Whatever the reason for voting, our respective crosses in respective boxes reflect a myriad of vested interests. Over the last 400 years or so, the evolution of our political framework has been predicated upon a simple idea: that democracy, the ambition to somehow garner and reflect the wishes of the majority, should be an implicit right we all have a duty to engage with. What's more, it's a right that's been hard won. When faced with such a binary choice as we've had of late, it's worth remembering what Lincoln famously said, that "you can't please all of the people, all of the time". The result of the referendum may have come as a shock, and we may look back and wish the debate had not been so shabby, that the government had been better prepared for the outcome, or indeed that the question hadn't been asked at all. Those who took part did no more than what they were asked to do in making a simple choice. With such a close finale to digest, those who mourn the result seem keen to point the finger of blame, often to an older generation. But in reality there's only one place to look: the one in four of the electorate that didn't vote at all, who might now wish they had. 🐑

• *Black Sheep will return next month*

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