

### **Participant 3: Catherine Regan**

#### **Location 1: Ferryport entrance**

When you talk about Pembroke Dock, and actually going to the docks, any dock like Holyhead, but particularly Pembroke, it's so evocative for so many Irish people living in England, be they first generation, second generation – because I grew up in London until I was 14, and so for all that time, we would get the ferry over to Ireland. My parents are both from Listowel. And so the whole trip to the docks and the whole dock experience – I mean, our experience of travel wasn't airports, it was the docks. But most Irish kids, you know, Irish families, were like that. And then when I ended up moving over here and had my own children, the feeling of actually going back to the docks with your own children, and taking them back to Ireland is very strange, because, I mean, there's a sadness that you are an exile or a kind of an immigrant again, but also the sheer excitement of actually getting to the dock, waiting in the car park, you know, the whole, 'why are you going over?' The excitement of getting on the boat, the whole experience is so ... it's really wonderful, you know? It's a proper trip! You know, you get into the dock, you get onto the boat, you load up your car ... and I've got two Westies – I've got only one now – we would bring the dogs as well. So the whole thing was this big road trip. And particularly with Pembroke, because we had the dogs we had to discover the area, because we had to find dog walks before we got on the ferry. So we used to just turn up early, and we discovered all these wonderful places around Pembroke! Places like Shrinkle, there's a place called Shrinkle – I mean, have you heard of Shrinkle? There's Shrinkle, there's Manorbier, and there's these most wonderful beaches, fabulous beaches in Pembroke, which we discovered every time – we said we'd set ourselves a thing where we were going to find a different beach – so we ended up exploring southern Wales around Pembroke. We didn't stray too far, because there's always that anxiety: is the boat going to go off without us? So Pembroke, for my adult children – now they're 24 and 22 – holds so many fantastic memories. This is a picture of my kids actually after we got off the ferry – it's one of my favourite pictures. This is years ago, with the dogs, because the dogs kind of controlled everything in terms of our trips!

#### **Location 2: end of Commercial Row, facing the Martello Tower**

I'll just start at the beginning: I was brought up in London, and my dad was a very, very hardworking Kerryman. My mother couldn't drive, so my dad would finish work, pack up the car, and then we – I had two other sisters – and then we would drive. So the journey when we were going over, where we were young, was very much like, get in the car, drive, get in the ferry. There was no sense of kind of exploring Wales, this was just like a transit point. And I was quite conscious of that when I was travelling with the girls: I didn't want it to be just a transit point. I thought, we might as well take the opportunity. And I think it's really interesting for people in Pembroke, because it's a very important function, but is there a way of actually trying to engage a bit more with people on this important part of the journey, you know? Because oftentimes, you're going at a crazy hour – like, I'm going in three and a half weeks time and I'm getting a two o'clock in the morning ferry, and it's very difficult to kind of

engage with an area at that time! But it was in my mind that I wanted to just to kind of understand the route through, and the dogs forced us to do that. So we would always go for a good walk, find a couple of nice National Trust places, get an ice cream, go for a walk, take a photograph ... so we discovered Shrinkle, Manorbier, some lovely castles – we just drove. I mean we had our SatNav, but we just drove, and said, 'oh, this is kind of cute!' There's lovely, magical little laneways, and it's not busy. Part of it has a lot of caravans, a bit like, say, Wicklow or Lahinch, but it's quite uncommercialized, you know? I mean it's a very nice area. A really sweet thing is, my daughter, when she went off to university, the first mother's day card she sent me was one of the pictures of us on Shrinkle beach, us and the dogs, she made a card, and it actually really made me cry. And so the girls now have that memory bank for south Wales. When they set up that Pembroke to Cork ferry, I cannot tell you the excitement – it was basically like Ireland winning the Eurovision! We were whooping around the kitchen: 'there's a ferry to Cork!' You get into Carrigaline, and literally 20 minutes into Cork City. And then the complete crushing disappointment when the ferry stopped. So it's a bit like Lorenzo's Oil, you know that film – there was like a moment in time of about three or four years where we had the ferry, we totally enjoyed it, we revelled in it, we went over to Cork every year – and then it was gone. At least we had it, at least we had that.

### **Location 3: Walking along Front Street to where it meets Western Way**

My kids, they were in a school here, a private school that had ridiculous summer holidays, like 10 or 12 weeks – so they used to go to my sister in West Cork, and they learned how to sail down in Baltimore. So we used to drive down to, they've got place in Tragumna, which is not too far from Baltimore. And so we would drive down there, they'd stay down there for two or three weeks, and then they would either fly back or whatever. We always looked at the journey in the round, it wasn't just the Irish piece, it was like the whole. So I've got my roof box now, and I look at it and I think, 'I don't really need that,' but I can't get rid of it, because it's like ... I mean I am getting the ferry in a couple of weeks. I'm going to stay with my dad, because he's been isolating so he's been on his own. So I am very excited about that. When we moved – and we wanted to move to Ireland – I was 14. My sister was 13, and my other sister was 10. We were north London girls, but you know, at a Catholic school. And one of my most favourite memories is when we got to the port, and the immigration officer said, 'how long are you coming for?' And my dad said, 'forever.' It just got me in the ... it gets me the guts now, how many years later? That was 1978. So they made a lot of big choices for us to move to Ireland, and it was very tough for them. They'd moved over here when they were very young, they had their lives – but they did it for us, and the education and the way of life. I mean, I was so spectacularly bad at school in London, I was told by my teacher that I would be lucky if I got to the sweet counter at Woolworths!

### **Location 4: Cwtch Café**

I mean, I do remember, when we were younger, the ferries were so awful – I mean, they had no stabilizers; there was no such thing as a cabin; you know, people were throwing up everywhere ... they were rammed full. I mean, rammed full of people.

There was one journey – I don't think it was the one when we went back to Ireland – when we were literally under a table in the bar. We were kids, with our blanket, like kind of refugees, you know, like fleeing a kind of a war zone, and there were people just everywhere – I mean, it was chaos, but in a kind of, a really funny Irish way, you know? Kind of like chaotic, but not edgy – chaotic and kind of like, 'oh well,' you know? I normally go back a few times a year, but you know, because of Covid it's been very hard for Irish people. I've found it exceptionally difficult not to be able to just go over for the weekend. You

know, my mother's anniversary we'd go over. My daughter's just finished uni in Manchester and my other daughter's in London, and we'd go every year, it's like part of our life. We'd go for the anniversary. They'd come from Manchester. We weren't able to do that this year. And it does make you realize how embedded the trips are into the fabric of your life. I think the stories that go through that port, you know, the hopes, the dreams, the sorrow's, the anguish, everything is sitting there in that car park waiting to get on that boat, you know – it's kind of like a soup of every kind of emotion, isn't it? And family ties.

I've just got for my daughter, for her 22nd birthday, I've got socks especially printed up that you can get the pictures of your dogs on them. So our Westies – our surviving Westie is going to be 13 in a couple of weeks, so we've had least 10 years of travelling over with them. And I mean, they're completely part and parcel of all our trips. When they were young, they used to have to be put in these kennels on the decks. So the first time we did it, we thought, 'oh, there's two of them, they're going to be all right.' And when we came back, they'd obviously completely lost the plot – they'd shredded, their bedding completely, and their bowl, their plastic bowl ... and we just looked at the whole thing, the kids, and we thought, we're just going to leave it there. So we just, we just left the devastation there! We thought, 'if we leave them in the car, it's going to be like that film, The Hangover, you know, where the tiger's in the car and just wrecks the car. So they had to go into the kennels. So we just loaded them up. When we got off the ferry then in Cork we'd get off the ferry and give the dogs a walk, stretch our legs, and then just get back in the car and, you know, head down to either Listowel or to West Cork. The thing about the dogs is that they just loved being with us, so they would just sit on the girls' laps. And funnily enough, there's lots of people in Baltimore with Westies. So Millie and Fred, they were part and parcel of just loading up the car.

### **Location 5: Walking back towards the ferryport along Dimond St**

And I've got this whole memory – you know, during Coronavirus, you've really had to access your memory bank to get you through days, you know? There's moments that I've gone back to – lovely moments, beautiful moments. It kind of keeps you going? Because it has been tough. I find in the last few weeks, I'm thinking, I feel like we've run a marathon. [] The end is in sight, but I've run 25 miles and I really feel tired, and I can't run very fast! [] I think an awful lot of people, people I've talked to, are very wary of going back to that kind of enforced busy life. People felt like, the kind of limit of your success was like, how busy you were. You know, if you turned around to somebody at the weekend ... now, if somebody says, 'what did you do the weekend?' you can in all honesty say, 'I went for a walk.' I mean you know, I write a

diary and it's like the diary of a 10 year old. Okay. I had this for lunch, I went for a walk, I planted some seeds ... I mean it is literally. There is no shame! You know, what you do for the weekend? Nothing. Did you meet anyone? No. It's not a problem! And time, just ... I look at the way my life was a bit out of control in terms of, I had missed deadlines – you know, I missed a mammogram, and I ended up getting breast cancer, you know what I mean, in terms of like, big stuff, because I was so busy. So now, a letter comes in, I read it, I register it, I think about what I'm going to do with it. It's not like in a pile and I'm like, 'I must get to that,' you know? I was kind of...was I lucky? It was 2017. I was basically in and out within a week ... And I actually got married the day before, on Patrick's Day, before my mastectomy. We organised our wedding in 48 hours, it was in The Times newspaper, if you look it up – and a couple of friends of mine came over from Cork, like, literally dropped everything, came over – girls I went to, we went to school in UCC together, and ... yeah. So as far as I know I'm cancer-free. Yeah, it was, you know, a lot of that was busyness. Hectic life, having a lot on, doing my job – I was doing a lot of travel – and my eldest daughter. she said to me, 'oh mum, you worked so hard when we were growing up,' and it kind of broke my heart, you know.

#### **Location 6: Final location back at the ferryport where we started**

There's a thing about ferry ports, it's a bit like a kind of a film noir, right? When you come to a ferry port, there's no people around, you know, there are lots of big lights, there's the boat humming there on the dockside waiting to board you on. And I mean, it's kind of amazing in a way. There are the people that get there really, really early at the top of the queue, there are, you know, the people with their dogs ... it's such a fantastic place to watch people! What we used to do, particularly with the girls, we would make up the story of like, what's their story?! So you'd see someone, they'd have a really big dog, and then, you know, their sandwiches, and, you know, their car, and you'd go, 'I think their story is this,' and so you're all waiting in your queue with your sandwiches – and then what I always love about the ferry to Ireland is, there's always a group of lads that I think have something to do with greyhounds, or horses, or some sort of an agricultural, general, kind of – they've got big trucks, big cars, and – what are they doing? What's the deal with them? We could never fully work it out, but we reckoned it had to do with either a greyhound or a horse. And you know everyone has a link, you know – everyone has a link to Ireland. A strong bond, or a tenuous bond, or a sad bond, or a home, or a sibling or whatever. So it's kind of like the wires are stretching across, you know, and you're at the point, and you're just being pulled back into Ireland. But it is a place, I was thinking, so many hopes and fears and reconciliations and hurts go through those ports. You know, people going back for funerals, people going back for annual holidays ... and the trip from Pembroke to Ireland is always very helpful. The one on the way back is very sad. So the Pembroke side is always a star full of hope. You know, the excitement of going back to Ireland. It's a bit like kind of bathing in the memories, you know?