

Why Did John Le Carré Become an Irish Citizen?

By [Tom Clifford](#)

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Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Irishman. A plot twist that might have been considered too bizarre for even John Le Carré. But the master of suspense shows, from beyond the grave, how to get the obituary writers rushing to update their paeans. The former British diplomat, secret agent, captivating espionage writer, and presumed Englishman, Le Carré died an Irish citizen, his son confirmed. It's like being told his fictional hero and the quintessential Englishman George Smiley was actually working for Moscow all along.

Nicholas Cornwell said his father, best known for his Cold War thrillers, became an Irish citizen before his death, aged 89, in December. The reason for the change of heart? One word. Brexit. It infuriated le Carre

. “This is without doubt the greatest catastrophe and the greatest idiocy that Britain has perpetrated since the invasion of Suez,” Le Carré said of Brexit at the time. “Nobody is to blame but the Brits themselves – not the Irish, not the Europeans.”

He thought it was a massive own goal.

“The idea, to me, that at the moment we should imagine we can substitute access to the biggest trade union in the world with access to the American market is terrifying,” he said.

The author of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* was eligible for an Irish passport through his grandmother, Olive Wolfe, who was born in County Cork.

Le Carré was actually born as David Cornwell and worked for the secret services while studying German in Switzerland at the end of the 1940s. Inspired by his MI5 colleague, the novelist John Bingham, he began publishing thrillers under the pseudonym of John le Carré.

His spies did not sip Martinis, frequent casinos nor have beautiful women as companions. They were occupied by office politics, often egotistical, flawed and lonely.

A strange thing is happening. For the first time in more than 840 years, since Henry II landed his forces in eastern Ireland in October 1171, it can be argued that Ireland has more

power, or at least access to power, than Britain.

Ireland, like Mexico, found itself in the wrong place, at the wrong time, in history. Too far from god, and intrusive neighbors. We had what is now referred to as soft power, the music, and political influence in Boston, New York and Chicago, as well as Liverpool, Glasgow and many other communities. Britain had real power, diplomatic and military that spanned the globe. But right now in 2021 it seems that Britain is diplomatically speaking adrift, at least compared to Ireland.

The reason? In 1962 former US secretary of state Dean Acheson remarked Britain has lost its empire and is seeking a role. The search continues. If its plight was advertised in a lonely hearts column it would read; *Nation, on edge of Europe, seeks companionship and friendship. May lead to something better. All can apply. Sensitive about past, hopeful of the future. Please send response to Whitehall, London.*

Brexit means Ireland is part of a bloc of 27 countries that, to put it politely, is bigger and more powerful than Britain. The six-letter word has changed the relationship. Like a couple seeking divorce, the husband, demanding to explore new opportunities and recapture his youth, realizes too late that all the assets are in the wife's name.

Of course it's not just Le Carré.

There has been a surge in applications for Irish passports from Britain.

The number of Irish passports issued in Great Britain rocketed in the years following the Brexit referendum.

This was most marked in 2019. That year saw 120,800 passports issued by Ireland's London embassy, double that of 2016.

Now the focus turns elsewhere. After all, if Le Carré is Irish then who else? There is no indication, just yet, that god is going to deny he is an Englishman.

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Tom Clifford is a renowned journalist and geopolitical analyst based in Beijing. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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