

KEELEY TRAVEL is a travel agency that doesn't sell holidays run by architectural historian Tom Keeley. This travelling agency acts as both guide and tourist, visiting one destination at a time. KEELEY TRAVEL is interested in the echo between people and their surroundings, and what the gaze of the tourist can show us about the everyday through architectures, landscapes, histories and geographies. Design by Simone C. Niquille.

# Hedge School

3 May 2021: 100 years to the day since the creation of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Like many things to do with this particular border it is never straightforward. Is it marked by the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which laid the foundations of a divided Ireland? Or is it the date – i.e. today – when that legislation was enacted? Potentially it could be the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, when the Irish Free State was created? Or maybe even when that treaty was ratified later on in the Dáil? The answer probably is that it is all these things, and just like the border itself a blur on the edge of two political entities, the way it was created was similarly blurred (à la Brexit), kind of gradual, and a fudge that no-one thought would last. Fast forward 100 years and here we are.

Over the course of the coming months I am going to be exploring and responding to the particularities of the border through a contemporary 'hedge school'. *Hedge School 2021* is an architecture and landscape school in the tradition of the Irish pedagogical precedent of the 'hedge school'. Hedge schools were illicit forms of education in Ireland in the 17th and 18th centuries when the penal laws banned Catholics from accessing formal education.

*Hedge School 2021* is structured around six materials which have been identified and documented as part of my ongoing work in and around the border. These materials in some way speak very directly to what the border is actually made of as a means of asking what the border is or might be. The materials – and the locations

Corrugated Metal, Drumhirk, Co. Monaghan



where they were originally identified – are:

- Breeze blocks (Glenfarne, Co. Leitrim)
- Cladding (Belturbet, Co. Cavan)
- Classical Columns (Monaghan, Co. Monaghan)
- Corrugated Metal (Drumhirk, Co. Monaghan)
- Signage (Strabane, Co. Tyrone)
- Tarmac (Drumgramph, Co. Fermanagh)

In quarries, plaster works, cement factories, signmakers and more I will be interviewing makers of these materials to understand how they are made and what the properties of each are. These conversations with material experts will be recorded and with the consent of the participants will be shared publicly.

These materials themselves will then be unfixed from these sites and reinserted back into the borderland in relation to sites of historical interest. These sites have been chosen where the idiosyncrasies of the border can be seen in different ways. And in each of these sites I will again have a recorded conversation with an invited expert whose work speaks to the site thematically or physically to the vicinity of the site. These sites are:

- Magilligan's Strand, Co. Derry: where the Ordnance Survey of Ireland began,
- Dolan's/Traveller's Rest, Strabane, Co. Tyrone: a petrol station on the site of a former customs post and army base,
- Boa Island, Co. Fermanagh: an island and bridges connecting an enclave of Fermanagh,
- Black Pig's Dyke, Co. Leitrim: a Neolithic earthwork following the boundary of ancient Ulster,
- Finn Bridge, Co. Monaghan: a former railway bridge entering the Drummully Polyp,
- Romeo 21, Co. Armagh: the last visible remnant of British Army infrastructure in South Armagh,

Confirmed participants for these conversations include Kerri ní Dochartaigh, writer and author of 'Thin Places' (Canongate, 2021); the National Folklore Collection at UCD; and historian Dr Peter Leary, author of 'Unapproved Routes: Histories of the Irish Border, 1922–72' (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Following the conversations with material experts and invited experts I will deliver a series of lectures about these materials and their corresponding sites in the locations where they were originally found. These lectures will be allegorical and polyphonic in structure and delivered in English and Irish. They will be broadcast live online, with dates and locations of each of these events will be shared in the coming weeks.

Through this series of conversations that will be shared publicly, lectures broadcast from a series of sites along the border, and methods of 'alternative arrangement', I hope that the nuance of this place that is normally only spoke of in the binary can be shifted or extended somehow.

While this border in some ways can be a state of mind, it is also a very particular condition, one that is more often than not looked away from, or moved through at high speed, or discussed by lapsing back into lazy/dangerous generalisms and stereotypes.

*Hedge School 2021* is an attempt to do the opposite, to really look, to talk, to sit with, and to embrace that the border is all the things we know rather than one or the other; and that through a method of 'alternative arrangement' we can begin to unpack a little of what it is right now.

Hedge School is supported by a Beacon Bursary from UCL Culture.

Breeze blocks, Glenfarne, Co. Leitrim



Tarmac, Drumgramph, Co. Fermanagh  
(the line in the tarmac here is the actual border)







Classical Columns, Monaghan, Co. Monaghan

Cladding, Belturbet, Co. Cavan

