UK Retail sales rise

The volume of retail sales was up 0.9% in June. We now know that in the first year post the Brexit vote retail sales increased by 2.9% in volume, confounding pessimistic forecasts. The value of these sales rose by 5.7%, with petrol prices the most buoyant affecting the figures.

Why haven’t more UK businesses been able or willing to build long term businesses in France or Germany?

The single market was meant to promote good long term investment both ways across the Channel. The weakest type of business arrangement is an agreement to buy their exports. You can always switch to some other company and country to buy your next consignment. The strongest is founding businesses in other EU countries and growing them in situ.It is much more complex closing them down or selling up.

The French and Germans have been keen to exploit opportunities to invest in the UK and establish businesses. Just look at the way Aldi and Lidl have brought their business model to UK shoppers, and grown a large market share. Look at the way the French have exploited easy access for mergers to buy up large amounts of the UK utilities sectors. The UK does not have similar freedoms on the continent where nationalisation, government controls and directions impede similar investment.

In contrast, the UK’s largest food retailer, Tesco, has no shop at all in France or Germany (or for that matter in Italy or Spain). In general retailing, an area of UK strength, M and S set up a continental business only to close most of it down in 2001 claiming it was not profitable and had no future. M and S today has just a few shops in the Paris area, with nothing in Germany, the continent’s largest and richest market. Boots too has no stores in France or Germany.

Most UK multinationals have made far larger commitments to the USA and to Asia than they have to continental Europe. Some have found too many cultural and business model barriers to establishing in Europe. Most have found it easier and more worthwhile to establish in the USA. Perhaps the enthusiasts for the single market writing to this site could help us as to why this is true.

South West Trains – Reading to Waterloo

I had a meeting today with the new Franchise team for South West trains who take over in August 20th.

I stressed to them the need for improved punctuality and reliability in the service. They assured me they had a number of planned actions to raise service levels including staff rostering, and more reliable trains.

They told me the introduction of extra trains as promised to give us 4 trains an hour to London from Wokingham will not be before December 2018. They plan replacement and renewal of existing coaches.

I raised with them the desirability of bidding for digital signalling to allow more trains per hour to use the track. They said they were working on this possibility.

News you do not hear on the media

“Pound rallies strongly by 7% against the dollar as investors see positives in Brexit.” (Pound up to $1.30 from low of $1.20)

“UK economy grows 2% in year to end March 2017 as Brexit gives consumers a boost”

“Jobs bonanza in post referendum UK. UK reaches record levels of employment in the summer of 2017 after the vote”

“UK companies think main problem with Brexit is they may not be able to attract enough low cost labour from the continent to fuel their continuing expansion plans in UK”

How the single market got in the way

of our art market

The UK art market is one of the big three in the world, coming second after New York and a little ahead of Hong Kong/Shanghai. 98% of the world's expensive paintings are sold through one of these three markets.These 3 account for 81% of total world art market turnover between them.

Only 3% of the UK's art exports go to the rest of the EU. Imports from there account for 16% of the total. The EU has imposed two extra costs on the London market not charged to clients of New York or China. One is a VAT on imports. The other is the living artists levy on a re sale.

In typical EU fashion they have invented rules and taxes that make an EU based market less attractive. London has lost some market share to New York and China as a result. It has not helped continental centres. The UK has 21% of the global overall market, and 62% of the European market.

Once we have left the EU the UK could cut the costs imposed. The VAT has cost us some business, but collects very little tax as a result.

It would be good to hear more from other media about the opportunities for us to do better out of the EU in sectors we are good at or have a natural advantage in. I have talked about fishing before, and agriculture is another obvious one. The Art market is an excellent example of something we are good at, something which generates well paid jobs with a high level of training and interest. Out of the EU we can help it grow faster.