This election came down to just one thing – Brexit

Forget about holding a second referendum. It just happened. Jeremy Corbyn did his cynical best to make the election about the NHS, with fake-news claims about Boris flogging it lock, stock and barrel to Donald Trump.

Admittedly, Johnson did himself few favours with his bumbling performance when put on the spot by a TV reporter over photos of a young boy sleeping on a hospital floor.

But it wasn't the NHS that made millions brave driving rain to mark an 'X' with a stubby pencil.

For most Tories – and many former Labour voters – it was, in the words of the only three words the campaign will be remembered for, to 'get Brexit done'.

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Simon Walters writes that the election was all about Brexit. Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking at Copper Box Arena in London in a last campaign effort the day before the General Election

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And for Home Counties Tory Remainers egged on by Sir John Major, hectoring Jo

Swinson's Lib Dem Europhiles and Labour's pro-Brussels London luvvies, it was to get Brexit undone.

The truth is that almost exactly three and a half years after the referendum the country is still deeply divided over whether the UK should leave the EU. Every party was tied in knots trying to grapple with Brexit fissures during the campaign.

Corbyn panicked when he realized his feeble fence-sitting was driving working-class Leavers in Labour's so-called Red Wall of seats in the North into Boris's arms.

A token pro-Leave Corbynista was sent North to try to curb the insurrection – and was greeted with a loud raspberry from one end of Hadrian's Wall to the other.

Shadow Brexit Secretary Sir Keir Starmer – a silken-tongued southern MP and arch-Remainer – was so invisible in the North he might as well have spent the campaign on Mars. But if you were a Labour supporter in pro-Remain Putney, south-west London, you could have been forgiven for thinking Starmer was Labour leader, not Corbyn.

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Brexit party leader Nigel Farage pictured on the campaign trail in Hartlepool, the day before the general election

Starmer's face, not Corbyn's, was plastered all over one of the Putney Labour

candidate's leaflets in a straightforward attempt to milk the Remain vote and 'Stop Brexit'.

Lib Dem leader Jo Swinson did the seemingly impossible when she was rejected by fellow Remainers who said her pledge to summarily revoke the Article 50 departure process from the EU made a mockery of the word 'democrat' in her party's name.

She consoled herself by trying to wrestle the Foreign Secretary – karate black-belt Dominic Raab – out of his seat in Esher in the heavily Remain Surrey commuter belt.

Nigel Farage disappeared in a cloud of his own cigarette smoke when his Brexit Party supporters concluded he had become the biggest threat to his own declared objective.

Johnson got every Tory candidate to sign his Brexit pledge, but this did not prevent blood-letting between the Conservatives' warring factions.

In Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, former Conservative attorney general Dominic Grieve, standing as an independent after being thrown out of the party for his one-man crusade to block Brexit, called Johnson a 'pathological liar'.

Parliament is widely held to have failed to do its duty over Brexit, with endless dither, delay, bickering and back-biting that reduced a once great nation to a laughing stock.

If only Brexit cheerleader Boris had moved into No 10 after the referendum instead of Remainer Theresa May, we would have 'got Brexit done' three years ago and moved on, goes the argument.

I am not so sure.

Current Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn pictured outside a polling station in his North Islington constituency in London

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Before the referendum campaign began, veteran Brexiteer John Redwood told me it would be 'the English Civil War without muskets'. That war lasted nine years, cost around 100,000 lives and split families for generations. But it but sowed the seeds for the nation's future tolerance, prosperity and success.

The long-term consequences of Brexit may not be so profound. Most would settle for a decent trade deal with the EU, continued pet passports and controlled immigration while ensuring we have enough people to staff the NHS, care homes and the local Costa Coffee.

There has been vicious social-media abuse and threats to MPs on all sides. Tory Iain Duncan Smith received a dismembered rat through his letterbox just days ago.

But staying in the EU has not prevented neo-Nazi protests in Merkel's Germany and Gilets Jaunes riots in Macron's France.

The Parliamentary deadlock in Westminster has been petty, agonizing and

frustrating – but in my view, the extra three and a half years spent thrashing out a hugely complex issue have not all been wasted.

Most people who turned out yesterday had a greater understanding of Brexit than they did in June 2016, when few had heard of the Customs Union, let alone knew what it was – including some MPs I could mention.

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If you wanted to vote for or against Brexit yesterday, there were guides on how to vote tactically in every seat.

Before the election was called, the depressing prospect (to me, anyway) of the UK spending much of 2020 fighting a long, bitter second referendum seemed increasingly likely.

With luck, it took place yesterday. And not a musket was fired.

me-just-one-thing-Brexit.html

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