

G03: ELLEN WILSON INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Ellen Wilson [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interview summarisers: Dr Hilary White and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single track with no section breaks

G03: Ellen Wilson	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:39:58	Duration: 01:39:58	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in Londonderry in 1973 into a Protestant family. Her mother was a nurse and her father was in the police, which meant that she had an atypical childhood that included being ever aware of her father's – and her family's – safety. The family moved from Prehen to Eglinton when she was ten, but she didn't attend the local school or form many friendships in the neighbourhood. Outside of school activities, she was in the Girl Guides and played the clarinet.			
10:00–19:59	Recalls getting multiple buses from her home to Foyle College and feeling conspicuous in her school uniform, even though there were never any tensions between the religiously mixed schoolchildren. Recalls 'twice getting stuck on the wrong side of the river' due to bomb scares, and not being able to get home. While she didn't personally experience any hostility or violence, she did hear a bomb explosion while babysitting one night. Believes that her mother 'hid a lot of the stress and worry' from her and her two siblings. Describes going to church when younger, but ceased to believe in God at the age of fourteen. Explains that both of her grandfathers were in the Orange Order.			
20:00–29:59	Says that her cousins celebrated the Twelfth of July, but her parents saw as a source of 'hassle' and didn't discuss politics in the home. At school, Ellen was part of a cross-community group through which formed friendships with her Catholic peers. Recalls the tensions that arose when one of these friends stayed with her and her family after falling out with her own parents, but notes that these tensions were more to do with social class than with religion. Thinks most people of her parents' generation remained in NI in spite of the Troubles. Says that her older sister went to Liverpool University, which seemed 'wildly exciting' to Ellen.			
30:00–39:59	Ellen herself felt a 'desperate need to get away' from Derry and wanted a 'proper experience' of university life, which meant that she chose to study physics at Edinburgh University rather than at QUB on finishing school in 1992. Says her parents were 'incredibly supportive' of her decision and explains that she feels fortunate to have had 'fairly liberal' parents who didn't 'inflict their beliefs' on her. Her then boyfriend also went to Edinburgh to study. Describes how she 'just fell in love with Edinburgh' and 'thought the Scottish people were lovely'. Although she wasn't planning to leave NI forever, 'life happened' and she has remained in Britain ever since and now lives in a village near Stirling.			
40:00–49:59	Explains that when asked where she comes from, she 'couldn't say Derry or Londonderry, I'd have to say both, cos I don't want to cause a fight'. Says that she didn't get asked much about NI when she moved to Scotland. Remembers it 'being important' to her, on meeting someone else from NI, to establish whether they were Catholic or Protestant. Attributes this to her need for 'safety' and 'wanting to feel certain', and says it took ten years for this feeling to fade. Thinks sectarianism is 'quite heightened' in Scotland, especially in relation to football fandom. Recalls how joining a group who met weekly for dinner parties made her feel 'cosmopolitan and grown up and sophisticated' in Edinburgh.			

50:00–59:59	Thinks Derry is ‘unrecognisable’ now compared to the city she knew in her youth. Met her husband, an engineer, in her third year of university. Went to York to do a PGSE and became a teacher. Subsequently got a job in a Catholic school in Manchester, where her religious background was never an issue, though she remembers her professor at York, who was Northern Irish, being surprised by this move. Says she felt it was ‘a wonderful opportunity [...] to get really good at my subject’ because the students were ‘glorious’. Lived in Chester, so didn’t spend much time in Manchester. After three years she was promoted to a post in London, to where she and her husband relocated and settled in Stratford.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Recalls how multicultural London was compared to other places she had lived. Gave birth to a daughter and moved to Stirling in 2002, to afford a bigger house with a garden. Her husband was made redundant in London, so they tried various forms of self-employment before setting up a successful wine business. Discusses their wedding, which took place in Scotland and which both families attended. Recalls her husband finding ‘the painted streets’ of NI ‘very, very strange’. Says that all three of her children ‘feel very Scottish’ and have little connection to their NI heritage. Reveals that she is now separated from her husband.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Says she encourages her children to ask their grandfather questions, to connect them to their NI heritage, and still goes back every summer. Recalls going on a Belfast bus tour with her daughter, hoping it might entice her to apply to study at QUB, but the tour referenced ‘lots of terrible things in the Troubles’ and had the opposite effect. Recounts getting emotional watching <i>Derry Girls</i> , parts of which ‘felt really, really real’. It also reminded her of the ‘harshness’ with which NI people sometimes speak to each other. Thinks the TV series has been ‘a really good thing’. Mention that she recently joined the Green Party in Scotland.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Says that she didn’t follow the peace process closely because she was just ‘glad to be away’ from NI. While she’s now more interested in NI politics, in the 1990s she felt ‘embarrassed’ to be from the province, owing to all the ‘horror stories in the news’. With regard to Brexit, she felt that NI ‘wasn’t given enough consideration’ and worries that border issues ‘might set things back a bit’. She thinks that the Troubles ‘haven’t gone away’ and suspects that some people are ‘still being told the same stories’, so will ‘feel as strongly as they ever did’. Cites the killing of Lyra McKee in 2019 as evidence that violence has ‘not really gone away, it’s just a bit underneath the surface’. Regards Derry as a changed place nonetheless and thinks it is now ‘an international city’.
01:30:00–01:39:58	Thinks there is still a sectarian undercurrent where she lives in Scotland and has been shocked by some of its manifestations in the classroom and staffroom. Describes her identity as Northern Irish, but admits that if someone asks her if she’s Irish, she’ll explain that she’s ‘not that kind of Irish [...], cos I presume Irish means Catholic’. Reveals that she acquired a British passport recently, ‘just to be the same as’ her children, but thinks they might all soon revert to Irish passports. Says that she would consider moving back to NI, but only when her children are older and if her parents were still alive. Feels ‘very much at home’ in Scotland, though she still speaks of ‘going home’ to NI.