

G06: JOHN ADAMS INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: John Adams
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

G06: John Adams	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:42:52	Duration: 01:42:52	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in Co. Armagh in 1961 and grew up in Hamiltonsbawn among a ‘very small community’ of farming folk, which was a ‘safe, secure environment’. Both of his Protestant parents were primary schoolteachers. His father belonged to the Orange Order and was also a member of the B-Specials, while his mother was ‘more family-oriented’. John was one of three brothers, one of whom died as a baby, which had a huge impact on his parents. He attended the school his parents worked in and then went to grammar school, where he was bullied for several years. Mentions that he was a member of the army cadets as a teenager.			
10:00–19:59	Attended a Presbyterian church where his father was an elder. Played in the local band where his father was bandmaster, so the Twelfth of July was ‘an absolutely massive part’ of his youth. Recalls participating in parades, which had a ‘real buzz’ of communality about them. Mentions that there were some Catholic families in the village, who had varying reactions to the Twelfth celebrations. Says his own involvement was ‘about the music’. Declined to join the Orange Order and was not forced to do so by his father. Explains that ‘politics was everywhere’ in 1970s NI and that ‘you couldn’t escape sectarianism’. Reveals that his parents were ‘moderate’ unionists, and while his father was in the UDR, he saw himself more as a ‘peacekeeper’ than a ‘lawmaker’.			
20:00–29:59	Says that ‘danger from republican terrorism’ was a constant fear during his upbringing. His father also encountered loyalist activism during the Ulster workers’ strike. While his family had good relations with Catholic neighbours, John was told not to discuss his father’s UDR membership on security grounds. This suspicion of Catholics was ‘reinforced at school’. Explains that, growing up, he was ‘first and foremost a unionist’, with ‘an overlay’ of ‘anti-communist right-wingness’ and had ‘a very conservative faith position’. Says his family viewed the civil rights movements with suspicion and recalls his father being summoned to assist the British Army and the B-Specials in quelling civil unrest in Derry at the ‘very start’ of the Troubles. Recalls bombings in Armagh while he was at school.			
30:00–39:59	Discusses his childhood anxiety about his father being shot while on duty. Speaks of people he knew who were killed and how such traumatic events became normalised over time. Admired the NI security forces because they were ‘on our side’. Had a close relationship with his mother because they spent a lot of time together when his father was working nights. Explains that she too suffered from anxiety and that his father developed a drink problem. John himself dreamed of joining the army, but was inspired to study geology by his teachers, and ended up doing so at QUB in the late 1970s and early 1980s.			
40:00–49:59	He had a varied friendship group at QUB and enjoyed a range of social activities, but eschewed student politics. University was the first place where he got to know some of his Catholic peers, but reveals that his mother was ‘quite adamant’ that he didn’t date Catholic girls, which he attributes to suspicion, fear and ‘pure prejudice’. His Presbyterian faith remained important to him in Belfast and he			

	recalls finding the ecumenical stance of one local minister towards Catholics 'quite influential'. After graduating in 1982, he decided to pursue postgraduate study at the University of Aberdeen, a career move that his parents supported.
50:00–59:59	He enjoyed meeting new people in Aberdeen, where his friendship group included three Catholic classmates from the ROI. He stayed on in the city after completing his M.Sc and worked as a geologist for an oil company. He also met his wife there, a 'left-wing, feminist, socialist' Londoner, who made him 'rethink quite a lot'. They married in 1986. His parents didn't mind that she wasn't from an Ulster Protestant background. Recalls the 'general suspicion of Irish people' in Britain during the Troubles and the security measures surrounding travel to NI, including a separate area at Heathrow Airport for passengers flying to Belfast.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Describes how exposure to 'the views of other people' changed his self-perception and led him to regard himself as Irish as well as British. When visiting NI, he tended to avoid 'the marching season'. Although his wife experienced some 'culture shock', she enjoyed these visits. After working for the same firm for nine years, he formed an independent company with friends, which operated for a further nine years before they sold it in the late 1990s. Moved to Ayr and then Glasgow in the mid-1990s, following his wife, a doctor, as she did her cardiology training. Says he was apprehensive about moving to Glasgow because its reputation for sectarianism, but encountered little of it. Mentions that he doesn't 'wear any particular allegiance' when it comes to local football rivalries.
01:10:00–01:19:59	As 'a dual passport holder', he is neither a traditional unionist or a nationalist, but sits 'somewhere in between', 'taking advantage of both identities'. Thinks that people can't easily discern his cultural background and that Glaswegians have a 'superficial knowledge' of the NI conflict, which often lacks historical nuance. Finds hope in the younger generation of NI people because their outlook is 'so completely post-Troubles', having grown up with cross-community engagement as the norm. He followed news of the Troubles 'really closely' from Scotland and thinks the British media was more balanced in its reporting and representation of the conflict than the media in NI.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Describes himself as 'pretty left-leaning' and 'mildly pro-Union' in a Scottish context, but no longer considers himself a unionist in NI terms. Says that he is open to Irish reunification if it were based on inclusive democratic principles. Concedes that his heritage makes him suspicious of nationalism in any guise, and goes on to discuss the complexity of his hybrid identity, which includes British, Irish, Scottish, London and European strands, saying that 'we can be all of these and one of them doesn't push out all the others'. He explains that after selling his company he studied programming at Glasgow University and subsequently got a job with the Department for International Development, where he still works. Followed the peace process from afar and welcomed its positive outcome.
01:30:00–01:39:59	Despite his 'difficult' relationship with Orange culture, he admits to harbouring 'a secret love of a country Twelfth' since his childhood. Notes that Glasgow parades are more overtly bigoted than those of his youth in NI. Although his brother and nieces live in Ballymoney, John visits NI infrequently, but thinks it has changed for the better, even if religious and political tensions persist. He doesn't envisage ever living there again, even though his sense of Irishness remains strong. Having spent forty years living away from his native place, he believes that he is now destined to 'feel like a migrant wherever I am'.
01:40:00–01:42:52	Commenting on this oral history project, he stresses how important it has been for him to have his experiences and perspectives recorded. Speaks of the tension he feels between his pride in his father's involvement in the defence of Ulster

	<p>during the Troubles and his awareness that the security forces 'weren't paragons of justice'. Cites the recent autobiography by SDLP politician Seamus Mallon, who was a near neighbour of his parents, to support his view that NI people from diametrically opposed backgrounds could have 'almost identical growing-up experiences', to the extent that they 'almost converge'.</p>
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