

### G13: CHARLES MCERLEAN INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Charles McErlean
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

G13: Charles McErlean	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:32:39	Duration: 01:32:39	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in 1952 in Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, which he describes as ‘very loyalist’ and ‘very separatist’. His mother was a full-time housewife and his father was an engineer in the local Courtaulds factory. Raised a Catholic, he experienced little sectarian animosity when young, although when he was hospitalised with a burst appendix, the nursing staff tried to establish what religion he was. Explains that local nuns would organise boats to take Catholic families to the Isle of Man in advance of the Twelfth of July festivities when he was a child. Recalls an occasion when their return journey to Belfast coincided with the arrival of a ferry carrying a contingent of Scottish loyalists, and the commotion that ensued.			
10:00–19:59	Recalls leaving NI for the Twelfth between 1956 and 1961, after which his family remained in Carrickfergus, which was initially ‘peaceable enough’ during the marching season, but ‘later on it became more [...] nasty’. Says that while his parents didn’t discuss NI politics with him, they did warn him to be circumspect about his Catholic background in certain settlings. Growing up, he had friends from both sides of the community and politics wasn’t an issue between them. Around the Twelfth, however, ‘you had to be on your guard and [...] watch what you did and who you spoke to’. Says he always went to church because ‘that’s just the way it was’.			
20:00–29:59	Explains how the voting process in Carrickfergus could be manipulated to prevent Catholics from casting their ballots. Recalls a relative being shot in a nationalist area of the town and a visit by Ian Paisley, with whom he personally ‘had no axe to grind’. In the main, Charles had no direct encounters with the B-Specials or the IRA. States that most people he knew ‘kind of drifted away, it wasn’t a mass emigration’. Attended secondary school in Belfast, where there would be ‘odd fights at the bus stations’, but nothing directed at him personally. Describes 1960s Belfast as being a more ‘dirty’ and ‘dangerous’ place than Carrickfergus.			
30:00–39:59	Explains that at school he wasn’t ‘terribly academically minded’. Recalls going to discos and occasionally socialising in Belfast at weekends. Describes seeing civil rights protestors being attacked by police at Burntollet Bridge on the outskirts of Derry in January 1969, and being shocked by ‘how violent they were’. Explains that he didn’t ‘take sides’ in the conflict because he ‘didn’t particularly like the guys that were supposed to be on my side’ and ‘certainly wasn’t wild about the other lot’. Offers his thoughts on why the violence in NI never spread to Scotland.			
40:00–49:59	Recalls an incident in the mid-1970s when he and a cousin were asked to leave a pub in Larne because they were assumed by the management to be Catholics. Explains that on leaving school he initially worked in a bank and then the Post Office for thirty years, after which he worked for the Department of Work and Pensions. Suggests that a high proportion of Catholic nationalists left NI during the late 1960s and early 1970s. His own reasons for leaving were to do with poor economic prospects and a disaffection from the prevailing culture of inequality and violence. Claims that it was an accumulation of ‘wee things’ that ultimately			

	pushed him 'over the edge' and led him to emigrate to Glasgow in 1970, where his grandmother and uncle lived.
50:00–59:59	Explains that he found it quite easy to get a job in a Glasgow bank, although he didn't stay in post for long. He initially lived in Kelvindale, where there were 'no knives or bullets or anything like that'. Comments on the inferior quality of Orange bands in the city compared to those he knew in Carrickfergus. Mentions 'the old Celtic-Rangers malarkey', but states that he himself never encountered any trouble in Glasgow, though he always maintained a degree of social vigilance. Offers his thoughts on the entrenched views that are held about sectarian divisions and rivalries in both Scotland and NI.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Thinks that 'sooner or later [...] there will be a united Ireland', which he would welcome. Believes attitudes to Irish unity are changing among some NI unionists. Mentions that he has a daughter who lives and works in Dublin. Recalls a period between working for the bank and joining the Post Office when he was sent on a truck driving course by his local job centre. Explains that while he would watch TV coverage of the Troubles, he was sceptical about its veracity because he thinks British news outlets gave 'the official line' on the conflict. Recalls meeting his Donegal-born wife in Glasgow and marrying her in Scotland in 1987. They have three children.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Recalls being offered a job in Belfast, but his wife did not want to move, believing the city to be too dangerous. States that while he did not engage with Irish cultural organisations in Scotland, he continued to practise his faith. Says his visits to NI are now infrequent. Explains that he 'semi retired' in his mid-fifties, but had to return to work on realising that he had insufficient funds to live on. Ended up working in a DWP call centre for about five years, a job he was 'totally unsuitable for'. Reflects on how Belfast has changed since the peace process and believes that it compares favourably to many English and Scottish cities.
01:20:00–01:32:39	Discusses the heavy policing of Old Firm football matches, which is 'a great waste of money' in his eyes. Although he is a Celtic supporter, he is averse to 'extremist behaviour', such as that exhibited by the self-styled Green Brigade at Celtic Park. Whereas he supports Irish reunification, he is more dubious about Scottish independence and is 'not a big SNP fan'. Describes his national identity as Irish and travels on an Irish passport. On the issue of where he feels he most belongs, he explains that while he thinks of Ireland as home, he has always been careful not to encourage his children to do so, to avoid them developing the 'split personality' that some of his emigrant relations had. Ends by saying that he has good memories of his pre-Troubles youth in Carrickfergus, where the 'sun shone' and he was 'happy'.