

L01: MARTIN SEEDS INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Martin Seeds
Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interview summarisers: Dr Hilary White and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

L01: Martin Seeds	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:11:42	Duration: 01:11:42	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Explains why he wished to be part of this oral history project, noting the dearth of attention to the NI Protestant diaspora. Grew up in ‘a staunchly kind of loyalist Protestant area’ of east Belfast. Family moved to a new housing development in Sydenham while he was still a child. Recalls his father’s various jobs before he became a chemical miller in Short’s aircraft factory. His mother worked in mills, as an assistant in a deaf school and as a cleaner. Describes a ‘vague’ early memory of being in his father’s car when it was stopped by masked men at a barricade, and his father recognising them by name and being allowed to pass.			
10:00–19:59	Describes some of the ‘habits of caution’ bred in him and other NI people as a result of the Troubles. Recalls the ‘massive culture shock’ of moving to London with about five friends in 1986 in his early twenties, after finishing a HND in computer studies. Enjoyed ‘wild and crazy hedonistic times’ there and prospered financially, but felt bitter that such opportunities were denied to him and his generation in NI. Mentions being injured in a car accident as a teenager in NI, which disrupted his education. Describes his shared accommodation in Stepney and his first job as a trainee computer programmer in Islington.			
20:00–29:59	Describes how run-down areas of Stepney and Islington were in the mid-1980s, even as expensive apartments were being built, and how different London was to Belfast in terms of wealth and cultural diversity. Recalls occasions when his NI accent attracted mild suspicion in London, but encountered no hostility in the aftermath of Troubles-related bombings. Admits to softening his accent over time, in order to be better understood. Recalls the dissonance caused by the disjunction between being raised to regard himself as proudly British in NI and then moving to England, where ‘everyone just thinks you’re Irish’.			
30:00–39:59	Explains his aversion to politics and religion, based on his experience of how they divide people in NI. Reveals that he ignored news reports about NI after moving to London and returned only infrequently for family events and to work on photographic projects. Recalls an East End pub that carried a ‘no blacks, no Irish’ sign in the 1980s, which caused him and his NI friends to wonder if it applied to them. Laments the social conformity of NI during his youth, when not being able to ‘stick your head above the parapet’ stifled his desire for adventure.			
40:00–49:59	While the insularity of NI bothered him, and London felt liberating, he admits to feeling guilty in retrospect for thinking himself more ‘worldly-wise’ than those who remained in NI. Describes how his IT career flourished in the 1990s, as he became a freelance consultant in London and also worked for Warner Brothers in L.A. However, he eventually tired of working in IT and abandoned his ‘quite high-end’ lifestyle to pursue a photography degree, which was ‘a big, enormous shift’.			
50:00–59:59	Recalls moving to Brighton to study photography, where his lack of financial worries made him an atypical student. Explains that he refused to work on NI material for the first two years of his degree, but did turn to the Troubles for his final year project, which centred on ‘a search for a lost cultural identity’. Recalls a			

	<p>friend describing his relationship to NI as ‘an unrequited love affair’. States that visits to NI evoke mixed emotions in him, as despite the many positive changes ‘the underbelly of it’s still the same’. He has continued making artwork about NI, including a project based on Ulster county in upstate New York, and regards this trend as part of his ‘coming to terms’ with himself and his history.</p>
01:00:00–01:09:59	<p>Considers how art has helped him to engage with developments in NI and given him an ‘artist’s voice’ to comment on what he sees as ‘universal problems’. Explains that he is interested making art that addresses cultural and political conflicts through the lens of people’s common humanity. He still has friends and family in NI, but is struck by the differences between those who left and those who stayed put, in ‘the way they position issues and talk about the world’. Recalls his initial impressions of London in 1986 and his first encounter with another Irish person, an inebriated labourer on the tube, who revealed that he was illiterate. Comments on his own ‘very strong work ethic’ and sense of self-reliance.</p>
01:10:00–01:11:42	<p>Reflects on how the ‘new possibilities’ London presented to his younger self made failure as likely as success, which taught him the value of resilience and adaptability, qualities he now tries to inculcate in his students.</p>