

G16-SG5: PETER MCGRATH INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Peter McGrath
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

G16-SG5: Peter McGrath	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 02:05:19	Duration: 02:05:19	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born to Catholic parents in Glasgow in 1958 and lived there until the end of his undergraduate degree at Glasgow University, then moved to Birmingham for postgraduate study. His family lived in Partick and then in Knightswood. Explains that his father was from Co. Fermanagh and his mother from Co. Cavan, and they knew each other before emigrating to Scotland. His mother came over around 1945 and his father followed within a few years. His mother was a childminder at first, while his father worked as a bus driver in the city.			
10:00–19:59	Discusses his father’s employment history, culminating in his being promoted to the role of bus inspector, which greatly pleased him. Explains that his mother worked principally in retail and waitressing until her children were born. Says that his understanding of the Irish parts of his parents’ lives was rooted in visiting the places they came from during his upbringing. While Peter grew up feeling more Scottish than Irish, he nevertheless ‘felt part of that whole Irish thing’, which helped him to forge a strong and abiding link to the parental homeland.			
20:00–29:59	Reflecting on his father’s Irish affinities with Glasgow, he notes that his ‘whole family are big Celtic football fans’ and that his father had Scottish friends as well. Although both parents were teetotal, Hogmanay was a time of fulsome family celebrations, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Recalls his father taking him to a couple of Gaelic football games and to watch Celtic play, which would be ‘the most significant social event’ of the week. Catholicism loomed large in his parents’ lives and attendance at mass ‘seemed a natural part of growing up’. Peter remains a regular churchgoer to this day.			
30:00–39:59	Recalls having to change Catholic schools each time his family moved, with positive and negative effects. Explains that there was a competition for boys from his last primary school to go to St Mungo’s Academy in Glasgow, which led to him being awarded one of its cherished scholarships and spending six happy years as a student there. Says that his parents were ‘great encouragers’ of their children’s academic endeavours, so he worked hard at school, including during the years after his father’s death when he was twelve. Played football for the school team and for the boys’ guild.			
40:00–49:59	Explains that in primary school he was unaware of sectarianism, but as he got older he came to understand ‘the Celtic-Rangers thing [...] as a proxy for Catholic-Protestants’. Not until teenage years did he realise that the division was connected to Ireland. Says that his youth revolved around playing football, where it never mattered what religion the children he played with were. Visiting NI after his father died in 1971 felt decidedly different to Glasgow, but not unsafe. By contrast, his older brother had some ‘close shaves’ as his grandmother’s house was close to a police station that was a target of IRA attacks.			
50:00–59:59	He doesn’t recall his father expressing any strong political opinions about the Troubles, although his father was irritated by the presence of British soldiers on Irish streets. Peter suspects his parents’ were nationalists and would have			

	<p>supported Irish unity, but he wasn't aware of this as a child. He started university in 1976 and gradually developed more of an understanding of the Troubles. He identified as an Irish nationalist and attended a Troops Out march in 1977, though his activism didn't extend much beyond that. Makes it clear that he supports Celtic out of a love of football, and while he recognises that some fans were and are staunchly republican and pro-IRA, he 'never felt part of that'. Believes that Celtic fans' understanding of NI politics was largely superficial and that many 'didn't quite know what they were chanting'.</p>
01:00:00–01:09:59	<p>Made annual summer visits to NI and the ROI when younger. Favoured visiting his father's family in Fermanagh because it was in a village and there were other children to play with, whereas his mother's home in Cavan was 'in the middle of nowhere'. The fact that his uncle would make them help out on the farm acted as another deterrent for 'city boys'. He did a lot of socialising and remembers those summers as 'happy times' when he felt 'part of that whole community'. Explains that Fermanagh felt like home, even though they only visited once a year, and people were very welcoming. Says he is now quite content to consider himself Scottish and British, though he still feels an 'Irish sense of identity' through his parents. He obtained an Irish passport in the wake of the Brexit referendum.</p>
01:10:00–01:19:59	<p>While he has no immediate plans to live in Ireland, acquiring a passport was 'a symbolic gesture' and 'a manifestation of a sense of Irish identity'. Recalls the lax customs checks when crossing the border between Fermanagh and Cavan in the 1960s and how they changed following the onset of the Troubles. Notes that when he visited NI with college friends in the late 1980s and 1990s, further changes were occurring as the border gradually became more demilitarised and less noticeable. Says that as 'Christian people' his parents did not condone IRA violence nor does he remember them expressing anti-unionist views.</p>
01:20:00–01:29:59	<p>Reflects on how violence in NI became entrenched during the 1970s and 1980s and spilled over in to England, but not Scotland. Explains that he studied English literature and history at Glasgow University, and while he continued to live at home, he became fully immersed in university life. Returns to his memories of taking part in a Troops Out rally in Glasgow in 1977 and says that the 'absolutely horrible' tension and 'acute' fear of violence deterred him from participating in future protests.</p>
01:30:00–01:39:59	<p>Explains that he undertook postgraduate study in industrial relations in Birmingham in 1980-81 and subsequently worked there and in Luton and Liverpool, before deciding to move back to Scotland in 1987. Reveals that his two children also chose to study away from home, his son in Manchester and his daughter in New York, which he thinks is 'good for them'. Reflecting on his time in England, he says that it was only in Birmingham that he socialised in Irish circles, as his father's brother owned a pub in the Sparkbrook area. More generally, he observes that 'the whole point of me moving away was to sort of be myself and find my own way and identity'. Says that he continued to visit Ireland during this time, albeit less frequently than before.</p>
01:40:00–01:49:59	<p>Explains that he still feels drawn to Ireland and to his many cousins in NI and the ROI. Recalls buying a flat in Glasgow soon after his return in 1987 and meeting and marrying his wife, who comes from Kirkintilloch. The fact that her family is Presbyterian meant that their marriage ceremony was co-celebrated by a Catholic priest and a Church of Scotland minister. Reveals that they decided to raise their two children not as Catholics but as Christians who respect 'both traditions'. States that in it was important to him that his children knew where</p>

	their grandparents came from and that they were aware of 'some of the difficulties that Irish people had when they came to [...] the west of Scotland'.
01:50:00–01:59:59	Explains that by the time his wife and children visited Ireland around the turn of the millennium it was a much changed country, north and south. As regards his national identity, he states that he's 'a bit of a mongrel', being equally aware of his Scottish and Irish identities. Says that he doesn't deny his Britishness, but would identify as Scottish and Irish before identifying as British. Says that he took a keen interest in the 1990s peace process and continues to follow politics closely now that he is retired. Admits that he would support Irish reunification and thinks that 'in time it will be realised'.
02:00:00–02:05:19	Explains that he is 'not ideologically opposed to independence for Scotland', but remains uncertain about what the economic consequences might be. Says that, with the passing of the older generations, his emotional ties to Ireland have diminished somewhat over time, yet he still looks forward to visiting it and still thinks of it as home, and believes that he will do so for the rest of his life.