INTERVIEW L14: JIM O'HARA

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Jim O'Hara
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Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type.

FR: So just to start this rolling, I don't know if, usually I would start by asking you to say your name, but obviously if you would prefer to not identify yourself by name.

JOH: I'll see how the, I'll see how it goes.

FR: Okay, okay, so we're, I won't, I won't say it either. If you could maybe just say today's date, but I don't actually know what it is.

JOH: I don't know what it is.

FR: [laughs] Neither do I.

JOH: Is it, is the ninth?

FR: It's the ninth, yeah.

JOH: Ninth of March.

FR: Okay, just so that I've got an identifying thing, so that I know which one it was.

JOH: Yeah, sure, yeah.

FR: Alright, well, thanks very much for agreeing to do this.

JOH: No problem.

FR: So we'll start with talking about growing up in Northern Ireland. So first of all, where are you from?

JOH: From Belfast, from Ardoyne to be specific and I lived there until I was twenty, twenty-one or twenty-two, I've forgotten, twenty-one or twenty-two, and then came over here.

FR: Okay, and what sort of place was that to grow up?

JOH: [laughs] It was a hard place to grow up. I grew up in Ardoyne, my parents had a pub in Ardoyne and though we did, we lived, we didn't actually live in, if you know Ardoyne, I don't know if you do or not.

FR: A little.

JOH: Well, we didn't actually live in the centre of Ardoyne, we actually lived on the Woodville Road, which is in Ardoyne, but it's, it's the top of the Woodville Road, where the Woodville Road and the Crumlin Road, if you know, if you know that area, where the Woodville Road and the Crumlin Road meet.

FR: Yeah, I do.

JOH: Yeah, right opposite what used to be called the Ardoyne shops, which became a flashpoint for many, many years, and I lived in the third house from the end, which was a very vulnerable place during the Troubles because it was on the right-hand side, if you looked at it you had Ardoyne, which of course is a hundred per cent Catholic, and the left-hand side you had Twaddell Avenue, which was a hundred per cent Protestant, and so we lived in the apex, and I went to school in Ardoyne for a very, for a very short period, but then my mother took me out, rightly cos I was only going for half a day, and I went to the Christian Brothers then in Donegall Street in Belfast and then subsequently to the Christian Brothers on the Falls Road, the grammar school there, St Mary's. So that's where I was brought up.

FR: And your parents were publicans did you say?

JOH: My parents were, yeah, nationalist, republicans, yeah.

FR: Oh sorry, sorry, I misspoke, they ran a pub.

JOH: Yeah, oh I thought you said republican [laughs]. Well, as it so happened most of the pubs in Northern Ireland actually were run by Catholics, most of them would have been certainly nationalists and probably republicans as well, yeah, yeah.

FR: And they ran a pub, did you live above the pub?

JOH: No, no, no, that's what I'm saying, we didn't.

FR: Okay, no.

JOH: No, the pub was in Ardoyne, but we lived on the Woodville Road, which is, which is the top part, it's part of Ardoyne, but it's, it's not part of the enclave, if you know Ardoyne, Ardoyne's actually an enclave, and we were, while we were in Ardoyne we were slightly outside, when I say slightly, I mean, I'm talking about thirty yards, you know, but there was

a, there was the distinction between which side of the Crumlin Road you came from, if you know that area, yeah.

FR: And so–

JOH: But it was a, Ardoyne was a hard place, it was a tough place to grow up as a kid, there was a lot of, there was a lot of social violence, you know, there was a lot of violence in households, domestic violence–

FR: Domestic violence.

JOH: Yeah, a lot of domestic violence, it was a tough place, it was, people were tough on it, you know, in Belfast and you were aware of that as a kid growing up, you know.

FR: And this is before the Troubles had really started?

JOH: Oh this is before the Troubles, yeah, this is before the Troubles, yeah, and there was also of course the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, the Catholics who lived in Ardoyne, the Protestants then who lived at, the Woodville Road is an extension of the Shankill Road, so at the bottom of the Woodville Road and Woodville Park you had the, you had, you know, a big Protestant population, you know, so you were always very conscious with that like, we used to go down with hurling sticks, down to play hurling, but we were always very conscious that if there was a big crowd of guys we'd be chased because we were playing hurling, which we were.

FR: Cos the hurling stick is a signifier or a–?

JOH: Yeah, cos the hurling, the hurling stick signified who you were, you know, so you were, even as a nine- or a ten- or a twelve-year-old, you were very, you were always conscious of the, of the political, religious divide, and very conscious of the fact that, and certainly my parents were, my mother's from Roscommon, my father was from County Antrim, very conscious of the fact that the state was not your state, or the police were not your police, the government was not your government, so you were very conscious of that, yeah, right from a very early age, so it was a, it was a, an odd sort of place, you know, your allegiance was not, were not, your allegiances were not to the established authorities and to the established regime, and you knew that from a very early age, which was made, then made much more apparent when you went to the Christian Brothers and you were doing history with that point of view–

FR: Okay.

FR: Yeah, and the whole ethos, you know, of GAA and going to church and going to mass and being an altar boy, and I was an altar boy in Ardoyne, all these, all these things added to your, to your sense of identity, so you knew very, you knew very early on where your identity lay and it was an identity which was antagonistic to the establishment, you know.

FR: Yeah, and so, we sort of misspoke about this before, but would your parents then have been political.

JOH: Not, not in the sense of a political party, they supported the old Nationalist Party, my father was friendly with Harry Diamond, you may have heard of Harry Diamond, and I think he may have known Joe Devlin actually as well, I can't actually remember.

FR: Wow.

JOH: Yeah, but there were certainly sort of, I mean, they were supporters of the Nationalist Party, whether they were members, my father might have been a member, I can't remember, my mother wasn't, but they were political in the sense that it was a political household, we discussed politics a lot, but at that time the only party was the old Nationalist Party who were pretty useless, most of the time, but then again they were in an impossible situation, you know, in Stormont as it was then.

FR: It's an imbalance, it's a fundamentally imbalanced state, that's the way it was created.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, and that's the way it was, so my parents were, yeah, we were very conscious politically, and we would have had loads of political discussions, as were all my relatives as well, yeah, so it was a political environment and I think that's probably true of a lot of families, I would have thought.

FR: I suppose it's hard not to be political when politics is kind of–

JOH: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah.

FR: Forced upon you in, yeah.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and like, I, from an early age I knew I had to go to university, even though, without even knowing what university was, my mother and father kept saying to me, you've got to go to university.

FR: Ah that's interesting.

JOH: The way to get ahead is through education, education, education, university, that's your goal, university, and indeed at school, the Brothers, Christian Brothers told us from a very early age as well. Like, when I went to, when I went to Queen's and out of my A-level class I think we were about thirty-eight and I think about thirty-two or thirty-three went to university, mostly to Queen's, cos in those days unfortunately everybody just went to Queen's, you know, which was very much a Protestant university then, but my point is that my parents knew that, or inculcated in me, the idea that you had to go, education was the way through, cos in those days in Northern Ireland like, I was the first one in my extended family, I mean, all my cousins, first cousins, second cousins, of whom there were many, I was the first one to go to university, first one to get a degree and then others subsequently followed on from that, and, and that, but because up until then like, most middle-class Catholics tended to be, they were beginning to get into the professions, but not, and

Catholics did go, as I'm sure you know, Catholics went to Catholic lawyers, and you went to a Catholic dentist, and they went to a Catholic doctor, that's how it was, but there weren't all that many of them, and most of my family were either publicans or hoteliers or restauranteurs because that, and the other one, although my family weren't involved, were bookies, so you tended to find that virtually all the bookies, a lot of the pubs, and a lot of hotels were run by Catholics, cos those were, of my parents' vintage, those were the occupations people went into.

FR: Those were the available occupations–

JOH: They were the available occupations, and then with my generation, we started to break through then into the professions, so a lot of my contemporaries who, **[00:10:00]** and I came over to London, most of contemporaries stayed in Belfast, but they became dentists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, so that was that generation coming through at the end of the sixties, you know, which coincided more or less with civil rights.

FR: That's right, yeah. Just, just to go back slightly, you mentioned that you were an altar boy.

JOH: I was an altar boy, yeah.

FR: So a religious family as well.

JOH: Oh yeah, very, my mother was very religious, yeah. My father was religious, but less so, yeah, but we were, yeah, we were a very religious family, yeah.

FR: And that's a big part of the kind of social calendar, yeah.

JOH: Yeah, very much so, yeah, yeah, yeah, very much so, yeah, we used to say the family rosary, when people came to the house and before they left my mother would say a decade of the rosary and so used to kneel down [laughs], say the rosary, which is unheard of these days, but there was no harm, didn't do us any harm [laughs], bit boring at times [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Yeah, when you're young I suppose, and you also mentioned the GAA and kind of Gaelic games, hurling.

JOH: Yeah, well, of course, those were the only games you could play, the ban was on–

FR: Of, okay.

JOH: So we weren't allowed to play Gaelic football or hurling, weren't allowed to play, sorry, soccer, soccer, rugby, cricket because the GAA ban was, the GAA ban wasn't lifted until, when was the GAA ban lifted, GAA ban wasn't lifted till about seventy-, I can't remember, '76 maybe or something like that.

FR: So this, is this a ban in schools, to stop schools–?

JOH: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, throughout the whole GAA.

FR: Okay.

JOH: The Gaelic Athletic Association had an article in its constitution which banned you from playing foreign games, now foreign games didn't mean, didn't mean playing pelota, foreign games meant English games, effectively it meant soccer, rugby and cricket, I don't know about hockey, I'm not sure about hockey, but the, but that, but those were the three, and we tried to form a soccer club in my sixth form, which we did actually and we were called in by the headmaster and told very quickly to disband.

FR: Wow.

JOH: Yeah, by Brother Murphy as he then was, he's dead now, and, and I was banned from the, I played for Kickhams in Ardoyne, GAA, after, both at school, I played at school, but also I played for Ardoyne, Ardoyne had a GAA club, still does, called Kickham after Charles Kickham, one of the founders of the GAA and indeed of the IRB, but, and then I went to a soccer match actually, Distillery, I used to go and watch Distillery playing up the Grosvenor Road and somebody reported me to the, to Kickhams and I was banned for two weeks I think or something, or a month.

FR: And just for spectating, that was?

JOH: Yeah, for going to the soccer match, yeah, yeah, and that ban, that ban remained in place until probably the mid-seventies, and of course there was another one which banned policemen.

FR: Yes, yeah, I know about that one.

JOH: And that wasn't lifted until about fourteen years ago.

FR: That's right, that's right, yeah.

JOH: Fifteen years ago, something like that, you know, yeah.

FR: That's really interesting, I know the, I remember when I lived in Dublin there was a big controversy about no foreign games in Croke Park, because they wanted to play a soccer match or something in Croke Park.

JOH: Yeah, that's right, yeah.

FR: But I didn't realise that it extended to the kind of amateur participation.

JOH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, throughout the whole country, yeah, so that's, but interestingly enough, it was stupid in a way, because in the Northern Ireland the Christian Brothers, in all the Christian Brothers schools in Northern Ireland you didn't play soccer, rugby or cricket, but if you were down in Cork like, one of the best rugby schools in Cork is CBS Cork,

Christian Brothers School in Cork, where they did play rugby, despite the fact that was a GAA town [laughs], so it was a dichotomy, and then I actually, I always fancied playing rugby, so when I went to Queen's I didn't know anybody who played rugby, so I didn't join the rugby club, I joined the GAA club in Queen's, but then I was at a party one night and I was getting some drinks and it was a Friday night actually at the Cliftonville Road I remember, and I was, there was a guy beside me and I said do you, do you want a beer, and I was getting a beer and he said no, no, I'm not drinking he said, I'm playing rugby tomorrow, and this was very much a Catholic party, you know, in those days there were Catholic parties and Protestant parties [laughs], but anyway, so I said oh you're playing rugby, I said God, I said I've always fancied playing rugby and he said, I said who do you play for, he said I play for Bangor, I said I've always fancied it, but I've never played it, so he said why don't you come down on Tuesday night to training, so I went down on Tuesday night to training, to Bangor, and this guy, this guy was a very nice fellow called Tom Kelly, used to, or his father ran Kelly's wine stores in Belfast.

FR: I know Kelly's wine stores, I do.

JOH: Do you, well, his father, Tom's father, ran that, but anyway, Tom was the son, so I went down and I joined Bangor rugby club and I became either the second or third Catholic in Bangor rugby club, which was, I was very nervous about joining, but having said that, this was in nineteen sixty, when was this, sixty-, I don't know, '63, '64, something like that, I was received so well in a very Protestant environment, middle-class environment, but, I mean, I was very conscious and nervous, (a) because I'd never played rugby, I didn't want to make a balls of it, and secondly because I was going into a very alien environment for me, you know, from a completely Catholic GAA background going into more or less a ninety-nine per cent Protestant environment, which I hadn't been used to, but the people in Bangor rugby club were terrific, couldn't have been more welcoming and I've kept the contacts and some of my best friends are now guys that I've known back then and I see regularly when I go back to, go back to Northern Ireland.

FR: That's really interesting.

JOH: What?

FR: That's really interesting, that–

JOH: Yeah, yeah, no, it was, and actually I got another friend of mine to join then as well, so he joined, so he became the, so the [laughs], we were, we were unusual, in fact, we had a, we had a mismove, I don't know, do you play rugby?

FR: I played it at school, aye.

JOH: Yeah, well, we had a, we had one move. I used to play centre, outside centre, and we had a, we had a mismove, missed, missed the inside centre, straight out to the outside centre, but anyway, it was called the Fenian [laughs], that was the call, the Fenian [laughs].

FR: [laughs] So, the, your, your Catholicness was, people were conscious of it, even in a light-hearted–

JOH: Oh yeah, very common, but then there was never a problem–

FR: It wasn't a joke, it was a–

JOH: Never a problem, never a problem, the only time it was a problem once I remember being in a pub and somebody came in collecting for Paisley and this, this was, this was after, after, this is after '66 when Ward had been shot, you know, the barman, the barman–

FR: Yes, Peter Wa-, Peter Ward.

JOH: Peter Ward, and somebody came into the pub and started collecting, and I was with a bunch of the rugby guys, and I don't know if it was because I was there or not, but anyway nobody gave him any money, but I was very conscious of that and they didn't come up to me, cos I wouldn't have given any money, but the other guys just told him to go away, now whether they did it because of me, or whether they would have done it anyway I don't know, but it avoided any embarrassment to it.

FR: I'm trying to think, so, just still thinking about growing up on the Woodville Road, you're an altar boy, you play, it seems like you were quite sporty.

JOH: I was, yeah.

FR: And then, what else was the kind of social life like as a kid, do you have neighbour, friends with neighbours, friends with–?

JOH: Oh yeah, very friendly, yeah, yeah, they had lots of, lots of families, you know, the Woodville Road at that time, the top half of the Woodville Road was mainly Catholic, not exclusively, but, it was mixed, but they'd be mostly Catholics until you got, until you got about a third of the way down and then it changed completely, then it became completely Protestant, so yeah, yeah, I had loads of friends and of course then school friends, you know, from St Mary's whom are, whom are still in Belfast and whom I see quite, see quite regularly whenever I go home, yeah, so socially it was a good, it was a good time, yeah, and going to Queen's was great, I mean, I had a great time in Queen's, I really enjoyed it, yeah, I mean, university was great, really enjoyed it.

FR: So you went to the Christian Brothers grammar school.

JOH: In those days it was down the Falls Road, Divis Street, beside the, beside, beside Divis Flats.

FR: Aye, okay.

JOH: Right next door to Divis Flats, in those days there were three or four flats, there's only one now.

FR: There's only the one big tower block now, but there used to be the, yeah.

JOH: Used to be four, was it four I think, yeah, yeah, so that was, that's where St Mary's was, it's now, it's now up the Glen Road.

FR: Okay, and what was, what was that like as a place to go to school?

JOH: It was, it was tough, **[00:20:00]** yeah, I mean, the Brothers were tough, I mean, far too tough, I mean, brutal. When I say Brothers they weren't necessarily all Brothers, half would have been Brothers maybe, half were lay people, and they used the strap, I mean, they did in primary school as well, they used the strap, the leather strap, a lot, and not for insolence, or not for disobedience, cos nobody was disobedient, I mean, the Brothers ruled like a, with a rod of iron, but no, but for getting things wrong, you know, we were, you know, we had a French form, my French is very good, still is, but we used to get a vocabulary, that guy would, Woodman was his name, I'd say, I don't remember, I think he's, may have died now, but he'd be [laughs], he wasn't well liked, he'd go to the start, the index at the back and take one line, everything beginning with A, you know, and you had to learn that, and then as soon as he walked in, round the class, what's the word for a table in French, so, you know, I mean, if you'd said *un table* instead of *une table*, out, out, so he'd have half the class out, bang, you'd get two, two whacks, same thing with doing maths homework, and that, and that was the primary school and the secondary school, and that went all the way through. There were a couple of, couple of teachers who didn't do it, but most of them used the strap, yeah, and mainly for getting things wrong, so, you know, and we used to cower and there was no restaurant, there was no canteen or anything like, at lunchtime you brought your piece as it was called, your sandwich, and you had to go out cos the classrooms were closed, regardless of the rain or the cold or snow, you were out, so you'd huddle in corners, or if you had French that afternoon you were learning your French vocab, so it was tough, yeah, it was hard, it was too hard. I would not have wanted my, I've got two sons, I would not have wanted my two sons to go through that. Sometimes you got six and they'd hit you on the wrists, you know, and your wrists would come up, and of course you never said a word to anybody, but it stopped after about the third, the third, when I say stopped, it more or less stopped after about the third form, and we had some very good teachers like, our Latin, our Latin, I did Latin in sixth form and my Latin master was a, was a real classics scholar. We were reading Horace and Cicero and Catullus, Virgil, and when I, I did actually Latin for one year at Queen's, cos in those days you took a subsidiary subject, and I could, our Latin, when we went up to Queen's our Latin was way ahead of people who were coming from, you know, the so-called elite, Methody and Campbell and Inst., the so-called great, you know, big schools, and Christian Brothers was sort of down, and our Latin, I mean, I remember, Michael Grant was the professor at Queen's, a very good Latin scholar, a classical scholar, and I remember he said Janey, you've read Virgil, you've read Horace, I said oh yeah, yeah, did that at school [laughs], so there were some very good teachers, but on the other hand there was a brutality. Now having said that, I mean, about, there's six of us, seven of us actually, meet up and we were all in the same class, about three of them are lawyers and two of them are dentists and one guy became a teacher and we were discussing whether it actually, whether the beatings had actually harmed us and we all agreed that it hadn't, us, none of us were actually affected by it, you know, we're not hung

up about it, but it shouldn't have happened, having said that, but it didn't do us any damage, psychologically or mentally, but it did do a couple of boys, yeah, I know that, there were a few other boys in the class who were really terrified, one of them developed a stammer, really as a result of what the Brothers did, you know, so it was hard, yeah, it was hard at the beginning, but then after you got to the fourth and fifth year, then you got older, you know.

FR: Yeah, it's interesting the kind of combination of that discipline with the kind of focus on education that you were describing earlier.

JOH: Yeah, oh before, yeah, I was, yeah.

FR: You've got these two things.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, there's a big emphasis on doing well in your, it was called the seniors, it's GCSE now, yeah, and then, and then your A-levels, you know, getting, at class you had to do well and this was drummed into you by the Brothers, and of course nobody complained about the Bro-, cos it was a good school, I mean, I mean, it was a good school in the sense that results were very good, you know, cos there was one boy, his mother came down to complain, he'd been hit by the Brothers and she went down to complain [laughs], and there was Murphy, the same guy who banned the soccer club, and Murphy just said well, Mrs Doherty, if you don't like it, you know, there's always, you can always take your son away, and of course nobody took their son away from the Christian Brothers, cos it was the only grammar school, well, there was, no, there was St Malachy's, there were only two grammar schools in Belfast, St Mary's Christian Brothers and St Malachy's, and they were the two schools, nobody went to a Protestant school. Now loads of Catholics go to Methody and Inst. and all the rest of it, but no, you would never take your, no mother or father would take their son away from the Christian Brothers, you know, so the Brother, the Brother, and they never said that either, you never said that, you were, you just got six whacks that maybe you didn't deserve, you know.

FR: You just–

JOH: You just put up with it, yeah, *c'est la vie* [laughs].

FR: [laughs] And this is, it was, it's a single sex school obviously?

JOH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah, oh God no, girls were forbidden [laughs].

FR: [laughs] And would there have been any opportunity to meet girls then, when you were getting to like, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen?

JOH: At school, never, or no, except a couple of times, you know, the Brothers, God they'd, they arrived, they had arranged a dance I remember at Ashfield House and we went up there, smelling of Old Spice and God knows what [laughs], and all these girls were there, I don't think I'd ever met a Protestant girl, and we were terrified [laughs]. I mean, it was interesting, I know that we enjoyed it, but it was very frightening, so awkward and clumsy

and embarrassing, lacking in confidence and all the rest of it, you know [laughs]. There were very few, very few opportunities, it wasn't till I went to Queen's, started going to the Saturday night hop as they called it, Saturday night dance, you know, that's when you started to meet different Catholic and Protestant girls, you know.

FR: Well, so Queen's is interesting, so you, you did your A-levels or the equivalent of A-levels and as you said, Queen's was really the only option, or it felt like the only option?

JOH: Well, you know, nobody ever thought, nobody in my group, and there were over thirty of us, we went up in a big gang up to Queen's, you know, like, it seemed like a big gang, we all went to Queen's. On reflection, I'd much, I would have liked, had I thought about it, but there was no career, we had no careers teacher or anything like that, you know, so you just sort of went to Queen's, you know, I would have liked to have gone to Trinity maybe or, probably Trinity actually, or UCD or something like that on reflection, but never even came into, entered my head, or anybody else's head, everybody just went to Queen's, you know.

FR: Yeah, and what did you, what did you study?

JOH: History.

FR: History.

JOH: Yeah.

FR: With Latin as a subsidiary?

JOH: I did Latin for one year as subsidiary, yeah, I enjoyed Latin actually, I even thought of continuing it, which I didn't do.

FR: And you d-, are you still living at home when you go to Queen's, you're still living with your parents?

JOH: No, no, no, well, I did for about a few months, then moved out, yeah.

FR: Okay, and where did you move to?

JOH: Moved up to, up the Malone Road, around Wellesley Avenue, I lived with some guys, and had a flat there.

FR: Friends from school?

JOH: One of them was, the others were people that I met, friends of friends, quite a few, I met quite a few guys from St Pat's, Armagh, who lived around the Armagh area, so, so we, we shared a flat together.

FR: And so what was that, what was the atmosphere like in Queen's, what–?

JOH: Oh great, yeah, yeah, great atmosphere, great fun, great freedom, we all went mad, got called in most of us by the tutors at Christmas and said if we continued like, I mean, I was called in, if I continued like this I'd be thrown out at the end of the first year, cos we weren't used to this freedom, I mean, you know, the Christian Brothers like, if you had homework to do you did it and by God you did it well, and then to go to Queen's and, it didn't seem to matter if you handed in an essay or not, you know, this is great [laughs], or if you went to a lecture, nobody bothered, I thought Christ, great fun, about half a dozen guys were, no, they weren't, they weren't kicked out, but they had to do resits in September.

FR: I suppose after the discipline of the Christian Brothers, like you say, it's a–

JOH: After the discipline of the Christian Brothers it was, this was, this was heaven, you know, but there was a reckoning at the end of it [laughs], but no, Queen's was great, Queen's was really good, yeah, I enjoyed Queen's, made a lot of friends, Catholic and Protestant **[00:30:00]** friends at Queen's, you know, so it opened my eyes a bit, yeah, well, socially it was great fun, yeah.

FR: And that was the norm was it, this kind of mixing, Protestant, Catholic mixing at Queen's, there wasn't–?

JOH: Well, I say mixing like, there was mixing, but there, there were, there were tensions, you know, as well, we had a, we formed a thing called the New Ireland Society, which was an attempt to bring the political situation, I mean, Queen's is very much a Protestant university and we were very conscious of this, by the way, and it was very traditional in many ways like, like, girls weren't allowed up the main steps of the union, they had to go round the side steps.

FR: I didn't know, is that right?

JOH: No, yeah, well, any girl who walked up was jeered and, I mean, it was terrible when I look back on it now, they all, people would be out smoking and all the rest of it, and then if a girl tried to walk up the front steps there'd be jeers and cat calls and saying ahh, ooh.

FR: That's wild, I'd never heard that.

JOH: So most women didn't, most girls didn't, to avoid all the cat calls and things, you know, I mean, it was terrible, so sexist looking back on it. They only did away with that until, that lasted until about 1968 or something, you know [laughs], but there was an attempt to bring politics into it, yeah, and of course the New Ireland Society was, was, I mean, Eamonn McCann was involved in that, and the guy, he's dead now, what was he called, Bowes Egan, a fella called Bowes Egan, I'm not sure you've heard of him, he went to St MacNissi's College, and McCann was there and Austin Currie was there, Currie was a couple of years older than the rest of us, and then there was another, then there was the Unionist Society, John Taylor, you know John Taylor who's now Lord whatever his name is, Lord, he was shot, he was shot in the chin, but survived, what's his name, I've forgotten his name, Lord somebody or other, John, John Taylor, I'm sure you've heard of the name, he was running the Unionist Association there, so there were, there were certainly conflicts there, yeah, and

not, no, when I say conflicts, I mean, there was, I don't mean physical conflicts, but then the civil rights movement began as well and, and that sort of infiltrated as well, you know.

FR: And were you involved in that then, the civil rights movement?

JOH: I was yeah, yeah, I went to meetings and marches, etcetera in the early days, but I come over here then in sixty-, I came over here in sixty-, '68, wasn't it, yeah, I think, I think it was '68, yeah, came over, '67, '68, '68 I think it was, yeah, but it was, it was the beginning of the civil rights movement, yeah, the civil rights movement I think was formed in '66, I think it was '66, yeah.

FR: And Queen's was quite central for–

JOH: Queen's, yeah, they, yeah, they, coming from the background you came from, not everybody, cos a very good friend of mine, one of my best friends never got involved at all, never wanted to get involved, so there were a few people who never wanted, but most people, yeah, felt, felt an obligation, and certainly I did, yeah, coming from my background, to get involved, yeah, and, well, I mean, we knew it was unjust, an unjust system and, I mean, it's the old story, it linked in with the Martin, we were watching Martin Luther King, we were marching, the Americans, watching the civil rights movement in America, watching the student movements throughout, throughout the rest of Europe and certainly that was an inspiration, yeah, and it was the, it was, it was the era of, it was the, it was a great era, I mean, from the music, you know, as well, you know, and it was 'make love not war' and the Prague Spring and it was a great time to be twenty-one, and all that permeated across in Northern Ireland, yeah, and there was, yeah, Jesus, these people were doing this in America, in France, in Czechoslovakia as it then was, you know, and other parts, so, you know, we've got to do something and that was the, one of the things actually I felt about my parents' generation, although I understand the reasons as well, is when they complained about the state and the discrimination that went on like, I'm not just talking about my parents, I'm talking about my parents' generation, they objected to it and they didn't like it, but they didn't actually do anything about it, and the old Nationalist Party was a useless party actually in many ways as well, so you had that sense of, well, Christ, you know, you did nothing, or they did nothing about it, so when you're twenty-one, twenty-two, or whatever age, early twenties, that we were going to do something about it, which is what happened.

FR: No, that makes sense.

JOH: Yeah.

FR: I was going to ask about, knowing that you're a historian and, or have been a historian, a history teacher and lecturer, what was the history syllabus like at Queen's? Did you, did it feel unionist or statist or contemporary?

JOH: Yeah, it did, I mean, well, I had J.C., you may have heard of him, Jim Beckett.

FR: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JOH: Yeah, he was my, he was my professor. He was a very nice man, although he wasn't head of department, Michael Roberts actually, who was a European historian, and while I, while I specialised in Irish history, I say specialise, I mean, there were more courses, but it, it wasn't so specialised that you went down the, it's just you did you more courses in Irish history, you know, and Jim Beckett, Jim Beckett was a unionist, but he was, he was a, you know, a moderate unionist who tried to be as impartial as he could be, but it was, it was, it was a very conservative type of Irish history, I mean, he was a nice man and all the rest of it, but, I don't know if you've read any of his, any of his books–

FR: Aye, yeah, yeah.

JOH: He did that, *The Making* I think, *The Making of Modern Ireland*–

FR: I think that's the, yeah–

JOH: That was Jim Beckett's book, you know, and it was a very conservative political type of history, you know, as most history was then, you know, social movements and all that were not really dealt with very much, or indeed economic movements for that matter, so it was, it gave me an insight into Irish history and made me more curious about it and to read more about it and to be more analytical in my approach, and some of us would get together and say Jesus, you know, he says this and what about, you know, he's leaving out things [indecipherable], so we were, it developed our critical faculties because we thought that, obviously coming from a different background to that, his analysis tended to be much more a conservative analysis, you know, trying to be impartial at the same time, he was, I mean.

FR: Of course, and that's the–

JOH: As was his responsibility.

FR: Exactly, right.

JOH: But then they were, you'd all that bunch of historians like Owen Dudley, not Owen, he's the son, Robin, Robin Dudley Edwards in Dublin, whom I knew very well, I mean, I know Ruth, I know Ruth Dudley Edwards very well, but, I mean, I knew Robin, Robin Dudley Edwards, Jim Beckett, but yeah, I used to go to historical conferences, which were great craic, and you'd watch Robin Dudley Edwards running around chasing the female students, but there were a group of them, T.D. Williams was another one, and Nolan, Kevin Nolan of Trinity, but they're all very conservative Irish historians, and they all came out of a, they're all part of a, the same group, the same clique really, you know, but they dominated Irish history teaching for a long time.

FR: Yeah, up until–

JOH: Up until probably the late seventies, yeah, I mean, Lyons, Lyons then produces, although at first he produced that *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland*, which was a bit different, and then, then of course he did *Ireland Since the Famine*, etcetera, and he was a bit different, yeah, although still coming from a fairly conservative background as well, you

know, but there were, you know, the new generation of Irish historians, well, certainly when I was studying history, they weren't there, you know, they didn't exist.

FR: No, it's interesting just to think about studying Irish history at the same time as the civil rights movement happening and the way that those things are kind of informing one another.

JOH: Yeah, they did, yeah, and certainly there was a, there was a dichotomy there between you, we, our generation coming up, particularly those of us studying history, and it was also a dichotomy with the other Protestants who were studying Irish history as well, they didn't feel that same sense of radicalisation that we, we had, you know, people who were coming from BRA or Methody or people like that, you know, or from, or from those schools, those types of schools, you know, tended not to, we had good discussions, that was the good thing about Jim Beckett, he did encourage discussion, you know.

FR: Okay. I've got, I've got two questions, so first of all you were saying earlier that your parents' generation didn't, **[00:40:00]** weren't able to find a political solution to their problems with the Northern Irish state because the Nationalist Party was not a very useful party and because they didn't really undertake any kind of direct action like, like the civil rights movement. Would you have talked to your parents about your involvement in civil rights?

JOH: Yes, yeah, we did, yeah, I did.

FR: And they, and how did they–?

JOH: Oh no, they were very supportive, yeah, yeah, and they encouraged, yeah, they encouraged that, and they didn't go on marches and things themselves at that stage, but yeah, no, they were supportive of that and they felt, yeah, that things needed to be done and, you know, we're behind, or certainly, you know, morally they were behind it, yeah, as were most of my relations as well, yeah, because my cousins and other people who were involved, yeah.

FR: And then the other question, sorry this is slightly unrelated, I think I read a brief biography of you on the website for the cultural centre which said that you're interested in trad music and folk music.

JOH: Yeah, yeah.

FR: And I interviewed someone recently who also went to Queen's at a similar time to you and she talked very enthusiastically about the kind of folk music scene in Belfast.

JOH: Yeah, it was great, yeah, yeah, it was great, yeah, both, both in Queen's, although there didn't tend to be all that much folk music actually in, in Queen's itself, but round the pubs there were, yeah, and, yeah, I used to go there and it was the period of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem and then the Dubliners, and so you used to learn off the songs and have great sing-songs, so the, it was really the revival of Irish music, I mean, whether

you'd say, whether you'd call traditional Irish music as different, you know, the Clancy Brothers were, you know, wore the white sweaters and all of the rest of it [laughs], but nevertheless it was great, you know, it was great and to go along and hear the Dubliners and to hear Irish songs sung with such gusto, which hadn't been the case. My mother and father were very much into music, but it was people like John McCormack, you know that, that more traditional type of Iri-, and have you heard of Brendan O'Dowda, you know, that would sing like, they sang songs like 'Pretty Molly Brannigan' and 'The Star of County Down', 'The Mountains of Mourne', but then the Dubliners were more earthy in the, you know, they were singing a different type of song, you know, and, and it was great, yeah, and that was, that was also important, even politically that was important, to hear Irish songs sung and, and being broadcast and, and people listening to it and coming on the radio and sometimes on television as well, so there was a very thriving, yeah, musical scene, yeah, in Belfast, and we used to go to other places actually as well, we used to go to, down to Newcastle, County Down and things whenever, if the Dubliners were playing, you know, you'd travel, you'd actually drive twenty or thirty miles to go and hear them, you know, so it was, yeah, it was, it was good.

FR: It's all this kind of interesting sixties atmosphere in Belfast with civil rights and with folk music and things like that, but then the beginning of the, of the conflict starts to change everything I suppose.

JOH: It does, yeah, it does and, and, I mean, there was a lot of turbulence then from, you know, but yeah, you know, people date it to sort of the October march in Derry, you know, October '68, but there was a lot of, a lot of stu-, there was a lot of stuff went on before that in Ardoyne like, and, there were mini-riots that, you know, fall into no comparison with what happened '68, '69, but there was, there was growing, there was certainly growing tension and growing violence, and I wasn't living in Ardoyne then, I was living in Queen's and the Malone, you know what the Malone Road's like, like, it's a very nice middle-class area–

FR: Leafy.

JOH: And so on, so on and so forth, leafy, yeah, so there was none of that there, but then when I went back to visit my father and my mother and back to Ardoyne, yeah, there was, there was tension then and there'd be stoning virtually every weekend, you know, across, you know the Crumlin Road like, Ardoyne's here, there's Ardoyne, there's the Crumlin Road, here's Holy Cross Ardoyne, which is the church, but everything here is Catholic, and then you've only got the Crumlin Road and then everything there is Protestant, so it's very easy to stone people [laughs], you only, all they have to do is have a good, a good throw and you can get a brick, or half a brick rather, across the road, so there was a lot of that went on, yeah, in the, so that was, that tension was building up undoubtedly.

FR: And you would have been conscious of that, even though you're slightly outside of it by living on the more–

JOH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I would've been conscious of that, yeah, but I, but I left then in '68 and, but I went back regularly and like, and still do, I went back every Christmas, every Easter and every summer.

FR: Sure, so maybe moving on to that then, to the kind of decision to leave, so how did that come about?

JOH: Well I, I, it wasn't really because of the Troubles, I wanted to, Belfast I felt, you know, I'd lived there all the time and I went to Queen's, etcetera and I knew there was a bigger world out there, and I'd taken a year, after I graduated I took a year off with a friend of mine from Armagh and I bought a second-hand red mini and we went off round Europe for about seven months, and travelled round, you know, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy and saw a bit of the world which I hadn't seen, I mean, going abroad was a big thing, you know [laughs].

FR: Had you travelled with your family before that?

JOH: To Europe, no, we, no, we always went to, we went to places like Portstewart.

FR: Ah yes, it's nice [laughs].

JOH: My first, my first seventeen summers were spent in Portstewart and I go back every year, Portstewart was a fantastic place, still is, I love it.

FR: My grandparents, who have both passed away now, but they lived in Portstewart, so I also spent–

JOH: Yes, Portstewart was great, yeah, we used to go, and the summers always seemed to be good, and we went to the Strand in Portstewart and, go to the Herring Pond in Portnahapple and, we had, the whole crowd of families used to go down there, cos Portrush used to mainly Protestant, mainly, and Portstewart was mainly Catholic.

FR: That's interesting.

JOH: Yeah, and so no, I hadn't travelled, no, first time I went abroad was a bunch of us went to Spain, where I grew my beard, after my first year at Queen's, was it, or second year, can't remember, we, six of us went to Spain, that's the first time I'd been, no, I went to France, I went to France at the end of my fifth year at school, we were sent to France, but people didn't go abroad, you know, didn't. So I went abroad and then came back to Northern Ireland and then I thought well, I'll give London a go, so I came over here and did, did some postgraduate research here and I was only going to stay a year. I actually didn't like London, I found London very imper-, well, you know, the first few months, I found London very impersonal, and I didn't know anybody, unusual for an Irishman that I didn't have a single address or telephone number, so I knew nobody in London, and I was living in a grotty bedsit up in Ealing, which was really bloody awful and I didn't really enjoy it, you know, and I went back at Christmas and I remember my mother saying, you know, how's it going, I said oh it's going really well, you know, I really enjoy it, but I didn't, and getting on a tube and

watching and nobody speaking to each other and, you know, coming from Belfast where everybody speaks to everybody, you know, and the whole, you know, how you doing there, alright, what about you [laughs], these old Northern Ireland thing, you know, which is lovely, but in London, God these people are weird, you know, they don't talk to each other–

FR: Don't look at you on the tube.

JOH: They don't talk to each other, they're loony, and then I was, also of course I was very conscious, I speak with a Northern Ireland accent, but not with the accent I used to speak with. I used to speak in that, you know, like, real Belfast, you know what I mean, and very quickly, much more, but when I started lecturing, you know, (a) the students, some of the students used to come up and say we didn't understand some of what you were saying, you know, I now say game, whereas I would have said gay-em, you know, there's all, and I used to speak much more quickly.

FR: Me, me too, I think that's–

JOH: And when I go back home, I still call it going back home, but when I go back home I speak much more quickly, but here [laughs], cos I speak much more slowly, you know, cos I sort of had to, but, what was I saying there, about coming over here, oh yeah, and then, that's right, but then in January I joined London Irish rugby club and that actually changed everything. In fact, had I not joined London Irish rugby club I probably would have gone back to Belfast after my year here, but I joined London Irish rugby club and I made, within a matter of a week I made a whole series of really good friends, and I've been involved with London Irish ever since in many capacities, and **[00:50:00]** then I played for them for twenty years, and people who are still my friends there, but it changed everything, suddenly the social scene became great craic and I had great fun and, and I thought after a year or two I'm going to stay here, it's, I'm enjoying this, you know, but it had nothing to do with the Troubles, I didn't leave Belfast cos of the Troubles.

FR: No, and the people at London Irish rugby club, are we, are they mostly from the South of Ireland, are they–?

JOH: No, they're from everywhere, that was the nice thing about it, that was, that was, cos when I applied for Bangor, obviously most people were from, virtually everybody was from Bangor, a few people like myself from Belfast, but most people were from Bangor, but when I joined the London Irish like, you'd be in the dressing room and that was one of the great things about it, you know, there'd be Dublin, people from Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Cork, Ballymena, Belfast, Dundalk, it was fantastic, it was, and also you were very conscious of the fact that you were pulling on a green jersey, and you were playing against an English team, so it was almost like it was Ireland, every Saturday it was Ireland-England, and, and it was a united Ireland, and there was never ever any, ever, ever any sectarianism within London Irish, nobody gave a hoot whether you were from Belfast or whether you were from Killarney, you know, and it was, it was, it was great actually, it was a great unifying factor, less so now because unfortunately very, most people in London Irish are not Irish, there are some second generation, quite a few second generation, but, I mean, the club has changed, but in those days like, you had loads of doctors, dentists, lawyers, solicitors, it was mainly

middle class, not all, not all, but mainly middle-class people, but the craic was mighty, you know, so that was a great, and it still is a great club, I mean, I'm still heavily involved in it.

FR: And that was the big turning point for you in terms of feeling that actually you could live in London.

JOH: Yeah, in terms, yeah, in terms of living in London, yeah, yeah, it was, yeah.

FR: But it's interesting then because presumably most of your friendships are with Irish and Northern Irish people rather than with English people, say.

JOH: Certainly initially, yeah, very much so, yeah, they were very much so, initially, and the Troubles then were breaking out, you know, but they, but they weren't necessarily with Irish, I mean, my best friend who became best man at my wedding was a Protestant guy that I met in London Irish back in 1970 or something, he phoned me this morning actually, but he, it so happened that he was a Protestant from the bottom of the Woodville Road [laughs].

FR: [laughs] That's amazing, there you go.

JOH: Unknown to me, but he came back, but then when I was working here then, you know, a lot of, lot of my colleagues were obviously not Irish, although eventually I ended up in St Mary's University where there, where there was a big Irish tradition, and so there were quite a few students, mainly from Northern Ireland, because in those days there was no university, Thomond and University of Limerick hadn't been set up, and St Mary's had a very big sports studies department, so a lot of Irish students, in order to qualify as P.E. teachers, came to St Mary's, but even apart from that St Mary's was founded in 1850. It was the first Catholic institution of higher education to be founded, the English and Welsh hierarchy was re-established in 1860 and the first thing they did was, 1860 obviously there were hundreds of thousands of Irish coming to England because of the Famine and obviously having children, and the Catholic church was establishing Catholic schools, but they needed teachers for those schools, so in 1860 St Mary's was set up as, originally as a teacher training college, primarily to provide teachers for the Catholic population of Britain and Wales, and so they the Catholic bishops of England and Wales set up St Mary's and they still own St Mary's, I don't know if you know St Mary's, but anyway, it's where Liam had his first job, and they, they, it was run by, the principal was always a Vincentian priest as well until relatively recently, so you had an Irish tradition there in St Mary's, so, but no, having said that, the majority of the staff were not Irish, you know, there, so I made, so I made lots of English friends there, you know.

FR: Through work, yeah.

JOH: Through work, yeah, primarily through work and then through meeting other people as well, you know, one thing and another, yeah.

FR: So what, you came over to London to do research you said, what was the research in?

JOH: I was doing an MA in Irish history at Queen Mary College.

FR: And you wrote a dissertation?

JOH: Yeah.

FR: Yeah, what was it on?

JOH: It was on the effect of the Irish question on British politics during the 1870s and eighties.

FR: Okay, interesting, and again, interesting to be thinking about the Irish question in 1968 or 1969.

JOH: Yeah, that's right, yeah, and in fact, the first course I set up in St Mary's [laughs], when I set up the Irish st-, in fact, no, it was before I set up the Irish, cos what I did in St Mary's was, is, St Mary's had no Irish history, I thought Jesus, this is, I was in the history department teaching European history, you know, mainly French, German, Italian, etcetera and there was no Irish history, so I introduced a course which I called England's Irish Question, as opposed to Ireland's English Question, sorry, I called it Ireland's English Question as opposed to England's Irish Question.

FR: Ah that's good.

JOH: So I called that Ire-, in fact, I met a student of mine there about a month ago, I didn't recognise her, but she said you used to teach me, I said right, did I, oh she said I did one of your, what was that, well, she said, you called it Ireland's English problem and I said God I remember that, yeah [laughs], she said I'm teaching it to my children now, and I said that's brilliant, keep going [laughs]. So I started introducing Irish history, bit by bit, and of course the courses, the courses were very popular because there was the, there were a lot of, St Mary's used to get a lot of people from Liverpool and Newcastle who were second-generation Irish, from people who had come over in the fifties and sixties, and they graduated to the courses, so they actually, the Irish history courses were really popular, so that then gave me the incentive to think about setting up an Irish studies degree and setting, set up a separate department, which I did in 1989.

FR: Did you work somewhere before you moved to St Mary's or did you–?

JOH: Yeah, I was in another, I was in another college, a teacher, it was actually a teacher training college in Kensington.

FR: Kensington, okay.

JOH: So I worked there for three or four years before I got the job in St Mary's.

FR: Yeah, and during this period you were saying you were going back to Ireland, Northern Ireland, whatever, reasonably often.

JOH: Yeah, yeah.

FR: So you would have been conscious of things developing over there, the Troubles.

JOH: Oh God yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah, yeah, very much so, and, and–

FR: Was that difficult to, I suppose I'm thinking of your parents and your family still being over there.

JOH: It was very difficult for my mother and father who were running, they were still running the business, yeah, I mean [sighs], there were, during the Troubles there were, not quite daily, but certainly, I mean, in the height of the Troubles there were weekly gun battles between the Provos and the British Army, and then rioting every weekend, yeah, serious riots every weekend. I mean, how my parents got through it I don't know, I suppose they adapted to it, but it was very, very difficult, yeah, it was, and then, and then, you know, friends of mine were killed, shot, blown up, so you were going back to that. I mean, it was another world, I mean, it was, it was, and I'm sure some of your other people might have mentioned it, you got on a, you got on a plane at Heathrow and an hour later you landed in what Aldergrove used to be before George Best was set up, you landed in Aldergrove and then half an hour later you're in Ardoyne, to everything that was happening there, you know, I mean, I might go down to my father's and the British Army would've searched a hundred houses. I don't know whether you've ever been in a house that's searched, but, I mean, people talk about army and house searches as though it was people that go in testing, you know, lift a book and see if there's anything under it, that's not what happens, you know, the tiles were ripped up, cupboards were torn off walls [sighs], everything was thrown out, beds were upturned, mattresses were slash, slashed, I mean, to go into a house while there's a house search on, and then what, and then all the language and what was said to the people there, and then walking out and leaving the people with a house that was devastated, you know, and you're going back into this and you've only been in London two hours earlier, you know.

FR: Must be so strange.

JOH: It was so strange, and then coming back after two weeks or **[01:00:00]** whatever, and then you got on the plane at Aldergrove and you'd arrive back here, it's all normal, you know, and, and it was very difficult, it was, I, I, didn't, people used to say oh but the Troubles in Northern Ireland, tell us about the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and I avoided it, I never spoke to people, even people in the South of Ireland, they didn't really understand. I only really spoke to people from Northern Ireland about it, who knew, who understood what was happening, you know, even and, you know, they could've been Protestants, but at least they understood what was happening, and people over here didn't, and I, and I don't blame them either, they had no, I, well, whenever a bomb went off, you know, there was something that was interesting, well, I'm talking about before the bombs started going off here, people just weren't interested in Northern Ireland, in fact, they're still not, by the way.

FR: Aye, when, when people ask you to explain it to them or to tell them about it, sometimes that can be as frustrating or annoying as no interest at all because you become the kind of the informant that has to explain–

JOH: Yeah, and why is, why, you know, why are the Catholics fighting the Protestants, ah it's all this religion [sighs], I, you'd give sort of [sighs], I tried to avoid getting involved in discussions actually, I mean, norm-, if, certainly not speaking to people casually, occasionally maybe at a dinner party or something you might, you know, depending to who, to who it is, you know, but, but most of the time I'd, it's different now obviously giving, attending lectures and giving lectures, you know, one of the subjects was the Troubles obviously when I set up the degree, but you were talking to students there who were reading and all the rest of it, it was a different, different audience, I'm talking about people generally. Most people in Britain hadn't a clue, you know, where Belfast was or even where Derry was, but forget Ballymena or Enniskillen or the rest of that, you know, and in a way I don't, I didn't, I don't blame them, you know, they were getting on with their lives and this was happening, it could've been a thousand miles away rather than an hour's, an hour's journey by plane. It was very frustrating at times as well of course, you know.

FR: That lack of–?

JOH: That indifference, yeah, that and lack of knowledge, lack of knowledge is still there, I mean, that huge lack of knowledge about Irish history. I mean, even yesterday I was sitting beside a guy, a very nice guy, I was playing golf, a really nice English guy, he was asking me about the Famine, you know, I've heard of the Famine, tell me about the, so I told him a bit about the Famine, he said I never, never knew that, you know, and he's quite an intelligent guy as well, you know, a well-educated guy, but just this ignorance about it, you know, och I talked about this, even 1800, the Act of Union like, he didn't know that's when the United Kingdom was established, you know [laughs]. I thought about saying this is your bloody country, God Almighty, Jesus, do you not even know how the UK came into existence, you know. So there's, I mean, there's an appalling, an appalling amount of appalling ignorance about Ireland, cos when I was at the Christian Brothers we did loads of British history, loads of stuff, you know, about, about the Chartists and the Great Reform Act and Peel and Gladstone and, you know, Disraeli, etcetera, etcetera, you know, our British history was good, we knew a lot about British history and not just because of the Irish involvement, just British history as British history, you know, but unfortunately it's not, this is a terrible thing, now my two sons, they didn't do any Irish history, they're both born here, they didn't do any Irish history whatsoever at school, which is tragic, you know.

FR: Yeah, absolutely.

JOH: Did some French history, but didn't do any Irish history.

FR: Which definitely contributes to the ongoing ignorance about Northern Irish politics.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, it does, and that's why you get a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who doesn't know that most Protestants tend to vote unionist and most Catholics tend to vote nationalist [laughs], you know.

FR: No, no, that's right, yeah [laughs].

JOH: It's appalling [laughs], it's, it's funny, but it's tragic.

FR: No, absolutely, and so in this kind of period, so the seventies I suppose, you're, you're living in London, apart from kind of ignorance did you ever experience or feel any kind of hostility or any kind of like, anti-Irish sentiment?

JOH: Occasionally, yeah, I was conscious, certainly when the bombs started going off, I used to read the *Irish Times*, which I still do, although you can't buy it anymore in hard copy unfortunately, and a very good friend of mine set up the *Irish Post* in 1970, Brendán Mac Lua who's dead now, God rest his soul, so I used to read the *Irish Post*, but I might like, you're very conscious of sitting on a tube reading the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Post*, not until the bombs started going off in Britain, but once the bombs started going off in Britain, and certainly there was an anti-Irish sentiment here, and then of course you had the Birmingham bombings and, you know, the Manchester bombs and, you know, the bombs here and the big bomb in the Baltic Exchange, which was a huge bomb, I gave a speech on the Baltic Exchange about an hour, about a year beforehand actually on St Patrick's Day, and then Canary Wharf and all that, so there was definitely an anti-Irish feeling at times and I was conscious of that. I came across it a couple of times, once from a taxi driver, and a couple of times playing for London Irish, yeah, there, a couple of times there were a couple of–

FR: From other players, from other teams?

JOH: From other teams, yeah, fucking Irish bastards, you know, this sort of thing, and which caused a few punch-ups, and I remember giving a coup-, some lectures on the hunger strikes when the hunger strikes were going on and, and at St Mary's, and some people at St Mary's felt it was wrong that this should be happening, you know.

FR: Wrong that you should be talking about it?

JOH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that this subject should be brought up at the historical society, yeah, so while I, I didn't suffer myself to any extent, but I know other people who did, because I was involved mostly in the middle-class academic milieu, you know, for the most part, but certainly I remember going to, going to, and I played in a folk group in a traditional band, we had a band for about twenty years, Tristram Shandy, and we chose the songs that we sung depending on where we were playing, and the songs that we used to sing in London Irish like, we didn't sing rebel songs during the Troubles because there were guys there, you know, a friend of mine, his father and his daughter were both killed by mistaken identity, so you were very aware of that, you know, that there were people there in London Irish, for example, and then it depended what pub, what, what pub we were playing in [mobile phone interruption], just the, yeah–

FR: You'll take that, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JOH: There's a, there's a friend of mine who I'm going to be meeting, can't remember what we were saying or talking about, oh yeah, sorry, oh yeah, sorry–

FR: Choosing songs.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so you were conscious of that, you know, and then, you know, I got my, I was involved in various movements over here, you know, for the Birmingham Six, etcetera–

FR: Okay, okay.

JOH: And the Guildford Four and, and they weren't po-, they weren't popular at the beginning, you know, eventually the Birmingham Six became a sort of *cause célèbre*, but at the beginning it wasn't, and I'm talking about the Irish community here as well, who for the most part, I mean, the Irish community here, they're a strange bunch, it's a very diverse community here, at the moment here, but then, during the 1970s and indeed the 1980s, for the most part the Irish community kept their heads down, you didn't, I mean, they were, the idea was St Patrick's Day parade, have you ever been to the St Patrick's Day thing here in Trafalgar, Trafalgar–?

FR: I haven't actually.

JOH: I mean, it's forty thousand people, be here now on Sunday and the [indecipherable], but the idea of having St Patrick's Day parade in the 1970s or eighties, absolutely unheard of, I mean, the Irish community kept their heads down.

FR: That's, that's interesting.

JOH: And there was no, yeah, there was no great identification about being Irish, quite the reverse, and, and those Irish organisations that did exist were very conservative, small c type organisations, you know, the old community, I don't know if you know the county associations.

FR: Aye, I do know the the county associations.

JOH: Those county associations, I mean, they had an annual dinner and that sort of stuff, you know, but they never really got involved in politics, and even when the Birmingham Six campaign, which was the first real big campaign, that was not a popular campaign. I mean, a lot of Irish people didn't want to be involved in it and played it down and you were associating yourself with bombers, you know, and then eventually, I mean, there was people like Father Bobby Gilmore, who's a great man, he's back in Dublin now, Bobby Gilmore was one of the, you know, stood up as priest and, and **[01:10:00]** got involved, and for a while became chairman I think of the Birmingham Six campaign, and then it became a bit of a cause eventually, when Chris Mullen wrote the book which, and all that, and then it sort of built up, but at the beginning it wasn't at all, same thing with the Guildford Four as well, you know, I mean, these were, these were radical cases and to be involved in them sort of you almost became tainted with a terrorism brush and most Irish people, and indeed

most of my friends, stayed well away from it, and I mean Catholic and Protestant, and London Irish was very much, in one way, London Irish rugby club, my, I knew many, many people, it was very good in one way, it was non-political, but then people would have their own paths and lives outside it, but most people in London Irish, and I mean mainly from the South, never got involved, ever, stayed clear, and most people from the South didn't want to know about the North anyway, my wife's from Kilkenny and, I mean, it used to frustrate me going home, or going down to Dublin and meeting her friends, she went to UCD, and meeting her friends in UCD and you'd mention, oh no, we don't want to talk about the North, oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no, and then I walked out of a restaurant one day because just out of, if I hadn't walked out I would've hit somebody because of that attitude about the North, they just didn't want to know, they were too busy getting on, you know, making money and all the rest of it. Anyway, that was very frustrating, particularly if you were politically involved in any way.

FR: Yeah, there's always that weird thing between the South and the North where the North is–

JOH: Yeah, the black North.

FR: The black North, they don't want to talk about it, they don't want–

JOH: No, they didn't want to talk about it, they didn't want to talk about it, and I said do you know, I used to say this is happening, this is happening fifty miles away, are you not aware of this, no, I don't want to talk about that, don't want to know about that.

FR: It's really interesting to hear that that was reproduced in London as well, in the London Irish communities.

JOH: Yeah, it was, it was, yeah, yeah, and there were various organisations set up here, but most of them were, they wanted to be middle of the road, they wanted the Irish community to be respectable.

FR: Sure, sure, and to be integrated and to be, yeah.

JOH: That was it, yeah, yeah, and it was the extremists who got involved in some of the campaigns, and then you had other things like the Anti-Partition League, etcetera.

FR: So you, you continued to be involved in politics then after you moved over here.

JOH: I did, yeah, yeah, well, to say in politics, not in a political party, but in movements like Birmingham, Guildford and there were other campaigns as wells.

FR: And [pauses] was that mostly Northern Irish people?

JOH: Yeah.

FR: I suppose I'm thinking of Troops Out, which–

JOH: Yeah, the Troops Out movement, yeah, that was another one you see, that was another one that was, the Irish government didn't want to get involved in that, you know. I mean, the Irish embassy has changed a lot here, in the last eighteen, twenty years it's much more open to the Irish community, but then it was a highly conservative establishment as well, and the Irish government didn't approve of Troops Out, and people who got involved with Troops Out, which I was involved in, again, were supposedly extremists, most of the Irish community did not get involved, the Irish community kept their heads down and that, that's, that was the same all the way through, virtually all of the Troubles.

FR: It must have been frustrating I suppose thinking to, what you were saying about it's only two hours, three hours until you're in the Ardoyne where, you know, the, it's not normal life for all the people that are living in a kind of state of emergency, and then you come back here and both the English people and most of the Irish people are kind of not wanting to–

JOH: And Southern Irish people, yeah, I mean, it's not true of all of them.

FR: No, no, no, no.

JOH: I mean, there were obviously Southern Irish people who were involved and involved in the Troops Out movement, and there were middle-class people as well, but, I mean, some of the ordinary Irish working class were involved in that, yeah, there was as well, and I'd say there was, and like, in the Irish pubs here now, you know, there's a pub behind here, the Hop Poles, which is still in existence, I mean, there were a lot of Irish pubs here in Hammersmith at one stage, you know, and people would come along selling *An Phoblacht* and raising money for, for the cause, you know, and raised a lot of money, and these were mainly now working-class Irishmen, most of them were labourers and things who would go the places like that, you know, and they would, they would be, at least their sentiments were there.

FR: They would, they would put some money in–

JOH: They'd be too busy, they'd be, most of them were too busy working hard to get involved in politics, but their sentiments would certainly be pro-republican, you know.

FR: And would you have described yourself as a republican?

JOH: I would, yeah.

FR: Yeah.

JOH: Yeah.

FR: How did you meet your wife?

JOH: At a pub [laughs].

FR: [laughs] An Irish pub?

JOH: In an Irish, yeah, well, yeah, it was, yeah, it was an Irish pub, yeah, an Irish pub and, that a lot of, in, in, around the Twickenham area where a lot of us used to drink in and socialise in, so that's where I met–

FR: And she's from the South, she's from Kilkenny?

JOH: Yeah, she's a Southern Irish Protestant actually, whereas I'm a Northern Irish Catholic [laughs], but yeah, it was in a pub, yeah, at a pub where, again, where a lot of London Irish guys and supporters, when I say guys like, a lot of people came to London Irish rugby club to socialise, you know, apart from just to play, obviously it was the men who played there, but that's how I met her, yeah.

FR: And you said you've, you had two children?

JOH: Yeah, two boys, yeah.

FR: Two boys. Did you travel back to Ireland with them very much?

JOH: Yeah, we went, we tended mostly to go to Brittany actually, cos I've got a lot of friends in Brittany, mainly through the music.

FR: Oh through the kind of the tra-, the folk connection?

JOH: Yeah, through Breton music and Irish music, and when I played in the band we used to tour around France and Germany and Holland, but when we went to France it was mainly Brittany, so I've got a lot of friends now in Brittany that, so, and it was easier, it's easier to get to Brittany from here, you know, you just go down to Portsmouth and you're across in twelve hours or ten hours, but yeah, we did, no, we used to go back to Belfast, yeah, take the boys back to Belfast and also to Kilkenny, yeah, yeah, but the Troubles were, they were born '94 and '98, so they weren't really, I mean, they're conscious of the Troubles, in fact, my son has written a play, my son is, my younger boy is twenty-two actually, twenty-two now, he's in Newcastle University, although he's in Seville at the moment, but he has written a play, which I didn't know about. He asked me did I have any books on the hunger strike, I said I've got loads, so I gave him about four or five books, so just there the Christmas before last he came back at Christmas and said, he said dad, I've written a play, I said, have you, right, oh I said, great, what's it about, he said it's about the '81 hunger strike, I said oh that's interesting, I didn't know you were, I knew I'd given him the books, but I didn't know he was doing it for research, I just thought he was interested, so anyway it was put on in Newcastle University there, for three performances, and Adrian, do you know Adrian Dunbar?

FR: I do know Adrian Dunbar.

JOH: Adrian, yeah, Adrian, Adrian has, has been in contact now with some people in Belfast, so it's hopefully going to be put on in the summer in, there's a new centre open, the James Connolly Centre, I don't know it.

FR: I don't know it actually.

JOH: No, it's new apparently, Adrian knows it, I know Adrian well, a good friend of mine, anyway he's, but anyway, so my son's written, it's actually, it's good, even if I say it myself, as a biased father, it's a very good play, so they put it on with, he's very interested in drama, so he put it on with the, at the university dramatic society, you know, in the theatre in Newcastle.

FR: That's really interesting, cos obviously something about Ireland has left an impression on him, even though he was–

JOH: Yeah, well, that's how he got involved here, I mean, I took them down for Irish music, in the old centre here, so, I mean, Conor, he plays tin whistle, flute and the uilleann pipes, and he's a good musician.

FR: What did you play?

JOH: I was the singer.

FR: Oh really?

JOH: I played the bodhrán and a bit of, a bit of the mandolin, yeah.

FR: Okay. I'm trying to think, I think maybe, I was thinking first of all about the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the PTA Act, people have talked to me about difficulty in travelling between England and Northern Ireland, getting searched, getting, did you ever have any experiences of that?

JOH: Yeah, frequently, frequently.

FR: And I suppose especially being involved in the various kind of political groups.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, frequently, I mean, well, you see in my, in the height of the Troubles Ardoyne was, was, there were only two entrances in and out of Ardoyne, and you had to go through a checkpoint every time you went in and out **[01:20:00]** and, you know, I mean, our car was checked and we were subjected to all sorts of questions. Mostly it was okay, but sometimes it wasn't and we were slapped around occasionally, by Scottish regiments in particular, the Black Watch to be specific, in Ardoyne, who had terrible reputation in Ardoyne and well deserved and, so there, and of course you were on, you were on a computer obviously and, you know, and they had this huge computer in Lisburn, and going, coming back from France, yeah, virtually every time I was stopped, either leaving the country or coming back in, and we were all searched, sometimes politely, sometimes not politely and, yeah, on two or three occasions I was, not, I was never detained under the

Prevention of Terrorism Act, but I was threatened to be detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which at that time they could hold you for forty-eight hours and then they extended it to seventy, to seven days, but, I mean, it was quite a thing to be told, you know, unless you're answering my questions you will be detained, I've got the right to detain you for forty-eight hours under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and that was abused undoubtedly, and I wasn't the only one, I mean, there were other friends of mine who were subsequently, but I think where I came from, and our phone was tapped in Ardoyne, my father's phone in the pub, he would never discuss anything that was of any significance, using, using the phone there, so, and I'm sure there, there's a file somewhere tucked away, of myself and associates as well, cos they would take the names of other people as well who were with you in the car, that's how they built up their intelligence obviously, you know, so you were always conscious of that and it got a pain in the neck and it was annoying, you know, so yeah, and, I mean, I was never detained under it, but I know other people who were and subjected to interrogation as it was called.

FR: Euphemistically.

JOH: Yeah, euphemistically, yeah, and who suffered and who were beaten up and badly treated, yeah, but that was part of the, you know, again, nothing happened about that either, you know, they, they got away with it. So there was all, there was that un-, there was that undercurrent that was, that was present there, yeah, yeah, and that, that was [pauses], well, it made you angry and resentful and then again, most people were unaware of it, you know, again, and the Irish community would say oh well, you know, nobody would be questioned unless there, you know, unless there's something there, and the police are only doing their duty and so on and so forth, and there was that, there was the other, that was the other side of the Irish community as well, you know, there were those who objected strongly to it and then there was the others who, who felt no, this, either who'd wash their hands of it, which most people did, or took a rather pro-government view that this was necessary, so it was, the Irish community was, was fractured during the, well, during the seventies it was quiescent, certainly, and early eighties, and then it became much more self-assertive I think, round about the mid-, the mid-eighties, and more confident, well, those who were politically active, more confident in themselves. It's a very different community now.

FR: Why do you, why do you think that, what, what, do you think you know why that shift happened?

JOH: There was a greater sense of organisation, yeah, and there was, there was a greater acceptance that things were being done that shouldn't be done and therefore you needed to stand up and speak out and, I mean, the *Irish Post*, and all credit to Brendán Mac Lua for this, Brendán was not afraid to call a spade a spade and he, the *Irish Post* was, the *Irish World* was set up later on, I can't remember when the *Irish World* was set up, the *Irish Post* was the first and Brendán was the editor, and he wrote a column called the Frank Dolan column, which was actually Brendán's column, and he stood up and gave headlines about injustices and that, and it was quite widely read by the Irish community, and so here you actually had a vehicle for where an Irish people, an Irish organisation was standing up and saying there are wrongs here, there are injustices and these need to be called out, and there

were very few other people doing it, in that way, a few politicians in, in, in Westminster, such as Jeremy, Jeremy–

FR: Corbyn [laughs].

JOH: Corbyn, forgotten his name, such as, I mean, there were a few people like that.

FR: John McDonnell I suppose.

JOH: John McDonnell, Ken Livingstone, people like that, but again, there were many people in the Irish community who were against Ken Livingstone, I know. Ken Livingstone invited Gerry Adams over to speak, you know, and there were many people in the Irish community who were saying this is terrible and he shouldn't be doing this and, you know, Adams is a terrorist and etcetera, etcetera, all that sort of stuff and then the English newspapers were against it and, I mean, well, you've probably seen the book that Liam and I did.

FR: The cartoons?

JOH: Yeah, the cartoon book, you know, if you look at the some of the cartoons in that, that were there in the, you know, in the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, etcetera, you know, you know, but the *Irish Post* was calling a spade a spade and that was quite influential, that here was at least one medium which was saying things that nobody else was saying and saying it publicly, you know, so that was, I mean, that was effective, and then of course the hunger strikes were very important as well I think, you know, and then when Sinn Féin became, they moved on to that political, that political line, there were many, many people then who were, many Irish people who identified and supported that line, so at least, I mean, there you had, there you had a political party that was elected to Westminster and, you know, was becoming a different type of, or the Provisional movement was becoming a different type of movement, and so there was a vehicle there as well, again, not particularly popular in Britain by most of the Irish community, certainly in the eighties anyway, I would say. Sinn Féin was still associated with, you know, violence, extremism and the bombs are going off, etcetera and that sort of thing, but at least there was a political party that people could, those who wanted to, could get involved with and get involved with and give expression to and support and then there were more, then people began to have debates and lectures and things, you know, I used to get invited to give talks and things as well to different groups then, so there was, it was growing slowly.

FR: And then do you remember the peace process?

JOH: Yeah.

FR: Happening over here, did you, was it, did you follow it?

JOH: I did, yeah, I followed it, I followed it very closely, yeah, I mean, I got to know John Hume quite well and I invited him a few times to St Mary's, and Seamus Mallon, so I invited them over here to give talks. I mean, I was a very big supporter of John Hume and what he was doing, and despite, you know, the, all the attacks on him when he started talking to,

and argued, you know, for speaking to Sinn Féin, that was in the mid-eighties and again, that was important because here was, you know, a figure who was respected in Britain and Ireland and America, saying yeah, listen, what are we doing, we've got to, you talk to your enemies, or you talk to those people, you've got to bring them into the political, you've got to bring them into the political process, and so that was, that gained more support again to that, over here and the Irish community, to get involved and give support to that, so yeah, and it was a long process obviously, you know, it bore fruit in 1993, and then, then you had the breakdown of the ceasefire, putting the bombs, etcetera in Canary Wharf, etcetera. But the Irish community was much more, and it was a different Irish community as well, cos you had a lot of people coming, came over in the 1980s. I mean, there were, you had that huge influx, something like, what was it, over here, something like almost half a million people left Ireland in the 1980s and most of them came here **[01:30:00]** and most of them came to London, not to, not to Glasgow or Manchester or Leeds or Birmingham or Liverpool, most of them came to London, as they still are, and so you had that influx of mostly young Irish who were coming over here, who were more politically conscious, particularly the ones coming from the North, and so they got involved in a way that the older generation had tended not to get involved, it was almost like a repeat, if you like, of the nineteen, what had happened in the 1960s in Northern Ireland, you had this new influx, twenty or twenty-five years later in another generation who were coming in, who were very different from the old Irish, who were the working-class Irish, you know, and here were the qualified Irish, who were leaving Ireland because of the lack of opportunities in Ireland, and who were confident in their Irishness, even despite the fact that the Troubles were still going on, but they were much more confident than I had been when I came, you know.

FR: More assertive, more–

JOH: More assertive, yes, more different, more European, most of them going to good jobs, for the most part, and didn't, didn't have the sort of baggage, if you like, that people from, brought up during the Troubles, although the Troubles were still going on, but there was, it was different, you know, it was a, it was a new, new type of, new generation, as there is now at the moment, you know, this is the 1980s, we're now talking thirty years later, you know, so you've a new generation now coming over, of course, for whom the Troubles mean nothing to in many ways, yeah, or who are very diff-, like, who voted for Sinn Féin at the recent election and because of the bread-and-butter issues that are concerning, and Sinn Féin was not toxic in the way that it was supposedly toxic, you know.

FR: No, although they seem to be trying their best in the South to–

JOH: Although they seem to be trying their best [laughs], I mean, you know, how they, how the thing about the Quinn, the Quinn murder, you know, emerges, I mean, you know, I'm sorry about what happened and it was terrible what happened and undoubtedly the Provos were behind it, but nevertheless the fact that all this emerged three days, four days before the election like, you know, if MI5 isn't behind that I don't who is.

FR: Yeah. Okay, so I think maybe just some kind of final questions, a wee, wee bit more kind of reflective questions about how you think about Northern Ireland now. So did you feel a difference, what was it like to go back to the Ardoyne after the, after the peace process?

JOH: Ardoyne's a very deprived area, it still is, there isn't a green space in Ardoyne, if you look at actually where the enclave in Ardoyne, there isn't a single green, when I was growing up there wasn't a single green space, there still isn't a single green space in Ardoyne. There's a huge amount of poverty and deprivation, a huge amount of social break-up, loads of one-parent families, a lot of domestic abuse, which has always been there, which is still there, high unemployment, low educational achievement, young male suicide, which is probably higher in Ardoyne than any other part of Northern Ireland.

FR: And it's unusually high in all of Northern Ireland, I think.

JOH: Yeah, it is, hugely high in all of Northern Ireland, so when I go back to Ardoyne it's almost with a sadness that so little in a way, well, politically things have changed obviously, but socially, no, and a big drug problem like, I used to know the person who ran the youth club in Ardoyne there very well. I said to him, you know, what's the big problem that you've got here, he said the big problem is drugs, he said the dealers are everywhere, when the Provos were running Ardoyne, the Provos ran Ardoyne for twenty-five years and when the Provos were there he said there were no drug dealers, they shot them, shot them, kneecapped them, it doesn't happen anymore and the drug dealers are back. So Ardoyne still, it's a sad, Ardoyne, there's a vibrancy about the people at the same time and there's a, there's a collectivity and a communality there which exists, but a lot of things have broken down, like the, you know, the church, Holy Cross Ardoyne where I was baptised, my mother and father were married like, you know, and I'd go to mass there, mass attendance is away, away, it used to be, you know, there was standing room only in Ardoyne, it's a big church Ardoyne, I don't know whether you've been to it, have you been to it?

FR: No, I haven't.

JOH: It's a big church like, it was packed and there'd be about five masses every Sunday, now there's two masses and be about a third full, you know, so.

FR: Yeah, no, I know the figures from like, ninety per cent attendance down to like, sixty or fifty per cent attendance.

JOH: Yeah, so that's, there are major social issues, I mean, Ardoyne needs a huge investment in it, economically, educationally, culturally, employment-wise, etcetera, and still, and of course it's still a very volatile area, you know, there are a lot of dissident republicans there, you know, who get support from, from young people there because, because there's nothing else for them. But I like going back, you know, I enjoy going back, I've got a lot of fondness.

FR: Yeah, but no, it is–

JOH: But, I mean, as far as the future of Northern Ireland, I mean, well, you know, well, the DUP are on their way out. I mean, I've got loads of Protestant friends still from Bangor rugby club who are all, who would all be very happy in an Ireland that, an all-Ireland, a united, possibly federated Ireland, possibly keeping Stormont, you know, there are various

combinations that can be done there, but have no fear about, no real fear, especially now with the Catholic church and all the different, you know, what's happened down south and, you know, Rome rule is no longer, home rule is no longer Rome rule and all that. A lot of people in Northern Ireland would be quite happy, Protestant people I mean, going into a different type of united Ireland. I mean, my two, I told you my two, my sister and brother-in-law are, they're two vets who live in Broughshane, I've talked to them about it, you know, and they're both, my sister-in-law, my wife's sister, she's from the South of Ireland and her husband's Northern Ireland Protestant, but they have no difficulties with a united Ireland that's, that's an agreed and, where, where, you know, a unionist tradition, or a Protestant tradition I should say, unionis-, obviously there'd be no unionism if there was a united Ireland, but, but where those traditions would be accepted and where there's no discrimination, etcetera, you know, and I think that, I mean, that'll happen, it may not happen in my life, I'd say fifteen, twenty years, but, I mean, the DUP's on the way out, and they're dinosaurs and a lot of the, we ran a conference here actually about the future of Ulster unionism and–

FR: Oh aye, I was supposed to come to that actually.

JOH: Yeah, well, it was okay, but we didn't, the elephant in the, there was an elephant in the room and the elephant in the room was we did not have a hardline loyalist.

FR: Ah.

JOH: It's all very well to talk about the middle class, the middle class always mix anyway, you know, and have always mixed in Northern Ireland to some extent, but they do now, but, I mean, the hardline loyalist in the, I was talking to May Blood, whom you probably know, like, she was telling me, she lives in Ballygomartin, which is not far from top of the Shankill and she said the UVF are a really strong influence there and they have a really strong influence over the youth, they are heavily into drugs and interestingly enough she said prostitution. I didn't know that actually, I said really, she said yeah, not their own people, east European women, she said there's a huge amount of money being made out of prostitution in that area and east Belfast is the same, you know, that hardline loyalism is there and that's [mobile phone rings], so, so whenever we ran our conference here, we did not have a representative from that, which was a shame.

FR: That question about loyalism is interesting I suppose because those are the people who are probably the least comfortable with this kind of idea that you're describing of whatever it is, a federalised or a, yeah.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, now you see, interestingly enough I don't know many over here, you know, that's the other thing about the Ulster loyalists actually [laughs], they tend not to travel.

FR: Well, this is it, yeah [laughs].

JOH: It's true, you know, unless they've been kicked out, unless you're, unless you're like Mad Dog living up in Scotland, you know, but they, yeah, they tend to stay, you know, whereas, whereas the Catholics tend to move and the Protestant population of Northern

Ireland who do move **[01:40:00]** tend to be the educated, who came over here, rather than staying.

FR: I suppose access to industrial work and so on was much easier for working-class Protestant people in Belfast, say, than it was for working-class Catholic people.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, but there was never that tradition of, I'm talking about working-class Protestants, of actually leaving, you know, and going, whereas there was actually in the Catholic population like, emigration was ingrained, it's interesting actually, I'm only thinking about this now cos there was, I mean, during the eighteenth century obviously there was, loads of Presbyterians, you know, left and went to Canada, America and etcetera, but Ulster loyalist, Ulster loyalists, working class, I can't even think of a single organisation over here I've ever come across, cos if we knew them we'd have invited them to the conference over here, you know.

FR: Well, it is, it's certainly the demographic that we have had the most difficulty finding people to interview, and I'm sure–

JOH: Yeah, I'm sure, have you found any?

FR: One woman from the border, from a quite loyalist background, but not in any kind of systematic way. I'm not sure how she came across the advert, but in terms of like, an organisation or a network or a way to actually kind of reach out to those people, it's been, it's been hard. I think there must be, there must be working-class Protestant loyalists that moved, but–

JOH: Yeah, there must be, but there's a, and I know the community over here well, I can't think of a single Irish loyalist organisation that exists, there may be some possibly in Glasgow.

FR: Well, there's the Orange Order.

JOH: Well, there's the Orange Order, yeah, but the Orange Order here in London, Orange Order–

FR: I don't think there's a lodge.

JOH: I don't think there is.

FR: No, there's one in Manchester and there's one in Glasgow.

JOH: And there'd be one in Liverpool I would have thought.

FR: Probably, aye.

JOH: Yeah, but there's not one, I've never heard of one in London, I've never heard of a loyalist organisation, I've never heard of a, heard of loyalist politicians and things, yeah,

yeah, obviously, but a hardline loyalist organisation like, associated with the UDA, UVF or, well, the UDA's virtually gone, you know, the Red Hand Commandos or anything like that, you know.

FR: There's some associations with like, far right, you know, fascist [laughs] I suppose I would say, parties in Northern Ireland.

JOH: Yeah, yeah, with the, with the, yeah, with the National Front or whatever the new organisation's are called, yeah, yeah, yeah, there would be that, yeah, and maybe a few demos there, but nothing, nothing of any significance, you know.

FR: No, that's true. I wanted to ask you before [laughs], before we finish, quickly, about your involvement in the cultural centre, the Irish cultural centre, which we haven't really talked about. So you said to me earlier that it was because you brought your sons for music classes.

JOH: That's right, yeah, yeah, and then, I mean, it's a very long story. I brought my, yeah, I brought my sons down here and then the place was, it was owned by Hammersmith council, the old building, which was on the site, and then they decided to withdraw the grant, they were giving a grant of a hundred and thirty thousand a year I think to pay for the upkeep and all the rest of it and pay for salaries, and people knew me here, so they asked me would I get involved, to see if I could do anything to try and save it, so I got in touch with the, I knew the Ambassador well here and I got in touch with him and through him to the Irish government and I got the Irish government to agree to replace the grant, so that the council would save their hundred and thirty thousand, but the Irish government would give a hundred and thirty thousand, and then, and they would, so, and I set up a new charity, which is the current charity here, in 1990, in 2007 rather, 2007, and I got a five-year lease from the council which I attempted to renew in 2011 and which they initially agreed to do, it was a Tory council, which they initially agreed to do and then they reneged on their word, having sent me a lease and all the rest of it, and said they were going to sell the building over our heads and we protested and got the Irish community involved and all the re-, anyway, they, so to cut a long story short, so then they said they were, but they'd give us first option, I got, to buy it and they wanted two and a half million. Well, we had no money at all, so I made them an, I spoke to them, anyway, I made them an offer of one and a half million and they came back a few, about a month or so later and said they would, they would accept one and a half million if we could do it in nine months. We had no money, so had to raise one and a half million in nine months, so again I got in touch with the Irish government and I went over and met Eamon Gilmore who was the Taoiseach then and then I got him to come over here and I said look, this is a prime site, right opposite Hammersmith tube, middle of London, we can have this, you know, to represent Ireland and Irish culture, we're never going to get this opportunity again, so I asked him for a million, and this was 2012 and the Irish government was deeply in trouble with, financially–

FR: Sure, yeah.

JOH: Yeah, desperate, so anyway, all credit to him, Eamon Gilmore came back and said we'll give you five hundred and fifty thousand, roughly half a million, just over half a million, and

that left another million, so that, but that was a big boost to get that half a million, but then you've got to get, and by that time we only had six months left, or even less, to raise a million, so how do you raise a million, you don't get it by getting five thousand here or ten thousand there, that's no good, you know, we would never have achieved that. So I managed to, I got in touch with various people, anyway, I got in touch with a Shepherds Bush housing association here, so I managed to do a deal with them and then spoke to the council, if the council gave us permission to knock down the existing building, first of all to purchase it, then to knock down the existing building, to build a new building, new Irish cultural centre, and then to build twenty-four apartments on top, that that way we could, we could do that and it would be a win for the council, they'd get their money, be a win for us, we'd get a new cultural centre and be a win for the housing association, they'd have twenty-four apartments. So Shepherds Bush agreed to it, and on that basis I managed to get the planning permission from the council and then Shepherds Bush gave me the extra million to buy the site, buy the freehold, which we have, and also the money to build the new cultural centre and to give them a lease, a long lease on the twenty-four apartments up above, which is what we did. So we moved out in 2014 and it took three and a half years to build. We moved in at the beginning of, towards the end of 2018 I think it was, and then had to raise another half a million to refurbish the place and put everything in that's here in the hall, different rooms and the bar and everything, everything, all we had was a building with water and gas and electricity, but there was nothing else, bare floors, bare ceilings, bare walls, everything, so everything went in from, you know, it might've cost a hundred and twenty thousand just to do the auditorium alone, to the specification we wanted, you know, so that's what happened, that's how we did it, yeah, so, I mean, I was delighted, it's a legacy now which can be held in trust for the Irish community for the next hundred years or whatever, you know.

FR: And it seems like that connection to Irish culture has been like, a big part of your life all the way through.

JOH: It has yeah, ah no, it has, yeah, I mean, I'm committed to Irish culture, always have been actually, going back to my parents' time I think, you know, and I love Irish music, Irish literature, Irish culture, Irish theatre, the craic, the trad music, you know, the, the, all that has always been inspiration, to me, anyway, you know.

FR: I think it's so fascinating that your son has written a play about '81.

JOH: Yeah, yes, no, I must say, I'm delighted, I mean, I didn't encoura-, I mean, I had no idea he was doing it. He has shown a history, an interest in Irish history, so has my other son, both of them have, you know, but yeah, no, I was delighted when he wrote it, yeah, so hopefully it'll be on in Belfast some time in the summer.

FR: I might well, I might be in Belfast, so I'll try and see it if I am.

JOH: Yeah, okay, give me your details, I don't know if I have your details. Okay, I, I don't mind Fearghus [pauses], being named.

FR: Okay, okay, that's fine, yeah.

JOH: Okay.

FR: Actually just then, let me change this, so that it shows that you're, **[01:50:00]** so you want to be identified by name.

JOH: Well, I mean, I don't, I'm not–

FR: Not want to, but, I mean, you're happy to be, yeah. Just then before we finish, just quickly, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you thought we might talk about or anything you wanted to talk about?

JOH: Well, there's loads of stuff about, about the Troubles, but we'd be here all day, if we–

FR: Or anything particularly, I don't know, particularly vivid memories, particularly important memories about the Troubles?

JOH: About two of my neighbours being shot dead in 1976 in the Golden Pheasant restaurant in front of their families, that was very poignant, their brother being caught by the Shankill Butchers like, there are a load of, some of my good friends being shot, others being interned like, there's a whole, there's a whole history, if you like, you know, a layer of personal involvement that would actually take too long to go into, you know, at the moment.

FR: Yeah, yeah, no, that's fine. Again–

JOH: I think everybody's been marked by the Troubles, you know, in some way, in one way or another, and–

FR: The people in places like the Ardoyne especially, it seems.

JOH: Yeah, especially, yeah, yes, there's a few guys I went to school with, you know, bit more than a few. I think I saw a photograph of, was it of Kickhams or was it our school, I can't remember, and like, out of about twenty I think, twenty-two, something like eleven had died in various circumstances, but all associated with the Troubles. But my mother died indirectly as a result of the Troubles as well, I mean, she, she doesn't appear in the statistics, you know, but you know that book *Lost Lives*, she doesn't appear in that, but she's, she died as the result of a riot that took place, so, you know, those–

FR: Okay [extended pause; sighs]. Okay, thanks very much Jim. I'll turn the tape off.

INTERVIEW ENDS