

## L24: AMANDA ROBINSON INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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

L24: Amanda Robinson	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:46:02	Duration: 01:46:02	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in 1974 into a Protestant family that lived in Fivemiletown, Co. Tyrone, then moved to Enniskillen in 1984. Describes Fivemiletown as ‘a loyalist village’ where ‘we had plenty bombings to, to hear and to sometimes witness’. Recalls keeping watch while her friend’s brothers painted the kerbstones red, white and blue. Describes the riots provoked by the death of republican hunger-striker Bobby Sands in 1981, riots in which her parents participated. Speaks of the entrenched religious and sectarian divides in both Fivemiletown and Enniskillen. States that her father was in the Black Institution of the Orange Order and that her parents voted for the DUP, a voting preference that was also ‘ingrained’ in her.			
10:00–19:59	Mentions her uncle being forced by her mother to stop dating his Catholic girlfriend and notes the constant ‘undercurrent that you shouldn’t [...] be with somebody from the other side’. Describes an ‘unhappy’ religious upbringing, which included being ‘forced to go to church’ and sent to Bible evenings, which ‘scarred’ her to the extent that she is ‘practically an atheist now’. Recalls being very unsettled by having to change primary schools when the family moved to Enniskillen. Remembers being in the vicinity of several lethal explosions, including the 1987 Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen, which maimed and killed people she knew.			
20:00–29:59	States that ‘with all these bombs you can remember where you were quite vividly’. Her father worked for a bakery that delivered bread to the local RUC barracks, which made him an IRA target and made her fear ‘an explosion every morning’ when he started his car. Attended a Protestant secondary school in Enniskillen, where she was ‘bullied for being ginger’. Remembers a religiously integrated school trip to France in 1989, which made her realise that ‘Catholics are quite normal’, and she briefly dated a Catholic boy that same year. Recalls another atrocity, this one in Fivemiletown, where ‘a massive car bomb’ exploded outside the police barracks and damaged her friend’s house. No one was hurt, but her friend was traumatised and her family had to live in temporary accommodation for a year or two.			
30:00–39:59	Reveals that her uncle married a Catholic whom ‘everybody hated’, except Amanda. Reveals that she has ‘never really wanted to understand’ the NI conflict or its history because she believes people ‘should all be able to get on together’. In 1993 she began her nurses’ training at Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry. Initially, her friends were mostly Protestant, but by the end of her training they were almost all Catholic. Recalls going on weekends away with them to Bunrana, Castlebar and Galway, where she would find herself standing to attention for the Irish national anthem and being quizzed about her origins and background. She describes this as a time of ‘being freer and being away from Enniskillen’, and of forming friendships with people who did not have strong political views.			
40:00–49:59	Values having many good friends who ‘don’t see the Protestant-Catholic thing’. Refutes perceptions of NI as implacably divided along sectarian lines. Explains			

	<p>why she did her A-levels in Fivemiletown and her aversion to attending the grammar school in Enniskillen 'with all the posh rich girls'. After her A-levels she worked as a healthcare assistant in a nursing home before going on to do her nursing training. She did most of her placements in Omagh and Enniskillen, and drove to Derry for college. Mentions her constant fear of encountering an IRA roadblock en route to Derry, and her relief that this never happened.</p>
50:00–59:59	<p>Discusses her girlish love of helicopters and 'the big soldiers' they carried, who 'would protect you, you know, and I suppose from the Protestant side of things that's what they were there to do'. She even considered becoming a Chinook pilot, 'but then realised I'm practically blind'. Says her friends would 'swoon after soldiers' and at one point she had a UDR boyfriend. She claims that, contrary to popular perception, 'there was a lot of peace sometimes' during the Troubles as people got on with their everyday lives. Discusses her prior views and actual experiences of Derry, and her discovery of Benone beach near Limavady, her 'happy place'. Describes herself as having become 'an adopted Catholic' by this point. She split up with her UDR boyfriend in 1995 and on completing her studies in 1996 secured a job in London hospital where she had friends. Recalls being called a 'Northern Ireland Protestant bastard' by a woman on a Dublin street and an 'IRA lesbian bitch' by a knife-wielding man on the London tube.</p>
01:00:00–01:09:59	<p>Says the latter incident made her feel that she should 'turn and go back to Ireland'. Voices her anger at people from the ROI who express pro-IRA views yet are 'clueless' about 'what happens in the North'. Mentions further incidents of anti-Irish prejudice, which she attributes to her red hair and accent: 'they just all assume I'm some terrorist'. Remembers living in Acton when a bomb exploded in Ealing in the late 1990s. Explains that she left NI because of 'a lack of jobs' and to 'get away from my parents really', adding that she was 'the first Robinson to leave the country'.</p>
01:10:00–01:19:59	<p>Reveals she began dating a Catholic man from Cork soon after moving to London, then got a job in Charing Cross Hospital in Hammersmith and lived in Acton with him. Admits she sometimes envies her friends back in NI, when she is 'living like a battery hen in London and they're free range', but likes the anonymity of the city nonetheless. Says that she sometimes pretends to be Catholic to get 'on the right side' of her Irish patients, especially the older generations. Discusses how her work gives her a different perspective on things and that 'life's too short' to be prejudiced towards others. Whereas she once travelled back to NI every other month, her visits have become more infrequent the longer she has been away.</p>
01:20:00–01:29:59	<p>Recalls the stress and 'culture shock' of her initial months in London. Reveals that her partner, Mike, was born in Galway and in the 1970s moved with his family to London, where he 'got terribly bullied and picked on for having an Irish accent'. They have been together since 2003 and have two children. Recalls socialising in Irish pubs and clubs in London, where she 'blended into' the Catholic milieu. Says that she loves hearing the life stories of her older Irish patients, many of whom were part of the postwar wave of Irish immigration. Discusses how the English accents of her children are received in NI and how when Mike first visited Enniskillen with her his London accent agitated some local people.</p>
01:30:00–01:39:59	<p>Having felt that religion was 'forced on her' as a child, she chose not to baptise her own children or raise them in any particular faith. She is pleased by their 'broad-minded' multicultural schooling and proud that her daughter has become 'a warrior girl for everything LGBTQ'. Since the late 1990s she has noticed changes in Belfast, but she is not convinced that Enniskillen has changed much, and notes that there are still religiously segregated areas there. Says she enjoys</p>

	discussing her NI upbringing with her children, who 'love listening' to her stories and are 'very proud to have Irish parents, or Northern Irish, or whatever'. Reveals she named her daughter after a heroine in Irish mythology who is associated with the Giant's Causeway. Speaks fondly of her recent return visits to NI with her family: 'I think there is just something lovely about going back and driving, getting over, getting into fourth or fifth gear is quite exciting'.
01:40:00–01:46:02	Thinks that moving to London has made her 'in some ways a better person' and helped her to overcome what was a 'very narrow-minded' upbringing. Expresses her exasperation with the continuing political divisions in NI, which strike her as infantile from her detached perspective. Interview ends with a brief discussion of this oral history project and its anticipated outputs.