INTERVIEW L25-SG6: MATTHEW ORD

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Matthew Ord
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Location: Virtual
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: Okay, that should be us recording now, fingers crossed [laughs], so the first thing is, I know that I've, I've sent you a consent form and that, but if you could just, first of all sorry say your full name and today's date.

MO: Yeah, sure, my name is Matthew David Ord and it's the nineteenth of February 2021.

FR: Alright, thanks very much Matt, and thanks for, thanks for agreeing to take part. So yeah, like I say, sorry, I've sent you the consent form, but if you could just sort of say that you know this is being recorded and that you don't mind, yeah.

MO: Sure, yeah, yeah, I'm happy to be recorded, yeah, that's fine.

FR: Thank you, that's great, just for the tape, okay, so, like I said, we're going to follow a kind of a life history format broadly [laughs], so, but the first question then is where and when were you born?

MO: I was born in Welwyn Garden City, which is a sort of commuter town outside of London, in, on thirty-first of July 1980.

FR: Okay, and how long did you live there for?

MO: Not very long. I think, I mean, obviously you've, you've spoken to my, to my mum already, so she might have a better idea about this than I have, but I think it was only a short amount of time, a few months maybe, and then we all moved back to Belfast because my parents had met, I mean, they knew each other from Belfast and they, they met again when they were both working over in England, got, let's see, I think they married in, in Ireland and then moved to England, I was born there and then a few weeks later or a few months later we moved back to Belfast, but I can't remember exactly when.

FR: Okay and so you wouldn't have any, your kind of earliest memories wouldn't be of Welwyn Garden City then?

MO: [pauses] Sorry, you cut out there.

FR: Oh sorry, I was just saying that you wouldn't have any memories then of Welwyn Garden City.

MO: Well, actually we ended up moving back there in about, when was it, about 1987 or eight.

FR: Okay, okay, okay.

MO: So I was born there and then we ended up for some reason moving back there, yeah, when I, when I was still quite young.

FR: But you would have been, so you were born in 1980, so you would be seven or eight which means you spent a, a good portion of your early life in Belfast actually.

MO: Well, I think I would have been about five when we moved over–

FR: Oh right, okay.

MO: From Belfast because we, we didn't go straight to Welwyn Garden City, we went to a village called Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire, which is a bit, a bit further, just slightly, you know, I don't know how many miles, thirty miles to the north of Welwyn, Welwyn Garden.

FR: Okay, okay, but you, so you spent about five years in Northern Ireland then.

MO: I think so, yeah.

FR: And do you have any, any memories of that period as a child?

MO: I do, I have sort of, sort of vague memories of school because I started, you know, I had sort of nursery and, and, you know, kind of infant school when we were living in Glengormley just sort of outside Belfast, and I do, you know, I sort of have visual memories of the house that we lived in in Belfast, you know, the one that always sticks to, in my mind for some reason is someone coming to buy our piano [laughs], but I sort of have this memory of sitting on the living room floor and watching some, some men come and wheel our piano out of the living room [laughs].

FR: [laughs] That's a good, that's a good memory.

MO: But that's about it really.

FR: Okay, so sort of visual memories, but nothing really substantial.

MO: No, not really, I mean, I still remember, you know, kind of the walk to school and I remember kind of being in school, kind of being in a sort of classroom and, but, you know,

it's very vague, I don't remember kind of things that people said to me or any sort of specific events really.

FR: No, and people have different, some people have really vivid memories from that age and some people don't remember anything at all, yeah.

MO: I obviously wasn't paying attention [laughs].

FR: [laughs] And then what about your, what about your parents, so you mentioned that they, they're both from Northern Ireland?

MO: Yeah, yeah, they're both, they're both from Belfast, and they, they, they actually grew up together, they did, in the same kind of, actually they lived in the same street when they were kids, in Carryduff, just sort of south of Belfast and, but obviously they, well, they, they went to very different schools because they came from sort of different religious, religious backgrounds.

FR: Ah okay, okay.

MO: [pauses] But yeah, so they, you know, my, my mum was, my mum's family were Catholic and so she went to St Dominic's school in Belfast, is it west, west Belfast, and, and my dad went to Inst., so they, I think they used to get on the same bus together into town, but then they sort of parted ways and went, you know, went to separate, separate parts of the city.

FR: But both lived in Carryduff so were able to kind of stay in touch through that I suppose, even if they were at different schools.

MO: Yeah, yeah, they would've seen, I think, I mean, they would have seen each other sort of before and after school and stuff, yeah.

FR: Yeah, okay, and then, so you were five or six, you moved back to, back to England, Gamlingay, am I saying that right?

MO: Yeah, that's right, do you want me to, I can spell it for you if you like.

FR: Yeah, please do.

MO: Okay, so it's G-a-m-l-i-n-g-a-y.

FR: That's a lovely name.

MO: Mmm.

FR: Yeah, one of these kind of Home Counties sort of English towns.

MO: Yeah, it's an okay, it's an okay sort of place, I mean, it's, it's a bit of a dump, to be honest [laughs], it's not quite as nice as it sounds, but yeah.

FR: Okay, it's just got the nice name, and then, so do you remember I wonder the experience of kind of moving from Northern Ireland back to England? Cos it's quite a lot of moving around for a young, a young child.

MO: I do remember actually the journey sort of from Ireland to England because I remember we took the ferry obviously, we took the car ferry over, and I remember going on quite a long train journey for some reason, I can't remember why, where we were going from at some point, poss-, oh I, I don't know, I'm not quite sure why, but anyway, but I remember sort of meeting my dad's mum, my, my nana at some point and her giving us like, a little bag to take on the journey with us of sort of toys and puzzles and stuff.

FR: Right, yeah.

MO: But yeah, so, so I do kind of remember the journey and I remember being, it being quite a big deal and quite an exciting experience.

FR: So it sticks in your mind as kind of like an occasion I guess.

MO: Yeah, it was.

FR: And then you moved to Gamlingay and spent a few years there, were you at school, you would have been at primary school by that stage I suppose.

MO: Yeah, that's right, yeah, I, I went to the village First School, which was sort of an old Victorian, very English villagey-type school, you know, with, yeah, sort of a Victorian stone building and, but we, but portacabins out the back, which was where most of the classrooms were cos it was, it wasn't really big enough, but yeah.

FR: And did you have a sense at that age then, going to school, of yourself as Irish or as Northern Irish or as not English I suppose? Did you have any sense of difference from, say, the other kids in the school?

MO: Yeah, very much so. It, it's, maybe not to begin with, I mean, I don't remember any particular sort of moment when I, when that was brought home to me, but I think as soon as I opened my mouth it was fairly obvious that I wasn't from there, and we're talking about quite a, you know, it was sort of, it's a rural community, a hundred per cent white, you know, English, and there was, you know, and this 1985-6, you know, so this is a time when being from Northern Irish wasn't, being from Northern Ireland wasn't a particularly good thing to be basically in that kind of community, it wasn't, it wasn't seen as sort of something sort of fun and exotic or even, you know, it was sort of, and I remember getting quite negative comments from, from other kids at the school about, about, you know, where I was from, about my parents, about my accent, so it was, yeah, it was, it was difficult and I, I did have a very deep sense of being different, I think from the beginning.

FR: Yeah, so this is in the sort of mid to late eighties, I suppose, there's a bombing, the bombing campaign, the IRA bombing campaign on the mainland as well as the Troubles still going in the North as well obviously, so that's the kind of context, and it's interesting like, you do still I suppose have a Northern Irish accent to my ear, so you had that as a child as well, you, you spoke with a Northern Irish accent.

MO: Yeah, both, both, myself and Paul were actually, you know, both had pretty strong I suppose kind of, yeah, north-eastern accents when we moved over and Paul particularly, my mum always thought this was hilarious, he had a, he had a almost like a kind of Antrimy, sort of almost Scots accent somehow, I'm not quite sure where he got that from, but, cos my parents don't talk like that, but yeah, we were, were pretty extreme I think when we first moved over.

FR: [laughs] I suppose if you mostly spend time with your parents, right, that's the acc-, those are the accents that you pick up before you go to school really.

MO: Mmm.

FR: And what did your parents do, what were their jobs?

MO: My dad was working for a company called, I think he was working for Thorn EMI as it was called then at the time, so he worked in, it was telecom basically, yeah, that's, so that's what he was doing and he basically did that until he retired, and my mum was at, was basically **[00:10:00]** just at, you know, at home looking after Paul, cos he wasn't at school yet, and then she later trained to be a teacher.

FR: Okay, and do you have any other memories then of that period in Gamlingay, apart from school, say?

MO: Yeah, I mean, it, I mean, the sort of countryside around there was actually quite nice, I mean, there were sort of, it's kind of East Angliaish–

FR: Right, right, right, okay.

MO: And so the, it's quite flat, but there's a lot of, a lot of interesting sort of countryside and there was a, there was woodland nearby and, you know, we were quite near Cambridge, the city of Cambridge, so we would sometimes go there and, yeah, I mean, I sort of remember the village, it kind of had like, medieval bits, some old medieval houses and an old sort of Norman church and stuff and I remember it being sort of probably in my mind quite, cos I was a bit like this as a kid, it was quite, quite a, quite, I had a slightly romanticised view of it maybe, but then sort of going back you sort of think oh wow, this is [laughs], can't remember at all, but yeah.

FR: It sounds quite kind of romantically English to me, that kind of English village atmosphere.

MO: Yeah, I think it was.

FR: Which I guess is quite different from, from Glengormley, even if you only had a, kind of a, not much of a sense of Glengormley.

MO: Well, it was a, yeah, it's kind of an English place, and I was interested in history, so I, you know, I was interested in reading about sort of Vikings and Saxons and all that kind of stuff, and so I suppose East Anglia, rural East Anglia's a place where you can sort of, you can, you can engage with that kind of history, there's places to visit and, and you sort of feel like you're kind of close to it in a way.

FR: Absolutely, there's kind of a Roman thing around there as well, right, it's got Roman ruins and things.

MO: Okay.

FR: Okay, and so you were there for a few years and then you moved back, at least back for your parents anyway, back to Welwyn Garden City.

MO: Yeah, but because my dad, he got a job at, or I think he was with the same company, but he relocated to Southgate in, which is in north London, and he didn't want to live in London, or possibly it was too expensive, I don't know, but we ended up sort of moving just to sort of, you know, one of the sort of satellite towns, which was Welwyn.

FR: Which is commutable I suppose.

MO: Yeah, it's like, I mean, he, he drove, but it was, you know, it's like, twenty minutes on the train from London, from King's Cross, it's not very far.

FR: Right, and it's kind of, I've never act-, I've never been to Welwyn Garden City, but I've seen some pictures, it, it seems like quite an interesting, it's a new town, right?

MO: It's interesting from the point of view of someone who's interested, who's into the twentieth century, you know, urban history or something like that, but, I mean, it was okay, it was very nice, I mean, it's, it's, it's an interesting place because it's, it's not very English, you know, and so it couldn't really be further from the sort of, you know, small Cambridge rural village, it was, cos it was built in the twenties and it was, you know, a little bit like Milton Keynes, it's designed to be a nice place for the workers to live, although interestingly of course it, it sort of, they kind of built the class system into it because you had the, the sort of slightly poorer sort of areas with, you know, terraced houses on one side of the what was called the White Bridge, this is the bridge that divided the sort slightly more affluent side of town from the, from the city centre.

FR: It's so interesting that that's like, part of the architecture, yeah.

MO: Yeah, exactly, so you go across the White Bridge and if you heard, if someone was sort of, was like, coming up in the world and was doing quite well for themselves you'd be like, oh yeah, they're moving, they're going to live over the White Bridge.

FR: [laughs] Wow, yeah, okay, and what kind of a place was that like to, to grow up in? So I suppose you're getting a wee bit older now, you're like, ten, eleven maybe?

MO: Yeah, so let's see, well, I was, I would have been about eight I think, seven, no, eight I think when we moved there and it was, it was different, yeah, because it was more urban, I mean, sort of suburban really, but it was, it was sort of a bit more like a town, we were close to London, not, not that we ever really went there, but it was, it was there anyway [laughs].

FR: [laughs] It's kind of there as an imaginative presence I guess.

MO: Yeah, exactly, yeah, so we did go on the odd day trip or whatever, but, I mean, it's, you notice it with the accent in Welwyn Garden City because, you know, it, there was a lot of people who, whose parents and grandparents had come from London sort of after the war cos it's kind of a, like a lot of new towns, it was a lot of people who'd, their family originated in the East End of London and they had come out sort of, you know, to live, to get out of the city and to, you know, it was the whole promise of a, of the new town idea, wasn't it.

FR: Yeah.

MO: But, so there was a lot, the accent's a lot more Cockney, so there was, so the kind of, you know, you're surrounded by, the accents in Gamlingay were a little bit softer, the kind of English accents you'd hear there, whereas in Welwyn Garden City it's a lot more Londony, a lot harder sounding, and there's also a, there was also an Irish community as well, of a sort.

FR: Ah that's interesting, that's interesting.

MO: Yeah, I, I guess, I'm not sure why that was or where they all worked or whether this was sort of people who were transplanted from London at some point, but, you know, there was a couple of Catholic churches and there was Catholic schools and there was this place called the Shamrock Club, which is where all the sort of, you know, not all of them, but some of the local Irish community would go and, you know, there'd be sort of dances and raffles and various kinds of events going on there, but we weren't a part of that like, we had nothing to do with that [laughs], so.

FR: That's what I was going to ask, so your parents weren't really involved in that, or you, really involved in that kind of Irish world?

MO: No, no, not at all, that's, that's, yeah, we did sort of, we ended up there I think because at one point, despite the fact that, you know, neither of my parents were very religious or involved in our local church, we did start going again for a while when I was just on the verge, I guess I was about eleven or twelve, I'd just started secondary school and my mum decided that she wanted to sort of get more involved in the, our local Catholic church.

FR: This is a Catholic church, okay.

MO: Yeah, Our Lady's, which is our local church, and so we did, we did, she sort of dragged us to church a few times, but I can't, I can't, I don't know how long we went for and I think, you know, at some point we must have just thought, actually I guess we don't really have to go, do we [laughs] and, and we stopped going and, you know, I, I think because I went to Catholic school I'm weirdly the only, I'm the only one of my siblings that went to Catholic school all the way through from, from primary school through to secondary school.

FR: Wow, okay.

MO: The, the, my brother and sister, they, they did a bit of Catholic primary school and then they went to, you know, non-religious, you know, standard comprehensive schools, but for some reason I ended up going to Catholic secondary school as well.

FR: Okay.

MO: So, I forget what I was saying now.

FR: No, well, that's, that's kind of interesting. I was going to ask, coming up to that age then, just coming up to going to secondary school, would you have been going back to Northern Ireland as a, as a child throughout this period?

MO: Yeah, we used to go, I'd s-, we went most Christmases I think, it was, it was, yeah, I mean, I, we spent a lot of Christmases with my, my mum's parents who lived in County Fermanagh–

FR: Ah okay.

MO: In Enniskillen, and that's where my mum's family's from originally, her dad, her mum and dad both came from sort of the area round Enniskillen and, and had sort of moved to Belfast, I think it was sort of in the fifties, and they lived in Holywood on the coast and then later, and then later moved to Carryduff.

FR: So you would have gone back, not so much to Carryduff, but more often to Enniskillen.

MO: Yeah, although we did go to Carryduff sometimes because that's where my dad's mum st-, lived.

FR: Okay, and what are your memories of, of that? Cos I'm thinking if you're going back, this is like, the, the late eighties into the mid-nineties, there's still some kind of infrastructure of conflict and stuff.

MO: Yeah, there was, although I think we used to go, I'm trying to think how we got there, I think we used to, usually it involved a really long drive up to Stranraer and, to get the ferry over, I'm trying to remember when the Stranraer ferry went, was it Dublin–

FR: That is, that is such a long drive by the way [laughs].

MO: Yeah, well, it certainly, yeah, it is if you live just outside London.

FR: Yeah, such a long drive from London. The Stranraer ferry, the one that I used to get goes to Larne.

MO: Larne, okay, that, that must be what it was, yeah, so we would get the ferry over to Larne and then drive down to Enniskillen, yeah, and I do, you know, I remember a lot of, you know, the sort of soldiers along on the road and checkpoints and thinking, you know, thinking that that was, that was quite scary and weird, you know, living in England, but, but never really questioning it, never sort of thinking, you know, this was unnecessary or, or, you know, this was something that you could do anything about, it was just there, it was just part of the, part of the experience of going to Ireland. I don't, you know, I pro-, I'm sure I didn't have a very clear sense of why they were there.

FR: No, but I'm sure you, well, I'm sure you wouldn't really at that, at that age and I suppose it makes sense to kind of normalise it at that age as well, it's just, it's just the thing that is there when you go to Ireland. What about a difference between Enniskillen and Carryduff like, what kind of different, quite different places I suppose?

MO: Yeah, well, Enniskillen is, I mean, I suppose like, in my mind at that time it was just, I don't know, it was just so different from where we lived in England and, you know, the, the countryside, everything about it was just totally **[00:20:00]** different. Again, you know, I think what sticks in my mind is that it, it felt kind of, just feeling very close to the past there, and, I mean, kind of like, the distant past, and my grandad was really into history and he knew a fair bit about kind of local history, not just the sort of official local history, but also the history of the area because he'd grown up there and it was, he knew a lot of people and he knew, he knew who used to own all the shops and all the pubs and he knew their families and he kind of just knew the area, so there was a real sense of that, you know, this was a place where, you know, my grandparents were very much of that place and very much fro-, you know, they knew it, they underst-, they understood it, they were from there. I don't think we had that, you know, I mean, we certainly didn't feel that way about where we lived in England.

FR: Well, I think it's so interesting because I suppose somewhere like Welwyn Garden City, I mean, what past is there, it was built in 1920 and everyone, everyone is a kind of a transplant who lives there I suppose, there isn't that kind of like, folk, long-running tradition in, in a new town, so I can see that that's a big difference.

MO: Yeah, but I, I, but, I don't know, I mean, I think even in Welwyn Garden City there was probably families that had been there since the, you know, for a couple of generations, probably since the, you know, since the twenties.

FR: And then what about Carryduff, what, what was that like?

MO: Well, yeah, just, like my, my granny, my, nana I used to call her, my nana, granny was my mum's mum, she was incredibly sort of genteel and her, you know, her house, it was a bungalow, it was, like a 1950s bungalow I think that has been possibly built round about the

time that they moved in, they might have been, I think she might have been the only person to ever live there. That's where my dad grew up, so, you know, again, there was a real history, a real sense of, you know, that's where my dad had been born, gone to school and kind of lived there all his life and then my granny still lived there and, and lived there until she died in 2006, and it was the most perfectly, it was almost like [pauses], like a 1950s, you know, kind of the perfect housewife kind of, in the 1950s housewife-type home and it was like, you know, you'd go there, it was so formal, you were scared to sit down on anything, you know, you didn't want to sit on the sofa or move the cushions or anything like that, she was, I mean, she was lovely and very welcoming, but everything was so sort of pristine and, and ordered, and she always used to have, she always used to have this thing where she would make you sit down on the sofa and you didn't really feel like you could move, and then she would disappear off to the kitchen and she would bring a series of offerings back from the kitchen and it was quite often things like a cake that she had made the previous year and put in the freezer and de-, and defrosted specially for your arrival and things like that, and it used to drive my mum nuts, but we, you know [laughs], it was, so we'd go there for, you know, it was always for the day, we never stayed over cos there wasn't really room and, you know, it would be like, you'd only see her for about half an hour the whole day, cos she'd just be in the kitchen kind of preparing stuff for you [laughs].

FR: Ah okay, yeah, I can, I can picture the kind of house that you mean as well, where you, you feel like you can't really relax onto the sofa or whatever.

MO: Yeah, yeah.

FR: Okay, that's interesting, and so, so those are the two places. Would you have ever travelled around the rest of either the North or, or the South with your parents on holiday or was it mostly confined to the two towns there?

MO: We never went to the South ever, I think, I think we might have once gone to Sligo for some reason [laughs]. There was no, there was no, there was no sort of, you know, I guess because it was such a, such a hassle crossing over the border you'd have to, you'd have to have a really good reason, you know, like, you were getting the ferry from Dublin or something or, or, yeah, like some real special daytrip or something, I don't think we would have gone. I mean, later on, you know, when, when the relaxed, you'd, you'd nip over, I mean, my gran-, I remember my grandad going to Swanlinbar to get his petrol cos it was a bit cheaper [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Yeah, that is, that is what people do on the border, yeah.

MO: But, but yeah, obviously before, you know, before, when it was still kind of like it was in the mid-eighties we wouldn't really have gone over, but in, in terms of within Northern Ireland I think, you know, we would, I mean, I, I still haven't been to Derry, you know, or, I've been, let's see [pauses]. I've travelled around kind of Fermanagh and a few bits in, sort of around places, Tyrone and we went to Carrickfergus, we would, I think we went over to Donegal a couple of times cos my grandad was like, really into golf, so he would go to, there was somewhere he used to go and play golf, just over the border, but yeah, it was very, very, it was very sort of bounded by Enniskillen and its environs really, it was sort of, you

know, go over to Larne, drive to Enniskillen and just pretty much stay within a few miles of the town the whole time.

FR: Okay, and then thinking about I suppose going, going to secondary school in Welwyn Garden City, so first of all I guess what, what was that like, you said it was a Catholic school?

MO: Yeah, it was, basically it was, the school that I went to was kind of linked to my primary school in the sense that it was kind of a fee-, you know, it was a feeder school and there, there were quite a few kids who came from an Irish background at, at both of the schools. Most of them had some sort of background in the, in the Republic, you know, that's where they were from, where their parents were from. There were very few, there was a couple of kids who actually were sort of first generation, they'd, they'd come over with their parents or something from, I think there was, there was a family I think it was Pauric and Clodagh McGee, I think they came from somewhere like, somewhere in the middle like, Longford or somewhere, anyway, so there was one or two sort of first-generation Irish people there and there was quite a few kids that came from sort of, you know, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish background cos it was a Catholic school.

FR: Okay, sure, that makes sense, yeah.

MO: So it was a bit of a mix, but yeah, it was okay, I don't really know what else to say, I mean, it was a, it was a Catholic, it was a Catholic school and it was sort of, you know, probably a little bit behind the times even then, and this was the early nineties, so it was–

FR: So what, what did that entail, a Catholic school, a lot of ritual?

MO: Well, we had to go to mass every week like, you know, so every Wednesday morning we actually had like, full mass at school and, you know, that was mandatory, and then we had sort of religious studies, which and we had these sort of teachers that taught it who were just, you know, really, really devout Catholics, it wasn't sort of like, oh let's learn about, let's learn about Islam today [laughs], it wasn't, it wasn't that, it was sort of like, oh this is why you should believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation or why, you know, this is why abortion is a really bad thing isn't it, isn't it, kids, isn't it, kids.

FR: How did you react to that given that, as you say, both your parents were, although you had a brief spell of going to church, both your parents weren't really religious?

MO: I think it was good, you know, because my, my mum obviously was brought up Catholic and went to Catholic school and obviously was to some extent a practising Catholic for some of my childhood, and I think to some extent, oh I don't know, possibly still has some kind of belief, I don't, I don't know, but my dad, my dad was, you know, his family were, his mum was Presbyterian, but his dad was from the north-east of England and was I think probably, you know, an atheist basically, and so he did have to go to church and I, cos, cos I think his dad was pretty like, you know, oh I'll just do whatever, whatever his mum wants really in terms of the sort of religious side of things and, you know, they lived in rural County Down while he was growing up and he, my grandad was the headmaster of the local primary school, so he probably had certain kind of obligations in terms of going to church and stuff.

FR: It's like a respectability thing.

MO: I think so, yeah, but yeah, wasn't really religious, so, but in terms of how I responded to it, yeah, I think when I was at primary school, I, I would say that I was quite, I was a Catholic when I was a kid, you know, I believed in God and I believed in Jesus and stuff and I, and I was sort of, I think I probably, when, when we were sort of praying in school, I think for a few years I probably prayed quite seriously [laughs].

FR: Yeah, no, absolutely, yeah.

MO: And then, but I think round about the age of ten or eleven I just thought nah, I don't really, I don't, I'm not sure that I, I buy into this and I don't really think it's very helpful and, I don't know, it wasn't sort of like, a big, you know, oh I don't, I don't think I believe in this anymore, it wasn't really that profound, it was just sort of, it just faded away.

FR: Sure, sure.

MO: And then by, so by the time I went to secondary school, I mean, no one, no one I knew sort of took any of it very seriously, so.

FR: [laughs] It's such a strange thing to think of all these kids going to mass, none of them taking it seriously, yeah.

MO: I know, yeah, it's, I mean, we used to, we always used to do this thing where we used to kind of do this kind of robot voice, you know, when you have to do the responses and we would kind of do this like, you know, sort of zombie, robot sort of voice when we were doing the responses.

FR: I love that, it's like a **[00:30:00]** little resistance [laughs] within, within the limits that you can.

MO: Exactly, cos there were, cos there were like, there were monks and nuns there, you know, and stuff and they, and they were, some of them were quite scary.

FR: No, I can imagine, and then I'm interested in, so you mentioned at primary school in, in, in Gamlingay initially feeling a sense of difference, you had a slight Northern Irish accent, or maybe even then a stronger Northern Irish accent, your parents are obviously Irish, but then at this Catholic school it sounds like there are some Irish people and also the children of some other immigrants from other, other nationalities. So does that kind of dissipate then when you're here or–?

MO: I think so because, I'm not really sure, I certainly was still aware of being different and I think, see, this is a, this is a real, something I've been wondering about a lot actually in the last little while is how much the sense of difference I had was to do with me being Irish and how much was just the fact that I was generally a bit weird [laughs], so, you know, I mean, I certainly felt different and I felt that people, other people sort of viewed me differently and,

you know, cos I was always a bit awkward, but I don't know whether that was because, you know, I had this experience of coming from another country and, and talking funny and, you know, not understanding stuff, yeah, I think, I think maybe by the time I was about twelve or thirteen my natural weirdness had kind of superseded my Irishness as, as a, as a marker of difference [laughs] in terms of how, the way I was viewed.

FR: I understand, I understand what you mean, but, but, okay, but still some kind of, of, of sense of distance or difference, yeah, but maybe slightly differently expressed, and I'm kind of wondering then as well, as you start to get a wee bit older, sort of eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, do you remember your parents talking to you about, say, their childhoods or about Northern Ireland or about the Troubles or anything like that?

MO: A bit, yeah, I mean, used to ask them both about their experiences sort of when they were living there in the 1970s because that's when, that's when they were teenagers, they would've, I think they would've been, when everything sort of kicked off in 1969 they would have been just turning seventeen I suppose.

FR: Wow, right, so right in the middle of it really.

MO: Yeah, and, and my mum, you know, obviously she went to school sort of around, kind of over on the west side of the city, sort of Falls Road area, so she would've, would've, you know, made that daily journey between Carryduff and, and the sort of, I think it's near the Falls Road, I can't exactly remember where St Dominic's is or if it's, if it's still there, I don't know, but–

FR: It's west Belfast anyway, I know.

MO: West Belfast anyway, yeah, but that's where she was and so, you know, she, she kind of had friends who were, lived in ver-, a very different kind of environment I guess than, than she grew up in and, yeah, I mean, she, she sort of talked about some of her experiences and, and, yeah, it was just, I mean, unbelievable really to us, I mean, just hard to imagine, and my dad as well, you know, he sort of talked about getting stopped in the street, you know, by soldiers and kind of, you know, very aggressively searched and stuff like that and at various points, and he was, he was a musician as well sort of in his late teens and early twenties and, and he talked about some, having some slightly sort of odd experiences, playing in some really dodgy pubs and stuff, you know, having to, having to play the national anthem at the end of gigs or various other kind of bits of sectarian repertoire that you'd have to kind of have ready.

FR: Was he in like, a, like, a showband?

MO: No, no, he was, he was kind of really into sort of prog rock and stuff like that, so he was more kind of, playing kind of, you know, blues and, and hard rock and prog and stuff like that, he wasn't really part of that showband scene.

FR: Kind of a little bit after that I guess, this is a, this is a kind of a sub-interest of mine because I'm writing a book about the punk scene in Belfast.

MO: Oh great, yeah.

FR: [laughs] So yeah, no, it's just, I'm just interested, yeah.

MO: Yeah, so he would have been sort of on the, the sort of music scene in Belfast just, just before that all started.

FR: Yeah, there was a big blues scene in Belfast in the, in the, in the sort of, I, I guess, I suppose just before the Troubles, yeah.

MO: Yeah, so, and he was really into that, so he would have been involved in a lot of, a lot of what was going on then.

FR: Okay, that's interesting, and I'm, I'm always really interested in this idea that, you know, you're, you're in Welwyn Garden City and your parents are telling you these stories, it must be quite strange, as a child.

MO: Yeah, well, it's, it's one of those things, isn't it, it's kind of hard to imagine that those things happening to your parents or to, you know, to, it's, yeah, cos they're so, those things are so terrifying and dramatic and it's hard to, hard to connect them with, you know, your mum and dad I guess, especially when you live somewhere that's kind of peaceful and safe.

FR: Yeah, absolutely, and the other thing I suppose is the, the sense of your parents being in what in Northern Ireland they call a mixed marriage. I suppose that wouldn't really have meant anything to you or it wouldn't really have had any kind of, I don't know, meaning for you in the context of England.

MO: No, I mean, it didn't, it didn't have any impact on us at home, although I, I do remember my mum talking about having some difficulties kind of relating to, I mean, she always had a bit of a, a slightly strange relationship with her mother-in-law basically and I think, you know, she wasn't nec-, I think, she wa-, she wasn't sort of, you know, the stereotypical Presbyterian bigot, you know, I mean, she, but she certainly [pauses], oh I don't know, I mean [pauses], she was the kind of person that would say things, you know, that she, she, I remember, my granny telling me, telling this story about, cos her dad used to run the local shop in Saintfield in County Down and she always used to talk about how well Catholics and Protestants got on, you know, in the old days and how her dad used to have, have a Union Jack that he used to put up on the Twelfth of July right, right over the entrance to his shop and that his customers who were Catholic would have to walk in underneath this Union Jack and would, you know, give him shit about it basically and, and he always used to say sure it won't do you a button of harm.

FR: Okay [laughs].

MO: And this was her, this was her sort of story about sectarianism in the fifties, or, or before, I guess it would have been the thirties maybe even, I don't know.

FR: But it's that kind of period of supposedly everyone getting along together.

MO: Yeah.

FR: Although I'm not sure if that is what that story signifies [laughs].

MO: No [laughs], I'm not sure what she was trying to get across with that, to be honest, but yeah, I mean, she, my mum always thought that there was, that she had a, a few sort of, let's just say reservations about Catholics [laughs], but she wasn't sort of, you know.

FR: And it could be a really big deal, mixed marriages in Northern Ireland, certainly in that period, really a big deal.

MO: Yeah, and, and, and actually my mum was also herself the product of a mixed marriage in, in the early 1950s because her mum was, you know, very, very Catholic, from rural County Fermanagh, and my grandad was Church of Ireland, not, not Presbyterian, and they got married in 1953 and I know for a fact that one of the reasons that they decided to move back to Enniskillen was to get away from Belfast because they were, cos they were in a mixed marriage, cos, cos my grandad used to work for the tax office in Belfast and he, he would get people coming up to him and sort of asking him about his wife and, you know, I've heard, I've heard your wife's an RC.

FR: An RC.

MO: An RC, yeah.

FR: Wow, okay, that's, that's quite a family history there really, two, two, two mixed marriages, how interesting. Okay, so going back to yourself then, you stay, did you stay at the Catholic school all the way through to, to A-levels and that?

MO: Yeah, until I was seventeen.

FR: Yeah, and what did you do for your A-level?

MO: I did music, history and English.

FR: Music, history and English, and did you have any kind of plan at that age or any kind of intention what you would do?

MO: No, no, I had like, I had no drive or ambition whatsoever [laughs], so I, I mean, I was really into music, but not in a sort of, not in a very focused way, I just knew that I liked doing it a lot and I just spent, I used to spend all my time doing that and not really thinking very hard or in a very sort of detailed way about what I might do with it, so I didn't–

FR: Were you in bands and stuff?

MO: Yeah, I was, I was sort of in a couple of, couple of bands that I was quite serious about, but, you know, that never really did much, but there was quite a good local music scene where I was, so, you know, we did plenty of pub gigs and things like that, but, you know, there wasn't like, a music industry or anything there, it was just, just our local music pubs.

FR: Yeah, and so what, what did you do then when you, when you finished school?

MO: I, this is how disorganised I was like, I didn't even, I didn't even apply to university I think, or at least not at the same time as everyone else was running around with their UCAS forms, I think I was kind of like, just [laughs], I don't know, playing guitar somewhere in the corner, but I, **[00:40:00]** anyway, I ended up just leaving school and getting a really, really shit job working for, I think it was Thomas Cook or someone.

FR: The trav-, the travel agent?

MO: Well, no, I was working in their warehouse as a foreign currency cashier.

FR: Oh right, okay.

MO: So that was my first kind of job after school, yeah, and then, then I realised that that was horrible and [laughs] I decided, I decided to go to university, finally and, and then I did, so I, then I went to, I went to Queen's in, in Belfast and did philosophy.

FR: Did you, okay, oh that's interesting, okay, so you decided to go, go to Belfast?

MO: Yeah, I mean, it, it was sort of, it wasn't like, something that I thought hard about because I, I got in through clearing, so I, I basically, you know, I, the reason I, sorry if I'm giving you too much information–

FR: No, please, give me as much information–

MO: Or if I'm rambling, but, you know, like, I didn't do very well in my A-levels cos I wasn't really working very hard and so I kind of, the reason I didn't go straight away was that I thought oh I'll do it, actually I didn't really like those subjects, I might go to college and do another couple of A-levels and, you know, and, and sort of boost my grades so I can get in somewhere really good, and then, but, so I tried that and then I gave up [laughs], and then, and then I just thought ah fuck it, I'll just, I'll get on the phone to, you know, someone during clearing and Queen's was like, the, one of the first ones on my list and I said, you know, can I come and do philosophy there and they were like, yeah, and I was like, okay, great [laughs], so that was it.

FR: Okay, okay, so and then, so you, did you move to Belfast?

MO: Yeah, I did, but, again, I was only there, I was there for two years and then I transferred over to London because my girlfriend was, was studying in London and so I decided to move in with her.

FR: Is that a girlf-, is that a girlfriend who you know from, from Welwyn?

MO: Yes, well, no, yeah, from Luton, so–

FR: From, from England anyway.

MO: From England, yeah, and so yeah, so I was there for two years.

FR: What did you, what did you make of it?

MO: I really enjoyed it, but yeah, I mean, it was kind of, it was interesting because I was sort of, you know, I was, I realised like, how, how little I knew about, about the culture of the place, to be honest. I mean, I kind of knew a bit about the history, I kind of knew what my parents had told me and what I'd kind of learned about the place just going over on these sort of, you know, family visits at Christmas and Easter and during the summer holidays and stuff, but, it was, yeah, it was sort of odd going there and sort of realising just how, I mean, it wasn't sort of like, that I was, I didn't, it wasn't that I was English, that I felt English and therefore different, it was just, yeah, I just felt kind of there was just so much for me to learn, it was this, it was this weird feeling of familiarity and yet like, basic ignorance about the culture of the place.

FR: No, I can imagine, I can imagine that. What, what, what year is this that you're going to Belfast?

MO: 2002.

FR: Okay, so it's a while after the peace process.

MO: Yeah, yeah, I mean, there was kind of a sense that, yeah, that that period of sort of had moved, people, that things had moved on, definitely, and that things were sort of looking up and sort of a bit, a bit saner, bit more positive.

FR: And did you stay in student accommodation in Belfast?

MO: I did for the first year, yeah, and then I moved.

FR: Elms village, is that the place, south Belfast?

MO: Yeah, sort of, I think it, on the Malone Road, I think, or just, or near, near sort of, near Methody, just up the road from there anyway, and then I moved, then I moved out into sort of shared, a shared house for the second year and that was, where was that, that was kind of near, still south Belfast, just off the, not the Ormeau Road, Lisburn Road, just off Lisburn Road.

FR: Ah yeah, and did you live with Irish people or other English people or, or, or what?

MO: Yeah, I lived with, I just lived with two other people and they were both from, where were they from, Coleraine, one was from Coleraine and one was from Ballymoney. That struck me about Queen's actually was just how, I mean, it's, I don't know what the, the breakdown is now, but I think at that time it was about eighty per cent Irish, eighty per cent Northern Irish, in terms of the student population, and that was a bit of a shock because, you know, I was kind of expecting something a little bit more, a bit more diverse, to be honest, but.

FR: [laughs] A bit more, a bit more cosmopolitan.

MO: Yeah.

FR: I didn't go to Queen's, but I, what people used to tell me was that it, it wasn't a huge amount of fun because everyone went home at the weekends.

MO: Yes, exactly, yeah, so everyone was, yeah, oh it was really, it was really frustrating because I sort of felt, I actually felt that everyone was a bit younger, you know, well, I mean, I was a bit, I was slightly older cos I was twenty-, twenty-two by the time I started.

FR: Okay, okay.

MO: But yeah, I felt, I felt like I was surrounded by very young people and, and people who were very sort of, very attached to their, to their home, their parents' home, particularly in going home with their washing every weekend.

FR: Yes [laughs], yeah, right.

MO: I was like, I was kind of, you know, wanting to like, you know, have fun and do stuff and, you know, go to the pub and everyone was just, everyone disappeared on Fridays.

FR: That's, that's really interesting, yeah, I've heard that from other people, and what about Belfast as a city, how did you, how did you find it? Cos obviously your, your parents had kind of spent time there when they were younger as well.

MO: Yeah, I mean, I really liked, I liked Belfast a lot as a city and I started, I mean, that was around about that time that I started getting interested in, in sort of folk and traditional music more, I mean, it was some-, I'd always been listening to it, really from a very young age, I mean, it was something that my parents were kind of vaguely sort of, they certainly they listened to and my dad was involved in playing it a bit and, and, but I, you know, I wasn't, certainly there wasn't a lot of activity in that area when I was growing up, but when I was in Belfast obviously there's some, some really good, you know, Irish traditional music going on and so I started to try and explore that a bit with sort of, you know, I would probably say, I'd say kind of quite limited success in a way because it was kind of hard, it's kind of hard on your own, especially if you're not from there, I think, to sort of, to get into that scene. I mean, it's hard to get into any kind of cultural scene anyway as an outsider, but I think it did involve me sort of just, a lot, you know, a lot of trial and error and kind of, you

know, I would, I remember I used to, I went to this session at a place, you know, the John Hewitt.

FR: I do surely, yeah, I do.

MO: Yeah, so these, I went to the session there and there was the, kind of just sat in and actually everyone was really nice and kind of put up with me like, not really knowing any of the tunes and just sort of like, bashing away on the guitar and then, they were very nice about it and actually they ended up, at the end of the session they said oh we're going to another session after this if you want to come along and, you know, taking me to this place that was kind of like, way outside the main part of the city centre to this, this pub that I definitely would not have gone into on my own at any other time, I can't even remember what it was called, but it, I mean, I was pretty pissed by this time and I, but it was in a part of town that I prob-, I definitely hadn't been to before and I don't think I went to again and I don't really recall where it was, but I know, you know, it was clearly sort of like, Falls Road area and, yeah, it was good, but it was, I definitely felt like a, very much an outsider within that scene.

FR: I think, I mean, that's, I find it really interesting, partly just because like, going to watch trad sessions, I get the impression that there are kind of a lot of unwritten rules, I feel like I would find it very stressful to sit in [laughs] because they sort of, on the one hand it seems quite fluid, but on the other hand it seems like there's, there are some rules that I don't completely understand going on, about who plays when and stuff.

MO: Yeah, yeah, there are, there definitely are.

FR: But that's interesting that you got involved in that in, in Belfast, and do you think people had a sense of you as Irish or as English in Belfast?

MO: I think mostly English, I mean, I think most people would have, would have, cos, I mean, to be h-, I think my accent at that time was probably about the same as it is now, so, but I think the thing with accents is you generally hear differences rather than similarities.

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

MO: So I think probably, you know, if you're in a place where the norm is to have a Belfast accent or a Northern Irish accent then you're going to hear the things that don't, that are different from that, so, so I think probably from, quite naturally I think people would have heard the bits of the way I spoke that were, that were different, so yeah, I think I definitely came across as English to most people, yeah.

FR: And any other, any other kind of memories from that period, anything else about university itself or about, I don't know, just about the experience of living in Belfast?

MO: [pauses] Not, no, nothing that really immediately springs to mind.

FR: Okay, so you, you were only there for two years anyway and then you moved back to, moved back to England?

MO: Yeah, I moved, then I moved to Catford in south London for a year and–

FR: Dropped out of university or switched university?

MO: No, I just, I switched, I was doing philosophy at Queen's and then I just switched to another philosophy course at, it's really, it's kind of like, well, it was the University of Greenwich, it was on the, the old naval, the old naval college in Greenwich.

FR: It's lovely out there.

MO: Yeah, it's a lovely campus, but, you know, it was, like lot of things at that time in my life, it was, it was very **[00:50:00]** much a snap decision made with no planning whatsoever, it's just sort of like, oh I think I'm going to move to London and then it was just literally one phone call to the first university that I could think of [laughs].

FR: [laughs] Okay, yeah.

MO: So yeah, so I did that and that's, you know, from then on that was basically, you know, I lived in sort of, in, in London, moved back home a few times to sort of live with parents at various points, but eventually, you know, ended up sort of settling in London and just sort of trying to play music and do gigs and stuff and that's really, that was that really.

FR: And are you still interested in, in sort of folk trad music here or are we talking like, bands, like, contemporary music?

MO: Well, I was, I was playing, I was sort of doing a lot of solo gigs at that time cos when I, when I was in Belfast one of the things that I did, cos I was kind of, kind of on my own, I didn't really know any other musicians to begin with, so I used to, I played a lot of acoustic guitar on my own, so I ended up, when I left Queen's, I was able to start doing some sort of solo gigs on my own and that's where I sort of made most of my music income from–

FR: Okay, okay.

MO: Such as it was, but I did play a lot of folk and traditional music and I, I did do some Irish material and I did some English material, bit of a mix.

FR: Yeah, okay, and did you know any other kind of Irish people when you were living in London or–?

MO: Yeah, I did, I, cos I was sort of, I was kind of connected, I went to sessions.

FR: Well, that's a big, there's a big scene in London, right.

MO: Yeah, yeah, so I was living in, I ended living in Stoke Newington.

FR: Of course, right, which is the centre of it really.

MO: [laughs] Yeah, so I was, I mean, I was only a few hundred yards from Stoke Newington high street and so I, there's a couple of session pubs there that I used to go to and ended up, you know, knowing quite a few, not just Irish people, but a lot of people who are involved with that scene, so people from Ireland, Scotland, yeah, and so I was sort of on the fringes I suppose of that because, you know, I knew people that were involved with the sort of Irish centre in Camden and used to teach there and, so I was kind of aware of a bit of a circuit of kind of Irish music pubs.

FR: Okay, and I guess, this is, no, the, I mean, you weren't living in London during any of the kind of Troubles in London I suppose?

MO: No.

FR: No, you wouldn't have been, but I think it's interesting, the, the sort of trad connection, and then what, so, do you still live in London?

MO: No, I live in Newcastle now.

FR: Ah okay, so how did that come about?

MO: Well, through the music, so I'm, I'm a lecturer in the music department at Newcastle University, so that's, that's kind of where all that ended up [laughs], so I kind of, basically I, you know, I started playing sort of folk and traditional music, sort of upon, upon leaving Queen's and doing that sort of, I, I hesitate to say professionally, but I did, you know, I was very active, I mean, I didn't make very much money, but eventually I decided I'd like to go back and do a master's degree and then PhD and ended up teaching on the, the folk and traditional music degree here in Newcastle–

FR: Oh how interesting.

MO: So yeah, I've kind of, that's, yeah, it wasn't, it was going, in retrospect it was all heading somewhere [laughs], it was leading somewhere.

FR: [laughs] It's always the way, it doesn't feel like it at the time, but looking back you can see a, a direction.

MO: Yeah.

FR: That's interesting, and so your MA and PhD, maybe particularly the PhD, what were they about in terms of folk music or trad music?

MO: Well, interestingly the PhD was mostly looking at recording, sound recording and specifically within the kind of English revival scene, so I was kind of, I wasn't really specific, it

wasn't an Irish music project, although I did a little bit of, I did look a little bit at sort of early recordings of London Irish music as part of that, so yeah, there's a, there's a link there.

FR: What, what period is the English revival?

MO: Well, the period that I looked at in the thesis was 1955 to sort of mid-seventies.

FR: Right.

MO: So, so just really, just to kind of keep it within the sort of the first wave of, of activity. I guess some people would say that it's still going on, but.

FR: [laughs] Is it, okay, there's a complicated kind of periodisation there, okay.

MO: Yeah, I think so.

FR: It's interesting, I mean, I don't know very much about the English folk revival, a little bit, but yeah, that sounds really interesting, and about recordings specifically, so about recording practices or–?

MO: Yeah, yeah, looking at sort of tape recording and the sort of use of, you know, cos obviously that period is, there's a huge amount of, a lot of technological advancement happening very quickly and, and folk music is sort of part of that and the way that recording was used to sort of interpret traditional music and all that kind of stuff, so yeah.

FR: Okay, and then that, that's taken you eventually to lecturing in, in Newcastle.

MO: Yeah, which I, I finished the PhD in 2017 and so I've just been kind of teaching, teaching and researching, at, yeah, at Newcastle sort of ever since.

FR: Okay, I was trying to remember, there's a book by a guy called Reg Hall.

MO: Oh yeah.

FR: Which I have read, called *The Few Tunes of Good Music*, about the kind of Irish music folk scene in London.

MO: Yeah, yeah, I actually interviewed Reg for my, as part of my thesis.

FR: Ah did you, he sounds like a fascinating guy.

MO: Yeah, he was great, he, I mean, I could have, I could have interviewed him, you know, multiple times, I only got to speak to him once, but I said, cos he, I went to see him at his house in East Croydon and I, I think we did, we did about a four-hour interview–

FR: Phow, oh wow.

MO: With [laughs], and this wasn't me like, you know, it wasn't, I would have quite happily have taken a break, but he was, he had a lot to say, so.

FR: Ah I can imagine, okay, that's interesting, was, was your, would your, would your father have been interested in this then? You mentioned that he had a passing interest in the, in the folk scene.

MO: My dad, yeah, he was, he was quite active on the folk scene, weirdly, mostly after moving to England. I mean, he was sort of in, he kind of, he really liked some, some of the Irish bands like the, sort of, the more, yeah, he really liked the Bothy Band and Planxty and those kinds of people and he tended to be a bit sneery about English music, just because, you know, it's like, a bit more sort of Captain Pugwash, that's what he would have said, you know, it's like, it doesn't have that sort of, you know, fluid, complex kind of virtuosity that Irish music at the time had, so he, but yeah, I mean, he was interested in the Irish stuff, I mean, obviously I'm not, I'm not an Irish traditional musician really, but I'm interested in that material and, yeah, I think he sort of appreciated what I did with it and was very supportive and, and, you know, had an interest and I think a lot of the st-, probably, he was, he was definitely a formative influence in terms of his record collection.

FR: Yeah, sure, I guess that's always the way, it's the, the first introduction, and then just to kind of I suppose finish the life history bit with you, so how do you find Newcastle, what's Newcastle like?

MO: Newcastle's actually very similar to Belfast in some ways.

FR: I know what you mean, I know, I know Newcastle fairly well, my sister lives up there, so–

MO: Oh right, okay.

FR: And it does, it feels quite like Belfast, I know what you mean.

MO: Well, I suppose, you know, they're both small port cities that, yeah, I mean, and they've got a, you know, both have a historically like, a really good sort of folk and traditional, but also like, a blues scene and a rock scene, they're just, yeah, they're like, small, self-contained, really culturally vibrant places.

FR: Yeah, right, no, I can see that.

MO: And, yeah, Newcastle's great, again, there's a, there is, there is an Irish centre in Newcastle as well, I don't know if you've ever been there.

FR: No, I haven't, although I do know that there's a bit of a kind of a diaspora community, yeah.

MO: Yeah, it's in Chinatown, slightly confusingly [laughs] for–

FR: Strange [laughs].

MO: [laughs] But it's yeah, it's kind of, you know, on a smaller scale to the Hammersmith and Camden Irish centres, much smaller scale, but they do have, you know, there's, there's regular Irish gigs and events and Irish history, you know, stuff that goes on, you can go to, go to talks and things, but, you know, I, again I'm, you know, I'm not really, not really part of that, but, you know, I'm sort of aware of it and I have gone a few times and, yeah. I mean, the other thing about Bel-, Newcastle is it's full of Northern Irish people as well.

FR: Aye, yes, absolutely, it is yeah, lots of people go to university there for some reason.

MO: Yeah, I'm not, yeah, I don't, I don't know why that is, but yeah, there's tons of them, I mean, when you're walking round you just hear, hear sort of, you know, accents from all over Northern Ireland all the time, which is interesting.

FR: People just following the most miserable weather they can get I think.

MO: [laughs] Yeah, trying to stay on the same latitude.

FR: [laughs] Okay, that's, that's great Matt, thank you. I think I've got some slightly kind of broad and reflective questions which, you know, feel free to be like, I don't, I've got no idea [laughs], about kind of the influence of the Northern Irish thing on your, on your life I guess, although actually before, before I move to that, have you been back to Northern Ireland much as an adult I suppose?

MO: The last time I went was to, was to scatter my grandfather's ashes on Lough Erne [laughs], that was the last time I went, and that was, we basically were just passing through, we tried to, we tried to incorporate it with a visit to Donegal, but yeah, that was the last time I went, and then, to be honest, it's mostly been funerals since about, since I've left university, first of all it was my granny's funeral, sorry, **[01:00:00]** my, my nana, my dad's mum's funeral in 2006, and then a couple, his uncle and aunt died, we went back for, for that and, so yeah, it's kind of, it's a bit of a, bit of a downer really, it's like, most of the trips that we've had recently have just been people we don't really know very well dying.

FR: Yeah, no, it kind of happens I, I guess with extended family, and so have you got any remaining family connections in the North?

MO: My mum's got some cousins, a cousin Carmel who lives in, still lives in Belfast and some, some family, so her kids.

FR: But fairly, fairly loose connections?

MO: Pretty loose, yeah, my dad's cousin lives there, she's a lawyer in Belfast, but yeah, apart from that it's, it's very, very distant relatives at this point.

FR: Right, okay, so not really a huge reason to go back I suppose other than maybe to, to be a tourist.

MO: No, it's quite sad really actually, I mean, I, it's, it's weird, you know, cos all through the period I was growing up I had like, you know, close family that lived there and now there isn't really anyone, it's just very sort of peripheral kind of, yeah, extended family.

FR: And it sounds like you had qui-, have quite vivid memories of summers in Enniskillen and stuff as well.

MO: Yeah, very much so.

FR: Okay, well, I guess [laughs], I don't, I'm always a bit hesitant about these questions cos I think, I couldn't answer this, this is just a ridiculous question to ask, but, but what, what effect do you think your kind of, so your parents talking to you about Northern Ireland or your sense of Northern Ireland as a, as a child, what kind of effect do you think that's had on you growing up?

MO: [pauses] Talking about the Troubles and things like that or talking about Northern Ireland as a place or–?

FR: Either, either or both, I mean, the Troubles or just that kind of, maybe just that sense that you talked about before of kind of slight difference that you felt as a, as a, as a kid in Gamlingay.

MO: Well, I think, I mean, I'm not sure how much of this is to do with my parents sort of explicitly talking about Northern Ireland or talking about, you know, us being Irish as a family, but I always felt that I was Irish, you know, I always, I always sort of had, that was part, a really important part of who I was and I think, you know, it was interesting because I think for a lot of people who are second generation that comes from being part of a, some kind of community, you know, that they're connected, they live, you know, if you live somewhere Kilburn or Cricklewood or one of those places, or Luton even, I think that there's a sense that you're part of a, a kind of migrant community, whereas we weren't and I, I actually think that my sense of, of Irishness is very lo-, is very localised in being a part of my family, because we were the, you know, we were the only Northern Irish people in the village to begin with and then, you know, I think that sense of difference was quite profoundly stamped from an early age and, and it was more to do with, it was almost like we were the only Northern Irish people in the world [laughs], you know, it was like we were, I think that was, so that was, but it wasn't something that my parents sort of, you know, explicitly said, you are, you are Irish, you know. Oh I do remember, I do remember my dad once saying that he would never lose his accent and that he, that he thought that people that deliberately lost their accents when they, when they moved to somewhere like England, he thought, he really looked down on that, he thought that was a really kind of sneaky thing to do [laughs] where, you know, as if like, they were sort of slightly treacherous, but, inauthentic or something, but my grandad he would, he used to say, you know, ne-, you know, always remember that you are, you are Irish, you know, whatever, you know, whatever happens, you'll, you'll, that's something that you just are.

FR: That's, that's really interesting, yeah. The accent thing is interesting as well because it's such a, I, I don't know, for me certainly accent is, exists in this kind of weird realm where I'm

not sure how much of it is agentic or I don't know how much of it is like, something I'm doing, and how much of it is something that I'm not consciously doing, it's a weird one.

MO: Yeah, I mean, I'm, I'm sure that, that whatever's left of my Northern Irish accent is, is being kind of, I'm sure I'm, if I listen back to this recording I'd be mortified to hear how much I'm sort, I'm sort of exaggerating it and it's not, it's definitely not on purpose, but it just seems to happen when I'm talking to someone who talks like you [laughs].

FR: I know, I do it, I do it on the interviews all the time, my, my partner overhears me and says you sound much more Northern Irish than you do when you speak to, to me, yeah, it's strange.

MO: But weirdly it also happens when I talk to people from Glasgow.

FR: Yes.

MO: Or other sort of, you know, Scottish urban accents, I find I, I sort of, I'm somehow mirroring some of the sounds that they're making, it's weird.

FR: Oh people in, people in England certainly mistake me for a Scottish person all of the time, so there are, there's a real consonance really between the accents.

MO: I actually had a couple of students, Scottish students, ask me which part of Scotland I was from.

FR: [laughs] Yeah, it happens to me as well, there you go, yeah, and do you, do you think of yourself as Irish then, I suppose would be the question?

MO: I do, but I, but in a way that kind of, you know, but at the same time I'm aware that for a lot of Irish people, and I think actually probably particularly in the Republic of Ireland, that that would be an unacceptable thing for me to think [laughs], and I sort, but I kind of know that because I've had conversations where I've talked about, not, not where I've sort of, you know, insisted in any way on my Irishness, but just where I've had it sort of deliberately pointed out to me that I'm not really the real, I'm not quite the real thing, you know, for some, in some way, but I don't know, I just sort of think that, I mean, Irishness is, it's just such a and it is, it's a diasporic identity and it has been, it's al-, it always has been in some way I think and it's just, I think it's so difficult to support any kind of hardline kind of ethnic or, do you know what I mean, any, any definition that doesn't take that into account I think is, is really problematic. But it's not something that I'm, you know, I'm not, I wouldn't say, it's not something I'm sort of patriotic about, you know, I don't, I don't have any sort of romantic ideas about what it means to be Irish, but it's just, it's, in many ways it's just an unfortunate fact, it's something, it's just something that I have, you know, that I deal with, that I'm, you know, I'm not really from here, here being England, in, in the way that I feel other people are, because I came from somewhere else, you know, so.

FR: An unfortunate fact is a nice way to, a nice way to put it.

MO: I mean, it was sometimes, you know, not necessarily unfortunate, but you know what I mean, it's just, it's–

FR: It's a, it's a, it's not something that you've chosen, it's just a fact of, an accident of birth I suppose.

MO: It's, yeah, it's a, it's a neutral fact, yeah, it's, it's not unfortunate, I don't know why I said that really.

FR: [laughs] No, I understand, I under-, I didn't understand it as a negative.

MO: And unfortunate, I guess unfortunate for people who would like to define Irishness in slightly more, in slightly narrower ways.

FR: I've spoken to some people, second-generation people, who, who find it very painful and very frustrating to be told no, you're not Irish, which I can understand if, if, if you're very attached to it and if you feel like it's something that you've had to kind of hold onto, it can be quite frustrating to be told that actually you're not [laughs].

MO: I used to get very angry about it actually, I don't so much anymore because I just think well, you're wrong [laughs] basically, because, I mean, what used to really upset me about it was I sort of feel, I feel like I kind of had to some extent and in a small way and I realise that in many ways I've had a fairly easy life, but I, I had the, I had the immigrant experience to some extent and I had, I took, I took, you know, some of the sort of slightly less fun aspects of that, you know, moving to a place where I was considered to be other and in some ways lesser, and I sort of feel like, not that that, not that I'm owed anything as a result of that, but I sort of feel like, well, you know, the reason for that was not, was because of where I came from and, and because of my, my identity and how that was perceived in England at the time and so I sort of feel like, well, yeah, I mean, I feel that in a way I suppose, or I used to feel, that that counts, that should count for something.

FR: No, I, I understand you, I understand you entirely, yeah, and I think the frustration maybe of, in Northern Ireland or Ireland being considered English and then this sense that especially growing up in England you weren't exactly English is a kind of an awkward in-betweenness about that.

MO: Yeah, there's a lot of sort of unfortunate sort of discourse, I mean, even within Ireland, I mean, you know, there were some people who are more Irish than others, aren't there.

FR: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah.

MO: So, it's not just people who are outside of, of Ireland who, that sort of face that kind of thing and I always used to get very frustrated about, you know, studying folk music kind of brought this to the fore, was the way in which, you know, the kinds of background, for example, my grandad and his relationship with music, how that was considered to be not really the kind of thing that, that, for example, you know, scholars of traditional music would be interested in.

FR: Well, that, why would that be, that's interesting.

MO: Because, well, because, first of all because he was a middle-class Protestant and secondly because, you know, the, his repertoire was mixed, that he didn't just sing, you know, old ballads about, about hunting hares, he sang, you know, he sang **[01:10:00]** kind of popular material and, and sort of bits of classical material and stuff like that, but, you know, his was, he came from a song, you know, a living song tradition of, you know, mid-twentieth-century Fermanagh and, and so it, but I think that, you know, it's the fact that there were certain stereotyped assumptions about Irish identity that, that leave the stories of people, people within Ireland, you know, push them to the margins in that way.

FR: That's really interesting, so I didn't realise you, I, I asked about your father, but actually it's your grandfather as well in Fermanagh was the kind of introduction to, to folk music in some ways.

MO: Yeah, but of course, I mean, he wasn't really a folk musician, you know, in the, in the way that it would be normally defined, but he was interested in music, but, and he grew up in a time and place when there was a lot of folk music around. He was actually a classical singer, he had some training, he was more like an Irish tenor, you know.

FR: Right, sure.

MO: Sort of Joseph Locke style.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MO: And he used to sing things like 'She Moved Through the Fair'–

FR: Ah beautiful.

MO: But he would sing it in a very like, you know, in a slightly more trained-sounding way.

FR: Kind of a formal, yeah, I know, I know the type of thing you mean, the Irish tenor. There's a brilliant book by a guy called Henry Glassie, I don't know if you know of that?

MO: Oh yeah.

FR: *Passing*, *Passing The Time*.

MO: Yeah, I'm trying to get, I've been trying to find a copy of that, that, I don't mind paying like, I mean, I–

FR: Oh it's, it's out of print, isn't it, it's hard to get hold of.

MO: Yeah.

FR: I, I borrowed a copy from my friend and never gave it back [laughs], but it's a, it's a good book and, yeah, all about kind of folk and memory culture in Fermanagh.

MO: Yeah, I need to, need to get hold of a copy of that.

FR: It's really interesting, and I was going to ask then, I guess this is kind of a final question or final set of questions, would you have kind of followed the news in Northern Ireland, would you say that you kept track of what was going on in Northern Ireland as an adult or, or is it something that just doesn't really feature in your, in your life or in your politics or in your thinking?

MO: Not as much as I should, or I feel I should.

FR: [laughs] Don't, there's no, there's no obligation.

MO: There's not going to be a quiz or anything, is there?

FR: [laughs] Absolutely not.

MO: Alright, yeah, no, I, it's, it's definitely sort of something that's kind of just, yeah, very much, very in the, in the distance really, I'm kind of, I've started to pay a bit more attention with, you know, the Brexit thing and, a bit, but it's still, yeah.

FR: Yeah, well, that's, I mean, kind of my impression as a Northern Irish person living in England is that it's been quite weird to see Northern Ireland in like, the English news so much over the last few years, it feels like it's been a wee bit more visible again, having been kind of mostly invisible in like, British culture.

MO: Yeah, with sort of like, yeah, kind of the return of the repressed, it sort of pops up, it just keeps popping up, it's like, yeah, every time they think they've shoved it down under the carpet it pops up somewhere else, all those problems in Ireland, yeah, I, I, yeah, like, anyway, in answer to your question, I, yeah, not, not really.

FR: No, that's fair enough, okay, do, do you, okay, this is one of those questions where I'm like, this is stupid question, but [laughs] do, do you think of England as home [pauses] or do you think of Ireland as home or do you think of, I don't know, Welwyn Garden City as home or–?

MO: I don't think of anywhere in particular as home. I, it is an interesting question, I [pauses], I guess I do feel [pauses] that I'm from England and, and from Ireland as well, I mean, obviously I've lived most of my life in England and I sh-, so I feel, you know, I obviously I, I know the culture of England intimately, you know, I feel I understand it, but I don't feel completely part of it, but then maybe no one does, you know, maybe, maybe I just think that they do.

FR: [laughs] Yeah, that's, that's interesting, that kind of ima-, you kind of imagine English people as having a fully integrated Englishness.

MO: [pauses] Yeah, and, yeah, I, but then I think acc-, I think accent is more important than people realise in some ways because, you know, I think, I mean, particularly on the folk scene, I was having a conversation with some students recently about, you know, repertoire and stuff, and it's very important that people are able to place themselves or, or that other people are able to place you when you're a performer of traditional music, but I think it's true outside of that as well, I think, you know, if you, if you come from, you know, say you're from Manchester and you've got a really strong Mancunian accent, people feel, people feel comfortable around you and they, they feel that they, they know you're from somewhere and they can, they can easily, or lazily, kind of make assumptions about the kind of person you are and where you're from and what you're like, and I think if you're not, if you're not like that I think it's, it kind of makes, makes it a bit harder, you know, to sort of, to, for people to kind of place you and, and relate to you and I sort of feel like I really have often in the past really wished that I had a very strong kind of local identity that I could sort of, that I could substitute for a personality [laughs].

FR: [laughs] No, but I know, I know what you mean, to be, for, people want to be able to place you and I guess there's a kind of intimate relationship between folk and place, not that I know very much about it, but [laughs], there, I suppose that–

MO: But I think that's what, you know, in terms of English people and sort of whether England is home I think if, you know, I think it's if you, if you're going to identify as English and see England as your home I think people like that quite often are people who've grown up in a particular place and have a strong local accent and a connection with, with that and I think, you know, I don't have that, so I think, yeah, I'm missing that aspect of it.

FR: But I guess to some extent a kind of engagement with English folk culture is a, is a sort of a connection to Englishness, or maybe not, I'm not sure.

MO: Yeah, I think for a lot of people it is, there's a lot of interest in that at the moment, there's a lot of people kind of trying to rediscover their local folk heritage.

FR: And I guess there's an interesting thing about like, is it, is it nationalist or it can be nationalist in certain kinds of articulations like, nationalist in a kind of a malign way or an exclusivist way or whatever, or it can be localism in a kind of a nice way, there's a kind of a tension maybe.

MO: Yeah, this is, I don't know, I feel like I could really go off on one on that [laughs], but it's probably not really relevant to this [laughs].

FR: Sorry [laughs], this is, this is a bit of a busman's holiday for you, I don't want to get [laughs], I don't want, I don't want to force you to give your lecture [laughs], that's, that's more, that's more my personal interest than the project really. Okay, well, I think, I mean, in terms of my questions I think I've just about covered everything. I, I was going to ask actually, and we've kind of asked everyone this, why were you interested in the project, what interested you in, in taking part in the project?

MO: I, I think it's, it came along at a, quite an interesting time for me cos I think there must be something in the air, you know, presume-, I mean, this is quite often the way, isn't it, with when research projects emerge it's because there's a bit of a kind of groundswell of interest in something, and you would know if that's the case or not, but–

FR: There's a lot of funding-contingent issues as well, you know [laughs].

MO: Yeah, yeah, oh of course, yeah, well, that's the main thing, isn't it, but I think, I'd been thinking a lot about my own experience as something that, cos, let me try and sort of, I'm trying to be relevant, it's been a long day, sorry.

FR: Oh no, don't worry about it, don't worry about it.

MO: I, I just feel that, you know, this is, this is an area of history, of Irish history and I suppose British history, that, that is, just seems to have been ignored for a long time, that's been invisible and that, and so I just, when I saw the link to the project, I actually saw it before, before I knew that Paul had taken part in it or that he knew anything about it, it just, yeah, it just, cos I'd read a book by a guy called Sean Campbell, is it Sean Campbell?

FR: Aye, I think I know the name, yeah.

MO: About sort of Irish, second-generation Irish musicians and I remember being struck by it, I was like, that's really interesting, I'm really glad someone's writing about that because so much of the writing on Irish music is focused on the island of Ireland itself and act-, but I just, I just think, I just thought it was a really important project and, and I just really liked the idea of getting involved and, and sharing my experience.

FR: Ah well, it's been, it's been really interesting and, and, and really useful, so, so thank you for that.

MO: Okay.

FR: Is there anything then that we, that you thought we might talk about that, that, that we haven't talked about, or anything that you wanted to talk about that we haven't covered?

MO: [pauses] No, I don't think so. I, I'm not sure, not quite sure what I expected, but I, but I think, yeah, I mean, I'm not sure I have any other, anything else to, to offer you at this point, but, anyway.

FR: [laughs] No, it's been, it's been really, really useful, so thanks a lot and, yeah, I mean, I, we can, **[01:20:00]** we can, we can be in touch with anything that kind of happens with the, with the material, and let me know if you have any kind of questions arising from, from the interview or from the forms which I've sent you.

MO: Yeah, sure, yeah, no, I just, just let me know when you, when you publish something, I'd be really interested in reading it.

FR: Yeah, we will, absolutely, absolutely, we'll be in touch, but yeah, thanks so much Matt and enjoy your, well, your weekend I guess, it's Friday, isn't it, enjoy your weekend and, yeah, nice to, nice to meet you [laughs], you know, such, such as it is.

MO: Yeah, alright.

FR: Alright, cheers, take care.

MO: Thanks Fearghus, bye.

FR: Thanks, bye, bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS