

## L25-SG6: MATTHEW ORD INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Matthew Ord
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

L25-SG6: Matthew Ord	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:20:40	Duration: 01:20:40	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	<p>Born in Welwyn Garden City in 1980. His family moved to near Belfast soon afterwards, then moved to Gamlingay in Cambridgeshire when he was about five, and then back to Welwyn in 1987. Has only vague memories of living in Belfast. Explains that his Catholic mother and Protestant father grew up on the same street in Carryduff, south of Belfast, but attended different schools. Recalls his childhood move from NI to England as ‘quite an exciting experience’. At school in Gamlingay, he had ‘a very deep sense of being different’ from the outset, at a time when ‘being from Northern Ireland wasn’t a particularly good thing to be [...] in that kind of community’. Mentions getting ‘negative comments’ from other children. Explains that his father worked for an electronics company at this point and his mother was a housewife who later trained to be a teacher.</p>			
10:00–19:59	<p>Speaks of his ‘slightly romanticised’ view of the Cambridgeshire countryside and of the contrast between rural Gamlingay and suburban Welwyn. Says that there was an Irish community in Welwyn that was predominantly Catholic, with its social hub at the Shamrock Club, although his family did not engage with it. Matthew was the only one of his siblings to attend Catholic primary and secondary schools ‘all the way through’. His family spent ‘a lot of Christmases’ with his maternal grandparents in Enniskillen and they also visited Carryduff, where his father’s family lived. Recalls the long drive to catch the Stranraer-Larne ferry and the ‘quite scary and weird’ sight of checkpoints and British soldiers in NI, whose presence there baffled him.</p>			
20:00–29:59	<p>Describes feeling very close to ‘the distant past’ in Enniskillen, whose history his grandfather was very knowledgeable about. His grandparents being ‘very much of that place’ heightened his awareness of the shallow relationship he and his family had to their English locale. Explains that his family rarely crossed the border into the ROI when they visited NI and that their travels within NI were quite limited, ‘bounded by Enniskillen and its environs’. Discusses the culturally mixed backgrounds of his secondary school classmates and the school’s orthodox Catholic teachings. Says that neither of his parents were particularly religious, however, and that his own religious belief ‘just faded away’ around the age of ten. At school, none his peers took religion seriously.</p>			
30:00–39:59	<p>Wonders if his ‘natural weirdness’ had superseded his Irishness as ‘a marker of difference’ by his early teens. Recalls talking to his parents about their teenage memories of the Troubles in the 1970s. Says he found their stories ‘so terrifying and dramatic’ that it was hard to connect them to their ‘peaceful and safe’ life in Welwyn. Discusses his parents’ ‘mixed’ marriage and the strains it caused between his mother and her mother-in-law. His mother was herself the product of a mixed marriage in the 1950s, and her parents moved from Belfast to Enniskillen to avoid scrutiny. Reveals that his teenage love of music and playing the guitar led him to perform in local bands in Welwyn and eclipsed any ambition he had at that stage to go to university.</p>			

40:00–49:59	<p>After school, he briefly worked for Thomas Cook, then decided he would prefer university. Began studying philosophy at QUB in 2002. Lived in Belfast for two years, then transferred to the University of Greenwich so that he could live with his English girlfriend in London. Recalls having a ‘weird feeling of familiarity’ with Belfast and a ‘basic ignorance about the culture of the place’. Recalls his time in QUB halls of residence and his surprise at the lack of diversity among the student population. As a slightly older student, he felt ‘surrounded by very young people’ who were still quite attached to home. Attended Irish folk and traditional music sessions in the city, but found it hard to be fully accepted as an ‘outsider’. Thinks he ‘definitely came across as English to most people’ he met in Belfast.</p>
50:00–59:59	<p>After completing his degree at Greenwich he stayed in London and became a solo musician, playing English and Irish folk and traditional music on the pub and club circuit. Eventually decided to return to university and completed his MA and PhD at Newcastle University, where he now lectures in the music department. Discusses his doctoral studies, which focused on sound recording and the English folk revival. Says that Newcastle and Belfast are quite similar in that both are ‘small, self-contained, really culturally vibrant places’. Observes that Newcastle is also ‘full of Northern Irish people’. Says that his main reason for visiting NI in recent years has been to attend funerals, and that the last time he went was to scatter his grandfather’s ashes on Lough Erne in Fermanagh.</p>
01:00:00–01:09:59	<p>Reveals that he has only ‘very distant relatives’ now living in NI. Says he always felt he was Irish, and that his Irish identity was ‘a really important part of who I was’, but it was ‘very localised’ rather than community-based. The sense of difference that came from being the only NI people in Gamlingay was ‘quite profoundly stamped’ on him from an early age, such that he felt as if his family members were the ‘only Northern Irish people in the world’. He still considers himself Irish, but knows that some people in the ROI would object, even though Irishness is to him a ‘diasporic identity’. He has no romantic illusions about his Irishness, seeing it simply as ‘a neutral fact’ of his life. Says he used to get ‘very angry’ when others would dismiss his claim to Irishness, not least because he has had ‘the immigrant experience to some extent, moving to a place where I was considered to be other’, which, he feels, ‘should count for something’. Nowadays he regards such views as misguided and simply ‘wrong’.</p>
01:10:00–01:20:40	<p>Explains that his grandfather, who was a middle-class Protestant and a trained tenor, came from ‘a living song tradition’ in Fermanagh, and developed a mixed repertoire of popular and classical music. As such, he fell foul of ‘stereotyped assumptions about Irish identity’. Matthew reveals that his interest in the politics of NI has waned over time, but he has been more engaged since the 2016 Brexit vote. States that he doesn’t ‘think of anywhere in particular as home’, but has a sense of belonging to both England and Ireland. Thinks that it is ‘very important that people are able to place themselves’ and admits he feels the lack of a strong local identity. Says that he regards this oral history project as ‘really important’ because it is addressing a long neglected aspect of British and Irish history.</p>