

M09: JOE LENNON INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Joe Lennon
Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interview summariser: Dr Jack Crangle and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

M09: Joe Lennon	Start time: 00:00	Finish time: 01:45:04	Duration: 01:45:04	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	<p>Introduces himself as a retired psychologist who moved to England in 1980. Says he was motivated to take part in this oral history project by a desire to increase understanding of the NI conflict, especially in light of Brexit. He was born in 1957 in Castlewellan, Co. Down, where he had ‘one of the loveliest childhoods that one could ever imagine’. Raised by ‘deeply religious’ Catholic parents in an overwhelmingly nationalist town, where Protestants were objects of curiosity. His mother was a trained nurse and his father a grocer. Attended boarding school at St Malachy’s College in Belfast. Cites his mother’s belief in the necessity of education for Catholics and his own dim awareness of there being ‘a form of apartheid’ in NI when he was growing up. Describes himself as a ‘homeboy’ and likens his time in St Malachy’s, which was located at a volatile sectarian interface, to ‘two years of hell’ during which he ‘deliberately didn’t work’.</p>			
10:00–19:59	<p>Recalls walking through the Shankill to the Falls Road baths and being chased by youths with knives on account of his Catholic school uniform. Mentions being among those who were sexually abused by a priest at St Malachy’s, but declines to go into detail. Says he was unable to tell his parents, who had a reverential attitude to priests, about this abuse. Moved to a grammar school in Downpatrick in 1970, which he preferred. Claims that nationalist towns such as Castlewellan were ‘dangerous places to be’ during the Troubles because it was ‘easier for the military or police to pick on you’. Mentions being involved in a student protest against the introduction of internment in NI in 1971.</p>			
20:00–29:59	<p>Recalls the ‘provocation’ of July Orange parades in Castlewellan and being bullied by the RUC as a teenager. Says his father was both ‘an out-and-out republican’ and deeply non-sectarian. Describes both religious segregation and mixing in Castlewellan’s pubs. Became more politically conscious during the Troubles, especially as he grew older and was harassed by British soldiers, whom he recalls shouting lewd abuse at girls as young as ten. Reflects that while he ‘possibly’ might have joined the IRA in his youth, he was and always has been a pacifist. Claims ‘everybody knew’ the identity of local IRA members. Recalls the deaths of British soldiers, IRA men and loyalist killings in Castlewellan. Criticises media portrayals of these incidents. Became a youth leader in his late teens in order ‘to help change things’.</p>			
30:00–39:59	<p>Recalls intervening when soldiers dragged teenage boys out of the local youth club and later being threatened by one of the soldiers involved: ‘he said I’m going to get you down an alleyway and I’m going to put a bullet in the back of your head and they’ll blame the loyalists’. Left school with maths and English O-levels, but no other qualifications. Recalls brutal sectarian killing of a local Catholic man whose killers escaped justice, despite their identity being widely known. Speaks of his brother’s suicide around this time, which he regards as being Troubles-related. Recalls working in a benefits office in Belfast for two years after leaving school, where he experienced ‘crazy’ incidents and ‘very strange people’.</p>			

40:00–49:59	Speaks of his dissatisfaction with his Belfast job and the sense of liberation he felt when visiting England in the late 1970s to watch Manchester United play, which motivated him to emigrate in 1980. Recalls immediately finding a job in local radio in Leeds and later moving into community work. Recounts his weariness with NI at this time: 'I was sick of this narrow-mindedness. I was sick of seeing what was happening and I felt crushed'. Remembers a dispute with 'local hoods' in Castlewellan that resulted in his being beaten unconscious and another occasion when 'I got my head split open for doing youth work'. Reflects that it was such incidents that spurred him to leave NI.
50:00–59:59	Describes his radio work with local bands and artists. Remembers being pleased to find his Irishness was positively perceived in Leeds, which he partly attributes to his NI accent, but also recalls being somewhat perplexed: 'it was quite strange cos the Troubles didn't seem to affect people here in their attitudes'. Mentions having to 'cope with the Irish jokes', but claims 'most prejudice' came from ROI migrants, who regarded Northerners as troublemakers, which discouraged him from frequenting the Leeds Irish Centre. Felt much more at ease with first- and second-generation immigrants from the Caribbean and Asia.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Praises the 'mainly black' district of Chapeltown in Leeds as one of 'the best places I've ever lived in my life'. Notes a tension between older, socially conservative Irish migrants and the younger generation. Recounts how, 'just because of the accents', he and four friends were ejected from a Leeds pub after a Falklands veteran objected to 'sitting here with this Irish, IRA scum'. Voices his indignation at those who express sympathy on hearing that he comes from NI. Recalls working in a shelter for homeless people, many of whom were Irish and Scottish, whose alcohol dependency he links to their severance from home.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Continues describing his work with the homeless, culminating in his recollection of how in 1984 he injured his back when attempting to restrain a suicidal man. His condition became chronic and deteriorated to the extent that he had to use a wheelchair for a time. Moved on to work at Barnardo's. Recalls his reaction to later atrocities of the Troubles, such as the 1994 Loughinisland massacre. States that when the Good Friday Agreement was signed 'that day I broke down and cried, and it was one of the most cherished days of my life, and that's still, I still get very emotional'. Discusses how his belief in social equality and his grounding in youth work in NI inspired him to pursue social work as a profession.
01:20:00–01:29:59	States that his 'insight into how wars are carried out' makes him uneasy with campaigns such as Help for Heroes and the valorisation of the British Army: 'I don't like all this glory stuff there, you know, cos I saw another side of it and in a sense it was very dirty'. Says he felt less safe on nights out in Leeds than he did in Belfast, but concedes the culture of 'kangaroo justice' in NI was a factor in this. Believes his parents were content for him to leave NI, thinking he might be safer and less wayward in England. Suddenly realises he has omitted 'the biggest thing' in his life story and reveals how the suicide of a close friend in NI, coupled with a relationship break-up in Leeds, led to him attempting suicide and spending six weeks in a psychiatric hospital.
01:30:00–01:39:59	Recalls obtaining a certificate in occupational psychology at Hull and being on call with Barnardo's. Discusses meeting his wife at the time of his back injury, her visits to him in hospital and their marriage in 1990. Describes how she and his father formed an affectionate, jovial bond. Recalls his wife's first visit to NI and her observing how 'ludicrous' it was that soldiers patrolled the streets.
01:40:00–01:45:04	Interview forced to conclude because the venue's closing time was approaching. Joe reveals that while he still regards Castlewellan as home, he has no wish to

	<p>return to live there because 'it's almost too close to everything that was'. Claims that moving to England has 'changed me and broadened me in many ways as a person', and that living through the Troubles has had a lasting impact on him, making him more sensitive to global injustices and 'probably more politically active' than he would otherwise have been.</p>
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