

M11: KAREN MALLON INTERVIEW SUMMARY

| |
|--|
| Interviewee: Karen Mallon |
| Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley |
| Interview summarisers: Dr Jack Crangle and Prof Liam Harte |
| The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks |

| M11: Karen Mallon | Start time: 00:00 | Finish time: 01:33:48 | Duration: 01:33:48 | Brief description of content: |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 00:00–09:59 | Born in 1972 in Lurgan in Co. Armagh, the eldest of four children. Grew up in Magheralin, near Moira in Co. Antrim. Her mother was a homemaker and her father, of whom she has fond memories, drove a tanker for the Milk Marketing Board. Describes her Catholic upbringing on a religiously mixed housing estate as 'very working class'. Recalls being 'always aware of division' and not mixing much with Protestant children, despite her parents' non-sectarian outlook. When she was eight her family moved to Dromore in Co. Down, where her father was from and where her family still lives. | | | |
| 10:00–19:59 | Remembers the 1979 papal visit to Ireland as 'a big thing'. Recalls being daunted by the painted kerbstones of the mainly Protestant estate in Lurgan where her cousins lived. Explains her belated awareness that her family's move to Dromore in 1980 was prompted by the IRA's intimidation of her father, which included the theft of his car and lorry for subversive purposes. Recalls her mixed reaction to life in Dromore, where she formed friendships with other Catholic girls, but also experienced teenage boredom and a sense of isolation. | | | |
| 20:00–29:59 | Attended secondary school in Banbridge and enjoyed socialising there and in Dundonald and Lisburn. Recalls sectarian tensions in Dromore after the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, especially around Twelfth of July: 'that's when you just kept quiet, that's when you kept back'. Recalls her irritation at the frequency of local Orange marches. Mentions being deemed 'snobby' due to her aversion to some social activities. Reveals she would not have dated a Protestant boy in her youth. Recalls her father being happier in Dromore, surrounded by family. Says that her parents were republican in outlook, but 'definitely not militant'. | | | |
| 30:00–39:59 | Notes that while Catholicism was important to her mother, she herself 'hated the lectures from the priests' and was relieved to stop practising after moving to England. Describes her education at St Patrick's College in Banbridge as generally poor, but has positive memories of being taught Irish and visiting the Gaeltacht. Also recalls a 'brilliant teacher' whose classes on Irish history she found enlightening. Left school with three GCSEs, intending to pursue nursing. | | | |
| 40:00–49:59 | Recalls how, during her pre-nursing course in Newry, she was urged by a tutor to consider going to university, which led her to sit A-levels in sociology and politics. Secured a place on a social science degree at the University of Hull, a city she had never previously heard of. Moved there in 1991 aged nineteen, becoming the first in her family to attend university, although her parents did not want her to leave NI. Met several NI students at Hull, including many Protestants. Recalls having heated debates about Irish history and politics with one student in particular, a staunch Ulster unionist. | | | |
| 50:00–59:59 | Remembers becoming good friends with Louise from Newtownards: 'that's the first time I actually really had a Protestant friend, you know, a real Protestant friend'. Recalls getting 'a lot of gyp' from people in Hull on account of her accent, especially after IRA bomb attacks in England, and experiencing 'a lot of | | | |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| | <p>antagonism from particularly very working-class people who [...] didn't understand the history of Ireland or what was going on'. Reflects on how getting to know NI Protestants in Hull helped her to 'see them more as human beings' and overcome the 'us and them' tribalism she grew up with, yet also recognises how conflict-related trauma can thwart interreligious relations. Speaks of how her academic studies helped her achieve a better understanding of what she lived through in NI. Began dating her future husband in Hull and after university moved with him to Leeds, where he was from.</p> |
| 01:00:00–01:09:59 | <p>Remembers celebrating St Patrick's Day in Hull, something she felt scared to do in Dromore. Notes that being Irish was perceived as 'quite cool' within the Hull student community, whereas there was 'some antagonism' towards Irish people elsewhere in the city. Returned to NI during university holidays and began socialising in Belfast with her sister, who later moved to Leeds. Says that she finds it increasingly hard to be away from NI now that her parents are elderly and admits to feelings of 'terrible guilt', knowing that her mother 'desperately' misses her and her sister. Suspects that her family were initially 'suspicious' of her having an English boyfriend, but eventually warmed to him.</p> |
| 01:10:00–01:19:59 | <p>Reflects on the intricacies of her cultural identity and that of her daughters, all three of whom have Irish names. Believes that while she doesn't regard herself as 'a very Irish Irish person', having an Irish identity in England confers a distinctiveness on her that she lacked in NI. Speaks of wanting 'to keep that identity [...] for my children as well', by sending them to Catholic schools and having them make their first communion, despite her own atheism. Notes that her daughters are 'very proud of their Irish roots' and thinks they would identify as 'half Irish and half English', although it frustrates them when English people mispronounce their names. Reveals that her sister married a black man and jokes that he was probably the first black person to attend mass in Dromore.</p> |
| 01:20:00–01:29:59 | <p>Reflects that moving to England has changed her life for the better, saying: 'I know that I was a happier person being in England than I was in Ireland'. States that 'being away from the Troubles and the negativity' brought her much relief. Expresses gratitude for her loving family and circle of friends in Leeds. Claims that emigration has broadened her horizons. Now sees herself as having 'two homes', Ireland, which still exerts a 'really strong' pull, and Leeds, where she feels she has both 'assimilated pretty well' and 'become more Irish'.</p> |
| 01:30:00–01:33:48 | <p>Says that she feels fortunate not to have experienced direct personal trauma during the Troubles. Reflects that meeting and mixing with NI Protestants in England has developed in her a sympathetic understanding of their history and culture. Expresses delight and positivity about present-day NI: 'I see so much more integration back in Belfast, in Northern Ireland, and it's great compared to when I was growing up, you know, it's really come on'.</p> |