

## G18: CHRIS PATON INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Chris Paton
Interviewer: Dr Jack Crangle
Interview summarisers: Dr Hilary White and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded across two audio files that were spliced together to create a single audio file.

G18: Chris Paton	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 02:12:44	Duration: 02:12:44	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in 1970 in Larne, Co. Antrim to parents from Carrickfergus. Soon after his birth his father, who was in the Royal Navy, was posted to Helensburgh in Scotland for four years, after which his was posted to Plymouth for another four, at which point the family returned to NI in 1979. Explains that his parents had separated in Plymouth, which resulted in his mother living in Carrickfergus with his two youngest siblings, while he and his older brother lived elsewhere in the town with their father. Chris's first school was in Plymouth, which he was sad to leave. Recalls no hostility towards his family in Plymouth, and 'had no knowledge of the Troubles at that point'.			
10:00–19:59	Says that moving to NI was 'a sudden sea change as to who I thought I was and what the world was'. Attended a Zion Methodist church in Plymouth and was part of the first Boys' Brigade group there. Explains that when he joined the BB in Carrickfergus, he came to realise that 'only certain people' in NI did so. Reveals that he is now married to a Catholic woman from Kilkenny and that his sons had Catholic christenings in Scotland. Compares his early life in Plymouth with the 'culture shock' of adapting to life in Carrickfergus, where 'suddenly the world was different' and people were labelled in ways he didn't understand. Says that his mother's family were 'quite loyalist', unlike either of his parents.			
20:00–28:04	Explains that his father left the navy in 1978 and joined the single-parent charity Gingerbread in Carrickfergus, where he tried to build inclusive, cross-community partnerships. Chris thinks that this ecumenical outlook 'rubbed off' on him and made him question received opinion. Attended Presbyterian church services in the town, which were 'very different' to his church experiences in Plymouth. Recalls his parents' 'messy separation' and how at times he would visit his mother in secret. Explains that he had some extended family in the Carrickfergus area, but they 'weren't particularly close'. The two interview audio files were spliced together here.			
28:05–38:04	Says that he soon lost his English accent in Carrickfergus and 'assimilated quite quickly', although he still had friends calling him English in his late teens. Recalls how a Catholic neighbour in his estate used to get 'a lot of grief' on bonfire night and remembers local Orange marches, which he 'didn't go to a lot'. Explains that he did a three-year media degree in Bristol, starting in 1991, and focused his projects on NI, including making documentaries about aspects of Orange culture. Became aware of the sectarian divide on moving back to NI and felt alienated by the entrenched culture of tribalism, saying: 'I wasn't part of what everyone else had been indoctrinated into and [...] I did feel like an outsider to some extent'.			
38:05–48:04	While none of his immediate family were directly involved in the Troubles, some of his extended family were, including a cousin who was shot dead in a loyalist feud. Recalls British troops on the streets of Belfast sighting their weapons on him, which felt 'very intimidating'. Attended grammar school in Carrickfergus,			

	<p>where there was 'a class divide' between him and his classmates. Discusses reading up on Irish history, having never been taught it at school in England. After completing his media studies in Bristol, he stayed there for three more years, working for the BBC, by which time he felt 'a lot more clued up about the fact that I was Northern Irish'.</p>
48:05–58:04	<p>Discusses making programmes about a local landmark in Carrickfergus and the Battle of the Boyne for the BBC, only to find that his bosses wanted both to include a didactic 'commentary on the Troubles', which was not his intention. Says he found other BBC coverage of NI 'patronising'. Describes the Carrickfergus of his youth as 'almost [...] exclusively Protestant' and recalls how an influx of loyalists in the late 1980s changed the character of the area in which he grew up. Adds that the town was in some ways 'a pretty nasty place' and mentions there being 'a lot of [...] local paramilitary sort of punishment beatings and stuff'. Recalls his first train journey to Dublin and feeling 'absolutely terrified' on arrival, having been told it was the place 'where the bogeymen lived'.</p>
58:05–01:08:04	<p>Recalls attending Irish language classes at the Bristol Irish Society, which ended when Belfast loyalists attacked one of the organisers, after which he studied Scottish Gaelic instead, which he found easier to learn. Reveals that he voted once before leaving NI, for the Alliance Party, having never thought of himself as a unionist or a nationalist. Says he thinks of himself as nationalist now, 'but in a Scottish context'. Explains that his political preference is usually for 'the middle ground', but on moving to Scotland he became more involved with the SNP. Discusses studying design and communication in Belfast from 1989 to 1991, by which point things were getting 'pretty nasty'. Took a job as a security guard during the summer to raise money for his Bristol studies and found himself dealing with several serious incidents.</p>
01:08:05–01:18:04	<p>Reveals that after his first year in Bristol, during which he made return visits to NI, he stayed away for six years, as he was 'just too freaked out about it all', even though the Troubles were not his main reason for leaving. Explains that he has lived in Britain since 1991 and worked as a genealogist since 2006. Having researched his own family history, he now has a 'very comfortable' relationship with NI identity, as he does with his Scottishness, having determined for himself where his roots lie. Mentions the emigration stories of his parents and sister. Thinks it's hard to return to NI after moving, because 'when you go back, you go back with a different understanding of the place'. Says he enjoyed his time in Bristol, which included working full-time in an Asda superstore in his first year.</p>
01:18:05–01:28:04	<p>Describes some of the NI-themed projects he undertook at university. Says that he developed his 'most comfortable relationship' with NI by adopting an impartial, journalistic approach to it. While he enjoyed working at the BBC, it also made him realise what an 'awfully Oxbridge place it was' and sometimes made him feel pigeonholed on the basis of his 'Protestant Ulster working-class background' and accent. Mentions that at university he was sometimes irked by 'people trying to tell you what the solution to the Northern Irish Troubles was', which made him value his small group of NI friends with whom he felt at ease.</p>
01:28:05–01:38:04	<p>Explains that he never identified as British or as Irish in Britain, adding, 'I think it was part of my exploration, trying to work out what the hell it was I was'. Speaks about the knowledge and understanding he has derived from his examination of the complexities of his cultural heritages in Ireland and Scotland, which has made him feel at ease with his Ulster Protestant identity and 'very proud' of his 'Ulster Scottish credentials'. Says he possesses an Irish and a British passport. States that in the wake of the Brexit vote, and with his 'Scottish nationalist interest', he is</p>

	coming to 'reject the whole British thing' and looks forward to the day when he can exchange his British passport for a Scottish one. Explains that his disillusionment with aspects of the BBC in Bristol eventually led him to move to Glasgow in 1997 and from there to Ayrshire, where he has lived since 2001.
01:38:05–01:48:04	Worked variously for Scottish TV and the BBC in Glasgow, and found their approach to NI affairs to be generally well informed. Says that the reason behind his family's moved to Ayrshire was his desire to distance his son from the sectarian 'soup' of Glasgow. While he thinks Orangeism in Scotland has 'almost died', he is worried that if Scotland becomes independent there may be a loyalist backlash. Reveals that he joined the SNP and stood for a council election, but has since left the party, though he remains staunchly pro-independence. Says that he initially became involved with the Scottish independence movement as a means of preserving his European identity at a time when Brexit started to look like a real threat. Thinks that a united Ireland is 'inevitable' and 'would be a good thing', but will be difficult to achieve peaceably.
01:48:05–01:58:04	Believes that 'a massive change is slowly beginning to happen' in NI, with many Protestants obtaining Irish passports and becoming open to the idea of Irish unity. Explains that he met his wife while working at the Asda store in Bristol. Discusses how 'barriers began to break down' between him and her Kilkenny family when they realised he wasn't a 'stereotypical' NI person. Reveals that some of his family didn't attend their wedding because it was in the ROI. Says that his children 'both feel very Scottish', but also have a sense of their Irishness and understand that their parents are 'different types of Irish'. He has visited Carrickfergus with them, but is not convinced they 'quite understand' NI yet.
01:58:05–02:08:04	Explains that Carrickfergus has now become 'a middle-class suburb of Belfast'. Reveals that he has written an account of the first eighteen years of his life for the benefit of his children, knowing the town he grew up in no longer exists. States that 'home is always Carrickfergus', even though he doesn't go back that often now. Reveals that he and his wife hope at some point to relocate to Glasgow, 'the beating heart of Scotland'. Explains that he is now 'very proud' of his NI identity, which he defines in relation to his 'Ulster Scottishness as a opposed to any kind of Orange nonsense'. Add that he is content to be 'a dual citizen' of Ireland and Britain, but rather than describe himself as Northern Irish he prefers the term Ulster Scot, which better captures his cultural background.
02:08:05–02:12:44	While he believes that people are slowly emerging from the 'polarisation' of the Troubles, he thinks there is still a hesitancy to discuss the past in NI, more so than in the ROI. Says that there is an 'ongoing dialogue' with his wife about the idea of moving to the ROI or NI, although Chris himself would not wish to live in Carrickfergus again. Concludes by saying that they are 'so happy here living in Scotland' that they may well see their days out together there.