

G19-SG6: MARY BONNER INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Mary Bonner
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.

G19-SG6: Mary Bonner	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:29:56	Duration: 01:29:56	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in 1941 in Glasgow and lived there until 1967, when she went to Canada to teach for a year. She married her Donegal-born husband in 1968 and moved to Northampton, where he was based, and where she still lives. Explains that her father was from Mayo and her mother from Strabane in Co. Tyrone, where she spent annual holidays when young. Both parents emigrated to Scotland for work. Recalls how Strabane changed from being a peaceful and ‘lovely little town’ to being ‘fairly destroyed during the Troubles’. Discusses the fear and anxiety she and her wider family often felt when going about their everyday lives during the conflict. Says that they had particular fear of travelling at night ‘because the B-Specials could be out and grab you and question you and whatever’.			
10:00–19:59	Refers to the banning of Sinn Féin in pre-Troubles NI. Says that her father supported ‘the rebel side’ and was against partition, although his death when she was fifteen meant that she was unable to discuss such issues with him. Explains that he worked in a rubber factory in Glasgow, while her mother gave up paid employment after she got married. Describes her upbringing in a religiously mixed community in Glasgow. Mentions her sister’s experience of anti-Catholic discrimination when seeking a job in the 1950s. Recalls attending the local Catholic primary and secondary schools, where she did well academically and went on to qualify as a primary schoolteacher in the city.			
20:00–29:59	Confirms that Catholicism was a central feature of her upbringing and that her faith was something she ‘never questioned’, then or since. Explains that while hers was the only Catholic family in their close, relations with their Protestant neighbours were very good. She grew up with a firm sense of her Irishness and only came to think of herself as more Scottish than Irish when she moved to England. Recalls frequenting Irish dancehalls in Glasgow and spending whole summer holidays in Strabane, being taken there by her aunt after her mother’s death when Mary was five. Explains that her father took no time off work to accompany her to Ireland, but did send money over to support her.			
30:00–39:59	Describes the convivial activities she took part in during her holidays in Strabane among family and friends. Mentions that her father took her and her sister to Mayo for the first time in 1955, the year before he died. After his death, she was able to continue her education with the support of her eldest sister and proceed to teaching training in Glasgow. Says that she accepted the loss of her parents as ‘God’s will’ at the time and only later came to realise how much their deaths affected her. States that her other siblings left school early, although her father would have wanted all of them to continue their education.			
40:00–49:59	Explains that her social life was ‘very innocent’ and mainly consisted of spending time outdoors with friends and going to dances when she was older. Attended Notre Dame teacher training college, which was affiliated with Glasgow University and run by nuns. Began her teaching career at the age of twenty and			

	greatly enjoyed the work. Explains how, after six years in her first post, she decided to teach for a year in Canada, where there was a teacher recruitment drive in progress, which included the the targeting of Scottish teachers.
50:00–59:59	Explains the circumstances in which she met and started dating James, the man who became her husband, prior to leaving for Canada in 1967 with a female friend. Says that their courtship was conducted through letter writing while she was in Toronto. Recalls being ‘terribly homesick’ to begin with, but matters improved when she began to meet people socially and when friends of her travelling companion visited them in Toronto. States that she enjoyed life in the city and ‘probably wouldn’t have come back’ were it not for James, whom she married in Glasgow in September 1968. Explains that James first emigrated from rural Donegal to Glasgow in 1959, but, on finding life there ‘too bewildering’, moved to Northampton, where his brother lived.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Recalls being questioned by British troops at a border checkpoint near Strabane in 1980, an experience that deepened her fear of driving through NI during the conflict. Explains that her family were ‘always on the Catholic side of things’ and were keenly aware of how pervasive anti-Catholic discrimination was in pre-Troubles NI. Thinks that civil unrest might have been averted if the Stormont government had acted speedily to bring about electoral reform in the 1960s. Felt that the intransigence of the Thatcher government in the 1980s did little to stem the violence and believes that the British police ‘have a lot to answer for’ in relation to the investigation of the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974.
01:10:00–01:22:01	Feels that anti-Irish feeling in England was common during the Troubles, though Mary herself never encountered any prejudice. Explains that her teaching career in Northampton was interspersed with periods of leave, during which she was a full-time mother to her growing family. Says that she has always thought of herself as Irish and that all four of her children ‘feel Irish, but English as well’. Reveals that her daughter went to university in Derry in the late 1990s and that a son has also spent some time living in Ireland. She herself still visits Strabane, although not as regularly as she once did. The two interview audio files were spliced together here.
01:22:02–01:29:56	Reflecting on her recent visits to NI, she says it pleases her that ‘there is no border’ between NI and the ROI and therefore no checkpoints or military infrastructure to negotiate. Thinks that Brexit is ‘awful’ and was dismayed to discover that some Irish people she knows in Northampton voted to leave the EU. She currently holds a British passport, but plans to apply for an Irish one as soon as she has the necessary documentation. Says that she never ‘truly felt Scottish’ when growing up in Glasgow because her family felt themselves to be Irish, even though ‘you couldn’t say you were Irish when you spoke with a Glasgow accent’. Concludes by saying that while she now loves ‘all things Scottish’ and believes that ‘where you were born does mean something’, home for her is Northampton, where her children are.