INTERVIEW L18: GARETH AICKEN

Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interviewee: Gareth Aicken
Interview date: 16th June 2020
Location: Virtual
Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type. The interview was recorded across two audio files that were spliced together to create a single audio file.

FR: Hello [pauses]. Strange [extended pause].

GA: Hello.

FR: Hello Gareth.

GA: Ah we can hear each other, good.

FR: Yes.

GA: Excellent, good, well.

FR: Okay, that, that's perfect then. I think I can, I can record from this and that should be fine.

GA: Good. I just noticed by the way, I said I'd send you notes on the questions, did I actually send them?

FR: The, the consent form, I think you did send it, yes.

GA: No no, the consent form you got, yes, but the, before that I, you know, the, the questions about, you know, name and age and beliefs.

FR: Yes, yes, yes, you did, you did send me those, that was, that was very helpful actually, thank you.

GA: I had a, you know the way sometimes you say you're going to send something and you forget to actually attach it, so that's fine.

FR: Yes, no, it's easi-, easily done, but no, no, I had a look at, I had a look through those, which were very helpful actually in terms of kind of thinking about your, your trajectory.

GA: Yes, yes, it saves sort of clearing up, you know, explanation which is not, which is necessary to move ahead, but it doesn't necessarily contribute to, you know, what you're wanting to know.

FR: No, yeah, absolutely, it's good to have a kind of a factual basis from which to start I guess.

GA: Yeah.

FR: So before we get started, do, do you have any questions for me about the project or, or anything like, anything that's not clear?

GA: No, I mean, I'd, I'd be interested in obviously finding out how it, how it works and you, it's one of the things that is mentioned in the consent form that you, you know, you keep us informed, I don't mean that you'd send us weekly updates, but, you know, that we'll know what, what happens with it and what the, it would be interesting to, you know, find out the broad conclusions of, but oral history obviously, I mean, everybody's experience is different, but presumably you're going to draw out some broad observations, you know, that the majority of people found this or, you know, certain categories of people had this experience, that kind of thing.

FR: Yeah, abso-, absolutely, that, that will be some of the work that's done in the book, and I think it's interesting to think about some of the, yeah, some of the commonalities between the kind of different people that we've interviewed as well as, as well as the differences, so, so yeah, no absolutely, we'll, we'll stay in touch about, about the book and about anything else that comes out of the project, well, yeah, we need to [laughs], we need to start thinking about, about writing actually, but we haven't really got to that stage just yet.

GA: How, how far are you in terms of numbers of people that have been interviewed and recorded compared to how many you hoped to get before you [indecipherable]?

FR: So we're, we're doing, we're doing ninety in total, or we're hoping to do ninety in total and I think we've done forty.

GA: Oh right.

FR: The guy who's doing the Glasgow interviews, or the Scottish interviews, only started, actually just before the pandemic [laughs], so he hasn't started his interviewing at all really, so there's thirty that we have to do in Scotland, and then me and the other interviewer have done about half of ours, so I think I've interviewed, I've interviewed maybe eighteen, nineteen people.

GA: Right, well, good. Okay, well, yeah, that's fine. I don't think, I'm not aware of any criminal connections I've had, so [laughs]–

FR: [laughs] Well, we should, we should be grand then.

GA: But I, you know, I'd say in this context there could be, there could be various things that some people have, although, so I suppose you're wanting to cover all the bases really just in case, but I wa-, sorry.

FR: Yeah, I don't know, I don't know if you, I don't know if you followed the Boston College tapes, which was a big controver–

GA: No.

FR: It was a big controversy a few years ago where an oral historian–

GA: Vaguely aware of it, but not the detail.

FR: Yeah, an oral historian interviewed some former members of the IRA and basically overpromised what they could do, so they said no one will see the tapes until after you've, you've all passed away, and then the police asked them for the tapes, and the police were able to force them to give them the tapes, so that, that bit in the consent form is just to sort of say that under certain circumstances we're not able to guarantee anonymity or whatever.

GA: Yes.

FR: Yeah.

GA: Right.

FR: But as you, as you say hopefully it won't be an issue.

GA: Yeah, the only other question I have is a procedural one, but, I mean, obviously in a context like this where, you know, I'm talking off the top of my head, I mean, hopefully reasonably coherently, but it, obviously it's not as neat as if I were writing something.

FR: Sure.

GA: So do you do any editing or is it all completely verbatim?

FR: The, the transcript, as I would transcribe it, or as whoever transcribes it, will transcribe it, would be verbatim.

GA: Yes.

FR: If you want to look at the transcript and, and check if you've said anything that, that you're not sure about or, or check if you've not expressed things in, in the way that you would like to, then, then you can, that, that's possible, if you would like to do that.

GA: Well, that's an option, put it that way, if there's something that, you know, gets confused or, but obviously if I clarify myself during the, the interview then presumably the

record is there, provided the transcription is accurate, so, but I was just thinking obviously, yeah, obviously the book that you'll write isn't going to have, isn't going to be verbatim. I mean, the tapes exist in their own right, but a book would obviously be a condensation which would refer to individual things that people said, presumably, that kind of thing.

FR: Yeah, that's, that's absolutely right, yeah.

GA: Perhaps quoting, quoting verbatim, short passages, but obviously not lengthy ones.

FR: That's, that's–

GA: I mean, I'm not, I'm not interested in, in, I mean, I, obviously I'll convey what I think is the truth of my own experience, but it is just that it may inevitably be a little bit more long-winded than it would be if, you know, I had the questions in advance and if I were replying to you, you know, in, in writing, so, but again, that's part of the, part of the process really, if it, if it's oral.

FR: Yeah, that's right and, and, I mean, the kind, the kind of oral history that, that I'm interested in really is, is, you, you can, I don't know, I think there's something interesting in the way that people speak as opposed to the way that people write, and that's, so, so yeah, don't, don't worry too much about, about clarity or chronology or anything like that, it's, it, I think, it's not a, it's not a big concern for us.

GA: Right, right.

FR: But, but as you say, if you want to clarify things as you go that's, that's fine as well. So are you happy to begin?

GA: Yeah, we can start, yes.

FR: Okay, just, I know that you've sent a consent form, but just to get this on the tape as well, could you confirm that you consent to this being recorded?

GA: Yes, absolutely, yes.

FR: Okay, thanks, yeah, we've got to add that in now that we're doing it–

GA: And [indecipherable] to use my actual name as well.

FR: Yes, okay, grand, so, for, that starts us off well actually, so could you say your name and today's date?

GA: Yes, my name's Gareth Aicken and I'm particular about the spelling A-i-c-k-e-n.

FR: Yeah, we talked, we talked about that a little, yeah.

GA: Yes, today is the sixteenth of June 2020.

FR: Thank you very much. Okay, so we're going to start off talking about your childhood, so first of all where were you born?

GA: In Larne in County Antrim, twenty miles north of Belfast, on the coast.

FR: Yeah, and, and when?

GA: 1950.

FR: 1950, okay, and what was Larne, what was Larne like?

GA: Well, it was, it was a port, as you know, and in terms of, I, I was born in the sort of late postwar period you might say, I had basically my primary education there and, you know, I grew up in, I hadn't much to compare it with, although I did spend, with my mother being, being Welsh, I used to spend my summer holidays, which were longer in Northern Ireland than in England, in Wales, so, you know, I had a corre-, you know, had another part of the family, you know, in rural Wales. As I tended to find out later, Larne is a pretty predominantly Protestant town really, there's not much, I mean, there's not a, between Catholic and Protestant it's not evenly divided, as it is more in the west of, of Northern Ireland and I became conscious of those kinds of issues, but they weren't, you know, because of the nature of my family in particular, you know, having a mother from outside and a father who had, you know, **[00:10:00]** been away and come back and was pretty enlightened, you know, I wasn't brought up in a sort of narrowly sectarian way.

FR: That's, that's interesting, so you mentioned your, your mother was Welsh and your father was–

GA: My mother was Welsh–

FR: Yeah, how did they–

GA: My parents, my father was, sorry.

FR: How did they meet?

GA: Well, my father had done, had studied science at Queen's and he, I think he graduated in 1940 and then he did a one year master's and then, you know, they didn't want him to join the army because of his science background, so he was working in, for the Ministry of Supply and various aspects of science research. I mean, he was in Scotland for a while, Girvan and Annan and then he was posted down to, well, it's probably south, well, Sevenoaks, south-east Greater London it would be, used to be Kent, to a place called Fort Halstead and he was there towards the end of the war, in fact, the war ended while he was there. My mother was already there because she was a lab assistant attached to a team which used to be based in Aberporth on the coast of Wales, which was, you know, close to where she had been brought up and, you know, there, there was a, she decided, against her parents' wishes I think, to go up with the rest of the team, the scientists and so on, and

accompany them as they were transferred up to London and they, I mean, although it was wartime and flying bombs and things like that, it does seem to have been a, you know, there were young people together and, you know, going to the theatre and doing things together, it seems to have been quite a sort of a happy time, you know, in the local context, with all this war going on outside of course. So they met there, they got married just at the end of the war, they stayed there for about, I think eighteen months or so, and then my father got a job teaching at Larne Grammar School, which was where he had been educated–

FR: Oh wow, okay.

GA: And he decided to go back. He always wanted to be a, well, he, at Queen's he had some teaching responsibilities because a lot of [indecipherable] had been, you know, drafted into the army and, well, into research and so forth, so he got some early teaching experience at university and decided that he was more interested in teaching, ultimately, as a career rather than continuing as a, as an academic scientist.

FR: So, so he moved with, with your mother, his wife, back to Larne, and were you the first child?

GA: Yes, in about 1947 I think, yes, and then I was, I was born in 1950, my sister in 1955.

FR: Okay, and you lived in Larne up until you were ten or so, is that right?

GA: Just short of ten, yes.

FR: But you do, but you do, you say, have some memories of, of the time.

GA: [indecipherable] and, I mean, it's a little bit like, I mean, I cou-, I could still, I could still walk myself round the town as it, as it used to be at least, I know Larne, parts of Larne have changed, but, you know, my mother used to take me with her when we went shopping and things like that and, you know, it's a bit like James Joyce sitting in Paris and thinking of writing *Ulysses* and how, how many steps you had to take from Murphy's bar to whatever, you know. I mean, you, you do get a very clear memory and I have been back since then, although, as I say, parts of Larne have changed quite a lot, so yeah, I mean, I, and I remember of course not just the, the just the physical aspects of Larne, but my, I had a, you know, family of cousins there, my father's sister was near, you know, the closest part of the family, and grandparents, and also of course friends at school. I'm not in touch with any of them, but, you know, anymore, but, you know, I, I grew up with lots of people who, you know, when we were, well, doing things that small boys do really I suppose, a fairly normal in that respect childhood.

FR: And what about school? So you would have gone to, to primary school in Larne.

GA: Yes, it was called, rather grandly, the prep school because it was attached to the grammar school. It was fee-paying, but my father being a teacher at the grammar school, you know, I got a place, you know, free really and it was, I suppose to that extent, you know, classes were smaller, teachers, well, I, I wouldn't, the teachers, I know that one teacher was

Montessori trained and so forth, you know, and, I mean, I went to that, it didn't occur to me until later on that that was slightly, you know, out of the ordinary, but it wasn't very out of the ordinary, but I, you know, we did the usual things, I mean, they, I suppose the rest of the, the kids were more, had parents who were, you know, in more professional occupations perhaps, you know, doctors, bank managers, one or two like that, so to that extent it was not absolutely a cross-section of the Larne population, and I, I think Larne Grammar School, I mean, I think there were one or two Catholics there, but it was predominantly Protestant, though I don't, I don't recall that at the school there was any great emphasis on, you know, the sectarian issues.

FR: That's, that's interesting, and you mentioned I think that your father, because he'd been away from Northern Ireland took a, I think you said an enlightened [laughs] position on, on the kind of Northern Irish society?

GA: Yeah, I mean, he'd been, you know, he'd been away, I mean, obviously it's, it might be an issue in somewhere like Glasgow, but it's not an issue in, you know, in London, or wasn't then and also, you know, he was, well, he, it wasn't just being away, but I think that in terms of his reading, his self-education and so on, he'd, you know, he'd experienced, he'd seen some of the sort of nonsense that went on and, you know, didn't want any particular part of it. I mean, in those days we, the, there wasn't much overt going on, I mean, it was before the, you know, the more explicit, you know, the civil rights marches and so forth in the, in the mid-sixties and it was fairly quiet, I mean, in a sort of Tacitus sense, you know, I mean, peaceful, but peaceful because people weren't addressing the issues or they were suppressed, not because there weren't any issues, but I remember him saying about the fifties oh you know, the IRA may have blown up the odd telegraph pole here and there, but nothing much, you know, nothing much happened, it was fairly dormant as far as explicit political or, you know, extra-political action was concerned, but there were, you know, there were prejudices going on. I mean, the, you know, the, the rigging of, gerrymandering of elections and so on, I mean, the, I remember one, one election, it must have been '59, the British or, you know, the UK election, he took me along to a polling station, you know, just to see what happens and I think in those days, you know, the Ulster unionists got, Ulster unionists got fifty thousand votes and the Sinn Féin got two thousand, and the Sinn Féin was in jail anyway, so, you know, it was, and they would certainly, there were twelve MPs and they were all Ulster unionists at that period, you know, there was, there was no Sinn Féin, no SDLP, no, no DUP for that matter.

FR: No, you had the Nationalist Party, but they didn't really func–

GA: Yeah, but in terms of, they never actually got anywhere near, well, they did get, they did get obviously in in the west, Tyrone and Fermanagh and so on, they did, they did a bit better, but they, they didn't actually win at any elections in those days, they did later on I think and, you know, Bernadette Devlin and people came in, I think there was, but in those days, you know, whether perhaps, perhaps ballot-rigging helped, but, you know, they, the Ulster unionists used to return twelve out of twelve.

FR: Yeah, that's, that's right, and your dad took you along to the polling station, would he have been politically minded at all?

GA: Well, he would have voted in, if, in a UK sense, he would have voted Labour or possibly Liberal in those days, he ended up being certainly a Labour supporter, but, but then that wasn't an option there. I honestly don't know what he **[00:20:00]** voted, he might have put, I mean, he, he wouldn't have been a Sinn Féin supporter, but he might have put down Sinn Féin just for the hell of it, or he might just have said it's all a bit of a farce anyway and put an X in the idiot's [indecipherable], I don't know. He wasn't, he, he wasn't, you know, he didn't, he didn't feel that, you know, he, he was aware of the sort of static sort of, limited outlook and everything, and things were always seen through a sectarian lens in those days, and Larne, as I say was, was a fairly Protestant town, although we did, he did have friends, we had friends, one of the dentists, Barry Riordan, was, was Catholic, as dentists often, often are I believe, you know.

FR: That's interesting, I wonder, I wonder why that's the case.

GA: Well, it, I read somewhere that, I mean, don't let me, you know, distract from the main purpose, but the, you know, at, at Queen's, well, doctor, the den-, the doctor training, the medicine training was longer and it was, it was, it was easier for Catholic families to get into, you know, that kind of profession, medical, caring, health professions, you know, for financial reasons and others, you know, as dentists, but I, I remember this, coming across this a couple of times or being, reading about it, I mean, I'm sure it's not a complete division, but, but we, you know, the Riordans, I remember they moved down to Downpatrick and we spent an Easter weekend with them, so, you know, we knew them quite well, although obviously most of my, my parents' acquaintance, you know, like, the teachers at the school were, you know, on the Protestant side, but not, many of them were, were not, you know, were not happy with the overall way that Northern Ireland worked.

FR: Okay, so what about church then? It sounds as if it might not have been a very religious family, but did you go to church?

GA: Well, my father took me once or twice. I think it was a case of sort of showing me what, you know, being sort of liberal rather than saying well, you know, you need to know what, you know, what people do and what many people believe and, and that kind of thing. He, I mean, later on in his life I think he became more explicit, he, he was, yeah, he wasn't, he wasn't against people looking for, you know, the meaning of life and the, and there being something perhaps beyond what is immediately obvious and so forth, although he later I think declared himself, you know, to be an agnostic, but he did feel that, you know, the way religion came across in, in Northern Ireland was pretty old-fashioned and rigid. I mean, he, he used to say that, you know, he could, he could see Christianity in a metaphorical sense, you know, in terms of possibilities for living, you know, in a, in a richer and a more, I mean, richer spiritually, in a more fulfilled way and loving your neighbour and all this and of course that being common to, to many religions, but, you know, with the, the sort of rather embattled, you know, religious views that there were in, in Northern Ireland he wasn't, you know, he didn't have much sympathy for that. I know we went once or twice to the, the First, the First Larne church there and, and they used to have two sermons and kids would often attend the first sermon and then leave, well, leave with my father, but then, you know, there was another sermon, it was, you know, quite a heavy dose of, I don't ever

remember staying for a second sermon, and whether the second sermon was, you know, was different in tone or whatever, I don't know, but, you know, we, we didn't go, you know, we, we went a few times, but not, not regularly.

FR: Okay, no, that, that's interesting, so, and then why did, why did your parents decide to leave then, do you know, in 1960?

GA: Well, I, I learnt later that, you know, they did have the sort of broad motivation for thinking that, you know, they would prefer my sister and myself to be brought up in a, well, out of Northern Ireland, not that we were under any particular threat and, as I say, you know, the, you know, the political activity, the civil rights movement and so forth and all, all that happened from the mid-sixties onwards hadn't, hadn't happened and, but I think they just felt it was a rather narrow-minded environment to be brought up in. I mean, the proximate cause was that by my father being a, a teacher, he had applied for a couple of jobs elsewhere in Northern Ireland, but hadn't got them, but he applied for the job of head of science in Welwyn Garden City Grammar School. I mean, in those days there were no comprehensives, it was, you know, the old system, the grammar school at Welwyn Garden City and he applied and attended it from, from Wales, attended the interview from Wales, where we were for the summer, as I said earlier, we used to spend about six weeks or so in, in my other grandparents' house in, in rural Wales and, yeah, I mean, I think my parents were, I mean, in a day-to-day sense fairly happy in, in Ireland. My, my mother coming from a small town or maybe a large village, you know, found it very easy to get into the kind of place that Larne was, you know, knowing who was related to who and that sort of thing and knew more about that I think than my father did after a fairly short time, but, I mean, my father was, was later more or less, I mean, after he'd been over here for a couple of years he was offered, more or less told that he could have the headmastership of Larne Grammar School if he wanted to apply, but he decided not to, you know, he didn't want to go back to that even though, you know, it would have been a step up from, you know, head of, head of department, so yeah, so that, that was, that was it really. I mean, I wasn't particularly aware, I mean, I, when I, I knew that we were going I had obvious worries, I was leaving my friends behind, that kind of thing. It happened to be, I was in my last year of primary, so it, you know, it wasn't a bad, a bad, and my, my sister was just starting school, so in terms of, you know, transferring to another, another set of schools, you know, it, it wasn't too bad, I mean, it, it, there was going to be an obvious break anyway in terms of me going to the secondary school, my sister, you know, well, joining again at the bottom, at the youngest level of the, of the primary school, so yeah, so it worked out fairly well and, in that respect, I mean, I, I recall being a little bit lonely or nostalgic or whatever, you know, to begin with, but not really anything very dramatic, you know, when we came to England.

FR: Yeah, so–

GA: I mean, it was, it was different, I mean, it, it was different and there are one or two, I mean, nothing, again, very important, but, you know, people laughed at, laughed at my accent a bit and–

FR: Well, I was going to ask about accent actually, so did you, did you, did you have a Northern Irish accent?

GA: Oh yes, I mean, you, I, people still pick me as Northern Irish, I mean, it's pretty sort of subdued now, but I, but I've lived, lived in other places.

FR: Yeah, no, I can, I can hear it.

GA: Yes, when I say now, for example.

FR: [laughs] Yes.

GA: And I, I can, you know, I can instantly recognise, you know, from four or five words, you know, I can recognise a Northern Ireland accent, you know, if it's somebody on television has got it or somebody, you know, passing, who you pass in the street or something, you know, but yeah, I mean, I, I, I was a pretty good student I suppose in everything and I found my own way, but I, you know, I got a bit of ribbing for, for accent or, I remember once using the word wee instead of little and amusing everybody by that, you know, sort of the odd idiom that, then Welwyn Garden City was, being a new town, I mean, the place was full of people from the north, from London, from south Wales, you know, it was, in fact, I remember, **[00:30:00]** I can't remember what age I was, but I must have been in the sixth form I suppose, we did a kind of survey in the school, asking people, you know, where they were born and plotting them on a map and, you know, a huge number of people of course came from outside Welwyn Garden City as, you know, their, their parents moved into it, you know, for, for work and so forth, so it's not as if, you know, I was, I was the only person who came from somewhere different, it was not like that at all.

FR: That, that's interesting, I hadn't, I hadn't thought of that, but it makes sense in terms of Welwyn Garden City being a new, a new town, as you say.

GA: Yes, I don't remember anybody else from, from Ireland, any part of Ireland, but certainly from many parts of, of the UK, of, of Britain I should say.

FR: But nobody else from Ireland or Northern Ireland, no?

GA: Not that I can remember, I mean, there might have been some in, in other years, but I don't, I don't remember them, and of course it was also a very, you know, racially, to use that word, I mean, there were, everybody was, was sort of white and, and British, I don't think there were even, you know, Europeans or, certainly there were no non-white, you know, black kids or BAME kids when I was there, it's, Hatfield particularly with the universities is really quite, quite mixed now in terms of, you know, ethnic origins of people.

FR: And you're not very far from London, are you, in Welwyn Garden City?

GA: No, no, and, no, exactly, and, I mean, I, when I was saying I don't, you know, I've only lived for limited periods in, in London, when I was working in this country as opposed to working abroad, you know, I, I mean, working in London I would commute up to London on the train from Hatfield or Welwyn Garden City, so to that extent, you know, part of a, part of a sort of London, economically part of London you might say.

FR: Sure, sure, and, and you went to school in Welwyn Garden City, where did you go?

GA: Well, just one term of the, of the primary school and then I did the eleven-plus. I did it later than others because I, they'd done it earlier, but they let me take it again and then they put me, then I got a place in the, in the grammar school and joined that September, September 2020. My father was actually teaching at the school again, which had, which wasn't too much of a problem, although it was a kind of sort of issue, you know, because, I mean, it wasn't, again, a very serious issue, but in the sense that, I mean, I, I was, I'm not trying to be immodest, but I was quite a successful student and, well, it just meant that, you know, that everybody knew I was my, was Mr Aicken's son.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GA: And I knew, I knew many of the teachers, you know, out of school, which, you know, my parents' friends among the teachers and that kind of thing, it wasn't, it wasn't a big problem in, oh I, I mean, but I, then, you know, I had to be sort of, there was this, I had to be slightly better behaved perhaps than I might have been. I remember the school caretaker, who was a bit of a curmudgeonly old so-and-so, he, one winter he caught me sneaking round with a snowball which, he didn't see me throw it, but he reported me and, I mean, nothing terrible happened, but it was kind of registered, my father knew about it, and whereas if I'd, if my father hadn't been in the school, you know, it, it, nothing would have, he wouldn't have known about it. I mean, my father didn't do anything about it, he didn't do anything about it, but there was that sense that, you know, you could be, you know, your, your home life and your school life are not completely separate as they tend to be for most people.

FR: Yeah, I know, I know exactly, I know exactly what you mean, and it means that the teachers know you as Mr Aicken's son, right, which is kind of sometimes a difficult position as well.

GA: Yes, I mean, he avoided teaching me, except that as he liked, there are three strea-, three entries, three streams, it was, or there were mixed entry in the first year, they weren't streamed ABC, they were XYZ, he liked to, he was teaching physics to the, he liked to meet the new kids coming in, so he taught each of them physics, you know, so I had him as part of that and then we didn't, he didn't intend to teach me again, but I did chemistry for A-level and there was a new syllabus brought in, so one group did the new syllabus and one group did the old syllabus and he, he was doing the new syllabus and another teacher doing the old syllabus, so in that way I ended up with him again, but it wasn't, it was under these slightly unusual circumstances, and it, it, I did okay and by that time, you know, the other, I mean, people were, the other kids were more, were pretty mature about these things by then, you know, it wasn't, when I was in the sixth form–

FR: Yeah, it's, it's a, it's a different, it's a different dynamic I suppose when you're a little bit older, and it, it sounds like you enjoyed school in the, in the main?

GA: Yes, yes, I mean, I, I, I did actually, yes, I was never particularly sporty or anything, but, so I didn't excel on the playing field, but, yes, in other, in other ways, you know, we, I mean,

Hertfordshire I think at that time, as the local authority, used to have the highest spending of any local authority on education, I mean, really–

FR: Wow, okay, that's interesting.

GA: I mean, you know, after, you know, years of, you know, people talking about cuts in education and this and that and the other, I mean, and I, I think, I mean, we had a few dud teachers of course, but I think we got a pretty good deal and, you know, it was, it was a state school, there was no, as I say, it was before comprehensivisation, my father, a few years after I left they began, they went comprehensive, but no it was, it wasn't like a private education or anything like that and, you know, we, there were a number of, of people who, who were at the school who, who did fairly well. I remember, you know, friend, friends of mine and, you know, then I, I used to meet up with them obviously during the holidays, vacations from university and so forth, yeah, no, it was, it was pretty good. I mean, the question that I have often asked myself, and getting back to I suppose, you know, the focus of this interview was, well, you know, what, what would have happened to me, or what would I have done, to put it a bit more actively, if we'd stayed in, in Larne, I mean, I'd have gone to Larne Grammar School I presume, I could of course have gone to university in England, I wouldn't have had to go to Queen's, but, you know, with the, with the political changes and so on, you know, I might have been caught up in some of those and, you know, and what, added some parallel, you know, there could have been a sort of parallel life there and, I mean, as it was I, I kept a close interest in, in how things were developing and I think we visited Ireland three or maybe four times during what would have been the, yeah, the sixties. I remember the last, the last time in 1970, I mean, the last time, cos after that I didn't visit for quite some time, but in 1970 we had planned to go over. I went over with my parents, I was at university then, but it was just about a couple of weeks after the army had been deployed for the first time and things, things quietened down dramatically, you know, because the army was there, but then of course, you know, they started up again later, but I remember going up to Belfast and, you know, walking up the Falls Road and down the Shankill Road and all the little streets in between, or maybe it was the other way round, but, you know, just looking around really and, and seeing what it was like.

FR: And you could see, you could see a, a big change from, from previous visits.

GA: Well, yes, I mean, in my, my earlier experience of Belfast had been largely things like going up and, you know, when, you know, doing some sort of serious shopping when my parents wanted, I don't know, to buy some furniture or take me up to visit Father Christmas in Robinson and Cleaver's, which was one of the department stores there, so when I went up, you know, when I went up in 1970 I just took the train up and, **[00:40:00]** and walked around, you know, I, I hadn't really been out of the centre of Belfast really before and only kind of knew it through, you know, newspaper and TV reports. Larne, Larne is a bit of a backwater in some way, I mean, well, all these things are relative, but, you know, it, it hadn't really struck me that Larne, it's the end of the railway line because it's pretty difficult to build a railway line north of Larne because of terrain and, you know, the, and the, you know, I, I wasn't, I hadn't really been aware of, say, the Glens of Antrim and how, you know, in the nineteenth century access was more or less by boat rather than by road or, or train and, you know, that I had been unaware of the sort of hinterland of Larne. I mean, we used

to go up the coast I suppose as far as maybe the Giant's Causeway and things like that and was aware of that spectacular, you know, it was spectacularly beautiful, the coast, but I'd been kind of unaware of, you know, the fact that, for example, most of north Antrim, you know, has got a Catholic heritage and, you know, and I'd, I'd kind of assumed that, you know, the whole of Antrim was more or less, you know, it's very much Protestant and the Catholics were more over to the west again, but it tends to be more a case of, you know, you know, the majority of Protestants are within maybe thirty miles of Belfast, you know, now it would have been the case, you know, I think broadly speaking going north. I mean, it wasn't a, it, it wasn't a problem, you know, I was, I was very committed to the, you know, the civil rights movement, although, you know, my heritage was sort of mildly Protestant, but not, not really, given that my parents were, you know, my mother wasn't really part of it, my father was relatively [indecipherable], even my father's mother, although she was a Presbyterian, she had a, she came from Scotland, but she came from Hawick in the borders and, you know, there wasn't really a sectarian issue there, if she'd come from Glasgow it might have been different, but, so she didn't really have that, you know, she was Presbyterian, but she wasn't part of the Ireland sectarian, you know, view of how, how the world is divided.

FR: So you've got a kind of a connection, but it's a kind of a, you're also able to kind of be somewhat distant I suppose from the kind of sectarian landscape.

GA: I, you know, if you judge it as a human rights issue, you know, you, you know, it was obvious that there was a lot of disadvantage directed against Catholics and this fear, you know, that they're going to take over and, you know, and of course, you know, when I read about it, being aware of the history and went into things, you know, the, the whole history of the Northern Irish statelet, you know, was, you know, the way, the way it worked out, I know it wasn't intended to be a permanent division, but obviously it meant that the, you know, the Protestant, the Protestants concentrated in the North, you know, did have their own, their own government and their own part of Ireland to administer and, you know, if you, it, it didn't seem, and, you know, they chose, they chose on the whole not to, not to kind of hold out the olive branch, you know, I don't say they weren't, you know, there weren't problems on the other side as well to some extent, I mean, the Irish Civil War I think must have, I mean, long before my time, but it must have, it must have given some of the Protestants pause, you know, when these people, they got freedom and so forth, but, and, but my, my father's brother-in-law was much more sectarian, so, you know, I was conscious that, you know, there would be arguments or differences of point of view and so on with, between him and my father, uncle David he was, but on the other hand I, I remember him saying once that, although he didn't have much sympathy for Catholicism and what, what that meant in terms of how Northern Ireland should conduct itself, he did, he, they happened at least at one time to have a Catholic family next door and he said, you know, if, he said, you know, if anybody came for the Murphys, you know, I'd be out there defending them, so, you know, it's that–

FR: Complicated.

GA: That split that people have between, you know, you say something like oh, you know, you get it in race things as well, you know, you sort of, well, course I'm, you know, if I'm

saying I don't like black people it's not you that I don't like, I mean, you're fine, but all the others.

FR: Yes, it's not these ones, it's not these ones, it's the other ones, right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GA: Yeah, sort of nameless other out there that represents the, you know, the things that you really don't like.

FR: Yeah, and I think in, in Northern Ireland, everyone living so close together, there's a lot of that really.

GA: Yes, yes, and, you know, so, I mean, David, you know, he, he might have, yes, well, you know, he might have had views that one wouldn't endorse, but he wasn't a kind of malicious or rogue person by any means, you know, but, you know, he was, you know, he was, he was from Bally-, Ballyclare I think and, you know, he was, and, and my cousins to that extent I suppose had a kind of much more Irish, and a much more Northern Irish, you know, without the, without having a Welsh mother, without having a father who'd been away though, so they were perhaps more into that kind of thing than, than I was, although, you know, I don't, I don't think they're particularly bigoted now, my, my two cousins, but, yeah, but they, they were obviously, they didn't have that outer pers-, outwards perspective that I, I had, having been away.

FR: Yeah, no, that, that makes sense. I'm thinking you would have been eighteen in 1968 when the Troubles is just starting, and it sounds as if you, you followed it a little bit, you mentioned that you supported the civil rights movement, so did you sort of, you watched the news or you read the news?

GA: Yes, I mean, we were, I suppose, well, you know, I'd be, at school, you know, we, with, with one or two others, you know, we got interested in politics, you know, the, I remember even, I mean, I was only fourteen then, but in the '64 general election when Harold Wilson got in, you know, after the Conservative Party, I mean, I'd, I obviously was, was young, but I, I went around just helping on the day, you know, to knock doors, to get people to, but then, you know, obviously reading about what was happening in the US and, you know, I suppose I, yeah, I mean, all the, the obvious sort of left-wing or more liberal causes, you know, and, you know, I, and I continued to, well, I suppose I've continued broadly in that direction all the time, but certainly at university, again, we were, you know, in the, going to university in the late sixties, you know, we were, we didn't, I mean, in, in France they were, you know, digging up, digging paving stones up and so forth, but, so it was quite a, you know, it was a time when, you know, it seemed as if, you know, I sup-, it seemed as if, you know, there was going to be a lot of change and there was some change, but of course there wasn't as much change as, as we might have thought there was or should have been at the time.

FR: Sure, so–

GA: Northern Ireland was part of this really and I felt connected to them and it's given me one, it's given me one lasting legacy I think, or, yeah, basically one, but I suppose you could subdivide it, that, one is that the way I look at the world, you know, I, I mean, I've been

having arguments with my son who accuses me of being, you know, hanging around, you know, with too many of these old lefty ideas and he's very influenced by people like Jordan Peterson and Douglas Murray and, you know, the, the dark web they call themselves, you know, they spent a lot of their time sort of putting left-wing views under a microscope, they're not, you know, far right, but they've been putting left-wing views under a microscope and saying, you know, you know, oh you're virtue signalling, you're, you know, you're simplifying things, you know, and then I've been saying to him look, you know, these guys are, are picking on the details, **[00:50:00]** they're, they're losing sight of the, the whole issue like, for example, topical one, you know, being worried about what happens to statues rather than, you know, the grievances of, of black people as, as expressed, you know, in the demonstrations. Anyway, but the, to come back, to come back to it, it's left me, I think, with something that I can't get Alex to, my, my son, although I think he likes winding me up, you know, I'm saying that I've always been very conscious of, of power, you know, not necessarily explicitly, but this implicit power in a lot of relationships, whether you're talking about individual relationships or whether you're talking about relationships between groups of people or classes or whatever and, you know, when everything's quiet it's easy to say well, there isn't a problem, but, you know, there is a problem, it's just that, you know, the people who are telling you it's not a problem are the ones that in some cases know there's a problem and don't want to admit it, but it many cases aren't even aware that there is a problem because, so, and the, but if you talk about things like structural racism or something then, you know, this can be shot down as, you know, a bit of, a sort of pile of post-Marxist, you know, conceptualisation, and, and I, I think that, you know, yeah, you know, you can throw around clichés, but, you know, there are issues, there are meanings behind those clichés and, you know, you need, if you want to analyse a situation you need to tease out those things, so I've always, I've always had that kind of legacy of saying, saying well, not that I'm, you know, looking for conflict everywhere, but that very often there are these issues where, you know, there is injustice, there are imbalances and as [indecipherable] that led me to, you know, working in international development, and a lot of my time was spent, I mean, partly by accident the first time obviously, but by choice later I spent a great deal of time, you know, living in, in Pakistan and of course, you know, you've got the Orange and the Green and the South Asia, you know, writ large, written many times larger than in, in Northern Ireland, but it, it, it get, you know, without, without exaggerating, you know, it's, and not saying it's comfortable, but, you know, I feel in a sense that coming from Northern Ireland, you know, I, I can see how these things have developed and how they're sustained and what they do to people and how people exploit them, you know, perhaps more easily than some who, who haven't got that experience of, of living in a society which, you know, has, has deep divisions.

FR: No, that, that makes sense, that kind of awareness of, of how these structures function I guess, even when they're not always visible, which I guess is, as you said Northern Ireland in the, in the fifties, maybe the structures of oppression aren't quite as visible, but they're still operating in the way that the state is set up.

GA: Yes, yes.

FR: No, that, that, go ahead.

GA: I mean, they, somebody said something like, you know, you know you really have got power when, you know, things happen and you don't actually have to exert it, people just kind of, you know, move, you know, do things because they're aware of something there and, you know, nobody actually, yeah, I don't know who said that, but there was, somebody did once.

FR: No, that, that makes sense to me. So just to briefly return to kind of chronology, you went to university after, after school. Where did you, where did you go?

GA: I went to Cambridge. I hadn't, I had a sort of, well, a, a sort of gap year and, I, I taught for a, well, I, I went to France for, for, I lived with a French family for about nine weeks. I didn't do A-level French and I read English actually, and there was a paper where we were expected to come to terms with some literature in, in other languages, most of us did French, so it was a, you know, I was advised it would be a good idea to go and, you know, polish my French up, cos I'd done it just to what was then O-level, and then I came back and I taught for a, a term in a secondary modern school in, near Welwyn Garden City and in, in old Welwyn, and, so I'd had a bit of experience, you know, before I went up to Cambridge in September '67. I was a bit young, so having that extra gap, you know, was, was useful anyway, cos I was seventeen and a half when I actually started at university.

FR: That's, that is, that is very young.

GA: Well, in those days they didn't bother seeking, you didn't have to kind of prove your age to get a drink, they assumed we were all eighteen.

FR: Well, that's [laughs], that's fortunate in this instance then.

GA: Yes.

FR: So, so, what, what was Cambridge like, what was that like as an experience? You studied English you said.

GA: I studied English, as a matter of fact, yes, I mean, this may not be particularly relevant, but I'd, for A-levels I'd done chemistry, maths and English. I had started doing chemistry, maths and physics, but I was actually, I actually started my A-level course at fourteen, I did my A-levels at just over sixteen, but I found it rather narrow and my father, although he was a science teacher, you know, encouraged me to, you know, you know, to think more widely and I swapped, I swapped physics for English and then I decided to read English at university rather than, I mean, the argument being that if I decided I wanted to be a scientist again, I'd sort of the time in hand, you know, to, you know, to make up the physics A and, and then go to university, but I, I did in fact go and read English, although again with my school science background, my father's interest in science, although he's, you know, he had, also had an interest in, you know, a very strong interest in theatre and some other things, you know, I was always comfortable with scientists. I mean, I had friends at university who were scientists as well as, you know, hanging out with the English, the other fellow, people doing the same course.

FR: That's interesting, it's quite unusual I think to kind of straddle those two worlds.

GA: It was certainly unusual then. I think it's, well, things, you know, things have been structured slightly differently now and, you know, with these, you can enter sixth form with a slightly broader range of subjects. I mean, my own kids did the, did the international baccalaureate which, you know, cos I always felt that, you know, A-levels did, you know, narrow you down too much.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, and–

GA: But, sorry, go ahead.

FR: No go, you go, you go ahead, you go ahead, I was thinking out loud about the baccalaureate [laughs].

GA: Well, yes Cam-, I mean, I was at Churchill College, which was not only a new college, but, you know, it was seventy per cent science, maths and engineering, but it wasn't, you know, it wasn't as, quote, traditional as, you know, other, as other Cambridge colleges and, you know, it had a higher proportion of grammar school people and, compared to private or so-called public school people, and things like that, you know, and I, as I say, I was comfortable, you know, with scientists anyway and, you know, there was a, there was, I think, a different ethos at Churchill perhaps than at some of the more traditional colleges and, and, you know, I got, yes, I got sort of politically active a bit, you know, even went on a few demonstrations against the American presence in Vietnam and things like that and, and, well, the usual things one does at, or did then at least in the, in, at university, you know, it was quite an exciting time and we, you know, we pushed for reform at our local level as well. I mean, I was on a, I, I was a representative meeting with some of the English faculty, several, you know, we had a group that looked at ways in which, you know, the syllabus might have been broadened in some ways, cos it more or less stopped, it more or less stopped in 1930 with, you know, maybe D.H. Lawrence could be mentioned, but it, it, I mean, now, it's interesting nowadays, you know, people are saying, you know, it's all dead white men, dead white males, you know, I mean, we weren't, we weren't sort of, you know, I don't think, we didn't recommend black studies or anything like that, but we were arguing for, not, not taking **[01:00:00]** away people, but making, adding on opportunity to study other kinds of, of work and, yeah, and, and the other thing, I wasn't involved in this, but the, you know, colleges were, our college Churchill was the first to get student representation on the college council, for example, and things like that, so, you know, we thought we were, you know, generally changing the world and, and we, you know, we did, we did in a very minor way, but–

FR: And as you, as you say, kind of part of that '68 cultural moment or whatever, that kind of global left moment.

GA: Yes, and the, I, again, I, I remember, I remember, I didn't know him, I didn't, you know, I wasn't a close friend of his, but there was a guy there from Northern Ireland, for example, but I, I don't, I don't remember any particular contact with people from Northern Ireland, but I do remember occasionally people saying, you know, what the hell's going on, you

know, the sort of English inability or difficulty in, sometimes in, in saying where does, you know, where does this fit in, you know, with our idea of what sort of country the UK is. Of course, people, people in this island have always, have never quite, most people have never really accepted that Northern Ireland, like it or, whether you like it or not, is actually part of the same country as, as England, you know, they've always, I mean, if it were joined on to the, you know, people used to say if things were happening in Glasgow or Liverpool that happened in Belfast, you know, it would have been treated very differently, you know, bec-, but, you know, Ireland has always been seen as something else, you know, in history it seems to me the whole of Ireland, you know, the potato famine and so on, I mean, if that happened in, if that had happened in Lancashire, you know, then I'm sure the government would have done more, you know, rather than follow this *laissez-faire* approach that they did take to the potato famine.

FR: Yeah, there's that separation I guess, which makes it easier to [laughs] ignore I suppose for a lot of English people. So you were at Cambridge for three years, four years?

GA: Well, three years for a degree and then I, I stayed to do a postgraduate certificate in education.

FR: Ah okay.

GA: My father had been a teacher and I wasn't, I really, hadn't really thought what I wanted to do and, you know, I did teach for a couple of years later, but then got on to other things, but I did stay on, you know, as far as Cambridge was concerned I, I stayed on for a final year. I think if, it would have been more enterprising to go and do that somewhere else actually, you know, to have the experience of somewhere else, but I kind of ended up doing that a bit by default actually, but, you know, it was, it was, you know, it was a different, I mean, there were still things in Cambridge, one whole term was spent on teaching practice, there was only two terms rather than the three, but, and, you know, the course was much less demanding, but it gave a chance to sort of read more widely into sociology and various other things and, so I don't really regret it.

FR: But it sounds like, it sounds like it wasn't a, it was kind of a, a default option or a, it doesn't sound like you were kind of desperate to become a teacher.

GA: No, I mean, I think I, well, it was a different, I mean, in terms of job markets and things it was much more open than today. Actually if I'm honest I, I had thought of, as I say, this is also a default option, but I had thought I'd like to stay on and, and do some further study, but I, I didn't do terribly well in my finals and so that wasn't, wasn't an option, but, and I hadn't really thought through and, you know, people, most of my friends, some went on to PhDs and things and some, some left and, you know, did various things temporarily and eventually, you know, settled down into what you might call a career, perhaps including further study and so on, but it was much, it was much easier to, if you like, take risks in those days, you didn't have to kind of think well, if I, you know, I'll just take a year sort of looking around and working cas-, you know, people could pick up jobs fairly easily and experiences and that kind of thing, so, I mean, I, I did some language teaching, which got me travelling to Sweden, which is the first, after that because when I graduated–

FR: Ah yes, I saw that on the, on the document that you sent me, I was curious about, about Sweden.

GA: Well, it was something that I had seen the year before and I was going to look out for it this year, basically teaching Swedes, adult Swedes, to speak English. I mean, most of them spoke English already, although obviously not all of them very well, but there was a strong, you know, they, they, we, we would be based in a Swedish town and teach, teach English as a foreign language, and you had to be either a teacher or at least have trained as a teacher, and they gave, you know, they gave a month's training in Stockholm on how to teach English language, which is different of course from being an English teacher in a school, and, you know, again, I only, that was the only job I applied for and I got it. I mean, there were like, fifty of us or something, so it wasn't a unique job, but it was an opportunity to, you know, I hadn't done much travelling outside the UK except, except to this period in France before I, before I went up to university, and so yeah, it was an opportunity to do that. I hadn't, and I just thought well, I don't really want to go into a school, I'll, I'll do one or two things first and then when I feel a bit more like it I'll, I'll do it [indecipherable], so it was an interesting experience, and I remember in Sweden there, there was, there were a couple of classes where they asked me, you know, to, to give them a talk on Northern Ireland and, you know, what is this and what is the, what is going on here and what are the issues and so forth, so I, I had a sort of, you know, instead of, but these, these were higher level classes obviously, conversation classes and so on, but I remember giving them a kind of overview and discussing the issues and, you know, suggesting what possible solutions there might be and, you know, then we had a discussion and so on and it was, it was quite, quite interesting, but just again to illustrate the fact that, you know, people from Sweden, you know, thought oh, you know, Britain's a progressive country and, you know, we're all fairly enlightened these days and where does this, where does this conflict seem to come from, you know.

FR: I think that that's quite a challenging lecture to be asked to give [laughs].

GA: Well, of course, I mean, you know the old joke about anybody who thinks there's a solution hasn't, is ill-informed, and you have to simplify it, I mean, but, you know, if you go, if you talk about, you know, the plantation and, you know, and the battle, you know, the Battle of the Boyne and quickly whizz through, you know, two or three centuries of history and sort of start taking it up, you know, again with the partition of Ireland I suppose, I mean, I'm sure, I'm sure it could be shot down for sins of omission and commission, but talking about something that, yeah, a presentation of, you know, twenty minutes, half an hour and then people discussing it, you know. I, I did actually consult a few books, I didn't just, I didn't just do it from, from memory [laughs].

FR: [laughs] So you were in Sweden just for a few months, doing, teaching?

GA: A year.

FR: A year, oh a year.

GA: Well, like, well, the academic, yeah, we went across in August, were trained in August in Stockholm, then we went, sent off in September to where we were based, and then there were basically two, two semesters I suppose with Christmas in the middle and, yeah, we ended, we went back in May and we were, there was a link to a language school in Hove actually, next to Brighton, where we were asked to–

FR: That's where I'm speaking to you from [laughs].

GA: Right, yeah, of course, I'm, I'm forgetting I don't need to tell you where Hove is. The, it's still there actually, it's called the English Language Centre and it's near the square there.

FR: Churchill, Churchill square, maybe?

GA: No, no, that, not, further out, you go down **[01:10:00]** towards Hove and there's, there's a sort of garden.

FR: Ah yes, I know, I know where you are, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GA: It used to be up one of those, if it, I mean, it was there a few years ago, I, I'm not, maybe it, I can't guarantee it's in, anyway, but it, it meant that you came back and you had a job to, to go to, they asked you to do it for at least four weeks and, you know, so it meant that people had the chance to sort of, you know, not just stop earning money in Sweden and then be completely as it were adrift, so, you know, I was there for a few weeks in the summer and teaching English and, you know, as I say, coming, getting, coming back to adjusting again to life in, in England.

FR: And, and did you, were you, did you think of leaving England for good at the time or did you think you would stay in England?

GA: Well, the Swedish job was not, people did go back to do a second year, very occasionally they did a further year, but then they were, were kind of more or less joining the organisation because there's, the Swedish tax arrangements meant that you didn't pay tax for the course and therefore, the company didn't need to pay us on a rate that would be appropriate to be taxed, if you see what I mean, cos tax is about fifty per cent in Sweden.

FR: Yes, okay.

GA: So if you stayed, you could do two years tax-free, I mean, for people like us who were, you know, brought in, specialisms like being a native speaker from, from the UK, but if you stayed on a third year then you had to pay back tax, and so the company was only keen to do that for people who were really committed and who, you know, would jump the, you know, making a career of it and very good at it and so on and then in those cases they, it was a Swedish organisation called *kurs vuxen hegu* which was part of the Swedish adults' education movement, and then it had this link with the English Language Centre in, in Hove, although the ELC, you know, in the summer they, they had students from a wide range of places, pretty much, well, mainly Europe, but certainly not all Swedish–

FR: Yeah, we, we do still get quite a lot of language students in Brighton actually.

GA: Well, it's a good place to, to be if you're studying, studying langua-, studying languages and, you know, it's a, I think a good place for people to visit and quite a laidback sort of place.

FR: Yeah, and you've, you've got the–

GA: And I do like Brighton, you know.

FR: Yeah, me too, I've been living here for almost five years now. Okay, so [laughs] you came back from Sweden and you're living in England again, is, is that right, so–?

GA: Yes, I mean, just, what I did then, I, I, I actually went to work in a children's home because I wanted, partly through the persuasion of a girlfriend, admittedly, as well as saying it might be good for me, but I also thought it would be good for me too, I worked in a children's home in Islington, for London Borough of Islington, it was actually called an educational assessment centre though, you know, kids would be received and then maybe put into long-term arrangements later, but in practice it wasn't, there wasn't that much of it, but I wanted to see kids at close hand really, I mean, I, obviously I, you know, have cousins and so on, they were younger children and that sort of thing, but I, I felt I, you know, I, maybe I was just delaying being in, going into school teaching, but I wanted to understand kids more and anyway, I did that for six months and then I went back to the English Lang-, this would be about March, something like October to sort of March or maybe April in Islington, then I went back to the English Language Centre and stayed there until Christmas, so about nine months in Brighton, and I taught there obviously outside the, you know, the summer period. They, they asked me to do a course called Cambridge Proficiency, which was about six people, but it was a, a higher level language course with, you know, a bit of literature as well and studying, you know, thinking English up, you know, approaching native speaker level, so it's a more advanced course and I did, I did that between September and December that year, but by that time I, a friend of mine who I'd met in Sweden, through him I got a job in Australia, and so I went to Australia.

FR: Oh, oh [laughs].

GA: Yeah.

FR: Okay.

GA: Not a lot of this has much to do with Northern Ireland, I mean, maybe some of it later was, but–

FR: No, it's, don't worry, don't worry about that, I mean, it's a, it's a life history interview, so I'll be asking you questions about your life, and if there's a kind of Northern Irish connection then obviously please express it, but if there isn't it's just of interest as part of the kind of, the life history.

GA: Right, right.

FR: So don't worry about that, so Australia?

GA: Well, this, this is, yes, we're talking about, I actually went out in January 1974. When I was in Sweden I'd met a, he was a guy called Peter, who was a bit older than us, most of us were, you had to be minimum of twenty-one and most of us were twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, that kind of thing, Peter was twenty-eight and seemed pretty ancient. He'd been working on a, you know, secondment from Australia at Christ's Hospital, the, you know, the, the public school, Christ's Hospital and, and he'd, and he'd agreed with the school that he was substantively at in Australia that he wanted to go and get some wider experience and, and go to Sweden for a year, which he did. When I got to know him, when he, he went back to Australia, was appointed head of English at this school because he, he'd had several years more teaching experience than the rest of us and he, obviously it had to be approved by the headmaster and so on, but he, he, it was a, it was a private school, but he basically arranged for me to come out. I applied for a job and so on, so I, I went out to Australia at the beginning of '74, more because I wanted to be in Australia rather than, I wasn't, to be honest, particularly attracted to the school, which was a bit more like a Brit-, a British so-called public school, you know, there's a lot of emphasis on sport and so on, although I, I got involved in the debating and things like that rather than, you know, the rugby and the cricket and so forth, but I went out there. Peter had been, you know, he, he had a bit of an inferiority complex about not having been to Oxbridge I think, not that I, not that I used to pull this over on him, but, you know, he, he was keen to get, get the, to get new people, you know, to come out and, and teach and, you know, there were other people from, there were one or two others who were there who like, like me were fairly young and, you know, had a fairly, a more solid perhaps academic background in the subject than one or two of the older teachers and so I was, I taught there for a couple of years and enjoyed being in Australia and in Sydney, just it's, actually, you know, you could see the Harbour Bridge from, from the school, it was just on the North Shore there and, yeah, so I was out there for, I was there for two years and then I'd become aware of a job, a friend I, well, a friend of my, like, I got, I had a, a girlfriend came out with me, or after me actually and joined me there and we got married there, although we, but through her I became aware of a job which, working with Aboriginal education, this is was in the, the Whitlam government, the Labour government in 1974, or in 1972 it got in, it was kicked out in 1975, but they introduced a lot of reforms **[01:20:00]** including an incentive programme to try to get Aboriginal school kids, secondary school kids and Aboriginal tertiary students, you know, to, well, to get, to get, to get more, help them to get more out of, out of the secondary school and to, you know, to apply for further or higher education. There was a grant attached to it, but it was also, we were quite well staffed in New South Wales and so we, there were about fifteen or so of us called education officers and we used to go out to cities and towns in New South Wales, a federal scheme, but administered obviously through the states because that's what, the basic education was a state-based thing, so we used to go out and, you know, see the kids at school and liaise with the parents and that kind of thing. I suppose again, that, that was, you know, beginning of my more active, you know, sense of sort of, well, you know, there are injustices in the, in the world and, you know, they can be, things can be improved and, and so forth, so I found this actually more rewarding than, you know, being a, I also, being a teacher, I mean, I was a teacher of relatively privileged kids, but I, I

wasn't being kind of oh, you know, these are rich kids, you don't need to worry about them. I didn't think I was particularly good as a teacher, I, I might be better nowadays, but I was, I was a bit over-academic and I didn't particularly, I don't know, yes, I, I think I would have been better if I'd, you know, if I'd had a bit more school teaching experience, anyway, and I'd, you know, issues about, well, not that I was trying to sort of break away from my father, but I think if my father hadn't been a teacher I probably wouldn't have been toying with teaching anyway, you know, it was, it was the kind of thing, you know, like, you know, little boys are supposed to want to be train drivers, and I always said when people said to me what do you want to do when I grow up, I always said a teacher because my father was a teacher and, so anyway, I did, I did the teaching and I found it more interesting to, you know, but understanding what, you know, what sort of institutions schools are and visiting a number of them and you know, meeting the teachers and the, the students and the parents, as I say, you know, it, it also put things in a context, I mean, in terms of what it did for me, I mean, I hope it obviously did something for the people I was supposed to be working for, but, you know, it, it, you know, you could see, I mean, I've, I've sometimes said that if you think about the, the meeting between the first fleet, you know, which consisted mainly of convicts and soldiers and Australian Aboriginals in what later became the Sydney area, you know, it's difficult to think of, you know, two cultures that would be more different when they met, you know, than any other encounters in, in history, you know, it's, it's as if, because, you know, they were, they were so different, and even they, you know, as I say, the British side of it, you know, were, were, you know, were convicts and soldiers, you know, in some ways, you know, a very particular part of society and you wonder what the Aboriginals would have made of that and certainly what the, what the whites disembarking would have made of Aboriginals, you know, who didn't seem to have, unlike, you know, people in Tahiti and so on, who didn't seem to have, you know, recognisable hierarchical structures and, you know, trappings of wealth and organisation and so on that you would, as I say, they didn't seem to cos in, Aboriginals of course have got culture, but it's a large, it was a largely, you know, certainly not written and largely, of course, the Aboriginals that I was working with were not, you know, exotic tribals, they were, you know, they were largely people who were marginalised on, you know, in country towns and in the outskirts of towns and so forth, often in new housing.

FR: It sounds, yeah, it sounds like a really interesting job.

GA: It was, you know, and it, it, you know, when you talk about, well, I was going to say structural racism, and there was racism, but it's, it's structural disadvantage, you know, if you leave aside deliberate discrimination or prejudice or whatever, but when you, you know, it, it seemed to me that there were so many reasons why most Aboriginal kids didn't do particularly well at school, you know, when you look at the, the kind of disadvantages in relation to the formal system that they had, I mean, including things like, you know, health issues, but also in terms of the kind of social patterns, family patterns and, you know, the lack of role models and everything else, you know, and it seems to me that, you know, when people, when people say, you know, why, you know, I did well at school or I did well in a particular job, why can't X do it, you know, then, you know, it, these were very many examples, you know, very many incidences of why X can't do it, you know, or why it, it takes a lot more effort and, and people, you know, by default perhaps get pushed onto other paths.

FR: Yeah, and it's, it's about seeing a wider context, right, like, all of these, these achievements are all achieved within a particular context which doesn't exist for everyone.

GA: Yes, and, and I realised that, you know, although my family wasn't, it wasn't a wealthy family, but, you know, we, we didn't have any, we were not poor, you know, I can look back and say well, actually, you know, I mean, I had a lot of advantages, you know, my, I mean, even among my contemporaries, I mean, obviously a lot of, a lot of people hadn't got a parent who was, who had been to university and things like that, you know, and so, so it's a case of saying well, I, you know, you can see why I have been successful in this system and you can see why other people aren't and, you know, it's not a simple case of saying that, you know, I'm clever and, you know, he's thick or, there are all sorts of instances, and, and it's not a case of saying that the path that I benefited from is the best path, that, you're not saying that either, but it, it may be suitable for success in normal, in generally recognised terms in our society, but, you know, again, you know, there are other paths which, you know, might suit other, other people in different ways and, you know, and different societies would value different things differently and so forth, so, you know, and again, I think that's, you know, that, that was added to, if you like, the sense, the Northern Ireland sense of coming out of that that, you know, things are, you know, what you see is not, is not simply what there is, you know, you, you have to, you know, as a sociologist, say, you know, it's problematic, you know, you have to look at it and say well, actually, you know, just because this is something that we've all unconsciously absorbed it doesn't mean that there isn't an issue here, why do we do it in this way, you know, to a Martian it would look as a peculiar way of doing things, you know, that, so, you know, I suppose I got, I trained myself or I acquired some ability to, to think outside the system and put myself outside it, even if I were a, you know, on the whole a beneficiary of it.

FR: No, that, that makes sense, and again it seems to be, it seems as if the Northern Irish background is, is part of that. What, what did your parents make of you moving to Australia? Cos it's quite far away especially in those days, without the internet.

GA: Yes, yes, New Zealand's a little bit further, but yes, it was. Well, I didn't, I didn't go back for four to five years, though I kept in touch, I was a fairly assiduous letter writer and, you know, on occasions, but, but maybe only a couple of times a year or, you know, I'd phone up, but in those days of course phone calls were relatively speaking much more expensive and we didn't have, you know, all the IT, you know, possibilities that we have now. No, it, my parents, well, my father had, I think my mother had probably more explicit regrets, but, you know, the line was, well, you know, if this is something that you want to do and it's good experience, and I was actually earning quite a bit more **[01:30:00]** money over there in Australia because of the exchange rate and so on at the time, not that they were particularly materialistic, but, you know, generally speaking they, you know, they accepted it. My father always, I think he probably had a sort of little bit of a regret, he, he often, he said it to my daughter one, once when she was doing her PhD, you know, he said well, you know, if, if, if, and, you know, having a child during the middle of the study, if Catherine isn't able to finish it, you know, she can always become a, you know, she might find it fulfilling to be a primary teacher, he's always tended to see the world through teaching, but at the same time he has not stood in the way of, of people who want to do something else, if you see what I mean,

although there's a certain amount of double bind stuff perhaps going on there, but basically they, to give you a short answer, they supported it, but no doubt they'd have liked to see me more often. Oddly enough one of my, my next door neighbour in Larne, the next door neighbours went, had gone out there to Australia.

FR: Oh that's interesting.

GA: I mean, they were living in Newcastle, which is about a hundred miles north of Sydney, and I went to see them a couple of times and, well, more like, maybe, maybe half a dozen times during the, you know, the time I was there, which was about four and a half years.

FR: What a, what a coincidence.

GA: Well, I mean, they were, yeah, coincidence, although they were, they were not, as I say, they were not sort of like, next door in Sydney, which would have been a real coincidence, but they'd gone out, he, the father was a, I think he was an electrician and the, the boy, they only had one son called Alistair, who was just virtually the same age as me, so I still, I mean, I'm still sort of in contact with him in the sense that in Australia he had a very different life from me because I, I don't know that he ever came back at all, but he, he lives there, I mean, he'd be seventy now, he's, he was a retired butcher, he, that's the job he went into and, but they went out there, although I, my mother who came out to visit and, and had some detailed talks with the mother, you know, said which, that, you know, she was not very happy out there and it never quite worked out for her husband because he'd, you know, he didn't, he didn't have quite the qualifications that he needed and whatever, but yeah, seems a long time ago.

FR: And did you say that you married your, you wife, that you got married in Australia?

GA: Yes, I did, although she was English, I mean, I'm married to somebody else now, but we were married for quite a long time, but we, what happened was that we, well, she was actually in Sweden when I was there and we, we knew each other, but we, we were not, you know, we were not linked in any romantic way. There were about five of us in this particular town in Sweden, there was a place called Västerås, which is quite a, quite a big industrial town, and inevitably we got to know each other there quite well, and then she went off, she was a linguist, she went off to do an attachment in Germany, cos German was her main language, so she was like, a thing, you know, what do they call them, teaching assistants, you know, like, they call them *lärare* in, in Swedish or, but, well, yeah, I remember at, I remember at school, you know, there would be, an exotic French person would come in sometimes and, you know, be attached to the school, so it was that kind of thing in, in Germany and then we, we happened to get together by, partly by chance when she came back from that, because I was living in Brighton doing this language work and she got a job in, in Crawley in a school, Thomas Bennett school in Crawley, so we kind of, you know, met up and one thing led to another as they say, but by that time I'd already committed myself to going to Australia and so I went anyway and we kept in touch and she came out later, about September I suppose that year, so we, and then we lived together and, for a year or so and got married in, if, if I hadn't married her, I mean, in the sense of being somebody who was British, English in fact, I might not have gone back because the Aboriginal work was

part of the, the civil service, so I might have continued in that for a while, but if I hadn't continued in that way I could have perhaps had a job, a career in the Australian civil service, you know, if I'd married an Australian I probably would have stayed there.

FR: Sure, so, so how did, how did your coming back to England come about?

GA: Well, we were both pretty happy there, but I think, Celia her name was, I mean, she was beginning to think perhaps a bit more than I was about the prospects of having children and so on and thinking well, you know, with children, be nice for children to have grandparents actually there, and one thing, so we decided, we, I did about two, a bit more than two years in this Aboriginal education civil service job and we went back and we thought, again, things were relatively open, I mean, we thought well, if, if we really don't like it, we can probably still come back to Australia, I mean, even though we obviously had to give up our jobs and so on, but, and we spent about five, almost six months travelling in, initially we went to Fiji and Samoa and then spent time travelling round North America in a Volkswagen campervan and then we arrived in November '79 in, in Britain again, in, in the UK again and, you know, we, we ended up, we, we got temporary jobs and so on, and then I was beginning to think I'm not getting anywhere permanent when I got a job working in the Commonwealth Secretariat, which was a kind of international development job, it was based in London, but it was adminis-, part of the administration of a small multinational fund called the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation and, although it was based in London, I travelled out for a few weeks each year to, or a few, about three weeks, twice a year to the Caribbean, so I did that for a while and later worked, I mean, later did the job in parts of Africa as well and one or two other aspects, there was a programme helping Namibians, so, who were at that time, you know, that was before changes in southern Africa, so having had that job, although it was a, although I probably stayed too long, I mean, it was a, a very interesting job to get and so, you know, we, I'm not saying it was just my decision, but Celia had a job, she, she had in fact in Australia been doing some work in, a sort of parallel job to mine, but in, in employment, so she got a job in employment here and then, but then we, we, our first child was born, Catherine in fact, who you've met, was born in 1981, and so we'd had a, you know, a couple of year, you know, we were getting a house and, you know, all the things and then had a child and that was, we had a second child, so we, you know, we abandoned ideas of going back to Australia. I did actually go back cos I, I did actually go back because there are, I would have been able to go back without a visa within three years, so I did actually go back and look around and so on, but, I, we decided not to, I'd visit old friends, but I decided not to, not to stay, or not resume our stay.

FR: Well, it sounds like you picked up another interesting job in, in England. **[01:40:00]**

GA: Yes, I mean, the, I mean, international development is very diff-, is different from, you know, working with Aboriginals like, a minority within a dominant culture, but, you know, there are obvious, obviously it's premised on the fact that, and, you know, I know it can be called paternalistic and neocolonial in part, but it's premised on the, on the assumption that, you know, the world would be a better place if, you know, people in, people had, if it was more equal, if people had access to, to education, to material benefits, to better health and so on, you know, throughout the world than, than remaining in, in a much more divided world, so it was my, my, my sense of justice coming on again and, it was, the Secretariat was

a, as an organisation was, I mean, it was multinational, obviously it wasn't like the UN or something, but it was much more small scale and it wasn't, it was a little bit dysfunctional I suppose, but, you know, it was interesting working in a, an organisation that wasn't, you know, a monocultural organisation and, you know, there were people from, well, maybe not all the Commonwealth countries, not the very, but there was a pretty good, a pretty good range of people, the Brits were a bit overrepresented I suppose, but they gave us the opportunity to go and visit the Caribbean and later, later Africa and, you know, which fed my interest in, you know, exploring other parts of this planet.

FR: Yeah, it sounds, it sounds like you've been able to travel quite a lot looking at, again, looking at the document that you sent.

GA: Yes, I mean, I've said, you know, a lot of people say oh when we, when we stop working, you know, we'll go on a world cruise, I haven't seen enough of the rest of the world, I mean, I, I've said that, although I, obviously at the moment it's out of the question, but I, yes, I would, I would like to travel more and see things I haven't seen, but if somebody said to me, you know, you've got to stay in this country, I wouldn't feel grossly deprived, as I would if I hadn't travelled much or if I'd only gone abroad, you know, for brief holidays.

FR: I wanted to ask you then about something else that you, you mention in the document that you sent me, which is that you've been an active Labour Party member, because it certainly sounds like there's a kind of politics in the job that you start doing in Australia and then in these kind of Commonwealth jobs it seems like there's a kind of a, I can see a kind of a political aspect to those jobs, so yeah, I just wondered if you could tell me a wee bit about your involvement in politics in that period maybe, in the, in the eighties.

GA: Yes, obviously formally, formally in the, in the jobs, you know, it, it's not, not political, but, I mean, most people who get involved with international development or, you know, working with minorities tend to, tend to be, you know, left wing. I, I didn't pay particular, there's not a problem about that or any particular surprise about that, it's just like, you know, if you meet Americans abroad, you know, you're often hard pressed to find a Republican.

FR: Sure, sure.

GA: They're mainly all Democrats, but yes, but the Labour Party, yes, I, I, well, I rejoined the Labour Party after the, after the 2017 election, I, I had, I think I'd done some work, a bit of work for it before, but I hadn't actually rejoined. I had been a member in the eighties, I joined after the, the '83 election, that was, yeah, the Falklands election when Thatcher consolidated her, you know, her majority and so on, Kinnock became the Labour leader and I was fairly active during the time I was at the Commonwealth Secretariat, which was basically during the eighties, and I, I, well, when I went abroad, I mean, when I, I joined the Department for International Development, which was UK government from, you know, in 1990, which was the longest of the development jobs I had and I became more dormant then, you could be, I mean, you could be a party member, at least at my level, but you weren't supposed to be too active and, you know, it sort of got, the higher up you got, you

know, for example, a permanent secretary wouldn't be a, wouldn't, wouldn't be expected to have a formal party affiliation.

FR: Sure, sure, I see what you mean.

GA: Though I was, I, you know, I could, I was able to, at my level I could, you know, be a member and I could attend meetings, but I wasn't expected to, you know, be an office bearer or something like that.

FR: Yeah, I understand.

GA: Anyway, I went, I went abroad to Ma-, I'm jumping ahead, but I went abroad to Malawi and then I let it lapse really then, and when I came back, although I was, you know, I, I came back after Blair got in and I didn't rejoin and then, you know, with the Iraq war and so on I wouldn't have rejoined. I mean, in any case I was, during, you know, I went, I was back for a couple of years and then I went to Pakistan for the first time, so, you know, the, I, yes, I could have been a member, but, you know, there wouldn't have been much point anyway, so I didn't, I didn't join. I have been fairly active, in the, well, in, you know, in going to meetings and, and, you know, helping and, you know, canvassing and, and so on for the elections and a bit of work at a local level. I, I haven't taken a, you know, I haven't, I mean, it's, it's, one gets elected to these of course, but I haven't put myself forward for any administrative posts in it because I, well, I, I felt I, I didn't want to get too bogged down in, without being snobbish or standoffish about it, you know, I didn't want to get too bogged down in, you know, administration and they seem, you know, I thought I wanted to spend my declining years or at least the part of them I'm experiencing at the moment doing more, doing perhaps more personal things, you know, catching up with some personal interests and just, yeah, but yes, I mean, my, my politics have remained fairly, I mean I'd say I was on the left of the Labour Party. I, I'm not a, I wasn't a kind of uncritical Corbynite and I'm not an uncritical Starmerite, although I did vote for Starmer because I thought it was the only way ahead, you know. I, I, I don't, I blame, I, I have some reservations, I mean, I, I think Corbyn had a very hard time, but, you know, equally, I don't think that, you know, he was a hundred per cent perfect and, and, you know, it was all the media and the, the bad guys, you know, bringing Labour down, I think it was a bit more complicated than that. I hope Starmer follows a broadly, you know, a fairly left agenda rather than just trims towards the centre, I know it, it's difficult to judge at the moment because of the coronavirus, but, you know, you know, but he's starting to I think articu-, you know, I mean, it, the government seems to making a huge mess out of everything, so I think it has possibilities for him, yeah, but, but you know, I've, again, when I was in, you know, at the Commonwealth Secretariat we were living in Enfield in north London and there were a group of about four or five of us who, from a particular ward who, you know, got fairly active and we did quite a lot. We, we, you know, we canvassed, we almost got our person into the, onto the borough council, even though it was a, basically a very Conservative ward, but we got the second highest result, but unfortunately my activity also stimulated the Conservatives to get out and fight for something they thought was going to fall into their laps and they just pipped us at the post, but whatever, I mean, it was, it was quite fun in a way, I mean, we had, there were, yeah, there were a group of us and, you know, there was speakers coming to the meeting. I mean, we, we had ward meetings in those days, nowadays we only seem to have, or as far as all

the member meetings are concerned they're for the whole constituency and we only get about twenty people, twenty or maybe thirty on a good day, **[01:50:00]** and in spite of the fact, you know, the Labour membership is still, you know, about half a million I believe [indecipherable], so, you know, I, I, it's the, it's just, I'll stop in a moment, just I suppose the thing is, yes, I've always had one or two doubts about, you know, how I don't agree with everything and, you know, is this the way one wants to spend one's time, but I, I think what made me want to rejoin was not only, you know, the, the real problems that I feel are growing and have been growing, you know, with an increasingly right-wing government and the divide in society, but also the fact that, you know, yes, and this is what I say to my son, you can sit and sort of quibble about things, but, you know, you know, you, if, if something is ninety per cent or eighty per cent what you believe, then, you know, you're better off joining that and doing something about it rather than sort of waiting for the, you know, the pure and ideal vehicle to, to come along, cos it won't.

FR: Yeah, the perfect is the enemy of the good, right.

GA: Yeah, exactly and so, you know, and, and the advantages of, I mean, you can be more or less active, I mean, I, I was, I did nothing for the European elections, for example, because, in fact, I even voted Green, I didn't, they didn't kick me out cos I didn't tell anybody, but, because I thought they were, the party got itself into a terrible mess over Europe and, you know, since this was a specific European election I decided to vote for the Green and in fact the Green actually, well, we lost the single Labour seat in east of England and a Green got that as it happened, the Tories came fifth or something in the, I mean, it was a, it was a very odd election, but–

FR: Yeah, it didn't really divide along the, the usual lines I guess.

GA: No.

FR: I was going to ask about, so you mentioned Corbyn there, and did your politics have any relation to Northern Ireland in this period, because I guess the Labour Party and especially the left of the Labour Party is kind of associated with maybe the Troops Out movement, Corbyn himself as a figure is obviously associated with, with, with Northern Ireland, so yeah, did your politics have any involvement with Northern Ireland in the eighties?

GA: Not, not explicitly, I mean, I continued to be keeping up with it. I, I should say that after, I mean, on a sort of parallel point, I mentioned that, you know, I'd been and visited Northern Ireland in 1970.

FR: That's right, yeah.

GA: I didn't again visit it till, till I was fifty, which would have been in 2000, so for thirty years I didn't visit.

FR: Wow, okay, okay.

GA: It wasn't, it wasn't a case of me deliberately staying away, but I guess, you know, coming back, well, obviously when I was in Australia I didn't think I'd been coming back to this country, you know, in getting involved here and, you know, having kids and so on, it wasn't a case of staying away because of worries about we might be in danger or anything like that, but somehow we just didn't go there. So Catherine, for example, Catherine and Alex have both been to Ireland, but they've, neither of them has been to Northern Ireland, although I have sort of said, you know, you really ought to, really ought to go, and my, my relatives over there used to come over, you know, you saw them over here a couple of times I suppose and, so, anyway, so I was, I didn't start, but I decided, it was when I was in Malawi I remember saying that I really, you know, within a year of getting back, in fact, it was a little longer than a year, but, you know, but it's something I will make a point of doing is going to, is going to Ireland and I, I went there initially on my own, although by that time my, my marriage to Celia was, was not in very good shape, and since, since then I've been about five or six times I suppose. My present wife has been with me for, quite a few times, you know, and when we've been we've, we've, we've gone, we've visited the Republic as well, I mean, last time we went we, I mean, we know people in Dublin and so on and, and a little bit, I mean, I've, I've been, yeah, I don't know the, I don't know really south of Dublin, but I know, well, I've been to the west a bit and, and so on, anyway, sorry, getting off, getting off the point, but, yeah, the Labour Party politics, yeah. I mean, I've always thought Ireland would be better, for both parts, you know, if it, if it were united, but, I mean, obviously a lot of things have to happen first and it's not just a matter of waving a magic wand and that happening, but, I mean, the Republic has changed, or at least Dublin at least has changed hugely, I mean, we were in Dublin about eighteen months ago and, you know, you never see, you don't even see a priest walking around anymore as far as I could see, but, you know, because of the, the problems the Catholic church had with its child abuse and so forth, you know, and, and Dublin being quite a cosmopolitan place with foreign students and, I mean, it seems very different. I, I know there are obviously issues and underlying issues that, you know, any, any country has, but it seems to have, you know, the, the old sense that the Republic was being kind of locked into a, you know, a time warp, you know, of at least thirty years earlier than the, the present, you know, which no doubt was a simplification, but there were some, I could see from a, from a Northern Irish perspective some people would say well, yeah, we don't, you know, we don't want this, you know, this papist nonsense, you know, you, the church was extraordinarily powerful and that, that appears at least, you know, I dare say not evenly throughout the country, but it, it is very different, I mean, it's a, it seems just like a, you know, like going to Eur-, a continental European country, you know, where, yes, there is a religion which may be Catholic, but it's not kind of in your face in the way that it, it may have been in the past. **[01:57:21]** [The two interview audio files were spliced together here].

GA: And Northern Ireland in fact is, you know, is much more kind of socially backward, I mean, these are all gross generalisations of course, but, but the politics, yes, Corbyn, I mean, I, yeah, I mean, I, I didn't have a problem with Corbyn meeting, you know, IRA people, I mean, I, I think he is basically a peacemaker. I sometimes thought that he wasn't necessarily, and I'm not saying I was, but, you know, that he necessarily, that he understood all the nuances and so on of, of–

FR: Sure, sure, I know what you mean.

GA: Of Ireland. I think there is an element to which, you know, he may have been a little bit naive, but by saying that I'm not, I'm not saying that, you know, you know, because I would

support, you know, the ANC in South Africa that somehow that that's easy to do, whereas when it's a place that you come from, you know, you, you always end up making little excuses and things like that. Every situation is very complex and, you know, at one level you can say well, I basically support, you know, this solution or this, this organisation which is promoting, you know, this sort of ultimate configuration, nevertheless, you know, like I was saying about the Labour Party, you know, there are always bits and pieces that you, you know, you may not like or you're uncomfortable with or you may disagree with, you know, and it's, and, you know, I'm, I'm not a pacifist, but I, I'm, like Corbyn I suppose again, I'm, I'm not, not that far off it, you know, and, you know, I don't, you know, I don't, I don't glamorise or support, you know, bombs going off whether they're, you know, I mean, you, you know, romanticise the IRA basically.

FR: I mean, that, that actually takes me to my next question in fact, which was, although you kind of are travelling or wor-, I mean, working abroad for periods in the eighties and nineties, you're sort of also based in London, is that, is right, or working in London?

GA: Well, when I was at the Commonwealth job, yes, in the eighties I was based in London.

FR: Okay, okay. I was going to ask if you have any, any recollection of the Troubles in, in England, so I'm thinking of the various IRA bombs in the nineties, for instance.

GA: Yes, in Birmingham and so on, yes, yes, no, I do have a recollection of it, I wouldn't, I mean, I'm a bit vague about exact dates and so on, and I'm, I'm aware of the Diplock courts and I'm aware that there were some miscarriages of justice and the hunger strikes and, you know, all this, all this kind of thing, yes, I, yeah, I mean, so, yes, I mean, I was, I was as much, you know, obviously when I, when I went later in, in the nineties, when I spent five years in Malawi, or this century, you know, when, until I, until I came, until I retired in 2016 I would have spent two thirds of that sixteen years abroad, so obviously, you know, one would know what was going on to an extent, but not necessarily, you know, I'd read the *Guardian Weekly* and, you know, obviously I wasn't, you know, I mean, you know, news is international as well, but I wouldn't have that detailed knowledge that you have if you, you know, are in the country and, you know, hearing the news every day.

FR: No, that, that makes sense. Moving on from then I guess, do you remember the peace process happening?

GA: Yes, but again–

FR: From a distance I guess.

GA: Yes, I do remember the peace process though, and I've, I haven't read a book about it, but I've, I've heard at various times people, people like Jonathan Powell, who was, well, he's Lord Powell isn't, no, there's one, there's two of them, two Pow-, anyway, talking about, you know, about the meetings with Gerry Adams and, and, what's his name, the, he was the deputy minister, Martin McGuinness.

FR: Martin McGuinness, yeah.

GA: Yes, and I, yeah, I mean, I think, I think I left, I was abroad from, again from 2001, I'm forgetting the exact timescale of the Good Friday Agreement, but obviously it was a process and indeed I think you have to give the Tories a bit of credit, I mean, John Major for maybe starting the process off, although brief, brief, the peace process is largely obviously the achievement of the Labour government.

FR: Okay, yeah, a–

GA: I mean, I didn't, I didn't at that time, I don't remember discussing it with anybody in, in Ireland or, or even much outside that.

FR: Okay, well, I, I think we're kind of moving into the last bit of the interview, probably just a few more kind of reflective questions, although, although actually I, I think we maybe we should finish the, finish the chronology first. So you, you worked in the eighties in this, in this job that took you often to the Caribbean, and then you kind of–

GA: Yes, I applied, yeah, I applied to join the British civil service at the end of the eighties, you know, there was this arrangement for people in mid-career or who'd already had a substantial amount of experience to join directly rather than, you know, come up from university or even from school, and so I joined, yeah, I joined the civil service and I wanted to go to the Department for International Development, indeed, well, it, sorry, it wasn't called that then, it was ODA, the Overseas Development, sorry, Agency.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GA: ODA, and it was then, yes, a kind of wing of the Foreign Off-, I mean, it was an autonomous unit, but ultimately responsible to the Foreign Secretary, but Lynda Chalker was the, was the, was the minister, it was under a Labour government that DFID was formed, which was completely, had its own cabinet minister, but I basically wanted to, to do that job, in fact, had I been, had I been, you know, able to get into the civil service, but, but not been able to go to DFID I would have thought about it, you know, twice, I might not have accepted, sorry, to ODA, you know, if I'd been asked to go to the Home Office or something I possibly might not have gone ahead, but, as I say, you had to pass the exam first and then, you know, I was part of the first batch out of I think three each year, so, you know, being early in the year I suppose, you know, the, had the opportunity to get my first choice, which might have been more difficult later, and I worked there for three years on Pakistan for ex-, as a matter of fact, but only visiting and then I wor-, I got a, I volunteered, or I wanted to go on a posting overseas, so I went to Malawi, which then had a regional office, and I stayed there because they then relocated the, the office to Harare, I mean, it would have been in Harare in the first place, but, you know, when it was set up it was, you know, UDI and Ian Smith and so on, so the office was moved to Harare and my daughter Catherine was doing her GCSEs out there, so I, I was seconded in fact to the delegation of the European Union or the European Commission there and, and worked there for a couple of years. It was one of those situations which suited them, it suited me, it suited DFID, you know, and I was, I was on unpaid leave for two years, three years in fact, no, I was seconded for one year, that's it, and then they, then the Europeans offered me a contract for two

years themselves, so I was directly employed by the European Union and, and DFID gave me a leave of absence for that period, but on the understanding that, you know, I, I wouldn't have a specific job, but that they would expect to be able to employ me when I came back. Sorry, too much detail, but, you know.

FR: No, it's, it's interesting, okay–

GA: And yes, took me to the, to the late nineties, I came back in '98 to Britain.

FR: Back in '98, so I think that is actually just as the peace process is happening in Northern Ireland funnily enough.

GA: Yes, between '98 and well, 2000, well, 2001, but I think it was pretty early 2001 I went abroad again, so basically late, late **[02:07:21]** '98, so the whole of '99 and 2000 I was, I was in the UK working for DFID, but London-based, although making some overseas trips.

FR: Okay, and then you, you later worked in, in Pakistan, is that right?

GA: I worked in Pakistan for four years heading the office out there, which had been a bit of a backwater, but it became alive after 9/11.

FR: Sure, sure.

GA: It was, and then I, I was there for four years and then I did two years in Bangladesh, so it was a total of six, I mean, I came back obviously on holidays and things. I, we were abroad for six years and then I came back for three years, 2007 to 2009, and then I got the opportunity of going out again to Pakistan, but this time with an organisation called the Asia Foundation, which is an American, what the Amer-, what they call a non-profit, you know, like an international NGO, except technically it operated internationally or at least in Asia, but, you know, it was actually American, sorry, excuse me, my throat's beginning to get a bit dry.

FR: No, that's quite alright.

GA: And then I did six and a half months, sorry, six and a half years running the office in Pakistan for the Asia Foundation and came back in mid-2016.

FR: Okay.

GA: So that's the chronology.

FR: That's the chronology, yeah, thank you very much. It's, so do you, it's, I'm just thinking of all of these postings abroad, interesting postings abroad, interesting places, do you think of yourself still as, as Irish, is that, is it important to you that you're Irish, is it something that you–?

GA: Yes. I, you know the one thing that annoys me is having my name spelt wrongly, but another thing, another thing is being called English. I will admit to being British, but I will, I always say to people, you know, I'm, you know, if, you know, as I'm, I'm originally from Northern Ireland and, you know, as it happens, you know, I have, I mean, a Welsh mother and my, and on my father's side a Scottish grandmother and, you know, so, you know, I, I have, you know, I, I have inheritance from, you know, the, well, there's a lot of talk these days about the four nations of, I've a lot of inheritance from, you know, the three that are not England, but I actually don't have, at least not, not, I haven't, I haven't gone and investigated my family tree, but as far as I know there isn't any English heritage, you know, anywhere near in it, maybe some way back, who knows. My wife, my first wife was English, so my children have the burden of being half-English. My present wife is actually originally Indian, and, I mean, we married, you know, we married later, I mean, we don't have, you know, we married when we were sort of, you know, in our early fifties, so, you know, we're not, we don't have any kids, I mean, no, biologically we don't, we don't share any kids, we have obviously descendants on both sides, stepchildren, you know, one stepchild and to that extent, but yes, I, I admit to, you know, and I, I mentioned that I'd, I have a British passport, but I, I have applied for an Irish passport and as you know, you know, I fall in the category of somebody who's a kind of a latent Irish citizen anyway, I don't have to prove anything apart from the fact that I was actually born in Ireland, I don't have to kind of justify it by, you know, talking about parents or grandparents, so, and it, you know, the, obviously the immediate stimulus is, you know, is, is the whole disaster of Europe and so on and the whole disaster of Britain in relation to Europe and, and I've known some people who are much more picky about having a Republic of Ireland passport, applying for, for, for one, but it's also, you know, I wouldn't apply for a Republic of Ireland passport if I was uncomfortable about being seen as, you know, an Irishman without the qualification of Northern Ireland and, you know, I think, as a I was saying earlier, you know, Ireland has modernised in a way that Northern Ireland is still struggling with. I've never denied being Northern Irish, but, you know, if I travel later on on a, on a purely Irish passport, you know, I, you know, if somebody says, you know, are you Irish I'd say yes, if somebody wants to get to know somebody and wants to know about my background I'd say well, actually I, I mean, I'm not intending to go and live in Ireland, although I'm, you know, becoming more and more depressed by some of the things I see happening in, in, in the UK. There's still a lot of people who are, you know, equally depressed and hoping to do something about it, prevent some of the, so, you know, I, I don't think I'll necessarily be driven from these shores.

FR: It's interesting though that you've taken some trips back to Larne in recent, recent times, it sounds like.

GA: Yes, I mean, my, my first wife never did, I mean, I went, as I say, I went, I went on my own for a week and I think, you know, we, we must have split up formally [indecipherable] fairly soon after that, but my present wife, you know, has been very interested in going to Ireland, you know, she's, I haven't had to sort of drag her there–

FR: That's interesting.

GA: And we've been a number of times, yes, I mean, I, I think, trying to be objective, I mean, I think my first wife just that she, I mean, she obviously met my relatives when they came

over here and so on and, but I don't think she ever, she'd never expressed any great sense of wanting to go back, or not go back, but go back to where I was from and see what, see about it, yeah, it, it, no I, I can't remember, is it half a dozen times, I mean, the last time I was there, my father died, in fact, two years ago this coming Thursday he died and I, he, he gave his, he gave his body to science and we didn't have a, a funeral, we had a memorial kind of commemorative meeting in about three months later, but I went over to Ireland partly to, you know, I mean, partly to see my relatives, but also to visit some, you know, old friends of his with whom he still remained, see them and talk to them, actually they were slightly younger than him obviously, they were like, half a generation younger because he was ninety-eight, but I saw them and I saw my aunt, who had outlived him, but, though and then we went to, we spent about five or six days in Larne and then we went and spent about a, a week in Dublin and, and then we went, we went back actually very shortly afterwards because my aunt then died, so we just went for twenty-four hours and her funeral. I mean, she was, I was very glad to see, well, I'm not sure that she really took it in, but, you know, I did see her for the last time when I'd gone over, you know, in September and then we were back in October for just this brief, the, her, her funeral, and she had a funeral the normal way just after, you know, just some days after she died, and, but, I mean, I'd go, I'd go again, I'd certainly go again. Larne itself, I mean, from a tourist point of view Larne is quite frankly a bit of a dump in some ways, but if you're interested in exploring, you know, some beautiful parts of Northern Ireland–

FR: Yeah, you're very close, yeah.

GA: You know, it's a great, great jumping off point, and I think if I go, if I go there again, you know, we'd, we'd again, I mean, it's, we'd again probably, you know, go to the Republic or, you know, we might, I mean, I want to go down to Kerry some time, you know, and we may well have the holidays when holidays are possible again, you know, and visit the Republic without going to the North. **[02:17:21]** I mean, I just have my cousins, my two cousins are there and, and, and the thing about, it does give me a, a real kind of buzz to go back to Larne, even if it is a bit of a dump, just to, the familiarity of it and the familiarity of the immediate surroundings and, and so on, you know, it, it, it, I mean, I guess most people have, not all by any means, but most people I guess, you know, live, they don't necessarily have a, have a sudden disjunction from the place that they were born, as I had, you know, I mean, it doesn't mean that they necessarily stay there for the rest of their lives, but they visited it more frequently, so I, you know, I, and then having been abroad, the same thing, you know, I, I, I think of my life in some ways as a series of, I mean, superficially disconnected, you know, that was the period I was in Pakistan or, you know, that happened before I came to England and, you know, it's, it gives a kind of structure and, you know, the, the context is different, obviously I've talked about some, you know, underlying connections between all these, but because I've jumped around in terms of my place of residence so much, you know, it's, it's had that kind of sequential kind of feeling about it.

FR: Yeah, I understand, I understand what you mean I think. Okay, I think I've, I've probably asked all my questions. I wanted quickly to ask you about how you, what you think about Northern Ireland now, you've mentioned Brexit a, a couple of times and obviously Northern Ireland is, is going to be affected by that, so yeah, what are your thoughts on the kind of political situation in Northern Ireland now?

GA: Well, I think the, the, you know, the, I mean, Northern Ireland was one of the three things, wasn't it, that, you know, the British government had to sort out. One was the divorce bill, one was Northern Ireland and, and then I think the, yes, what, you know, what to do about Brits in Europe and Europeans in Britain, and Northern Ireland, they've obviously shifted their, I mean, that ridiculous process of Johnson denying that there was going to be a border in the Irish Sea and, yeah, there is certainly a lot of paperwork and so on, it looks like a complete mess, all tied up obviously with, you know, with Theresa May and the losing a majority and then being reliant on that bunch of DUP members, but yeah, I mean, I, it is, it is, it is a mess, I've said that it will, I've put my money on, on it bringing a united Ireland closer, which I think in terms of an end result would be a good thing, but obviously it's not something that, you know, I think, you know, one, one wants it to happen, you know, by consent and without violence and, and so on and I, I think the worry is that, the worry is that the present arrangements could mean, you know, economic difficulties for Northern Ireland, which would, would certainly not help and might well exacerbate, you know, political problems, and, and also, you know, the, the whole business about, you know, what are we, are we not, you know, from the unionist point of view, you know, are we, you know, part of the UK now and from the, from the nationalist point of view, you know, is, you know, is this, is this halfway to, you know, is this to sort of, you know, semi-detached province of the whole of Ireland, you know, and, you know, what that might mean in terms of the Troubles starting again. I mean, you know, it, it could be, I mean, one can, one could draw up scenarios in which it all happens, you know, things happen very smoothly and so on, but, you know, with the stresses and strains that are put on the, on the system then, you know, the risk is that it would, there would be violence, and I still think it's unlikely that at the end of the day there will be a united Ireland, I mean, maybe, maybe, maybe under some sort of semi-autonomous or looser structure, but, yeah, but, you know, you don't, you don't, it's the ends and the means, you know, you don't want the ends so much that, you know, it, it causes agony to Northern Ireland or indeed Ireland as a whole, and I think we, I think people in the Republic have recognised this, I mean, you know, the, the, the territory of the state is the whole of Ireland, but, you know, clearly for most people active reunification is, is something they, they're not pushing for at any, at any cost, it has to be in a way that, what works.

FR: Yeah, and I think they've been quite cautious about it in the Republic.

GR: Yes, yeah, I remember, in fact, there was an Irish at the Commonwealth Secretariat and he, he said, I mean, he was from the Republic, I mean, he used to say part of my country is in the Commonwealth, you know, and that's, in other historical circumstances Ireland would have been, you know, a Commonwealth country, but, you know, because of history and so on it, it didn't happen that way, anyway, but he, I remember him saying that, you know, we were talking about something to do with South Africa and, or southern Africa, but I, I remember him saying, you know, if, a lot of people in the Republic would run a mile if they were told that, you know, Ireland'll be united tomorrow, you know, it's, everybody would, you know, sentimentally say of course they want a united Ireland, but, you know, not at any cost, they, they know enough about the problems and issues that, you know, it, it needs to be done very carefully.

FR: No, it's, it's complicated and it's hard to know what's going to happen really at the moment, although, yeah, as you say, maybe a united Ireland is, is more likely under the current circumstances. So yeah, I think that's–

GA: Mind you [indecipherable], Boris Johnson's bridge, the bridge, you know, the bridge that he suggested.

FR: Yeah, I–

GA: [indecipherable] they said it was possible he'd get the bridge built and find that it's connecting two, two places that are no longer part of the UK. If Scotland gets its own way and if Northern Ireland, you know, should join the Republic, I mean, you know, that, yes, it's, so Larne's fame as a sort of potential end of a Boris Johnson bridge is, is not something I'd wish on it particularly.

FR: [laughs] I, I do not think that the bridge will happen [laughs].

GA: No, no, I think that's pretty sure, yeah.

FR: So I was just going to say, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you thought we might talk about, or that, that you were, that you wanted to bring up?

GA: I don't think so, I mean, yeah, I mean, you know, there's always a little anecdote here or there, but, you know, I think, I mean, I thought about this about this before we, for the last two or three days, you know, in preparation and I didn't make detailed notes about things that I wanted to include at any cost, but I think we've covered pretty much what I would want to say and I'm sure we can always, I can always add more, but equally I can always, you know, waffle and, you know, there comes a law of diminishing returns really, the more you say the less substance may be added after a certain [indecipherable], so yeah, no, I mean, I've enjoyed, I've enjoyed this conversation and I certainly would very much like to see, you know, the end product in due course and indeed if there updates you want to share along the way as, you know, be happy to, to get an email, so.

FR: Yeah, absolutely, well, thank you, thank you so much for agreeing to do it and for taking the time, it's been really interesting, and yes, we will be in touch, sorry, go ahead.

GA: Yeah, well, I'm just saying I, I don't ask to see the transcript, but if, if for some reason there's something that seems to be total gibberish that comes out, you know, that, that, you know, then by all means check back and I can clarify something, but that's perhaps unlikely, you know, because you were there.

FR: No, I, I, that's helpful **[02:27:21]** because sometimes, it depends how long it takes to transcribe sometimes if, if something's not fresh in your memory it can be difficult, so I will, I will do that if we have any difficulties, and if, if you would be interested in seeing the transcript I can send you the transcript as well.

GA: Well, I, I would be and my sister who I was in touch with, I said, you know, I think Catherine mentioned her, but she, she lives outside your kind of key areas, you know, she's up in the north east, you know, inland from Middlesbrough, so, you know, not, not near any of your three centres.

FR: That's a shame.

GA: She might be interested in that, I mean, we, we've talked a bit about Northern Ireland except that, quite a big difference, I left when I was, you know, almost ten and she left when she was five, so on one level it's only five years, but, I mean, it's, you know, it's half a, half a life, you know, in terms of our relative ratio of our ages, so she doesn't, she has memories and she, you know, but she, she, I don't think, no, she's never been back, she keeps saying that, you know, she would like to go, but she's never been back since the seventies.

FR: That's really interesting, do you, do you think she, it has left less of a mark on her or less of a kind of a, has her life not been impacted by it in the way that yours has been, do you think?

GA: I wouldn't think as much, I mean, politically she's, yeah, we, we, we're pretty similar I would say. She hasn't travelled much at all actually, I mean, including, you know, trips to, you know, she's only just started taking, you know, she and her husband were going to take a trip to Italy, but I think, I think until two or three years ago she hadn't been abroad since she was either in her teens or early twenties, which is really quite a, a big, I mean, very different from my experience in that way.

FR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

GA: I'm not quite sure exactly why, she's not a particularly bad traveller or anything like that, I guess it's, I guess it's, you know, and, I mean, she is, she's very, you know, she knows a lot of people up in the north, I mean, which is her adopted part of the world and, but, and her husband is at Teeside University, well, she is too, except she's, she's in the library at Teeside, she works part-time, well, she's just retired actually, but she was working part-time at Teeside library and he's in the economics part of it, I think they call it business faculty now, but, you know, basically he's an economist, well, I think it's just, just one of those different things, you know.

FR: Yeah, no, it's, it's really interesting and it's a shame about the kind of catchment area stuff, but we're being a little bit more flexible with that under the current circumstances, so, so, I don't know, I'll talk to my colleagues about that, but yeah, thank you, thank you so much, it was, it was fascinating.

GA: Oh not at all, and good luck, you know, good luck with, yeah, with continuing the work, and I've, I've enjoyed it, I hope I haven't, as I say, I was conscious I was perhaps beginning to waffle on a bit as one gets a bit tired, but, you know, hopefully–

FR: No, it was, it was really, really interesting and I think lots of stuff that will be relevant for the project, so I'll, I'll be in touch with the transcript, take care.

GA: Thank you, take care and all the best, cheers.

FR: Thank you very much, cheers Gareth, bye, bye.

GA: Bye and all the best.

INTERVIEW ENDS