INTERVIEW M13: GEORGE PEEL

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewee: George Peel
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Transcriber: Dr Fearghus Roulston

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.

BH: Okay, so that's it running now basically, and I'll just put it beside you, that, it'll pick up your voice more than it will pick up mine.

GP: Okay.

BH: Okay, so it's Thursday morning the twentieth of February, which I know cos I've just written it down on the form there, and we're here in Manchester University with Mr George Peel. George, before we begin can I just say thanks very much for agreeing to do the interview and for coming the whole way from Bolton this morning, and it's a particularly bad, wet, windy morning, so [laughs] I think that speaks to your commitment to this. Before we begin, can I just ask how did you hear about the project and why were you interested in taking part?

GP: I'm not absolutely certain, but I think it was probably on a tweet on Twitter that caught my eye.

BH: Okay, yeah, and you thought it was something you were interested in, that you would–

GP: Well, yes, being Irish and what have you it struck a chord.

BH: Okay, so, as I said there a few minutes ago, the format of this is like a life history, so the first question I usually ask is when and where were you born?

GP: April 1949 in Coleraine in County Londonderry, Derry, in Northern Ireland.

BH: Yeah, and what did your parents do?

GP: What did they do?

BH: What did they do, yeah, what was their occupations?

GP: My father he was a maintenance engineer in a quarry and my mother was a housewife, dinner lady, sometime waitress.

BH: And were they from the Coleraine area themselves?

GP: No, no, neither of them were actually.

BH: Oh right.

GP: My mother she came from Country Tyrone, near Dunnamanagh in County Tyrone, and my father he came from Bonawe in Argyll in Scotland.

BH: Ah right, okay.

GP: They met in Edinburgh apparently. Other than that don't ask me too many questions about them [laughs].

BH: Right, okay. You don't know what your mother was doing in Edinburgh?

GP: Oh she was [pauses], as far as I, as far as I remember she was a waitress then, in and around Edinburgh.

BH: Okay, and was this effectively like, a labour migration then, she'd went over there to find work?

GP: She'd gone to find work and my father had been in the army serving in Edinburgh and that's basically how they met.

BH: Ah right, what regiment was he in?

GP: Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

BH: Ah right, and did he see action or anything like that?

GP: No, it was before the war.

BH: Right, okay, yeah, and so what brought them first of all back to Northern Ireland, but in particular to Coleraine, which is obviously not the birth-, where your mother grew up?

GP: I suspect that was more my mother than my father, but how they ended up in Coleraine I'm not absolutely certain why did they [pauses], well, when I think about it now, I haven't thought about it very much, but when I think about it now there wasn't a great deal going on in Tyrone, so perhaps Coleraine was the nearest place they could find work.

BH: Sure, so did they live in, did you live and grow up in Coleraine town itself or was it outside it?

GP: No, it was Coleraine town itself. We, in actual fact only just found out this week that where I, when I was born, the place my parents lived was in Windsor Avenue, which is, as a matter of topic that's where Harry Gregg was living at the time.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

GP: Yeah, but shortly after I was born we got a, what do they call it, housing, Northern Irish Housing Trust house in what they call the Heights in Coleraine, which is on the other side of the river, so I grew up there in the Heights.

BH: And what kind of place was that? Was that a nice place to grow up?

GP: I thoroughly enjoyed it. At the time, when we first started living there, we had open fields all round us, which were eventually built on, but I thoroughly enjoyed the place, I was out every day. The strange thing is I didn't go to the nearest primary school, which was only about, what, half a mile from where we lived. I had to walk about a mile or a mile and a half every day to go to the [laughs], the Irish Society School for Boys and Girls, which was again, on the other side of the river, so I had to cross the river again on my way to school and then back home again.

BH: What's the Irish Society school? I'm not, I'm not aware of that.

GP: Yeah, it's, goes back to the Ulster Plantation in the sixties whose, sorry, the sixteenth century. The Irish Society was an organisation set up, run from London by guildmen in London, basically [pauses] a charitable organisation I suppose you'd call it, to oversee the Plantation of Ulster, and they set up this Honourable The Irish Society School for Boys and Girls [laughs], which sounds much more [laughs], no, I won't say that [laughs].

BH: And was this, this was still financed as a charity from London or was it, was it run by the state at this stage?

GP: No, at the time, at the time I went to it it was under the Northern Ireland Education Authority, but there was still an involvement from the Irish Society because once a year they used to come and present prizes and things like that, at the end of school year come and present prizes, and the thing that always got me was that if you had ever, if you had gone to school that year without missing one day, everyone was given a shilling, but if you had gone to school for that year without missing a day you got two shillings, and I did my damnedest to go to school and I managed it once or twice, but–

BH: So that was a pretty strong incentive to go every day.

GP: Yeah, it was, yeah, two, two, two bob rather than one bob [laughs].

BH: Yeah, so why did your parents send you there as opposed to the much nearer school?

GP: I think it was because my brother, my older brother and my older sister were going there. They'd started while the family lived in Windsor Avenue.

BH: Ah right, so at that stage it was closer, it was a closer school to go to.

GP: It was for them. My sister was still there when I was starting, so just to make it simple, parents' evenings and things like that, they sent me there as well.

BH: So that means you'd a brother and sister who was older than you.

GP: That's right.

BH: Were you the youngest one then or was there anybody after you?

GP: I was the youngest.

BH: You were the youngest, yeah.

GP: Spoiled.

BH: Spoiled [laughs]. My girlfriend is the youngest in her family, but she takes the opposite view, she says she wasn't spoiled, she says she got the brunt of everything. So was it a good school? Did you enjoy that school?

GP: It was a good school up to a point [pauses]. I, I enjoyed it, I had plenty of friends there, but academically I wasn't the brightest at that school, strangely enough.

BH: Right, was it quite a competitive school, was it? Was it hard to get into?

GP: No, it's [pauses], it's hard to describe actually [pauses]. I think, I don't think I was disciplined enough in the, self-disciplined enough to deal with it. It wasn't until I went on to secondary school and I started to blossom [laughs].

BH: Right, okay, what were the teachers like in the school? Cos sometimes you hear stories about sort of schools in the fifties and things like that, and the teachers were quite brutal. Was that your experience at that school or was it much, a much lighter touch?

GP: Some were, I had my backside warmed a couple of times, but not very often, but [pauses] no, there weren't any, any real headline stories about brutal teachers or anything like that, they were all much of a muchness really. Miss Perry, she was my first teacher, there you go.

BH: Yeah, you just remembered that there, yeah [laughs].

GP: Miss Perry. The worst one, I, oh I can't remember her name now, she was the next year, but she had a hell of a reputation and everyone was a bit wary of her, but I never, **[00:10:00]** never had any real dealings with her at all.

BH: Yeah, what about other things apart from education then? Were you interested in sports or did you have hobbies outside of school?

GP: No, that didn't come into it in those days. I [pauses], I used to take my time walking home from school and get up to, get up to mischief, shall we say. I can remember once I was on the banks of the river climbing trees and I slid along this branch of the tree and it wasn't until I got off the tree that I realised I'd taken the backside out of my trousers [laughs], so I had to walk home with the backside hanging out of my trousers. Don't tell anyone.

BH: Yeah, what about things like church then?

GP: Oh church.

BH: Cos I know that for a lot of people the church was a big part of their life.

GP: Yeah, yeah, church was a must, went to, on a Sunday I would go to Sunday school, this was at the St Patrick's parish church Sunday school, just as a matter of interest that's where Harry Gregg's having his funeral tomorrow.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

GP: The Sunday school, and then immediately after Sunday school would be morning service, then home, on the way home buy the Sunday papers, Sunday dinner, and then back in the afternoon to a children's service.

BH: Right, twice, three times a day for you then basically.

GP: Three times on a Sunday, I wonder how I ended up as good as I did [laughs].

BH: [laughs] And did all your family go to the services or was it just your dad went and your mum?

GP: Yeah, my mum, my dad, my dad never, I don't think I remember seeing my dad in a church ever in my life.

BH: Is that right? So he wasn't interested, it was your mum who drove that then?

GP: It was my mother. She, normally it was [pauses] my brother, my sister and myself, and then when my brother left home it was just my sister and myself, and then when she left home it was me, and every now and again my mother would come along to the church, to the morning service in church, but in fact, the funny thing is I can remember in round about 1960, '63, something like that, I can remember watching a film on television with my dad and it was called, you may have heard of it, you may not, *Inherit the Wind*, with Spencer Tracy, Fredric March, Dick York, and it was about the Scopes Monkey trial in the 1920s and it absolutely had me enthralled, it was a conversation between atheism and, I'm sorry, evolution and God, and I sat there, I sat there open-mouthed and I don't think I moved, and I looked at my dad at the end and he looked at me and he went [laughs].

BH: Right, so even at that age, presum-, it's 1963 you'd have been an early teenager then?

GP: Yeah, I was.

BH: Thirteen around, yeah, and even then you'd watched this, and what was your feeling about it?

GP: I, I thought it was, I'd, I'd never come across it before and I started asking my dad all these questions, is this true, did this actually happen, and he said yeah, it did, and even, he wasn't very vociferous about it because he didn't want to upset my mum, the churchgoer, but the more I thought about it, the more I looked into it and I moved on from three times on Sunday to two times on Sunday and eventually no times on Sunday. I hung on until my confirmation, I had my confirmation in the church and you're supposed to pick up a certificate apparently afterwards, but I never even bothered picking up the certificate, and then from then on I, the more I looked into it I moved from atheist, no, sorry, no, Christian to non-denominational to agnostic to athe-, and eventually atheist. It just, it just goes to show what triggered it.

BH: Yeah, well, that was going to be my ques-, well, my first question was, apart from seeing that film, what do you think conditioned your sort of gradual moving away from the church?

GP: [pauses] It could be that I used it as an excuse, I don't think I did, but it could be that I used it as an excuse to move away [pauses] because, and I, I know that prior to that I was getting fed up going three times on a Sunday, I had other things to do, I was growing up, like you say, I was a teenager, an early teenager and had better things to do than go to church on a Sunday afternoon. There were girls around [laughs], so, like I say, that, I may have used that as an excuse, but no, it was a handy coincidence, let's put it that way.

BH: Sure, and how did your mum feel about this?

GP: She didn't have a say in it.

BH: Didn't have a say in it, yeah.

GP: I dug my heels in and said I'm not going.

BH: Yeah, so when were you confirmed, when you were about fourteen, fifteen?

GP: Fifteen I think it was.

BH: Yeah, and after that then–

GP: I, I only hung on that long just so there'd be no conflict with her.

BH: Sure, yeah, but it was understood then after that that it was your decision whether or not you actually–

GP: Oh yes, yeah.

BH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What about your friends then, at school and so on, were they very religious or were they kind of on the same trajectory as you in terms of–?

GP: Funnily enough no, they weren't. Some of them, one or two of them went to the same church, not as frequently as me I found out, but [pauses] when I [pauses], we didn't talk about it, let's put it that way, it just sort of floated along, happened, worked themselves out.

BH: Yeah, and would they have all, St Patrick's presumably was a Church of Ireland church, was it?

GP: Yeah, the, yeah, the Irish Society school that was a Protestant church, but I, I did have Catholic friends as well.

BH: Well, that was, I was going to ask, where you were growing up, the particular residential area, was it a mixed area or was it largely all one religious group?

GP: It was a mixed area and I never gave it a thought to what religion these people were, the people I was playing with, the people I was playing sports with, whatever, never gave that I thought. The only time, when I thought about it later, the only time I thought about it, while I didn't realise it at the time, I thought, as I say, I thought about it later, was come the Twelfth of July and the parades and all the rest of it, they were different then, they didn't have the same political meanings as they do now, as far as I'm concerned it was music and it was a family day out, which I thought was brilliant. When I thought about it later the Catholic friends disappeared at that time, they weren't to be seen and it never clicked with me then, but when I thought back on it I thought, yeah.

BH: Yeah, a lot of people would take the Twelfth fortnight and go on holiday.

GP: Twelfth of August in Derry and things like that, yeah.

BH: Yeah, of course, yeah, that's right, so you're quite close to Derry there as well.

GP: Yeah, that's right, it's only about thirty miles away.

BH: Yeah, and what about your parents then? I mean, I know your dad was from Scotland. Were they involved in Orange culture?

GP: No, well, my, again, my mother was to an extent, that was only because her, she told me, I don't know whether it's true or not, but she told me that her father, my grandfather, had signed the Ulster Covenant in 1912, now whether he did or not I have no idea, it didn't really, it didn't particularly interest me, but she did, she did try every now and again to, what would you call it, indoctrinate me.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

GP: But–

BH: You weren't interested?

GP: Not really, I went along for the music and the day out.

BH: Sure, what about your brother and sister then? Were they the same as you or were they different?

GP: They couldn't be bothered at all, they came on the days out, on the Twelfth of July and the Twelfth of August, they came along on that, but other than that–

BH: Yeah, and what about your dad then? Because I know some people from Scotland, particularly Glasgow, sometimes they have a connection with the Orange lodges and things.

GP: No, nothing, there was not joining the Orange lodge or the l- or, the, a band or anything like that. **[00:20:00]** He tried, he tried to sign me to bagpipe lessons because I love the bagpipes, I do, I don't care what anybody says about them, English or otherwise, right, I love the bagpipes and every time around the Twelfth of July or the Twelfth of August, bagpipe band, I was there, I'd stand there, I'd follow them, I'd stand there and listen to them and then I'd follow them, loved them.

BH: Yeah, do you play now yourself, do you?

GP: No, I don't, I went along and sort of, I learned to do, I learned a few minor tunes on the chanter, but I never ever had a full set of bagpipes.

BH: Yeah, yeah, it takes a bit of practise to learn to play one of those.

GP: It does, yeah, takes a bit of puff as well.

BH: Yeah, so I take it then from that that your parents weren't political in any strong sense, they weren't activists or they weren't–

GP: No, no, they weren't activists, my mother if it came to the bit she would come down on the side of [pauses] unionism, shall we call it, not, not particularly Orangeism, but unionism, but my father [laughs].

BH: Didn't really care.

GP: He couldn't care less.

BH: Yeah, what about in terms of their social life then? Your dad obviously worked in the quarry. What did they do then, outside of that, did they have pubs to go to, football teams or was there anything–?

GP: He never went to a pub, he'd go to people's houses, play cards, have a drink there, but that was a very odd occasion [pauses]. It's a funny thing, my mother, she was the Irish one, and she was the one who actually pushed the Scottish influence on to me.

BH: Right [laughs].

GP: Yeah, I've thought about that now and again, I've thought I wonder why she did that, never came to any conclusion, but she enjoyed a singer called Robert Wilson, he was a Scottish singer, a Scottish balladeer, somebody that Billy Connolly would hate [laughs], and he'd come round every now and again to, and give concerts and we'd be dragged along to that, and you'd have the whole Robbie Wilson singing and Scottish dancers and somebody else playing Scottish tunes on an accordion, this sort of thing, in the town hall.

BH: Right, and was that interesting, was it, or was it–?

GP: It was to an extent, but had I been left to my own devices I probably wouldn't have gone.

BH: Yeah, you mentioned earlier that you began to blossom when you went to secondary school, so tell me a bit about that. First of all where did you go to secondary school and what did you mean by blossom?

GP: Well, at primary school, at the Honourable Irish Society School for Boys and Girls, I wasn't the brightest pupil, according to them, but my brother went to, when he left, left there he went to Coleraine Academical Institution–

BH: That's quite a, that's quite a prestigious school, yeah.

GP: It was, that was a grammar school for boys. When my sister left she went to Coleraine High School for Girls, another grammar school.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: When I left I went to Coleraine secondary modern school, intermediate, and the funny thing was when I got there they found out that I was good at English. I would generally end up first in the class in English and last in the class in maths [laughs].

BH: Right, okay [laughs].

GP: And geography and history were in between [laughs], but I suddenly found a liking for English, actually writing, short stories, had short stories read out and all sort of things like this, and at first it gave me a bit of a buzz, but fourth or fifth time I started getting a bit embarrassed, so–

BH: You were making yourself a target, like [laughs].

GP: Yeah, yeah [laughs], exactly, yeah, get a clip round the earhole as I'm walking out of the classroom [laughs].

BH: Was reading something then that was important?

GP: Reading, reading has always been important to me, I've always read books, always, always, always. My parents had a set of encyclopedias called *Odhams Encyclopedias* and I went all the way through them. The main, I can remember the main parts of those that I enjoyed most was about Greek mythology, about Ulysses and Jason and the minotaur and the Trojan wars and stuff like this, and I went all through those and read them over and over again, and there was a couple of books there I remember, *The History of the Second World War*, volume one, volume two, and I sat down read through them, yeah, thoroughly enjoyed them.

BH: Yeah, did you like war stories?

GP: Nah, not necessarily, it was recent history and I wanted to, nobody talked about it, nobody was talking about it much and I wanted to find out about it, and that was a good way of finding out about it.

BH: Did anybody talk about Irish history when you were growing up?

GP: No.

BH: About, for example, the Northern Irish state or anything like that?

GP: No. As far as I was concerned growing up Northern Ireland was where I lived and that was it. It was only later on, the late [pauses], yeah, the late sixties when [pauses] the, what are they called?

BH: Civil rights?

GP: Civil rights, that's it, when civil rights started protesting and I started thinking oh what's all this about then, and People's Democracy, I remember them, and [pauses] I can remember the date exactly, the fifth of October 1968 in Derry, on the Waterside in Derry, and the police stopped the civil rights movement marching from the Waterside into the city itself and it ended up in a riot, and it was a very good programme, news programme on the following, the following Monday, this happened on the Saturday and the following Monday *World in Action* had an in-depth report on it, and I can remember distinctly that, as the line of protestors marched along up to the police lines, there was an RUC inspector, chief inspector or something like that, stood there and suddenly you could see his baton come out and punch the guy, the other guy, in the stomach, and that's what started the whole thing off, it was bedlam after that, and then of course that went on for two or three nights, rioting.

BH: That's quite close to Coleraine actually, where that happens, yeah.

GP: It is, yeah, Coleraine, there was very little trouble there, but you could feel and you could hear the tension building up, nothing, nothing dramatic, but it was there, you could feel it there.

BH: What did you think when you watched that *World in Action* documentary?

GP: Well, I wanted to find out what, what these people were protesting about and I started talking to people, I started talking to, I started talking to the Catholics because that was mainly where it was coming from, and the things they were telling me about how the, how Derry, Derry city itself had been gerrymandered. Catholics living in Derry city, Protestant council, how did they manage that, don't forget at this time I was only [pauses]–

BH: Must've been about nineteen?

GP: Nineteen then, yeah, yeah, and that sort of thing had just never occurred to me before.

BH: Sure, what did your, what were your parents' response to that kind of activity and that documentary? What did they say about it?

GP: We didn't talk about it.

BH: Didn't talk about it.

GP: Yeah, there was, my mother she [pauses] was tentatively in support of the RUC because they were on the side of law and order, the others they were [pauses], they were bad [laughs].

BH: Yeah, I mean, most, maybe not most, well, probably most Protestants at the time, as we understand it, felt threatened by it, **[00:30:00]** they seen this as a rebellion and in fact, yeah, as you say, didn't believe the protestors–

GP: That's right, yeah.

BH: And did not, didn't accept that there was discrimination or gerrymandering, as you say. That's a viewpoint that's still quite prevalent I think as well amongst a lot of Protestants.

GP: The thing, that was, that was the very start of the Troubles, that fifth of October 1968, but the trigger happened over new year, 1968, 1969, and I am absolutely adamant about this, People's Democracy, which were basically students from Queen's University, were on a protest march from Belfast to Londonderry and they marched, they marched up over Glenshane Pass, they were not very far from Derry, probably about twenty miles, fifteen miles, something like that, and all of a sudden they were attacked, ambushed, and it transpired later that this ambush had been set up by B-Specials in civilian clothes and they were actively led by Ian Paisley. Now why he did that I have no idea, why they did that I have no idea, that was, that was, to me that was badness. Why, if they had let those people march on peacefully as they were doing, as they had been doing, let them march on to Derry and make their protest, the Troubles may not, may never have happened, but they

did and that was the start of it. Then as soon as that started Derry started rioting on a more frequent occasion and eventually as we all know now the troops were sent in in, what was it, August 1969. Now the funny thing is, completely unrelated to it, in July 1969 I joined the Royal Air Force [laughs].

BH: Well, I was going to ask, yeah, there, I mean, at this time (a) were you aware of these events and secondly what were you doing? At school probably, you leave school when you were about eighteen, is that right?

GP: Yeah, no, I'd left school when I was sixteen and I'd [pauses], I was rudderless, I was drifting here, there and everywhere.

BH: Were you working or were you, what were you doing?

GP: I worked. I went to the Isle of Man for a summer. I went to London in 1966.

BH: Right, on your own?

GP: On my own, yeah [laughs], I suppose you'd call it running away from home now, but I, I just didn't think of it that way myself, but my parents probably did.

BH: Yeah, cos you only would've been, what, sixteen?

GP: '66, seventeen, sixteen, seventeen.

BH: It's very young to be in London on your own.

GP: Well, it was the time of the World Cup.

BH: Ah right, okay.

GP: My sister lived in London and I ended up staying with her, which she wasn't very happy about because I put a cramp on her social life [laughs], but I didn't even give that a thought then either, this is what I mean, probably, probably spoiled a bit, didn't give other people's feelings much of a thought, but–

BH: And why did you go to London in 1966? What was the idea behind that?

GP: Well, I knew the World Cup was going on in London and [pauses] I wanted to see what was going on basically, expanding my horizons.

BH: And what was your sister doing there? Why did she move to London?

GP: She moved to London to get away from, well, to get away from Coleraine I think.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

GP: Yeah, the same as, the same as most people leave Coleraine.

BH: Yeah, cos you said there she'd went to a grammar school. Did she stay on to do A-levels and go to university or–?

GP: Yeah, she, I don't think they were called A-levels then, it was the junior and senior certificate, she passed both of those, she got a place at Queen's University, got her grant, spent her grant and left [pauses], and I know she regr-, she regretted doing that to this day, but that's life.

BH: Yeah, so she didn't go then to Queen's, she didn't go to–?

GP: She di-, she went to Queen's, she was living in Stranmillis and, like I say, she went through her money like, like water, so when my parents found out about it they couldn't afford to support her and I think that was probably part of the reason why she left.

BH: Yeah, and that was it then, she went to London.

GP: That was it, yeah, so she was told in no uncertain terms that she had to get a job. She thought right, I'll go the whole hog, I'll get a job, but it won't be here, I'll go to London, seek my fortune.

BH: Right, and what about your brother then?

GP: My brother, my bro- [laughs], my brother got the hell out of the place as soon as he could [laughs]. He joined the Fleet Air Arm when he was, God, he must've been about sixteen [laughs].

BH: Sixteen? Right.

GP: Yeah, he joined the Fleet Air Arm and that was it. He came back every now and again, but as far as Coleraine was concerned he didn't want to know anymore.

BH: Right, so he didn't even bother to stay on to do his final exams he just–?

GP: Yeah, he, he did his final exams, yeah, yeah, oh he went through all of his schooling and he, but he had it in his mind all this time to join the Fleet Air Arm, that was his aim, his ambition.

BH: Yeah, and was that your father's influence or what, or what was–?

GP: No, I don't think he had anything to do with it at all. He'd been in the Sea Cadets himself, so that was probably a big influence on him.

BH: Okay, I'm picking up sort of the sense that people were trying to get away from Coleraine, that, what was that about, why was there such repulsion to Coleraine at that stage?

GP: Yeah, yeah, at that time there wasn't, there was very little work around, there was work starting to come in, but not quick enough for my brother and my sister, so they decided the best option must be get out of it.

BH: Okay, and did your parents support that sort of ambition or were they like, no, you need to stay?

GP: They'd, they would've liked them to stay, but they weren't going to stand in their way, if that's what they wanted to do, and I'm not sure, I think they probably had chats about it, but if that's what they wanted to do they weren't going to stand in their way at all.

BH: Sure, and were other people migrating out of Coleraine as well?

GP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah [pauses], a lot, a lot, in fact, a lot of people were migrating, but at the same time there are people still living there now that were living there then, who've never left Coleraine.

BH: Is that right? What about your own like, school friends and things then? Were any of them interested in leaving or were they more sort of determined to stay?

GP: The same applies to them, some of them stayed, some of them left. One, for instance, and as far as I know he ended up in Toronto in Canada, in fact, two or three of them did, went to Toronto in Canada, but again there was some of them stayed.

BH: Yeah, you said yourself that you in 1966 you'd went to London to stay with your sister and a big part of that was the World Cup.

GP: The World Cup, I wanted to see what was going on, I wanted to see if it was, what I was seeing on the television or reading in the newspapers, and it was, it was quite an exciting time. I only stayed for maybe six weeks. I was lucky I had my sister there, I don't think I'd have stayed six weeks if she hadn't been there, but came home again [pauses] and then the following year, 1967, yeah, the following year I had the best time of my life, best summer of my life [laughs], I took off again, this time I, I, oh when I went to London I went on the, sailed across on the ferry to Liverpool and then I hitched from Liverpool to London. I was quite lucky actually, I got, **[00:40:00]** I only ended up getting, needing two lifts, stood there with my thumb out, yeah, it was pretty safe to do in those days, but the following year I flew to the Isle of Man and I spent the summer in the Isle of Man and it was just, the same time as the pirate radios stations were starting up, the first year, was it the first year, sorry, can we stop for a minute?

BH: Sure, yeah.

GP: I've got to go to the toilet.

BH: Yeah, go for it, go on ahead, yeah, I'll just pause this. Do you know where you're going?

GP: I'm going that way.

BH: Go out right, yeah, and then left again.

GP: Okay [interview briefly suspended].

BH: Okay, that's us off again. So I think we were talking about you'd been to London in 1966, cos you were interested in the World Cup and also just to see London, but then you'd came back and you'd spent a summer I think in the Isle of Man, I think that's where we were up to.

GP: Like I was saying, it was probably the best summer I'd ever had in my young life [laughs], Isle of Man being a, being a holiday destination.

BH: Sure, yeah.

GP: I worked, well, let me see, as a kitchen porter and behind a bar, washing glasses, that kind of thing, but being a holiday destination I had a different girlfriend every two weeks [laughs].

BH: But presumably that kind of work it only lasts for the summer season?

GP: That's right, yeah, it did, yeah. Can we just go back a bit?

BH: Sure, yeah.

GP I didn't explain how I left school and moved into the work environment. As I say, at Coleraine secondary modern I did reasonably well, still a lazy sod, but I, in my last year I got a place at Coleraine tech, Coleraine Technical School as it was then, Coleraine Technical College now, but it was a secretarial course teaching me typing and shorthand and all sorts of things like this, which in later life, looking back on it now, would've come in handy in some instances, but there was an organisation called the Youth Unemployment, sorry, Youth Employment, government organisation, and out of the blue I got a letter from them offering me a job in a local engineering firm in quality control and I thought yeah, alright, give it a go, and I went along there and I think I only lasted a month maybe, probably the most boring, well, it was one of the most boring jobs I've had in my life [pauses], and I left there, got a job as a milkman, what other jobs did I have [pauses], milkman with Ballyrashane creamery [laughs], oh I, I had various jobs, I, I filled in here, there and everywhere.

BH: So this is quite a few jobs really, from leaving school?

GP: Yeah, like I say, I was a piece of flotsam and jetsam, moving around.

BH: And then, round 1968, 1969 you decided to join the RAF, is that right?

GP: I tried to join the RAF as a radio operator, but I went to RAF Stafford for an aptitude test, I didn't pass it, but they seemed keen on me actually joining as something else, and eventually I joined in what they called a new trade, air photography operator, sounds good, doesn't it [laughs], that's what I thought [laughs], but no, I did eventually join as an air photography operator in July of 1969.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: Now the first RAF station I went to was a recruit training centre at RAF Swinderby in I think it was Lincolnshire or Nottinghamshire, can't remember which one it was now, we'll go for Lincolnshire, but we arrived there and twelve-man rooms, dormitory rooms, and in the room I was in there were eleven Irishmen and one little Englishman in the corner trying very hard to keep quiet [laughs] so we wouldn't notice him, but the Irishmen, the Irish guys came from all over Ireland, from the North and the South, from all over the North and from all over the South as well, and then the army moved into Londonderry and the discip staff thought this was a big joke, having eleven Irishmen there, let's wind them up a bit, and they came in one morning, I can remember this distinctly, they came in one morning and they stirred the pot and I thought you bastards, you're doing that deliberately, I didn't like it, and of course it got everybody going, everybody arguing, and I didn't join in, they walked out of the room laughing, and I thought fuck this, bastards, and that was the first time I think that I'd had any sort of inkling the [pauses], what's the word I'm groping for, what other, what English people or people who weren't Irish thought of the Irish.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: Cos to them it was a big joke that people were throwing stones at each other and the police were involved and there was riots all over the place, and that's why they came in, they came in and they stirred the, they stirred it up deliberately.

BH: What way did they stir it up? How did they do that, like?

GP: They were just, the little comments about what's all this about then, is it the, who's the orange, who's the green, what, are they Catholics, are they Protestants or what, and that just started the argument.

BH: Amongst the Irishmen themselves?

GP: Amongst the Irishmen themselves, yeah, and then, well, being from the South and being from the North and being all sorts then in the first place, it was easy to do. I didn't take part in it, I thought no, you can stuff that mate, I know your game.

BH: Yeah, and they thought this was funny?

GP: They thought it was funny, they walked out laughing, it was the discip sergeant, the discip. corporal, I can tell you the names now.

BH: It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter, you can if you want.

GP: Discip sergeant was Sergeant Slater and the descip corporal was Corporal Yardley, and a few years later, he didn't remember me, but I remembered him, I came across Sergeant Slater again as Warrant Officer Slater, he didn't recognise me, so many people going through, wouldn't remember me from Adam. Corporal Yardley, never heard of him again. They were, well, I left the room and when I left the room they were stood outside giggling between themselves, thought yeah, got your number.

BH: Why did you join the RAF? Was it simply about getting a job or were you interested in the RAF as an institution?

GP: Well, as I explained to you I was a piece of flotsam and jetsam and the RAF [laughs], I wasn't going to join the army, my brother had already joined the navy, so wasn't going to join the navy, so I thought alright, give the RAF a go, piece of flotsam and jetsam, I was getting on a bit, by that, by the time I joined the RAF I was twenty and I knew that I needed something to settle me down, give me an anchor, for a while anyway, and I joined for five years to start with, did my recruit-, basic recruit training at Swinderby, moved on to RAF Cosford near **[00:50:00]** Wolverhampton to do my trade training, spent five months there on trade training, then my first posting was to RAF Kinloss in Scotland on the Moray Firth. That was brilliant, that's when I really started enjoying myself, went up there, met some really good people, worked with some really good people, the work was interesting, working on Shackleton maritime reconnaissance aircraft, loading the cameras, downloading the cameras, all this kind of thing. Where we worked at Kinloss was on the far side of the airfield away from the main part of the station in, it was hangars, 120 Squadron, 201 Squadron, and then I spent a year there and during that year the Shackletons started to be replaced by Nimrod aircraft and they were on the station side of the airfield, and some of us stayed with the Shackleton and some of us stayed, moved across to the Nimrod site to set up our operation there and it was all, it was pretty varied. But one other thing, being Irish again, the guy I worked with, the corporal I worked with, he said right, do you drive, and I said yeah, I've got a driving licence I said, but it's Northern Irish, it's a little blue book with my photograph in it, and in the rest of the UK the driving licence at the time was a little red book with no photograph in it, so he said right, we'll take you along to the MT section, the Motor Transport section, and we'll have a chat with them, had a chat with them, they said right, we'll give him a, we'll just give him a little test, see how he goes and let him get his RAF driving licence, so I could drive landrovers and what have you, and the guy who took me out, I didn't like him, he didn't like me, and he said right, I don't think you're a good enough driver, I said why not, and we had a bit of an argument about it, he said in any case you're going to need a new driving licence, your Northern Ireland driving licence isn't good enough here.

BH: And was that true or was that just–?

GP: No, it wasn't true.

BH: And why do you think he said that?

GP: Well, he either thought I was a bad driver or he didn't like the Irish, take your pick.

BH: Yeah, at this stage then, when you had basically become part of a new squadron and so on, were you the only Irish person there–

GP: No.

BH: Or were there other Irish scattered through the squadrons?

GP: There were quite a few Irish people in the station, but in the particular place I worked there were, let me see [pauses], two of us, yeah, it was just the two of us, oh beg your pardon, three, Paddy Rooney, Bill Algeo and myself, but my boss, my corporal, he was a brilliant guy, he was actually married to a girl from Derry and he'd been stationed at RAF Ballykelly where he met her, so he knew Ballykelly, he knew Derry, he knew Coleraine, knew the areas I knew and we got on like a house on fire. We would, he would come and knock me up in the early hours of the morning and say come on, go and do a bit of hunting, at that time there was no barbed wire, nothing in, the whole airfield was absolutely open, no problems getting on to at all, said come on, we'll go and do a bit of hunting and he had a .22 air rifle, was all it was, and we'd go out shooting rabbits and pigeons and then we'd go down to, he and his wife lived in the nearest town, Forres–

BH: Ah right, okay.

GP: We'd go down there, she'd make us breakfast, he'd leave the pigeons or the rabbits or both with her, we'd go off to work then, and then in the evening we'd go to his place again and his wife would've cooked a meal with the pigeon and rabbits, and then we'd go out drinking.

BH: Fantastic, brilliant.

GP: Yeah, it was [laughs]. I could stand it then, I was young then, couldn't do that now, but yeah, got on really well at Kinloss.

BH: And at that time then, cos obviously it sounds like the backdrop to this is the Troubles intensifying in Northern Ireland, this is the 1970s presumably.

GP: That was 1970 itself, they were going on, but being away from, being out of Northern Ireland at the time and having my own life and enjoying my own social life and my work life and all the rest of it, they didn't, every now and again they would register with me, but most of the time they didn't.

BH: Yeah, so you weren't like, you know, obsessively watching the news?

GP: No, no, there was even once I came home on leave and I brought a guy, I invited a guy to come back to Ireland with me on leave, and he was from Exmouth in Devon, and we travelled on the train to Stranraer, on the ferry to Larne, on the train again into Belfast and then from Belfast up to Coleraine on the train, and the time we were there, the time we

spent there we hired a car and we drove around, and it was actually, no sign of anything at all.

BH: Yeah, yeah, so actually it was–

GP: It was a holiday.

BH: Yeah, it was possible to go there and actually not encounter any kind of violence at all.

GP: Yeah, yeah, my aunt, my mother's sister, she lived just in a place called New Buildings just outside Derry, on the Strabane Road, and we drove up there for the day and took her out sightseeing and for a meal and what have you, and [pauses] in New Buildings it was only, well, a matter of three miles from Derry, and there were no signs of anything whatsoever, nothing at all.

BH: Yeah, what about other people then, either at your stat- or whatever, at you station? So is that first experience when you were doing your training, where you were in an actual dorm with eleven other Irishmen, did anybody else talk about the Troubles or talk about what was happening in Northern Ireland at your station or within the RAF?

GP: No, it was, as far as I remember it was just those two, the sergeant and the corporal, they were the only two I can remember now talking about it, out loud, seriously, within our hearing.

BH: Yeah, what about the two other Irish guys that were based there? Rooney I think you said one of them was called?

GP: Rooney, he came from Dublin.

BH: He came from Dublin, and did they, did yous talk about Northern Ireland?

GP: Yeah, we did actually, not with Pat Rooney, but with Bill Algeo, I soon found out that Bill Al-, like I say, he came from Derry, I soon found out that he was more of a unionist than I was.

BH: Is that right?

GP: Yeah, he was, he believed in the cause more than I did.

BH: What was his second name, Algeo?

GP: Algeo, yeah.

BH: Unusual name.

GP: Yeah, if I remember right I think he was probably Maltese I think he was.

BH: Right, okay, and the other guy, Rooney, was from Dublin.

GP: From Dublin, yeah.

BH: Yeah, right, so you were having a great time there then, but presumably it had to come to an end at some point?

GP: Yeah, the other thing was, I said earlier my brother had joined the Fleet Air Arm, it turned out coincidence that he was only just up the road in what was RNA, Royal Naval Air Station, Lossiemouth, about, what, ten miles away I think it was, so I would go up there some weekends and socialise with him.

BH: Yeah, and were yous both at this stage kind of thinking about your future in terms of living in Great Britain or had you kind of plans after your five-year spell to, of moving back?

GP: [laughs] I had no plans whatsoever [laughs]. **[01:00:00]**

BH: No plans of moving back, yeah [laughs].

GP: As I say, I spent 1970 at RAF Kinloss and then at the end of 1970 I was posted to Germany for the first time.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: Just before Christmas, and I arrived there, the heating was off in the station and there was about three foot of snow on the ground [laughs], and that was my introduction to Germany, but it was great, aw, I thoroughly enjoyed it again, the work wasn't very exciting at all, I was processing [pauses] cinefilm that had come from the aircraft, it was a Lightning squadron that I was based with and they had three cinecameras in various places on the aircraft, so I'd take the, take the film out of the aircraft, off the aircraft and process it through a machine, which took about ten minutes, and that was it until the next lot came in, so it was a matter of sitting around twiddling my thumbs.

BH: Right, so you weren't under a huge amount of stress or pressure then.

GP: No, I mean, the only stress was boredom, and then, yeah, the social life, again as I say, the social life was brilliant, you had everything on the station, cinema, bars, clubs, what have you, of various types. It was there, I got a letter from my, I'd been there about what, five, six months and I got a letter from, no, four months, and I got a letter from my mum saying my father had had a stroke, but he was in hospital, he was recovering well, there was no problem, so I wrote to her again and I said look, if anything like that happens again send a telegram, send a telegram to the station and I will see about me getting some time to come home, they were still living in Coleraine at the time, and next thing I knew, a couple of days later there was a telegram [laughs]. It was quite late in the evening and a tannoy went out, a message went out on the station tannoy, SACPO, that's senior aircraftsmen, SACPO report to the guardroom, I thought what, what for [laughs], so I went up to the guardroom and the duty officer, Johnny Johnson, Flight Lieutenant Johnny Johnson, he said we've had a

telegram here, your father's had a stroke I'm afraid to say, I said oh yeah, I know that, that was last week, he said no, no, it says your father's had a stroke here, I thought perhaps he's had another one. What it was, my mother had got my letter and thought alright, I'll get him home for a couple of days, I didn't want to go home [laughs], so [pauses] she'd sent the telegram, the telegram had arrived, Johnny Johnson looked at it and he said look mate, if it was my father I'd want to go home, I thought yeah, probably knew right, so they, what they called an indulgence flight, they couldn't give me compassionate leave, but, oh sorry, yeah, I did get compassionate leave and they organised an indulgence flight for me to fly back to the UK, fly back to England and get a train from where I landed, where did I land [pause], I can't remember where I landed now, I know where I left afterwards, but I can't remember where I landed, strange that, anyway, got a, this was all done on warrants, flight to England, train to Heysham, ferry to Belfast and then train to Coleraine from there, and saw my father, I was just, just, we both had an interest in motorcycle racing and it was just at the time of the Northwest 200, and he'd came out of hospital just in time for me to drive him there and show him around, and it was there that I noticed my dad was getting older, it had taken a lot out of him, the stroke, he did have a stroke, but he was still lucid, he was still able to move, there was nothing physically wrong with him, but we went along on the day and I could see him getting tired and that's when it first struck me that my dad was getting old.

BH: How many years had you been away by this stage?

GP: Ah it was, pffft [pauses], about one year.

BH: One year, yeah.

GP: Yeah, he'd, he seemed to have waited, but I spent the day with him, spent two or three days with them both and then flew back to Gütersloh, and then a couple of months later I was told that if I wanted I could be, I could get a cross-posting to headquarters of RAF Germany, Rheindahlen, near Mönchengladbach, and I jumped at it, I thought yeah, I've had enough of Gütersloh I'll go there, so I went there and met a few, met a few people I'd known at Kinloss when I arrived there, non-flying station, bit of a holiday camp really, so made a good decision and again the social life was brilliant. The only downside was I met my wife there, it was about a week after I arrived [laughs].

BH: And was she in the RAF as well?

GP: She was Women's Royal Air Force, yeah, a WRAC, not a WRAC, a WRAF.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: WRAC, that's army.

BH: And presumably she wasn't from Northern Ireland, she was from England or Scotland?

GP: No, she was from Bolton.

BH: From Bolton, right, okay, right.

GP: But we'll come to that later [laughs; pauses]. Yeah [pauses], going back to what the subject matter is, there was a, there was no real, no real animosity apart from [pauses] at Rheindahlen, Rheindalen was a huge place, it was army and air force and it was all sorts of nationalities.

BH: Of course, a military base as well.

GP: Mmm. Germans, Dutch, Belgiques, there were other nationalities as well, Americans, Canadians, all this sort of stuff, but in the NAAFI, the first time it struck me, that Northern Ireland struck me, was some army lads had just come back from Nor-, from doing a tour in Northern Ireland.

BH: Yeah, cos they often interspersed those with tours to Germany, yeah.

GP: Yeah, and stood in the NAAFI bar, and this guy came up to the bar, stood beside me, heard me talking and he said to me you Irish, and I said yeah, and he really had a go at me–

BH: Is that right?

GP: Yeah, he did, and it took a while to calm him down, his mates had to come and calm him down, but he didn't like his tour in Northern Ireland at all.

BH: [laughs] He wasn't impressed with it, no.

GP: No, so he got me in the bar and he was going to tell me about it.

BH: Right, and did it matter that you were from a Protestant background?

GP: No, didn't matter at all, he just heard the accent and that was it, that was his trigger [pauses]. But that's another thing as well, wh-, joining, when I first joined the air force, initially joining the air force, I found I had to modify my accent because, obviously I didn't notice it, but apparently I had quite a broad accent, a Coleraine accent, which isn't the prettiest [laughs], people couldn't understand me, so that's why I say I had to modify it **[01:10:00]** so they could understand me, and now these days people are, some people are quite surprised that I'm Northern Irish. They know I'm not from round here, but they haven't put me down as Northern Irish, some people have even put me down as Australian, New Zealand or something like that, not Northern Irish.

BH: Do you think if you hadn't have, you know, joined the RAF and worked somewhere else in Scotland or England, like what your sister did, for example, you would've lost your accent to the same extent?

GP: Probably would have, yeah.

BH: Probably would have, yeah. Did your sister change hers as well?

GP: Yeah, she's, cut-glass crystal she is.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

GP: Yeah, well, that's, that's, I don't think that's anything to do with Northern Ireland, that's a personal choice of hers.

BH: Yeah, just interesting what you were saying there about the soldiers, that they, you know, they had tours in Northern Ireland, but then Germany was somewhere that in between tours they would go. Was there a common perception of Northern Ireland within the armed forces, whether it was soldiers in particular or the RAF, that this was a bad place to be posted?

GP: Yeah, yeah, the, no, none of the army personnel looked forward to going there, not in the least, I mean, you hear, you hear some stories about what a good, what a, such and such happened, what a good time they had, but I think a lot of that was bravado. They didn't enjoy themselves too much while they were there, they enjoyed the social side of it, in themselves, in their own barracks, in their own little, the camaraderie, cos it was place to generate camaraderie.

BH: Sure, yeah.

GP: But apart from that they didn't have very much going for it.

BH: And what did you feel about that? I mean, whenever that guy came up to you in the bar how did it make you feel, what did you think about that?

GP: Shit-scared, to be honest [laughs], I thought hello, I'm in for a thumping here [laughs].

BH: Yeah, and had you been conscious of that kind of an attitude towards Northern Ireland before?

GP: No, no. I think in actual fact looking back on it, I said this guy had a tough time, but in actual fact I think his unit had lost a couple of guys and that's what his problem was.

BH: Yeah, yeah. I wonder about wider sort of British society, English society and Scottish society, cos obviously quite a lot of particular working-class guys were recruited into the army and they were sent there. How did people in Britain sort of look upon the conflict in Northern Ireland? What did they think about it? Did they even have a view, maybe they didn't?

GP: Yeah, no, I think it's, bloody Irish, let them get on with it, but then something happens over here and hello, that grabs their attention, but only for a little while, fairly soo-, I doubt if any of them could tell you whether Stormont is back up and running again or not.

BH: Sure, yeah.

GP: [pauses] Yeah.

BH: After that incident in Germany, were you more wary after that of running into soldiers?

GP: Yeah, I was, yeah, if I knew the army were coming back from Northern Ireland or a unit was coming back from Northern Ireland I'd make myself scarce.

BH: Scarce, is that right, yeah?

GP: Yeah, I'd hang out in the Dutch bar or the Belgique bar or the German bar or something like that, where they weren't likely to go. They were all air force bars, Dutch, Belgique, German air force, and go and hang out in there.

BH: Yeah, what did your wife-to-be think about your Northern Irish background? Did she, did she have any kind of any views about it?

GP: [laughs] Well, no, the funny thing is [pauses], I'm a Protestant, I'm an Irish Protestant, she's an English Catholic.

BH: Oh right, interesting [laughs], I can see where this is possibly going.

GP: When, when we first met to me she looked Irish, she had dark brown, black hair, green eyes and high cheekbones, your stereotypical Irish girl, and I made the mistake of telling her, telling her mum and dad that.

BH: Oh no [laughs], what did they say about that?

GP: They weren't impressed [laughs], they, they didn't say very much to start with, but they didn't, they didn't like the thought of their family being tainted by Irish.

BH: Is that right? Really?

GP: Yeah, that's what I found out later, and to say that their daughter looked Irish was oooh [laughs].

BH: Yeah, that's quite interesting because Bolton is quite a large, or there was quite a large Irish community there.

GP: I, I suspect there was Irish ancestry in that family, yeah.

BH: Well, I was going to say, yeah, lots of English Catholics turned out at some point to, you know, to have come from Ireland.

GP: Yeah, I found that strange, but as time went on, a lot of time went on [laughs], I found out that both her parents were, and I'm sorry about this, there's no other way of saying this, both her parents were bigots and racists.

BH: Oh right, okay.

GP: Her brother, well, after we got married we were back staying there one Christmas, new year I think it was, and her brother, her younger brother, brought a new girlfriend home for tea to meet the family one Sunday and [pauses] we got on fine, got on fine with her, having a chat, all the rest of it, back and forth, and then he and his girlfriend were going off to the pub somewhere, they'd arranged to meet someone, some of his mates, he'd joined the navy by this time by the way, but he'd arranged to meet some of his mates, so they got up and they left and I was sat there twiddling my thumb, feigning neutral and I heard this munking and moaning going on, and I thought hello [pauses], and her mum was, mum was muttering away to herself about what the hell did he bring her home for, did you see what she looks like, and I piped up and I said yeah, she was a nice enough girl, I thought she had a lot of make-up on to cover a bad complexion, this sort of thing, and her dad was sat behind me and he said she's black, I thought what, he said she's bloody black, she is [laughs].

BH: Is that right?

GP: I, I was astounded, I thought how'd you pick that up, how'd you pick up, how'd you pick up she was black, she doesn't look black to me, and he says she's bloody black she is. As it turned out, her mother was west, west Berliner and her father was a West Indian.

BH: Right, yeah.

GP: Yeah [pauses]. It just never crossed my mind, but these two, they picked it up straight away.

BH: Straight away, yeah, so what'd they think about you then, because you were Irish, first of all, and on top of that Protestant, so you were kind of wrong on two accounts, like. What did they–?

GP: Yeah, well, this is, this is where it gets a bit [laughs], my wife and I got married because she was pregnant.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: Alright, and [pauses] I wrote and told her mother that she was pregnant.

BH: You wrote to her mother?

GP: Yeah.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: Well, I wrote her parents that she was pregnant and we were getting married and blah, blah, blah, and we got married in Germany, neither sets of parents came to the wedding.

BH: Was that just because of the difficulty of travelling there?

GP: Yeah, it was, it wasn't quite as convenient as these days and apart from that they were getting on a bit, but she didn't like that idea either, me writing to her and explaining things to her, perhaps she didn't like the way I explained them, but there you go, what's done is done. **[01:20:00]**

BH: Sure, presumably then if your wife was pregnant there's a limited amount of time she could work then after that in the RAF.

GP: Yeah, she couldn't stay in the RAF, she cou-, at that time pregnancy and a pregnant WRAF was a no-no, that was it as far as you're concerned, so she came out of the service, we got married and then shortly after that we came back to the UK, a matter of a couple of months, two or three months.

BH: Right, so did you leave the RAF as well then?

GP: No, no, no, this is [laughs], yeah, this is another stage on the road. I'd initially signed on for five years, and then [pauses] when we found out that she was pregnant and we were getting married I extended that service to nine years, and then when Karen was born I extended again to twelve years, and it went on like, my service went on like that, five years, nine years, twelve years, fifteen years, twenty-two years and eventually, aged forty-seven, but going back again, we came back to this country, got posted to RAF Wittering near Peterborough, where they had the Harriers, and we lived there for a couple of years, two or three years, and then back to Germany again.

BH: Back to Germany, yeah, all three of you then back to Germany?

GP: All three of us, yeah, and got posted to a flying station again, RAF Laarbruch, spent a year there and then they came to me and said right, we're going to promote you, you've got to go on a course, so went on a course to Cosford again, came back to the UK to, the cou-, we all had to come back to the UK cos the course was six months long, I think it was, came back, got settled in a married quarter near RAF Brampton near Huntingdon, I went off to Cosford, missus and Karen stayed in the married quarter by themselves through the week, I'd come home at weekends. But the other thing is, went to Cosford, Cosford said who are you, I said well, I'm here for a course, I've been told I'm going to be promoted and I've got to do the course first, they said yeah, but you haven't done your pre-course course first, I said what [laughs], and it turned out I got myself mixed up in the middle of a power struggle between one side of the trade and another side of the trade. The instructors they said that you had to do a pre-course course first of all, a short course to see if you had the aptitude, never mind the assessments you'd had in your previous stations, and then it turned out there were five of us that went on that course and we were all kicked off because we hadn't done this pre-course course, so I came back to, worked at RAF Brampton near the married quarters again, worked at RAF Brampton for about a year, did the pre-course course in the meantime, the earliest they could fit us in again, fit me in again, was about another year, so I spent that year at RAF Brampton, another non-flying station, a dump, nice enough place, but the work itself terrible it was, I didn't enjoy it, anyway, went on the course, finished the

course, got posted to another station near the married quarter, not RAF Brampton, RAF Wyton, which was on the other side of Huntingdon, and spent nine months there and then eventually got posted back to RAF Rheindahlen.

BH: Right, back there again, right.

GP: Yeah, back there again, went back there for three years, and again thoroughly enjoyed every single minute of it, it was probably the best posting I've had, the friendliest posting I've had from the social aspect of it, lived in the married quarters away from RAF Rheindahlen itself, lived in blocks of flats, German flats, fantastic places, won't hear a bad word said about the Germans, I think they're brilliant.

BH: And so your daughter then would've been, her schooling would've taken place within the compound or whatever, yeah, was there–?

GP: Yeah, she, in fact, she, she first went to school while we lived at Huntingdon, RAF Upwood it is, a little village outside Huntingdon, she first started school there and when I moved to, oh hang on [pauses], go back a bit, sorry [pauses], RAF Wittering, daughter born, spent a couple of years there and then got posted to RAF Laarbruch, spent a year there then got posted, but while we were there that year my son was born, our son was born.

BH: Right, second child.

GP: Yeah, in a Royal Air Force hospital and he was a baby, then got posted back to RAF Upwood**,** Brampton, whatever you want to call it, and then back to Germany again and [pauses] we had another little girl while we were in Germany, so [pauses] yeah, thoroughly enjoyed Germany, I've enjoyed Germany every time I've been there, people say bloody Germans, but I don't see that at all.

BH: That's a long career in the RAF, you know, it's successive postings. I mean, you built a career within the RAF really, over the course of your life. During that period did you continue to return to Northern Ireland or Coleraine?

GP: I, sorry, yeah, I was getting way ahead of myself then. Back to the RAF Rheindahlen, the first time, when I got cross-posted from Gütersloh to Rheindahlen, this is 1971, possibly '72, enjoying myself, enjoying work, making friends all the rest of it, blah, blah, blah, then out of the blue I got a letter from my mum saying this is our new address, we thought you'd better have it [laughs], I went what [laughs], and they'd packed up and left Northern Ireland.

BH: They have, really?

GP: Yeah, that was in 1972, yeah.

BH: So that's really the height of the Troubles, '72.

GP: 1972, well, there was, I think there'd been one bomb, there may have been one bomb in Coleraine by then or that may have come later, I'm not sure which, a bomb went off in

Railway Road in Coleraine and two or three people killed, quite a few injured, but next thing I knew my parents had moved across to England.

BH: And was that what provoked them to move?

GP: That was probably the final straw with them, I think they'd been thinking about it before that because by then my brother was living in London, my sister was living in London, I was in the air force and there was no reason for them to stay there, so they made the unilateral decision to up sticks and move to where the children were.

BH: Wow, did your mother still have any relatives or–?

GP: Yeah, she still had a sister living in Northern, in New Buildings and a few cousins living thereabouts round Dunnamanagh, Strabane, that area.

BH: Okay, and how did they find that move? Cos that's quite a big transition.

GP: It was a big move for them, a big transition for them. My father got a job working for the Thames [pauses], was it Thames Water, this is before it was privatised, whatever the company, the water company was he got a job with them in south Oxfordshire. A nice place they moved to live, but it was tiny little place in comparison with what they'd come from, **[01:30:00]** it was a bit uncomfortable staying there.

BH: I was going to say, I mean, for your mother in particular, who presumably has quite a strong Northern accent, to move to a small town as opposed to Manchester or London, you're going to stick out there, like.

GP: Yeah, she stuck out like a sore thumb, in fact, thinking about it now that was, that was before I got married and the first time my wife heard my mother she said who the hell is that [laughs], cos my mother, she won't, she finds it, she can do it, but she finds it hard to modify her accent, she'd rather just be herself. But we arrived in this place, Goring railway station, Goring-on-Thames, it was the first time we'd met, just after Christmas I think it was, and we arrived on one side of the station, on one platform, and my mother was on the other side of the station going to Reading to do some shopping, and she saw us coming in and she climbed halfway up, halfway up the steps, the bridge that crosses the lines, and I was bimbling along there carrying the cases, my wife beside me or girlfriend beside me, and my mother's head appeared on the other side of the bridge and she started ranting, not ranting, she started shouting, my wife, girlfriend turned to me and said who the bloody hell's that [laughs], I said that's my mum [laughs].

BH: What did your parents think of, particularly your mum, think of your wife-to-be in terms of her religious background?

GP: That never came up.

BH: Never came up, right.

GP: Well, it came up once, I said she's Catholic, deal with it, and that was it. I said it's not the religion I'm marrying, it's the girl, they said okay then, that was it. My father couldn't care less, couldn't have cared less if she'd come from Mars.

BH: Yeah, given that your mum was, you know, so interested in your church back in Coleraine, when she moved to this small town in south Oxfordshire was she able to kind of integrate into the like, sort of quite different religious culture there? Did she go to church there, for example?

GP: No, she stopped going to church, well, she may have done I, I don't know whether she did or not, whether she tried carrying on or not, but not that I know of.

BH: Yeah, yeah, did they think it was a good move after they'd made it? Was it the right move?

GP: From my mother's, from my mother's point of view it was a step backwards in terms of, in terms of accommodation and in terms of her work, her own work. In Coleraine she'd been a dinner lady and working part-time as a waitress, which she enjoyed, one of the big hotels in Portrush, she used to get regular work there. But my father, it was a step up from working in what was basically a dirty job as a maintenance engineer in a quarry, so all the dust and filth and what have you, he moved to this very cushy little job, much better pay as well, he took great pride in, took great pride in showing me one of his payslips and I said you should've moved here sooner, shouldn't you, and he said yeah. But thinking about it now, when they did move I wish they'd moved to Scotland instead, where he, closer to where he'd come from, cos they still have family up there, or they still had family up there, but he enjoyed himself, weather was better, scenery was, beautiful place, beautiful part of Oxfordshire, right on the Thames, and he was left to his own devices, given a van, driving around here, there and everywhere and that was it, well paid.

BH: Did they make friends? You know, where did they, cos obviously they'd no relatives there.

GP: They made friends, work friends, neighbours were a bit different. I don't know, does anybody make friends with their neighbours any more?

BH: I don't know, I don't know, I know in Northern Ireland people do cos I guess, cos maybe they've been there a long time kind of thing.

GP: Yeah, it's, it's strange, if you get a good neighbour you're lucky, you're very lucky, but I don't think I, my, maybe my father, my father sounds a bit of a [laughs], bit nonchalant, bit too nonchalant, shall we say, but I understood him. He was quite happy within himself, if you wanted to be friends with him he'd be friends with you, if not, so what. My mother, she was different, mother's always been a bit more ambitious than my father was.

BH: Is that right, yeah?

GP: Yeah, she, she'd be quite happy being a social climber, or she would have been, they're both dead now, I'm talking about them as though they're in the present, but they're both dead now, yeah, my father was laidback, easy-going, yeah, whereas my mother she was, she was the go-getter, the ambitious one, ambitious for her family, which is alright.

BH: Did they, whenever they moved, did they maintain contact with Northern Ireland? Did they continue to be interested in what happened there or–?

GP: They did for a while, they maintained contact with neighbours like Eliza Gorham, she's dead, and that sort of thing, but as far as the political situation goes, no.

BH: They weren't interested.

GP: No. They weren't really interested while they were there, but it did affect them because they were there, but once they got out of it that was a different matter altogether. They could forget about it, or take an interest in it now and again if they wanted to.

BH: Yeah, what about yourself then? Because obviously once your parents move there's no obvious reason to go back there. Did you yourself after that take trips back to Northern Ireland or was that kind of the, end of taking journeys there?

GP: No, no [pauses]. Alright, moving forward again, three children, in Germany again, another three-year tour, three-year tour ended, got posted back to RAF Coltishall in Norfolk. Now when I'd applied for postings on leaving Germany, I'd stipulated negative choice, not the east of England, so somebody with a sense of humour sent me as far east as they could possibly send me in my trade [laughs], wish we could get a hold of him, so I went to Coltishall, after a year in Coltishall had an affair and the, it wasn't my instigation, it was the other person's instigation, I enjoyed it, got, got a guilty conscience, which lives with me until this day, and I knew that I couldn't start the marriage over again, I couldn't repair the marriage, not because of the character of my wife, she would've forgiven me, but she would never have forgotten it, and I wasn't going to live with it, so they moved, the three children and my wife moved to Bolton. I stayed there, moved into single accommodation and then, up until 1982 nobody from Northern Ireland could serve in Northern Ireland–

BH: Yes, I remember, yeah.

GP: In the regular forces, yeah, and then they changed it because it was what they called normalisation.

BH: Of course, yeah.

GP: You can use a word like that and all of a sudden the situation changes, it doesn't, so 1982 I, when I heard this, I applied for service in Northern Ireland.

BH: Really? Right, wow. I suppose the question is why, as in like, having heard stories from other soldiers and so on that they didn't like **[01:40:00]** it, would you not have sort of been turned off, turned off it?

GP: No, I, I sat and thought about it and everything I'd done up until then was training for war and that's all it was, training.

BH: You hadn't actually, yeah.

GP: Yeah, it was in an unreal, made-up situation I'd been working in, and I thought I can't waste it, all this training and my experience and the rest of it, there's only one place that's operational and that's Northern Ireland, so I applied for Northern Ireland, Aldergrove, and there was a guy there, he extended his leave, sorry, he extended his posting by six months and luckily enough I got his posting when he left there, so I went there for two years and I ended up serving for three years, and workwise it was the best job I'd ever done, socially was Rheindahlen the second time, workwise was Northern Ireland.

BH: Really, right, and why was that then?

GP: Because the work I was doing, the way I looked at it was, the work I was doing was, I may not stop all of the fighting, all of the killing, all of whatever's going on, but I can help them minimise it as best I can and that's the way I looked at it. We worked twenty-four-hour shifts, twenty-four-hours on, twenty-four hours off. Now we didn't do that very often, normally we were on from twelve o'clock midday until twelve o'clock the following midday, but normally the work was from twelve o'clock until eight o'clock, nine o'clock, say, and then we'd have a sleep, go back in again at eight o'clock the following morning, work until twelve o'clock and have a day off. Now I was permanent staff at the time, on a two-year, three-year tour, but there were guys who came out there for four months at a time and they worked twenty-four-hour shifts the same as I did, but they worked, they only had four days off during the four months, during the four months they were there [pauses], whereas I had every, let me see, what was it, every three weeks I would have eight days off, so I would alternate, I would either come back to the mainland here, that's a point, does that annoy you, people calling it the mainland?

BH: Doesn't annoy me, no, my parents always would've said that, but I know it does annoy some people, yeah.

GP: Yeah. I'd come back to the mainland to visit the children and then I'd get on the train and go visit my mum, cos this, by this time my father had died, and then back to Aldergrove again. That was every other month, but every other month what I would do is, during the eight days I was off, I would organise a trip. Now in, at the time there was a third of the, a third of Northern Ireland we couldn't go to at all because it was too dangerous, another third we could go to sometimes, sometimes it was too dangerous, we couldn't go, other times it was okay we could go, and the other third was we could go any time. So knowing the area reasonably well, what I did was organise trips, we'd drive up, a group of us, I don't know, ten, fifteen maybe, we'd drive up to the Old Bushmills Distillery–

BH: Right, and that was in the safe zone was it, yeah?

GP: That was in the safe zone, yeah, no, sorry, not the distillery first, what we'd do is go to a place called the Salmon Leap just outside Coleraine, a little bar I knew, you went in there and you paid three pounds fifty for a plate and then you walk in and they had this table, absolutely laid with food, roast beef, pork, sausages, lamb, ham, you name it, plus salads which didn't get touched [laughs], and these guys, took them in there and they absolutely, they were like bloody locusts they were [laughs], it was embarrassing sometimes, they'd clear that table and then they'd bring the sweet table out, and I remember one time they brought this strawberry gateau out and in five minutes there was one strawberry from the top of the gateau left on the plate [laughs], the rest had gone [laughs], but that, that's what they were there for, they were there to release and enjoy themselves, and then we'd go to the Old Bushmills Distillery, Giant's Causeway and then end up at the Harbour bar in Portrush, so that was, like I say, that was all a release for them and they enjoyed themselves.

BH: Did they know that you were from Coleraine or that area originally?

GP: Yeah, they did, oh yeah, yeah, they knew that, there was no secret about that.

BH: Yeah, and what did they think about that?

GP: Well, eventually they knew Coleraine had a good football team [laughs], no arguing about at that [laughs], that was, there was some Irish guys, other Irish guys in the section, Scottish guys–

BH: Southern Irish guys as well in the section?

GP: No, no Southern Irish guys, no, can't remember any of them, no, not at Aldergrove. There was one guy from Belfast and he was a flipping pain in the arse he was, came from the Annadale Flats in Belfast and every other word was [laughs], and he, he was, he was Prot-, he was a unionist Protestant through and through, so we had some discussions him and me. It's alright him having his views, but maybe he could try and moderate them a bit.

BH: Sure, you mean he was sectarian, you mean, yeah, sectarian?

GP: Yeah, he was, I'm afraid, so yeah, but–

BH: I mean, how did you feel about coming back to Northern Ireland this way? I mean, obviously you'd grown up there, but you'd spent a long time now basically in service, overseas a lot of it. To arrive back effectively as, being deployed effectively, what was, was that strange?

GP: Wasn't strange at all. I, I, like I say, I knew I was going there for a reason, I knew what the reason was. Now the same wasn't true of everyone there, the, there was extra money for going there. Now I knew there was extra money, but I thought it was about a fifty pee a day, but it turned out it was a lot more than that.

BH: Really, right.

GP: Yeah, and unfortunately most of the people who were there were there for the money and they had not an id-, not a clue why they were there really.

BH: You mean they had no understanding of the political situation?

GP: That's right, yeah, no understanding of trying to minimise the violence that was going on. I mean, there was contact with the RUC and the UDR and other people as well, other people involved as well, and they, they had no real concept of what these people did. They knew the UDR was something similar to the TA, which it wasn't, the RUC was a police force, which it wasn't, and that was it, that was as far as they wanted to go, they didn't want to understand the ins and outs of it. Did you see a series that was on television last year, *The Troubles*?

BH: *Spotlight on the Troubles*?

GP: Is that what it was?

BH: It was a seven-part–

GP: That's right, that's what it was.

BH: *A Secret History of the Troubles*, *Spotlight: A Secret History*, yeah, I did see that.

GP: Yeah, I thought it was excellent, that, yeah, it was really, really well made, really well explained. A lot going on that I didn't know about that came out in that, but that sort of thing just had no interest for the–

BH: For the ordinary, the average.

GP: Yeah, yeah, at all.

BH: What, for example, that story that you recounted about meeting the squaddie who had just been sent to Germany and was really quite angry because **[01:50:00]** he had lost people from his unit. You were now deployed there, you've a Northern Irish accent or at least everybody knows that, you know, you're from Northern Ireland, and now the people that you're working alongside are themselves encountering potentially violence and actually putting their lives in danger. I'm just wondering did that, did their reactions to that have any impact upon their relationship with you within your unit?

GP: The majority of them, no. Some of them, as far as I was concerned, you were still a bloody Paddy, but that was only one or two of them, the vast majority of them, I got on well with them, there were, again it goes back to this, the social life, not just trips to Old Bushmills or what have you, but, at Aldergrove each, because of the situation there, because of the shift systems we were working, each section, each section on the station had a bar of their own, where I worked we had our own bar. Now that was, initially that was open two nights a week, suppose they close at, open at seven o'clock and close at eleven

o'clock, and a lot of the other sections that we worked with they had their own bars. Now the idea was that if you wanted a drink there was always a bar open somewhere throughout the week, but eventually it went to flipping five nights a week, and I'll hold my hand up and say initially, for the first three months maybe, I flipping, I went bloody daft. I was there until, say I was on shift, the bar was set up in the crew room, which was just next door to where we were working, and I would finish the work and instead of going back to the block and going to bed until eight o'clock the following morning I would go in the bar and I'd stay in the bar until you name it, but I would still be up at eight o'clock, back in at work again at eight o'clock in the morning, and I did that for about three months, and then I just, a light came on and I thought what the hell are you doing, because I realised I was putting weight on, so instead of standing on one side of the bar and getting drunk, I went on the other side of the bar and I started working behind the bar.

BH: Is that right?

GP: And I still had, I'd still have one or two drinks, but not as many as I had been having, and I actually made some money out of it [laughs].

BH: Right, and why do you think those first three months you spent so much time drinking? What was the purpose of that?

GP: I think I, I think I was, because of the personal, what had been going on previous to that, the marriage falling–

BH: Of course, yeah.

GP: Losing the kids and, well, not losing them, but no longer living with them, and then the woman I'd had a, had the affair with, she was a WRAF by the way, in the service, I worked with her at Coltishall, and eventually I thought yeah, you're not for me, so I gave her the elbow and that was after I'd found out I was moving, that I was being posted in Northern Ireland, I thought yeah, good opportunity and [pauses] so when I did get to Northern Ireland I did go a bit wild, flipping, trying to make sense of things and I eventually did make sense of things.

BH: So was Northern Ireland, going to Northern Ireland an escape from those other things?

GP: No, it was just a convenience, I was going there in any case, but it did turn out to be an escape.

BH: Right, cos a lot of, you know, ex-soldiers and things, when they talk about Northern Ireland they talk about it being stressful, and it was a difficult place to be, but for you it was actually a place where you worked things out.

GP: Yeah, it was, yeah. It was strange, I did an awful lot of thinking, first two or three months, yeah, bit wild, bit daft, but then I did an awful lot of thinking, eventually worked things out.

BH: Did you still at that stage have a sense of belonging to the place Northern Ireland? Did you still see it as your home or–?

GP: I still do [laughs].

BH: Still do now, yeah, and that didn't change over all those years being away, no?

GP: No, no, I am who I am, I was born in Northern Ireland and I may not live in Northern Ireland now, but that's still where I'm from, and that's the place that, it didn't make me, I would say the air force made me, but Northern Ireland was the place that nurtured me.

BH: Yeah, I noticed as well that you always say, you use the word Irish, I'm Irish. A lot of Northern Protestants would say either they're Northern Irish or even they might even say British, but you've used the, you've used in particular, that, the word, the word Irish.

GP: As far as I'm concerned I'm Irish, but if anybody has a problem with that, we'll have a discussion about it. I'll still be Irish and they can call me what they want.

BH: Yeah, when you were in the RAF, and in particular when you were posted to Northern Ireland, did people make assumptions about how you would feel about the conflict? So for example, you mentioned–

GP: Yeah, they did, yeah.

BH: Yeah, the guy from Belfast who you said actually was sectarian and actually did hold those kinds of views, did people expect you to be like that, I wonder?

GP: He did.

BH: He did.

GP: He didn't see anything wrong with what he was saying until I had a word with him.

BH: Yeah, yeah, and what did he, what was his response to that?

GP: Well, he did modify, moderate his speech for a while, but he couldn't help himself. Every now and again it would come out again.

BH: Yeah, yeah, I'm just wondering about the perception of other English people and Scottish people. Do they expect Irish people to be like that? Do they automatically think well, you know, they're going to think that way?

GP: Yeah, some of them do, but this guy, for instance, he, people thought he was funny.

BH: They thought he was funny, yeah?

GP: Yeah, coming out with the stuff that he did. It was a joke to a lot of them, but to me it wasn't.

BH: Yeah, yeah, what kind of things did he do like, what did he–?

GP: He was a Linfield supporter [laughs], so when I say he was sectarian you can see what a, what sort of level of sectarian I'm talking about, coming from the Annadale Flats, and when something happened or when, say, an INLA guy got killed or IR-, Provo or whatever, he was, he was very celebratory, yeah. Now yeah, okay, he's got a point, but only up to a point. Like I said, as far as I'm concerned I was there to try and minimise the violence, and I knew all sorts of things were going on, but that programme, or that series of programmes, I was, I really didn't know, have an idea what was going on.

BH: Yeah, and do you think actually having watched that programme that vindicated your position on a lot of things, even though you weren't aware of them?

GP: Even though?

BH: Even though you weren't aware at the time of a lot of the things that were going on, when you watched the, that series, the *Spotlight* series, did that vindicate your kind of position on the conflict and what you thought you were doing?

GP: Well, yeah, there were two sides to that. I mean, the INLA and the PIRA [pauses] as it turns out were just as bad as the UDR or the **[02:00:00]** RUC and the other shadowy people behind them, so whether I did any good there or not is, well, that's open to question, I don't think I, minimal.

BH: It's a very interesting question, you know, what was the British armed forces' role in Northern Ireland, not in the sense of did they commit crimes and this kind of thing, but actually what did they achieve, and I don't know, I think, you know, the case could be made that they did achieve some-, I mean, I suppose if you look at it the other way, if they weren't there what would've happened, is the other argument.

GP: [laughs] Yeah, that's chicken and egg argument, isn't it?

BH: Yeah.

GP: Yeah, going back to 1968 or 1969, what if there'd been no gerrymandering, what if Northern Ireland had been a democracy, which it's been proved now that it wasn't.

BH: Yeah, and was that something that you bec-, you weren't aware of that at the time you were serving, that was something you began to understand later, is that right, or had you already by this stage?

GP: It's something I'd got an inkling about, but it wasn't my priority at the time, my priority at the time was settling myself, I'd come to the conclusion that I needed to settle myself

down, and joining the RAF that was the way of doing it, but the other stuff in the background in Northern Ireland it was there, but it wasn't, it wasn't a priority for me.

BH: Those issues about, you know, Northern Ireland, you know, lack of democracy and things like that, would the other people that you served alongside, did they have any understanding of that?

GP: No, they didn't.

BH: No, they didn't.

GP: They didn't understand how the political system in Northern Ireland worked at all, and to be quite honest with you, my, eventually my understanding of it was pretty hazy. I knew there was corruption, there was corruption there, there very possibly is still corruption, in fact, I know there's still corruption, I mean, three years without a government [pauses], they, the only thing that brought them back was the DUP losing the hold of the Conservative Party, they had no other option but to resume power-sharing in Stormont, that was all that was left to them.

BH: It sounds like you follow Northern Irish politics now–

GP: Oh I do, yeah, yeah.

BH: Cos you said earlier on when you first moved away from Northern Ireland–

GP: No, I didn't.

BH: You didn't bother, you weren't thinking about it, so at what point did that change then, when did you become interested?

GP: [pauses] Mo Mowlam, I think.

BH: Right.

GP: Yeah, Mo Mowlam was a politician that doesn't get the recognition she deserves. Tony Blair seems to have taken the lion's share, which I think should be the other way around. Mo Mowlam did the donkeywork as far as I can see and Tony Blair came along and gave it the okay.

BH: Right, and–

GP: And it's the same with, the same with Jeremy Corbyn by the way. Jeremy Corbyn's been slated left right and centre for talking to Sinn Féin [pauses], and I think that's wrong, his slating is wrong, he should be given appreciation for that.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: Because the more people who talked to Sinn Féin I think eventually brought about the Good Friday Agreement, and Jeremy Corbyn was one of them.

BH: When Jeremy Corbyn was talking to Sinn Féin, back in the eighties and so on, were you aware of that at the time? Were you interested in left-wing politics in Britain at the time?

GP: I was. It was round about 1985, the time of the Brighton bomb, there were stories in the newspapers about him inviting Sinn Féin into the Houses of Parliament round about the same time and all the rest of it. Now he wasn't doing that because he was pro-Sinn Féin, he was doing that because he wanted the violence to stop, but the newspapers weren't saying that, as far as they were concerned he was pro-Sinn Féin because he was doing that.

BH: So were you, at the same time as serving in Northern Ireland, were you interested in politics in Britain, yeah?

GP: Yeah, I was.

BH: When did that happen then, when did you become–?

GP: [pauses] It was Thatcher.

BH: Thatcher.

GP: Yeah, something I've got to thank her for. When she became prime minister in 1979 I thought yeah, alright, due a woman, let her get on with it, see if she can do any better, and then, this is a bit complicated this. In the air force the pay is banded and scaled, and when Thatcher became prime minister I was middle pay band, one, two and three, and I was two, and then if you got promoted beyond that you went four and five. But Thatcher came to power, she became prime minister, about a year later, all of a sudden we were told that instead of being band two we would, it, pay rises were automatic each April, it doesn't matter whether a big one or a small one it was automatic, band two, word came out of the blue that instead of being band two we were going to be rebanded to the lowest band and there was a big stink about it within the trade, within the photographic trade, excuse me, but it went through in any case, it ended up that the following year the people who had been band two were now band one, didn't get a pay rise at all, that's how it worked out, in fact, I think we may have lost a few pence because of it. So the more we looked into it, it was a wing commander was doing it, but it was the people above him who were really doing it, and the further you went the more it became a Tory policy that this would happen to save money, they're still doing it today, making cuts to save money. So that, that got me started on politics and then when I, actually I'd been reading the *Observer*, was the only newspaper I got was the *Observer*, I bought it every Sunday, initially I bought it because of Clive James and his television reviews, and as I read it I went deeper into it and deeper into it and eventually then there was Clive James and then there was the sports, Hugh McIlvanney, Clem Thomas, and then the politics, Conor Cruise O'Brien, people like that. I became more and more interested in it through that. Now in Northern Ireland, I had this other thing as well, in Northern Ireland if I was working on a Sunday I would organise a newspaper run. People would give me an order for the newspapers and I'd go to the local

newsagents and I'd bring them back the newspapers, and my paper was always the *Observer* and I'd sit there, quiet corner somewhere, and start reading the *Observer*. Somebody would come in and see it and say the *Observer*, that's a bloody left-wing paper that, isn't it.

BH: I was just going to say, how common was the *Observer* in the armed, in the army reading room?

GP: I'd say, and I would say to them well, have you read it, not really, but it's bloody left-wing and I wouldn't flipping look at that, and I'd say well, I suggest you do, because at that time the *Observer*, as far as I'm concerned the *Observer* was the paper to read for reporting and truth and honesty, not so much these days [laughs], I'm looking for a reaction here [laughs].

BH: Yeah, well, I mean, it's, there are very few newspapers that I would read now at all, there's no mainstream papers that I would, my girlfriend would read the *Guardian* and the *Observer*, but there's slim pickings, there's maybe the odd article which is useful, **[02:10:00]** but a lot of it's advertisements and, you know–

GP: And they're always asking well, online, I, I, I only, I must admit I read the *Obser-*, I still go to the *Observer* and it's solely because of the cartoonists Steve Bell and Martin Rowson, and on a Sunday Chris Riddle in the *Observer*, they're brilliant, what they do is more brilliant than any of the other journalists in the written word, they can illustrate it in just one cartoon. But going online, every now and again, well, not every now and again it's most of the time, please contribute, even if it's only a pound, no, fuck off. I did for a year, I did, I was never sure whether I was a contributor, a member, what the hell I was, they had so many different categories of it, and after the year I thought no, you flipping, you want to think about your reporting more. They still, don't get me wrong, they still do have some good, good stories, good, good journalists, but–

BH: Well, it's, it's, it's, I mean, it's a difficult industry to operate in now, they have to try and maintain sales and that has a knock-on effect in the kind of articles they're going to publish.

GP: Well, think about it this way, if they, if it [pauses], let me see if I can remember the names, Suzanne Moore, Marina Hyde, Barbara Ellen, last year, even before the general election campaign, they, each of them took it turns to write an anti-Jeremy Corbyn piece and they really slammed him. Now it transpired that the only reason they did that is because they were trying to wind up Owen Jones, their left-wing colleague. Now alright, they might have wound him up or they might not have wound him up, but what they definitely did do is do damage to Jeremy Corbyn.

BH: Yeah, so I take it at that stage in the 1980s then, when you became interested in politics, your identification would've been with the left of the party.

GP: Always has been.

BH: Always has been, yeah, so–

GP: Yeah, I've thought about that as well, that goes back to 1968, my, my, probably my formative year was 1968. 1967 was my, what would you call it, recreational year. 1968 you'd all sorts of, all sorts going on, you'd the student riots in Paris, you'd the Vietnam war going on, you had Bob Dylan and [pauses] I think Leonard Cohen came to the fore then as well, it had all sorts of protests going on and that sort of piqued my interest and that was, I think that was probably the beginning of my left-wing outlook.

BH: Right, okay, and did that kind of continue to grow once you'd joined the RAF or did it stay dormant again until the 1980s?

GP: It, it, that's the, it was still there, but I had to suppress it a bit because being left-wing in the forces isn't the done thing.

BH: I was going to say, I mean, it's not the obvious career choice for somebody who's thinking that way.

GP: Well, that's the choice you've got to make, you want a job or you want to be a rebel, so I wanted a job, that one.

BH: So then presumably, you said, you know, you didn't really, even though you had these sort of left-wing ideas at this stage, you still weren't really watching Northern Ireland, you weren't following it on the news until later, or were you following it back then?

GP: I suppose [pauses], nah, I wasn't, no, I've got to be honest, probably in the eighties, from the eighties onwards I started to perhaps take a bit more interest in it.

BH: And was that because you were deployed there or–?

GP: No, this is the early eighties before I was deployed there, and then the other aspect to it was I couldn't go there whether I wanted to or not, they wouldn't post me there, and then all of a sudden they decided it was okay for people from Northern Ireland be posted there [pauses]. So yeah, that was probably round about that time, 1982, that sort of brought it to the fore again.

BH: Right, that's just immediately after the hunger strikes as well.

GP: Yeah, that's right, yeah. Ah yeah, I remember taking an interest in that, Bobby Sands and what have you [pauses], yeah, yeah.

BH: What did you think about the peace process then? Because you mentioned Mo Mowlam there. Did you think the peace process was a good thing?

GP: I think any peace process is a good thing, whether it works or not, but it certainly keeps the topic in people's minds. While I was there at Aldergrove, I was there from January 1984 till December 1986, so it was three years more or less, and 1985 was the Anglo-Irish Agreement and I can remember looking out of the window onto the pan, the aircraft pan.

There was an Irish Alouette helicopter sat there, or an Alouette helicopter sat there with an Irish roundel on it, and I knew what it was for, and then shortly after that it was a Lear jet on the pan with an Irish roundel on it, green, white and gold, green, white and orange, and I can remember another guy from Ireland, comes from Tyrone as well, comes from Omagh, and he came in and I was looking at this out of the crew room window, and he came in and he said what's going on here then, I said that's your country's history being made, mate, that's an Irish aircraft over there, he said you're kidding, what's that here for, and I remember I was able to tell him. Is that rain?

BH: Yeah.

GP: Bloody hell. Yeah, I was able to tell him, he said bloody hell, I didn't know any of that.

BH: Right, what do you think, in those days it was the Blair government really who was sort of central in that, were you a Labour Party supporter at that time?

GP: No, I wasn't, well, I wasn't a Tory, let's put it that way, I've never been a Tory, not a Tory, never been a Tory, never will be a Tory, but, let's face it, we know now that talks had been, it wasn't just Labour, talks had been going on even under Thatcher and then John Major, although they didn't admit it, which is at the same time as Jeremy Corbyn was having talks, but who got slated for it, but as I said, Mo Mowlam was the one who forced it, forced the peace process, and Tony Blair was the one who put a tick on it along with, obviously along with Bill Clinton and George, what's the senator's name?

BH: Mitchell.

GP: That's it, along with George Mitchell, General Chastelain, but–

BH: So did you follow this then?

GP: Oh I did, I did.

BH: You did, cos you were there three years and you were back then when, 1988 or something like that, back–

GP: I was there from '84, '85, '86, I left there, I got promoted there again, got posted to Lincolnshire, Coningsby, which after Northern Ireland was deadly dull. God! [laughs], it was another training station and a year after that I applied for recruiting duties and went to a recruiting office in St Helen's on Merseyside.

BH: Right, so your job then was basically to recruit people in?

GP: Yeah, and I spent three and a half years at it, got posted, three and a half yea-, at that stage I was in until age forty-seven [pauses], the Iraq, the **[02:20:00]** first Iraq war came up and I applied for what they call premature voluntary release, which is in effect eighteen months' notice, you work eighteen months' notice and you're out before your actual contract is up, and at the same time I applied to go to Iraq–

BH: You applied to go to Iraq?

GP: Or Kuwait, yeah, I did.

BH: Right, yeah.

GP: It was operational again, that's what I wanted to do, Kuwait or Turkey, one of the two, and the air force in their wisdom sent me to Belize for six months [laughs], and when I came back from Belize that was me finished with the air force, but one thing I haven't told you– [interrupted by a ringing phone]

BH: Sorry, I'll turn that off.

GP: It's alright, no, answer if you want to.

BH: It'll be my mum, yeah [ringing stops]. Sorry, what were you saying?

GP: While I was in, while I was in the recruiting office, I was, on one Wednesday afternoon was sat in the office, just the two of us sat in the office, and the telephone went and the other guy answered it and he said it's Mrs Winterburn for you and I thought oh fucking hell, shit, tell her I'm not in, and he tried to tell her, but she wouldn't have any of it, she'd heard me or something, and what it was, this woman that I'd had an affair with that had ended the marriage at Coltishall, she meantime had left the WRAF and she was managing a pub in Peterborough and [pauses] I took the phone, well, I took the phone call and to cut a long story short we ended up together for two and a half years, we had a little girl and left the air force, around a year later, after leaving the air force with a fistful of money because of my twenty-three years' service, a year after, I suddenly found myself on the kerb with a few suitcases and some boxes, wondering what the fuck happened there, which was [laughs], which was basically the whole reason for the phone call, being what, two, three years previously. It hadn't started out like that, but the process had gone on to that point, so [pauses], so I went to the Channel Islands and I thought it'd be easy getting a job on the Channel Islands, but it's not if you're an outsider, the only job you can get is, oh I'd left the service, it was at the time of John Major's recession, I started doing voluntary work, I worked as a caseworker for the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association. Now that is the best job I have ever had in my life, it was unpaid, but it was the best job I've ever had in my life. It was seeing what help people needed and getting them that help, brilliant it was, absolutely loved it, started going to a gym, keeping myself fit, that's what I done in Belize, I lost a lot of weight in Belize, been to the gym every five days on, one day off, five days on, one day off [pauses], came back from Belize, no job, voluntary work. I recorded books for the blind as well with the RNA, the RNAB had studios in Peterborough, so went up there once a week and recorded books for the blind, went to the gym, carried on going to gym and then, as I say, a year later there was me on the kerbside.

BH: My goodness, yeah, so what was the plan then, what was the plan then?

GP: Well, I ended up in the Channel Islands and tried to sort out what had just happened and I, after about a week, maybe two weeks, I wrote to my ex-partner, which she was at this time, saying I wanted to carry on maintaining the baby, who was three years old by this time, and she wrote back and said no, I don't want anything off you, so I wrote to her again, a different letter, saying that she deserved to be maintained properly, blah, blah, blah, and the letter was sent back unopened with an insult scrawled on the outside. But I then wrote to, the Child Support Agency had just started the previous month, which at the time seemed like, seemed like a good idea to me, so I wrote to them and they wrote back and said for the purposes of the Child Support Agency, the Channel Islands are not part of the United Kingdom.

BH: Ah right, yeah, of course.

GP: So I thought phew, can't give money away [laughs], so I came back, I came back here to the mainland again and I got a, started living in London, doing security work and I, I came up to Peterborough shortly after I came back, tried to see our little girl again, her mother wouldn't let me see her, so the next thing I did was consult my solicitor, and having done that I got in contact with the Child Support Agency, told them I was back, this has got nothing to do with Northern Ireland–

BH: That's okay, tell me what you want to tell me, you know, I'm going to lead it back there in a minute.

GP: Alright [laughs], got in contact with the Child Support Agency, told them I was back in the mainland, explained the situation to them, they said well, since you're starting court proceedings we'll leave it on the shelf for now. So started court proceedings, didn't have a problem getting a parental responsibility order, that was straight away, contact order was a little more difficult, but eventually got one, which meant absolutely sod all because she wouldn't comply with it and the courts wouldn't do anything because of that, anyway, long story short, seven years later I gave up and little girl and I haven't seen each other for, what, thirty years now.

BH: Right, that work that you were doing at that time as a, casework with veterans' families and things like that, is that right, yeah?

GP: Yeah.

BH: You said that was a really, was a really good job.

GP: Brilliant job, yeah.

BH: Yeah, how do you think veterans of the armed forces, the ones who had served in Northern Ireland, have they been handled fairly by the state effectively?

GP: Yeah, no veterans have, whether they served in Northern Ireland or not. It's only an estimate, but it's estimated that twenty-five per cent of homeless people are ex-service men and women, now that shouldn't be for a start. Same goes for, you hear a lot of good

news stories about rehabilitation in hospitals and limbless homes for ex-servicemen, but what you don't hear about is the ones who don't get that.

BH: Sure, yeah, you went, you were deployed in Northern Ireland for three years and you said actually you were surprised to find the pay was actually a bit better than you thought.

GP: Yeah, it was an allowance, an extra allowance for Northern Ireland service, yeah.

BH: An extra allowance. Why did you not sign on for a few more years after the three?

GP: Yeah, as I say, I got promoted while I was there, or on leaving there, but I knew about it before I left. I just wasn't quick enough in thinking about applying to stay on as an ex-rank, as a senior rank. By the time I did get around to thinking about it somebody else had got the post.

BH: Right, okay.

GP: So there was no post for me. **[02:30:00]**

BH: Yeah, would you have liked to have signed on again for Northern Ireland?

GP: Yeah, I would, yeah.

BH: You would have?

GP: Yeah.

BH: So these, all these other events that were happening in your life after this, were you still taking an interest in what was happening in Northern Ireland at that time?

GP: Yeah, to, let's see, that started in 1993, I was keeping an eye on what was going on, matter of fact I was driving up to the court in Peterborough for one of the hearings, from London to Peterborough on the A1, on the day that John Smith died and I distinctly remember listening to that all day on Radio 5 Live, which was the, one of the first programmes that Radio 5 Live broadcast, they'd only just started, yeah, so from then on through Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, 1997, by that time I'd moved to a little village just outside Huntingdon and I'll always remember, I will never forget, walking around Huntingdon on the second of May 1997 with a huge grin on my face, I grinned so much, I grinned for a week and my face hurt, that was John Major's constituency [pauses], yeah [laughs], and then the following year was the Good Friday Agreement and I was glued to that. I can remember sitting in a pub with somebody and the news came on that, it was 1996, a ceasefire had been called, the IRA had called a ceasefire and then in 1996 they set a bomb off in Manchester, and prior to that they set one off in Bishopsgate in London, which I'd, I was working close to, as a security guard.

BH: What was the reaction to that at the time, when you were there?

GP: Well, it didn't go off while I was there, it was after I'd left there and moved to Huntingdon, but then, yeah, that's right, I did, bomb went off in Manchester, first of all Bishopsgate during, which ended the ceasefire, and I can remember feeling angry that they'd started again, they'd come so close to that and all of a sudden we're just back to square one again, that was the end of the ceasefire, and then it started again, the talks went on and eventually I can remember Mo Mowlam going into the Maze to talk to the prisoners in the Maze, and I thought bloody hell, that's a flipping risky thing to do, but she did it and it worked, and the person who told her to do that was Jeremy Corbyn.

BH: Do you think other people in Britain cared about the peace process? Like, it sounds like you actually were quite, you know, invested in like, you were angry when the IRA set those bombs off and things cos it set the process back and so on.

GP: I remember when it came on the news I said, I said out loud, bastards and I really meant it, bastards, it was flipping anger, it was anger that they'd started all over again, they hadn't carried on talking, they'd set off a bomb instead.

BH: Yeah, I was in a pub recently in Liverpool actually and I just overheard a conversation, and they were talking about actually Boris Johnson and about, you know, the recent, you know, Brexit negotiations and so on, and they were expressing the view, this one guy expressing the view that, well, thank God we're going to get rid of Northern Ireland now–

GP: Is that right?

BH: There's, they've been nothing more than like, a drain on the public purse for forty years, all the money that the UK–

GP: Some truth in that.

BH: Well, this is what I was going to ask, was that a common view do you think at the time, that Northern Ireland, we really do, we could do with getting rid of this place?

GP: I think the majority of people in England would, wouldn't be saddened to see Northern Ireland going, would be a rough old process, mind you. I think there'd still be trouble over a united Ireland, but the same thing could be said for Scotland as well, people in England would be quite happy to see Scotland going.

BH: Yeah, how would that make you feel if you heard that kind of attitude, being from Northern Ireland on the one hand, but at the same time having been actually a member of the armed forces that had been deployed there, what would your view be on it?

GP: Well, it's what, been eight hundred years now, hasn't it. Taking their time about it, aren't they, wanting to get rid of it.

BH: Yeah, would it bother, would it upset you?

GP: On the surface no, but I could see there being trouble starting again, this time, this time not instigated by the, by Sinn Féin or the IRA or whatever, but by the Red Hand gang and people like that.

BH: Yeah, bombs potentially in Dublin or somewhere like that.

GP: Potentially, yeah, yeah, they would have, if it was ever going to come about they would have to do it very, very sensitively and they would have to do it over an extended period of time I would think. The whole island could, if it was going to become unified, the whole island would have to sit down and have a radical rethink, and the way I see it is, they've got a, they've got a format there for a federalised Ireland in the four provinces, give the four provinces some form of government themselves, regional government, which may calm down the Orange Order and the Protestants and what have you in Belfast, make Belfast the capital of Ulster, and they have a certain amount of autonomy, and the same with Connaught, the same with Leinster, the same with Munster, they've all got scope there for regional government, with a central government still in Dublin.

BH: Would you ever consider moving back to Northern Ireland?

GP: Nah, not now. If I was going to move now I'd love to move to Scotland, but in fact, I'd love to move back to where my father came from, there's very few people around there [laughs], leave me alone [laughs].

BH: Would you think of doing that or is that–?

GP: If I could afford it I would, yeah. Certainly think about moving, nothing to do with Ireland, a united Ireland or anything like that, but just out of bigoted racist England. I think it's getting worse rather than better.

BH: Final few questions then. What does Irishness mean to you now after all these years? What do your origins in that place mean to you now?

GP: Well, as I said before, I'm Irish, there's nothing that can change that, I'll always be Irish, I'll always support Coleraine football club, I'll always support Ireland rugby union team.

BH: [pauses] Do you think the, the nature of Northern Irish society or the Troubles more generally has had an impact on your life?

GP: [pauses] Yeah, I suppose it has, it's hard not to have [pauses]. My parents moved away from there, there's no reason for me to go back. Took a chance of going back when I was in the air force. **[02:40:00]** Only reason to go back now is for a holiday, whether I go to Northern Ireland or western or southern or eastern Ireland remains to be seen, how I get on there with the people in Kerry or the people in Wicklow, who knows [laughs].

BH: So I think I've asked most of my questions. Is there anything that I haven't asked which is important, that I've missed out, anything that you think is important that I missed?

GP: [pauses] There is one thing, four children, out of the four children two of them have been on holiday to the Aran Islands with the school, when in Bolton, but as for the, as for the, knowing where I come from in Northern Ireland they know nothing about that.

BH: Well, yeah, I should've asked you about that. Did you ever feel it was important that you transmit some of that background to your children?

GP: I think important is a bit too strong a word, but it would've been nice that they knew where I came from, had a sense of where I came from.

BH: Do they have any sort of impression of Northern Ireland at all? Do they, would they call themselves Irish, for example, or second-generation Irish or would they, I know some people do do that.

GP: [laughs] No, the first one is English, the second one and the third one were born in Germany, so they're conflicted about whether they're German or English or British or what the hell they are [laughs]. The fourth one, she was born in Preston.

BH: Yeah, which is quite close actually, the north west, it's–

GP: That's right, I still like Preston, I always did like Preston, but obviously she was a baby the last time she saw it. Nah, I would say it's not important, but it just would've been nice–

BH: Would've been nice, yeah.

GP: If they, you know.

BH: Were, did any of them ever go on trips to Northern Ireland when they were–?

GP: Not Northern Ireland, no, it was just the Aran Islands and the west coast, and they enjoyed it, came back with suntans.

BH: Yeah, I remember going when I was young and the boat being really terrible like, choppy water and being just nauseous [laughs] the whole way back on it, I remember that [laughs], and my mum, you know, telling me to keep breathing like, you know, so I wouldn't be sick, that's what I remember [laughs].

GP: That happened the last time we came back from Germany. We'd always flown back previous to that, but I drove back and we came back on the ferry from Zeebrugge to Felixstowe and three, three young children, had never been on a boat before [laughs]. First of all the mother was sick and then the eldest, the eldest girl and the boy, they went with the mother and they were sick, and I was left with the youngest one who [pauses], I kept her quiet by walking her up and down, and I walked her up and down and up and down and up and down and up and down and she was alright. But eventually I made a, I sat down with her on my knee and I made the mistake of sitting down next to a window, and I saw her look out the window and she looked at me and she went uuugh [laughs] all over me [laughs], yeah, was seasick, yeah, not a happy memory.

BH: So final question. Do you think over the course of your life, in particular over the last so many years, your sense of Irishness or your sense of where you come from has become more important to you or less important?

GP: [pauses] I think it's about the same actually.

BH: About the same, yeah.

GP: Yeah, if anyone says where are you from then, I've never had any hesitation saying Northern Ireland.

BH: Yeah, and that was constant throughout your life, it didn't kind of change at different times?

GP: No, no. Even that guy in the NAAFI, just back from Northern Ireland on duty, he turned to me and said you're Irish, are you, I can remember I said yeah, Northern Irish and that was it. I'm not going to deny it. It's where I was born, it's where, developed me and that's it.

BH: And what do you think today whenever you sort of observe what's going with Brexit and, you know, the content of this deal apparently, which is–?

GP: It's a hell of a confusion, isn't it?

BH: Yeah.

GP: Northern Ireland voted to remain, and we all know that Scotland voted to remain, and Wales and England voted to leave, but as the, as the process went on over the three years, is it four years now, I started reading these stories about the president of the Ulster Farmers' Union contemplating a united Ireland to get around Brexit, and to me that was, that was amazing, to even contemplate, the Ulster, the president of the Ulster Farmers' Union to even contemplate doing a thing like that was absolutely astounding, and he wasn't the only one, there was a lot of the people around the border regions were thinking the same thing and who knows, that may be something that does actually be the catalyst.

BH: Could be, yeah, I mean, the content of the proposed arrangement itself clearly does detach Northern Ireland economically from the rest of the UK. Interesting to see how that pans out, what kind of effect it'll have, if it does happen, I don't know what's going to happen in the next year.

GP: Do you read the *Irish Times* at all?

BH: Yeah, yeah, I read it.

GP: Fintan O'Toole?

BH: Yeah, yeah, I do.

GP: He, brilliant he is. He got Brexit absolutely spot on the whole way through, for three years he was telling everybody what was happening and that's exactly what was happening.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

GP: What was the book, *Heroic Failure*?

BH: Sorry, the book?

GP: His book.

BH: Oh the book that he brought out.

GP: *Heroic Failure.*

BH: Yeah, yeah, *Heroic Failure*. There's a guy who's been saying a very similar thing about British culture for a long time called Paul Gilroy. He sometimes writes in the *Guardian*, but he's a sociologist as well and he's been talk-, saying this kind of thing from the eighties, since the 1980s. Listen, I think I've asked everything and unless you've anything else that you want to add–

GP: Been a, been a bit of a ramble, hasn't it, but–

BH: No, that's fantastic.

GP: But we got somewhere.

BH: I just want to say again thanks very much for taking part and for making the way up here today, and for giving so much of your time as well.

GP: No problem.

BH: I've taken, we met at eleven, quarter to ten actually, and now we're at ten past two, so that's pretty good going I think.

GP: Well, if you want more punishment give me a shout [laughs].

BH: [laughs] I was just going to say, I'll stop this.

INTERVIEW ENDS