

M15-SG3 MICHAEL CASSIDY INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Michael Cassidy [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interview summarisers: Dr Jack Crangle and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

M15-SG3: Michael Cassidy	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:29:33	Duration: 01:29:33	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in Rochdale in 1986, but raised predominantly in Runcorn, Cheshire. Father was from Rochdale and mother from Lurgan in Co. Armagh. Parents met in Liverpool during early 1980s while both working for the NHS. Has two younger brothers. Family moved around frequently during early childhood (including briefly emigrating to Australia) before settling in Runcorn when Michael was seven. Describes Runcorn as ‘a bit grim’, featuring lots of social housing built for former residents of Liverpool slums. Moved to a school in a more affluent, middle-class area for sixth form, where academic achievement was much higher.			
10:00–19:59	Parents were both practising Catholics and sent Michael to St Chad’s, a Catholic secondary school in Runcorn, after which he undertook a degree in French and law at the University of Manchester, during which he spent a year in Dijon, France. Became disillusioned with law during his studies and moved to Portugal, working as a teaching assistant and tour guide in Porto. Moved to London in 2011 and has lived there ever since. Recalls his mother talking a lot about the Troubles when he was growing up and how she retained ‘a certain bitterness’ about ‘some quite traumatic episodes in her young childhood’, most notably her family being driven from their home by mob violence when she was about ten years old.			
20:00–29:59	Discusses his mother’s memories of Catholics in Lurgan experiencing loyalist harassment when Troubles began and her training as a nurse in Belfast, where she witnessed casualties of the conflict. Recalls how ‘bombings every week, people being murdered, assassinated, executed and the pervasive violence’ eventually led her to move to Liverpool. Mentions her early views of the English as a less hospitable people than the Irish. Believes that she experienced prejudice in England during the Troubles. Underlines her enduring bitterness that the RUC and British Army ‘didn’t lift a finger’ when her family were forced out of their home. Recalls his father’s lower middle-class family background in Rochdale.			
30:00–39:59	States that he has no memories of his mother being part of Irish emigrant networks in the Cheshire area. Notes that his family visited NI at least once a year when he was growing up, usually driving to Stranraer to catch the ferry. Recalls being struck by the murals and painted kerbstones in his grandmother’s nationalist housing estate and being warned by his mother not to discuss the Troubles in public while in NI. Mentions visits to his uncles and cousins in Larne. Reveals his mother’s sister also lived in Runcorn, where she worked as a teacher.			
40:00–49:59	Recalls his mother following the news from NI and her emotional responses to events during the peace process, ranging from tears at the collapse of IRA ceasefires to elation when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. Describes her changing views on her national identity and her antipathy towards paramilitarism and the prospect of Irish reunification. States that his NI heritage ‘definitely had a big impact’ on his identity formation, particularly his mother’s ‘quite shocking and traumatic’ stories of growing up in ‘a civil war’. Recalls being teased in school for having an Irish mother and notes that his girlfriend jokingly refers to him as a			

	'plastic Paddy'. States that he read and thought a lot about the Troubles when he was growing up.
50:00–59:59	Recalls his mother's frequent criticism of the 'structural prejudice' against Catholics in NI, alongside her belief that republican violence made matters worse. Studied the Troubles at GCSE level and remembers drawing on the 'nuance' his mother taught him to correct the teacher when they got details wrong. Recalls developing a view of the IRA's armed struggle as legitimate and the heated rows with his mother that ensued. Now dismisses his prior views as 'youthful zeal and idiocy'. Expresses his shock and dismay at English ignorance of NI history and society during Brexit debates. Voices his critical perspective on Britain's imperial history and his strong hostility towards the Conservative Party.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Reveals that his visits to NI are now infrequent and his contact with his extended family there intermittent. Has not engaged with any London Irish cultural institutions, believing them to cater for a 'different era' of Irish migrants. Asserts that younger Irish migrants are now 'more accepted by mainstream society' in GB. Relates 'far more' to people from NI than those from the ROI, crediting the former with an ability to 'laugh at themselves'. Describes his national identity as 'English, but of Irish heritage' and reveals that he has held an Irish passport for over a decade. States that, despite not being directly affected by the Troubles, they have 'definitely shaped' his worldview and understanding of British history.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Reflects on how his own opinions regarding the history of the Troubles differ from those of his mother. While he condemns paramilitary violence, he believes that the pre-1969 status quo was ultimately 'intolerable', but is keen to stress his outsider perspective and emotional detachment. Declares himself broadly in favour of a united Ireland, but is sceptical about whether the ROI would be willing to absorb NI. Remains reluctant to define himself as unequivocally Irish, stating: 'although I claim an Irish lineage and heritage, I'm not really Irish, I haven't done enough to investigate my background and I haven't spent enough time in Ireland, and that's something I regret actually'.
01:20:00–01:29:33	Explains that while he regards himself as 'plastic Paddy' to some degree, if the term was pejoratively applied to him 'I'd just laugh about it because I'd know it's true'. States that he has never encountered hostility in NI on account of his English accent, but is mindful that many Irish people tire of English people who claim Irish ancestry. Shares his mother's distaste for certain stereotypes and tropes associated with Irish culture, especially the commercialisation of St Patrick's Day and its transformation into a 'booze festival'.