INTERVIEW M19: JOHN COTTON

Interviewer: Dr Barry Hazley
Interviewee: John Cotton [pseudonym]
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Transcriber: Naomi Wells

Textual Note: Annotations and observations appear in square brackets (e.g. [pauses], [laughs]). Partial, interrupted or unfinished utterances are denoted by a dash. False starts, filler words and non-lexical utterances (e.g. 'um', 'hmm') are not generally transcribed. Time codes appear at ten-minute intervals in square brackets in bold type.

BH: Okay, that's us off. Okay, first of all before we begin John, I just want to say thanks very much for agreeing to do the interview and taking the time today to take part.

JC: Thank you.

BH: I know like anybody else who works at the university you're probably very busy and it's hard to find time to do things that aren't directly related to your immediate teaching load and research load.

JC: Yeah.

BH: So thanks for agreeing to do it. So I'll begin by talking a bit about your memories of growing up in Ireland. So first question, when and where were you born?

JC: I was born on third of September 1954 at Carrickfergus Hospital. My parents lived on what was called the Sunnylands estate, which was I think built primarily for Courtaulds workers at the time, and Carrickfergus as you know is an old town with a wonderful castle.

BH: Yes, and what did your parents do?

HM: My mother was at home during most of my school, although she did some time as a school dinner lady at one stage and then she did work in shops later on. My father was a process worker at the Courtaulds factory and he, well, he used to travel there by bike at the time, and we lived in a mid-terraced house, three-bedroomed house, my sister and my parents and I and it was a very happy times that we had. My father was very keen on working with wood, so we had a coal shed which was actually turned into a carpenter's shed with a big revolving saw which was open, did have a thing that you would get sued for having on your property nowadays probably, cos he used to make things, he was a real, really good with his hands, but he was very much involved in the union and so he didn't like to work extra time. I can remember playing football with him and Billy Irvine who, probably before your time, was the Division One's top goalscorer at Burnley, in fact I think they won the league that year or something and I, go on, sorry.

BH: And was he in your age bracket at school?

JC: No, no, no, no, no, he was much older, I was at primary school when he, when that happened.

BH: Right.

JC: So my father brought me along to play with him that day and so they stuck me in the wing, and he scored a goal from the halfway line with his head, those type of things sort of stick in your memory, and my father also took me to see my first proper international, we went to see England play Ireland just after England had won the World Cup and so they went around with the Jules Remit trophy that day, and so that was a quite an experience. Growing up in Carrick was, I really enjoyed it, cos we used to walk everywhere and you could walk down to the sea and my parents quite liked to walk, and my father and I would go up if it was very windy and wet, and the rain and the wind was splashing the waves up at the harbour and to see them come shooting up over the walls was great fun.

BH: Yeah, did you have any siblings?

JC: A sister, she's eleven months younger than I am and, cos she and I could be competitive at times, given the nearness in age, but we were in different years at school, which helped.

BH: So your parents weren't in professional jobs then, were they? They were factory workers.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

BH: And what was the street you lived on like?

JC: The street I lived on was Kirkland Square. As I say, it was terraces and we were in a mid-terrace that had a like, a ginnel in the middle of it which you could run along, hit the door, the door was in the shape, of the two houses were in a V shape, you hit it in the right place you could climb up and get over the fence even if it was locked, one of those skills you learned, and I suppose the other bits, in those days there was fields beside us, at the side of the house, now it's all houses at the side, with a river where we used to go and play in and get wet and go across, and at this time of year cut up trees to create bonfires and catch fish in jam jars.

BH: Is that right? It sounds quite idyllic a childhood.

JC: Looking back, it was a very, I think a very safe, a very warm and a very caring sort of childhood, but my mother was always around. The one thing she couldn't do was cook and she went to cooking lessons after I left home, but it didn't really make much difference. Her idea of baking was something when you cut it and it went to either side of the plate at a great speed of knots.

BH: Oh right [laughs].

JC: So we had lots of eggs as children and I also remember that in terms of, financially they weren't that wealthy, at that stage anyway, and I can remember going to school with a top of a cornflakes box in my shoe because there was a hole in the bottom of it.

BH: Right, what about grandparents and your mother and father's family? Did they live nearby or were they in different parts?

JC: Well, I thought they lived at the end of the earth cos they lived in Ballymoney and it was like going to another world, but they, both sets of grandparents lived in Ballymoney. My mother's grandparents we used to go and stay with quite a lot, but not my father's as often, cos his father had died and his mother lived in a two-bedroomed flat, which sometimes, I mean, I would go and stay at. But my granny she also took in lodgers and she had these big, I suppose I didn't realise at the time, was a bit like an Aga I suppose, this thing in the middle of the lounge, which you just bunged wood onto and coal into and you cooked on and kept the house warm all in one, and she always had a crate of little bottles of lemonade for when the grandchildren came and a crate of Guinness for the parents.

BH: Right, what were your grandparents' occupations?

JC: My grandfather drove a bakery van and I went out with him a few times and then at lunchtime he would let me choose which cake I wanted when he was making his deliveries. My granny didn't work, I don't think, I'm not sure she ever worked, and in fact, my father's mother she used to live on a farm and I don't know if she ever worked after that, I never knew her as a worker.

BH: You mentioned there your father was involved in unions. Was he left leaning in politics then?

JC: Yes, he was. He was a member of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, probably one of the four members or something they had that particular time, and that, he was convenor of the union and brought Courtaulds out on their first strike ever and following that strike is when things began to change in terms, cos they, the manager of the company offered him an opportunity to do a degree in personnel management and become a personnel manager, and although he did fill in his form for doing that, he ended up getting a job in England for Courtaulds which he'd, almost like an apprenticeship, where he went across there for six months, back and forward. But I also remember the strike, I can remember going down with him to the dole for him to sign on and I can also remember some of the men apologising to him about some of the abuse that my mother had taken because of them being on strike, from the other women, and of course not having any money then because they were on strike. I mean, there were also good times, in terms of primary school we had a really good football team, so when I was in the year before the final year in primary school we won the East Antrim cup and the league, and then the year when I was in my final year we won both of those and the five-a-side competition as well and school gave us medals and had a, its own little reception for us, we had the mayor up to give us the medals. But it was a funny school Carrickfergus, sorry, Sunnylands primary school, because we'd probably more

children who were in the football team than went to the grammar school. But on the weekends we always went to Sunday school, Marion and I, on a Sunday morning and then to the Presbyterian church in the afternoon, sorry, in the morning, and then in the afternoon we went to, the Baptists had a small Sunday school up on the estate too that we used to go to, and then my father was, depending what shift my father was on I might have to go to church again in the evening with him.

BH: Right, so at that time church going was quite an important part of your childhood.

JC: Yeah, and the sense that it also, I was a member of the Life Boys and then the BB, so that, the BB was probably one of the few places that had like, a youth club where you'd go **[00:10:00]** and play, had a good football team and then we'd also play athletics in the summer, cross-country and the table tennis competitions we used to be in, so there are a range of things you could do, and of course going away to camp was quite fun, and the Girls' Brigade would come too, so my sister would be there as well.

BH: Was Carrickfergus a predominantly Protestant town when you were growing up?

JC: Yes, I think it was, although we had a few Catholic families on the road, the majority of people that we saw and knew were Protestant, and the ones that I knew who were Catholic at the grammar school they were, tended to be people from England, not from Ireland.

BH: Right, and was there evidence of tension between Catholics and Protestants?

JC: Not in the early days. I mean, there's obviously things on the TV before the Troubles sort of really hit off, about concerns, and in fact, I can remember my father now talking, him saying to me something about you shouldn't believe everything you see on the news, I'm thinking, at that stage I'd have thought the BBC news was the arbiter of everything, an objective reflection of what was going on within society, so that, in the early days it wasn't, cos the, our Catholic families, we used to get on with them, we would play football against them, race against them and between the schools, etcetera, so there wasn't that type of tension around till, I don't know, it must've been at the start of the, '69, '70, when it became more apparent. I can remember going to see the Orangemen once and thinking I'm not sure I like this, a bit jingoistic for me, and that my father wouldn't let my mother join the Orange lodge.

BH: So your own family then, your father wasn't in the Order?

JC: No, no, no.

BH: And what were his reasons? Because obviously a town like Carrickfergus I guess was, probably quite a lot of people would have been in the Orange Order?

JC: I think they probably would and particularly as he was, he had talked about either moving a job to working in the union full-time, he'd been offered, which he'd turned down, but there was also talk of him becoming, at the next election standing as a Labour member, although they stopped elections just before then, but I think he felt that, not that it was too

jingoistic, it was too, I don't know, I think he probably felt that they were too extremist in perhaps the things that they were saying and didn't reflect upon the real issues in Northern Ireland around the poverty and about access to jobs, etcetera.

BH: Yeah, I'm thinking as well, you know, being a member of the Northern Irish Labour Party, in that era their vote was growing quite a bit, they were beginning to emerge as a serious threat to the Unionist Party. I'm wondering did that generate tension in any way?

JC: I don't think so, I don't think he thought he'd ever win in Carrick, I think that it was always going to be the unionists who won, I think he, but he felt that the, he needed to be able to make a stand and to try and show his own values, cos in a sense the work he was doing in the union at the time, each year meant he had the conferences in England where he met a number of the leading members of the union who were obviously very much pro-Labour.

BH: Where do you think his own values came from, his interest in politics? Cos it's not necessarily the norm in Northern Ireland.

JC: No, it isn't [laughs], it's not the norm at all. It's a strange one that, because it's interesting that when I was an undergraduate and I came home with some of my sociology books, I wouldn't be able to get away from the house with them, he'd have them himself. As a child I always remember, and I said to other people, that on our bookshelf, cos he liked to read, there was a copy of the Qur'an, there was a copy of Marx, there's a copy of the Little Red Book, copy of the Bible and a copy of, was it, Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, so he liked to read and when I was doing my O-levels he was doing, he was doing some O-levels too, cos he had left school early to work on the farm and then had done his national service and then he and mother met in Ballymoney and then they moved to Carrick with the job at Courtaulds.

BH: And would his father or mother have been interested in politics?

JC: No, I think he was probably the left member of the family. The other ones that have, I know my uncles and aunts, would have been much more unionist oriented.

BH: Yeah, when he did the national service did he have to go over to England for that?

JC: He went to Palestine [laughs].

BH: Oh right.

JC: And that left a view on him in terms of what he felt was, in terms of the Israelis and their occupations.

BH: So I take it that he came away from his national service with a negative view of the British Army?

JC: Not necessarily the British Army, cos I don't, I think he met some people there that he had a really good time with and he did some boxing, played football and got to see places he wouldn't have seen otherwise, but I think more about the Israelis and how they'd taken over the lands that was the Palestinians and about that being put into a situation that they shouldn't have been in in the first place.

BH: Mmm, an obvious question to ask off that is did he perceive any analogies between that situation and the situation in Northern Ireland?

JC: I don't thi-, never an analogy that we talked about, in the sense that I could see why you could argue that there is that type of analogy, but I don't think maybe it being brought up, in the way that he was brought up it might have been more difficult to see.

BH: Mmm, what about your own schooling then? I mean, you mentioned that you went to a local grammar school.

JC: Yeah.

BH: And I take it from that you did well at school.

JC: Yeah, I mean, I enjoyed school and, so that I enjoyed, the year that I went up my friends also went up to grammar school, which was really nice, so there was a group of us were together, were in the same form and that, we learned to play rugby and learned to race and now I've been running now five times a week for the last fifty years.

BH: Is that right? Wow.

JC: So I used to race. I got into trouble in grammar school when I gave up playing rugby, cos I thought I couldn't run in the afternoon and play rugby in the morning, and as it was the medallion year, the teacher, coming up, the teacher wasn't very happy, but they were good times at school. We had a pretty patriarchal type of headteacher who when I went into school one day wearing my brown duffle coat asked me what was the school colours, and I said blue, and he said yes, what colour's that, so I had to admit it was brown and not to wear it anymore, and he also made comments every now and then about the length of my hair, to remind me it was time to get it cut again. But they were very happy times, they were a good set of people and, I mean, in those days I never intended doing what I do now, I had thought it might be nice to be a pilot. I'd have been richer if I had have done that, wouldn't I.

BH: You mentioned earlier that, you know, really when you were growing up, you know, tensions between Catholics and Protestants weren't really very evident, but later on, towards the end of the sixties, it was perhaps noticeable.

JC: It was, with the civil rights movement and things like that were, yeah.

BH: Yeah, well, I was just wondering what your memories of that kind of manifestation of tensions are?

JC: It was interesting cos it was a bit about, you know, why are these people marching, why are they saying it's unequal, without, I think at the time most people didn't believe it was, they thought this was the, the natural order, so what are you complaining about, so I'd say that one of the bits that, my father wasn't necessarily always keen on the national order and wouldn't have, isn't, wasn't a royalist by any stretch of the imagination, would have been quite happy for it to be a president rather than the Queen, and he believed that every millionaire was basically a thief.

BH: So your parents, or specifically your father, what was his response to the civil rights movement?

JC: I think it was initially some shock about what was going on, but also quite positive, or sort of app-, not positive, that's the wrong word, was probably supportive of **[00:20:00]** some of the things they were standing up for, cos obviously it would chime with his union background, and I can remember my mother once saying to me that she was worried my father was a communist, I'm not sure she understood what a communist was, although she went to grammar school and looking at all her reports there seemed to be a theme going through them about that some day she'll have to stop seeing school as a place for play and buckle down and do some work, which she never did.

BH: Yeah, and do you have memories of the civil rights movement? Did you have a view on it?

JC: Yeah, I mean, my father and I talked about that as we did about South Africa, in terms of yes, if there were inequalities and if there were people who were being disadvantaged just because of their religion that was wrong, and that we as a country needed to address that. I think his concern was about how far it might go in terms of the violence.

BH: Was this something that you were observing from like, a safe distance in Carrickfergus or were there more kind of physical manifestations of escalating violence in the area that you lived?

JC: Not so much in the areas that I lived then, but there have been in recent years I've noticed when I've gone over, there's more manifestations in terms of murals, painting of the roadsides and a clearer demarcation lines between different community groups.

BH: Yeah, so when do you come to the end of schooling then?

JC: Right, what happened, as I said, that my father had this job in England, he was coming back every weekend and then it was coming up to the point where he was due to go into university and they offered him a permanent post in Wales, for Courtaulds in Wrexham, and that as I was in the first year of my lower, I was in the lower sixth at the time, coming up to Christmas, they said I could stay with my aunt. I stayed with her I think it was about a week and decided I was that homesick I went to Wales and the, and I suppose that was when I found out more about what it was to be Irish, cos suddenly you were in a different community where you were the odd one out and where even the language wasn't the

same. So, for example, I can remember my mother trying to order some scallions in the greengrocers and them looking at her totally, what are you talking about woman, and she could see them, but they, obviously it wasn't a term they use or, I use the term gutties, at the school I was at, they'd say what's gutties, they called them plimsolls, I thought that was even worse. So it was, I found it a very strange time cos I didn't particularly enjoy Wrexham, although I did meet Catherine, who's my wife now, so I can't, who's a Catholic, a Welsh Catholic, which is, makes an interesting combination, so that that bit of good came out of it, but I did suddenly feel a lot more Irish and that suddenly all the folk songs, etcetera that you'd taken for granted, which you don't hear, suddenly become even more important to you, although I did go back each, well, I have been back every year until this year cos of Covid, I've the, my father arranged for mother to go and spend some time with some of my relatives and get around to see my friends, whilst I was there and also, but I was an undergraduate in England when that happened. As I say, that was the first time I ever realised what it meant to be Irish.

BH: That's really interesting. So what age were you, and what year was that when you went over?

JC: It would have been, the start of '72, hang on, I went there in '73, so I did have my lower sixth there and all my upper sixth, and I went, that'd be September '73 is when I went to college, so '72, '71.

BH: '71, okay, that's quite a big transition, in the sense that these people who you'd gone through school with were like, in lower sixth.

JC: It was, yes, yeah, it was, I really missed my friends then, and Magda was very kind to offer me the accommodation, but it just didn't feel right and, as I say, the friends I met in Wrexham tended to be a very academic lot, they worked really hard, they were all aiming for Oxbridge, whereas in Carrick we got the odd person going to Oxbridge, here was a whole class of them going to Oxbridge.

BH: Yeah, and was it easy to integrate, to make friends with these, this new group of scholarly students?

JC: Yeah, some of them played sports and I always remember that when, one time when I played tennis with someone they said oh you said you couldn't do this very well when you played for the football team, and you said you couldn't do this very well, when you won the cross-country race for the school, so, but I wasn't very good at tennis, so that'll give them something, but yeah, I mean, they were good friends, but it was a different, sort of you couldn't walk down to the harbour in the evening or go, there was less places to go in that way, there was a folk club I suppose, which was quite nice.

BH: I'm guessing as well your accent would've marked you out as quite different.

JC: Oh it did, yes, yes, it did, and I also had my school blazer in the lower sixth and, cos we had to wear blazers to that school, and then in the upper sixth, then went to a sixth form college which didn't require a uniform, so everybody wore jeans, you know, it's great.

BH: And were the people that you met when you went to Wrexham, were they aware of the political situation in Northern Ireland?

JC: Yes, I think that they were aware that there were troubles in Northern Ireland and difficulties cos they saw them on the news and a bit of that, you know, Northern Ireland's a place where people keep getting shot and blown up all the time. Catherine's parents were very concerned about her going over the first time she went.

BH: Right, when did you meet Catherine?

JC: When I was in Wrexham at the start of the upper sixth, no, it would have been the Christmas we were in upper sixth, was at the school dance.

BH: So that's the very first year you were there.

JC: That would have been in, yeah, in upper sixth in the, I was, so, as I say, I was halfway through the lower sixth when I went and the upper sixth when I met Catherine.

BH: Right, and she became your wife?

JC: Yeah.

BH: And you've been together ever since?

JC: We have.

BH: Right, and what did she think about your origins in Northern Ireland?

JC: She met my parents and I think that she was, felt quite comfortable with them, and wanted to come to Northern Ireland just to see what it was like, I think it was a bit, although her parents were a little bit worried about her going, thinking that because of what they'd seen on TV, and interestingly enough a couple of years later they came over too. An incident there which, a funny incident was that her father was driving the car and the car broke down, with us in the car, and just had the idea, well, we shouldn't have six in the car, but obviously you could in those days, and the, it was late at night and a car drove up and passed us a few times and then came and stopped, which was a police car, an unmarked one, saying what are you doing stopped there, we explained and I, neither my father or Catherine's father had AA membership and I had already had one, so that they were able to phone the AA and get them to come out fix the car, but they took Catherine, her mother and my mother off to the police station whilst it got fixed.

BH: Yeah, were her parents just apprehensive about the [indecipherable]?

JC: Yes.

BH: Or was there concern about really I suppose forming a relationship with somebody maybe they perceived as Irish?

JC: Yeah, I don't know, I think there might have been a fear about her being a Catholic and me being a Protestant or how people might receive her, but that's, I don't think there's ever been a problem. I also had an uncle and aunt who were a mixed marriage, mixed religion, and my cousin also married a Catholic girl too, so in some ways it's, it shouldn't have been a problem, but I can understand if what people see on the TV is what they see and make the assumption that's Northern Ireland, it's hard to get away from that because you don't see the beautiful bits, you don't see the coast road.

BH: Yeah, could you say a bit more about that idea **[00:30:00]** of first realising you were Irish when you came to Wales?

JC: Yeah, I think it's because in some ways your immersed in your own culture and you have your own language and that your own things that you see as important on the TV, you'd see about Irish football, and then you go to somewhere where there's no Irish football, there's no, the language that you use is different and the understanding of the language, and of course the Welsh have quite a strong accent of their own and that the, and you've been moved away from the coast, you're in inland all the time now, so you can't see the sea, and that suddenly those things which you'd taken for granted growing up aren't there anymore and those sort of comfortable things which allow you to enjoy, and also for me my sort of like, friendship group that we would, you know, we're were at a good place, enjoying ourselves, and suddenly then you're out of that and having to rebuild all over again.

BH: Yeah, I'm wondering in particular about the fact that the recognition you had of being Irish, whereas some Protestants, in particular from a unionist background, come to England and yes, are perceived as Irish by English people, but in fact feel a need to raise their Britishness. Did you have that issue?

JC: No, I was quite happy to be seen as someone from Northern Ireland. I could happily own my own heritage [laughs].

BH: Yeah, that's interesting there you said Northern Ireland, it's a slight qualification of Irishness, so would you have said Northern?

JC: I'd probably have said Northern Ireland, yeah, because that's where I was brought up and that's where I was living.

BH: How do you think people in Wales, and I suppose later when you went to university, what view did they have about Northern Ireland?

JC: It was, they had a view that there was a lot of sectarianism and a lot of deaths on both sides, a lot of murders, that some, particularly in the student days, there were some who felt all the blame lay just on one side, so that, cos I remember speaking at a union debate in relation to the internment of the, I think they wanted all the Catholic people, IRA people to be released from internment, I said we don't want, it's not a question of releasing IRA or

UDA or whatever, it's that people who have murdered others do deserve to be behind bars and it's not about choosing sides in that way, it's about trying to come to some form of accommodation and some sort of way of people being able to live together.

BH: Yeah, and did you encounter within your union or within in some respects the culture of politics–

JC: Yeah, and I was surprised.

BH: A more blanket view?

JC: Yeah, it was a very, I felt a very simple left politics in many ways, cos I'd have said, I was, would've gone, you know, in agreement with them in terms of the left politics, but I thought in terms of Northern Ireland, just to see Northern Ireland in terms of left and right is pretty unnuanced in terms of what was going on.

BH: Yeah.

JC: Cos you try to explain to people that actually it's the poor communities, if you want, in both sides of the religious divide who are suffering the most with having the most deaths.

BH: I'm guessing as well, even people who have a left analysis of Northern Ireland, many would have thought that ending partition would have resolved that problem.

JC: Yeah, there was a view by some that would be the answer, and if we support Sinn Féin to do that, that that'll solve the problem.

BH: And did you agree with that view?

JC: I thought that it was too simplistic, that just to resolve partition hadn't worked previously and just to think that would work in this type of crisis is hardly likely to be successful, cos it has to be something that the majority of the people would want.

BH: When did you become involved yourself then in left politics in England?

JC: Well, I didn't really get involved in them in that way, cos in a sense this was in the students union debates, where I spoke out a couple of times, cos after I did my degree I then did a social work course, I went into the social work, which in some ways is a way of sort of expressing one's left leanings, if you want, and a way of expressing one's value base about your perception about inequality and of me wanting to be part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. We had sort of high hopes for radical social work in those days, we could change the system rather than expect the person to fit into the system.

BH: After you finished you're A-levels in Wrexham, where did you go to university?

JC: Well, I went to Edge Hill College, which is now Edge Hill University, part of the thing I found is that my colleagues in Wrexham, the syllabuses between the Northern Ireland and

the Welsh board were different, and so I sort of ended up doing some of the things I'd already done and they had done things I'd never done, and that my desire to be a pilot had begun to disappear, cos one of things I'd started in Northern Ireland was the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, at the time I hadn't realised that that was for children from run-down estates, it was interesting that was the grammar schools that took it up, and that, I quite enjoyed doing that, and as part of that when I went to Wales I was on the gold, and I did a placement in a home for children with learning disabilities, it was a holiday home for children with learning disabilities in the countryside, which I went to for a week, I really enjoyed it, so I went back in the summer and worked there, and had a shift to wanting to move into the social work and applied social sciences field.

BH: Yeah, so was the degree that you did at Edge Hill, was that social work or was that something different?

JC: It was applied social studies and education, then I did social work qualification the year afterwards. I was offered a place at York to do the MA, but they said I'd have to do a year's exp-, practise beforehand and UCLAN offered me to go then, and Manchester Met offered me a placement straight away, so I had a word with my tutor and he said grab the one you've got now, you can do an MA later.

BH: So while you were studying at Edge Hill and then going on to do the social work training, this must have been mid-seventies?

JC: Yeah, yeah, it's '77, that's when I went, cos it was a four-year course, so then it was the year to do the social work course. During this time I suppose I should also say that my mother, I think as I intimated, didn't find Wrexham as the best place for her, shall we say, and father got offered an opportunity to move to Dungannon, to the, Moygashel, and the, the, was at the chicken factory as well, Moy Park, so, which Courtaulds owned at the time, so he went back to Ireland and my mother was very happy to go, just as literally a few days after I left to go to college, so that I spent my terms, end of terms back in Ireland again, spent a lot of time going over on the Liverpool boat and lying on the floor just as you get onto it, found a place where you get some decent sleep and work your way around it.

BH: So I take it from that then that your father wasn't particularly happy with Wrexham?

JC: No, no, he got promoted.

BH: He got promoted?

JC: Yeah, they offered him the factory in, be manager of the factory, new factory they were going to open in Derry or Londonderry, depending which way you want to say it, and he, then they offered the one in Dungannon and he thought the one in Dungannon would be better, he thought it was too early for the other one.

BH: Okay, but they didn't, I mean, would they have preferred to move back there or would they have preferred to–?

JC: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I think that my mother particularly felt like, a bit like a fish out of water, and my father less so because obviously he had work and so he was meeting people in other types of ways, but her sisters, or the sister that she's closest to, was in Ireland, and she'd just moved to Carrickfergus out from Belfast, from the Donegall Road, just before we moved. **[00:40:00]**

BH: Well, that kind of connects to the next salient point, to the question I'll raise about when you were doing your degree. It's the mid-seventies–

JC: Yeah.

BH: Troubles got particularly violent at this stage–

JC: They did.

BH: And also your parents have moved to Dungannon in Tyrone.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

BH: Did you continue to follow developments, political developments back in Northern Ireland?

JC: Yes, yeah, I mean, I still do today, I still have a look at the *Belfast Telegraph* and things like that, yeah, and when I came home during the periods, you know, in between the terms, I remember going with my father to go and get broken flagstones so we could terrace the back of the garden, cos he chose his bungalow very deliberately, so it had a south-facing back garden, it had a huge south-facing back garden, which he then turned it into vegetables and flowers, which he really liked, that there were bits of Dungannon where Cath and I were going in the evening, father'd say don't go down there, stay away from that bit cos there's always trouble, and when my father and I went out for a drink that we would go to presumably safe places, so that I think that Dungannon was a more divided community than Carrick was, and that we lived not far from the police station, so you could hear the helicopters every now and then coming and going.

BH: Yeah, so was that an eye-opener then, your previous experience of Northern Ireland being kind of a largely homogeneous community in Carrick?

JC: Yeah, it was and, I mean, and I think that the tensions and the murders, etcetera had become much more a part of life, to a point whereby you begin to think can this ever stop.

BH: Yeah, what about in England then? Obviously the republicans didn't target kind of Liverpool, Manchester area that much, although there were bombs in the Manchester area in the seventies.

JC: There was, there was, yeah, yeah.

BH: Yeah, did you experience any tension from that?

JC: Yeah, I can remember something from the Birmingham one, that there were some tensions about Irish go home, this type of stuff, and I can remember sort of like, someone trying to pick a fight in a pub one night–

BH: With you?

JC: That I wouldn't rise to, yeah, but I just let them get on with it, they picked a fight with someone from Wales in the end. I [indecipherable] my friends from Wales after that, yeah.

BH: What about with people you attended college with or even your colleagues [indecipherable]?

JC: Yeah, never had a problem with any of my colleagues in social work, obviously had a couple of discussions and debates, but nothing that would sort of stick in your memory as being particularly racist or any form of religious in that way.

BH: Yeah.

JC: [indecipherable] a social work course, we had a few discussions then which were quite good too in terms of exploring, cos there were a couple of other people from Northern Ireland on the course.

BH: Oh right.

JC: And there were a couple of people from Northern Ireland who were on my student course, a couple of them actually came from Dungannon, there was one girl who was in the café, worked in the café, that when my mother, always called her the wee girl, she said oh what are you doing now wee girl, shouldn't you be off to college or something, she said no, no, I'm going to the same place I was, so that I was marched in when I came home later on, before going back, to be introduced to her.

BH: Right, and what was it like meeting other people from Northern Ireland in the context of England?

JC: I think it was almost like a little bit of home, it was usually quite nice cos you shared things which weren't evident to our English compatriots and that you obviously had some type of shared background in terms of what was going on.

BH: Were there tensions between Northern Irish students with people in England?

JC: There wasn't where I was, there might well have been in other places, but it didn't feel that there was a lot of tension. There was some sort of talking to, about the Troubles and the bombing and how terrible it was and when's it going to stop, some people saying I'll never go over there, that type of thing.

BH: Yeah, so what were your plans then after you finished college? Obviously social work was something you were keen to become involved in.

JC: Yeah, yeah, so that, Cath and I decided that whoever got a job first the other one would go to live with them, and I got offered a number of jobs and the first I accepted was here in Stockport and so that we came to Stockport cos I wanted to be somewhere that was in striking distance of a university so I could do an MA, so I did my MA as a social worker, my MPhil as a team manager, my MSc in management as an area manager and my PhD as a service manager, and was an assistant director for three years before moving into academia.

BH: So the reason for settling in that area then really had to do with career development?

JC: Yeah, cos I just wanted to do at least an MA and probably a PhD, cos I wanted to do my PhD when I did my MPhil, but I was at Lancaster and the head of the faculty of research degrees there didn't believe anybody who was working full-time could do a PhD, so they just said no, that I'd have to accept the MPhil and let me grade up.

BH: Yeah, and did you return regularly to Northern Ireland during these years?

JC: Yeah, as I say, I've been there every year bar this year, and that Cath and I would go over and by then at least we'd a little bit more money, so we could fly over, and then we had the children, so we'd drive them over, and my parents would come over as well and my father was also doing some work in England for Courtaulds too, some consultancy in England as well as the work in Northern Ireland, so he would come over and stay with us.

BH: I'm wondering as well about the wider Irish community in sort of the Greater Manchester area, in addition to obviously those Northern Irish people that you mentioned who were kind of on your course and so on, cos obviously there's a relatively large Southern Irish population in Manchester. Did you have much interaction with people from that community?

JC: No, only unless they came up through work or some other way, I didn't sort of go out to part of the ceilidhs or anything like that.

BH: Yes, yeah, so that wouldn't be part of your sort of kind of leisure routine, to go to bars or Irish centres?

JC: No, no, it's much more local around here, and also with doing all those degrees it didn't give me much leisure time, cos I worked full-time all the time.

BH: Yeah, what about church? Once you kind of settled in the Manchester area was that still an important part of your life?

JC: Yeah, we, I mean, I still go to the, which is, well, it's a local evangelical, what do they call it, local something partnership with, between the Methodist and United Reform Church, and Catherine goes to the Catholic church, so when Cathy would come to Ireland she would

go to the Catholic church on the Sunday morning and I'd go down to the, either in Dungannon or when my parents later moved, to Castlerock, down to the one in Castlerock.

BH: Right, and you have maintained that attachment to your church?

JC: Yes, yeah.

BH: And how was that, I mean, you know, attending Catholic or Protestant churches, when you returned to Dungannon, how was that looked upon?

JC: My parents never said anything [laughs], but I've got to say I also had an uncle and aunt who were, who lived in Newtownabbey, but they moved to Australia cos they got a number of threats, it was sort of like, what would happen to them if they stayed there, so they ended up moving to Australia, which was sad.

BH: Right, how did you your mother in particular regard that kind of dual religious identity?

JC: I think that she probably cared less about the religious identity than my father would have done.

BH: Oh really? Right.

JC: Cos he still attended church, and attended church much more often than my mother ever did, and he quite enjoyed having the discussions with the ministers, I think he liked to challenge them, and decided he was one for going to evening schools and things cos it, he enjoyed those things, and I know that when he gave up work, for example, he was on the tribunal for benefits and would try and eke things out to try and ensure that people got something out of it, trying to find a way round the rules, and when he was doing his job as **[00:50:00]** the industrial relations manager, he would tell me on occasions when the union would present a case so poorly that he felt he needed to try and feed them some lines, and doing a bit of subversion on the side.

BH: Yeah, what about children then? Presumably whenever you returned back for holidays and so on to Northern Ireland you took them with you.

JC: We did, and that my parents, my father retired and moved to Castlerock, so James might have some memories of being in Carrick and digging in the garden with my father and about going on trips with mum, and Eleanor would have very little memory, cos I think that she was probably born just at the time that they moved to Castlerock, so they were very pleased to go to Castlerock cos it's by the sea, a big beach and that you could walk in your wellies and say can we go in the sea, and you'd say yes, and then there's then the worry if the water'd go over the top of the wellies and then it'd be oh, oh, so can I kick the wellies off now, and on one occasion they both went in swimming, having started off wearing their clothes and walking on the beach in their wellies. Eleanor came out fast when she fell down and went into the water, but James showed that he could swim around a bit longer.

BH: Okay, what did you do about sending them to Sunday school or church then? Did you have a choice?

JC: Yeah, they went to the Catholic church with Catherine, but they went to state schools.

BH: Right, so they got their religious education then in the Catholic church–

JC: Yeah.

BH: But then went to the local comprehensive.

JC: Yeah, and the local primary school.

BH: Yeah, and did they have a sense of I suppose cultural identity drawn from parents, whether on the Welsh side or on the Northern Irish side?

JC: Yes, I mean, it's interesting that their childminder, I remember saying about how, that they really liked the children's accents, and that James and I still, well, had been going to the rugby, the Irish rugby matches, so that we were there, you know, this week it's the French game, and James and I were there with some friends to watch them win in France two years ago, in fact, we've also been to see New Zealand, when they beat New Zealand, so we've been going to games together, plus that James would always cheer on for Northern Ireland against England or Ireland against England, depending whatever sport it was, or anybody against England I imagine, and that Eleanor would see us having a degree of Irishness to her.

BH: Yeah, and did you talk to them about the politics of Northern Ireland?

JC: Only when they asked, when they asked any questions I would talk to them about it, I wouldn't sort of force it onto them.

BH: Were they curious about the events they must have encountered whenever they went there?

JC: Yeah, so, for example, when they were going back at the beginning you had the things like people lying in the road with guns and stuff like that, which was a bit strange for them, it's not something they'd seen beforehand.

BH: Yeah, and did they ask questions about it?

JC: Yeah, obviously why, and so you'd have to try and explain to them it's about trying to keep people safe and that there was a conflict going on between two sides who, who were trying to find ways to win a war. I know the Troubles is a euphemism, and I think the day of the peace agreement was signed I think we were sitting in the car up in Scotland just about to get the ferry across to Larne, I think we probably, I don't know whether it was Cairnryan or Stranraer, we were sitting on one of them, watching it on the TV cos we'd got the early boat, but they're always called their cold holidays and they always talk quite fondly of them and a couple of years ago Cath and I took them and their, their partners, I think Eleanor had

just got married that year and James's partner, who's now his wife, we took them to Northern Ireland, we did a nice big tour around.

BH: Is that the first time you'd been round the whole area?

JC: Well, it was the first time they'd been there for years, the two of them, cos of obviously I'd carried on going and Catherine had carried on going when they had gone to university and things like that.

BH: And did they over the years form their own political views about Northern Ireland? Did they have a perspective on it?

JC: I know that James is, has got a left view of politics, Eleanor's, I'm not so sure. Eleanor's view when she went to Leeds to do her degree was no one told me that the gowns were green, I don't do green, I said it's a bit late to be choosing your university by the colour of the gown.

BH: [laughs] What about your own politics then? Did you become interested in mainstream British politics while you were living in England?

JC: Interested in terms of watching what was going on and obviously voted in every election, and I've always voted for Labour, although no, one time I didn't vote for them here on the grounds that there was no way Labour were going to win, but there was a chance the Conservatives would lose their seat, so I voted Liberal Democrat and they won, so it's probably the best you, I could get around here.

BH: Right [laughs], and what about political events in Northern Ireland? Did you continue to follow that?

JC: Yes, yeah, the other things I did as, not only did I go home each time, for the last five years I've been an external at Ulster and prior to that I think I did six years at Queen's before that, so I've been able to keep in touch, and obviously with colleagues that I've done work with over the years and keeping in contact at conferences, etcetera, there's quite a nice little band of Irish academics.

BH: Right, and do yous all talk about developments in Northern Ireland whenever yous meet up?

JC: Yeah, depends on what it is. I can remember Jim Campbell, who's the professor at UCD, him and I having a discussion with someone from England who was struggling about it and the, how you could tell, so Jim said to me okay John, if I said I'm from Derry, you know, what religion I am, if my name's William what religion am I, and sort of going through some of the, if you want, identifiers and things like school uniforms that give views about who's coming from which community.

BH: When the peace process came about did you watch that and did you think that was a positive development?

JC: Yeah, I thought it was a watershed at the time. As I say, that, we were in the lounge, up in Cairnryan or Stranraer waiting to catch the ferry, early, the first ferry out that morning to go to Ireland, so and they were coming back and forward and saying an announcement is due any minute, so when it came, yeah, I felt really happy, I felt this is a, you know, this is potentially a way forward and that the murdering will stop and hopefully that we'll be able to have a, Northern Ireland can be able to hold its head up high again.

BH: Yeah, since then do you think the peace process has fulfilled its ambitions?

JC: I don't think it's fulfilled its ambitions, I think it is better than it was, but I still think there's a lot of things that still need to be done, in the sense the bit when we had that hiatus recently, when there was no one there willing to take charge and to try and shape things, I thought that was a really poor.

BH: Yeah, what about Brexit then? Did you follow that?

JC: Oh yeah [laughs], you couldn't not, could you, there's so much of it, and again, as I was a remainer rather than a get out person.

BH: Yeah, and I wonder did that reflect on things like your Northern Irish background?

JC: Yeah, I mean, it did cos in a sense the difficulties, particularly now, about talking about hard and soft borders and all those types of issues, and you think the last thing we want is to try and destabilise that, what they got, we need to be able to build on what they got to get a fairer community.

BH: Yeah, in terms of the conflict over here in England, how do you think English people in general saw the Troubles?

JC: I think to begin with it was, there was some interest, what was going on here, cos you don't expect that, and then there was, I think they got a bit about, a disbelieving view about the Irish, that all they're doing is killing **[01:00:00]** each other, and then I think there was a bit of wariness about the whole thing and that, you know, that they just want it to go away cos it was spoiling things on their TV, and that, and also when it had come to England itself and the murders in England and the bombs, etcetera, that that, and the other one down in Brighton as well, that that would have, did upset people and did, had some negative results for Irish people, I'm sure that a lot of people faced a lot more antagonism than I did in those types of situations.

BH: Yeah, that's what I was going to ask you. I mean, you mentioned a few times in the seventies you maybe encountered hostility.

JC: Yeah.

BH: Did you continue to encounter that the rest of the time you lived in England or did that change over time?

JC: It changed over time, as I say, I didn't really, it was interesting that I also had a case one time as a social worker where I had to meet the, from the London Met, with men in a Cortina in a lay-by to discuss one of my clients who they wanted to give evidence, who was an ex-IRA member, that they wanted me to get him to agree to give evidence in court, but he didn't want to, so I told them no. That was quite interesting cos I hadn't expected to be in that situation. I remember just sitting in this lay-by that they told me where to sit and then they turned up in this large Cortina, these two men in suits [pauses], so even though that he was IRA him and I were able to have interesting conversations about Northern Ireland together.

BH: What about now, I mean, in your working life outside of it? Do people, you know, pick up on your accent? Would they want to know about Northern Ireland?

JC: Not, not really. We have some people from Northern who are part of our department now too, which is quite nice, someone who'd moved from Keele after being at, he was at Ulster before Keele, just come, so that it's nice to be able to talk to things, to Robert about some of the shared memories, but in a sense my accent's my accent, I can't change that and, as I said before, I'm quite happy to own it or say to people, you know, I'm the only one in the room without an accent or whatever, but I'm happy to be part of that. It was also interesting too, just thinking there, just before the Troubles really set off I can remember we had a thing in Carrick where groups of four, so three of my friends and I, where you went out in the evening, I think about, it's fifteen minute, so five-minute intervals it must've been, in Carrick, and you were given a map and you had to get around this map between the different points where you were supposed to check in, during which time people would be chasing you in cars around it, and to think about, given what was going to be coming it seems a strange thing to have had going at the time, and there was a prize for the team that could get around without being caught, in the fastest time, I think it was about twelve miles overnight.

BH: Have you and your wife ever thought about moving to Northern Ireland?

JC: Yes, Catherine said that she would move and a couple of years ago there was a post at Queen's, which I got, a number of staff and people there wanted me to apply for, but our daughter had just got married and our son was about to get married and Catherine was worried that if they had children we'd be a bit like my parents, where they wouldn't get to see them as often as she'd want to, and though I did get offered about another job in Australia, in Singapore at a conference, the guardian took a group of us to do karaoke and there was this bloke from Sydney, Western Sydney University I think it was, who's Irish and him and I had been talking in the evening, so he sang Van Morrison and he asked me about my intentions and I said well, I only intended working full-time for about another three years or so, and he said they were having, struggling to get a professor of social work, and I said well, I'd be interested for a few years possibly, and then I came back and got an email to say that him and his dean would like to interview me, could I give them a date, I hadn't told Catherine yet, she wasn't impressed with that one at all. She thought three months is one thing, three years is another.

BH: Yeah, that move, potential move to Belfast, to Queen's, would that simply have been because Queen's would be an interesting place to work or do you still feel kind of a sense of attachment to where you grew up?

JC: I do, I mean, if you were to ask me where home was it would still be Carrick, and that I sense, my mother had dementia and we had to move her out of Ireland, but we took back her ashes at the end to Carrick, so it's, yeah, it's, if I die first Catherine'll have to bury me in Carrick or take my ashes to Carrick.

BH: Right, so–

JC: So yes, so in a sense the thing about Queen's was if it happened about ten years or so beforehand we probably would have gone, but it was because our children and to be near them it's, and now we have a grandchild and so Catherine's really pleased, if she'd known what grandchildren were like she would have had them first and left the children to second.

BH: Yeah [laughs], so it sounds like actually it's being close to family over here in England is an important part of what anchors you here?

JC: Yeah, I think family is important full stop. One thing I'll say about my father and mother, family was very important to them, they would go without things so that Marion and I would have what we wanted. As I say, my father didn't do very much overtime, he wasn't, money wasn't the driver for him in that sense.

BH: Do you feel settled in England?

JC: I think we probably feel settled. We've lived in this house now for thirty-two years and we live in a close and my neighbours all got their houses, we all got these houses brand new and we're still all living in the same houses, and our children have all grown up. We do, we used to have parties every five or ten years, but we've been having them more frequently now since I think we're the youngest ones here, and where we live is quite good in terms of access to the motorway, access to the airport, and we did used to like getting away, that's not happened just recently, and one of my best friends that, who we took to Ireland a couple of years ago, cos he had started travelling again, he hadn't done anything for about thirty-odd years, frightened of travelling, took him to Belfast when I was going over for a board, for a long weekend and he decided he wants to go there every weekend, every time we go to Ireland now, he really likes it. I think you could get him on the travel agents here on, you know, advertising Giant's Causeway and the coast road and other bits and pieces that he likes, oh and yes, he likes the food.

BH: He likes the food?

JC: Yeah, the Red Door, I don't know, do you know the Red Door?

BH: I don't, no.

JC: It's in Port-, Ballintoy, just as you, going down a little road towards the church on the left-hand side, used to be a farm, and they do some wonderful home cooking and large helpings.

BH: Oh right, I didn't know that, I must look it out.

JC: Oh yeah, it's worthwhile going to.

BH: So when you said you still regard Carrick as your home, what does that signify? What do you associate with it? What does it mean?

JC: I suppose it means a time in my life when I felt really positive, that time when you felt you could do anything, you know, the opportunities were boundless, the friendships you had, the things that you, you know, the experiences you were able to do. I mean, some of the experiences I have to say may not be ones that I should have done, like climbing around the outside of the castle with the sea in, part of it which we got to go hand over hand and there's no foothold on it, or jumping off the community centre and finding out that you can't run anymore, and the school saying you'll get dropped from the team if you don't start running and your mother thinking you've got polio cos you're too frightened to tell her what you've got and having to go up to the hospital in Belfast to have your legs checked, or falling through the ice, I did chuck some bricks in the ice first, it didn't break, so I thought it was hard enough and went straight down, turned around, hands in the side and came straight out, but I did go home quicker that time and got old off. **[01:10:00]** So it was a place that I felt in many ways that my values were set, that my eyes were opened and that it was a special time that set the foundations for what's happened since.

BH: So in a sense then that was, you used the word foundations, your kind of development over the course of the rest of your life emerged out of that.

JC: Yeah, I think some of the questions I have and the things I wanted to do were set at that time. I thought oh pilot, cos a pilot seemed very glamorous, but I was already quite interested in some of the things to do with inequalities.

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

JC: I think it was. I think I said to you beforehand about the books we had at home, he was a really keen reader and, as I say, when I was a student, books, I talked to him about some of my books and then he asked me to bring them home so he could read them.

BH: Yeah, yeah. The Troubles then happened a bit later. Does that pose any kind of threat to the values based on that earlier period of your life?

JC: I think the Troubles, if you want, helped us to get through that in a way that not necessarily was the same for everybody else, but we weren't sort of pitched into believing everything one side said or the other side said, we were more, I had a more of a sceptical view, although my, as I said, my mother's was less sceptical, my father's was more sceptical, and that the awareness just of which groups within society were dying, which groups were

being bombed, etcetera, the army, question marks about some of their tactics, but obviously an awareness that it's actually a very difficult situation to be placed into, to be trying to keep two sides apart who are, if you want, seen as civilians in the most part, but being aware that people were finding ways to beat the system, having to queue up and be searched before you get into shops, people lying with guns with roadblocks every now and then, so it's not a situation that people should have to live with.

BH: Yeah, yet you have a society which on one hand, as you experienced it growing up, clearly had good things about it, it wasn't impossible to have a rich childhood–

JC: Yes.

BH: Yet the same society had generated these other problems.

JC: Yes.

BH: How do you reconcile those two things?

JC: Yeah, I mean, I think that I was lucky in a sense cos I think that if I had been born sort of five, ten years later my experiences would be very different. I think that the only way I can reconcile them is that that's where I was born into, I didn't have a choice about that and I can only do things about those things as I become aware of them. I am aware that, you know, that the shipyards was not an equal opportunities employer, and some of the other big firms in Belfast at the time, and that when you looked at those things you couldn't justify them, but that that in some ways it may have been [indecipherable], cos of Courtaulds being the big employer in the town, I'm not sure that it had an under-representation of different groups within its employ, but there was that and ICI, so there was plenty of employment at the time, and my father's stance in terms of the union allowed him to stand outside some of the other politics.

BH: Yeah, do you think your views about these issues, in particular about I suppose how Northern Ireland's shaped, have they changed over the course of your lifetime?

JC: Yeah, I suppose that I've become more critical of both sides and that I think that if I was voting in Ireland at the moment I would probably vote for the, what do you call the independents, I've forgotten their name now.

BH: The Alliance Party?

JC: Yes, I think that the politics is still too aligned to religion and I think it always seemed to me that the last thing the Christian religion was sort of advising people to do was to go and blow each other up.

BH: Yeah, but of course you've also maintained your religious identity–

JC: Yeah.

BH: Through the course of your life.

JC: Yeah.

BH: Sometimes people who migrate they don't, they kind of fall away from the church [indecipherable]. Did you have to think, you know, part of being the congregation in England, what the relationship should, between religion and politics should be or was that something you'd already thought about?

JC: I think it's something I'd already thought about, I mean, it's interesting when we came to Wales my father and I went round a number of the different churches before we decided which one we'd go to, so it wasn't just a, alright we need to go to a Presb-, find a Presbyterian church, we'll go to that, okay, well, let's try and to see what these are like and where we feel comfortable, so, and that I think that in terms, I don't think you can get away from politics, I don't think that Christianity does try and get away from politics, I think there are people and the way that they construct it, construe it just as they do with other religions, and that's sadly to say that it's been the cause, cause it probably the wrong word, it has been a reason given for many wars that should never have been held.

BH: Yeah, yeah, it certainly looks like in Northern Ireland, at least historically, religion, religious identities and political identities have supported one another.

JC: They have.

BH: Whereas in England, there seems to be a capacity, at least after 1945, to hold those things apart. Did you recognise that whenever you've, you know, started to attend church in England and so on?

JC: I, I'm not so sure about that because I think that part of it, and when I got in discussions with people, it wasn't, it was about changing the status quo, it wasn't about maintaining the status quo, cos obviously there is an historical, particularly the Church of England has been seen as the church of the status quo and maintaining the status quo, hence the idea, you know, the bells were there so that the workers knew when they had to go to work and when work finished, etcetera, so I think there is a Christianity which questions poverty, which questions inequality, which questions the use of resources and questions politicians about what they're doing in terms of the directions they're pushing the country. I'd like to see them do a little bit more around sort of like, the neoliberal hegemonies around, I'd like to, they did challenge austerity in lots of churches and got food banks, etcetera and they've tried to respond to people's needs, which I think is great.

BH: That's really interesting, that way of seeing a religion as a political resource. Was that something that you became aware of as result of settling?

JC: Yes, I think in the sense that one does reflect on the Northern Ireland situation and in some ways that situation was always going to blow up at some stage, we just didn't realise it at the time.

BH: Yeah, what about your parents then? Once they moved to Dungannon, did they ever make return visits back over to see you and Catherine in Manchester?

JC: Oh yeah, yeah, they did until my father wasn't, he died of motor neurone disease, so as that progressed he wasn't able to travel and then my mother would travel by herself after he died, yes, so they would come quite regularly and we would go over there quite regularly. My father, my mother found it a bit easier coming when there was us and the children because we could interpret what was going on.

BH: Right, I think I have asked most of my specific questions, so I've just got a few more general questions.

JC: Okay.

BH: So do you think the Troubles has had an impact on your life?

JC: Oh yes, I think that's unquestionably so, cos at one stage **[01:20:00]** I thought I didn't actually want to go back to Ireland because of the violence that was on, and that it did make me question in some ways my experiences and my happiness, as I say, about saying Carrick, how I remember Carrick, I don't know if I'd have been in a Catholic family at the same time would they have experienced it in the same way, I'm not in a position to be able to answer that, and it did make me think about, you know, that in some ways I think Northern Ireland would have taken me off Christianity rather than anything else because you, the church is, there were people, there were individuals within the churches who seemed to me making a stand and trying to promote some type of understanding and some sort of dialogue, whilst there were others who seemed to me to be stirring it up.

BH: Yeah, during your time living in England have you felt like a migrant or an immigrant here or has the journey been something different, classified a different way?

JC: Yeah, I think in some ways, as I said to you before, I never felt I was Irish until I came to Wales, in England I think as a student, and you're joining a number of other people and you're all first years together, I think there's a healthy mix of ideas and a healthy mix of accents, etcetera, so that probably didn't feel too different, and I suppose I never actually felt myself as an immigrant as such, although you could argue that I was and that while I'd sort of write about minority groups in England, I don't necessarily think of myself as one.

BH: Yeah, it's an interesting perception that perhaps moving to a new place as a university student and being enmeshed in that kind of scholarly community–

JC: Yeah, we were very, very good at drinking, that scholarly community.

BH: What did you say?

JC: Very good at drinking.

BH: Very good at drinking, yeah, but maybe something that also buffers individuals from maybe some of the more disruptive aspects of having to settle and integrate where, for example, you perhaps have to work on a building site or something like that.

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I think it does. I think it also, as I say, if you come over as a builder or something like that you almost are being stereotyped I think, in terms of what people would expect you to be like, and being over as a student I think it's a much more open and it's a much more, people are more accepting of you taking risks and doing different things, and that you're all in it together, to start, and there's something I imagine quite quaint having a friend who speaks funny.

BH: Yeah, that's really interesting, for want of a better word maybe social class or cultural class [indecipherable] migrant group?

JC: Yes, I'm sure there is a bit around that too and that I do have to remind my students sometimes saying to them, you may think you're working class now, but once you've finished this course you'll be seen by the people you're working with as middle class whether you like it or not.

BH: Yeah, is there anything I haven't asked about which you think's important and want to talk about?

JC: No, I mean, the only other think I think is that I've been going to a conference in the US for the last few years and I remember getting into a discussion with one of the, a friend of mine who I write with, one of her friends who was wanting to say that oh well, why don't they just put all Ireland together and then there'd be no problem again, so that it was obviously still seen as the solution by someone to the situation there, as trying to move it forward. As I say, that my view on it is that, you know, when the majority of the people want to do that then that would be the right time to do it, to force it on the communities is not going to work or wouldn't have worked during the Troubles.

BH: Yeah, yeah, I mean, my own experience is certainly most American people and even I suppose large sections of kind of people who work in the humanities and social sciences here have a similar kind of view.

JC: Yes.

BH: I suppose the point that you've made there, yes, it wouldn't resolve the current problem, the question that runs round my head, would it have worked initially, in the sense that if partition hadn't have happened would it even, would it have worked then. I don't really know the answer, potentially it wouldn't have worked then either.

JC: Yeah, yeah, I mean, it, as you say, we don't know cos we can't go back to that, it would, if it had worked, it'd have worked in the sense that we would have had a different experience.

BH: Yeah.

JC: There obviously was a lot of conflict about at the time and they decided that the best way to manage it was the partition. Now whether, as you say, that was the right way to do it or do, whether they even drew the boundaries in the right places is another issue.

BH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JC: Cos always, I thought it was interesting that, you know, at school, for example, I ran for Ulster, raced for Ulster, of course that's the eight counties, not the six.

BH: Yes, yeah, yeah. Do you ever find it surprising that so many English people seem so unknowledgeable about sort of the existing development of Northern Ireland, given that it is a part of the UK state?

JC: Yeah, I think there's a parochialism about it and I think when I was in Ireland there was a parochialism about Northern Ireland too, that we didn't see about England except what we saw on TV with the Queen and that people wore hats, etcetera and those types of stereotypes. So in some ways I can understand that because in some ways that's taking you outside your four walls and looking across the sea, so you can drive into Wales, but you have to get a boat or a plane to go to Northern Ireland, so that sometimes I am surprised and that some of the thoughts that people still have who remember the Troubles who wouldn't want to go there, and I try to say to them well, actually it's a beautiful place, and one of the advantages of the Troubles has been is that it didn't get commercialised in the way that it could have done, which could have ruined it, in terms of a place to visit as a tourist.

BH: Yeah, yeah, something I've always wondered about, I mean, you look at the large states, you know, Germany or the US, and these are geographically much bigger places and actually they have a lot at the regional level probably huge amounts of difference between different parts, you know, dialect, local history, so on, but in fact these things have been created as a unitary state, so culturally there's sort of a set of factors, how all these quite diverse people see themselves as part of the same nation, part of the same thing, yet the UK's comparatively small, in fact it's very small, and, you know, even though you have to cross a small stretch of water to get to Northern Ireland, geographically it's tiny, the whole thing is tiny, yet you get the sense somehow that Northern Ireland is still outside of this nation-building project of Great Britain.

JC: Yes, I mean, I think you're right and it's the bit about okay, you have to get a plane, but it's only an hour and you could get a plane in the morning, see some family and come back on the evening type of flight if you wanted to. Of course they're not flying, are they flying to Belfast at the moment from Manchester at the moment, can't remember.

BH: They were in the summer, I don't know if they are now.

JC: Yeah, it was just EasyJet, wasn't it, and someone else.

BH: Yes, EasyJet, yeah.

JC: Yeah, I mean, I think that it's almost like, out of sight, out of mind type of thing.

BH: Yes.

JC: And that yes, it's quite nice to see some pictures on the TV, and they might even like some of the things that come out in terms of our actors or our musicians, etcetera, but how many of them would actually want to go, and, as I say, when I've taken people and shown them around they've always been very happy to be there and been surprised about how welcoming and how friendly it is, but I suppose that's the other thing I remember from childhood is about how friendly it was, you know, all the neighbours, etcetera, that everybody knew each other and you could play football in the street in those days cos there wasn't hardly any cars for the ball to hit and people to get upset.

BH: Yeah, I think that's all I've to ask, but I'll just raise a last question, **[01:30:00]** anything else you think's important?

JC: I think that the Troubles is part of the backdrop to my life story and to many other people's life stories. I think that, you know, while there'd be similarities in my experience there's also differences from other people's, that I'm proud to, you know, to identify myself as someone who was from Carrick, I don't try and hide it and never felt the need to, and I will use it in terms of, you know, when I'm giving examples of things in lectures, etcetera, and I still intend to carry on going over every year, even though both my parents are now dead, go and see my uncle, aunt, but just to have a bit of time to get my accent going again and have some nice food and some nice beer.

BH: In terms if your national identity, what do you say, you know, what, British, Irish, Northern Irish, is there a particular term or no term?

JC: I would say Northern Irish cos that's where I call my home, if that becomes just one big Ireland in the future that's fair enough, that's what it is, but I don't say British, sometimes I tick British if it's going to make life easier, but as a rule it would be Northern Irish if someone asks me about it, it wouldn't be British.

BH: What about the Republic of Ireland and the idea of Irishness as something distinct? Do you feel an affinity with that?

JC: I feel an affinity with the people from Southern Ireland, people that I know, you know, that we can get on well with and have a bit of craic and some good evenings at different places, so I'd get invites to the South to do things there as well, and that, you know, we travel down, and when my mother lived in Castlerock we used to get the ferry across to Donegal, from the prison across, and I can remember as a child my father driving us down around the South and spending time down there, so I, yes, I feel quite happy to be neighbours, I feel quite happy to be friends with people who are from the South, I don't have, I never had that problem.

BH: Yeah, and would you see aspects of that culture as related to your own?

JC: Yeah, especially when we're in the crowd together at the rugby.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Yeah, I mean, in a sense I think there is, I think there's quite a degree of affinity between the two cultures. Obviously there's still a big agricultural culture in both bits, there's still the competitiveness between the different teams, etcetera, and there's still a lot of shared understanding and a shared history, and part of that history obviously being in relation to England and the, its, things they did on both sides of the border over the years.

BH: Yeah, okay, that's me done. Can I just reiterate again thanks very much for agreeing to do this and for taking the time. It's been really enlightening and really informative, and I hope it hasn't taken up too much [indecipherable].

JC: No, it's been enjoyable, it's a change to think back on those days.

BH: That's good, it's good when it's an opportunity to think back on good things. If you want to know any more about the project I suggest you drop me an email.

JC: Yeah, it'd be interesting to see what the findings, cos are you going to be putting all the different findings, the oral histories together in some sort of set of themes or will it be just the oral histories by themselves?

BH: All the oral histories will, they'll be made into transcripts and then be archived in Manchester Central Library, so eventually you will be able to read your own transcript.

JC: [laughs] That'll be strange.

BH: Well, yeah, it's going to be a big archive, round about ninety testimonies, so it's a good lot.

JC: It is, yeah.

BH: The other things are obviously academic journal articles, there's going to be at least sort of five or six of those.

JC: Yeah.

BH: And there'll be a monograph as well.

JC: Yeah.

BH: The themes haven't been set yet for the book in particular but, you know, we have some themes already we've talked about in terms of what the articles might be.

JC: Yeah.

BH: So one sort of is the Northern Irish Protestant experience of migrating to England during the Troubles.

JC: Yeah.

BH: Somebody else is writing about the second-generation experience, the sons and daughters of those people.

JC: Yeah.

BH: And then another writing about the reasons why people left, kind of the push factors kind of thing.

JC: Yeah, yes.

BH: So those are some of things that'll come out of it, but, as I say, any time drop me an email, and also there's a website, there's not much on it yet, but hopefully in the near future we'll start putting more stuff up there.

JC: Okay.

BH: But yeah, if you want to speak again just send me an email.

JC: Will do.

BH: Okay.

JC: Right, thanks Barry.

BH: Okay, thanks very much John.

JC: Right, see you then.

BH: Yeah, bye bye.

JC: Bye.

INTERVIEW ENDS