

Reflected Lives

Intergenerational
oral histories of
Belfast's peace wall
communities



*Belfast
Interface
Project*

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FOREWORD

Few people would have anticipated that the temporary barriers erected almost fifty years ago to separate the Lower Falls and the Shankill would not only become permanent but would in time provide a template for similar walls across Belfast and beyond. Amidst the heady optimism of 1998, still less would have predicted that the number of peace walls would have grown to over 100 in the post-Good Friday Agreement period. Indeed, some of these iconic symbols of division now count amongst the top tourist attractions in Belfast.

In May 2013 the Northern Ireland Executive published its 'Together: Building a United Community' (TBUC) strategy which set the target of removing all interface barriers or peace walls by 2023. To help inform this process, detailed research on the viability of this objective has been undertaken by the lead partner in this project, Belfast Interface Project, together with the Community Relations Council.¹

Large-scale surveys and analyses of public attitudes to peace walls have also been completed by academics working in this field.² Such research adds greatly to our understanding both of levels of awareness about peace walls and of the diversity of attitudes relating to them. In particular, it highlights the challenge for policy makers in reconciling the broad political objective of reducing communal division and furthering reconciliation with the needs and wants of local residents. There is nonetheless a danger with such policy-focused studies that the richness of local and individual experiences can get lost. Rather than focusing on peace walls across Belfast and beyond the 'Reflected Lives' team resolved instead to focus on one particular area and to explore in some detail the lived experience of the men, women and children who grew up on either side of the same barriers.

The Short Strand and Inner East area was selected because of its unique micro-geography. The obvious demarcation is

¹ For the full range of resources produced by Belfast Interface Project, visit: <https://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org/publications>

² See, for example, Byrne et al 'Public Attitudes to Peace Walls' (2015) available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/224052/pws.pdf

that a predominantly Catholic enclave is surrounded by a much larger Protestant area. The standard assumption is that the smaller community is 'boxed in' by fear and intimidation. Whilst elements of this are of course true, one of the many benefits of this type of detailed local research is that it challenges easy assumptions about these interconnected communities. In the course of these interviews, for example, some people not surprisingly highlight the long history of tension and division in the area, referring to the 'pogroms' of the 1920s and other flashpoints that followed in the ensuing decades. Others were nonetheless keen to highlight the proud labour tradition in the area going right back to the famous Dockers' Strike of 1907 (which brought in the workers at Sirocco, an engineering firm bounded by Short Strand, Bridge End and the Lagan) and reflected thereafter in the outdoor relief riots of 1932 and the intermittent successes of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The complex history of mixed or interfaith marriages discussed by interviewees also underlines the fact that the separation of these communities was never entirely complete.

The area also followed its own particular trajectory of peace and conflict. While it remained relatively quiet in the very early days of 'the Troubles', this area erupted

in June 1970 in what became known in the Short Strand as the 'Battle of St Matthew's'. Likewise, although the Short Strand and Inner East interface was seen as something of a beacon of good relations in the immediate post-Good Friday Agreement period, progress was severely dented with the sustained rioting and violence that erupted there in 2002.

The purpose of this publication is not to document in detail the political history of this area. Rather, as noted above, the intention is to capture something of the direct lived experience of the individuals who grew up there. It is based on a relatively small-scale project conducted over a fifteen-month period by a team of part-time researchers. The project grew out of a series of conversations in 2016 between Joe O'Donnell (Strategic Director at Belfast Interface Project), Nick Garbutt (local journalist and PR specialist) and David Corscadden (Bauer Academy, Cool FM). Nick and I had worked together previously on an EU-funded project I co-directed (*Peace Process: Layers of Meaning*) and he thus approached me to see if I would be interested in coming on board as a consultant, to help with the overall shape and direction of the project and in particular to inform the oral history dimension of the work.

I was immediately impressed by the team's passion and commitment for the work and the sense of urgency they felt about the need to capture first-hand accounts of life lived at these barriers before it was too late. I was particularly attracted to the intergenerational component of the project – juxtaposing the stories of those who watched with horror as barriers began to carve up the territory of their childhood with those who find it hard to conceive of life without them.

Together we mapped out what we felt was a 'do-able' plan and established some important ground rules. The first of these was that the project should be 'bottom-up' in nature, working with and through established community groups and community leaders in the Short Strand and Inner East. Second, we resolved to ensure that, rather than parachuting in and paying less than proper attention to the wants and needs of local residents, we would try to ensure that the project 'put something back' into the local communities. We thus built in a series of mentoring workshops and facilitation sessions with local young people (both 'single-identity' and 'cross-community') and, working in partnership with the Cool FM Bauer Academy, we organised a training programme for local youth (media interview and digital recording skills). To facilitate ongoing research,

we promised to donate all relevant recording and computer equipment during the project to the two local community facilities. Third, we pledged to give each interviewee a copy of this publication and to invite them to celebrate their history and that of their families and local communities at exhibitions in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland and in community centres in the Short Strand and Inner East. Finally, as a gift to posterity, we resolved to take great care to ensure that the material we proposed to capture and recorded would be preserved for future generations. In this regard we are grateful to the staff of the Linen Hall Library in Belfast for agreeing to archive and safeguard the original recordings and ancillary material.

In late 2016 the Heritage Lottery Fund kindly agreed to fund the proposed project and the reality of what we had pledged to complete came into sharp focus. In view of the timescale and resources at our disposal, our plan was undoubtedly ambitious but we were fortunate to secure the talent and commitment of a recent QUB PhD graduate as a part-time research officer. Dr Rosaleen Hickey bore the brunt of the heavy lifting for this project – identifying and conducting interviews, transcribing and coding the recordings, attending to the day-to-day management

of the project, writing this publication, and organising the exhibition and other related outputs. We are also grateful for research assistance along the way from Claire Harris and Sarah Lorimer, and from local community leaders, Bernie McConnell and Gareth Beacom.

The concern with a project such as this is often whether or not people will agree to be interviewed. With twenty-three interviews in hand we had to concede that we had the opposite problem and that, reluctantly, we would have to stop and try to make sense of the rich material that had been recorded to date. Naturally many people are shy to begin and wonder whether or not their story could possibly be of historical significance. However, as one begins to see people becoming aware that their story and that of their family and community has value and worth, it is one of the great joys of engaging in this type of work.

It would be impossible in a short publication such as this to do justice to the richness of each individual story. Instead the team reflected on the transcripts as a whole, and agreed a series of themes, organised in broadly chronological order. In the pages that follow we hope to offer glimpses of lives lived in the Short Strand and Inner East Belfast area before, during and after the creation of interface barriers. The intention is thus to humanise the

history of the area and to offer a grass-roots perspective on a profoundly important aspect of our post-conflict landscape.

In the stories that follow you will find tales of innocence, camaraderie, friendship and fun cut through with shocking examples of the normalisation of the abnormal. It was and is not normal for people to witness gunfire breaking out after a football match, to get up at dawn to walk to school in safety, to get hit in the chest by a brick whilst standing in the back garden, to crush valium up in a child's milk so that they might get to sleep during riots, or to live in near darkness because all the windows in your house have been boarded up. All of these things were experienced in the area. Although this is in some ways a tale of two parts (pre-Troubles and post-Troubles; pre-walls and post-walls) the line between laughter and horror, friendship and fear was never fully drawn. Indeed, examples of the 'black humour' that helped many individuals to survive unspeakable challenges are woven through almost all of these stories.

Academic analysis of the conflict has drawn attention to the territoriality of violence and the importance of micro-geography but I was nonetheless struck by the incredibly close attention to distance reflected in these interviews – and the

ways in which attitudes and experience shifted over the course of a mere hundred yards, never mind a single street.

Likewise, much has been written about the labelling and objectification of 'the other' in conflicted communities but is given a very real edge in these individual testimonies. My attention was captured, for example, by one woman's childhood memory of peering over a wall "to see, you know, what's going on round there", only to discover to her surprise that "everything just looked normal". In a similar fashion one of the younger interviewees explained that his curiosity once got the better of him and he drummed up the courage to cycle through the Short Strand with a friend. This he recalled was one of the scariest experiences of his life: "People were just staring at you because they didn't recognise you [...] I just looked around myself and seen what it's like and then – straight out again the other end."

As noted in the penultimate chapter, the intergenerational perspectives are particularly revealing, capturing something of the difference in attitudes between younger and older residents. Again, the picture here is far from black and white, with some young people expressing depressingly negative views and others suggesting that sectarianism is abating with the passage of time.

Whether readers are inspired or concerned by the scenes depicted, they will hopefully be assured of the value of capturing individual stories, in all of their messy complexity. In the detail of everyday experience these interviews offer important snapshots of the emotional, social and physical reality of what it is like to live on either side of a peace wall. In these pages we can also discern threads and patterns – whether imagined or real – that help us to make sense of the conflict that continues to delineate our communities. This relatively modest oral history collection, publication and exhibition showcases the immensely important and rich heritage that can be captured and preserved in a relatively short space of time - and offers a taste of what could be achieved if the horizon were to broaden.

Dr Anna Bryson
Queens University Belfast, March 2018

INTRODUCTION

‘Reflected Lives’ is a unique oral history project that has captured the everyday experiences of people living either side of interface barriers or peace walls in Short Strand/ Inner East Belfast. Significantly, the project is not just cross-community but inter-generational. The project has uncovered fascinating stories of those who lived in a shared community before the peace walls were erected, those who were segregated as the walls were built and those who have never experienced life without them.

Interviews were conducted between 8 September 2017 and 12 January 2018. In total, 23 people were interviewed. These participants were composed of 11 residents of Short Strand, 11 residents from Inner East, and one retired policeman who formerly worked in the area. This balance or equal representation of the two communities was crucial in ensuring a lack of bias in the research.

The age of participants ranged from 17 to 80. This enabled the project to uncover a wide range of intergenerational perspectives. All interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed.

This publication presents, for the first time, the results of the oral history project. Throughout the publication, interviewees are quoted verbatim and are identified by gender, age and community affiliation. During the project, both archival and contemporary images of the area were collated from a range of sources, including the personal archives of some of the interviewees themselves. These images are included within the publication and they help to bring the stories of the participants to life.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Short Strand/ Inner East Belfast is known as an interface area. It is marked by peace walls and security infrastructure which denote the boundaries between the two communities, and the continuance of cross community conflict. Short Strand is a predominantly nationalist or Catholic 'enclave' with a population of around 3000, surrounded by predominantly unionist or Protestant Inner East Belfast which has a population of around 60,000 (Cosstick, 2015). Due to the location and small size of Short Strand, it has developed a specific character. Short Strand is a close knit community, with many residents choosing to live there all their lives and many generations of the same family living side by side, fostering a strong sense of local identity and pride in the area (Ballymacarrett Research Group, 1997; Byrne, 2005).

Inner East Belfast, situated within the ancient townland of Ballymacarrett,

became urbanised during the 1700s and 1800s. In fact, by the late 1800s the area had become the industrial heartland of the city, dominated by Harland and Wolff shipyards. Other industries included a pottery factory, ropeworks, vitriol works, glass works, and the Sirocco Works. As a result of the wealth of industry in the area, rural workers – both Catholic and Protestant – were drawn to the area. Mass construction of workers' terraced housing in the 1880s and 1890s shaped the identity of the Inner East as a mostly working class district. St Matthew's Roman Catholic Church and Parish was established in 1887, affirming the identity of Short Strand as a Catholic district, distinct from the rest of East Belfast (Ballymacarrett Research Group, 1997).

The industrial development of Inner East Belfast ran parallel to the escalation of sectarian tensions throughout the Victorian era.

From the late 1800s, clashes along sectarian frontiers of the city were often prompted by political controversies over Irish independence and violence typically spiked in July around Orange Order parades. Economic competition between working class Catholics and Protestants over employment in the shipyards became an additional catalyst for conflict. Political unrest throughout Ireland during 1910s and 1920s caused existing strife in Belfast to boil over into prolonged fighting during the first 'Troubles' of 1920-22. Repercussions of these 'Troubles' were felt on the streets of Short Strand/ Inner East. Catholic workers were forced out of the Sirocco Works and St Matthew's Church was attacked (Ballymacarrett Research Group, 1997). In fact, the first interface barrier to separate Protestants and Catholics in Belfast was erected in the Short Strand area in 1920 (Heatley, 2004).

During the Second World War, Inner East Belfast was particularly vulnerable to German bombing due to its close proximity to the shipbuilding and aerospace industries. As a result of the Luftwaffe bombing campaign of April and May 1941, over 1,000 people were killed in Belfast, the Harland and Wolff shipyard was severely damaged and many buildings in Inner East Belfast were destroyed (Ballymacarrett Research Group, 1997).

Although there is a history of division between the two communities, going back over a century, sectarian tensions rapidly escalated following the outbreak of the 'Troubles' in 1969. The subsequent population movement hardened the residential segregation already evident in Short Strand/ Inner East. Despite its small geographic size, Short Strand was the site of many key events of 'the Troubles', not least the 'Battle of St Matthew's' of June 1970 which contributed towards an escalation of the conflict in Belfast and fuelled recruits to the Provisional IRA. British Army troops were stationed at Beechfield Street Primary School, located on the Bryson Street interface, following the events of summer 1970. Mountpottinger Barracks, located in the heart of the Short Strand was also used as the main military base for the district during 'the Troubles' (Ballymacarrett Research Group, 1997).

Peace walls around the Short Strand which cemented division between the communities were built from the 1970s. Unlike the blockades erected in the area in the 1920s on a temporary basis, the walls built in Short Strand/ Inner East from the 1970s were seen as more permanent structures. The first peace walls established at the Short Strand/ Inner East interface were those at Bryson Street and Cluan Place/ Clandeboye



Map of Short Strand with interface barriers highlighted in red. Map imagery © OpenStreetMap contributors

Gardens. And over the ensuing decades, the walls around Short Strand increased both in size and number (Belfast Interface Project, 2017). Consequently, Catholic and Protestant residents can live adjacent to each other and yet lead parallel lives (Leonard & McKnight, 2011).

The peace process, which signalled the end of 'the Troubles', gained momentum during the 1990s. The first Republican and Loyalist paramilitary ceasefires were declared in 1994, and on 10th April 1998 the 'Good Friday Agreement' was signed (Leonard & McKnight, 2011).

As a result, Belfast commenced its transition to a 'post conflict' city. However, twenty years on from the signing of the Agreement, extensive security infrastructure continues to define and demarcate Short Strand. Peace walls remain at Bryson Street (to the east of the district), Strand Walk (to the north), Mountpottinger Link and Short Strand (to the west) and Cluan Place, Clandeboye Gardens and Albertbridge Road (to the south). In addition, interface violence continues to blight the area. In fact, following persistent violence at

the Short Strand/ Inner East interface in 2002, walls were both significantly heightened and constructed anew in the area (Byrne, 2005). In fact, a ten-metre high mesh fence erected in the grounds of St Matthew's Church in 2012 has been identified as the most recent peace wall that has been built anew within the city of Belfast (Belfast Interface Project, 2017). As a result, the area continues to be physically marked by conflict and division.

The area also bears witness to years of redevelopment in Short Strand/ Inner East. In fact, redevelopment schemes in the area have broken up the traditional layout of workers' housing. Many streets have been transformed or, indeed, eradicated in recent decades. This has led to a significant shrinking of the population of both communities. In addition, the area has witnessed the loss of dominant buildings including the Picturedrome Cinema and the RUC base, both formerly located on Mountpottinger Road. Furthermore, although the iconic cranes remain, many of the industries that formerly characterised the area have been eradicated. However, some landmarks of the district, such as St Matthew's Church still stand today.

CHAPTER 1

AS WE WERE:

The Age of Innocence

“I can remember exactly what it was like, I can remember every street and every corner and every picture house, police station, salvation army citadel, churches, mission halls, the lot.”

Male, 77, Inner East

Interviews with elderly residents of the Short Strand and Inner East revealed fascinating detail on life in the area in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. The quotes set out **below** offer a series of snapshots of a way of life that has long since passed.

Hard Life

Many interviewees were keen to point out that living conditions were challenging to say the least and that people had to work incredibly hard to make ends meet.

“The houses in the street were literally two up, two down, you know, a small hall, a small living room with a fireplace, a scullery, that led in to the back yard, and a small room which was used for a variety of purposes [...] ...the stairs went up out of the living room and above the stairwell was a bunk in the cavity between there and the ceiling and actually in some houses people had...a place for children to sleep in there, you know, if they had a very big family.”

Male, 77, Inner East

"It was hard times for them, yes, their world was very precarious. And I know, like my nanny and my granda wasted nothing, everything was used, everything was mended, everything was fixed"

Female, 56, Inner East

"Your mother was constantly working because she had to, you know, steep all the clothes, boil the water, put it in the sink, get in the soap suds, use a big barrel and a bar of soap, and a washboard and scrub all the clothes"

Male, 77, Inner East

To illustrate the lack of access to luxuries that we would today take for granted, some people explained that they were sent to the Templemore Baths to get a proper bath:

"When I was a kid we used to go to Templemore Avenue Baths and we walked up there because we lived in a two up two down, outside toilet, so every Friday your ma, your mother and father gave you the money to go up and get a bath, a real bath like."

Male, 68, Short Strand



Thistle Street - Oct 1980 © Philip McAlpine www.belfast35mm.co.uk

An Inner East resident likewise suggested that acquiring big warm army coats was a major motivation for his brothers in joining the Territorial Army:

“My brothers all had to go and join the TA or the army, know what to get? They got big coats in the army and that and they used them as bed covers, oh that’s true.”

Male, 65, Inner East

Although some of the stories smacked of heart-breaking poverty and vulnerability, interviewees were careful to explain that everyone was more or less in the same boat:

“When I was young my mother would have sent me to the pawn shop to pawn my brothers’ suits [...] because in those days you know my mother was probably pawning my three brothers’ suits on a Monday and lifting them out on a Thursday or a Friday, but that’s just the way people lived in those days.”

Male, 65, Inner East

More importantly, poverty and hard times were not confined to one or other religious community:

“Times weren’t easy, times were tough enough for people on both sides of the community.”

Male, 65, Inner East

“I’m sure it was actually the same in the Short Strand, you had to make do with what you had for the family that you had, because 3 bedroom houses or 4 bedroom houses weren’t a thing that were accessible to working class people.”

Male, 65, Inner East

Animated Streets

One of the great benefits of oral history interviews is the manner in which they can bring the history of a particular area to life – colouring in the fine detail of daily routines on each and every street:

“The lights in the street were gas lights and the gas man came round at night and turned them on. And he came round in the morning and turned them off and he and the milkman would have been the alarm clock for the community”

Male, 77, Inner East



Short Strand Trolleybus.

Image reproduced courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. LA/7/26JC/1/133.

"When I was a child it [the Newtownards Road] seemed enormously wide, you know, it was cobblestoned, and there were two sets of tram lines, and these big Corporation trams ran up and down, clanging and clattering you know, and some were painted red and white and some were blue and cream, and they had the livery of the Belfast corporation on them."

Male, 77, Inner East



Coalman, Clyde Street, 1983
© Frankie Quinn www.frankiequinn.com

"There were loads and loads of visitors to your street with horses and carts and donkeys. And I can think of them all, the coal man came to your street with a big shire horse and cart [...] And the man who came with coal brick which was a different thing [...] The baker came with a big flat cart and a big cart that was shaped like a loaf almost and he had big long drawers and all the bread was in these big long drawers, so the baker came round to your house. A little man came round with a granite wheel that he peddled and sharpened knives and another lady came round - Lizzy came round - selling herrings and she would go round shouting 'Ardglass herrings, Ardglass herrings' [...] The undertakers came, in those days they still had the big Dracula style undertaker's wagons with horse and everything, big black horses, that would have been the normal funeral for those days."

Male, 77, Inner East

"I can vividly remember every Friday at a certain time the fruit and veg man would come out and people would get all fresh vegetables from wherever they got them, probably the farms of County Down or wherever, and... you know, on a Sunday the ice cream man would come round and sometimes your parents would send you out with a big bowl and you'd get the bowl filled up with ice cream"

Male, 58, Short Strand

"I mean these roads used to be packed with shops, there used to be shops right here to the very bottom of Albertbridge on both sides of the road, every corner had shops. [...] There was grocers' shops, there was pork shops, there was furniture shops, drapery shops, everything. There was every kind of shop on them roads, the same in the Newtownards Road."

Female, 68, Inner East

"I can remember Thompsons bakery round the corner and confectionary shop. What else was there? A clothes shop, was a fruit shop... Feeneys, they sold everything, like from fishing nets to knick-knacks and miscellaneous stuff. There was a butchers across the road. There was McNicholls, there was a hardware store. There was a newsagents. Symingtons shoe shop. My brother as a matter of fact, my mother used to take him over to a butcher's that was at the junction of Carlingford Street and Albertbridge Road, and they used to give him a raw sausage which he ate, which he used to eat a raw sausage every time my mother used to go over to the butcher"

Male, 66, Inner East

"There's a striking memory that I have as a child. At the top of the street, at the junction of Chamberlain Street and the Albertbridge Road there was a yard, a yard like a builders yard [...] it was actually for housing carts that horses pulled. [...] I can remember those shire horses vividly. I can remember them bowing down, and my house where I lived was a wee two up two down. And the big head coming down and feeding the horse with a round of bread and even with the bit in he was able to negotiate the bread."

Male, 66, Inner East



Bryson Street, c. 1965. Photo courtesy of Ella McMahon

Childhood Play

Although many of the quotes above speak to the hard times and poverty of the 40s, 50s and 60s, many interviewees were keen to emphasise that their childhood was at the same time characterised by the joyful and innocent play:

"At the back of our back door there had been Tower Street and Westbourne Street and

they were bombed during the war. And my initial memories were of all the wreckage and everything and then the wreckage all got cleared away, and it gave us a magnificent place to play football or cricket or whatever."

Male, 77, Inner East

"All this thing of cars coming up to the corners - there wouldn't have been nothing like that, you know, the street was ours to play in and with no obstacles or anything like that."

Female, 58, Short Strand

"We, as kids had very very little compared to the children nowadays, you know, we had to go and make our own fun out in the streets and that was just the way it was in those days"

Male, 65, Inner East

"In the scullery my nanny had a jawbox sink and there was no hot water in those days, only a cold water tap [...] the water used to run, it went out into an open gully in the yard [...] So we used to make wee paper boats, my granda used to help us make paper boats and we used to sail them down that"

Female, 56, Inner East

"There was one lamp post in Thistle Street that hadn't been replaced, it was still like the old gas one, so it had the cross beam, so we used to swing around it"

Female, 56, Inner East

"We as children used to dress up in these high heels and these big dresses and trip along the street."

Female, 56, Inner East

Memories of childhood play inevitably brought to mind favourite haunts such as the 'mousy':

"The 'mousy' was just a wee piece of waste ground that went on to the backs of houses in Thistle Street and the houses in Bryson Street. [...] Like just a piece of spare ground. And it was called the 'mousy', you know, and we were there every day, three and four times a day, playing with our neighbours"

Female, 58, Short Strand

"A guider was basically made, it was made out of wooden boxes and pram wheels and a rope [...] people specialised in these, and you could fly these up and down the 'mousy'. Football was played in it. Halloween was done in it. Everything was done in that entry. Everything."

Male, 58, Short Strand

Strong Sense of Community

Another very positive memory people had of this period was the sense of a close-knit and interdependent community. This was an era in which neighbours helped each other out and children were nurtured both by their parents and by the wider community.

"In those days you knew everybody who lived in your street and you knew, you know, you had a great sense of, if you were out on the road somewhere and something happened to you, there would be somebody there to help, I mean people would rush in and you know...come to your aid in whatever circumstances it was. And if you misbehaved on the road it would be possible for your parents to know before you got home."

Male, 77, Inner East

"Years ago the neighbours went in and out of each other's houses, doors were never locked, now it's all different, you know, you nearly have to get an invitation now before you can go anywhere"

Female, 79, Short Strand

Indeed, there is a sense in which each street or set of streets was a self-contained unit. Remarkably, a man who grew up in Bryson Street notes:

"We never went near the Short Strand, Short Strand was a world away"

Male, 58, Short Strand

This can be paralleled by a resident of Inner East who comments:

"there was [...] always a very distinct set of little urban villages. And there were invisible walls. And generally speaking [...] where you got to a wide street or a road, the territory changed to be somebody else's territory."

Male, 77, Inner East

Socialist History

A former resident of Thistle Street highlights a surprising aspect of the post-war political landscape of Inner East Belfast:

“a lot of people in my street wouldn’t have voted unionist or nationalist for that matter, they would have voted for a labour, I think he was Jack Beattie he was called. And you know... the people in that street should have had more affinity with the socialist party than with a unionist. And some did, some had affiliations with the communist party, and fairly left wing socialism.”

Male, 77, Inner East

This recollection is supported by another Inner East resident who argues:

“there’s always been a subterranean river of socialism within the Protestant area with nowhere to go. [...] Jack Beattie represented East Belfast. And Jack Beattie was a commie, and Jack Beattie faithfully represented his constituency and they backed him. Once Jack Beattie started talking about the border, united Ireland: out”

Male, 66, Inner East

The Pre-Troubles ‘Golden Age’

“We were all running about together, Catholics and Protestants. We were all chums. You could of walked down to Short Strand. There was never no bother then.”

Female, 68, Inner East

Although relatively little has been written about the ‘pre-Troubles’ decades, social histories of this era do typically suggest that it was something of a ‘golden age’ in terms of community relations. Not surprisingly, this view is sometimes more prevalent amongst members of the Protestant and unionist communities whereas Catholics and nationalists are often inclined to qualify this memory with reference to discrimination and a sense of political alienation. In the interviews conducted for this project there was nonetheless ample evidence from residents from both communities of cross-community interaction in terms of work, leisure, childhood play, friendship and courtship:

“Protestant girls went with boys from Short Strand and vice versa, the same here, it was all like that. There was no squabbles, there

was no nothing whatsoever. We all worked in the mill and the rope works together."

Female, 68, Inner East

"When I was a young lad, you know, we collected for bonfires and went to the Twelfth and there was very little... very little sectarianism about at the time. And there was Catholic families lived in all the streets in and around where I lived before 1969"

Male, 65, Inner East

"When I was young my mother would have sent me to the pawn shop to pawn my brothers' suits and stuff, I'm serious, and the pawn shop was in Mountpottinger Road, and we didn't see it - believe it or not - as the Catholic Short Strand, we didn't see it as that when we were kids, it was just another part of East Belfast, and I had no fear going down to get, to leave my brothers suits in"

Male, 65, Inner East

"There was a couple of Catholics as I said lived in our street and they actually would babysit and they would babysit for my mum and that there, you know, for us and that there."

Male, 65, Inner East

"I had a friend I went to school with who lived in Harper Street. [...] And I went down there, used to go down there pretty regularly, and there was a number of Protestants on Harper Street and Edgar Street."

Male, 66, Inner East

The sentiments offered above by residents of Inner East were echoed in the interviews with individuals from the Short Strand.

"There was no like Protestant and Catholic fighting then that I could remember. You know, there'd have been no catcalling or anything like that there."

Female, 65, Short Strand

"80 per cent of my friends were Protestants. But remember what I told you, my play area was between Bryson Street and the Newtownards Road, ok, so to me there was no politics, there was no religion"

Male, 58, Short Strand

"Bryson Street was a pretty long street, it stretched from Madrid Street right up until the Newtownards Road and I couldn't have told you who was who because I had no interest in who was who or what was what. But I do know there was a lot of Catholics"

in it. But there was also a lot of Protestants in it – and good people - good people in it who you'd grew up with, good neighbours"

Male, 58, Short Strand

"We were used to going up and down that road and you never thought anything about it until after 1969 or 70. Because you always felt safe. I mean I never encountered any sectarianism in my life before that, never."

Male, 68, Short Strand

"the Troubles' just ruined everything."

Male, 51, Short Strand

Some interviewees did, however, note that there was a certain tension, or at least an acknowledgment of difference, that existed prior to the outbreak of the Troubles':

"You would have known that that was a Catholic area and you would have known they were Catholics and they went to the chapel. But I can remember in the chapel, on Sunday nights they had a wee film show and I think it wasn't unusual for some Protestant people to go to that"

Male, 77, Inner East

"You were naturally playing. Playing mostly with our own community. But if they, if the Protestant community were knocking about, especially young wee boys, you know, our age group, we were always welcome to play with them, there was never a word said or... you know, there was nothing too strong."

Female, 58, Short Strand

"I do remember a wee fella from Seaforde Street and he raised up a football team and we would go and play football against them in the Ormeau Park [...] he had a sort of an understanding of the difficulty but he had a wee football team"

Male, 77, Inner East

"It was harmonious enough. [...] But there was always, I'm sure there was always, there was always a tension, there was always a tension there."

Male, 66, Inner East

CHAPTER 2

“There was no sectarianism, there was no animosity, you were just getting on with your life, just like in a normal society - until 1969 and everything changed.”

Male, 68, Short Strand

"ALL CHANGED, CHANGED UTTERLY"

“The Troubles’ arose, in part, in the late 1960s out of the campaign by Catholics in Northern Ireland for civil rights. The resistance by the unionist government to grant such rights contributed to the outbreak of violence on the streets of Northern Ireland, population movement which hardened residential segregation already evident across the province, and the resurgence of Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries (Fitzduff & O’Hagan, 2009).

In August 1969, rioting known as the ‘Battle of the Bogside’ in Derry was sparked by an Apprentice Boys parade in the city, and violence soon spread to the streets of Belfast (Gillespie, 2017). Subsequently, British Army troops were deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland on a ‘temporary’ basis (Kennedy-Pipe, 2013). Today, 1969 is generally acknowledged to be the starting point of thirty years of civil war in Northern Ireland which became euphemistically known as ‘the Troubles’.

One of the striking features of the comments relating to the outbreak of 'the Troubles' was the sense that it seemed to happen overnight – that the innocence associated with childhood memories was suddenly obliterated and the area changed forever.

"Well what happened was when 'the Troubles' broke out in 1969 there was an exodus from both areas"

Male, 66, Inner East

"People were uprooted so fast and the whole environment from peace to conflict just moved so fast and it was, in those days it was vicious, you're not talking what it's like now, you're talking serious stuff. Like gun battles, riots, soldiers on your streets. And you had to move with the flow pretty quick, and that's the best way I could describe it to you."

Male, 58, Short Strand

"It was just like one minute [Bryson] Street was just a normal street with people in it, 'cos we would have gone round, there was a wee sweet shop in that street that we used to go to, and then all of a sudden this just scene of devastation, you know."

Female, 56, Inner East

The conflict had immediate repercussions on freedom of movement, both within

Inner East Belfast and across the city of Belfast as a whole:

"We all worked together and went out together. And then it just sort of stopped when 'the Troubles' started because people were frightened to go up into the Loyalist areas and our ones were frightened to go into the Catholic area."

Female, 68, Inner East

"We were wandering up the Shankill and up the Falls, you name it, we went everywhere. [...] And then all of a sudden - plang."

Female, 80, Short Strand

Significantly, many interviewees indicated that the outbreak of 'the Troubles' signalled the end of their childhoods:

"I remember breaking our hearts at having to leave such a lovely street that we grew up in, our childhood just seemed to disappear overnight."

Female, 58, Short Strand

"Suddenly everything you knew - everything that was part of you - is just wrenched away from you so fast and so quick [...] And then you have to grow up fast, you know, that innocence is gone."

Male, 58, Short Strand

CHAPTER 3

RUPTURE AND DISPLACEMENT

Although ‘the Troubles’ are generally acknowledged to have erupted in 1969, it was to be two major events in 1970 and 1971 that marked turning points in the history of East Belfast, and definitively brought ‘the Troubles’ onto the streets of Short Strand/ Inner East.

‘The Battle of St Matthew’s’

“This is when the whole thing becomes gone forever. And it’s actually the 27th of June 1970. That’s your crucial date.”

Male, 58, Short Strand

‘The Battle of St Matthew’s’ occurred over the night of 27- 28 June 1970 and involved fighting between the Provisional IRA and Ulster Loyalists in and around the grounds of St Matthew’s Church, situated at the corner of Bryson Street and the Newtownards Road. The gun

battle lasted for about five hours and left three men - two Protestant and one Catholic – dead. Accounts vary in terms of what actually started the ‘battle’; however, the incident was to have clear implications on both ‘the Troubles’ as a whole and on the district itself.

Significantly, ‘the Battle of St Matthew’s’ has been interpreted as the Provisional IRA’s first major engagement of ‘the Troubles’. The Provisional IRA were seen by many Republicans as defenders of the Short Strand, and the battle contributed to the growth of the Provisional IRA. In addition, the ‘battle’ has been seen as a key turning point in terms of the break-down of community relations in Short Strand/ Inner East (Ballymacarrett Research Group, 1997; Cosstick, 2015).

Aligning with the literature, the interviewees presented varied opinions in terms of both the initiation and the scale of the incident:

“people had opened up from the grounds of St Matthew’s Chapel. And two people, two guys, a guy called McCurrie and a guy called Neill were shot dead, they were men coming out of a club, they weren’t armed in any way, shape or form [...] what happened is, the Protestants then, even under fire were attacking, were going to try and attack the chapel. And one humorous incident was there was a shop... and all these balls had been kicked out, you know, soccer balls, and these guys were saying ‘f you’ and kicking the balls [laughs] kicking the balls into the grounds of the chapel.”

Male, 66, Inner East

“somebody got up on our side and waved a tricolour. Red rag to a bull. So that did start that battle, you know.”

Female, 79, Short Strand

“I remember [...] wakening up in the middle of the night and going downstairs, and my mother was at the front door, and I remember standing with her, and one of our neighbours with her, and you could just hear the gun battle going on at the top of the street. And I didn’t know what was going on, all I could hear was this shooting”

Male, 58, Short Strand

“You couldn’t call it a battle. It wasn’t a battle. It was a... it was a surprise attack on, especially after Mr McCurrie and Neill were killed, and then the Protestants then attacked a small house at the edge of the grounds of the chapel, and set it on fire with petrol bombs. And... but you couldn’t call it a battle, the battle was very very one sided.”

Male, 66, Inner East

Interestingly, one elderly woman recalled a domestic perspective of the ‘battle’:

“I was getting the kids bathed in front of the fire. And all girls. So putting something in their hair – this was Saturday night – for mass on Sunday morning. And my husband come in and said ‘I don’t know what you’re bothering with that for, there’s not going to be a chapel in the morning’ [...] that was the one time we weren’t allowed to go into mass by the front door, we had to go to the convent.”

Female, 79, Short Strand

Despite differing accounts of the ‘battle’ itself, the interviewees made clear the significant consequences for the area:

“I think that St Matthew’s thing would have been the trigger for a total division of the community, you know I think after that, that the community was divided.”

Male, 77, Inner East

“the next morning I came out of the house and the British army was actually out on the streets for the very first time. On the streets. And there was like jeeps sitting outside my door, open top jeeps. And armoured cars, and soldiers lying up against the houses. Sitting on the ground, just sitting there, you know, so I think they had been drafted in... throughout the night and the early morning, I don’t even think they knew where they were, never mind, or what they were doing there, they had just been drafted in. So here you have this ten year old kid seeing all these armoured cars sitting outside his door, and jeeps, and thinking this is a war film in my street, this is great, this is brilliant, where’s all these soldiers come from? [...] And we actually brought them up sandwiches and cups of tea to be truthful to you, we didn’t know what they were doing there.”

Male, 58, Short Strand

Significantly, this initial friendliness towards the army was paralleled on the other side of the interface:

“when the army first came I remember in Thistle Street my nanny making them tea”

Female, 56, Inner East

Internment

“the whole place was ablaze.”

Male, 58, Short Strand

Internment commenced in the early hours of the morning of 9 August 1971. The morning witnessed British Army raids across the Short Strand, during which many Irish nationalists were arrested. Older generations of Short Strand residents have vivid memories of the morning. Internment was to have significant consequences on the district, resulting in a marked increase in violence, the deterioration of cross community relations and population movement (CAIN, 2018a). In fact, residents of Bryson Street of both religions moved out of their homes, as reported by the Irish News in August 1971.

“I lived in Bryson Street. I lived there for quite a lot of years. And the morning of internment when sort of all hell broke loose we were sort of burnt out.”

Female, 65, Short Strand

“They were burning cars at the corner and I think the Protestants, some of the Protestant community had come down and shouted ‘get out of the street’ or whatever. I don’t really know but we were gone, you know, we were a big family.”

Female, 58, Short Strand

“And then, internment. Ok. That’s the next big thing I remember. I remember 4 o’clock in the morning, having to get out of bed, and the noise and everything, just total, utter chaos.”

Male, 58, Short Strand

“I didn’t know what was happening at 4 o’clock that morning. I hadn’t a clue, all I knew is that I was told to get out of bed and told to get in the living room, ok. And when I opened the front door there was a bus right up against the door [...] these areas were coming under attack, the British army were invading them, but I didn’t know that. So every street was barricaded, right across the whole district, every street had a barricade on it.”

Male, 58, Short Strand

Male, 51, Short Strand

“about 7 o’clock or half 7 in the morning we were crowded around in my grandmother’s wee house and the next thing you could hear the shooting and the rioting going on and you went out to the door out of curiosity and the next thing I remember the parachute regiment breaking in from the top, and the CS gas was just floating everywhere, I mean the area was covered in gas and flames and smoke all over the street where the factories were on fire.”

Male, 58, Short Strand

[illegible]

Internment was directed at nationalist communities, and therefore memories of internment were more marked for Short Strand residents than for their Inner East peers. However, one Inner East interviewee recalled her childhood reaction to the aftermath of trouble on Bryson Street:

“there had been real bad trouble in the area in Bryson Street and [...] she [my nanny] walked me down Bryson Street the next morning wherever we were going, I don’t know, and it was, it must have been very early and, you know, people’s houses were just empty and there was furniture lying in the street and windows and doors lying open and, people’s curtains, you know, and I must have been about 7 at the time, or 8, I don’t know, and just thinking what has gone on? You know, and even seeing toys and thinking: a child, really?”

Female, 56, Inner East

To Stay or to Go?

“looking at it from a child’s point of view, all of a sudden I remember people moving out of the street and they went on coal lorries”

Female, 56, Inner East

Displacement was an immediate consequence of these significant events, mirroring the mass population movement that had occurred throughout Northern Ireland since the outbreak of ‘the Troubles.’ The interviews revealed personal accounts of this population movement in Short Strand/ Inner East Belfast: reticence to leave; indecision on whether to stay or go; heartbreak at leaving family homes; and consequences of empty houses.

“[My father] didn’t want to sell his house, why would he want to sell the house he had put his whole life into? He thought maybe it was a good idea to look at a plan b, as a precaution [...] you don’t put your life’s blood in a house to say ‘it’s time to go”

Male, 58, Short Strand

“there was a Catholic family lived there [in Skipton Street] and then they left [...] and it was acrimonious as they left on a lorry, I thought it was heartbreaking, they had lived there for most of their lives.”

Male, 66, Inner East

“I remember breaking our hearts at having to leave such a lovely street that we grew up in, our childhood just seemed to disappear overnight. And when, and this was the start of the height of serious serious trouble...our parents just decided and knew that we had to move then.”

Female, 58, Short Strand

Displacement created empty houses in both Short Strand and Inner East. Previously animated homes became eyesores in both communities, and Bryson Street became regarded as a ‘buffer zone’ between Short Strand and Inner East.

“you see those houses on Bryson Street, they stayed up for a few years and...there was no reason to take them away, they acted as a kind of buffer zone... there was no way we were going to move back in”

Male, 51, Short Strand

“[Bryson Street] was very dismal looking, to think of the beautiful street that it was, you

know. It was very dismal for years until they built houses and rehoused people there.”

Female, 65, Short Strand

One interviewee recalled her perspective of the population movement and the particular impact of empty houses on her childhood play:

“it wasn’t like removal vans. Coal lorries came and put everybody’s stuff on coal lorries, you know. and so that left houses empty and I remember in particular there was a couple at the top of Thistle Street, sort of along Beechfield Street and, so we went and played in them, so it became a playground for us which was really exciting and, you know, and the windows were smashed and you were able to go in and, you know, and you know it meant nothing to us, you know, we didn’t have an idea why people had to go [...] it was just for us, a new playground.”

Female, 56, Inner East

Another interviewee revealed the sad and irrevocable change of conflict and displacement on his own childhood world:

‘All the friends I had in Bryson Street I never saw again’

Male, 58, Short Strand

Broader Context

Alongside the very local events of the outlined above, interviewees also referred to other key events of the 1970s and 80s that had an impact on life in the area, including the Hunger Strikes of 1981:

“While we were there [in Beechfield Street], the hunger strikers, that all happened. And they were waiting on Bobby Sands to die. So all of a sudden the whole atmosphere in the street changed. And they knocked the houses down facing us so that was a bit of spare land. And people used to park there for Rupert Stanley. So the army all of a sudden were about and the police. And they wouldn’t let anybody park there, they were worried about trouble kicking off. When my husband was coming home from work at night he was constantly being stopped ‘where are you going? What are you doing?’ and he said ‘I live here, I live here.’”

Female, 56, Inner East

An Inner East resident also recalled the drastic impact of the Ulster Workers’ Strike of 1974, during which Protestant workers across Northern Ireland united in a general strike to protest against the political and security situation in the province and to voice their opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement (CAIN, 2018c):

“everything was shut down, nobody had gas, electric, shops or anything. People were bringing you around bread and milk around the back of lorries.

Female, 68, Inner East

CHAPTER 4

CEMENTING DIVISION:

The Walls Go Up

The first peace walls that cemented division between Short Strand and Inner East were established in the 1970s, at Bryson Street and Cluan Place/ Clandeboyne Gardens, with additional walls being built in the area in the 80s, 90s, and 2000s (Belfast Interface Project, 2017). However, it is important to note that interface barriers were not unprecedented in Belfast prior to 'the Troubles'. In fact, separating communities physically to prevent inter-communal conflict has been a recurring strategy in the city, and intercommunal blockades were used

in Belfast as far back as the 1800s (Cunningham & Gregory, 2014). Following the first 'Troubles' of 1920-22, the first interface barrier to separate Protestants and Catholics in Belfast was erected in the Short Strand area in 1920 (Heatley, 2004). A key point to note, however, is that these early divisions were viewed as temporary measures in response to specific periods of increased tension, whilst the peace walls that appeared from the 1970s in East Belfast were built as permanent structures.

Psychological Barriers

“you don’t need a wall for there to be a barrier.”

Male, 32, Short Strand

Many of the physical barriers around Short Strand were built later than one might imagine. Madrid Street stayed open throughout ‘the Troubles’, and was only severed by a physical barrier following violence in 2002. In addition, the mesh fence at St Matthew’s Church was erected in 2012. In fact, only two peace walls were constructed in the area during the 1970s (Belfast Interface Project, 2017). However, the interviewees commented on the prevalence of psychological barriers that were ‘constructed’ following the outbreak of the Troubles. These ‘invisible lines’ demarcated territory and indicated where one could and could not safely go.

“There was a psychological boundary, you knew that side of Madrid Street was dangerous. See, one of the dares that we had was running from Beechfield Street up Thistle Street and back out onto Madrid Street.”

Male, 51, Short Strand

“Whenever we were growing up, we knew where you weren’t allowed to walk, we knew, as you were growing up, you weren’t allowed to go into certain places, you weren’t allowed on certain buses, you had to be careful, careful coming home as well.”

Female, 51, Inner East

One interviewee recalled her childlike curiosity as to what was on the other side of the psychological wall:

“my mum always told me: never go through that entry. And it’s one of the things as a child, you go ‘what’s through that entry?’, you know, we were never allowed to go through there. But little did we know it was a Catholic area, you know, we were just told we were never allowed to go through. But of course me and the sister and a wee friend stuck our head round the wall to see, you know, what is going on round here. But everything just looked normal to us.”

Female, 49, Inner East



Madrid Street, 1982 © Philip McAlpine. www.belfast35mm.co.uk

"I remember coming out of school and you would have went into Thistle Court, and Madrid Street would be there and that would be open, so [...] half a street would be Protestant and the other half of the street would be Catholic, and there would be a space in the middle with a couple of houses in the middle that were derelict, and that was the interface, that was [...] the mindset of an interface, it wasn't actually a direct barrier or a physical barrier, it was in your mind, right, that was the point of no return."

Male, 33, Inner East

Therefore, when the walls themselves were built, mostly in the latter stages of 'the Troubles' and during the peace process, they were merely a physical expression of already existing lines of division:

"the walls, it was only like a physical manifestation of psychological boundaries."

Male, 51, Short Strand

Interestingly, an older interviewee referred to psychological divisions that existed before 'the Troubles', as far back as the 1940s:

"There were not very many Catholic people on this side of Bryson Street, you know, [...] up the Belmont side of Bryson Street if you know what I mean. Madrid Street and Beechfield Street at that end would have been a movement into what was almost exclusively a Protestant area. So although there wasn't a wall then there was a very clear division"

Male, 77, Inner East

However, this interviewee also referred to 'invisible walls' existing between the patchwork of areas that make up Inner East, regardless of religious affiliation:

"although we're now talking about a big dividing wall between communities, there was always a, you know, always a very distinct set of little urban villages. And there were invisible walls."

Male, 77, Inner East

Alongside psychological walls that can be geographically located, several interviewees commented on the psychological walls that have been constructed in people's minds. It is perhaps these barriers that are harder to remove than any physical wall.

"you see the walls are representative of something deeper, and that's the walls inside people's hearts and people's minds."

Male, 66, Inner East

"Barriers in the mind are as important as physical barriers love, you know."

Male, 65, Inner East

"its clichéd, it's been said over and over again, but you get the walls out of people's heads, then you can start to take the walls on the streets down."

Male, 32, Short Strand

Impact on Everyday Activities

The interviews convey to outsiders the everyday reality of living by peace walls in East Belfast. These walls have a significant impact on residents, not only during times of heightened tension or violence. They also affect everyday choices and activities, including shopping and childhood play.

Due to the geography of the area, the interface has hindered shopping for Short Strand residents to a much greater degree than residents of Inner East.

“in East Belfast we had shops all around us whereas Short Strand, they had to come out if they wanted to go to Connswater”

Male, 33, Inner East

“the ones were coming from say the Strand onto the road, I think they maybe found it hard, or they’d use Peggy’s, the wee fruit shop that used to be there... and they’d of come in and got a couple of wee bits and then went into the Strand again”

Female, 49, Inner East

“There was an awful lot round here wouldn’t go up the Newtownards Road to shop. But as I said, round here, you pay nearly twice as much for things... There was a fruit shop round the Newtownards Road now and they were Protestants and she especially was the loveliest woman you could meet and if you went round and you had too much to carry and you were pushing the pram, the baby in it and all that, she’d say, ‘och, I’ll get Tommy to nip round with them.’ And they were burnt out.”

Female, 79, Short Strand

In fact, despite the proximity to the Albertbridge and Newtownards Road shops, many residents of the Short Strand now completely avoid shopping in these areas, and shop instead in the centre or north of the city.

“I haven’t been on the Newtownards Road now for... I think about 8 weeks. I don’t go personally up, I just go straight into the town, it’s near handier for me anyway cos I get a taxi and he takes me to the post office and then I go all round the town”

Female, 80, Short Strand

"My mother and all the neighbours I knew always shopped in the Newtownards Road. And then would of walked straight up the Newtownards Road or up Beechfield Street or up Madrid Street or up the Albertbridge Road and they would have done all their shopping there and then it got to the stage they did their shopping in the city centre, you know, cause they were getting abused going up"

Male, 68, Short Strand

"my mummy used to do our shopping in Connswater and it didn't really have an impact on how she...she just used to get a taxi and go up. But like my daddy and stuff wouldn't really like shop up there, he would like Yorkgate or like, I don't know, he just thinks it's easier and it's not as much drama."

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

Generational differences are apparent in shopping habits; the older generation would be more inclined to continue to go up the Newtownards Road to shop.

"when my mother and father were still with us they would have definitely taken the taxi up to parts of Newtownards Road. I was put off going on the road simply because you heard of people being attacked and things like that. But I would have no problem of

going out in the car, maybe nipping into the chemist to get a prescription or quickly in and out of somewhere. I certainly wouldn't be going up on foot or I wouldn't be hanging about if I was there."

Male, 31, Short Strand

"I think as far as we'd of ventured would have been the doctors and if you were really under pressure you'd have run round and use the chemist [...] My grandmother was of a generation where you were accustomed to getting your trolley on a Saturday morning and walking up and calling into wee shops to get your stuff. And...and there's still some people, there's still some people I suppose of a generation in the Strand who I would see would go up the Newtownards Road."

Male, 32, Short Strand

Interestingly, it seems that it wasn't actually 'the Troubles' or the early peace walls that had the greatest impact on shopping for residents of Short Strand, but more recent events such as the 2002 interface violence and the consequent severing of Madrid Street.

"We still shopped in the same shops up the Newtownards Road and [...] I had lovely memories of [my mother shopping] at Christmas time for toys for the younger children and whatnot and having to come

down the Newtownards Road with bundles and bundles of bags of toys and whatnot for we came from a big family and her not afraid, and I wouldn't have been frightened or anything. And that was during 'the Troubles' then, we still shopped in the Protestant areas"

Female, 58, Short Strand

"even after internment you might have been a wee bit afraid of going up Madrid Street. But Madrid Street then there was a lot of older people lived in it. [...] You may have been slightly afraid but not really because nothing ever happened to us going shopping, ever ever."

Female, 65, Short Strand

"I mean the people of the Short Strand kept those shops along the Newtownards Road and Albertbridge Road open, gave then a lot of business and then after [...] 2002 that all finished, all those businesses closed."

Male, 51, Short Strand

"this wall being built in Madrid Street. You couldn't walk down it no more to get into, to go do your shopping up the Newtownards Road."

Female, 58, Short Strand

Many of the interviewees also indicate that living by an interface places limitations on where children can play.

"kids across the street, their parents can't put them out the back because they're throwing stuff over"

Male, 25, Inner East

"I couldn't let the boys play too much, my two sons, out the back when they were younger because of the fear of something getting thrown over. We've golf balls, we even had chisels coming over"

Female, 49, Inner East

"you used to play football and you kicked [it] over the fence and it was gone, that was it, you never got it again. Being in school, every now and again there would have been rocks and bricks and things coming over the wall and I remember obviously play time, I remember the...the dinner ladies saying 'everybody against the wall' and everybody run against the wall and all lined up and there would have been bricks coming over the wall and stuff. And obviously we were just kids like, under eleven years of age."

Male, 33, Inner East

Impact on Life Inside the House

"Blinds were kept shut, lights were kept off."

Female, 49, Inner East

For those who live closest to the interface, even life inside the home is impacted. Significantly, the quotations below convey both the physical and psychological impact of having to prioritise security considerations and fortify the home.

Many of the interviewees who live closest to the peace walls comment on the need to have reinforced glass or grilles over windows. Although they offer some sense of security at the interface, they have negative implications on visibility out and they reinforce a feeling of being 'under seige'.

"we had to have sort of pyrex windows [...] these were like plasticky type windows and the window cleaner obviously would have come and cleaned the windows but when there was birds and stuff who did their business on them you would have scraped it off so over time there was little scrapes on the window, you actually couldn't see out, they actually look cloudy almost, like a bathroom

window would look. And I mean that was me looking out of my bedroom window."

Male, 33, Inner East

"just the relief of getting the grids, knowing you had windows, you couldn't clean your windows, well you could open them but you didn't bother, and... you know, so it was miserable."

Female, 56, Inner East

"We were offered bullet proof windows at one point. I wouldn't live with bullet proof windows because they block a good portion of the light coming in and it's not a way I want to live, you know, having to fortify your home for fear of being shot at, it's not a good way to think you want to live. [...] But they are strengthened glass windows throughout the front of the house."

Male, 31, Short Strand

"they asked us at the time you can either have a grille put on your window or you can have the reinforced glass. And I said put the reinforced glass on, it's bad enough opening the windows in the mornings and seeing the big fence up, you know, as it is. [...] no matter how much you clean your windows, you think it's not clean but it is clean"

Female, 49, Inner East

Interviewees also indicated that darkness inside the house can be a direct result of living adjacent to an interface barrier. Two interviewees from either side of the interface highlighted the lack of natural light which affected them due to boarded up windows:

“we had had no windows for a long time, so we’d had to have boards up, I mean we didn’t get post sometimes because it looked like there was nobody living in the house, and you were living in darkness all the time”

Female, 56, Inner East

“In 2002 our houses were hard-boarded up, the windows were hard-boarded up, because they were getting smashed that many times. So we lived, our living room was in darkness most of the time. And it was a nightmare, you know [...] my wife is very very houseproud and she went ‘it’s terrible having to live like this.’”

Male, 68, Short Strand

In addition, an Inner East resident commented that, during times of increased tension, she would keep lights off to avoid missiles being thrown at the house. This quotation conveys the realities of feeling watched and ‘under siege’ within your own home:

“when there was trouble going on, you know, I always at night times would have kept the lights off. Blinds were kept shut, lights were kept off. We didn’t put any lights on, only in the hall not in the rooms, the back rooms. When you went into the kitchen you depended on the light from the hall again. You didn’t put a light on, because every time you put a light on something got threw over. Cos you could hear them shouting, getting on. So we always just kept lights off.”

Female, 49, Inner East

Micro Geographies

"Even two streets away is a totally different experience."

Female, 56, Inner East

The interviewees stressed that your attitudes to the peace walls are directly shaped by how close you live to them. Strikingly, even seemingly very minor variations in distance to a 'peace wall' can have a big impact on attitudes to them. In fact, just around the corner from a 'peace wall' can seem like a 'world away' from the interface.

"I mean if you live in this part of the area [Beechfield Street] and somebody asks you: 'do you want those walls to come down?' You would probably say 'yeah, they're an eyesore'. But if you live where I live and right round that perimeter and you ask people you get a different response because we did a sort of straw poll and every house that I went into... people said they wanted the wall because they feel safe behind it."

Male, 68, Short Strand

"we did get moved to Westbourne Street which was just totally different [...] it was just round the corner, it was off Beechfield Street, but just a totally different experience, you can be living in the same area but your experience is so different"

Female, 56, Inner East

"it doesn't affect the people on that street, it doesn't affect them in the next street or McMaster Street or Templemore Avenue, but it affects the people who live right on the interface."

Male, 65, Inner East

A number of interviewees commented on the fact that outsiders form opinions and prejudices of the area without having any real understanding of the realities of living beside an interface.

"at the end of the day, some of the people who would slabber to me about the interfaces and about trouble and stuff like that: where have you lived? Have you ever lived on an interface? 'No'. You know, there you go, I lived there, I know what it's like. You know, I'm not saying anything... like I'm being bussed in from somewhere, I actually know what it's like to live there."

Male, 33, Inner East

“people that didn’t live near there say ‘oh here they go again’. But we were on the front line so to speak, we were having to live there every day. You know, they could just turn their tv off and get on with their own lives but we were right in the middle of it all.”

Female, 49, Inner East

“usually people who live in leafy land say ‘oh we have to have these walls down.’ They don’t live there, you know.”

Male, 66, Inner East

Consequently, many of the interviewees argued that it has to be the residents living closest to the interface barriers that ultimately decide the future of the walls.

“people like my sister who lives on the coal face, they’re the ones that are going to have to decide, they are the ones who are going to say yes or no to taking the walls down”

Male, 51, Short Strand

“it’s the people who can’t sleep at night, it’s the people who are constantly under fear of attack from both sides are the ones that need to have the say in this and the protection”

Male, 65, Inner East

“I don’t live beside a wall so I wouldn’t say ‘yes take it down’ or ‘keep it up’. I think it has to be them people’s decision.”

Female, 65, Short Strand

CHAPTER 5

'THEM' AND 'US': *Perceptions of 'The Other'*

**"Everybody knows
everybody".**

Female, 49, Inner East

Within interviews with residents of Inner East, a common perception of Short Strand was that 'everyone knows everyone', which therefore impedes one's sense of anonymity in the area. In the quotes below this lack of anonymity is generally associated with an unwillingness or even fear to go into the Short Strand.

"I would never walk through [Short Strand]. But one time I did cycle through with my friend just to see, like curious, like I've never been in this place, I want to go in there and see. And it was one of the most scariest experiences of my life.

People were just staring at you because they didn't recognise you, everyone does know everyone in the Short Strand and oh it was scary, I have to say."

Male, 21, Inner East

"Drove through it once and got stuck at the lights. They were rioting and they just spotted, once they see you and see the car, they know the car, they know everything, they can see it from their windows."

Male, 25, Inner East

*"Like I've dj'ed all over the country,
like in the Republic and all different areas.
[...] but I wouldn't do it in Belfast like.
'Go over to the Strand Bar and do a disco
on a Sunday?', 'no you're alright' [...] I
can do it outside because nobody
knows you."*

Male, 25, Inner East

*"there's people definitely like myself that
wouldn't walk through it, I wouldn't be
stupid and say I'm going to put myself
in danger by walking through the
Short Strand and some young louts
turn around and see me and say
'oh there's that orange b' "*

Male, 65, Inner East

*"Everybody knows everybody and no,
I would never [walk through the Short
Strand]".*

Female, 49, Inner East



Clandeboyne/Cluan Place Interface © Frankie Quinn www.frankiequinn.com

Interestingly, however, Inner East residents also referred to their own ability to gauge 'who was who', and differentiate between Protestants and Catholics. This indicates that a lack of anonymity is not restricted to the Short Strand area:

"you just knew growing up in interfaces, you knew who the Catholics [were], you knew the Protestants, just by looking at them. And that sounds wrong or something but it's not, you just knew, the way people dressed, the way they looked, their hairstyles, different things like that."

Male, 33, Inner East

"I think everybody knew where people were from, and I think that was bred into you at a very young age."

Female, 51, Inner East

Paradoxically, although a strong sense of 'the other' pervades many of the interviewees, several interviewees argue that both communities are in many ways very similar.

"you know those people are like us, just doing a day's work, and they're trying to do good for their own areas. [...] At the minute it's all cutbacks, cutbacks in all areas, no jobs in all areas, education, I mean, if you sit down and look at it, it's the same on both

sides really and truly. No matter what side of the wall you're living on."

Female, 65, Short Strand

"Catholics - this is me saying this like - but Catholics are the same people like I think there's no reason to fight with them"

Male, 21, Inner East

"You don't know the people the other side, and they're just as decent and as struggling as you are."

Male, 31, Short Strand

Class is regarded as a common denominator of the interface communities:

"You know, the people on both sides are both working class, they've both the same problems, and they've both got the same issues, and they're no different, you know, they're no different to each other"

Male, 53, Former Policeman

"there's no peace lines in the middle class areas, they're all in the working class areas."

Male, 51, Short Strand

CHAPTER 6

NORMALISATION OF CONFLICT AND DIVISION

“So everything is starting
to become normal”

Male, 58, Short Strand

A pervasive theme of the interviews was a sense of normalising the ‘abnormal’, whether it be ‘the Troubles’, violence at the interface, or the physical walls themselves. In fact, many of the interviewees indicated that they just had to ‘get on with life’ despite a difficult situation.

“There was always trouble that I remember. Always. But it was just there, it was just what we lived with.”

Female, 49, Inner East

A resident of the Short Strand recalled getting used to recurrent searches in the district during ‘the Troubles’.

“what used to happen as you walked down the street [...] you’d be stopped by a foot patrol and you’d more or less be questioned, and they’d throw you against the wall. And it was known, and they would basically kick your feet, like spread eagle, and they would search you. ‘Where are you going? Who are you? Where are you coming from? What’s your name?’ You know, the usual sort of stuff. You go through all that, they let you go, you walk around the corner and the next patrol stops you again. And they do it all over again. Are you with me? And you walk two streets down and you get stopped again and they do it all over again. And yet, believe it or not that becomes normal”

Male, 58, Short Strand

One Inner East resident told of the normalisation of heavy security and soldiers on the streets during 'the Troubles':

"I remember going to the shops you had to be searched going into the shops, I think we just thought of it as an everyday thing, and security, heavy security, being searched, I remember waking up in the mornings, soldiers were at your door, [...] waiting for trouble breaking out. So you had to step over soldiers to get out, to go to school."

Female, 51, Inner East

In fact, school may be seen as a symbol of normality in the midst of conflict, an example of an everyday activity co-existing with chaos. One Short Strand resident recalled the normalisation of British army raids and riots in the district in the early 70s, and remembered how he struggled to school despite the disruption:

"the noise of the bin lids and whistles [...] became familiar. So everything is starting to become normal. And believe it or not, through all that, I still went to school, tried to carry on."

Male, 58, Short Strand



Saul Street, 1985 © Frankie Quinn www.frankiequinn.com

One elderly resident of the Short Strand recalled the extraordinary lengths her daughter went to in order to sit her 'O' Levels:

"[My children] went to Rathmore which is in Dunmurry and the UWC strike was on [...] there were no buses, trains [...] there was protestors everywhere, there was just no movement, there was no gas, there was no electricity... It was really hard, that wee period. But my eldest was doing her 'O' levels at the time and she got up at about half 5 that morning and she said mummy 'I'm going to school.' 'Really? How're you going to get there?' 'I'm going to walk.' [...] And she did."

Female, 79, Short Strand

Another resident of Short Strand recollected a particular incident of violence at a cross community football match:

"we had a football match, must have been about 1974... local kids. And sure there's loads of people there must still remember it, that in the grounds of Beechfield Street Primary School there was a football match and after the football match one of the Loyalists pulled out a gun and started shooting, just for no reason, maybe bad losers or something"

Male, 51, Short Strand

An interviewee from the other side of the interface vividly remembered one particular night of rioting during her childhood. She recalled how her grandparents didn't panic but played a game of cards with her and her brother whilst chaos reigned outside the door:

"this particular night I just remember the noise, the people, the shouting and the feet and running [...] and I remember being so afraid they would come into the house, you know, and my nanny and my granda as I said lit a candle and sat and played cards with us."

Female, 56, Inner East

Younger interviewees who have no direct experience of the 'Troubles' indicated a certain normalisation of more recent incidents of interface violence:

"There was always petrol bombs being thrown over from Short Strand and golf balls and nuts and bolts and marbles and everything always got threw over. [...] It was just normal life growing up"

Male, 25, Inner East

"Bricks. Golf balls, marbles, metal. There used to be a construction site behind the peace wall and they used to get like bolts and throw them over as well."

Male, 21, Inner East

Interestingly, both an older resident of Short Strand and a young teenager from Inner East commented on 'routine' violence occurring in the area during both 'the Troubles' and the more recent flag protests of 2012:

"it was just constant, and it was just like a norm. it just, everyone just got used to it. And they were like 'oh about 7 o'clock tonight there's going to be a riot' and there was, you know what I mean."

Female, 17, Inner East

"the occasions that you had to go to mass, you used to walk up and take a left at Seaforde Street and every Sunday evening, it was clockwork, there was serious riots going on at that corner"

Male, 51, Short Strand

One Inner East resident conveys a general expectation of violence at the interface:

"back car window's been done once but ... you expect it now and again."

Male, 25, Inner East

Normalisation of Walls

"it's a way of life now, it's a wall, so no big deal."

Male, 68, Short Strand

The normalisation of the peace walls themselves was particularly evident from younger interviewees who have no memories of life without the interface barriers. For many of them, the walls have been rendered invisible - 'part of the background' - through familiarity. Interestingly, the quotes below reveal very similar thoughts on the peace walls from young people on both sides of the interface.

"I just couldn't imagine life without the peace walls, just because like I'm so used to them being there"

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

"As I was growing up, basically the wall just became like a part of the background really, so it was something that didn't really bother me back in the day, when I didn't really understand anything about it."

Male, 21, Inner East

"They don't really bother me as much as what everybody else makes out that they do, like it's just a wall."

Female, 17, Short Strand, 2

"I don't think you ever noticed a wall as such. 'Cos they've always been there and that was it."

Female, 51, Inner East

"I don't mind them, it's not a big... issue in the area. It's never really spoken about. It's just... a wall. You don't classify it as a peace wall, it's just a wall."

Female, 17, Inner East

"I know some people have got so used to those walls they are a memory to them, they are another piece of breath to them, for safety. For the older people, you know. But what affect is that having on them? Because it's made them like that now, having those walls up."

Female, 58, Short Strand

"obviously it's [the wall is] there but it doesn't affect your normal life. Cos you grew up with it and you're used to it, so it doesn't, it doesn't bother any of us now."

Male, 25, Inner East

"I think it's just something you get used to living with, you know."

Female, 65, Short Strand

Interestingly, the normalisation of the walls was also evident in interviews with some of the older residents of the area. Indeed, the longevity of the walls means that, even amongst an older generation that can remember life before the walls, many have now become used to them.

"it doesn't annoy me that wall now. Because I'm so used to walking up and down at it. It means nothing to me now. If they want to take it down - fine. If they don't want to take it down - it makes no difference to me."

Female, 80, Short Strand

CHAPTER 7

LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY

“Quite a lot of mixed marriages in Short Strand. And lots of people living here wouldn’t have said anything to them”

Female, 65, Short Strand

For some, the psychological and physical walls between the communities have impeded mixed relationships of any sort. However, many interviewees indicated that both mixed marriages and mixed relationships are not unknown in the area.

An older interviewee recalled mixed relationships prior to ‘the Troubles’:

“Well, 50s and 60s, that’s about as far back as I remember [...] Protestant girls went with boys from Short Strand and vice versa, the same here.”

Female, 68, Inner East

Following the outbreak of ‘the Troubles’, mixed marriages and relationships were curtailed. Many couples already in mixed marriages had to move away from the area or faced ostracization:

“whenever I was growing up I remember there was a mixed marriage and they were put out of their home. So they were. There was quite a lot of that.”

Female, 51, Inner East

“there was lots and lots of families had to leave that were of mixed marriage.”

Female, 58, Short Strand

"I think we've lost out on a lot, could of had maybe brilliant friends and that down there, or married into, you know, different religions and that. So I think we've lost out on quite a lot as well... without ourselves withdrawing away from it, it's been taken away from us"

Female, 51, Inner East

"Obviously with cross community work you done with schools, you maybe did fancy the odd girl or back and forth, but you knew not to take it anywhere because you just didn't have that space to do that. So the back yard wall was the Alamo, you know, and that whole interface there, you just didn't pass into it."

Male, 33, Inner East

Significantly, although 'the Troubles' curtailed mixed relationships, they did not prevent them. In fact, many interviewees argued that mixed marriages and relationships continued throughout 'the Troubles' and after the construction of the peace walls.

"when I was growing up, a teenager, some of my friends had girlfriends the other side of the wall."

Male, 51, Short Strand

"summer nights and things we used to lie in bed and the kids would have gathered at both sides, so we used to hear them shouting over at each other. And the problem was, they knew each other, 'cos they'd all been away on cross community holidays. And they're shouting all this abuse, and then they say 'hey Seamy, she fancies you'"

Female, 56, Inner East

"there was a lot of intermarriage between Newtownards Road and Woodstock Road with Short Strand. But it wasn't really, it wasn't approved of, you know."

Male, 66, Inner East

"my uncle married a girl from the Short Strand so my cousins grew up as Catholics in the Short Strand [...] they all lived in the Short Strand, grew up in the Short Strand. So it wasn't something that you would have advertised, let's put it that way. But it wasn't uncommon either, you know."

Female, 56, Inner East

A number of interviewees also commented on the increasing prevalence of mixed relationships within the younger generations of the area. Significantly, this speculation by some of the older generations was confirmed by the younger interviewees themselves, some of whom stated that they actually were or had been in mixed relationships.

"So now it's good to see people with a bit of sense, younger people, are actually socialising in the city centre now. And there is relationships being built up. I've heard of young people going with girls from the Newtownards Road which is brilliant, that's the way life should be."

Male, 68, Short Strand

"I think some of them [young people] have even got relationships going. I don't know, there's talk of a few of them having Protestant-Catholic relationships going."

Female, 65, Short Strand

"the kids, some of them are yes, fighting, some of them are actually sitting on a wall talking to each other, on both sides, some of them might be kissing each other, you know, all the while fighting's going on, you know. So you'd three sorts of elements of this one bit of trouble: you'd friendships, relationships, fighting, you know, it was all going on."

Male, 33, Inner East

CHAPTER 8

SHARED SPACES:

*past, present
and future*

“sure Titanic
Quarter’s
a shared space”

Male, 33, Inner East

Strikingly, despite the overall narrative of division, the three generations of interviewees all highlighted specific shared spaces in East Belfast where the different communities could meet, both in the past and present. Interestingly, potential future shared spaces were also highlighted by the interviewees. The shared spaces ranged in scale, from the city centre to an individual building, and they fulfilled a variety of functions, from leisure to practical need.

The Picturedrome Cinema was cited as a shared space by the older residents that were interviewed. Used by both communities, it remained open during the early years of ‘the Troubles’, but closed its doors in 1972.

“at the spot where the Credit Union now is on the Mountpottinger Road, that was the famous Picturedrome, that was used by both communities until 1972, it closed in 1972.”

Male, 51, Short Strand

“in between each set of movies they played the national anthem and that was the real teller of things you know. The Catholics would have managed to not be there by the time they played the national anthem. If they didn’t want to stand for it it was their business.”

Male, 77, Inner East

“we had of went to the Picturedrome and sometimes we would have fought in there with some of the kids from Short Strand, you know. [...] I mean we also fought with the gang in the next street, you know what I mean, or the gang from Sydenham”

Male, 66, Inner East

Multiple generations of interviewees from both communities remember using the **Templemore Avenue Baths**, both before and during ‘the Troubles’. This building is an interesting shared space as, unlike many of the other examples, it is located within what was perceived as a single identity territory.

“we learnt to swim in Templemore Avenue Baths... I mean... all the kids in St Matthew’s School, right up until, what, until it was, until the pool closed there in the 80s, used to walk round with our towels under our arms and go swimming”

Male, 51, Short Strand



The Picturedrome Cinema, Collection Belfast History Project

“when we had the swimming, we had to walk up Madrid Street to Templemore Avenue, to the swimmers there. So you had to walk through the unionist area”

Male, 31, Short Strand

Significantly, the younger generations of interviewees conveyed a perception of the **Titanic Quarter** as a shared space:

“I think when you’re at Titanic, there’s all different people and religions and cultures and that there. So it doesn’t really matter.”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 2

“when we go out with our Protestant friends we go over to Titanic, you know like behind the Odyssey, we sit about there, there’d be a lot of us”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

“you know the Odyssey Complex is a great success story where both communities go there quite regularly and meet”

Male, 53, Former Policeman

“The Titanic Quarter as well, as I say, it’s a shared space, people are walking in and out doing different things. I remember walking round last year...the ‘Pokemon Go’ thing was a big craze, I never seen so many people out

doing things, I actually was scared to get on my phone and text anybody in case people thought I was doing ‘Pokemon’ and so I put my phone in and just took in how changed the whole area is, and people were just sitting around talking and walking along and there was none of this ‘are you a Prod mate? Are you a Catholic mate?’”

Male, 33, Inner East

The **city centre** was referenced by several interviewees as a shared space. It was regarded as a *neutral* space within the city, facilitating mixing in the workplace and in places of leisure.

“Like when I was working for a company in town it was mixed, so Catholics and Protestants, I was talking to the likes of Catholics from Glengormley and Falls Road”

Male, 21, Inner East

“You don’t go by your religion when you’re in work, it just doesn’t happen. You meet them [work colleagues] at Christmas time for Christmas stuff, you go out for a drink and... but you leave them and you leave the town, that’s it, it’s left there. ‘Cos they’re not going to come back to your house for a drink.”

Male, 25, Inner East

"in the early 60s when I was in my teens and older there was very little sectarianism as I recall because I went into the city centre to a place called the Jazz club [...] we were the mods, we went to the Jazz Club and that's actually where I met my wife. I was 17 and she was 16. She was from the Hollywood Road so we were of a different religion. But there was a group of us and we didn't talk about religion and we talked about soul music and blues music."

Male, 68, Short Strand

The **doctors' surgery**, located at the corner of Bryson Street and Newtownards Road was also cited as an informal shared space, used by both communities:

"people coming from both districts are actually using the doctors' surgery [...] And wee gentle talk between people in the doctors' surgery or the dentist, that's progress"

Male, 53, Former Policeman

However, one resident of Inner East indicates that the design and location of the entrance impacts upon their interpretation of the doctors' surgery as a shared space:

"their door is right into Bryson Street and I still feel strange to walk round that corner to go into the doctors."

Female, 49, Inner East

The **former Sirocco Works** site was highlighted by a number of interviewees as a potential shared space. However, its designation as a shared space is dependent on careful design and choice of use.

"what's coming in what used to be the Sirocco site, that's exciting, if that's done right and that's consulted right, that could be another sort of, a new, a small step to shared development for the future."

Male, 53, Former Policeman

"I mean there's that Sirocco site, there's the Titanic site, to me I think the whole area's going to more metropolis or something, it's becoming more like a normalised society almost"

Male, 33, Inner East

CHAPTER 9

POST CONFLICT?

The peace process gained momentum during the 1990s. The first Republican and Loyalist paramilitary ceasefires were declared in 1994, and on 10th April 1998 the Good Friday Agreement was signed, bringing to a close almost thirty years of civil war that had left over 3,600 dead and many tens of thousands injured (Leonard & McKnight, 2011; Fitzduff & O'Hagan, 2009). One of the consequences of the Agreement was the creation of a power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly.

Following the signing of the Agreement, Belfast commenced its transition to a 'post-conflict' city. However, East Belfast experienced continuing conflict in the decades following the Good Friday Agreement. Interviewees highlighted two critical periods of violence during these decades in the Short Strand/ Inner East interface area: 2002 and the flag protests of 2012/13.

2002

"unfortunately in 2002 interface conflict returned to the streets"

Male, 58, Short Strand

During 2002, the interface areas around the Short Strand experienced persistent, large scale violence, with the majority of the disorder occurring at the Clandeboyne/ Cluan Place interface. The violence had significant implications on everyday life for residents on either side of the interface barriers. The use of facilities such as the doctors' surgery, post office, and shops on the Newtownards Road was impeded for Short Strand residents. In fact, the period of violence was subsequently dubbed the 'Siege of Short Strand' by residents of the Catholic 'enclave'.

"It had an impact on everybody in the Short Strand, that siege [...] we all suffered because of it. I mean for six months like... doctors' surgeries had to be conducted in the community centre."

Male, 51, Short Strand

"residents on both sides suffered, a lot of people, you know, houses were really badly damaged in the Clandeboye area, houses were damaged in the Cluan Place area."

Male, 53, Former Policeman

"June I think it was 2002, [...] that was what was dubbed the Siege of Short Strand and Bryson Street again got it. Every single house was targeted on the interface, especially Bryson Street and Clandeboye, Clandeboye got it very very bad."

Male, 31, Short Strand

"the Cluan Place episode. It looked as if, it looked as if the IRA were trying to put the residents - there's a wee enclave, you've heard of it - tried to put those people out. Five people were shot there."

Male, 66, Inner East

"I live just facing the wall, you know, so my house has been attacked on numerous occasions. But 2002 was more concentrated and in fact a blast bomb came over and blew my front door off and my youngest son was just out of the road of it, he'd just walked into another room. So this was going on every night, every day, 5 o'clock in the morning. Didn't stop. Relentless really for about a year."

Male, 68, Short Strand

"In the early part of 2002 when the troubles started first, I remember one day being in Clandeboye and actually tins of peas came over the wall and frozen stuff. So obviously they'd got into somebody's house that was derelict or they had left and were throwing stuff out of their fridge [...] I know for definite one day, I remember my mummy saying there were 300 fireworks came out over the wall."

Female, 65, Short Strand

"there was five people shot round in Cluan Place, you know what I mean, and this was when the IRA was on a ceasefire, there was five people shot. And there was a guy shot standing beside me when I was out my back, a young lad shot in the ankle, from the barrier"

Male, 65, Inner East

Interestingly, several Short Strand residents compared the events of 2002 to the thirty years of 'the Troubles', indicating that violence in 2002 was actually more frightening:

"2002 was very bad. I think I was more frightened, I think I was more afraid in 2002. I think 'cos it was very local."

Female, 65, Short Strand

"there wasn't hundreds of British troops on the streets, there wasn't gun battles, but it was vicious, it was bad. And probably the worst there's been and it would be, 2002 was six months of hell in East and North Belfast."

Male, 58, Short Strand



Madrid Street wall, 2018 © Rosaleen Hickey

"In 2002 our houses were hard-boarded up, the windows were hard-boarded up, because they were getting smashed that many times. So we lived, our living room was in darkness most of the time. [...] Before that we never had our windows boarded up.

Male, 68, Short Strand

The disorder also held longer term consequences for the area. In June 2002 interface barriers were increased in height across Short Strand. Significantly, Madrid Street, which had remained open throughout 'the Troubles' was severed by a barrier in June 2002 (Byrne, 2005). In addition, the violent events of 2002 have had a lasting effect on the use of the Newtownards Road and the Albertbridge Road by residents of the Short Strand.

"Madrid Street for some reason was allowed to stay open until after 2002 and that was the final nail in the [coffin], where they sealed off the whole thing."

Male, 58, Short Strand

"Well when I saw the Madrid Street wall being built after the siege of the Short Strand business I was angry. I was so angry."

Female, 58, Short Strand

"I mean the people of the Short Strand kept those shops along the Newtownards Road and Albertbridge Road open, gave them a lot of business and then after [...] 2002 that all finished, all those businesses closed."

Male, 51, Short Strand

Flag Protests

“it was a war zone for two weeks.”

Male, 25, Inner East

On 3 December 2012, Belfast City Council voted to reduce the days that the Union flag flies above the City Hall to 18 designated days a year. The Ulster Loyalist response to this decision was immediate and persistent. Throughout December 2012 and January 2013 street protests were held throughout Northern Ireland, but focused in East Belfast. Some of these protests turned violent, developing into clashes between Loyalists and the police (CAIN, 2018b). Although protests reduced in scale and frequency from February 2013, the consequences of the council vote can still be felt today. Indeed, it had very long term consequences on cross community work, trust and relations in East Belfast.

“when it gets serious, during say the flag protests and stuff like that, just things just totally broke down, you just didn’t do that cross community contact.”

Male, 33, Inner East

“when the flag protest thing came up I just couldn’t understand it, I actually confronted senior Republicans about it and asked them why, why, because, and I believe that the work that we had done in the previous seven or eight years had all just been wiped off, wiped off. And I believe now, it’s about three or four years since the flag protests [...] I think the dialogue is ready to start again”

Male, 65, Inner East

For the youngest interviewees, born after the 1998 Agreement, memories of the months of protests following the decision to limit the flying of the Union flag are amongst their earliest recollections of widespread disorder in the area:

“Well when the flag came down in December [...] right until July, it was unreal, like it was just like riots every night, cars getting burnt out, buses hijacked, just constant violence. And see they were wrecking their own area, like they were doing it to their own people.”

Female, 17, Inner East

Triggers of Violence at the Interface Today

During the interviews, interviewees cited many reasons why trouble can flare at the interface today. In fact, time of year, weather, school holidays and sporting events were all held to be contributory factors:

“summer time and school holidays and all would be different because there would be a lot more trouble [...] you just know that the interfaces are a wee bit different in and around them school holidays and summer holidays. Because there’s a lot more kids on the street and people are crossing.”

Male, 33, Inner East

“it’s seasonal. Warm weather would also be a factor.”

Male, 53, Former Policeman

“certain things in history over the years, you know, different protests, different things created tensions”

Male, 53, Former Policeman

“usually like if Celtic won they would start like throwing things over”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 2

Several interviewees also indicated that events at Stormont feed down into behaviour at the interface:

“takes a lot what happens up in Stormont you know. How they behave filters down to how people on the ground behave. [...] It’s a lot to do with what happens on the hill”

Male, 33, Inner East

Young People at the Interface

“young people, they’re all different, they all get on and then the next day they’re fighting and then the next day they get on again so... as I said they’re confusing.”

Female, 17, Inner East

The role of youth in continuing violence at the interface was discussed widely during the interviews. Residents presented a range of views regarding the role of young people in both continuing and overcoming interface violence in East Belfast.

The interviews indicated that kids at the interface today are complex and contradictory; they both fight and are friends with their peers from the other community.

“the kids, some of them are yes, fighting, some of them are actually sitting on a wall talking to each other, on both sides, some of them might be kissing each other, you know, all the while fighting’s going on.”

Male, 33, Inner East

“there is like a load of projects that go on at the minute. And it’s like... the Catholics from Short Strand and Protestants from here like they put them together and do trips with them and so it’s like engaging that way and then they become friends... but it just depends, like it could come July again and then they’re just all rioting.”

Female, 17, Inner East

“it’s a hard one about kids, kids are funny, [...] if you had different kids in here they’d probably tell you very different stories of what they, how they view the barriers or the walls”

Male, 65, Inner East

“I see young people now who have an extensive network of friends and contact in both communities, back and forward [...] and social media plays a big impact on all of that... But I do see kids who know for the first time, who know who they’re throwing stones at, who are able to say and who are able to prearrange stuff via social media so they do have relationships but yet they feel part of their relationship has to be, ‘well at July we’re going to organise a couple of fights’”

Male, 32, Short Strand

Many of the interviewees indicated that rioting or disorder at the interface is not necessarily sectarian in nature but a response to boredom; a desire for some 'craic'; a reflection of 'kids being kids'.

"Like half of the kids I spoke to don't even know anything about religion, they're just down there for the craic. 'Cos kids are kids and they will do that, you know what I mean. So... they see their mates going down there like 'aye, we'll go down there and throw a few bricks."

Female, 17, Inner East

"you get the young ones at Mountpottinger Road. The young ones from this side go to the bottom of Castlereagh Street, maybe bored to tears, start throwing a stone here and there"

Female, 68, Inner East

"it's going to happen in Halloween time, that kids are off school, later nights, all that stuff, they don't have to go in as early. So where do they get a bit of craic? They go to an interface, throw a few stones"

Male, 33, Inner East

"It's not like because they are a Catholic and like someone's a Protestant. They don't fight over that anymore. It's just because...they just feel like fighting."

Female, 17, Inner East

In addition, several interviewees argued that youth interface violence will always continue:

"I just don't believe it'll ever stop. I think it will just go on and on"

Female, 51, Inner East

"it's always going to be there, people say 'oh we have to stop this interface trouble.' Never going to stop it, you know. And that's not a cop out"

Male, 33, Inner East

"There has always been a wee gang to take over from the next gang. And these things will just happen you know."

Male, 68, Short Strand

Interestingly, many of the interviewees argued that young kids causing disorder at the interface don't actually understand the issue or the history of division in the area:

"the younger versions, they are growing up, they don't know exactly what it is all about. They only listen to bits and pieces, and [are] trying to put it together."

Female, 51, Inner East

"younger kids, like they just don't understand, like I wouldn't of understood when I was 13, like as much as what I do now. As you get older then you understand because you're getting involved in more cross community projects and like you're understanding general stuff more"

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

"A lot of the kids, especially the younger ones, don't even know why they're there"

Male, 51, Short Strand

"I think like the younger ones just don't really understand what it's all about"

Female, 17, Short Strand, 2

"Well I've asked my kids how do they feel about it and they had said it's over a flag. I don't believe they have any real meaning of or understanding of what it was like when we grew up."

Female, 51, Inner East

In fact, residents on both sides of the interface suggested that some young people actually romanticise 'the Troubles', which leads to a desire to get involved in interface disorder:

"the younger ones are listening to [...] stories from some of the older ones about the 'good old days'."

Male, 51, Short Strand

"there's always an element to young people, the romanticisation of 'the Troubles' [...] some young people feel they've missed out on actually getting involved in things [...] So that feeds into some of their feeling about maybe wanting to go on the interface and cause a bit of a ruckus"

Male, 33, Inner East

Today, new technology and social media is also seen to be an important contributing factor in perpetuating youth disorder at the interface in East Belfast:

"this Facebook business now, there was never none of that. Now they're organising wee meeting matches."

Female, 68, Inner East

"Social media is the biggest instigator of it all. They're arranging meets through Facebook."

Male, 25, Inner East

"from having all people my age on Facebook, from both communities, and just seeing statuses and people fighting and arranging fights and just completely bitter stuff over social media [...] it's nuts, really nuts."

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

"Kids can now organise things on the internet, they can organise riots at the drop of a hat, they can organise to meet over Facebook. One bad post on Facebook and they're all out."

Male, 53, Former Policeman

Significantly, residents from both sides of the interface also argued that it is not just local kids causing trouble at the interface. Rather, it seems that a large proportion of interface violence is actually caused by outsiders coming in to the area:

"It's not just local kids now, its people coming from other districts, and that's what communities are saying [...] Why are they coming there to have their so called meetings and wrecking about?"

Male, 53, Former Policeman

"kids would have come into the street and threw rocks over, bricks and bottles and whatever else. But they were ok because they went home, maybe a mile, two miles, three miles, sometimes even ten miles away and went home and went to their beds"

Male, 33, Inner East

"it's not our kids are creating it, it's ones I know are coming from outside the area, and we're sick and tired of saying to the police, you need to deal with them"

Male, 65, Inner East

“recently there’s been a whole lot of people gathering on the interface, like kids, like 13 and 14 year olds. And it’s hardly people from our area, there’s people coming over from like the Markets and standing at the interface and getting a crowd of Protestants coming down and giving our area a bad name”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

Paradoxically, although the quotes above suggest that young people play a key role in continuing interface violence, some of the interviewees also indicated that many children today are turning away from conflict and are actually more open to cross community engagement than the older generation:

“there seems to be a bit of a change in young people, they’re seeing that they’re living with, you could say our mistakes in terms of adults, but even people older than me’s mistakes, in terms of this trouble all seemed to come about because people couldn’t seem to get on in the 60s and 70s, and it’s just filtered down and filtered down and these young people are now living with it and they want to break out of that [...] young people from right across the city seem to want to mingle together and be ok with each other.”

Male, 33, Inner East

“the vast bulk of kids I know and I’ve worked with have no interest in that kind of interface arranged nonsense.”

Male, 32, Short Strand

“nowadays you’re talking to people my age and they don’t care anymore, they don’t care about bands, they don’t care about, like, rioting, they don’t care about trouble, they don’t care that someone’s a Catholic or someone’s different than them”

Male, 21, Inner East

“I’ve great hope for younger people, I really do, who maybe can get beyond this.”

Female, 56, Inner East

CHAPTER 10

VIEWS OF THE PEACE WALLS TODAY

**“it’s hideous,
but to me it’s
a necessary
part of survival.”**

Male, 68, Short Strand

At the latest count, Belfast Interface Project (2017) identified 11 peace walls or security barriers in Short Strand/Inner East Belfast. Within the interviews, a wide variety of opinions was evident regarding these walls, across both the generations and the two communities. In addition, some interviewees evidently had mixed internal feelings towards the walls.

Several residents, predominantly from Inner East, indicated a strong desire to keep the walls:

“I say the wall’s better staying where it is.”

Female, 49, Inner East

“I wouldn’t have it down.”

Male, 25, Inner East

In fact, one interviewee argued that, for greater reassurance of security, the height of the walls could actually be increased:

“In my opinion the fence could be made bigger because [...] I can’t believe how far kids can throw”

Male, 21, Inner East

However, evident from other interviewees, from both communities, was a strong desire to see the walls of the area removed:

“I would love to see all the paramilitary murals off the walls, I would love to see, you know, back to the time when I was a kid when there were no peace walls, you know, and I’d love to see that, you know. But I have to be realistic about it, you know.”

Male, 66, Inner East



Clandeboy Gardens/Cluan Place wall © Neil Jarman

"I want them gone, I don't like the notion of people thinking I live in a cage, I live in a community."

Male, 32, Short Strand

"I would rather see them all gone. Because they weren't always there. They were put there as a temporary measure many years ago and they have just become part of the fabric of the community."

Male, 31, Short Strand

"I would say take all the walls, all the gates, all the trees away. Stop, stop hiding behind them. Take them down. Just take them down."

Female, 58, Short Strand

"They [the walls] should be all down, and live just the way it was years and years ago."

Female, 68, Inner East

"in the future, definitely, they will have to come down eventually."

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

Alongside the strong opinions on the walls evidenced above, several interviewees also displayed mixed feelings towards the walls. The young people quoted below show a reading of the walls as both positive and negative entities for the area.

"I just couldn't imagine life without the peace walls, just because like I'm so used to them being there and...I don't know, like... I think it would just start all the troubles all over again 'cos obviously people want them down for like a better future but then there's people want them up just because like they just don't really want to deal with the reality or like anything, they just want an easy life. But I think it would be a good benefit to our area. But at the same time I think it would just be like, nuts."

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

"the first thing you see when you look out the window is this big fence. It's.... it's not annoying, it's more disappointing that it has to be there. But if it wasn't there then the place would be distraught like, the place wouldn't be a nice place to live at all."

Male, 21, Inner East



Bryson Street wall © Neil Jarman

Although a mix of views is evident above, a strong theme across all of the interviews was a feeling of pessimism regarding the removal of the walls in the foreseeable future:

“see the chances of getting walls away by 2023, there’s not a chance in hell love if it continues the way it’s going.”

Male, 65, Inner East

“they’ve been there forever. Like there’s been things like trying to take them down but it

just never happened. And it keeps getting higher, never mind smaller or taken away.”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 2

“Unfortunately I don’t see too much changing in the near future.”

Male, 31, Short Strand

“I think there’ll always be a need for peace walls in Belfast for a long time to come... unfortunately.”

Male, 51, Short Strand

“the barriers can only come down when the people who live at them feel safe enough to live there, which in my opinion knowing the area and knowing the people and knowing the issues, we’re a long way off in that sense.”

Male, 33, Inner East

Furthermore, some interviewees commented that they don’t believe the walls will ever come down, with one resident of Inner East stating strongly:

“I don’t think peace walls will ever come down full stop.”

Female, 51, Inner East

Overwhelmingly, a sense of safety was cited as the key justification for retaining the walls.

“see when I say I personally wouldn’t want those walls down, it’s not ... it’s not that you like looking at them, it’s not the thing, people still feel they are safer behind them”

Male, 68, Short Strand

“it does give the community a bit of security and to be honest if you took that wall down it would just be world war 3”

Male, 25, Inner East

“to be honest with you love, I looked upon it [the Madrid Street wall] as a device that was needed for to give the safety to the people that lived there.”

Male, 65, Inner East

“as for the walls themselves, an awful lot of people appreciated them because it was a safety measure... from UVF, UDA and from us to them, it worked both ways, trust me, it wasn’t all one-sided, you know.”

Female, 79, Short Strand

“there are a lot of people who very much see the walls as a safety mechanism and a comfort blanket.”

Male, 32, Short Strand

“it kept you safe, ‘cos I heard stories from the old boys back in the days where they used to come through and smash your house up, but now it’s, you’re safe more where you are. You get the odd thing but it’s just...life. So it is.”

Male, 25, Inner East

“ ‘Cos it’s all down to security and you ask my sister, if you ask her now do you want the wall taken down she’ll say no. Because she’s grandchildren out in the street so she wants it as high so as nothing can get threw over. It’s all about feeling safe, you know.”

Male, 51, Short Strand

Paradoxically, however, some interviewees argued that the walls or security barriers don’t actually protect.

“people think... oh it’s a safety barrier, it’s a safety barrier, but during the flag protests and during the stuff that happened at Cluan Place, people were able to shoot through those railings at my community [...] you say to yourself, it’s not a protection from either side because it’s easy enough, the barrier’s easy enough to get over, or to deal with or to pull away or whatever.”

Male, 65, Inner East

“I don’t really see them as protecting me. ‘Cos there’s not as much trouble anymore.”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

“It’s still not stopping bottles and stuff coming over”

Female, 58, Short Strand

“[The Madrid Street barrier] wasn’t keeping me safe or doing anything to build relationships, in fact, quite the opposite. And it was disappointing. Because you just seen these builders coming in and building steel fences and brick walls and it was just another nail in the coffin for any sort of relationship.”

Male, 31, Short Strand

Although a small number of residents commented that the walls didn’t impede their daily lives, it should be noted that none of these interviewees live directly adjacent to a peace wall.

“it doesn’t annoy me that wall now. Because I’m so used to walking up and down at it. It means nothing to me now. If they want to take it down - fine. If they don’t want to take it down – it makes no difference to me.”

Female, 80, Short Strand

“there’s like all different ends to get into Short Strand. So... you could just walk up the street or walk on to the road and you’re into Short Strand. It’s not affecting anybody really.”

Female, 17, Inner East

“you can go round them. They never bother anybody, you just get on with it, they’re not stopping you going anywhere.”

Male, 25, Inner East

“as regards the walls being...an issue for people on the unionist side and the Loyalist side, no, to me anyway this is my personal view, I don’t think they’ve been, ‘cos they don’t stop us accessing anywhere if you understand me, it’s not as though we have to do a two mile detour to get from a to b”

Male, 65, Inner East

Interestingly, the quotes above also speak of similarities of opinion across the generations.

CHAPTER 11

INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

**“my generation,
we’re all going to
have to die out and
take our nonsense
away with us”**

Female, 56, Inner East

A unique aspect of this project was its intergenerational. Indeed, the age of interviewees ranged from 17 to 80, enabling the project to uncover a wide range of perspectives. The interviews permit us to see how attitudes to and behaviour at the interface barriers is influenced by age.

The quotes below speak of general generational differences in terms of perception of freedom of movement and sense of security, suggesting that the older generation are less affected by the peace walls:

“A lot of people of my age would have them feelings obviously of growing up during the mad sort of years of the riots and stuff so... you wouldn’t go in and out of the area, in and out of Short Strand or walk around it. And obviously grannies and that older generation would know how it was before the walls went up [...] so they would be a different generation, the way they would get on with people, the way they would feel around the interface and stuff, a lot of pensioners obviously wouldn’t care because they would be at that age where they wouldn’t get any hassle and stuff. Whereas young people would be a bit different.”

Male, 33, Inner East

"I mean my grandmother still would have ventured out that way to do her shopping on the Newtownards Road, would have went to places there [...] Whereas I suppose even her daughter, my mother's generation, then us, we would tend to venture over into the city centre and cross over the Queen's Bridge."

Male, 32, Short Strand

However, particularly evident from the younger interviewees was a sense that the older generation are actually more entrenched in their attitudes towards 'the other'.

"I would say the older generation who have lived through 'the Troubles' would be different in their way of thinking and I would imagine that the majority of them would see that there's no hope if any of the walls came down because they have been through this bitter divide of society"

Male, 31, Short Strand

"older ones like 60s and 70s and the ones that actually grew up through the riots and 'the Troubles' and stuff are the more bitter ones."

Male, 21, Inner East

"I mean I don't even care about religion, religion means nothing. But then if you meet a 60 year old man what has 1690 on his arm, he's like 'aye that there's there for a reason'"

Female, 17, Inner East

"The older generation I think would be a bit harder 'cos they don't know no different where the younger generation, if they're kept out of it I think they'll be able to live with each other, yeah, and I think they'll not miss out on what we missed out on."

Female, 51, Inner East

"old people. I don't know, like they're just bitter"

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

Correspondingly, several interviewees conveyed a perception that the younger generation from both communities may actually be more open to engaging with 'the other' and eroding divisions than the older residents of the area.

"nowadays you're talking to people my age and they don't care anymore, they don't care about bands, they don't care about rioting, they don't care about trouble, they don't care that someone's a Catholic or someone's different than them and stuff so I disagree with people saying that, you know, it's the older ones are more pro peaceful."

Male, 21, Inner East

"I think there are a lot of young people, and I see it in my own children, you know, who would all be in their 30s but grew up in East Belfast, they're not in the least bit interested and, you know, don't care about anybody's religion or politics or are bored by the whole thing"

Female, 56, Inner East

"I mean I'm 31, even myself I would still hold out hope and say some progress can be made."

Male, 31, Short Strand

"I've great hope for younger people, I really do, who maybe can get beyond this."

Female, 56, Inner East

CHAPTER 12

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Significantly, the interviewees were asked not only about their memories of growing up in Short Strand/ Inner East, but also about their hopes for the future of the area. Interviewees were asked if they had messages that they would like to convey to future generations of young people growing up in the area, and many of their answers are documented below.

Two residents of Short Strand of very different ages provided remarkably similar messages to future generations of people growing up in the area, conveying very similar attitudes to the past despite their vast generational differences:

“I would hope in my son’s lifetime things would be different and I would love him to be living a carefree life on the interface where people are just people and nobody’s different.”

Male, 31, Short Strand

“Forget about the past. The past belongs in the past and we have to move forward.”

Female, 79, Short Strand

“the past is the past and keep it that way and move forward.”

Female, 17, Short Strand, 1

The importance of ‘leaving the past in the past’ was also conveyed by a resident of Inner East:

“If I had a message I think it would be just let sleeping dogs lie”

Female, 51, Inner East

This encouragement of moving forward and looking ahead was repeated by several interviewees:

“reach for the stars almost and...don’t think nothing’s...like out of reach, if you know what I mean, just...work towards your goals and always think of what’s ahead of you”

Male, 33, Inner East

Other interviewees argued that, although we shouldn’t dwell on the past, we need to *understand* the past to move forward.

This is significant in light of one of the findings outlined in Chapter 10, that many young people at the interface don’t actually understand the root of the conflict at the interface.

“It’s remembering the past to go forward in the future, see from our mistakes”

Female, 58, Short Strand



Short Strand © Robert Fitzsimmons, 2018

"it wasn't always like this; and it doesn't always have to be like this. You know those walls can come down, they weren't there and people lived in peace and someday that can happen again. And I think the sad thing is that if you don't know anything else you just think well that's, how can it be different? But it was different and it can be different."

Female, 56, Inner East

Other interviewees encouraged future generations to 'keep the peace' and 'get on with your life,' urging young people:

"Just to get on with life and just don't be going down to riot because people tell you to because they don't know what they're fighting for. And just to keep the peace."

Female, 17, Inner East

"'Live and let live,' that's the best motto I can say."

Female, 68, Inner East

"Keep your head down, go to school, get an education, don't be scared to socialise [...] get out, meet new people, you have to do it. And definitely stay in school, don't cause any trouble in the area and you'll be alright."

Male, 25, Inner East

"Get on with your life, concentrate on your family, what you have to do, if you can help in any way to sort of stop the stuff that's going on within your area it's a must that you do that"

Male, 65, Inner East

Several interviewees also encouraged future generations of young people to develop friendships across the interfaces:

“It’s easy to hate someone you don’t know. And just give everyone a chance. And don’t instantly go with the crowd who says you know ‘we despise those ones because a, b and c.’ You don’t know the people on the other side, and they’re just as decent and as struggling as you are so get on with them and try and make some relationship with them.”

Male, 31, Short Strand

“I’d just go and tell them [kids] to catch themselves on and just make friends, make friends. That’s the way it was like, I’d like to see that again, you know, everybody just sort of living together again.”

Female, 68, Inner East

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'Reflected Lives' is a unique oral history project that has captured the everyday experiences of people living either side of interface barriers or peace walls in Short Strand/ Inner East Belfast. Significantly, the project is not just cross-community but inter-generational. The project has uncovered fascinating stories of those who lived in a shared community before the walls were erected, those who were segregated as the walls were built and those who have never experienced life without them.

This publication presents, for the first time, the result of 23 interviews conducted during the project. Quotations are complemented by archival and contemporary images which help to bring the memories and everyday experiences of the interviewees to life.

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