University of Limerick Oral History Project. (ULOHP)

Interview: Mr. Martin Chappell.

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I.: So Mr. Chappell, thank you very much for coming in today. Can I begin by asking you to introduce yourself and provide us with some biographical details?

MC.: Yes, sure. Well I was born in England, and I am English, still English. I was educated in England, I studied French at Leicester and then at Sussex, and then I worked for a few years in Oxford Polytechnic, which is now Brookes University. Then we went to Africa, the University of Khartoum for a few, three years, came back and did another post-graduate in Lancaster in Education, and came around to applying for jobs and saw this place called the NIHE in Limerick and applied and surprisingly got an interview so, I had never been to Ireland. We were quite good, great travellers in those days, so Cathy and I came over, and came to the interview and I got the job. In fact the university students were on strike that day I think when I came over, in 1976, wonderful summer.

I.: Ok. What was the nature of your employment in the NIHE?

MC.: I was a lecturer in French Studies, I think it said. So my job was a … slight surprise when I first came, because I thought I was coming into a Department of French, or at least a Section of French, and I got here and I found that I was the only one. Everybody else had left the year before, ’76 was a big transition year and people had left and I had to start from scratch on my own and recruit part-time people and staff, so that was a bit of a shock to start with. But it was like that here, it was a small place and teaching had to be done. It was a teaching place.

I.: Can you describe the campus at that stage?

MC.: Yes … none of this was here!. You had the White House and you had what they call Phase 1A and Thomond, that was it. None of the B, none of the C, none of that.

None of the Foundation of course and nothing across the river. I think there were eight hundred students at that time.

I.: There was a newspaper headline at the time that 'the Institute will be unique', I think that was, well it was back in 1971. Did you share this view when you came to NIHE?

MC.: Uniqueness … I won't say uniqueness but difference, certainly, that it wanted to be different, and that was the vision that had been set out, and that had been attempted in various ways, some successful some not so successful. But it certainly wanted to be different from traditional universities, not only in Ireland but in Great Britain as well. In that respect, yes, it was different. It wanted to be different and it was. Originally it had obviously attracted some interesting students in its first intake in 1972, but the crunch had come in 1976 when things started to go wrong, a bit.

I.: What happened?

MC.: Well when I came, one of the first things I had to do was to give oral exams to the fourth year, who had already done all their exams, because they had to do them all over again for the University of Cork, who had been given the responsibility of validating NIHE degrees. They came in and said 'Oh you've done it all wrong, you've been doing continuous assessment, terrible stuff, that was too revolutionary, they'd done all the wrong things and this was all across all the subjects … and students had to, fourth year students had to re take exams and they had to redo oral exams. I remember doing it with a Professor of French, quite an elderly lady then, near retirement, who was a, a phenomenon in Cork at that time I think, who was sort of giving traditional oral exams to very modern younger students who had done very different sort of courses which weren't very literary at the time. That became a running battle that languages had to teach seventeenth century literature, not modern society, that was a great battle that carried on, still carries on in teaching diploma courses.

I.: So it was a time of a certain amount of tension then?

MC.: The tension wasn't so much … well there were tensions internally, but the tension really was from the outside. We were being, when we came, we were put under Cork for one year, and then we were put under Galway for another year, and we had to negotiate our courses with, for example, the Registrar, in Galway in ’77-’78. I remember going up there and having to argue, could we have … how much continuous assessment could we have, and we only managed to get 40 per cent in any module and that's 60 per cent in final exams.

Now some lecturers, for example, law lecturers, love having 100 per cent final exams but language people and other people prefer continuous assessment and sometimes as we were perhaps younger and more radical then, we wanted NO final exams which is often what they do in universities today, in fact. A lot of project work or essays although that's a problem because of the internet. And negotiating all that was what we were doing. So we were fighting from the inside out, we were also fighting among ourselves but that was a different matter altogether. No, it was very, I think maybe from there, because this place is often very unified, even though there are often internal arguments, but looking out. And certainly we were different. There was no DCU at the time. And we were, felt that we were here on sufferance, looked down upon by Cork and Galway, who of course didn't want us to be here, yet we were here and we were doing quite well, but we had to fight our corner and validate our courses. The number of times we had to rewrite module descriptions, probably five or six times a semester; a term, sorry, because we had three terms then, three sets of exams, three terms; three ten weeks. It was different and it was in that sense, it was different.

I.: How do you remember those first years?

MC.: Oh, with great pleasure really, because we knew everybody. We knew everybody, now that I’m retired two or three years I have to look at names I hardly know anybody, but even the last few years I was here a lot of people didn't know. We knew everybody who was in Engineering, Electronics, Business, the whole lot. Everybody knew everybody in that sense, and socialised together, you knew all the students, and in that sense it was a very close sort of place. And it grew pretty quickly then. Eight hundred was quite a small, in modern times it was quite small. But remember I suppose in the sixties, when I went to university, a university, an average

university would have about two thousand students and now an average university has about ten, fifteen thousand students so it's changed hugely.

I.: And you made Limerick your home?

MC.: Yes. I remember when I came to the interview, they said you seem to have moved around a lot, because I had moved from Oxford to Lancaster, to Africa and now we'd come here, how long would you stay? And I lied and I said I think I'd stay about five years. I thought I was lying but it ended up, in the end I never left!

I.: There was a good social life attached to the NIHE among the staff and between staff and students?

MC.: Certainly, yes, yes. People socialised a lot together, and were very interested in who was coming and who was new and what was going on, yes, people did yes. I think perhaps they still do in different ways, it is a very social campus anyway, and it always has been but in a different way then because there was no bar, there were no bars, there were no restaurants then. Everybody ate together, there was a staff restaurant thing but it was next to the student one, open plan, you could eat in either. But that was it really. That was in where the cafeteria is now.

I.: So you witnessed very much the very rapid expansion then, of the University?.

MC.: Yes, another thing that happened then when I first came was I suppose I went to get involved … I wasn't particularly radical, but I became seen as radical. They had the opening of Phase 1B, have you heard of that? Opening? We were going to be opened by representatives of the churches, and I think the Chief Rabbi of Ireland was invited as well and what was his name, Newman, I think, was Bishop, had become the Bishop of Limerick, and said he, this could not take place, that he wouldn't come, so they actually dis-invited the Chief Rabbi at that point. So I, being a very principled person, said I wouldn't go.

I.: And you didn't go?

MC.: I didn't go.

I.: And you were involved in the Union, the ASTMS?

MC.: Yes, when I first came I knew if I went to union meetings I would get involved, so I didn't go to any Union meetings for a year, and when I did go in the second year, I was immediately, I immediately got involved and I stayed involved for the next ten, fifteen years.

I.: There was a number of industrial, I suppose, difficulties between the Union and the Governing Body in the seventies, from 1977-78?

MC.: Yes, which one are you referring to there? The exams?

I.: Around grading and invigilation?

MC.: Yes, there was a dispute about payment for exams. It seems odd now but anyway, we were looking for, the staff union were looking for, payment to mark, or invigilate, particularly marking, anyway, and payment for grades, which ended in, which came to a partial strike, I think, an exam strike, and then went to the Labour court where there was a settlement where a sum was agreed, and it carried today I think, you are still paid for grades, and that was what was done then. Some people thought that we hadn’t won that because we didn't get what we wanted, but there was a compromise and we got paid. So that was a … battle, then, which it seems … in a way it characterised the way in which higher education worked, and particularly this place.

Before I came, they sent down somebody who was called Mary Maguire, a well known historical figure from the Dept. of Education, who was sent down to oversee this place and make sure it didn't step out of line. And that seemed to be the attitude of the Dept. of Education, that they would refuse everything, and from a finance position, everything. So every play that staff unions would make would be automatically refused and would automatically go to dispute and then maybe go to strike and then go through the Labour Court and it would be solved that way.

Everything seemed to end up in the Labour Court, very wasteful, no negotiation, no, no, no. And In some respects bypassed the local management, while local management were quite conservative too. Ed Walsh, being a very strong President had his own particular views, some of which were very enlightened, some of which were less enlightened. He wasn't a great respecter of labour law for example … in other respects he was great and let people do what they wanted to do, very free in that way. The real power was in the Dept. of Finance, Dept. of Education and they would say no to everything automatically particularly if it involved money…

I.: So a lot of the disputes then were really with this Dept. of Education …

MC.: Yes, a lot of time was spent going to Rights Commissioners … does a Rights Commissioner still work, for the system? Whereby, say you had a dispute involving you, involving payment or something, that would go to, if it wasn't resolved, that would go to a Rights Commissioner, the Union and the Rights Commissioner and a representative from here and from the Department of Education or Finance, and the Rights Commissioner would make a recommendation on that, they put in a lot of time doing that. Or going to full Labour Court, to which we would go as the Union reps. The Union would write submissions to the Labour Court and then the Departments would turn up with dreadful submissions, absolute rubbish. I remember going to one, one Rights Commissioner once and a guy from the Finance, from the Dept. of Finance came along, he was sent along, he obviously didn't know much about it. He has this script and he said 'I'll read this out for what it's worth' and he read out this blank refusal. He didn't know anything of what was going on, we won the case because they just weren't trying, they just refused things. So yes there were, there were quite a few disputes which seemed to be resolved in that way, everything seemed to go through for years and years, go straight through the dispute process. We'd had a conciliation conference, then we'd go to the Labour Court, back to the Labour Court, go to the Labour Court, negotiate, accept, reject and generally accept.

I.: And you were one of the principal officers involved in this?

MC.: I was chairman and secretary, yes, for quite a long time, yes

I.: So this must have been quite challenging, quite time consuming?

MC.: I enjoyed it, I have to say I enjoyed it. In a way I found that was what I really enjoyed doing. If I'd gone back maybe I should have been a lawyer or something!. But I did enjoy negotiating, because I could do it in a way … and I didn't, yes I enjoyed it I suppose, as well. It could be, it was time consuming, it could be time consuming at meetings, certainly, because everything had to go back to meetings, and we had some great big meetings in Jonathan Swift lecture theatre … shouting … members of staff shouting at you, about this and that.

I.: And as the Institute increased in number, the staff numbers increased as well as the student numbers so you were representing a growing body of employees.

MC.: Yes, we were slightly, we were different here in that there was only one union and that was slightly before I came, and everyone would join the same union which was called the ASTMS, then it changed its name several times, and amalgamated and now, what's it called, Unite? It changed several times. So everybody was in the same union if they were in a union, and most people were, I'm not sure what … union membership has dropped now. The last ten years or more have not been very kind to unions, whereas the seventies, unions were strong. Negotiating power would perhaps cease, we seemed to have more power than we perhaps really did. People assumed, perceived that union power was probably greater than it probably was, so yes, we represented everybody, all sections anyway, and there was a fairly high percentage of, I've forgotten what it was now, of union representation, much higher than it is now.

I.: Industrial action was threatened on a few occasions?

MC.: And taken on a few occasions. Yes, yes. Yes, we were on picket lines a few times, in a way it was a tradition, because the day I came for my interview there was a picket line, not a worker's picket line, but a student picket line. They were protesting at the gate about this fact that their degrees had been put back and they were being reassessed by Cork University and they were protesting. This was in probably in March or April or May I think of that year, and they had been told that they were going to have to have, be reassessed. So there was a tradition of, a battling tradition

perhaps here. And ASTMS was a union, as opposed to say IFUT, which quite a few more traditional members of staff would have wanted to belong to, IFUT was a proper university union which hardly ever went on strike, if ever went on strike in fact, it never did anything much, but was more respectable. And there were, had been some attempts still to belong to IFUT, lecturers should belong to IFUT, the rest should belong to more suitable unions for them. But that's always been resisted, it’s actually quite difficult to change unions, takes a long time, you have to go through quite a difficult process and it’s never actually happened.

I.: Can you remember what that action was taken about? What the industrial action was about?

MC.: Oh I don't know … I remember one strike, over the library? I think it was appointment processes, I can’t remember now; we were on strike for that, just a one or two day strike. Then we had a picket on the gates. I remember that because the university took out injunctions against me, I was named, that we should not be picketing, should not picket … the campus, and I was actually named, the first time I’d ever been named in an injunction.

I.: And was this in your capacity as Chairman?

MC.: As Chairman of the Union I think at the time, yes. What else? I can’t remember now.

I.: Did you persist with your activity with the Union after that?

MC.: Yes … I, yes, up to about ’86, ’87, then I became a member of the Governing Body, got elected to the Governing Body, so I was no longer a member of the Union executive, so any political activity … there was a group of us that sort of went together, we were sort of union and ex-union people on the Governing Body and we went in there perhaps to change the atmosphere on the Governing Body and to make some changes. I think Ed calls it a union ‘clique’ or something in his book, without naming us, but that was us.

I.: Would you like to tell me something about that time on the Governing Body?

MC.: The Governing Body? Yes. There was a time of change there. One of the things we, the four of us, there were four of us, I think, we used to meet beforehand, much to the annoyance of management who thought that we were … we had the idea I suppose that we were representing people and the management here, Ed and co., felt that members of boards were not representing anybody but should act together in the interests of the Institute and should not bring anything from there, from the outside in. And we felt very strongly that we were there to represent people, so we went back and reported and told them what was happening. And asked them what they wanted us to do, and if they agreed with what we were doing. Which was anathema to Ed, who didn't like that sort of thing, didn't like that sort of thing. And perhaps we were right in modern day things, boards, boards of governors and boards of companies can be very cosy places if you don't get the information if you don't get the financial information, you get the accounts and they look alright, and you say yes, nobody asks any questions. We began to ask questions on certain things and one policy we decided on was we would go for semesterisation and eventually it happened.

I.: This was something you supported?

MC.: Something we started. Although I think some people would say that the management thought of it eventually but they actually opposed it, tooth and nail, 'over my dead body', I think Leo and Ed, one of them said. And they commissioned reports, saying what a bad idea it was, some consultant from some university in America produced this … bad report which we rejected as being mad. And we won that on the Governing Body vote on semesterisation.

I.: And of course you were on the Governing Body when University status was granted.

MC.: Yes, that was towards the end of my period, '87, no, sorry you mean status,
I.: Yes that was granted in '89?
MC.: Yes, that was a great time, yes. Everybody was supportive of that. Ed was very strong on the idea that we should become a university just as you can hear the same

arguments coming out about the Institutes of Technology, that the name university means things. It was true I suppose. You had to constantly explain what is the NIHE? Is it a university? Well, MIT isn't a university, MIT is MIT, everyone knows what it is, but nobody knew what an NIHE was, you had to explain to everybody, even in Ireland, what NIHE was. Was it just an RTC, was it a tech., a glorified, a polytech? So they were very keen to get University status, which is what it was meant to be in the first place, as Limerick had missed out on universities in what, the 1840s when they were set up. They were colleges, somebody had tried then to get one in Limerick, and that failed, and the best they could get was the NIHE, faced with opposition from Galway and Cork and a lot of other people too.

I.: Do you have any other abiding memories from your time on the Governing Body?

MC.: Yes, a few good arguments. One I remember once, we used to get free lunches, they still do I think get their lunch free, and I proposed once that the Governing Body should, instead of having its lunch in the East room, should go out into the restaurants of the student body and I got them to go to the Stables once. They had burgers and chips and they didn't like it at all! That didn't go, that didn't last long, that policy!.

Yes, the semesterisation thing was a big thing, there were a few individual cases, which I suppose we took, given the union background, there are a couple of … attempted dismissals or back payments for people, for different reasons that we fought and won. In a sense, they were union battles that we took to the Governing Body. I suppose yes, I shouldn't use names on those but there were a few of those, which stick in the mind.

I.: And you witnessed the development of the Dept. of Language and Cultural Studies and went on to become Head of that Dept.?

MC.: Yes. As I say, when I first came there was European Studies. It seems an odd set up now but what was different and what I think Ed probably brought from America, but also from other ideas and they were good ideas, but European Studies was a Department in which you had all the subjects that you have today … well perhaps not so many, you didn't have Spanish then, but otherwise you had History … They were

all together so there were no Departments, there might been, not even sections really, you had … certain committees called inter disciplines, which nobody really understood what they were. They used to meet so there'd be a lawyer, a historian, a language person, and we'd talk about different things, that was the interdisciplines. And it never really, it didn't work that well and there was always an … I think, well Edward always said and I fully agree with this, there was an inbuilt conservatism among academics and I represented academics as a Union, I know that they have their failings too.

And in a way, eventually … people really wanted to be like other universities, a lot of people increasingly so, as other people came, were not happy with being different. They wanted to be the same, they wanted to do the same degrees and they wanted to be, historians wanted to be in a History department which they are now and they probably shouldn't be, in my view, actually they should have never created a History department I think. All the, they should never have broken up the Government and Society, but everybody wants to be in their own Department. In Languages there's still and I think it's going on even now, instead of the Languages all being together which they always were and carried on being, people wanted the French Dept. to have nothing to do with the German Dept. and nothing to do, like the Universities.
And that was something that goes on still.

But Languages in those days then, there were, in fact when I first came, there was no Head of Dept. at all, there was the Triumverate, because of the big upheaval in the seventies and a lot of the people had left and a lot of the people who had been employed in the first place, gone. And so there were three people in charge, Paddy Doran, Joyce O' Connor and Henry Ellis, a sort of Triumverate, in charge of it. And gradually it became so that these three people would come in, in charge of three sections, and they became three departments, so one of them was Languages and something or other, Social Studies or something. It was a silly arrangement, because some politics was in Languages and Social Studies and some politics was in Government and Society, and then there was Law, and Law always wants to be by itself, and eventually got itself called the Faculty of Law, even though it was only a Department, because they were an Ollscoil faculty, so they had to become a faculty, very childish, when you're outside it.!

And there was always this move towards … convergence towards this more discipline stuff, and that would be a criticism from outside I suppose. And Engineers felt it too, their outside critics who said there should be more Engineering and less of this Languages and Cultural Studies, this cultural stuff. Because in the beginning one of Ed's ideas was that all technologists should do Humanities, and all Humanities should do Technology, which is a good idea, except they hate it. Trying to get Business Studies, do Business Studies still do History? And a lot of them hate it. I didn't come here to do History, I came here to do Business, even though it's a good idea and you know, business people need history, you can't understand anything without it, that sort of thing, that's the way society works, we forget, that these things happen not one hundred years ago, they happened five years ago, a short time now.

I.: Did you enjoy your time as Head of Department?

MC.: Yes, I did I suppose, yes, yes. I hesitated before I sort of, before I put my name forward, but I suppose, yes, from my time as head of the Union, anyway, I tended to run the Department as a type of Union as a shop steward, really, representing people's interests. And after being involved in the Union, running a Department was childs play!.

I.: And were you a shop steward? You were chairman and secretary at one stage.

MC.: I suppose I was …
I.: But you'd consider yourself in a sense as a shop steward, in your representative capacity I suppose?
MC.: Yes.
I.: Your approach was a representative approach?
MC.: Yes, I think so, yes.
I.: And that continued then into your time as Head of Dept.? You sought to be Head in that sense?

MC.: I would think, yes, yes. I was trying to make I suppose, allow, as far as you can allow people to do what they wanted to do. Because to get people to do things they

don't want to do, they'll do them badly, with bad grace and these things won't work. Now you do sometimes have to get things through that people don't agree with, but then you had to do that in unions too, you never get, agreements don't suit everybody. You have to get unpalatable things through. But I was lucky in a way I suppose, it was say, 2000 to 2006, this was, you know, the Celtic Tiger times, money was tightish but not as tight as it was in the last … 2007 onwards, when things have been cutting back back.

But we did go through that in the eighties, I remember a Governing Body meeting in '88, saying we must realize that there are going to be no more funding for this, for certain things, there's going to be severe cutbacks, but it didn't actually happen. Things began to get better in the nineties, early nineties. But in 2000, there was money and you could always get around accounts. We always started the end of the year saying you owe two hundred and fifty thousand euros overdrawn, and you'd go through, trawl though accounts with the lads in the office, and they'd go through stuff and say, no they got it wrong, got it wrong, they're counting these things wrong, and they'd go 'bring it down, bring it down', you know. And they'd say 'all right, you've broken even, fine, forget it'. So it was a constant sort of thing there ... I was at the … I suppose my term of office coincided with Pat O' Connor being Dean, and she's quite a challenging sort of Dean and a lot of time was spent dealing with her, because she's quite aggressive towards staff in certain senses, so a lot of my time was, by the end of each year, negotiating more contracts, renewal of contracts with people, and resisting Pat's penchant for cutting things!.

I.: Did you enjoy teaching?

MC.: Oh yes, yes. Teaching was the best part of everything. Yes, having said that I mean there were times certainly in the last few years when nine o' clock in the morning teaching French to first years, and then three of them turn up, you wonder what you are doing it for! But yes, I was always a teacher first, I think I would never have considered myself an academic, I didn't publish a lot, some, a bit but not really. No I'm not a researcher, I was a teacher ... an activist …

I.: Are there any other reasons why you think that you may always have been considered a radical here?

MC.: I don't know. Easy to say there was always a tradition, there was always one or two seats on the Governing Body for 'bolshie' Brits and I was one of those I suppose!. I suppose when I came, we were young, when we first came, it was in '76, the second of two glorious summers. We came here and we thought we would … we looked on the map, where would we like to live? because we'd lived in the country in England, I'm from the country, I'm not a city boy really … we still live in the country. Where would we first of all like to go? We looked at the map and saw a place called Killalow! and we went there and we camped for ten days. We came here in this old Renault 4, loaded up with all our gear, come over from Lancaster, Cumbria, and unloaded it into my, into the office, I had a room in the C1 block I think, no, A, A1 corridor, where there are no offices any more, I think. And Evan Petty, he was the head of something there, he was looking out of his window and he finally phoned up the Personnel office, which didn't really exist, saying there's some students moving in to the university bringing all their stuff in, thought we were in occupation, sort of, but we were just dumping stuff in the office …

I.: This is your wife and yourself?

MC.: Yes. And we looked, what we were I suppose, slightly trendy 'pinkos' ! wearing flared trousers and beads and long hair.

I.: Can you tell me about your time in the film society?

MC.: Yes, the film society was started … Dave Burns was one of the first people who started it, along with Pat Carroll, who was a very active student in Business in those days, he's still around, he's quite a successful accountant, Pat Carroll. And I became involved in it, was into the cinema, and we carried on and it grew. This was before videos, before video tapes, you couldn't, video tapes were still huge clunky machines called … I don't remember the name. So nobody watched videos, certainly not DVDs. And it became bigger and bigger, there was a, there still is, I think, an Irish Film Society Association, we belonged to that, and they would get together and agree

on certain numbers of films. They would have a weekend every year somewhere like in Ennis or Athlone, and we’d all go up there and we’d watch films solidly for three days from nine in the morning to eleven at night. It was great. Then we’d agree on certain films that we had in common so they’d be circulated around, it made them much cheaper and we’d go and collect a film at the station and bring it up and show it, get someone to show it or show it yourself and you’d get two of the projectors, they’re still in the Jonathan Swift, and show films. And it grew till we had, I think it had at its peak, in it would have been the early eighties, 250 members or more, packed out every week and showed some very good films. There was a lot of interesting films around as well.

I.: There was some controversy in 1986 about one of the films you showed?

MC: Yes, that was the films by Jean Luc Goddard, called ‘Je Vous Salue Marie’ which came with a reputation. It had been shown in Paris I think, and people, Catholic organisations objected to it. The film societies got it here, and it was going to be shown around the film societies, not many. We decided to take it and Galway decided to take it. And Galway were going to show it first. And … they got criticised by … people like Opus Dei and some different Catholic organisations who got the University, mounted a campaign against the University really in Galway, and the University backed down. I think, I’m not sure, they didn't show it in the University, they might have showed it in the town, but I think they might even have backed off it altogether.

And we were going to show it the next, following days and the same attack came onto us, and Ed was phoned up by various people, from, a few staff members here who were Opus Dei, who were trying to get it stopped and Ed who would have been looking for the university then, and I remember Ed quite gleefully, I think, he said, ‘although I may not agree with showing the film, the university does not interfere with freedom of expression’ and he didn't do anything about it, fair play to him. And we showed it. I don't know if you've ever seen the film, it's a pretty boring film. It’s basically a very ‘Goddardesque’ interpretation, not even an interpretation … what if a young modern girl who plays basketball, says she’s got pregnant by an angel?. What would her boyfriend think? He wouldn't believe her would he? And he didn't believe

her and her boyfriend happened to be called Joseph! Didn't believe her and is full of … roundness and things, it's dull and rather boring. And the son is born anyway and various things happen to him and at one point, he decides to go off, and one of his last remarks is 'I'll see you at Easter'!. It's tongue in cheek, it's irreverent, purposely, but it did arouse a lot of opposition and the night we showed it here it was a dreadful night, weather wise, it was pouring rain. And all day long there had been a picket at the gates, people bussed up from Cork, I don't know who they were … a right wing Catholic organisation. And when it was being showed they came to the back entrance and lined there. So anybody coming to see the film had to walk through them and they were in the pouring rain, singing hymns and praying and people went in and it was packed out!. We showed it twice. The Jonathan Swift only takes 250 people I think and it was packed out twice. People were bored out of their minds because it wasn't very exciting, it wasn't very provocative, there was no sex in it … irreverance at most.

One thing … Pat Kenny used to do a five to six news programme called, I don't know what it was called, I think it was called 'drivetime' five to six or five to seven, five to six. And he interviewed me over the phone, so I ended up being interviewed by Pat Kenny. I remember him saying 'why are you showing this? … how do you think about the Catholic and the Church thing?' … I said 'well I'm an atheist, I don't believe in God anyway, so … it doesn't really affect me' He said 'well, we'll cut that bit out' he said, so he didn't have me saying I don't believe in God anyway!

I.: And locally, you made the *Limerick Leader*?

MC.: It made the *Limerick Leader* headline, yes, and I remember being pointed out in the pub, 'that's the guy who showed the film' in the village I live in, I remember there … I was phoned up by people, from here, actually, to argue with me that we shouldn't show it, but we did. I was sort of designated to go on the radio and answer the things because … on the committee, the people running it there would be a lot of students, a lot of electronics students were interested in film in those days and they didn't want to go on the radio! and to Pat Kenny to defend that so I went on.

I.: So the film society represented staff and students?

MC.: A lot of staff went to it, yes, oh yes. It gradually, it died away really with videos and the students union began showing videos and that. Film societies, they still work, but there isn't one in Limerick any more I don't think, there's a student one here run by the Arts officer, I think. It's not a student society anymore, not like it used to be, a big society, the biggest and there were, you know, some good films.

I.: How do you feel about the University in the last decade of your time here?

MC.: It changed. In a way … one of the alternatives to changing jobs is that your job changes while you're there. And that certainly happens when you stay in a place as long as I did. This had grown from about eight hundred students when I first came to what is it now, what did I say, twelve, eleven, twelve thousand students. It just, the place changed. It's now a different sort of place … it's much ... also the university changed as well, so the NIHE, UL has became like other universities, we've got the medical thing, the medical thing … was the thing, we'd be like other universities, we had a medical faculty … we'd be a proper university, a real university then, nobody could say we weren't a real university if we had medicine, so that's a bit of a coup people felt, although it didn't impact on me at all, nor on you I'd imagine either.

And we wanted to become like other universities, and other universities became like us. This whole emphasis that we had on Coop and work experience ... A lot of people don't like, there were a lot of arguments in the beginning, good arguments, between people who said you have to teach people pure history, you have to teach them pure science, not just applied … There's an argument what is knowledge? What is applied knowledge? … You're getting back to Philosophy, I always wanted that we should teach philosophy of science, but we never will now. But what is 'techne', you know, the Greek idea of technology and knowledge, and applied knowledge and what does applied knowledge mean? You do teach things only in as far as they are useful, you don't have to teach the whole thing.

There's a lot to be said for that, particularly in education, when teacher training still seems to demand that students spend an inordinate amount of time studying the history of Irish education, and much less time in the classroom. They should spend much more time in the classroom and all learn how to teach rather than studying the

philosophy of education and the history of education, which they seem to spend most of their time doing. Which is useful, but doesn't teach you how to teach, not really. We've had those problems here with teacher degrees, undergraduate teacher degrees all across the … there was one with languages that I think got axed but it may have come back now, because it didn't have enough of this kind of stuff, it didn't have enough literature, even though the Leaving Cert in French, for example, has absolutely no literature in it. The teacher trainees had to be trained in literature. Why? Certainly some knowledge of literature is good, but since there's absolutely none in the Leaving Cert it seems a bit silly.

I.: Did your students travel much?

MC.: Another thing I got involved with was the Erasmus. I was one of the people at the beginning of Erasmus, along with Donal Dineen, we set up a link with Angers, that was the first link we had, that the University had. And we had always been trying to get placements abroad through Coop and they'd work and they wouldn't work, but then when Erasmus came in you had a system, and they went to the University and said 'do you want to exchange students with us?' and they said yes, and that was fantastic. They sent people here, more here and we sent people there. And the first lot that came from Angers to us, they slept on our living room floor. About six girls, and we put them in bed and breakfasts and looked after them and it grew and grew and grew until we've got an office now. So that was a great time, then. We'd have to go and visit these places, I remember doing a whistle stop tour of France, going from Paris to Angers, back to Paris, down to Grenoble, down to Montpelier, back to Lyon, back to Paris and then home again on the trains asking people did they want … and we did, we ended up with Grenoble, Paris … Angers and Montpelier weren't interested!

I.: And was it difficult to establish these connections?

MC.: No. People mostly wanted to do it. Because it was an Erasmus thing there were grants to do it. It was official and it was an EU initiative. The difficulties were with particular universities in particular countries saying what will our students do, and we need to get recognition. We, to a certain extent, were more, more cavalier about it we

didn't really care, we said go and do something, and we'll, if that's all right we'll say that's it now, that will be good. But the French people would come over and they'd say 'Will I do a course in a thing called the techniques of commerce?' And you don't have a course called the techniques of commerce, and you'd say of course we don't have one, do something that's like that, and their lecturers at home wouldn't accept it because it didn't, it wasn't exactly the same. You had silly arguments like that. Law was a problem too because legal systems just aren't the same. You've got common law here and Napoleonic codes and things in France. But law and law professions are probably, you can't be a lawyer in France if you're trained as a lawyer in Ireland, so Irish people can't be a lawyer in America either can you? You know that … teaching is a problem too.

I.: When did that start?, when did Erasmus start?

MC.: '89, I think was the first ones. '89 was the first year, and it grew from that. You'd have meetings with your network, you'd form networks, so you'd have four or five universities … and I ran two or three of those which was basically two students would go here and there and there and there, all over the place. And that worked well, its heyday was up to about '95, '96, and then it changed. You'd have these general meetings, so you'd choose a nice place to go. I've been everywhere really, Greece about five times, Cyprus, Germany, Spain, Portugal where you'd have these meetings and eat for Europe!.

I.: Did you take any time out to lecture abroad?

MC.: A couple of times … in Grenoble, I spent a couple of weeks in Grenoble once. That as a system was a good idea but I'm not sure how much students got out of it really, they'd be happy with coming here. I'd say I've got this guy from France, what will I do with him? He'd become a lecturer in History because he was a historian, so he'd get History lectures, you'd say will you give a lecture in your course when he can't speak English, so you'd have to translate it for him. And it was interesting but what the students got, I don't think that really worked that well. The teacher exchanges didn't work out that well, really. It's the way that students continue to come now I find, in the hundreds now … I think that has, I hope and I think that's had an

economic effect, it has a cultural effect I think on people, for Ireland, it's good for Ireland and it helped that at that time Ireland was opening up, and I think that was a good thing, I believe it was a good thing, I don't know how you'd measure it really. Ireland was opening up anyway wasn't it, in the nineties, everything was opening up, the church was losing its grip, and emigration, immigration …

I.: How do you feel about your time in the NIHE and UL now that you've retired?

MC.: Yes, good, it was a good time. Yes, I feel good about it … some people can when they retire, feel bitterly unrecognized. You do a job, you get paid for it. There is a Hungarian lecturer, Erasmus also went into … in eastern Europe and a Hungarian lecturer came and they were paid abominably. He said 'I pretend to work for them and they pretend to pay me!' But it wasn't like that, but you work for them, they pay you, that's the deal, and it was good times, yes, I had good times with good people. I miss the contact with people I suppose and with students, otherwise not, exams and that sort of stuff.

I.: Is there anything else that you'd like to record about your time here?

MC.: No.

I.: Thank you very much.