

## **University Of Limerick Oral History Project**

### **Interview Transcript : John Redington**

**1 May 2013.**

I.: John, thank you very much for talking to me today in connection with the University of Limerick Oral History Project in this, the fortieth anniversary year of the University. You were one of the first class of students in the then NIHE, can you tell me about yourself and how you came to NIHE?

JR : Well I grew up just up the road from here anyway, so I was just over a mile from the college anyway, so I would have known Plassey House and Plassey and the area around it long before the college was ever here. I can remember when Keating was living here first and REHAB took it over then, in the mid 60s I'd say, 64/65, when they took it over then. Well I remember the place, what it was then- it was kind of, in a way it was one of these forbidding mansions all the way down to the river. The river down below was where, if you ever wanted to go for a swim or anything like that, it was the only place available around. And it was a place for a lot of young fellas to go, you know, when you were growing up, you know along the riverbank. Then I think about, I'd say it was about '68, we were just starting secondary school anyway when REHAB started pulling back from it. There used to be beautiful glasshouses and all ... and the place was getting stripped down a bit too, we thought then. And next thing then we heard that they were going building the college here and to be quite honest like, even though I lived around the place, and like I used to pass it by a lot, it didn't strike me very much first. But then when we heard it was opening ... I was in fifth year when it was supposed to open, I think it was put back a year, and then it was in the year I was in doing my Leaving anyway, it was opening that year.

And we'd come out, I'd say that the year I was in, was nearly the first year free secondary education became available as well so we would have been a generation, you know, that changed Ireland in a lot of ways because before, I'd say even the year or two before us, like you know, it wasn't just third level education, secondary education was quite restricted in the country so. Then we'd

a place here. To be quite honest with you, you asked me why did I come here? ... more than anything else, there was a few of us around, a few fellas I was in secondary school with, you know, and there was a few fellas from one or two of the other secondary schools in town as well. And I would have known, you know, there was about what, about a hundred pupils started, I would have known maybe thirty, twenty to thirty of them anyway before to various levels. I mean there was about, I went to Munchins myself now, and I think there was six or seven of us started, I would have known about four or five of the guys who were in CBS and the same with Crescent, and a good few girls as well, we got to know as well. So you know in a way, it was there, it was local. I'm not even too sure. I suppose I did engineering in one way was, I was good at maths and I suppose I was good at Irish and I was good at geography, they were the kind of things I was best at, but I suppose Maths in a way. My father was an engineer as well, he worked in Shannon Foundry at the time anyway, you know, so he was into mechanical engineering, that end of it as well, so there would have been that impetus from home as well. But to be quite honest like it was applied science, I didn't even know it was engineering, you know, like most of us, I think in our class, I think the name kept changing, it had a different name every year we were in there, the first four years. It was Applied Science the first year, it was Applied Science and Engineering the second year, it was, I think, Materials and Industrial Engineering the third year, Materials and Production Engineering the fourth year, you know it was, it was just a different name every year. So that's why I'd say I came here you know.

I.: Were there many in your class?

JR: There was, we started off with about twenty doing Applied Science, Well the first year, apart from about one module, we did a lot of the same as Electronics as well so there was about forty between the two lots of them. The other three disciplines kind of shared their ones, there was European Studies and I think Business and Secretarial Science, and they shared most of their lectures as well. And then there was a few, we all had to do a language in first year as well so we pushed in with some of the business side of it as well. But it was small enough

classes and by the time I finished I think there was about twelve finished in our class.

I.: Were they mostly Limerick students?

JR.: They were. There was a lot of Limerick students, I'd say it was about, I'd say between city and county, I'd say, nearly half it, maybe not quite half but I'd say about forty, there would have been forty, forty-five. There would have been a fair lot from Clare, North Cork, Kerry, Tipp. yeah. 'Twas a bit more spread out on the other side, I remember, on the Business, European Studies side of it all right. Our side was nearly all male, I think there was about two women doing Engineering, started doing, two women started doing Engineering. Electronics was, it was much more local, the Engineering side of it was.

I.: And of course the Electronic Engineering, that was very new, in this country wasn't it?

JR.: Yeah, well a kind of the glamour ones were Electronics and European Studies, but there was an awful lot of guff talked about Europe when we started, you know! We went about joining the EEC the year after we started, but I suppose the country had its mind made up to go into the EEC at that stage anyway, and that was kind of seen, as you know, high flyers. Electronics were, yeah, they were quite into technology boys like, you know what I mean, while us humble engineers like you know, and the secretarial science like, were into the more mundane things.

I.: How did you apply for the NIHE? What did you have to do?

JR.: Filled up a form!! The thing about it was, I know in Engineering, that they took it in two ways. You had to do an interview, that was one thing I remember. And I'd say, you know, I'd say they filled it and not an awful lot more than that like on it. You needed I think to do engineering and electronics, you needed, I think you needed an honours in maths and you needed two honours. You just

used those, I think there was just abcd, that's all it was back then, I think, the grades – you know you needed that to get into it. I think there was a fair amount of competition to get in, I think, in Electronics and European Studies, but I think the other ones, there wasn't the same pressure on it at all.

I.: Do you remember the interview? Do you remember who interviewed you? Was it one...?

JR.: Evan Petty, I remember was, anyway. I'm trying to remember who else, I think John Alexander was the other one, who interviewed me anyway. There would have been ... Alexander was the Head of the Electronics and Evan Petty was head of Engineering at the time. I think they were the two, I don't think there was anyone else.

I.: Do you remember the Official Opening at all? September 1972, Jack Lynch?

JR.: I do, I actually remember that day very well now. There's a few things I remember about it in particular. We started actually, the lectures on a Monday and that was on the Wednesday afternoon. I remember actually even the first lecture, we went in anyway, it was Engineering Science and there was a Dr. Alexander who was there, and he was, I suppose, very British, very English. He was like one of these fellas straight out of the Dambusters movies, that sort of thing, you know, the tweed jacket and the slide rule and everything. And we were all in there in the class, there was about forty of us in there, and he said 'Remember chaps, we are Engineers!' – laugh- and we ... so he takes out anyway, the slide rule, and the slide rule was the tool of the engineer and that was my first introduction to it.

But you know, it was kind of cheesy in a way!. But anyway Wednesday there was yeah, the official opening . I think we had lectures that morning as far as I can remember, and I remember walking down, from home like, you know, in the morning and I was going down by Milford Road, as it was then, and it hadn't even been widened out to quite what it is now, and they were building, the first house

they were building in Milford Grange then, there was no estates at all around then, you know, This was way out the country like, and the front of it was covered in muck. I was walking back at lunchtime then just to get the dinner and put on a collar and tie for the opening, and I saw they had created an entire garden around the show house! There was a lawn rolled out, and there were shrubs put in, whereas in the morning it was absolute muck!. But they wanted it anyway for the television cameras!. So I came down. It was a real hot day, I remember, that was my thing I remember most. There was a big tent out there where Phase 1A is now, and I remember it was held down by ropes, and they had these big pegs, iron pegs on it, and I remember catching one in my only decent trousers and put a hole in it -laugh-.

There was a lot of speeches, to be quite honest, I wasn't half listening to them at all!. You know, there was all sorts of people congratulating each other!. But the one thing I do remember coming out was, at one stage we were coming out and it might even have been before it, and there we were anyway, drinking glasses of sherry you know out of fluted glasses., and sitting down there on the bank of earth beside were the guys that were already levelling out the site sitting down drinking tea out of their striped mugs!! That memory sticks in my mind of it anyway!. But it was ... yeah, it was a very sunny day, but I remember it got cold then, there was some of them, I didn't bother going to it, I think they had a dance that night I think, most of us went up to the Hurlers, but anyone who was at it said how cold it got in the tent that night. That was another thing I remember.

I.: Would you like to tell me something about what it was like to be a student, student life?

JR.: Well the first thing about being a student which made it absolutely great when we were there was, we started off as what, seventeen year olds, eighteen year olds in the place, and we'd no one telling us what to do. You know, we could do what you liked, you know, you had no crowd looking down on these jumped up little twits, like coming into the place! We could do what we wanted to,

ourselves in a way!. You know that was great about it, you know, and you'd never again get, just the small group that was there, in it like you know, and it was, I would think in our own class in particular, in the Engineering class more of the lads knew each other before they started, and it was, I suppose by today's terms, what we'd call a fairly 'jock' class, like you know. I mean they were into football and soccer and a few things, and hurling and those things and having a lot of pints like, it was that type of a group that was in it. Not a particularly academic group, while some of the other classes were much more academic. I mean, a lot of the lads in our class were for the crack, and they were fortunately, like, I think the crack caught up with a good few of them in a way because, I mean, we lost about half them along the way. It was ... no, it was great that way on it. It was great in a few other ways too, you know that I remember about it was ... we were actually learning, we were learning things that was totally different from universities on it. The course, there was no Materials Science taught in Ireland at the time really. There was no Industrial Engineering, proper Industrial Engineering taught in the country at the time, and it was, we were, I think the course was aimed at industry in a lot of ways. Ireland had been industrialised quite quickly there during the late sixties, and there was a huge gap in the amount of technically qualified people, you know, to be employed in industry and that's what we were there for, to fill that gap, that was one thing about it.

We did, it was great, the small classes, like you know. You know, I think one module, I think I was on my own in it even in fourth year, but you know I mean, often it would be about four, five, six; that would be all that would be in it, when we were doing the elective in the later years ... I mean there was a real one to one relationship with lecturers like, you know you could, and, you know, if the lecturer was anyway motivated at all, you know a great response and there was a great rapport within that. And because there was a small group within the class as well and because I think in our own class in particular, wasn't particularly competitive academically. I mean, lads used to really help each other out in a lot of ways too like, you know. There was a good co-operative spirit in it as well.

I suppose there were a few other things too. We were at a time, I suppose, of, 'twas actually the tail end of, kind of, it was actually a spill over from the sixties. Really, I suppose a generation there that, we came, something like what was happening just before the crash here. I mean Ireland had gone well, from about the ... it had gone from absolutely nowhere from about the late fifties up until 1973 and you know, the country was expanding the whole time, it was a very optimistic time, about it. And a ... it was also a time, quite a radical time in a lot of ways too, you know, you had, you know, it was kind of cool to save the world like you know and Che Guevera and you know, these were the kind of heroes you'd have like. Mao Tse Tung and something like that, you know. So there was, to be in that sort of mood, it was a good time on it. Where it all changed actually was in '73, was it the end of '73 or something, the Arab Israeli war, you had the oil crisis and the whole lot, and then austerity hit people, the first time in a long time, but up to then nobody knew about it. And like even in small things like, we could actually do a good bit of part time work in the college even then. So I mean you could afford to ... I remember chaps worked down at the library, down at the labs, things like that. There was a good bit of work which two years later, you wouldn't get for love or money, so people could afford, you know, you could afford to drink like, you know.

I.: You were reasonably well off as students, comparatively?

JR.: We were, you could afford to go and have a good session. – laugh- Ah it was, ah it was, there was no ... there was a very, particularly in first year, the second year, when it was quite, very small then, you know, everybody knew each other. And then you had, the PE students appeared then, I'd say it was about the end of first year. I remember one day, walking down one Monday morning anyway and seeing the place covered in blue tracksuits, it was like an alien force! But it was ... yeah ... it was a time, I think it was a time, the country was growing up in some ways at the time and we were growing up with it as well, and it was a great time that way, it was a good place to grow up in it. And one other thing that I think helped too was that I think Limerick took to the college from the start as well like. There was an awful lot of good will to it, because there was a lot of

resentment before that you know, Cork had its university and Galway had its university but Limerick was having it now and I think there was quite a lot of good will within the town.

I.: So the first year, the college opened in Plassey House. You just had Plassey House until the stables I know were converted into labs and phase 1A was built.

JR.: Well the stables were there at the start as well, there was a few labs there, you know, what would be on this side of the stables there? they were a kind of an 'e' shaped block, you know there there was the Stables there, and there was two pre-fab, one was the drawing office and I think it was the Electronics or Electrical Engineering, Electronics level. The drawing office anyhow was, you know it was done before CAD, you did all sorts of things with pen and pencil, and 'T' squares and all that sort of stuff. But it was also, the drawing office was also a very central part of the college. The drawing office was also where we'd have discos and students union meetings and god knows what!. The drawing office was the one big space we had ourselves as students, that you know, outside of lecture time, you know, and it was used quite a lot, for a lot of things like that. The students union was founded there, the first disco, the first couple of discos we had were in there.

I.: Were they run by the students union?

JR.: Yeah, the students union ... I think the first disco was there, I don't know whether it preceded the students or what, you know, they came about the same time! But yeah, the discos, the students union, the football, the GAA club, soccer club, they kind of merged into the students union in one way. There was an attempt to set it up, it was set up I think one or two lads got onto USI to set one up anyway, and I think it was in the second week we were in the college anyway like and there was a meeting of ... what happened was those who were sent out by you know ... those who also came into it ... and they were mostly the engineers actually, and also the football team and the soccer team and a few other things, ok, we wanted to run it as well then because we reckoned that's



where the money was. Do you know, if you want to get money to run a soccer team or whatever it was like, you know, the best way about it was to control the students union, and it was from that ... I think the first election was nearly, I think there was five or six going for it anyway, and I nearly got elected myself, just because I was an engineer, and because they were looking for, there was a lot of us wanted to take it over that way and I happened to go on it that long, and that was it like you know, and there was nothing other than that you know.

I.: So you were the first president of the students union?

JR.: Yes, Yes.

I. : And what other officers were there on it?

JR.: John Kerr was in Business. The treasurer was Eric Duhane , he was in business too I think. I think Fionnuala was the secretary, I can't remember, it was either Fionnuala (Lyddy, later McMahan) or Joe O' Connor, no, Andrew Elder was the secretary, and I think Fionnuala was the Assistant Secretary, and I think there was a Mary O' Brien there as well, they were the officers, and there was Union accounts then as well. There was two from each class, that was the officers, it was Mick Mac (Mick McMahan) ran the sports, he was the sports chairman I remember anyway, with his sports empire I suppose! I mean there was a chaotic first year in it, I mean, it was full of rows and fights and god knows what else, like you know.

I.: What do you mean, what were they fighting about?

JR.: It started off over personalities, even you know ... well, it wasn't like, there was two different views, there were those who saw it as, I suppose, a different view opposed to, one, a very pragmatic approach as opposed to, and a bit more of ... they would have seen it as a vocation, you know!!. There was ... but you know I mean, people coming up with constitutions and going on about points of order, things like that!. But it worked quite well, there was plenty of interest in

it. I mean, I'd say we had about ten general meetings during the year, I mean we used to get about sixty, seventy per cent of the people used to come to it. And people would give out and mouth to each other and start shouting at each other, but they were actually genuinely interested in it, you know. You know, it was a kind of an anarchic, there were no full time officers, we had a budget of, I mean four or five hundred quid, that was all we had then like, you know. It really did involve people, you know, and it was very good that way at getting people together in it. And it did, it did work, it was a focus for things to work, I mean sports teams grew out of it, entertainments grew out of it, you know, and even early on, we were, it was always completely independent of, of the ... college, because before that, most of the universities that time had SRCs, or student representative councils, and there was a kind of a hidden hand of the college itself was involved in a lot of those and their sports clubs were controlled by the college. We completely controlled all the money that was in it like you know. We raised our own money and ok, we worked it on the capitation after that but the capitation was voted through by the students. If the students wouldn't have had that money then the college would collect it and we would take it off them then. So it did, it was quite progressive in a lot of ways, like you know and ... I think the experience of that, it did stand to us when we were in fourth year in particular, like, there were a lot of problems in the college.

I.: And how did the sports teams, how did they come about or how did they do?

JR.: How did we do? Well, what started it anyway was like any time between lectures there was, where, I'd say nearly where this building is now, it was just that side, just in front of the quadrangle beside Plassey House, there was a kind of a field down there, sure we were out kicking ball the whole time! You'd throw the two jumpers down on either side of the goals and it was a fairly common thing you'd go into factories or that, fellas used do that at lunch time. Yeah, we wanted a team, we wanted to go out and compete like. The only thing was we were very small, we'd only, I'd say about fifty, forty, fifty guys in the place in the first year. So it was kind of hard to get teams out you know. I remember in hurling we always struggled, you needed fifteen on a hurling team like. You'd

have a few fellows wouldn't, you'd always get a fellow to play soccer, it was easy to play soccer and Gaelic football, but hurling and rugby was a bit more difficult. We were useless, but we were afraid of no-one! do you know what I mean!

What really made it difficult too was with all these jocks down from NCPE as well at the time. I mean I remember the first football game we played.

I.: Ye played them, did ye?

JR.: Oh yeah in the Higher Education League, I remember our first ever football game was against them, we played up in Monaleen's field there. They had fellas, I'd say every one of the team they had on it, either at the time or within a year or so, were inter-county players. I mean they had All Stars, they had fellas like Jimmy Deenihan, Pat Spillane, Tommy Donnellan, I mean some of the biggest stars, Johnny Tobin, some of the biggest stars in football at the time. So that was our first game and we just about had the bare fifteen against them and we led them by two points to nothing after ten minutes, no a point to nothing after ten minutes, and we lost by about 5 -18 I think, to two points or something, but it was a chastening experience!!

I remember we were playing in the soccer too, in the university league. But I mean, we were mad keen. I mean Mac, Mac was, sure Mick Mac like, wouldn't take no for an answer anyway, and like you went straight over and you told, you know the soccer crowd, and he went 'we were to have degrees awarded and we were to demand of our rights. And ... we could barely field a team and we got into that one all right, into the Collingwood, on the sole reason, I think it had more to do with, 'twas a thirty two county one, 'twas the only thirty two county soccer body in the country, and I think 'twas, they brought in one or two extra colleges in the north and they had to bring in extra colleges in the south too. I think that helped us as well. And the PE college, they were really keen on getting the PE crowd into it as well, so we kind of got in on their coat tails, so the GAA, we got nowhere...the Sigerson. But there was the Higher Education teams, it was kind of split into two until about the mid 80s. I mean, you know like, we'd go away

together, I'd say first year, second year, I mean half the students would go away to a match. I remember one game down in UCC, no it was against Crawford Institute of Technology, actually it was, which was subsequently, became Cork IT, I think it was the following year. And we played down in Dennehy's Cross in a field that was, it was about eighty per cent water that was on it, covered in muck like, and all there was was a cold tap, it was about that high off the ground to wash yourself off afterwards. And you know it was an awful year, it was filthy weather and all like that, but you had everyone at it, and you know, and then we had a good session down in Cork afterwards. 'Twas about well after midnight when we got back on the bus and we got home, but you know, I'd say there was two buses I think, the bus with the team and a few others, and then a bus with supporters, another bus load of supporters, and it was just down for a session more than anything else like you know.

I.: So there was great camaraderie around the sports side?

JR.: It was, it was a great focus for it, yeah. It was, you know it was ... there was like you know ... there was a bit of a kind of a feeling with it like, that all the rest of the universities were against us, if you like, we'll stick together like, and we'll show them how like, you know. There was that feeling in the place and we used to get it, I'd say we used to get a lecture a week off of Ed Walsh about the pioneers and the guinea pigs and the building blocks and the cooperative, modular credit system like, Georgian vines and Corinthian arches and you'd be listening to this, like you know! And like you know, I mean Ed was out to take on the world and we didn't agree with, we probably agreed with about half of what he said, but he was mad to take on the world, and... if he was mad to take them on, we'd take them on as well like!. There was that attitude in us like you know!. You know, a kind of the mouse that roared, like you know! -laugh.

I.: Will you tell me about the struggle for the recognition of the degrees in the NIHE?

JR.: Yeah, I'd say, let me see ... when we started anyway, we were going to get , there was degree courses, there was actually degree courses and diploma courses in it at the start. But I think most of those doing the diploma, I'd say there was about sixty doing degrees and about forty doing diplomas, that sort of mix. But I'd say there was a fair old drop out, and the drop out rate was higher with the diploma but an awful lot of the diploma students wanted to convert to degree courses anyway, you know in first year, or second year. So there was I'd say in 1975 then when the diploma students, I'd say there was only about seven or eight of them finished at the diploma end. But anyway no one ever quite said who was giving us degrees and I think then in the first year I think it was the NCEA, I think it was then, and I wasn't, ... we were quite happy with that, we didn't mind at all. In a lot of ways I thought, a lot of us thought it was a good idea. There were some of them alright were saying it should be a university but I looked at it this way, like, if they were doing that for the whole country why not for... there was nothing wrong with it, a lot of us didn't have a big hang up about being a university or not. You know we were already believing we were into this kind of MIT or Institute of Technology which was a kind of a quantum leap beyond universities and everything, you know, so ... but it got very political I think. The NIHE was set up under a Fianna Fail administration there and I think the idea to go ahead was the decision about '68, '69 around then, and ... but there was a Coalition government got elected then in 1973, and it was very heavily influenced by the NUI. Garret Fitzgerald, now, was a real NUI man, he was Minister for Foreign Affairs and you had a few other ones like Dickie Burke, was a Minister for Education, was a UCD man too, and there was, I think they were going to get their pound of flesh, and we kind of knew there was things going on now.

It provoked a huge amount of resentment. Not so much, the, you know even saying ... about the award itself, but in the way that there was an ignorant complacent crowd of universities, who had it all their own way, you know, who looked down at all of us, and they were going to bully anyone else out of it, and that was what really got a lot of people. It, I suppose there were a few things, It started with the students going at it

I.: So did the students organise themselves? Did ye have meetings? This was in your fourth year?

JR.: Oh yeah, yeah. We got inklings, I think we even got inklings the end of third year anyway, you know, because there was ... the first bit of a row was between the engineers and the university, we got shoved out of our drawing room or something, drawing office, but you know they were building a new one, Phase 1B, or whatever it was, and the Hunt Museum was going there, and there was a bit of a row, we said 'look, fine, have the Hunt Museum but you can give us a drawing office as well, like you know, a proper one'. Ok, I don't know, those who were pushing the hardest wouldn't have been seen too often in the drawing office themselves, but it would have been a point of principle if you know what I mean, and it was within what was then, the third engineering, what became the fourth engineering the following year, kind of, you know. A good bit of the resistance started kind of started within there on it and it spread around then. In a way there was ... on the college side of it ... I'm trying to remember now exactly, you know, yeah, in one way they were saying 'look keep it down lads, don't go over the top', and in other ways I think some people were quite happy, you know, in thumping the table anyway and making the noise on it you know.

I.: So you weren't really resisted ?

JR.: Not too much within the college, no, there would have been some in the college all right who would have been very, I got the impression they were very, you know, oh its not going to look good, and you know, ah don't say anything to upset people', but I would think there were a good lot of the other ones all right. I got the impression now, I would say, Ed was playing, he was playing it like, you know, to ... There was a lot of things now I didn't agree with him on, and so but he had ambition for the place all right, and he was tough as nails about it. And I know some of the, a couple of the problems started because Ed really did get people's backs up all right. You know, he went about it like the way Michael O' Leary went about Ryanair, you know. To be quite honest with you I don't think, if

he hadn't done that the place would have been ground out. Because the universities – at the time they were really small minded, you know, they'd been there for one hundred and fifty, two hundred years, you know, and they were part of a small minded Ireland too, you know. But where it did come around, what did make a big difference was that the city, we got a lot of support in the city but where we got an awful lot of support was from parents. That really made a difference on it, like you know. There was a lot of parents got involved, and a lot of them would have been known around the city too, like you know, and that's what got a lot of momentum going you know.

I.: Did you take it to the city?

JR.: Oh we went into town, we went down to Cork, we occupied the place here, we occupied UCC ... we livened up the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis anyway, I remember I got caught with a ticket , the ticket I got was some other fellas' name ... what's it? 'Dickie Burke and Conor Cruise O' Brien walk over Donogh O' Malley's grave' sort of stuff! A few other lads went up to the Fine Gael one and got their heads bashed in, do you know! You know ...

I.: So you had a real campaign and a proper publicity campaign?

JR.: Oh yeah, we picketed the Dáil and everything a few times like. You know it made a lot of news, it made an awful lot of news, and locally especially, it made a lot of news at the time. You know we were, we had support let's say, from the city, in a lot of ways, you know, Limerick city is not normally known as a great place for standing up for itself but it did on this one. We got support from, we got support from industry around too, young people, you know like, people had done Coop and that. They were happy with us coming out of here, and didn't want to see the place getting screwed down as well like, you know, ... in the end, the – what it was then, it was handed over to UCC first, or was it UCG?, it was UCG, I remember now they really had a go at engineering, more than any other because there was a fellow in UCG there, he was a lecturer, a Head of a Department, and as far as he was concerned this place was primary cert level to him. He did

everything he could to make sure nobody would pass up ... so they got rid of him I think. When they went under UCC or something was supposed to do.

Then they told us ok all you have to do now is sign the Matric. form. We held out against that up to the end. I never even signed it I think someone forged my name! I can't remember what happened in the end, you know!.

I.: You burned Matric. forms, isn't that right, outside the Department, in Dublin?

JR.: Yeah, it was like the draft cards in America you know, it looked good!

I.: Was that your idea?

JR.: I don't know whose idea it was. It could have happened just there, there was all sorts of things were kind of happening, I mean fellas were going ... I mean it was great crack as well, do you know what I mean? going out and demonstrating and everything!. And it was great crack, it was. You know, I mean, at that age of life like, you knew you enjoyed a bit of agro, a bit of conflict, like, you know, yeah !!

I.: Some of the other interviewees have talked about the Governing Authority being locked in Plassey house, the lock in?

JR.: Oh yes, yeah. When things started to diverge a bit with the Students Union, the students, sorry and the officials, the Governing Body anyway, it didn't go down well with the students anyway. I don't know, I don't think, I don't know whether they were actually locked in, but there was a big crowd out there for a couple of hours, while they were in discussing everything and that, and when they came out there and that ... I mean there was a fair amount of them on the Governing Body, certainly a few of them on it, all right, 'yes' men like, which was the sort of thing at the time. You know, the sort of people, like local worthies who were looking after their own reputation, you know they'd hardly know what the significance of the matter at issue was, like, you know. And if you take, I suppose



at twenty, twenty one ... you don't tend to be too tolerant at that age you know!! There was also I suppose, the older, the earlier years as well there was a real anti all right feeling, much more so the earlier years, but that was because we'd been sold the whole deal, I'd say, while there was others I suppose, who were a bit more easy going. But even still from first year to fourth year, it was well supported you know. You know there was no, I mean there was one or two got very precious about it, on the Governing Body ones. There was one particular lady who kind of considered herself to be a kind of a leading light in Limerick at the time, you know... she felt her dignity was being impugned, you know, instead of getting behind the students.

I.: Was this a member of the Governing Body?

JR.: Yeah, I used always ... I'm never quite sure even looking back on it how much it was being stirred up from behind the scenes from the official end as well, you know! You know, and you didn't question those things too much because if you did, you know, you'd never get an answer like you know ... and even though there was quite a number of clashes between the Student's Union with the kind of the die hards of the Students Union and the college authorities, like, and there were a few quite heated arguments between them, particularly in the end when they were trying to get us to sign up to the Matric and get the thing out of the way.

And yet for all the ... for all the ... agro I suppose, the dissention, I think both sides had the respect for each other on it, and I think that's what held, held it together. And in a lot of ways, I mean, even in a lot of ways, that camaraderie, that was there a couple of months ago, most of the class turned up there for the fortieth like you know, and I was amazed like that that many would turn up.

I.: Why were you amazed?

JR.: Well after forty years, like you know, you'd think a lot of people would have forgotten about it you know what I mean!! You know, it was more than half our

lives ago, you know. And I mean most, they were all over the world, and the amount of people came back from all over the world for it, but I was surprised, I was, yeah, yeah. If you think now maybe thirty or forty out of the hundred would show up, you'd be thinking that would be a good show enough, but I suppose it was nearly seventy or eighty, do you know.

I.: Do you think that reflects good memories of the time here?

JR.: It does yeah. Yeah, I think it reflects, there are a couple of things it reflects. One is, I think it reflects, we were thrown in together to where we had to make a go of it ourselves, and we did make a go of it ourselves, and there was a lot of pride in that. That was one thing I like about it. We did know each other, you know a lot of us knew each other even previously as well, and that did help a lot, you know there was a lot of Limerick people in it and it was seen as their own college, that was one thing. So like people were more likely to come back to where they came from as well, like you know. And there is, a lot of people have kept in contact with each other, since you know. I mean I do business with a fair lot of lads I was in college with, over the years, yeah. I mean five or six couples got married out of the year. You know it was a fairly high, twelve per cent or something, like you know, which is a fairly good proportion!.

I.: Do any memories stand out in your mind of your time with the students union?

JR.: I remember one time they tried to impeach me! I mean there were four or five of us we got stuck into a very quite personalised and I remember surviving it and I remember feeling great about it! that was one thing anyway, you know!. I mean the numbers were dead against me, you know! They weren't ganging up at all, there was an AGM anyway and I let go at the AGM, it was one of those times, when you speak publicly and things go right for you, you catch the right tone and everything. That's one thing I remember, anyway.

What else? I remember another thing when we were there, the biggest thing every year was the budget, who got what out of it. And it was allotted between the sports and the societies. And ... we got hit one year, the sports end anyway, and the next year, it went in anyway, the numbers weren't adding up at all, the accounts wouldn't work, we had, I think, two engineering reps and we had two officers or something like that, I'd say it was about four, you could say were on our side, and one other guy, was doing European Studies, we reckoned we had, and there was about ten against us. And we got through our budget by a majority of one, and the vote that swung was the treasurer who voted against her own budget!! -laugh. We put a lot of pressure on her, anyway, you know - laugh. Like, aren't you one of us! Yes that one, it was about twelve hours of a meeting, I remember that one all right, yeah! -laugh.

There was a lot of it was, you know, I suppose you were learning how to operate as well and how to fix stuff, ... yeah there was a couple of other things too. What I remember out of it too was the way you learned things and the way you learned about them quickly. That was one thing I think about being on our own here, you know about being thrown in here at the start, ... in some ways we were very childish, but in a lot of ways we grew up very quickly ... you know that, you figured out how to do things, you figured out not just ... you figured out how to get things done and how to push things across, you know, how to sell an idea. We were at, still in an era, which was quite deferential, you know, there were, you accepted the way things were, while the college itself was very , it was revolutionary in a lot of ways, yeah.

I.: Leo Colgan said that the first cohort of students were very badly done by in that many first class honours students didn't get honours degrees. Would you agree with that?

JR.: Possibly, yes, but I was never in a position to get an honours degree like, you know. Yeah, there was a few of the lads, there were a couple of them ... there were two or three in our class that were interested in their QCAs. I mean the rest of us worked on the basis they weren't going to fail us all, and you know, if you

all kind of came up much the same, that we'd all get a 'c' on it anyway and we'd pass. There was a good bit of that in it I suppose to other people, but to most of us I don't think it mattered to us. In a lot of ways, because we didn't have difficulty getting work, that was the one thing about it. You know, ... there was two or three jobs I could have got after I left. I mean I got ... taken on by Ferenka, because, for metallurgy, because I'd done industrial engineering, and I'd done actually some of my Coop in industrial engineering, I already knew how to work at time study anyway, so I ended up doing industrial engineering, in Ferenka, and there was a couple of other places I could have got jobs, and the same with most of the lads on it, so I don't think we suffered in that way.

I don't think, yeah people were academically oriented, maybe so. It didn't affect the Engineering end of it or even the Electronics end of it that much, because that wasn't I don't think it was, would have been that high in their minds the time. There was, I mean one thing they did push a good bit here, was kind of the entrepreneurial end of things which was kind of unheard of in the country. I remember reading at the time, I was sort of, was kind of radical at the time, and the capitalists sort of pushing this thing down our throat, but when you just think about it afterwards, do you know, yeah, yeah. You know, if you want to have a go on your own, have a go, and there was an awful lot of lads, certainly on our side of it anyway, there was an awful lot of lads set up their own business, within a few years, you know what I mean and continued and had their own businesses and were, you know, had the hunger to do it. It was very unusual and back then, you know, university graduates didn't create companies. When you think of all the building companies that were started by fellows who went over to England when they were fifteen, working on the railways, and started making a few bob. People who didn't have an education, were the people who were the entrepreneurs back then. I would say we were nearly the first load of people with a technical background that got involved in it. So in one way, I think it helped, I know it may have affected some people, but I think in a way that you weren't pushed into the honours degrees sort of thing, in a lot of ways was quite good for what the college produced. It might be a heretical point of view now! But I think that's the way it was.

I.: And do you think Coop was a good idea? Do you think that was a big help in getting work?

JR.: Yes, great. Not just in getting work but also in growing up. You know, you learned a few things about life before, you know, before you graduated, which I think was very important. I mean, you learned you had to clock in in the morning, you know, you had to make the effort, you had to understand what they were doing in a factory, you already got over the ... you know, lads sending you off for the glass hammer, sky hooks for the ladders! ... you'd got through that, you know by the time you'd graduated!. It gave you while you were studying, it gave you an understanding of what you were learning and where it actually fitted in in the real world. Because I remember even coming back from it, where before when you were doing something like engineering, or science, what's it metallurgical engineering and things like that, it was all diagrams and formulas and everything like that. But being actually out there, you would have seen, now that's why this is important and that's why that was important. And that was the biggest thing. It gave us a few bob as well, you know ... what was I think at the time, certainly in the first couple of years there anyway, that the students here came from a much less wealthy background than the other universities. So like you know the few bob you could make from employment, yeah, it was necessary and it was helpful, yeah. And I think even ... it worked as well too, I think a lot of industries saw how it was being done, they were very happy with it too, I think.

I.: Is there anything else you'd like to recall about the student experience?

JR.: I remember the riverside. I grew up with it anyhow before this went up; it was the bank, it was part of the college, like you know, it kind of pulled away from it afterwards, but it was part of it then. That was one thing I remember. I remember the parties ... there was a few places ... I remember towards the end of third year, fourth year, Milford Grange being built, Elm park was being built at that stage. There was also town as well. What Milford Grange was like on a Thursday night or Friday night, like you know, fellows going around two

'Dannos' (pint bottles of Guinness)... in a brown bag, 'is the party on here?!" and there mightn't have been the party, - laugh, but sure we'd have a party in there anyway you know!!

I suppose there's a few things that would be strange now. I remember the first lecture in the morning would be packed. We'd be all sitting down there, and there was one fellow in our class, his father had a tobacco shop, and he always had fags. Most of us, we might have a fag or we mightn't anyway, and he'd come in and this would be about five minutes after the class starting, and he'd be taking off his motor bike gear and everything, 'jaysus Dermot, have you got a fag?' and having a light up, you know, in the middle of the first lecture and the day kind of came into perspective, like!

I.: Of course everyone smoked then.

JR.: Yeah, a lot of people smoked then, yeah, yeah. Well I mean smoking in class was ok I don't think we used to do it in the other place, it kind of established itself early and nobody got around to rooting it out early on! There was a few areas I think we weren't great at there. I think we missed out a bit on the cultural side of the country ... I thought it should have ... it did give a bit of an impression, even though I was on the engineering side, it did give the impression you know, that it was just a big technical college in a way, rather than having a roundness of learning on it you know. The PE college did bring in some bit of ... but there were a few things, I suppose the languages, that the European Studies did on work experience like you know, you kind of didn't want to look back on the country itself and there was a bit of a lack of faith I think in what, our own cultural foundations as well.

You know there was a bit of an inferiority complex in some ways, as well. And there was in the academic staff originally too it was very English, you know, there was a very British attitude in some of them which didn't appreciate really, you know, had a somewhat colonial attitude to what was going on here, you know, it didn't work because of ... you know that sort of way. I could have done

with a bit more of that area in the beginning ... it's just a personal regret. I think we could have learned a lot more on that area of it. You know and even things, it could have done with an Arts degree at the start. I know it was completely the antithesis of all the college ... but it did need that I think. It would have added to the place. There were a few other things too ... There was one or two other things at the back of my mind ... I suppose in a way, you could look at it, we were a bit too antagonistic, but no, I think no ... I think we would have been ground out if we hadn't been, you know.

I.: And when you say ground out, John, do you mean by the other universities?

JR.: Oh yeah, well what they wanted to do was ... they were starting the RTCs, they kind of started the year after. I think one or two of them were there in '72, they mostly started around '73, '74. They wanted, yeah, it was going to be Limerick RTC. I remember even what is now LIT, I mean there was a real college there, you know even though it wasn't on the one campus, and they wouldn't even call it an RTC because of the universities. Because if they called that an RTC then they couldn't grind NIHE down to be ... you know it was that petty like. Yeah. And it wasn't so much that they were against ... I mean a lot of other people would have felt different about it, it didn't really bother me that much on it, but what I thought was, the way that they wanted to shackle the energy that was in the place, they wanted it driven out. Yeah, and they were so vindictive about it and so petty about it. It was shameful in a way and it was very much, and the way the government really just, at the time, you know, were fully behind that attitude which was wrong, it was very wrong.

I.: But you were saying that was a formative experience as a student?

JR.: It was brilliant! You know it was ... yeah a few things, yeah, I suppose as you get old you start ... things become a bit more, you know, it was great when you were young, you get to be a grumpy old man! You know it was all better in our youth, these young kids, but at the same time I do think right through, there was a great sense of pride in it. And that lives on, a genuine pride that was in it you

know. And there's a sense now even, I think we all had a sense, we had a sense that we were a generation that was on the edge, you know, that was on the edge of old Ireland and that was coming to new Ireland. We grew up in a time when, you know we were children of the fifties, the early fifties, you know and so in other words, our early years we would have seen, while there was no cars around, you know most of rural Ireland didn't have electricity, even when we were in college, just up the road, you know, you didn't even have phones, you didn't even have automatic phones, you know. So we would have come from that and yet by the time we finished college there was a huge change in the country, say '59 '60 to '72, about, there was enormous change in the country, and we were the youngsters that came of age in that time. And we've ... we were lucky in one way in that we had the opportunities at the start which almost no other crowd had, we got in at the ground floor, and the college helped us to do that. I suppose that's my memory of it, yeah.

I.: Thanks very much

JR.: Cúpla daoine go bhfuil cuimhne agam orthu. Mattie Sharpe. An fear a bhí istigh an doras. Bhí Mattie mar caretaker ag an gColáiste. Bhí sé ag obair le Rehab roimh theacht anseo. Bhí polio air agus é ina fhear óg agus chaill sé lámh amháin. Bhí an-mheas agus an-chion ag na daoine eile a bhí anseo air. Bhí tigh ag Mattie thíos in aice leis na Stables – Ionad na Mac Léinn ansin. Bhí cónaí air ansin ar feadh na blianta. Bhí sé thuas sa Hurlers cuid mhaith den am – agus (*ag gáirí*) – an-chuid mic léinn ag ól ina theannta. Bhí Uachtarán NCPE ann ag an am. Coláiste Thumhain, Dr Oliver. Ba Shasannach é. Tháinig sé ón Arm is dóigh liom – ní raibh mórán grá idir é fhéin agus Ed Walsh – (*ag gáire*) – Ido labhradar lena chéile trí Mattie Sharpe uaireanta! Mic Mac – bhí Mic Mac ann – Michael MacMahon – b'eisean a bhí ina chathaoirleach ar an gcumann Sacair agus ar an gCumann Spóirt agus, *chancer*!!. Bhí sé pósta ar Fionnuala Liddy (MacMahon) – muirear acu – bhí seisean ina chuid tábhachtach de Chumann na Mac Léinn. Bhí Leachtóir ann darbh ainm Dan O'Neill. Gael-Mheiriceánach a bhí ann. Roinn na Ceimice agus Polymers. Bhí an Coop á stiúru ag Danno. Ní thagadh sé na leachtanna go ró-mhinic. Ag deireadh an téarma thagadh sé isteach agus dearadh



sé – “I’ve got a package for you here” (canúint Meiriceánach) agus sin an scrúdú amárach – bhí na scrúdaithe an-éasca. Cé eile a bhí ann – an Dr. Alexander – labharas fé cheana féin – Sin a bhfuil ...

I.: And if you want to stop at any stage ... You were just saying that it made a big contribution here? [UL]

JR.: Yeah, it made a contribution locally in one way in that Limerick needed an outlet, Limerick needed an outlet for ideas, that was one side of it anyway, because it didn’t have it. And I think in a city you do need, you know if you want to be a real city, you do need some sort of an educational peak as well to it, like you know, that it draws out the population. And it made a big contribution nationally, I mean it embraced new technology, you know I mean, it was up and coming as well at the time. I suppose computers were just taking off then, we knew about computers when we left here; you know, we knew Bask, I think everybody knew a bit of Bask programming, could compose a few lines of code anyway. We knew what computers could do and I don’t think any other college would have had that appreciation for another three or four years. So we were aware of where the future was kind of going in that way all right. We were aware I think of changing economies as well because of the way we grew up. I mean its like today, I’m lost now when it comes to all these smart phones and that, I got to a point there a few years ago, where I went, let them off! I don’t want to be confused even more. But I see kids now, nine or ten, and its there, they know instinctively of it, and it was like that in a way. It was a wave of technology and a way of I think, of society, of structures, of business structures, that was making a difference in the country. And we knew that instinctively and I’d say we were in a way, the group, if not the first group in the country who, you know, would have come up through that.

What else? I suppose we, there was a few other things that did happen in our time as well. Yeah, we did go into the EEC during that time as well, ‘twas the end of first year, yes it was January ’73, I think when we joined the EEC. And that was the start of our first year, like you know. So it did make a big change in the

country all right. The other thing too, we grew up through the Troubles as well and it would have, certainly we would have been very, very, aware of ... our first real awareness of politics would have been, around fourteen, fifteen and that was exactly ... you know we would have been fourteen, fifteen around '67, '68, '69, and that was the time when the North blew up and we grew along with it as well, though the worst of it. And it was something we were aware of as well, that was very much, a very, very big change in the country as well. So those things, I think at the time too, just even locally like, Limerick was a bit of a boom place in the sixties. I mean, it was stagnated from the first World War up until 1960, and it boomed a bit again in the '60s and '70s and we kind of came in on that, and then it stagnated again since like, you know. But we came through a time when Limerick was doing well in comparison with the rest of the country, in about the only period it was doing well, in comparison with the rest of the country as well. That was one thing about it, yeah. And I mean, even when you look at it, the time the college started, the city ended at the Parkway. There was only two actual suburban estates here, and they were quite small. They were in Castletroy and they started Monaleen Heights with about twenty houses in it, that was Castletroy Heights which had about twenty houses. There was kind of ... houses down there at the cross of Castletroy and the rest of it was just farmhouses and cottages. And that's what, that's where UL was born into. And within, I think, I'd say about ... nearly by the time I was finished, it was already covered on every side with housing. And so it was, it was, just in that short period, like you know, the place really transformed with it.

There was one or two other things too. I suppose, I mean the one thing, one thing about the EEC was, it was the first time in the country we were able to look beyond the wall. You know if you ever looked outside the country all you could see was the big wall of England, and we started to actually see beyond it there. So ... we grew up into that. We weren't quite shackled, let's say, our view of the world, even people I think that were born ten years before us would have been . So it was a more adventurous time. And even, I remember even then, it was just about around the early '70s, the first time we were actually getting a good few, a good lot of continental Europeans coming here.

It was sort of the time ... one of the things that took off around the time we were in college was the Irish music. You know the Horslips and Planxty and Stocktons Wing... the Bothy Band, they were, that was the time they grew and they hit the scene. And that also produced – I mean before that Irish music was considered ‘diddly di’, you know, ‘twas bog stuff like! Then it suddenly became a bit cool on it. And what it also produced was, a whole load of Germans and Dutchies in particular, French people coming across, fellas with their rucksacks over their shoulder and the tin whistle sticking out of their back pocket, this was their Nirvana and it was you know, unspoiled Europe on it. But we actually met foreign cultures then as well. And it was around that time it only started, you know, and that was the watershed we were born on, you know. And that was what the college grew up on in a way, and there was a lot of converging things came together around that time, and I’d say a lot of that, they were things that pushed it in that way as well. And for all his vagaries, like I mean, I think Ed Walsh understood a lot of this too, actually. He had it in him, like you know, he might have gone about it the wrong way, but at least he’d have a go at it, like you know, latching onto something like that as well.

I.: Do any other figures stand out?

JR.: People who made a lot of difference... I’d just like to go ... we had one lecturer I remember, an Egyptian fella called Mohie el Haradi, small little Egyptian man, and he used to talk about his ‘curved’ arrows and his ‘charged filters’, and most of us couldn’t figure what he was talking about. And to this day I remember, he taught me more about how to think about structure, you know about organisation, about how things happen and things like that. I didn’t even realize at the time, that was one guy all right. Ah they were, there was ... there was lecturers that pushed you, they pushed you as well, the lecturers. You know, they put it up to you, they knew you, they’d kind of get you and say, look you can do better than that. It’s not like now, where you go in there and there’s three hundred students, like you know. You know, you don’t even know who they are

like, there's just a registration number and that's as far as it goes. They knew you as a person.

I.: And students and staff had good relations?

JR.: Yeah .... Yeah...

I.: To a certain extent?

JR.: There was a few staff all right ... I mean, there was a couple of staff that were clocked at parties, I don't know what it was over, one thing or another ... laugh... you wouldn't get away with it now like, you know, but it did happen. There was some of them all right were, of course they were, only a couple of years older than us, you know. And a few of them like, they really got in, and they lived a bit of the student life with us too. Ken, now, was nearly one of the boys, I remember! Ken Wylie! And a few of the technicians as well ... I'm just trying to think of it now, who else was there, there wasn't a lot of cars that was one thing I remember. The big thing to have then was the Honda 50, you know! And that was when you were about third year, or fourth year, you finally got one out of Coop like!. So like, I mean, you walked a lot, there was no buses or anything out of town, I mean most of the students lived in town and then they started moving out. There wasn't that many people living in rented accommodation, I remember, it was digs, a lot of it, at the start. But I suppose that was kind of normal in that way.

And then Milford Grange grew up, Milford Grange, a lot of people of the people who bought houses in Milford Grange worked in Ferenka, and Milford Grange grew up about the same time as the college, and they paid for their houses out of keeping students here. But like it was hard to get in and out of town though, there was no proper bus service or anything. So a lot of people went, you know, it was town a lot of people went to, Collins, what was the other one?, the Round House, I think I remember, they were the two main ones. The PE students I think the Round House was their one, I think, a lot of it. And then the Hurlers of course,

that used to get the business as well. There was no bar on the campus now, back then. Yeah, so it was ... it's different now in the way a lot of them are living on the campus, there was nobody living on the campus then, So it did mix in more with the city, and you know, there wasn't as much distance ... it's more self contained now than it was. Yeah, I mean it was, it really was out the sticks, I know, there was a fellow in my class there, he was from Garryowen, like he couldn't get over how far out the place was, the sticks, like, I said 'I live around here, just up the road there, you know!'. 'Yeah, but you live on a road, this Plassey was the back of nowhere you know!'. Yeah, there was that about it.

I.: Thanks very much John.