

Time to Think

Open University Journeys in British and Irish prisons during the years of conflict, 1972-2000

Oral History interview clip transcript

Name of Interviewee: **Kay Muhr**

Interviewed by: **Pat Jess**

Date of interview: **19/02/2014**

Important

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Clip title: Reflections on Irish language in the H Blocks

Duration: 00:01:32

Clip start point in full interview: 00:12:35

Clip end point in full interview: 00:14:07

Interview identifier: 069_T_01

Description:

Kay Muhr tutored linguistics modules in the H Blocks of the Maze and Long Kesh Prison between 1986 and 1992 for The Open University. In this clip she describes reflecting with her Open University student about the use of the Irish language in the H Blocks by Republicans, and how Prison Officers realised it might be useful if they learnt some Irish too.

Transcript:

Did they reflect on, in any way language as it was used in the prison?

Yes, they did indeed and especially, you see we found it very interesting to talk about the use of Irish in the prison. They talked about the jailteacht, the Irish language use in the prison, which wasn't pure Irish- it was a sort of carefully constructed pidgin or creole based on Irish, but not bringing in the full difficult grammar etc. And there is one particular student that I really hope, but I don't know if it will ever happen- would record all of this, because he was very, very interested in language and he's one who said to me, "Although I am a Republican, I was brought up speaking English and I actually find it very difficult to do deep thinking in Irish." And I think that is often a problem with learning another language, no matter how much you love it, there are always some things that come from too deep down to be done in anything but the language you learnt first. But, that was very interesting but you couldn't, I said, "You'd better not tell me too much about this" because it was the language that they used among themselves, and it wasn't for outsiders, and it was at that time that some of the Prison Officers were starting to realise that it might be quite good if they learnt a bit of Irish.