

## 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: **John Wallace**  
Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**  
Date of interview: **18/06/2018**

#### **Important**

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

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**Clip title:** An invitation to meet the Queen

**Duration:** 00:03:20

**Clip start point in full interview:** 01:00:02

**Clip end point in full interview:** 01:03:22

**Interview identifier:** 109\_S\_01

**Description:** John Wallace, Open University student in the UVF Compounds of Long Kesh (the Maze and Long Kesh Prison) in 1979 recalls receiving an invitation to attend the tenth anniversary of The Open University in Milton Keynes and of visitors who came to apologise for his request to attend being denied.

**Transcript:**

Round about 1980 The Open University was celebrating ten years of existence and my recollection was that the Queen was going to Milton Keynes for some kind of ceremony. Anyhow, in my Open University bumph, which came in a pack, as I went through it, I found what turned out to be a personal invitation to go to Milton Keynes to meet the Queen. Of course I realised that that wasn't going to happen. However, along with Billy Strain, he and I, because we shared a cubicle together, we sat down and completed this form. And among other remarks one made, it was questions like "What's your mode of transport?" I said "Securicor". "How many people will be accompanying you?" I was saying "At least four armed adults and other things along these smart-alecky remarks, and then I posted it back. It went out, it wasn't intercepted in any way by the prison, it clearly went out in the OU mail. And nothing more came of it then for a few months; then one of the chaps came, one of the lads in the Compound came to the hut, shouted that there was people at the Cage gate wanting to meet me, wanting to speak to me. So I cleared it with my Commanding Officers, I said, "Look, I don't know what this is", and they said "Well okay, away you go over and find out, John". Trundled over, and there was a range of characters in suits; including also the security and Prison Officers and stuff like that. But there were two guys in particular- really well-dressed, big overcoats, stuff like that. Very politely said, "Are you Mr. Wallace?",

"Yeah",

"We're here to say, it is quite unfortunate but permission can't be given for you to travel to Milton Keynes to meet Her Majesty". Of course I was, "What? What?" and then of course, the penny dropped that I'd sent off this smart-alecky application to come and meet the Queen in Milton Keynes. The thing was, I think at the time, I wasn't sure, because clearly these weren't NIO [Northern Ireland Office] buffs. And I came to realise that actually they must have been equerrys for Her Majesty who had come over and made a point of saying, "We have to apologise, we can't let you come" [laughs] And I just think of all the weird things that could happen in life, as a consequence of being involved in The Open University, that always stuck out in my mind, this time, the day I was invited to meet the Queen, and couldn't do it.

*In the middle of a UVF Compound in Long Kesh? [Laughs]*

John Wallace Clip

[Laughs] Exactly, exactly.