

## 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: **William Plum Smith**  
Interviewed by: **Jenny Meegan**  
Date of interview: **16/011/2011**

#### **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:** The first person to get an Open University degree was a Loyalist

**Duration:** 00:01:35

**Clip start point in full interview:** 00:33:27

**Clip end point in full interview:** 00:35:00

**Interview identifier:** 047\_S\_01

**Description:**

William 'Plum' Smith counters the misconception that only Republicans studied in prison. He reflects on how studying The Open University in the Ulster Volunteer Force/Red Hand Commando Compounds at Long Kesh (the Maze and Long Kesh Prison) in the early 1970s gave Loyalist prisoners alternatives and a chance in education they didn't get on the outside and the impact of education in Long Kesh on Loyalist ex-prisoners in politics and in the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement.

**Transcript:**

The OU gave us that alternative that we could have other things. And the number of people that took it up, you know. It was surprising because most times, or even now, there is this common perception that Loyalists didn't do the education, it was Republicans that done the education, when if you look at the facts, Loyalists were the first. We were the first. In fact I think the first person to get an Open University degree was a Loyalist, or certainly among the first, and we have what like, twenty five or thirty people went through the OU during that period, which is a considerable percentage. Certainly on the outside, those people wouldn't have had that chance. Unfortunately we had to go to a prison to get educated, but it did—, I don't believe in education being the be all and end all, but certainly it gives people more options and more alternatives. It wouldn't have changed the course of the war, but what it did do, it produced people at a later time, because if you look at all the people who were involved in the Peace Process, like myself, involved in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement [the peace agreement between the British and Irish governments and most of the political parties in Northern Ireland], David Ervine, you know and a whole list of people that's been involved in moving the country forward – a lot of them got their education in Long Kesh [Ulster Volunteer Force/Red Hand Commando Compounds, the Maze and Long Kesh Prison]. Out of the five man delegation in the Loyalist side, four were ex-prisoners and two had done Open University in Long Kesh.