

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: **Eleanor Gaw**
Interviewed by: **Pat Jess**
Date of interview: **10/07/2012**

Important

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Eleanor Gaw Clip

Clip title: It wasn't exactly your average education!

Duration: 00:01:59

Clip start point in full interview: 00:02:27

Clip end point in full interview: 00:04:28

Interview identifier: 056_T

Description:

Eleanor Gaw, Open University Associate Lecturer, describes her first visit to the students in the Official IRA Compound (The Maze and Long Kesh Prison) in the 1970s to tutor Humanities, accompanied by the sound of gunfire.

Transcript:

The first students I met were in a Compound for Official IRA inmates in the very odd place the Compounds were- Nissen huts [pre-fabricated steel structure originally for military use] with wire fences. And the Education Officer gave me a very detailed briefing. I was taken in a van to the Compound and what I remember very vividly, because I was very nervous, was the sound of gunfire, a lot of gunfire. And the Compounds were right beside an army camp, and the army had a firing range. So there was this nervous Arts tutors going into, who knows, students accompanied into this very temporary looking place with the sound of gunfire. It wasn't exactly your average education. And then when I got to the Compound, and you got inside and was taken with your Prison Education Officer escort into their temporary classroom in the Compound, now there were these two young men who were so gracious and hospitable and welcoming and, "Would you like a cushion on your chair, and how do you like your coffee?" And they were just very keen to meet me and I think they were as nervous as I was.

And they were studying for the first time or had they—?

I think so, yes, I think. And they were both very motivated. History was their real driver, and I have the ignominious distinction with one of them as being the only tutor in his whole OU career on whose course he didn't get a distinction, but I taught him to be a student.