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Kieran Connell: I was going to start, if it's all right with you, just by, if you can remember what brought you to it, what was then the Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology.

Mark Erickson: I joined in 1996 and I was a lecturer at the University of Sunderland. And, I mean, it was a strange thing, when I was at the University of Sunderland, and that had just become a university in 1992, I started doing my PhD, and it was a bit of a ramshackle university. It had, I think, trebled its numbers of students almost overnight and they were desperate for lecturing staff. So although I'd only been doing my PhD for probably about seven minutes, they said, "Oh, would you like a job as a lecturer?" And I was teaching research methods and sociology there. And whilst I did like my job there and my colleagues, it really was not a good working environment in a lot of ways. So myself and my colleagues, Tom Shakespeare and Carol Stephenson and Steve Williams, formed an escape committee and we all decided we would help each other get out. Tom got out and then I got the job at Birmingham. I applied for the job at Birmingham just because I thought I don't know many other places around Britain that I'd want to live, I've always liked Birmingham, I'd lived there in the 1980s, and I knew it was a bit of a long shot. But they wanted a sociologist who could teach research methods and was doing stuff on, I think, inequality or work, or something like that, so I applied. And the interview process was really interesting, I had to do a presentation to the staff, I had to do a presentation to the undergraduate students, a presentation to the postgraduate students, then I was interviewed by an internal panel of students. And then I had a formal interview with Michael Green, who's head of department, you know, a couple of other profs, a couple of other people from the, you know, external people, that proper formal interview thing.

And I, I mean, if I'm going to be totally honest with you I knew there was no chance I could get the job, and the reason I couldn't get the job was that I had been sent down from the University of Birmingham in 1983, and I'd been expelled for a range of infractions of university regulations. And they'd expelled me in perpetuity, so knew that I actually couldn't get the job, but I thought, look, it's a free train ticket down to Birmingham, I'll get to see my friends. So having done these presentations to the staff and the students I thought, "Wow, I actually really like this place," I thought, well, I'd, kind of, got a bit of a feel that, you know, it might be quite nice to work here. So during the interview I did actually 'fess up and said, "Look, I really think I should tell you that I was actually, like, kicked out of the university and they said I could never, you know, be a member of the university again." And Michael Green did lean across and said, "Oh, dear boy, don't worry about that. That's perfectly all right, don't you worry." And I got the job and I was extremely pleased to get the job. And my bosses at the University of Sunderland were extremely annoyed that I got the job at Birmingham, I mean, really, really angry about it. Apart from anything else, despite the fact that I was only a PhD student on their temporary rolling contracts and all the rest of it, they were actually putting me into the RAE. So they then negotiated with Birmingham that I had to stay a little bit longer at Sunderland so that I would go into their RAE submission. But Birmingham were very good to me, Michael arranged for me not to do anything when I first started there, I think I got four months off to finish doing my PhD and then I was, kind of, in to the deep end and I would have been teaching, (inaudible 00:03:56) teaching.

Kieran Connell: And do you, like, I mean, as a sociologist doing your PhD in sociology were you influenced by the, kind of, the centre's work, that the Birmingham –

Mark Erickson: Oh God, no, not at all.

Kieran Connell: Not at all?

Mark Erickson: No, not at all. I mean, it wasn't I was unaware of that stuff, I mean, I was really aware of the centre's work from a previous job I had. So, I mean, I'd come across Stuart Hall's work and some of the other sort of cultural studies through being an undergraduate at Durham, and I was taught by someone called Dave Chainey, and Dave is, kind of, cultural sociology. I mean, in the '90s I think Dave moved more towards being cultural studies, but in the '80s when he was teaching me, yes, he was very much cultural studies sociology. He did stuff about cultural institutions, so he'd written

quite extensively on the BBC, particularly looking at 1950s BBC stuff. And he'd introduced me to the work of Stuart Hall, you know, the classic sorts of stuff around encoding, decoding, things like that, those sorts of things. And then when I was a Master's student at Durham I finished doing that and then I got a job working for a guy called Mike Pickering, and Mike is now at Loughborough University, but he was Sunderland Polytechnic in the cultural studies department or media studies department, he certain wasn't a sociologist, although I think he's a sociologist now. And I worked as Mike's research assistant, but Mike was very, at that time, was very much involved in, sort of like, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, that kind of, like, paradigm of cultural studies. And he made me read this stuff so I could get up to speed when I was acting as his research assistant, which was what I did. So that's actually how I'd come across it. I did my PhD in what'll be sociology of work, and I did factory studies, and whilst I really wanted to use, you know, radical actor network theory and post-structuralist analysis and things like that, I actually ended up using the work of Jürgen Habermas. And I did a, kind of, critical theory Habermasian study of moral and ethical attitudes towards weapons production in the defence industry in the north-east of England. So it's a very mundane, it was a, kind of, nasty topic, very mundane, very standard sociology, you know, get some theory, work out the context, go and interview a whole bunch of workers in factory settings and shipyards, and things like that, thematic analysis of the interviews, and what did you find? And that's what I did. So, you know, I could pull the PhD off the shelf and just have a look, but I don't think there'll be any cultural studies references in there at all.

[00:06:56]

Kieran Connell: Were you –

Mark Erickson: So I, kind of, moved away from those, it's weird, I'd moved away from it and then went back into it.

Kieran Connell: Were you aware of the, kind of, you mentioned you obviously had friends in Birmingham from your time there in the '80s. But you were you also aware of, I don't, the mythology that have, I suppose, kind of, sprung up around the centre, I don't know, since Stuart left almost? Like, about the collective way of working and their different approach to academic work, were you aware of that at all?

Mark Erickson: No, not the collective thing until I got there, no. I applied for a PhD at the Open University, oh God, I don't know when, and Stuart interviewed me for that, I didn't get it, Paul Degay got that. And it's strange because Paul and I shared an office at University of Durham, we were both post graduates there, and we both applied for this PhD position at the Open University. Gosh, it's all right, I haven't thought about that for a very, very long time, I remember that interview, I wanted to do something about disability. I'd been working as a residential care assistant before I went into university work and I wanted to do something about disability. And it was about the social construction of disability, looking at, like, discursive constructions of disability, and Stuart and two other people were interviewing me and the two other people were real proper, old style unreconstructed, just unreconstructed people. And at a certain point Stuart, you know, and big thanks to him, did actually come to my defence and said, "Look, you can't be so rude," because they were just so rude about the fact that I was would say, "Well, yeah, I want to use the work of Michel Foucault." They were appalled that, you know, I'd try and use a French post-structuralist to make any sense of disability when it's clearly about materiality and inequality and stuff like, and, you know, these are not irrelevant things. But yeah, I remember Stuart giving a very robust defence of Foucaultian (inaudible 00:09:01). I didn't the post, but never mind.

Kieran Connell: When you arrived at Birmingham then how would you describe the, kind of, way the department operated compared to what you'd been used to previously at Sunderland?

Mark Erickson: Oh, it was much, much more academically engaged. I mean, much more serious, I mean, it's light hearted in a lot of ways, but much more serious, I mean, really ideas really were important there, and there was an awful lot of contestation around ideas as well. I mean, well, it's like I said, you know, the fact they're going to put me into the research assessment exercise when I was like, didn't have a PhD, had, you know, a small range of publications but, you know, at Sunderland that was the kind of thing. Most of the people that had, you know, long term positions there didn't have a lot of academic

publications and weren't that, that wasn't really, you know, it was just coming out of that (overspeaking 00:10:02).

[00:10:02]

Kieran Connell: Teaching was more, kind of...

Mark Erickson: Yeah, it was a teaching sort of thing. I mean, you know, don't make the mistake of thinking that, like, Birmingham wasn't about teaching, it's the most teaching intensive an oriented department that I've been in and teaching is taken extremely seriously there, I mean, really. I mean, and to its credit, I mean, it was a really, really good place for producing very high quality teaching in most areas, not in all areas of the department, in most areas, and a very high amount of student engagement as well, and the students were really engaged with this. But it was the constant throughput of ideas and new ideas all the time and to do with challenging new ideas. I mean, going in as the sociologist, because there was one other sociologist there, was David Parker, and David and I were the two sociologists. And I think David was probably more, how was I going to put it, I think we both did the same sort of thing where we, kind of like, moved a long way in the direction of cultural studies. I mean, certainly I ended up teaching on a number of, like, the cultural studies modules as well as having to, like, service a sociology degree. David and I both provided the research methods module, I did the quantitative stuff, David did the qualitative stuff, and we just, kind of, shared the methodological things. But yeah, you know, you had to, kind of like, do more cultural studies, and cultural studies is really exciting, you know, I mean –

Kieran Connell: That wasn't a, kind of, you didn't see that as a negative thing then, leaning towards it, no?

Mark Erickson: Oh God, no, no, not at all. I mean, I think the, you know, there was always a, I mean, some people in the department would probably confirm they didn't like my attitude towards cultural studies in that I didn't see cultural studies as being radically different from a lot of the sociology that I'd been taught. So, like I said, in the 1980s I was taught cultural sociology by Dave Chainey, my final year undergraduate programme when I was at Durham University involved Derrida, Foucault... I just found it the other day, I couldn't believe it. This is my second year text book for my sociological analysis course, here it is, and it's by Michel Foucault and it's the Archaeology of Knowledge, and that was my second level text book from 1986. But yeah, I mean, I was brought, you know, I was taught into that tradition of, like, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida. Dave Chainey's stuff on cultural sociology, which included all the McLuhan stuff as well, you know, I remember reading the Gutenberg Galaxy and these sorts of things, you know, and those sorts of issues around that. But it wasn't, okay, I got taught stats as well, but it wasn't a hard core kind of version of what sociology is. And I think that I saw a lot in cultural studies that was really just a way of doing sociology.

Kieran Connell: Was there, like, when you were in the department, how did the kind of, you know, the organisational function in terms of administration and such like, was there a, kind of, still a trend, a move towards, kind of, a collective approach? Or would it –

Mark Erickson: No.

Kieran Connell: Had it moved towards a more conventional way of doing things by that point?

Mark Erickson: Yes. Yeah, it was, certainly. Because, like, there was nobody, none of the writing projects were running, or anything like that, that had all finished. It was, I mean, we would have team meetings, what I just considered to be interminable team meetings. I'd come from Sunderland where basically everybody was just running all the time because we had such massive teaching loads, we'd got so many students, whereas you'd go to Birmingham it's a much smaller number of students. I remember Michael explaining to me that there was team meeting, you know, second week I was there and I thought, "Well, that'll be one hour." It was a seven hour meeting, it was just, you know (laughs), and we would sit around that table, that round table in the (inaudible 00:14:08) for hour after hour after hour, God knows how we managed spin the time out so much.

Kieran Connell: Were you literally discussing, kind of, policy, administration?

[00:14:17]

Mark Erickson: Oh, we'd discuss everything, administration, who's teaching which modules, what the content should be and stuff like that. I mean, it's a lot more in terms of discussing, you know, what should be included in modules, these sorts of things. But, I mean, Michael Green, whilst he's a really nice person, and he micromanaged the department in a way that was probably not very healthy. I mean, for him it must have just been such a, you know, terrible strain on him. I mean, us more junior members of the department, you'd turn up in, you know, to work on a morning and there would be a University of Birmingham memo slip which Michael would have typed, yeah, be typed and structured, "Do not forget to tell the CS1 students that they must hand their essays in by Tuesday," these sorts of things, all these sorts of, like, aide memoirs. Things that, I would have to say, often we would have done them anyway, kind of, knew how to do these things, but Michael did micromanage things and it was just, kind of, the way that he did it.

Kieran Connell: Was there a, sort of, political element to the department in terms of, you know, were people, were students, were staff members politically engaged more so than you've experienced subsequently or previously?

Mark Erickson: Yeah. Well, I don't know, I mean... Gosh, it's difficult to say. There was clearly a lot of political activity, I mean, myself, Gargi Bhattacharya were very involved in the trade union, and Gargi was running a number of, sort of, social justice campaigns that I got quite involved in as well. The students, we had a lot of students who were interested in lesbian and gay rights campaigns in the, sort of, this would be the, sort of, mid, late '90s, although that, kind of, waxed and waned over the years. It wasn't the kind of hotbed of radicalism that, in terms of radical politics that I think some people might have expected it to be. And, I don't know, it's strange because I'd been working with Tom Shakespeare before, and of course Tom is very, very active and still is very active in disability rights so, you know, and I'd been doing that sort of stuff with Tom in the early '90s at Sunderland. So in some ways it was, kind of, business as usual, there wasn't, I mean, put it this way, there wasn't any overt political organisation inside the department. It wasn't that everyone was a member of one political party or there were factions, or things like that. I mean, I know that Michael was very involved in the Labour Party, I was a member of the Labour Party at the time, a very disillusioned member of the Labour Party. I mean, I think I resigned in '97, '98, I'd joined when I was working in the shipyards, when I was working at Swan Hunter shipyards, and it, kind of, seemed to make more sense when you're in a shipyard to join the Labour Party than when you're in Muirhead Tower. But yes, we weren't really, not that kind of politics, single issue politics, yeah, and there'd be things that we were doing that were about, you know, particular justice campaigns and things like that.

Kieran Connell: Did you get the sense that, I don't know, like Michael, for example, or may perhaps others who were, you know, directly in the cultural studies side of things, did you get the sense they felt the weight of the, you know, reputation of what had gone on previously?

Mark Erickson: Certainly the cultural studies people did, definitely, definitely, and in two ways, one is that there were people in the department who felt we really need to keep this sort of thing going, but it's not possible. I mean, the structural transformation of UK higher education in the 1990s just put an end to those sorts of ideas of like we're going to have a collective working group, or things like that. I mean, that's simply not going to happen because it was all becoming this individuated thing. And then there are other people in the department who felt, you know, this is, kind of, like a dead hand that is stopping us going in the direction that we would want to go in. So, you know, it was felt that homage had to be done in particular directions, yeah.

Kieran Connell: Because, I mean, there were these, I don't know if you were then when (inaudible 00:18:43) studies from Birmingham journals were produced.

Mark Erickson: Oh yeah, yeah, we were, I was doing that, yeah, I think I'm the editor of one, yeah.

Kieran Connell: Okay. Well, I mean, that clearly is, it seemed to me anyway from the archive, quite knowingly, like, nodding to what, the, kind of annual reports and the sense of occasional papers, and there were working papers in cultural studies. Is that –

[00:18:59]

Mark Erickson: Yeah sure, and we tried to keep it going as well, I mean, it was difficult to do. I've got some lying around somewhere, you'll have them in your archive, but yeah, at a certain point I think we put it online as well.

Kieran Connell: Yeah, because the last issue just said the next issue will only be appearing online. But I don't know where they got to, the online ones, because...

Mark Erickson: Well, there was only one or two.

Kieran Connell: (Inaudible 00:19:20)

Mark Erickson: Yeah, I mean, when the department shut they pulled the website, so that doesn't exist any more. I've probably still got those, in fact I'm sure. I can burn it on to a disc, because you should put that in the archive, definitely.

Kieran Connell: Do you remember, were they literally, was the idea literally to, kind of, was the motivation, one of the motivations anyway behind it to try and, kind of, keep that spirit of the centre alive in the department?

Mark Erickson: Yes, it was, definitely. Not as a, kind of, replication of it, but to say, "This is what we do." And it was, yeah, in some ways they're a bit like the reports because, of course, we put in the annual Raymond Williams lecture as well, I think we had Tony Garnett one year did, or something like that. I must dig these out.

Kieran Connell: There was, like, a list of the students and there was also some papers as well.

Mark Erickson: Yes, you know, proper papers as well. I remember Mark McGuinness is one of our former students who's now at Bath, I think, or Bristol, something like that, I mean, he'd written a paper in there. So some of them would be really good undergraduate dissertations that we'd ask the students to rewrite, others would be, sort of, PhD students or early career academics. So yes, we would have the list of who's doing their PhDs and things in the department, who's involved in the department. So yes, they're a, kind of, like a nod towards that, but they were different in the sense that they're all individually authored and it didn't have that, sort of, collective sense of responsibility to it.

Kieran Connell: At what point did you start to become aware of the university's, kind of, attitude towards the department? And what point did they, were they, kind of, putting increased pressure on the department, did it come quite late on, or...?

Mark Erickson: What sort of pressure do you mean?

Kieran Connell: Well, I mean in terms of the way you were operating, in terms of how you were functioning.

Mark Erickson: Well, they've all hated that, they hated the department ever since it started.

Kieran Connell: Did you become aware of that straight away?

Mark Erickson: Yes, straight away, I mean, probably because Michael would have told me or other people had said, "Boy, you've got to watch out at this place." But yeah, I was, sort of, young, I didn't care, I mean, like I said, I was really glad I'd got that job, it was better than what I'd had before, and I was very happy to be at Birmingham University. But yeah, you know, it's pretty obvious that you're in a department that is not exactly well liked by the university, I mean, you know, they've made it quite clear. You probably got told about that time when the cops had raided the department to take the posters off the walls.

Kieran Connell: About, were these explicit, supposedly explicit?

Mark Erickson: Yeah, supposedly explicit.

[00:21:42]

Kieran Connell: Michael Green mentioned it to me before but I've not got it down, I don't know exactly what happened.

Mark Erickson: Well, it was the year before I got there. But, I mean, someone else who knew, Ann, Ann Grey, if you interview Ann she'll be able to tell you about that. But yes, it was the, you know, the university delighted in those sorts of things. And certainly, if you went to faculty meetings, I mean, our relationship, the department's relationship the faculty was just awful. The department's relationship with the other departments inside the faculty of, I think we were called commerce and social science, or something like that, it was just terrible, terrible relationship with the politics department who were, frankly, predatory and wanted to take the place over. And, of course, they did manage to, well, the department was shut, they go their way.

Kieran Connell: Do you think that bad feeling from other departments stemmed from, I don't know, like just purely to careerism, or whatever? Or do you think it was more, sort of, like political or intellectual kind of distrust about the, kind of, nature of the project that you were involved in?

Mark Erickson: Oh, I think it's all of those things coming together. There's something about Birmingham University which I've had a long relationship with, well, over like 30 years, I went there in 1982, and I'm going there next week to go back and work in the molecular biology labs again, which I, it's my not exactly hobby but it's where I do my research. And there's something about Birmingham that it's even more divided and combative than most other universities that I've worked in, and I've worked in quite a few universities. It's, you know, it's proper, you know, old style university where, you know, if you write a book people slag it off, they'll say you shouldn't have done that, you know, it's not a supportive environment for that. And I actually think cultural studies was as supportive as it could be for people inside the department, given what was going down. I mean, there was always this tension between the sociologists and the cultural studies staff, which only got worse and worse over the years, and it got worse and worse and worse. Although, when the chips were really down in 2000 and Frank Webster, the head of school, resigned, and everybody in the department did actually stand up and back him. Not that it did us much good but, I mean, everybody did say, "Look, this is someone who needs to be protected and looked after," because he was doing the best that he could. But yeah, there's something about it, I mean, the politics people individually, lovely people but the head of the politics department, you know, really did just want to try and, like, I was going to say trash cultural studies but, you know, basically just take it over. So there's a certain jealousy as well, the fact that CCCS was the only department that was known outside Birmingham as 'The Birmingham Department', you couldn't say that about any other department in Birmingham University. That's going to piss a lot of people off, you know, they were jealous.

Kieran Connell: So I was going to ask if you could just give from your own, like your own personal reflection on the run up to and the actual eventual closure in 2002, from your own memory, or?

Mark Erickson: Blimey, well, aah, I don't really know when it starts, that's the thing. We got into a terrible situation in the department in 1999 or 2000 where one member of staff in the department took a grievance against the university on a contractual matter. Oh boy, it's just, you know, we'd been through quite a few different heads of department, so Michael was our head of department, then John Gabriel, and then I think Ann was head of department. And then it was Frank Webster, and then Frank resigned over these allegations of racial discrimination that had been made against him and put this report by David Treasman. And then the university accepted the report just without, you know, even considering that, you know, there may be some issue with the report. I mean, whether or not it's right or wrong, the fact that Treasman never spoke to the people, never spoke to Frank Webster, never spoke to most of us in the department and things like that, it's just bizarre. But anyway, I suppose, yeah, things started going wrong 2000, and being a troublesome department that's got an awful lot of troubles in it, it starts to make you think, "Oh boy, that's probably not going to work out very well for us." I was the AUT rep, I was the trade union rep and I had a look through my file of horrible things that I kept from that time. And I could just see from the memos and letters and emails, and everything that I'm sending, it's these desperate pleas on behalf of the vast body of staff, and we were all union members, in both directions. Both to the university to say, "Look, you've got to, like, give us a break and let us do our jobs," because they were just constantly denying us access

to information, changing the ground rules, moving members of staff, these sorts of things. And, on the other hand, the AUT, our trade union, who were really out to get us, I mean, they really were. And it was just bizarre because, you know, most of the people in the department had been very active trade union members.

[00:27:25]

Kieran Connell: Why were they, I mean, why were they out to get you, the union?

Mark Erickson: Well, I mean, I would say it's because David Treasman never liked me, but you would just say, "Well, you were just paranoid, Mark, it can't be a personal sort of thing like that." But I certainly took it as being a very personal thing, Treasman was going to, you know, I mean, there was no love lost between us, and he was going to see what he could do to finish us off. I mean, there's a lot of, like, personal stuff that gets built into these sorts of things, apart from anything else, like I said, Birmingham University was a hostile, uncondusive place. I mean, you could see, for example, similar things happening in the department of geography at the time. I mean, geography was just desperately unhappy, where you've got a power struggle going between, I think it was Geoff Petts who was the head of geography at the time, the human geographers and the physical geographers. And at a certain point the human geographers were just put to the sword and kicked out, and they did that the year after us, but it was a long, you know, it takes a while for these things to happen, you know. You can't just pull the plug on it. So, there's a combination of friction in the department, allegations being made, the university not doing anything to try and, like, sort things out for whatever reasons. I mean, I kind of think they thought, "You know what, we'll just let these people, you know, give them enough rope..." And, I mean, it was of course, the run up to the RAE as well, so at the time when you really need to be, sort of, maximising your potential and, you know, getting into the, you know, producing as many publications as you can. You're actually spending your time writing begging letters to the vice-chancellor saying, "Look, please can you reinstate our head of department?" Or, "Can you consider not just making these wild allegations about people in the department," and things like that. But everyone thought it would be all right, you know, we thought it would be okay, apart from me, I knew we were dead, I knew these people were going to kill us. So, I mean, and David Parker, it's funny, David and I –

Kieran Connell: The sociologist?

Mark Erickson: Yeah, sociologist (inaudible 00:29:38), but also the most cynical, we just, oh, "We know we've had it now, we really have." I think we got the RAE results at the end of 2001, I think it was December, something like that, and when we got that I just thought, "No, they're going to have us for this." We'd had two years of, sort of, rudderless stuff, you know, the on-going disputes, some members of staff insisting they were getting moved to different departments, other members of staff going on long term sick. You know, the student body were just fantastic all the way through it, that's the thing, they were wonderful and supportive and they were great.

Kieran Connell: Were they the drivers behind the campaign?

Mark Erickson: Yeah, yeah, they were just wonderful. But it wasn't until June 2002 that I think we got actually told that we were leaving. But I'd actually started applying for jobs in probably March or April, I thought, you know, anything that comes up, and I did, I got a job at Aston University. I mean, it didn't, it was very strange actually, although I'd gone for the job interview it took ages for them to release the post, they didn't tell me I'd got the job until, bizarrely it was the day after we got fired by the University of Birmingham. So I was lucky to get that but, I mean, I did, if I'm going to be honest with you, Kieran, I remember, you know, there were days when I would actually be physically sick walking into work, it was such a toxic environment. That 2001 was just awful because it was like the vultures are circling, there was an awful lot of very, very bad relationships inside the department, you know, people not getting on with each other, very stressful. I think 2001 was okay, it was 2000 was the worst when you've basically got people that would actually just refuse to talk to other people in the department, refuse to even recognise that they were there. And that, that kind of hostility in a university department is just not particularly nice.

Kieran Connell: Alongside the, kind of, external vultures that were –

[00:31:48]

Mark Erickson: Oh yeah, you know, the university are after us, I mean, we'd have to keep going to all these meetings in 2001 where we would go and see the dean of social sciences to come up with the plan for restructuring the department, the rescue plan, how we're going to do this, all the rest of it. God knows how many of these plans we produced, David and I were very cynical about these and said, "It doesn't matter, you know, they don't care about this but they're doing this for form," and sure enough, you know, they were just doing it for form. We had a colleague in the department, Jo Vanevery, who presciently had decided that she didn't really want to be an academic any more and she wanted to go into university administration, so she was seconded 50% of her time in the dean of social science's office. And it was her who got the job of, because apparently the dean of social science didn't want to email us, so it was her who sent us our impersonal emails saying, "Dear Colleague, your contract of employment has been terminated." And, yeah.

Kieran Connell: So, I mean, looking back on it now is quite, like, I mean, it seems like (inaudible 00:33:02) that year was just horrendous walking into work. It must have been awful walking into work and feeling sick, I mean, how do you, sort of, like, conceptualise it now, I mean, looking back on that time of your career?

Mark Erickson: I mean, it's a long way ago. I mean, I have to say, it was pretty much, you know, it sounds, sort of like, you know, bleeding heart stuff, but I have to stay being fired from a university post at that time, (overspeaking 00:33:33)?

Kieran Connell: How old were you at the time then?

Mark Erickson: In 2002 I was 36, yeah, I guess, well, 38.

Kieran Connell: Well, still obviously really on in your career.

Mark Erickson: Well, it's quite a long way down, 38, it felt like early on in my career, I suppose. Yeah, it's absolutely catastrophic, I'll be honest with you, it completely destroyed my career, it really did. That's, you know, that's okay, I mean, I've got a job now and I'm certainly not, I'm not complaining, I mean, you know, I'm lucky in many ways to have a job. But it did absolutely destroy my career, and I don't want to speak on behalf of my colleagues, but I think other people would stand back and say, yeah, it really didn't do that many favours to many people. Now, all of us, I think, have managed to find other jobs and other things, you know, the employment's, sort of, worked out okay. But in terms of being inside, you know, a nice Russell Group, low teaching load, straight forward environment, you know, you have one particular career trajectory, I mean, basically we just took jobs wherever we could. And, I mean, I actually ended up at Aston Business School what was (laughs), that's another story. I wasn't there very long but, God, I was really grateful because I needed a job, I was grateful to get it, I didn't particularly enjoy it there, but anyway, no, you know, I've, kind of, fetched up here. But yeah, you know, there's a kind of psychological shattering that takes place when you get fired from a place like that because it really is an absolute statement that you are not good enough and your work isn't good enough, and you should not be in this line of work. I mean, it's actually quite a big thing to get over.

Kieran Connell: Was it hard, I mean, did you ever, kind of, think, well, is academia the right, kind of, line of work, you know, did you ever consider just leaving and (overspeaking 00:35:39)?

Mark Erickson: Oh God, no, no, no, no, I'm far too, far too self-confident for that, no. I mean, it was more because, you know, for me actually academia's always been about teaching, I know that's, you know, I don't tell my employer and don't tell Stuart (inaudible 00:35:52). But, I mean, it's always been, and I know I was a good teacher, I knew I was a good teacher at Birmingham and, you know, I still do good teaching. No, I mean, the teaching thing is always what has kept me going and I think that was validated by our students being so supportive of us, I mean, they really were. And, I mean, you know, I'd like to think we were supportive of our students as well, I mean –

Kieran Connell: It had the highest feedback, didn't it, I think, in the whole university at the time.

[00:36:20]

Mark Erickson: Yeah, sure. And, you know, I mean, we really did do the best that we could for our students and, I mean, I'd like to think I'd do the best that I can for my students now, but it was very different at Birmingham. I mean, here I've got 250 students on my degree programme, whereas there we would have had 25 to 30, and you could really do a lot of, like, interesting, innovative work, I mean, really interesting work with students there. So yeah, it wasn't that I, you know, got kicked out and thought, "Oh, academia's not the right line of work for me," I knew academia is, but it's more that I had very serious doubts about whether or not I could be a research active academic, you know, publications, these sorts of things, I mean, it's much that kind of thing, yeah. It also made me, kind of, risk averse as well, you know, I'd like to say I've been much more careful, but actually I'm even more active in the trade union here. I'm the lead negotiator for our local trade union branch so, you know, I do a lot of personal cases, you know, it hasn't changed my political activities as an acting trade unionist. But I probably should be more careful, my mum would certainly tell me to be more careful but I'm not.

Kieran Connell: Just finally, Mark, because I know you've got to shoot off (inaudible 00:37:43), I wanted to ask you more broadly about, kind of, you know, the project I'm involved in and the fact there's an archive –

Mark Erickson: I think it's great, it's brilliant there's an archive for CCCS.

Kieran Connell: I mean, the fact that's a blue plaque on the wall of the Muirhead Tower and that kind of thing (inaudible 00:37:57).

Mark Erickson: That blue plaque, I just, I don't understand it. The blue plaque thing is so disingenuous because the University of Birmingham have put that blue plaque up, it's not, you know, they could do that for anything. They could put a blue plaque on the wall saying, "Mark Erickson used to be in this department," it wouldn't mean anything. I mean, I have to say, if I was the blue plaque committee in Britain I would sue them for that, it just seems, you know, really cheeky for Birmingham to do that. And I think it's doubly cheeky as well because, you know, to put a blue plaque on the wall saying, "Wow, the University of Birmingham, we love the fact that we had CCCS here." Everybody from Stuart to Michael, if he was still with us, to me or anyone, would say, "No, they've always hated CCCS." Let's face it, they always hated sociology, I mean, they, you know, I mean, talk about an unholy alliance, cultural science and sociology together it's like they put together the most hated disciplines that the university (inaudible 00:39:01).

Kieran Connell: For the naughty boy corner.

Mark Erickson: It is, it is. I mean, they shut the sociology department in 1979, brought it back in the 1990s. We, Frank Webster, David and myself put together a (inaudible 00:39:12) sociology programme in, you know, the late 1990s and they shut it in 2002, then they brought it back in 2004, and then I think they shut sociology again two years ago. I mean, how (sighs), how they could do this. But no, I think the, you know, blue plaque thing is just ridiculous, you know, I mean, it's so hypocritical.

Kieran Connell: And the fact that there's an archive, but not just in that bit, the fact that there's an archive housed in the very institution that's closed it as well.

Mark Erickson: That I think is really bad, you know, I think an archive to cultural studies is really important, I mean, important and I'm really glad that it is there. But I have to say, putting it at Birmingham, I just think, effectively it's like saying, "Well, you know, you trashed the place and..." Well, you've got to understand, when they shut the place they really toughed it out, it wasn't that they shut and said, "Oh gosh, we're a bit sorry," but they absolutely toughed it out. I mean, the day after they fired us I think it was like our 37 PhD students went to see the vice-chancellor to complain about the fact they'd fired their supervisors. And the vice-chancellor said, "No one told me they had so many PhD students," (inaudible 00:40:28) you didn't even do your research, but they still did it. They just were (inaudible 00:40:33) and they wouldn't do it, they wouldn't go back on what they'd done. I mean, hilariously they had to hire us back in to supervise our students, and I got paid, I don't know how much it was, not a huge amount of money, but for two years to carry on supervising my PhD students. But I think, yeah, I think anywhere else would be better, you know, I actually thought, well, Birmingham Central

University could pick it up, or something like that, it doesn't have to go to the University of Birmingham. And my concern is the archive and also the celebrations there next year in 2014 will be seen as a kind of, "Well, everything's all right now between cultural studies and the University of Birmingham." And maybe they are for other people, I mean, for me they're not, I will not forgive them for what they did, I thought it was a despicable thing that they did. I mean, fair enough, they could say, "Well, you know, Mark's our employee, we can do what we want to him," you know, and that's their attitude, I mean, there's issues around that. But what they did to our students was really, really bad. And what they did to our postgraduate students, what they did particularly to our PhD students who suddenly thought, "What on earth am I going to do?" And what they did to our undergraduate students was just disgraceful, and they just, you know, pulled everything away, you know. So I can't forgive them for that. And I just don't think putting the archive at the University of Birmingham is an appropriate thing to do. But I think an archive's a great idea, I'm totally supportive of that.

Kieran Connell: Thank you very much, thanks.

[End of Transcript]