

## GAA Oral History Project

## Interview Report Form

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Regina Fitzpatrick
<b>Date of Interview</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2010
<b>Location</b>	Michael's home, near Croy, Co. Wexford.
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Michael Whelan
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1935 <b>Home County:</b> Wexford
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary:</b> Crossabeg NS <b>Secondary:</b> Vocational School, Wexford
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> 3 brothers & 3 sisters <b>Current Family if Different:</b> 3 sons & 2 daughters
<b>Club(s)</b>	Crossabeg-Ballymurn GAA [Wexford]; Ard Colm GAA , Castlebridge GAA [Wexford]
<b>Occupation</b>	Builder / Labourer
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Labourers
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	Fianna Fáil
<b>Other Club/Society Membership(s)</b>	N/A

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<b>Date of Report</b>	27 <sup>th</sup> June 2012
<b>Period Covered</b>	1880s - 2010
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Wexford, Dublin, Great Britain, England
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Emigration, Role of Teachers, Role of Clergy, Role of the Club in the Community, GAA Abroad, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Challenges, Food and Drink, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Economy/Economics
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>Michael discusses his involvement in Crossabeg-Ballymurn GAA Club, as a player and administrator. He outlines the history of the club and his concerns over its lack of success in major games. He also recalls trips to Croke Park in the 1950s, during the heyday of the Wexford senior hurling team. He mentions his heroes from that team. He reflects on the challenge of adjusting to retirement from playing when he emigrated to England for seven years. In addition, he considers the future of local hurling in Crossabeg.</p> <p>00:48 Recalls the involvement of his brothers and uncles in hurling. Outlines the history of Crossabeg-Ballymurn GAA Club, prior to amalgamation. His uncles playing for Crossabeg before amalgamation. More players in the past, fewer distractions.</p> <p>02:21 Explains his uncles walked to matches. Few had bicycles. Lack of basic facilities.</p> <p>02:58 Describes the long tradition of hurling in Crossabeg from the 1800s.</p> <p>03:14 Recalls his earliest memory of GAA in the 1950s. Travelling to Croke Park in 1954, 1955, and 1956 to watch the then-thriving Wexford senior hurling team play. Travelling by car. Mentions Willie Roche who had a hackney service. Starting at 7:00a.m., bad roads, stopping in Arklow for a ham tea. Mentions John Murphy's car breakdown on one such trip to Croke Park because he forgot to put petrol in. Lack of driving skill, no knowledge traffic lights, insults from Dublin drivers. Excitement of going to the All-Ireland.</p> <p>07:58 Discusses the skill of the Wexford hurling team of the 1950s. Explains that football had predominated in Wexford</p>

	<p>before this.</p> <p>08:46 Describes his attendance at most matches. Lack of other pastimes.</p> <p>09:08 Mentions the 1955, 1956, and 1968 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Finals as his GAA highlights. he Wexford team winning the All-Ireland Minor Hurling Final too in 1968. Also winning the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final in 1996.</p> <p>09:41 Mentions the Wexford hurlers of the 1950s: the Rackards, Tim Flood, Hopper McGrath, Ned Wheeler, Jim Morrissey. Explains that players from Rathnure and St. Aidan's of Enniscorthy comprised the majority of the county team, along with several from New Ross. Lack of training together as a county team – training separately in their respective clubs.</p> <p>10:40 Recalls travelling to club matches on bicycles or on the handlebars of a fellow player. Walking to local matches. Lack of specialised gear.</p> <p>11:42 Describes discouragement of hurling in Crossabeg National School. More emphasis on athletics. Fear of accidents with hurls.</p> <p>12:33 Discusses his participation in athletics against other parts of the parish. Sports days. Patron Day, first Sunday in July, mass in graveyard, blessing of the graves. Field Day after Patron Day. Organised by schoolteachers. Cake stalls, mineral stalls. Mentions sheep-throwing show in Castlebridge.</p> <p>14:44 Mentions Father Byrne, who was involved in the GAA in Crossabeg. Also mentions Father Finlay, who is currently a selector with the team and is very involved with club.</p> <p>15:31 Discusses his position in family: three brothers and three sisters. Playing hurling in local field, Foleys' field. Matches in Foleys' field with other clubs. No other sports apart from hurling in the parish.</p> <p>16:54 Recalls his attendance at the vocational school in Wexford. No hurling; only handball. No pitch. His participation in handball, lack of talent. Popularity of handball then, and rise in popularity of the sport today.</p> <p>18:26 Explains that the club was Crossabeg when he began to play in the late 1940s. Playing with older members. Playing for two decades. Mentions his heroes: the McDonalds, Foleys, Brownes. His position in goal.</p>
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	<p>19:56 Mentions playing with Ardcolm GAA Club at juvenile and minor level. At that time players from other clubs allowed to play with other clubs. A sub for Ardcolm. Large pool of players then.</p> <p>20:52 Mentions Paddy Breen in Castlebridge. John Cowen of Oylegate Club.</p> <p>21:33 Discusses his return to play with Crossabeg. Training and playing in Foleys' field. Rivalry between the club and Caim-Kiltealy, Hollow Rangers, Marshalstown, St. Fintans, and St. Martins. Lack of success in finals against such strong teams.</p> <p>23:21 Describes lack of formal training. Cycling bicycles for fitness. No jogging. Mentions committee and two selectors who organised team. Reluctance to take players off then unless injured. Players' lack of melodramatics. Lack of protection for goalkeeper then. Recounts his injuries. Mentions Sean Foley, father of John, playing full-back who protected him.</p> <p>26:09 Discusses the challenge and responsibility of being in goal. Importance of having good protection in the back line. Crowd's attempts to distract him with insults.</p> <p>27:19 Recounts practising by having friends test him with shots. Heaviness of sliothar then, particularly when wet. Difficulty of controlling wet sliothar.</p> <p>28:08 Mentions Stafford in Crossabeg who made hurls. Also Randalls of Killoran who made hurls for Wexford team and club teams. Also Mick McDonald who more recently made hurls.</p> <p>28:56 Explains that the width of bosses were uniform back then, unlike today. Discusses size of goalkeepers' hurls today.</p> <p>29:44 Outlines the progress of the Crossabeg-Ballymurn club. Excitement of playing matches. Disappointment of losing. Lack of success in important matches.</p> <p>31:30 Mentions team from Crory in this area. Enough players to have practice matches between Crory and Crossabeg in the early 1980s. Emigration of players in 1940s, early 1950s, reduction in numbers.</p> <p>33:05 Discusses sources of employment for players: the majority in farming. Some working in Dublin or Waterford and</p>
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	<p>returning to Crossabeg to play matches.</p> <p>33:47 Describes the amalgamation of Crossabeg and Ballymurn in the late 1940s.</p> <p>34:18 Discusses accusations of favouritism from selectors for players from their own parishes.</p> <p>35:16 Mentions Crossabeg colours were green and white before the amalgamation, Ballyburn all green, Crossabeg-Ballyburn green and white.</p> <p>35:48 Recalls travelling to matches in Enniscorthy and drinking Guinness and eating sandwiches in Joe Neary's pub. Parking bicycles in Joe's yard. Post-match analysis. Cycling home before dark, no bicycle lights. No dances the evening of matches; farmers had to get back to work. Local dances in Ballymurn Hall Sunday nights, organised by committee.</p> <p>38:09 Describes the GAA's lack of involvement in these dances, unless they were fundraising for the GAA.</p> <p>38:33 Recounts his involvement in the administration of the club. Mentions major issues at the time: fundraising to maintain the club.</p> <p>39:47 Recalls the purchase of club grounds in the 1950s. Discusses the three pitches in Crossabeg today and running track, incomplete. Difficulty of raising money now. Also grounds in Ballymurn.</p> <p>41:13 Discusses the role of the GAA in uniting the community.</p> <p>41:43 Describes his retirement from playing in the 1950s. Missing the participation and camaraderie with team. Challenge of adjusting to not playing.</p> <p>42:49 Recalls emigrating to England for several years after he stopped playing. Working on buildings in Reading with some friends from home. Vast amount of emigration at the time. His sadness in leaving family. Writing letters home.</p> <p>45:04 Discusses Father Murphy's GAA Club in London, which had a number of players from Castlebridge and Wexford town. Soccer and rugby in Reading, attending soccer matches there. Irish people starting hurling clubs in Birmingham. His awareness of the GAA in England before he moved over. Going to a Cork vs Wexford match in Ruislip. Big crowd of Irish at game.</p> <p>47:10 Explains he was in England for about six years. His</p>
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	<p>happiness at returning to Ireland. Working in the power station in Campile for seven years. Power station drawing workers from Cork, Waterford, and other counties. Several hundred workers. Player numbers dwindling when hen work scarce; increasing when emigrants returned. Strong membership of the club today. Catering for young players today, both boys and girls.</p> <p>49:12 Discusses his son playing senior hurling for Ballymurn for years. His happiness in seeing his son carrying on the tradition. The interest of his grandsons living in England in soccer.</p> <p>51:05 Reflects on his satisfaction at his involvement in the GAA. Disappointment at the lack of success of his club and county. His views on the future of the Wexford hurling team. Poor standard of club hurling in the county. Mentions efforts of George O'Connor and Liam Dunne to promote the sport among youth in Wexford. Challenge of insuring children to play hurling in schools. Risks of children running onto pitches at matches. Importance of keeping children safe. Necessity of Wexford winning an All-Ireland Minor Hurling Final in order to improve at senior level.</p>
<p><b>Involvement in GAA</b></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p><b>Record as a Player</b> (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Played juvenile and minor hurling with Ard Colm, Castlebridge; played junior hurling with Crossabeg-Ballymurn.</p>
<p><b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Member of Crossabeg-Ballymurn Committee for 3-4 years</p>

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<b>Format</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
<b>Duration</b>	Length of Interview: 00:54:05
<b>Language</b>	English

**To be filled in by Interviewer:**

I hereby assign the copyright of the content of the above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this interview.

Signed:            Regina Fitzpatrick

Date:              27<sup>th</sup> June 2012