

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Regina Fitzpatrick
<b>Date of Interview</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> April 2012
<b>Location</b>	Johnny's home, near Birr, Co. Offaly
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Johnny Tooher
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1953 <b>Home County:</b> Offaly
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary:</b> Presentation Brothers, Birr, Co. Offaly. <b>Secondary:</b> Vocational School, Birr, Co. Offaly
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> 3 sisters & 1 brother <b>Current Family if Different:</b> Wife (Noreen), 1 son & 1 daughter
<b>Club(s)</b>	Birr GAA [Offaly]
<b>Occupation</b>	Horticultural Shift Manager
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Store Man [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	Fine Gael
<b>Other Club/Society Membership(s)</b>	KCB Gun Club

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<b>Date of Report</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> June 2012
<b>Period Covered</b>	1896 – 2011
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Offaly, Cork, Dublin
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Education, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Challenges, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>Johnny discusses his childhood in Birr and how his father's stories of playing influenced him. He then discusses Birr's various hurling wins at both Leinster and All-Ireland levels. He goes on to discuss the football wins that Birr has had but tells of the predominance of hurling. He next talks about the formation of the club and the first All-Ireland in Birr in 1888. He speaks about the dedication of the Presentation Brothers who nurtured young player along to become the senior players who won many titles over the years. He next speaks of the players he admired as a child before discussing his earliest memories of the games. He goes on to talk about his time in vocational school and playing up to intermediate level. He discusses the training regime under the Brothers and the facilities available when he was growing up. Johnny then talks about the place held by the club in the community. He then talks about the commitment required by those involved in the club before discussing his role on the administrative side of the club. He next speaks of the friendships he has made over the years before discussing the hard work involved at both club and county level during All-Ireland. He then talks about the makeup of the team and the support of the locals at the time. He speaks about the fundraising for the team and of the chairmen who secured funds and how they used them. He next discusses the club players who play for the county and the workload on them throughout the various seasons. He then goes on to talk about the All-Ireland game and the traditions the team had and the homecoming ceremony. He speaks of the team touring with the trophies and the level of commitment involved. He talks about the good relationship with the local rugby club and the number of club players who also play rugby. He next discusses the organisation involved in travelling to Corke</p>

	<p>Park for a match and the help received by friends in Dublin. He talks about his family involvement in the GAA. He goes on to talk about how developments in the running of the club have been influenced by technology. He goes on to talk about the inner workings of the county board and how important the rule book is for solving problems. He then talks of the training received by umpires and how club officials need training also. Having discussed what following Offaly has meant to him over the years he then moves on to talk about the proud moments with the club and how they cope with tragedy. He goes on to talk about difficult decisions over the years. Johnny then speaks about the future developments in the facilities at the club. He discusses his work to date in the club and acknowledges the help he has received from others. He finishes by talking about the friends he has made all over the country.</p> <p>00:29 Discusses his childhood in Birr.</p> <p>01:06 Talks of his parents involvement in the GAA through his mother in Thurles and his father hurling with Birr. Mentions there being two clubs in the parish, the Number Ones and Birr Club that eventually became one club.</p> <p>02:03 Talks of his father's time playing and how they had to pay for everything themselves.</p> <p>02:47 Speaks of his interest being sparked by his father's stories of playing. Mentions winning the 1991 Senior County final and bring back the previous teams. Also mentions the Purcells, Des Dillon and Joe Butler.</p> <p>03:53 Talks of going on to win four All-Irelands and seven Leinster finals. Mentions having Birr players on the Offaly team during the 1990's.</p> <p>04:13 Speaks about the popularity of football as well as hurling and mentions the fact that the Offaly minor football trainer John Ryan is from Birr. Mentions his son Sean Ryan who plays for the Offaly senior football team.</p> <p>04:42 Talks of winning five All-Ireland football championships as well as two or three Under 14 championships.</p> <p>05:26 Talks of the predominance of hurling in Birr but mentions how the football played is still of a high standard thanks to the work of certain individuals. Mentions John Ryan.</p> <p>06:18 Speaks of the formation of the club in 1896 and how Father Michael Crow, the chaplain in the local workhouse,</p>
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	<p>helped to develop hurling in the area.</p> <p>06:45 Talks of purchasing Saint Brendan's Park in 1928.</p> <p>06:57 Tells of the first All-Ireland club final in Birr in 1888 when Thurles played Meelick Mentions the field being sold on to Tesco but a plaque being erected to commemorate that game.</p> <p>07:40 Speaks about the first Club Championships in 1971 when Saint Rynagh's and Roscrea played the final.</p> <p>08:09 Talks of the numerous club hurling titles at all levels with 22 at Senior level, 4 Intermediate, 10 Under 21, 18 Minor and many at underage level. Also mentions the 5 junior football titles.</p> <p>08:40 Speaks of his early days hurling in school and the street leagues. Mentions the dedication of the Presentation Brothers to hurling in Birr in particular Brothers Denis, Linus and Vincent who are life presidents.</p> <p>10:15 Talks of them being vital to the development of the players on many winning teams including the All-Ireland winning team. Mentions Dáithí Regan, the Cahills and the Whelans.</p> <p>12:20 Speaks of three of the Brothers being from Cork. Mentions the Brothers' field and where they started playing hurling.</p> <p>14:06 Recalls hurling being the only sport he played as a child.</p> <p>14:44 Talks of the payers he admired growing up such as Declan Hanavey, the Hennessey's, Joe Ahernan, the Meaghers and Paddy Molloy from Drumcullen. Also mentions Des Dooley and Billy Nevin</p> <p>16:06 Talks about his earliest memories going to the games in the 1960's. Mentions Drumcullen, Coolderry and Saint Rynagh's</p> <p>17:07 Talks of Birr being the home of hurling but that the games have moved to Tullamore's O'Connor park.</p> <p>17:20 Tells of there being three or four matches in Birr on a Sunday and how it was a day of family entertainment.</p> <p>17:51 Recalls spending a full day at matches in Birr as a child and hurling with the other children during half time.</p>
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	<p>18:32 Talks of his time in the vocational school and hurling there. Mentions playing with and against the same players at club and school levels.</p> <p>20:20 Talks of Brother Denis bringing the young players through to success.</p> <p>21:04 Recalls his own hurling career up to intermediate level from playing in school.</p> <p>21:49 Speaks of Brother Vincent's involvement with an Under 12 team who went on to win four All-Ireland senior championships.</p> <p>22:45 Talks about the excellent relationship between the school and club.</p> <p>24:00 Speaks about the positions he played on the teams over the years.</p> <p>24:25 Talks of the training regime under the Brothers and their emphasis on skills. Mentions the use of ground hurling.</p> <p>26:12 Speaks about the facilities available when he was growing up. Mentions purchasing additional land on the Kinnitty road and the increased interest in camogie since the 1980's. Also mentions training in the community school and travelling to other clubs to train while developments were being undertaken in Birr.</p> <p>28:51 Tells of the place the club holds in the parish and the friendliness and loyalty that exists. Mentions the celebrations after the matches and on the bus home and the bonfires after the All-Ireland wins.</p> <p>31:17 Talks of the commitment required by trainers and how the standards have improved because of it.</p> <p>31:56 Speaks about his involvement in the administrative side of the club and the position he held. Mentions Mark Merriman.</p> <p>34:00 Talks of the friendships he made through the GAA over the years.</p> <p>34:44 Recalls the work involved during the All-Ireland winning years at not only club but county level. Mentions the sponsorship and the hard work training and playing in challenge matches.</p> <p>36:40 Talks about the makeup of the team at the time and the crowds travelling to see the matches not only hurling fans but football fans also. Mentions running golf classics to help with</p>
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	<p>funding the teams.</p> <p>38:24 Discusses the chairmen who worked on the plans for the teams and the grants that they got and how they used them to fund the teams.</p> <p>39:52 Talks about the club players who played for the Offaly team and how the county released the players for the club championships. Again mentions the importance of the Presentation Brothers in nurturing the team to the wins.</p> <p>42:15 Recalls how the players kept going throughout the various seasons and different sports including rugby.</p> <p>43:21 Talks about the time involved on an administrative level to support the team.</p> <p>44:11 Speaks about being in Croke Park on Saint Patrick's day for the match. Mentions the traditions involved including Susan Dooley, Brian's mother, blessing them with holy water.</p> <p>46:25 Talks about the homecoming with the bonfire and marching band the sing-song and a few pints. Mentions travelling around to the schools, hospitals and old folks' centres. Also mentions the holidays for the team.</p> <p>48:10 Tells of touring to different clubs with the cups they had won, the McCarthy cup, the Leinster Club cup and the All-Ireland Club Cup. Mentions playing challenge matches all around.</p> <p>49:31 Speaks of the level of commitment involved both financially and time wise.</p> <p>50:28 Tells of the good relations with the local rugby club and how they agreed to let them play under their lights. Mentions that a number of the GAA players played rugby also including Dáithí Regan, Johnny Pilkington and Gareth Dorrey. Also mentions the ban of foreign sports and dances.</p> <p>51:50 Talks of the commitment involved in getting to Dublin for All-Ireland day. Mentions Monica and Paddy Spellman who moved to Dublin and were involved with Faugh's GAA club. They arranged everything from the Dublin end when Birr travelled to Croke Park.</p> <p>53:22 Tells about his family involvement with his wife being a Murray who are involved in Coolderry GAA where his son also hurled. Mentions his daughter who lives in Drumcullen and goes to all the matches.</p> <p>54:28 Talks about a match between Coolderry and Birr, when</p>
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	<p>his son was playing and Johnny was secretary of Birr, in which he refereed.</p> <p>55:22 Speaks about the changes in how the club is run over the years. Mentions the minute taking, the yearly reports and the various requirements placed on clubs by technology.</p> <p>58:09 Talks about the increased workload on the administration of the club but the advantages of new technology.</p> <p>59:52 Tells of his position of Birr's delegate to the county board and of the inner workings of the county board. Mentions the reliance on the rule book and how important it was in resolving problems.</p> <p>01:02:49 Talks about training umpires and the need to also supply training for officers as well.</p> <p>01:03:54 Speaks about what following Offaly hurling has meant to him over the years. Mentions feeling really involved when so many of the Birr team played for Offaly.</p> <p>01:04:45 Talks of the support that is available when canvassing for raffle prizes.</p> <p>01:05:36 Speaks of his proudest moment winning the county final and having previous winning team members present for that win and the celebration afterwards.</p> <p>01:06:43 Talks about some of the sad times encountered by the club such as the tragic loss of some young hurlers.</p> <p>01:07:37 Discusses the response from the club to tragedy and how they would go on to win to remember their friends that were gone.</p> <p>01:08:56 Speaks of the difficult decisions made over the years and the stress involved when things are escalated and amateur volunteers and professionals are brought together to sort out a problem. Mentions the Birr and Crinkle clubs and Father Sean Heaney.</p> <p>01:15:47 Speaks of the developments for the future for fields and facilities in light of having so many teams in hurling and camogie. Mentions his optimism for the future especially in light of recent wins. Also mentions Steven Brown and the impact of emigration on the club.</p> <p>01:18:00 Talks of the hurling still being played at school but acknowledges the other sports such as soccer and rugby are</p>
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	<p>also popular.</p> <p>01:18:45 Tells what the GAA has meant to him so far in his life. Mentions being ill and how the GAA kept him going through the illness and focused his attention on something else.</p> <p>01:21:03 Talks of the GAA and how those getting involved are always eager and willing to get stuck in. There always seems to be someone better coming along and making use of the current technology. Mentions Martin Boland and Christy Todd and his admiration for their work.</p> <p>01:25:38 Discusses his time in the club and what he owes to those that have helped and encouraged him over the years. Mentions Joe Dooley and his help throughout the years.</p> <p>01:26:57 Tells of the fantastic friendships made with clubs up the north. Mentions Brian Whelan presenting medals.</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 checked="" 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 hurling with Birr from Childhood to Intermediate level (1961 - 1978)</p>
<p><b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Birr GAA: Member of Birr GAA from 1970s to current, held several roles including: Treasurer (4 years); Secretary (12 years); Assistant Secretary (5 years on-going); Trustee of Birr GAA; Birr delegate to Offaly county board; club kit manager.</p>
<p><b>Format</b></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p><b>Duration</b></p>	<p>Length of Interview: 01:28:18</p>
<p><b>Language</b></p>	<p>English</p>



**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: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2012