

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	19 th Aug 2010
Location	Christy's home, near Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Laois
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Christy O'Brien
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1933 Home County: Laois
Education	Primary: Borris-in-Ossory NS, Co. Laois
Family	Siblings: 3 brothers & 1 sister Current Family if Different: 2 sons & 2 daughters
Club(s)	Kilcotton GAA Club [Laois]; Borris-in-Ossory GAA [Laois]
Occupation	Farmer
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Irish Farmers Association

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Date of Report	13 th June 2012
Period Covered	1910 - 2011
Counties/Countries Covered	Laois, Antrim, Dublin, Americas
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Facilities, Playing, Celebrations, Coaching, Grounds, Supporting Training, Role of Teachers, Emigration, Role of the Club in the Community, Rivalries, GAA Abroad, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Childhood, Socialising, Food and Drink
Interview Summary	<p>Christy discusses his involvement with Borris-in-Ossory, Laois and Leinster over the years. He recalls the repeated amalgamations of Borris-in-Ossory and their neighbouring club Kilcotton and the ensuing splits. He describes the performances of both teams and his own contributions both to the Borris-in-Ossory and Leinster teams. He discusses the importance of former GAA president Bob O'Keefe to the development of local hurling. In addition, Christy talks about his brothers' involvement in hurling, how he managed both farm work and hurling, his participation in the Railway Cup, flying to America to take part in the Cardinal Cushing games, and the players he most admired.</p> <p>01:14 Describes how his family is fifth-generation in Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Laois. Mentions he has farmed all his life.</p> <p>01:25 Explains how neighbouring club Kilcotton existed before there was a club in Borris-in-Ossory. Describes how two or three of his uncles played for Kilcotton in 1910, 1912, 1914. Mentions that one uncle played in the 1914 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final when Laois was beaten by Clare.</p> <p>02:00 Describes how this uncle wasn't playing in the 1915 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final when Laois beat Cork, Laois's only All-Ireland title.</p> <p>02:10 Talks about the success of the Kilcotton team.</p> <p>02:36 Describes how about 1936, Borris-in-Ossory acquired its own field, O'Keefe Park. Explains that it was named after former GAA president Bob O'Keefe, from Mooncoin, Kilkenny.</p> <p>02:59 Talks about the Borris team breaking away from Kilcotton and winning the junior title about 1938 and intermediate the following year. Explains that the amalgamated team gradually broke up due to lack of</p>

	<p>success.</p> <p>03:29 Describes how the Borris-in-Ossory team amalgamated with Kilcotton again in 1947/48. Talks about lack of success of this team. Describes how this team broke up and how Borris went its own way again, winning the junior in 1952 and intermediate in 1953.</p> <p>04:06 Discusses the first Laois Senior Hurling Championship Borris won in 1956. Explains how the team won four senior medals between then and 1962.</p> <p>04:17 Talks about how he played in the 1972 senior final, which they won.</p> <p>04:36 Mentions the lack of success in senior titles of the club since 1972.</p> <p>06.:5 Discusses Bob O'Keefe's contribution to local hurling, his successes with Kilcotton and subsequently with Borris-in-Ossory.</p> <p>06:40 Describes O'Keefe's significance to the team when Laois won their only All-Ireland senior title in 1915.</p> <p>07:18 Mentions his grandfather who played football in Kildare</p> <p>07:37 Recalls listening to an All-Ireland in a neighbour's house on the radio when he was about ten years old. Describes his excitement at hearing commentator Micheal O'Hehir and O'Hehir's importance in Ireland at the time. Talks about playing hurley with his friends after listening to the match.</p> <p>09.20 Describes going to matches on a donkey and trap, others had ponies and traps, and how bikes were scarce. Mentions Pac Dowling who would sometimes bring supporters in a cattle lorry to matches.</p> <p>09.54 Recalls going six or seven miles on a donkey and trap and cycling to Portlaoise, 15 miles away. Mentions travelling to Camross, Rathdowney, Mountrath.</p> <p>10:20 Describes togging out under a ditch because there were no dressing rooms. Explains how some players had no hurling boots and sometimes borrowed them from players in previous matches. Mentions how this happened him once. Describes how playing fields weren't fenced, just open fields, and how, if it rained, they kept their clothes in someone's car.</p> <p>11:20 Talks about how spectators on the sidelines used to run onto the field and disturb the match. Describes how the</p>
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	<p>game improved when they fenced off the fields.</p> <p>12:25 Recalls not having his own hurl as a young lad and cutting a hurl out of ash he took from an old man's tree. Explains how he could afford to buy a hurl in the 1950s.</p> <p>14:05 Describes sewing rags together to make sliotars. Compares sliotars nowadays with sliotars when he played and discusses the difficulty of playing with a wet sliotar.</p> <p>15:00 Explains how not many locals made sliotars. Mentions Jack Murphy, a local postman who made small hurls. Also mentions going to Coolraine, six miles away, to two men who made hurls.</p> <p>15:59 Discusses the lack of interest in football in this area. Mentions that he played football in Portlaoise a couple of times.</p> <p>16:48 Talks about the significance of hurling in his life. Recalls playing hurling in summer evenings after work till dark. Describes how they played in their work clothes.</p> <p>18.13 Recalls being taught by Bob O'Keefe in national school. Explains why hurling wasn't allowed in the schoolyard.</p> <p>19:12 Describes playing with Kilcotton for the first time in 1950 in Abbeyleix when they got beaten badly, splitting up soon after.</p> <p>20:25 Discusses the light-hearted rivalry between Kilcotton and Borris-in-Ossory today.</p> <p>21:39 Talks about establishing a junior team in Borris-in-Ossory. Mentions his brother Paddy playing in the 1949 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final, who also played with Faughs in Dublin. Mentions Harry Gray who played with Paddy. Also mentions his brother Basil, who lived in Kilkenny and used to sneak out to play hurling.</p> <p>23:48 Discusses the supremacy of the Kilkenny team, the rise of the Wexford team in the 1950s, and the ascent of the Offaly team in the 1970s and 80s.</p> <p>24:29 Describes how most Laois hurlers played with Faughs while some played with Young Irelands. Talks about his uncle's and his brother Paddy's involvement in Young Irelands. Explains how Paddy played for Laois in 1948 and 1949 and how Christy himself played for Laois a couple of years later. Talks about only winning a Second Division National League title.</p>
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	<p>26:43 Recalls the beginning and end of his career playing for his county, from 1952 to 1969.</p> <p>28:42 Mentions his brother Basil who died young from asthma. Recalls practising hurling after the farm work was done in summer evenings and drinking milk afterwards. Compares his life to those of players today who have non-physical jobs.</p> <p>30:28 Describes how the Borris-in-Ossory team never trained in winter. Explains the limited training involved and the lack of coaching. Mentions an uncle of his wife's, Joe Keeshin who trained the team.</p> <p>31:50 Mentions rival teams: Clonad, Camross, Cullahill, Castletown, Portlaoise.</p> <p>32:32 Discusses the positions he played: centre-half back (his favourite) but played in every position, even goal.</p> <p>33:25 Describes his pre-match preparations, such as taking it easy on the Saturday, going for a run early on Sunday morning, and polishing his boots while supporters passed by on their bicycles on the way to the match. Discusses how he would be collected in a car and brought to the match.</p> <p>35:30 Explains how his club, Borris-in-Ossory, wouldn't train until April. Describes running around the fields in the dark on his own.</p> <p>36:18 Describes working on the farm and going to 11 o'clock Mass before playing a match on a Sunday.</p> <p>37:12 Recalls the celebrations when his team won in the 1950s and the huge excitement at matches in that era due to the scarcity of matches.</p> <p>38:20 Describes the excitement of eating dinners in hotels for the first time as a young player in late 1940s and early 1950s, when he travelled to matches in Birr and Kilkenny. Explains how before that he had only travelled as far as Roscrea or Mountrath. Describes the unease he felt eating these dinners if the team was beaten.</p> <p>39:40 Recalls the celebrations when the team won: having dinner in a hotel in Portlaoise, returning to Borris-in-Ossory for a dance in the hall, excitement in the pubs, the players marching through the town, crowds of supporters.</p> <p>40:40 Explains there was only hurling in Borris-in-Ossory. Mentions a soccer team in Kilcotton, Grange United, which</p>
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	<p>only existed for a couple of years.</p> <p>41:01 Describes being called to play for Laois, his nerves and his pride in representing his county and his club.</p> <p>42:30 Recalls a trip to America in 1966 for the Cardinal Cushing games in a group of four hurlers and eight footballers. Mentions some in the group: Christy Ring, John Doyle, Barry Hartigan. Describes playing two matches in the fortnight, travelling by plane to visit JFK's grave in Arlington Cemetery in Washington, socialising in Kerry O'Donnell's pub at night, staying in a hotel in Manhattan, playing with Limerick, with Christy Ring as coach and selector, beating Galway, going to Boston to play Galway again. Recalls the plane being forced to land in Boston due to a thunderstorm in New York.</p> <p>48:09 Discusses his memory of Gaelic Park, compares it to Croke Park.</p> <p>48:32 Recalls meeting Robert Kennedy in Washington and being presented with a tie pin and a souvenir. Discusses what Kennedy said to him.</p> <p>49:35 Describes meeting people from home in America. Mentions Bob O'Keefe, who had moved to America, and Christy's own relations, uncles and aunts who had emigrated in 1901/2.</p> <p>50:57 Discusses the difference between playing hurling in America and Ireland.</p> <p>51:54 Recalls his relationship with Ring and the other players.</p> <p>53:19 Explains his gradual gain of confidence as he won titles and the courage he gained from reaching the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final.</p> <p>55:13 Mentions some of the players on the Laois team in 1949: Mick Martin Mahon from Harristown in Rathdowney, Joe Styles, Billy Bohane from Clonad, Paddy Ring of Abbeyleix, Noel Delaney of Portlaoise, Paddy Delaney and Pascal Brennan, then later Frank Heenan and the Cuddys.</p> <p>56:24 Discusses his mentors: a brother of Andy Dunne, Coleman, and Ramsbottom, Brady.</p> <p>57:12 Describes training in Portlaoise, the lack of training for the first round. Discusses being beaten by Kilkenny.</p> <p>58:14 Recalls the lack of motivational talks or coaching</p>
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	<p>direction before matches, compared to nowadays.</p> <p>59:03 Discusses the players' treatment.</p> <p>59:25 Recalls playing for the Railway Cup team for Leinster for around 6 years, winning it four times. Discusses his regret that he wasn't fit enough for those matches.</p> <p>01:00:07 Mentions other players on the Leinster team he played with: Ned Wheeler from Wexford, Eddie Keher, Fran Whelan from Dublin, Des Foley of Dublin, Dick Rocket and Dennis Hayes of Kilkenny.</p> <p>01:00:52 Describes the difficulty of playing with top-class Wexford and Kilkenny hurlers, when he played against lower-division teams. Discusses the crowds in attendance at Railway Cup matches at the time.</p> <p>01:02:12 Recalls the nerves of playing in Croke Park.</p> <p>01:02:53 Discusses response of people in Borris-in-Ossory when he got picked for the Railway Cup. Describes wearing white jerseys for being on television for the first time.</p> <p>01:04:24 Recalls travelling to Belfast to play with the Railway Cup against Ulster in the late 50s, early 60s. Describes seeing B-specials hiding in bushes.</p> <p>01:06:21 Discusses the changes in the Borris-in-Ossory club over the years. Played for Borris for 22 years. His injuries and the different hospitals he went to. Mentions Westmeath player Jobber McGrath hitting him on the head with the hurl in one match, being brought to hospital to get stitches and staying overnight, being brought back to Borris-in-Ossory by hackney car and going for a drink in Kelly's in Borris-in-Ossory.</p> <p>01:10:35 Describes the social life around hurling. A big hall in Borris that was knocked down, and later a smaller hall, in which they held dances.</p> <p>01:11:45 Explains how the GAA wasn't political in Borris-in-Ossory. No tension between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil supporters.</p> <p>01:12:24 Recalls very little Irish being spoken in Borris-in-Ossory.</p> <p>01:12:53 Recalls being selector, vice chairman, and president of Borris. Lack of interest in the administration side of hurling.</p> <p>01:14:00 Describes the lack of effect of emigration on Borris-in-Ossory, with most players being local farmers. Discusses</p>
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	<p>lack of subs, usually only two or three for the senior team.</p> <p>01:15:03 Discusses his disinterest in training teams.</p> <p>01:15:13 Recalls the ease of retiring from Laois because they weren't successful.</p> <p>01:16:00 Discusses the greatest hurler he's even seen: Christy Ring, Henry</p> <p>01:16:33 Recalls the difficulty of playing against the full back line in Tipperary called Hell's Kitchen: John Doyle, Mick Maher, Kieran Carey.</p> <p>01:17:32 Discusses the more lax rules back then.</p> <p>01:18:13 Compares the game today with the game then. More playing on the ground then, less lifting than today. More tactics today. More free-flowing when they played wider as in the past.</p> <p>01:20:50 Discusses lack of talk of tactics when he was playing. Emphasis on staying in position then and keeping the ball in play.</p> <p>01:22:14 Says he'd like to be playing nowadays. His talent was for the quick spurt for the ball. He got no red cards or yellow cards.</p> <p>01:23:11 Recalls looking up to Mick Mackey of Limerick when he was a young lad. Later Christy Ring, Jim Langton of Kilkenny, Eddie Keher, Shefflin. Describes meeting Mackey once and his strength.</p> <p>01:24:37 Discusses the recognition he got from playing hurling. Having a song written about him. Preferential treatment.</p> <p>01:27:22 Explains how his father, his brother, and the workman on the farm took over his work when he was playing. Also the neighbours helped if he was injured.</p> <p>01:28:05 Discusses his wife's attendance at his games.</p> <p>01:28:26 Describes the changes in the GAA. Rules cleaning up the games. Severity of yellow card system. Players more disciplined.</p> <p>01:30:09 Discusses his two sons and two daughters. His sons' interest in hurling. His son Pat won a Leinster minor medal and played on the senior team. His grandson now playing on the minor team.</p>
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	<p>01:31:50 Describes following Borris now.</p> <p>01:32:44 Recalls starting hurling because there was nothing else to do. No cars, no facilities. Started hurling with sticks. The only other passtime was hunting rabbits</p> <p>01:33:02 Ponders what hurling means to him. Winning All-Ireland Cup medals. Making friends, camaraderie after matches.</p> <p>01:33:51 Discusses his pessimism about the future of Laois hurling. Lack of interest among players in representing the county compared to the interest in clubs. Lack of confidence in the county's hurling team today. Team's demise since 1949. Only got as far as a Leinster semi-final himself.</p> <p>01:36:32 Recalls refusing to play for Faughs club in Dublin. Also refused offers of a job in Roscrea because of farm obligations. Laois's Kieran Carey's move to Roscrea and his successes with Tipperary.</p> <p>01:38:48 Describes his refusal to play for another county's team.</p> <p>01:39:20 Recalls his happiest memory: winning the Senior Hurling Club final in Laois in 1956.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" 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>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Played with Borris-in-Ossory – won Laois Junior Hurling Championship in 1952; Laois Intermediate Hurling Championship in 1953; 5 Laois Senior Hurling Championships – 1956/62/64/65/62/72. Played for Laois Senior Hurling Team, participated in Cardinal Cushing Games in 1966; Member of Leinster Railway Cp team, 1956,64,65,68.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Committee member of Borris-in-Ossory GAA for many years, held many positions including Vice-Chairman and is currently President of the club.</p>

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Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01:41:02
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 13th June 2012