

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	26 th March 2010
Location	Fr Ronald's home, near Harold's Cross, Dublin.
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Fr Ronald Neville
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1933 Home County: Limerick
Education	Primary: Kilfinny NS, Co. Limerick; Adare CBS, Co. Limerick Secondary: Adare CBS, Co. Limerick; St Munchin's College, Limerick Third Level: UCD (Clonliffe College)
Family	Siblings: 3 brothers & 1 sister
Club(s)	Kilfinny GAA Club [Limerick]; Eoghan Rua GAA Club [Dublin]
Occupation	Priest
Parents' Occupation	Publican & Farmer [Father]; Draper [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Muintir n Tíre; Pioneers Total Abstinence Association

Date of Report	15 th June 2012
Period Covered	1910 – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Limerick, Dublin
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Education, Religion, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Identity, Rivalries, Irish Language, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish, History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Alcohol, Violence, Politics, Northern Ireland, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Retirement, Socialising, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Fr Ronnie talks about a lifetime's involvement in the GAA. He grew up in Kilfinny County Limerick, a strong hurling area. His father had achieved a lot in the game and Fr Ronnie followed in his footsteps, lining out for the Limerick minors. He then went to train for the priesthood and played the game at various colleges. After being ordained Fr Ronnie moved to Dublin. He was involved in coaching and administration with the Eoghan Rua club. He was also involved with the Rolestown club. A proud and committed GAA man, Fr Ronnie compares the state of hurling in rural and urban areas, reflects on the diminishing role of the clergy in the GAA and is forthright in his opinions on the Limerick hurling dispute of 2009/2010.</p> <p>00:15 He is retired parish priest of Harold's Cross, Dublin. He is 78 in 2010.</p> <p>00:40 Starting out in Kilfinny, Adare, Limerick. 5 children in family.</p> <p>01:00 Father an accomplished hurler, originally from Neville's Cross near Kilfinny.</p> <p>01:15 Father a barman in Dublin around 1910 and attending the 1910 All-Ireland hurling final featuring Wexford.</p> <p>01:35 Father playing for Grocer's and then Faugh's in the Army Ground in the Phoenix Park.</p> <p>02:00 Father winning titles with club and later All-Ireland titles</p>

	<p>with Dublin.</p> <p>02:25 Father, Mick Neville, moving back to Limerick and buying a pub.</p> <p>02:55 Mick and others starting up the Kilfinny team again.</p> <p>03:10 Father winning a Munster title with Limerick and contesting the 1923 All-Ireland final against Galway.</p> <p>03:55 Fr Ned Punch in Limerick heavily involved in GAA in Limerick and later eating with Fr Ronnie, his father and Tommy Moore of Dublin in Collin's Barracks. Fr Punch telling stories of his time as a Sinn Féin judge in Limerick and then reforming the GAA in Limerick.</p> <p>05:20 Fr Ned and Mick Neville starting up the West Limerick Board.</p> <p>05:55 Fr Ronnie getting a present of a hurley as a child. Football confined to other areas - Askeaton, Foynes, Glen and the border with Kerry.</p> <p>06:30 Playing hurling with friends, neighbours and siblings.</p> <p>07:30 His brothers, Ernie and James, becoming priests.</p> <p>08:05 Club's role in community quite small at the time.</p> <p>08:35 Séamus Ó Riain, who taught in Moneygall in Offaly, setting up a GAA Commission in the 1960s to investigate structures.</p> <p>09:35 McNamee report followed up by the work of Pat Flanagan. Club structure becoming more organised.</p> <p>10:30 No organised competitions at Kilfinny school or Christian Brothers school in Adare.</p> <p>11:00 Ordained in 1958. Not spending a summer in Limerick until 2000 and observing the changes that had taken place in that time.</p> <p>12:25 Love that people had for GAA and fear of professionalism.</p> <p>13:15 Father bringing Faugh's jersey back to Limerick. Winning a competition where the prize was jerseys from</p>
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	<p>Foxford's Woollen Mills in Mayo. Jerseys kept in Neville household.</p> <p>14:30 Conversations about GAA at dinner table in family household. Mick Mackey a hero of Fr Ronnie's. Listening to radio broadcasts. Timmy Ryan and Paddy Scanlon Limerick hurlers who were admired.</p> <p>15:55 Men in family pub talking about hurling.</p> <p>16:25 Local rivalries between clubs. Adare, Croom, Ballingarry all local parishes. Big crowds at matches. Cars scarce, people travelling by pony and trap.</p> <p>17:30 Cycling to games. Arguments during matches.</p> <p>18:25 Father was treasurer for west board and a delegate to county board, also a director of Gaelic Grounds in Limerick.</p> <p>19:00 Playing for Limerick minors. Losing often to teams like Tipperary and Cork.</p> <p>19:20 Memorable games between Tipperary and Cork in 1950/1951. Crowds at the Gaelic Grounds.</p> <p>19:35 Going to St Munchin's. Four Christian Brothers in Adare organising games for students.</p> <p>20:20 Playing on minor team and seeing Mick Mackey, Christy Ring, Jack Lynch in action. Advising Jack Lynch, who was a parliamentary secretary at the time.</p> <p>21:35 Trying to play hurling in the kitchen at home as a boy. Developing skills against a wall.</p> <p>23:05 Talking to 2010 Kilkenny manager Brian Cody about the usefulness of a ball wall.</p> <p>24:25 Being picked for Limerick minors, which had been suspended during World War II. Father's reputation feeling like a burden.</p> <p>25:50 Playing against Christian's, Crescent and Mungret whilst at St Munchin's. Being elected captain of junior team - the O'Meara team - and the Keane team, named after Bishop Keane. Winning titles.</p> <p>27:10 Involved as a selector with Eoghan Rua hurling club in</p>
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	<p>Dublin, then as a selector for the Dublin minor team. Training players in O'Toole Park in Dublin. Being given a programme from games at the Gaelic Grounds in 1950. He was marking Tony Wall of Tipperary that day.</p> <p>29:00 Pride in playing for his county but major anxiety before a game. Feelings after winning/losing a game.</p> <p>30:50 Difference between training methods then and now. Watching Limerick team train in 1973.</p> <p>32:10 Recalls listening to kids commenting on play at All-Irelands.</p> <p>33:25 Lack of formal training methods in Dublin. Christian Brothers in Brunswick St School instructing teachers on how to coach properly.</p> <p>34:20 Standard of performance in modern inter-county teams compared to teams in the past.</p> <p>35:45 Limited awareness of rugby until attending St Munchin's, where he was a border and resources were scarce. Eating porter cake sent to him at school. Playing rugby during the winter.</p> <p>37:55 Brought up by his father to have a pro-Ban mentality and playing rugby at school reluctantly. Ban a divisive thing at the time. No rugby at Christian's, rugby only at Crescent, rugby and hurling at Mungret.</p> <p>40:00 Students preparing for the priesthood at Mungret.</p> <p>40:40 Many going for the priesthood in his day. His brother having attended Rockwell and going to Clonliffe College in Dublin. Fr Ronnie doing the same and his hurling career coming to an end once ordained.</p> <p>42:35 Fr Punch a strong man but poor hurler. Told Fr Ronnie a story from the early 1900s about a classmate of his in Maynooth, Ger Kinnane, who became Archbishop of Cashel. They were on the same team in an inter-class competition and the opposing team in the final had a very talented hurler.</p> <p>45:00 Bob Mockler was captain of the Faugh's team and the county team. The captain picked the team at the time.</p> <p>45:30 Ger Kinnane was captain of the Fr Punch's team. He</p>
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	<p>told Fr Punch to mark the talented player. The talented player ended up in goals and Fr Punch was substituted.</p> <p>46:45 Fr Punch was a curate in Broadford near Dromcollogher in Limerick. He played as a curate for Clarina. A law came in banning priests from playing once ordained.</p> <p>48:00 Séamus and Liam Ryan were good players who played in college whilst training for the priesthood and also with Cappaghmore.</p> <p>48:35 Fr Ronnie's predecessor Des Dockery was a great footballer from Roscommon. He played for them under a false name after his ordination. A priest was reported this to John Charles McQuaid the Archbishop.</p> <p>49:50 Went to Clonliffe in 1951. Cycling to UCD in Earlsfort Terrace. Dress was formal. Ordained in 1958.</p> <p>51:55 Life in Clonliffe was disciplined. Dean was Fr McCarthy, who later became Archdeacon and was parish priest in Beetroot Avenue. 30-day retreats were common. During a retreat he recognised one of the senior students as a player for Mungret who once hit him during a game.</p> <p>57:25 He then went to Maynooth. They had hurling there, like they had in Munchin's in Henry St. Recalls playing in a field near the Gaelic Grounds. His mother bringing him buns. Experiencing loneliness for the first time.</p> <p>01:01:55 Inspiration to be a priest came at eight years old. Enjoying regularity and newness at Munchin's.</p> <p>01:03:00 Recalls a fellow student crying regularly.</p> <p>01:03:45 Realising his hurling skills had diminished at Maynooth. Playing better when put in with the backs. Winning a competition.</p> <p>01:26:25 Missing hurling after ordination but looking forward to new life in the priesthood.</p> <p>01:07:05 First posting was as a chaplain to a convent in Cellbridge. Taught religion at a nearby technical school in Lucan. Watching games as a spectator.</p> <p>01:07:55 Becoming a chaplain at a hospital in Cherry Orchard. Troops going from Baldonnell to the Congo in 1961</p>
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	<p>flying overhead. Commenting on planes to a Ms Healy and shortly after being posted in Baldonnell for 18 years. Going to the Congo.</p> <p>01:10:10 Poor conditions in the Congo initially. Transferring to Katanga.</p> <p>01:11:40 Starting a minor hurling team for apprentices in Baldonnell. Billy Barry from Kilkenny - married to a sister of Micheál O Muircheartaigh - was a sergeant there. A Cummins man from Kilfinane in Limerick there. Playing against Eoghan Rua.</p> <p>01:12:55 Moving to Collins Barracks temporarily.</p> <p>01:13:20 Going to Clancy Barracks in Islandbridge to be fitted out for the Congo. Commandante London from Limerick fitting him out. His cousin, James London, a big Limerick fan.</p> <p>01:14:00 On a month's leave in Ireland and U.S. President Kennedy shot dead. Made permanent at Collin's Barracks.</p> <p>01:14:40 Meeting a man from the Eoghan Rua team. Being asked to help with the team.</p> <p>01:15:20 Eoghan Rua played at the Hurling Ground in the Phoenix Park. Building a dressing-room. Improving the minor section. Winning an Under-15 Féile na nGael in Thurles. Playing Blackrock in a final. Cashman was a Blackrock player who went on to play for Cork. Winning games in Cloughjordan before reaching the final.</p> <p>01:18:50 Differences between being involved with a rural team and with a Dublin team. Eoghan Rua club based on Aughrim St parish and boys went to St Garbriel's National School and the Christian Brothers School in Brunswick St. Different sense of community and attachment to club.</p> <p>01:20:35 Doing indoor training in the winter. Starting up céilís. Tommy Norton and Seán Clerkin helping to found Na Fianna and building a ground. Teaching the boys and girls to dance.</p> <p>01:23:10 Recalls a céilí mór in Prussia St and a patron comparing it to the discos.</p> <p>01:24:10 Starting an underage disco and trouble breaking out.</p>
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	<p>01:25:05 Advantages of céilí dancing over disco dancing.</p> <p>01:25:50 Recalls Air Corps hurling team being the backbone of an inter-county C Intermediate team. Going to a match in Belfast.</p> <p>01:26:40 Disagreement with Eoghan Rua team over discipline whilst chairman. Some players leaving for O'Toole's - including the Cartans.</p> <p>01:27:00 Attending a hurling social event in Dublin 30 years later. Meeting the son of one of the Cartans.</p> <p>01:27:05 Fr Ronnie feeling his army background may have made him too disciplinarian for the Owen Roe players.</p> <p>01:29:00 Outlines duties as army chaplain. Saying Mass at St Briggan's hospital. Giving talks to platoons.</p> <p>01:30:50 Saying daily Mass in Congo.</p> <p>01:31:10 Being based in Cyprus.</p> <p>01:32:35 Priests in Dublin not involved in GAA so much.</p> <p>01:33:15 GAA part of national spirit in early days. Soccer popular in communities in Dublin.</p> <p>01:34:25 Work of Kevin Heffernan with a successful Dublin team. 1961 as a seminal year in Dublin. Hurlers reaching All-Ireland final and Jimmy Gray in goals. Vincent's re-founded by Fr Fitzpatrick. Fran Whelan and Seán O'Callaghan on Dublin team. Lar Foley sent off. Hurling in Dublin less popular after losing 1961 final.</p> <p>01:36:50 Kevin Heffernan's work as Dublin football manager making a difference. Dublin playing poorly against Limerick in the League in 1974. Team improving in Leinster championship games. Local clubs growing as a result of Heffernan's team's success. Fr Fitzpatrick, Paddy Donnelly's father promoting the GAA in Dublin. 1960s Development Commission set up by Jim Ryan making a difference.</p> <p>01:39:30 New rule coming in excluding country players. Fr Ronnie's father against it.</p> <p>01:40:20 Mentions an O'Brien player who was once a promising Limerick Under-21 hurler doing well for the Dublin</p>
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	<p>senior hurlers in 2010.</p> <p>01:40:45 Recalls being a selector for the Dublin minor team. The team was not very successful.</p> <p>01:41:50 His father sometimes mentioned playing with Harry Boland. Recalls meeting his nephew Kevin Boland.</p> <p>01:43:00 Connection between the GAA and Nationalists in his father's time. Hurling as a part of their identity.</p> <p>01:46:05 Fr Ronnie working in Clonskeagh. Going on to Rolestown and being president of Fingal Ravens. Pat McDonagh involved with the club. Being parish priest in Harold's Cross and then assistant to parish priest Fr Gerry Kane. GAA not prominent in Harold's Cross.</p> <p>01:48:50 Recalls being president at Rolestown. His successor was not invited to be president. Fr Ronnie feels it is because of 'the increasing secularization of life'.</p> <p>01:50:25 Decline in attendance at Mass in the cities meaning a decline in numbers who know the priests personally. Rural situation different. Media, clergy and paedophilia. Church response to child abuse scandals. Role of U.S. feminist movement in exposing child abuse. Bishop Murray meeting victims of abuse.</p> <p>01:55:15 Image of Church in rural communities.</p> <p>01:55:50 Contributing factors to clergy's diminished role in GAA.</p> <p>01:56:25 Talking to Jackie Connell, former secretary of Limerick County Board about the reduction in number of priests at board meetings.</p> <p>01:57:00 2010 hurling dispute in Limerick and his opinions on it. Role of success at Under-21 level in dispute. Affects of alcohol on performance. Recalls a story told to him by a former Limerick hurler who had an encounter with the Limerick Under-21 hurlers in a bar. Discussions at a January 2010 board meeting. Justin McCarthy arriving into the job as a stranger to the players. Fr Ronnie's description of how events unfolded. Comments of senior player Mark Foley in an interview.</p> <p>02:04:45 Mentions an interview with GAA President Christy</p>
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	<p>Cooney in the Irish Times. Other disputes in Cork and Clare. Importance of adhering to democratic principles.</p> <p>02:06:05 Schools of excellence for young players. Mickey O'Brien, a classmate of Fr Ronnie's, did a lot of work at Farranferris. Ned Quinn doing a lot of work to boost Kilkenny. Recalls attending a lecture by a sports specialist who mentioned Kerry trainer Tadhg Lyne and Michael Cusack training players at the Phoenix Park.</p> <p>02:11:40 Christy Ring mentioned in book 'No hurling at the dairy door'.</p> <p>02:12:50 Recalls meeting Mickey O'Brien and being shown what training methods he was using.</p> <p>02:14:50 Need to teach players about the spiritual side of approaching the game. Importance of being able to accept disappointment.</p> <p>02:17:40 Hopes for the future of the GAA. Tone set by Ryan Commission/McNamee Report. Human decency in GAA. Dangers of professionalism. Cusack's decision to follow the rugby model of volunteerism.</p> <p>02:20:40 Recalls a man lamenting the day rugby went professional.</p> <p>02:21:35 Role of GAA in his life.</p>
Involvement in GAA	<p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member <input 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>
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	<p>Played club hurling with Kilfinny and on Limerick minor hurling team 1949-51.</p>
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	<p>President of Fingal Ravens; Chairperson of Eoghan Rua's in addition to holding other positions there throughout the years; Chairperson of the Dublin Hurling Commission (late 1960s)</p>

REFERENCE NO. LK/1/2

Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 02:22:47
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 15th June 2012