

## GAA Oral History Project

## Interview Report Form

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Arlene Crampsie
<b>Date of Interview</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2009
<b>Location</b>	Boston College-Ireland, 42 St Stephen's Green, Dublin2
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Donal Kearney
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1976 <b>Home County:</b> Louth
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary:</b> Callystown NS, Clogherhead <b>Secondary:</b> St Josephs CBS, Drogheda
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> Youngest of 2 brothers & 4 sisters
<b>Club</b>	Clogherhead Dreadnots
<b>Occupation</b>	Consultant Regional Advisor for Institute of Groundsmanship
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Farmer & Rent Collector for County Council [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	N/A

<b>Date of Report</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2009
<b>Period Covered</b>	1887 – 2009
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Louth, Dublin, Armagh, Great Britain, Americas
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Family Involvement, Officials, Administration, Volunteers, Challenges, Sacrifices, Impact on Life, Role of the Club in the Community, Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Playing, Club History, County History, The Troubles, Opening of Croke Park, Professionalism, Politics, Identity, Education, Involvement in GAA Abroad, Media, Fundraising, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>Donal is from the Clogherhead area of Co. Louth and his club is the Dreadnots. Donal's father, Peadar Kearney, was the secretary/treasurer of Louth County Board from 1956 to 1989/1990, he was a member and chairman of the Leinster Council and a central council representative. He was involved in the setting up of Cumann na mBunscoil in Louth and held many other non-GAA related voluntary roles in Co. Louth. Donal was a player and administrator for a brief period, but due to work commitments he no longer holds any administrative role. Donal talks in detail about his father's life in the GAA, his various voluntary roles, negotiations he held with the land commission to purchase the Dreadnots grounds, the sacrifices he made, his views on a range of issues and how his father's roles impacted on the family. Donal discusses the importance of the volunteer, the troubles in the North, travelling with his father to meetings and matches, his own views on professionalism, the opening of Croke Park and the GAA abroad. Donal also discusses the role of GAA at school and college, its impact on his sense of identity and the impact of local politics on the GAA.</p> <p>0.00 Introduction</p> <p>0.20 Club – Clogherhead Dreadnots, Co. Louth</p> <p>0.30 Dreadnots is the nickname for club which was set up in 1887. It's one of the oldest clubs in Louth, and was set up by a group of fishermen with the mentality 'we dread nothing'. The name is often confused with the British battleship the Dreadnot, but nothing to do with it.</p> <p>1.25 'From a young age I realised that the GAA was a way of life, it was how my life was going to be ... every Sunday involved going to matches, going to training, watching the Louth County team train two, three times a week, going to club matches, helping out with the administration with my</p>

	<p>father at home in the house where his office was based.' 'It's just all I've ever known.'</p> <p>2.15 Donal's father was Secretary/Treasurer with Louth County Committee since 1956, 'he always made the point that it was a committee not a board'.</p> <p>2.45 Both sides of the family had connections with the GAA, his mothers brothers were players with Collon club. 'It was just GAA all the way.' There was no involvement with other codes, they never participated in Rugby or Soccer.</p> <p>3.25 Donal can't remember the first match he watched, but the first one of real significance was in 1981 when Kerry won the four in a row.</p> <p>4.15 They travelled everywhere. His father was chairman of the Leinster Council and he also spent five years as vice-chairman which involved travelling across the whole province and also to other provinces and going to Railway Cup matches.</p> <p>4.40 'In those days they were a lot more popular than they are today. A lot bigger attendance it meant more to win a Railway Cup in those times.'</p> <p>5.00 Donal feels the railway cup has declined for a number of reasons, particularly 'the increase in the popularity of inter-county matches through television has put greater emphasis on the focus of the county.' It 'was an outlet from good players from weaker counties ... who would probably never be recognised for their county, but playing for Leinster was definitely one way they got greater recognition.'</p> <p>6.25 When anyone reflects on the GAA in past it is important to put in context of the past.</p> <p>7.00 When you go back to the foundation of the association and Cusack's idea of there being 'no use in the Irish politicians looking for independence without us having social independence and the promotion of the GAA was that social independence and that would certainly be my father's attitude at the time that the GAA was who we were, it was our national identity it was what we were about and it socially put us in separation from the British I suppose.'</p> <p>8.00 Initially Donal's father was involved in a club from the neighbouring parish because the local parish club – St. Michael's wasn't well organised. The Dreadnots were the only club in the history of Louth to be banned for fighting at a junior club final in 1928. Everyone thought the entire club was</p>
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	<p>banned and not just the individuals who were involved. His father was making great progress with the other club St Colmcille's in promoting club and juvenile football.</p> <p>9.00 He was asked to get involved with the local club again. He said he would if the name Dreadnots was revived and if there was a greater focus on juvenile football. He felt the promotion of gaelic games needed to focus on youth. At that stage St. Michael's was just a group of adults getting together on a Sunday and there was no committee or organisation.</p> <p>9.40 Peadar represented the club on the county committee. His first step was that he revived the Dreadnots and they were back in play in 1953.</p> <p>10.10 Peadar was one of the main founders of Cumann na mBunscoil in County Louth in 1947. He had been secretary of the Louth minor board in 1946. That minor board didn't last very long. In the 40s communication and travel were difficult and he would have been on bicycle.</p> <p>11.00 Peadar approached the clergy to promote gaelic games in primary schools.</p> <p>11.25 Many people would say that the setting up of this led to Louth's success in 1950s.</p> <p>12.00 Donal doesn't think his father was really a player, maybe at school, but he was a handball player and played billiards in local hall. The team locally in the village wasn't very strong. His father was also involved in the local development association.</p> <p>12.45 His greatest contribution locally was the bringing of electricity to the village. Himself and a local businessman T J O'Reilly, the two of them literally went door to door got names and petitions. 'It could be said in some cases forgeries were used to send to the ESB at the time that the Clogherhead village wanted electricity. Many locals at the time were against it, because they were afraid of it, because they didn't understand it, but as soon as it came into one house every house wanted electricity.'</p> <p>13.30 Also established the credit union in the village at the time.</p> <p>13.45 He was a part time farmer and a rent collector for Louth County Council, the same occupation held by his own father. Rent collecting was flexi-time and this allowed him more time to spend on the GAA.</p>
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	<p>14.20 He was just a particular individual who had a particular drive and passion. He was a pioneer he didn't drink or smoke. The GAA wasn't just part of a social club, it was about being Irish.</p> <p>15.35 In 1956, he was elected Secretary/Treasurer on Louth County Committee taking over from Paddy Duffy. 'It was a very big deal indeed'. He was determined to prove that he was the right person.</p> <p>16.20 He felt that all the clubs should have their own premises and not rent from anybody whether it was a local farmer or the county council.</p> <p>16.40 At that time Dreadnots would spend 4/5 years in one field and then move on to another field. At that time the Markey estate was being divided by the Land Commission. Donal's father had seen a plot of land he felt would be very suitable, flat land with 'free draining soil which would allow them to play almost all year round.'</p> <p>17.30 There was opposition from local farmers, who themselves were local players.</p> <p>17.40 'The man from the land commission at that time had to come down and visit the plot of land they wished to purchase and he wanted to meet with the Secretary of the club who was Barney Reilly at that time. So the plan was to come down and meet Barney at a certain time and certain place the man from Dublin in those times really didn't know where he was he had come close to the village and asked for directions from various locals. They discouraged him and said there was no such club and no such man as Barney Reilly. So off he went back to Dublin, turned his car ... and reported to his boss that there is no club down there and that it was just a hoax ... at that time Seán Ó Síocháin ... telephoned my father and asked him what was going on and how annoyed he was that this man had travelled all the way from Dublin for a no show, so my father said right ok, I will meet this man, send him down again and I will meet him myself. I actually think he met him in the nearby town to ensure he didn't get distracted and brought him directly to the plot of land and ensured that the field was purchased in the proper manner.'</p> <p>19.15 Very much amidst local opposition. He didn't mind, he felt it was best for the club. He got no financial gain out of it.</p> <p>19.40 Local opposition was because it was prime agricultural land, it never flooded, never held water and always had a</p>
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	<p>good sward of grass on it.</p> <p>20.25 There was a certain amount of bad feeling, he's heard stories of when they tried to build dressing rooms, bring electricity into the field and water to the dressing room. The mains water pipe was in the neighbouring farmer's field and he didn't help them get pipe connected. But, they were minor stumbling blocks.</p> <p>21.10 The money for the land was raised by local féis's, draws, carnivals and church gate collections. It was a big deal at that time to purchase your own field.</p> <p>21.50 His father's role as Secretary/Treasurer of the County Committee meant that he was secretary/treasurer of every sub-committee as well. He was unusual in that he was also the Louth representative to the Leinster council and he became a central council representative in the 60s.</p> <p>22.45 Even at time in the 60s when Louth hadn't much money he would forego his expenses for the sake of the county committee. Rather than book into a hotel when he was going to central council meetings he booked into a B&amp;B.</p> <p>23.15 'He really was in it as a volunteer and he certainly didn't make use of his position for his own personal gain.'</p> <p>23.25 Donal feels one of his father's biggest achievements was the setting up of Cumann na mBunscoil, giving youth football a structure. He remained as secretary of this until 1977.</p> <p>24.15 He was good at keeping the administration in order and the finances healthy up until his retirement. 'Doing it for little or no cost as a volunteer and I think dealing with everybody in the same manner, he had no favourites really.' Same at home and with his local club. Greatest attribute was keeping Louth County Committee running efficiently. He left a great deal for his successor to follow – too much maybe.</p> <p>25.55 'He never had a holiday.' I suppose the holiday for us was going with him to annual congress. He'd be stuck in a meeting and stuck in congress. He sacrificed a lot of his own personal time, 'it was his vocation to promoting gaelic games, our identity as Irish people, and it's hard to know what he would have done without the GAA, the GAA was something, it was more than an organisation, it was his life, it was more important than going to mass on a Sunday.'</p> <p>27.25 No extreme resentment. 'We all got involved one way or another.' He and his brothers played for school and club.</p>
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'There was one time in the 80s when he was in hospital and my sister actually facilitated for him and opened a field on his behalf.' 'It would have been hard to imagine anything without the GAA ... we never considered what else we could have done.'

28.45 Donal thinks his father was the only man from Louth to sit on the modern day Games Administration Committee, which at that time only had seven or eight people on it and only second Louth man to be chairman of the Leinster council.

29.25 People including Jack Boothman have said he should have been president of the GAA. 'He was partly reluctant to let go maybe of the reigns of the Louth County Committee ... its important to remember he also held that position as well as chairman of Leinster ... he did say to me one time that his goal was to be chairman of the Leinster Council and that it wasn't to be president of the GAA.' His health let him down after 1989/1990 and he had to retire.

31.10 His father was involved in a disciplinary hearing for Christy Heffernan. His father asked him why he hit the other player. Christy replied 'I didn't hit him he just got in the way of my fist.'

32.00 He took over Leinster council in centenary year, great for Louth.

32.30 'I suppose politically it could be said Leinster was quite dominated by Dublin on and off the field.'

33.00 We went to Galway and Killarney to congress. We drove to Killarney in 1981 and 'I was standing up in the back of the car and watching my father driving and seeing the speedometer go up to 80 at times and passing out people.' It took them six or seven hours to drive down. They also went to Ballina, Mayo and other places around the country.

34.40 Many GAA facilities at that time were very similar, facilities were poor compared to that today.

35.10 'The one venue that does stick in my mind would be Crossmaglen in Armagh and going there with my father to the Cardinal Ó Fiaich cup ... that really is the memory that sticks out in my mind ... it's really not a competitive tournament ... whether you'd be playing Armagh or Tyrone or whatever the case might be, all of a sudden these helicopters would come in over the pitch, not more than a 100 feet above the ground when the game would be played, soldiers rustling through the

hedges around the pitch, and even prior to the game when we'd be standing around as the players would be getting ready in the changing rooms, we maybe outside having a social chat, British army soldiers with their guns would walk directly for you and you'd have to stand out of the way.'

36.35 That happened on nearly every occasion they went to Crossmaglen, but they received great hospitality from the local people in the club.

37.30 His father was held in such a high degree of respect 'he almost had celebrity status.' 'I knew nobody else in my class at school had a father like my father, in some ways it was almost like living in a bubble in a sense that people were looking in at you and you were seeing all these people looking at you. In some ways we were kinda separate from everyone else.'

38.10 Throw in might be 3pm, but they'd be there at 11.30 in the morning getting everything ready. Adults would say 'your Peadar's son good man ... we were definitely given special treatment.'

38.40 He treated everyone the same, he never took favours or looked for personal gain and didn't go drinking or smoking in the pubs. He was quite a unique individual.

39.20 People probably gave him too much recognition. 'He wouldn't even outside of GAA functions he wouldn't even wear a GAA sweater or even a GAA tie, he didn't want to be labelled, as far as he was concerned he was Peadar Kearney and on the day of the GAA he was involved in the GAA, but if it wasn't a GAA matter then he wasn't going to be labelled as GAA.'

40.10 He may not have been loved by everyone, some thought he was tight with money but everything was done up front and transparent.

41.15 Donal didn't really have a massive awareness of the media as a child. His father was aware that you shouldn't upset them and be wary of what you say to them. He was good friends with local journalists like Paddy King and Joe Carroll.

42.05 His father was often known for giving good advice, including by Jack Boothman. Boothman was very driven as a president and Jack has mentioned appreciated getting that advice.

43.05 Donal himself was a player and got involved in the



	<p>juvenile committee. There was a presumption that 'you would be there', because of who his father was. Donal didn't like this.</p> <p>43.55 Donal didn't get as involved as his father due to work commitments. He travels a lot including to America and England.</p> <p>44.30 'Going to university for a number of years and then working away from home just distracts you, because it's not the same getting involved in clubs in other counties.' Played a season for Drumcliffe in Sligo.</p> <p>44.55 Thinks the difference is because 'you don't identify with the area. It's from day one you're involved with the GAA from school league from primary school from the first day you're picked on the team by the headmaster.'</p> <p>45.10 His first memory would be playing on a 7 A-side school league team. His brothers played before him and he looked forward to playing. He played mid-field.</p> <p>46.00 We won the Louth 7 A-side, but didn't win the 13 A-side the same year. They played the local rival parish Termonfeckin. 'We actually won that game by a point and I'll never forget the final whistle, the adults ran off the sideline onto the pitch cheering like we'd just won the county championship ... they were more happy than we were.'</p> <p>47.25 For about six or seven years after that we were able to beat St. Feckins at adult level.</p> <p>47.40 'Rivalries stem with where you come from and where you identify from and it's about playing to represent your area.' If it's ever changed to allow good players to play for good teams then the GAA would be ruined.</p> <p>48.50 If inter-county players get paid it will widen the gap between county and club. 'They'll almost be like two separate sports ... the success of the GAA is about the grassroots ... it's the grassroots that are keeping the association going.'</p> <p>49.50 Donal played one or two seasons at adult level, but then he went to Cork and America for work. He did play for a period at horticultural college. The year he played was only the second year they had a GAA team and they drew with Ballyhaise. They had only the fifteen players. His college was An Grianan, Termonfeckin.</p> <p>51.25 Based in Florida, but GAA wasn't strong in area. Tried to get involved and even contacted New York board, but the</p>
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	<p>GAA was only strong in areas where there was lots of construction etc. Nearest matches to watch were three hours drive away.</p> <p>52.20 He would go into London to watch the games. Everybody was in the same boat, they'd love to be at home and love to be involved, but just couldn't because of work or college.</p> <p>53.00 When he was 19 he was secretary of the juvenile club St. Brigids, which was an amalgamation of the two rival clubs. He was also involved on main club committee, where he did fundraising. In the early 90s he raised a couple of grand from selling tickets. 'A lot of people would have went and sold tickets where they would work ... but I went round knocking on doors and sold tickets to people who wouldn't even dream of buying tickets from us.' He was too young, the next youngest person to him was fifty something.</p> <p>54.15 Donal has no involvement himself at the moment. He had hoped to get more involved but work has kept him too busy.</p> <p>54.35 'If I get involved I want to be able to give it 100%, probably something similar to how my father gave it and if I did get involved I'd always feel that there would be this comparison issue – ah you're not as good as your father.'</p> <p>54.55 If you can't give it 100% you are liable to make errors.</p> <p>55.15 'Many organisations have started over the years since I was a child ... all sorts of different clubs, they've started and failed, but the Dreadnots have always survived. It's an amazing thing, I don't know how – the Dreadnots have come close to not surviving, but they've always been there and I suppose it's just again one of those things it's the GAA, its what you're associated with it's the structure from juvenile up to adult level.'</p> <p>56.00 You must start from youth and work your way up.</p> <p>56.20 Challenges are the demands of the county players and keeping its place. How long more the GAA can continue without players making demands is a big issue. Feels they should maybe provide benefits in kind.</p> <p>57.05 Issue in Cork [Cork Players Strike of early 2009] is worrying, 'often what is on the surface and what we hear about in the media is not really what's happening underneath.' He feels the most long-term change is the professionalisation of GAA administration, but there is a need</p>
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	<p>to ensure that the right people are in place to get paid for it.</p> <p>57.55 There are secretaries around the country getting paid six figure sums for doing something they would probably be doing anyway. He feels that this is an insult to people like his father who didn't get paid and probably were out of money for it. He feels slightly bitter.</p> <p>58.50 'Probably its issues like that, that would annoy even the players from Cork. That if you don't lead by example and set a good example why should the players, you know, why should they do it anyway for the sake of playing if the boys in the suits are pocketing it and making sure they get the first class seats on the plane.'</p> <p>59.25 He doesn't think Roscommon GAA fell into debt for no reason. It's happening all over. Dealing with this is the biggest challenge for the administration in Croke Park. If things are more transparent the players will be alright.</p> <p>1.00.10 The GAA need to issue common job roles and responsibilities. There needs to be a job description detailing what they need to do in a year. Perhaps they could reward people who promote the GAA and do things that benefit the GAA through their role.</p> <p>1.01.20 Scór used to be quite strong, but died in the 1990s. Louth is one of the worst counties for Scór.</p> <p>1.02.05 Donal and his family didn't continue match day traditions after his father died. He and his brothers do go to the All-Ireland every year, they do get an allocation of tickets (not complementary, but very welcome).</p> <p>1.02.40 They do follow Louth every year.</p> <p>1.02.55 He always keeps an eye on results even when he's away from home, either on the internet or on teletext.</p> <p>1.03.30 Donal feels that no matter what part of the world you're in, sports and politics are inextricably linked. His father used to say that it wasn't inconceivable that Ireland would be invaded if there was another war. His father used to say 'don't worry about the 6 counties, let's make sure we can hold onto the twenty six.' He felt nobody could take GAA away from us. 'No matter who rules us we'll always have the GAA.'</p> <p>1.04.45 'He sent a set of jerseys to the prisoners in Longkesh at the time, old jerseys ... to be sent a set of jerseys in the early 70s free of charge just because they wanted to play gaelic games and it wasn't for any political motive on his part,</p>
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but he saw that there was a bunch of people who wanted to play gaelic games no matter whether they were inside or outside the prison that was fine by him, that was as deep as it went.'

1.05.40 They didn't get involved in other sports outside of the GAA. They didn't know anybody else going to rugby, only one or two going to soccer matches. 'You might see a soccer game being played and you might just poke in through the window at what's happening, but ... in comparison to the GAA game going on it seemed so slow and still and quiet and motionless. It never really attracted.'

1.06.50 Donal watched Jack Charlton on TV in 1988, but he only went to his first soccer match a year or two ago and that was through his job, he gave a presentation to groundsmen at an FAI Cup Final and that was his first match.

1.07.35 Donal wasn't happy with the opening of Croke Park. He did a thesis on the opening of Croke Park at college. He does see the benefits financially. In 1992 Sligo made the first motion to open Croke Park. If they had opened it then, the GAA wouldn't have got such a good deal as they had today and the clubs wouldn't have got the benefits.

1.09.00 The people who opposed it, created a strong argument for the financial gain that's being received now. In the UK when Wembley was closed there was no issue that Twickenham wasn't being used, they travelled to Wales.

1.09.55 The future of it depends on how GAA administration handles it. If they open provincial venues, then Donal fears that clubs would open and if that happens a lot of clubs will go. There's a lot of clubs just hanging on. Administration needs to keep a tight hold of it.

1.10.55 'One or two families would probably dominate the club, then that would mean that one or two families would stay out of the club and that's been self-defeating for us in many ways.' There are always personality conflicts in an organisation like the GAA.

1.11.55 The club has songs from the foundation of the club in 1887, there are other songs about the area sung by Paddy Reilly 'Clogherhead like it used to be' and another poet Nicholas Sharkey who wrote about the area and the club.

1.12.50 'I suppose I would have loved to be more successful as a player.' He would have loved somebody who would train him, and tell him what he needed to do like the younger

	<p>members now.</p> <p>1.13.25 His biggest disappointment supporting Louth was in 1991, when they played Laois in the semi-final and were defeated in a replay. Louth had an awful referee, Peadar Whelan of Wicklow. They beat Kildare, managed by Mick O'Dwyer, he saw old men crying in Drogheda that day.</p> <p>1.14.35 'To have gone to Croke Park and lose against Laois, it was sickening, it was like a death in the family, it really was, it took me a month to get over it.'</p> <p>1.14.55 Internal politics was to blame, the Leinster council would dish out a crappy referee for a game with Louth vs Laois, but he would never referee Dublin v Meath, 'but again that's just excuses.'</p> <p>1.15.35 After quarter final, everyone was in a state of shock, nobody expected us to win. 'My father wasn't well at that time, he just couldn't sit down, he was walking up and down the garden and the radio was in full blast ... it was unbelievable, it was just one of those things, nobody would have put money on Louth to win that day.'</p> <p>1.16.35 Their rivalry is with Meath, they've beaten them in many League games that nobody ever expected them to win.</p> <p>1.16.55 'My GAA hero would easily be my father ... for what he did for the GAA and for what he did to promote our national identity.' His favourite player was Mickey Sheehy of Kerry 'it was like the ball was stuck to his foot ... he could nearly kick a free off the ground with his left foot.'</p> <p>1.18.20 'It means who we are as Irish people, it's our identity, it's something that no matter where I've gone in the world that nobody else has.' We're unique, it's a very important part of our identity. The government need to ensure it is maintained.</p> <p>1.19.15 GAA also needs to develop hurling across the board.</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 type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Louth U-21 Representative to Congress</p>
<p><b>Record as a Player</b> (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Won a 7-A-Side School League, 1987. Played for 9/10 years.</p>

**REFERENCE NO. LH/1/1**

<b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)	Club Secretary for 2 years.
<b>Format</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
<b>Duration</b>	Length of Interview: 1hr 20min 07sec
<b>Language</b>	English

**To be filled in by Interviewer:**

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Signed:      \_\_Arlene Crampsie\_\_\_\_\_

Date:            \_\_\_\_\_15/10/09\_\_\_\_\_