

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	1 st Sept 2010
Location	Seamus's home, near Abbeyside, Co. Waterford
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Seamus O'Brien
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1921 Home County: Waterford
Education	Primary: Abbeyside NS, Co. Waterford Secondary: Dungarvan Technical School, Co. Waterford
Family	Siblings: 2 brothers & 2 sisters Current Family if Different: Wife (Cáit); 2 daughters & 6 sons
Club(s)	Abbeyside-Ballinacourty GAA [Waterford]; Cathal Brugha GFC [Waterford]
Occupation	Postman and Post Office Clerk
Parents' Occupation	Sailor [Father]; Seamstress [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Boys Scouts of Ireland; Abbeyside Archives Society; Parish Newsletter; Legion of Mary

Date of Report	21 st June 2012
Period Covered	1887 – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Waterford
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Administration, Sponsorship, Education, Identity, Irish Language, Fundraising, Role of the club in the community, All Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Challenges, Alcohol, Northern Ireland, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Ban on Security Forces, Professionalism, Purchase of Grounds, Socialising, Irish History, Rivalries, Media
Interview Summary	<p>Séamus gives an exhaustive interview about his experience growing up with the GAA. Secondly there is his involvement with the GAA. This ranges from club to county board level, and finally central council. He also gives his thoughts and experiences on ranges of issues of importance of the years, including Rule 27 and 21 and the opening up of Croke Park.</p> <p>1:00 Description of the background of Abbeyside and its roots including the celebration of the Feast of Saint Augustine</p> <p>1:45 Description of the details of his grandfather's and mother's occupations who were sailors and a seamstress respectively</p> <p>2:51 Description of his father's occupation as a deep sea sailor and how he travelled from Cardiff to America, New Zealand and also a major voyage from Australia from Swansea. Finally a description of the hindmost part of his career with the 'Lady Bell'.</p> <p>4:24 Description of the tragedies at sea in Abbeyside in his time growing up.</p> <p>5:29 Description of the customs associated with sea faring, including the 'Blessing of the Boats' and boat racing.</p> <p>5:48 Description of Dugarvan, and its nearness to places of interest including Helvick and Mount Mellery and the Gaeltacht.</p> <p>6:11 Description of the annual boat race held on 'Pattern Day' with their Saint being Augustine. Description of the other festival events including the 'Slippery Pole', sheaf throwing,</p>

	<p>step dancing competitions, three legged races and the long kick in football and long puc in hurling.</p> <p>8:23 Description of his parents background. His mother's family originated from the Gaeltacht in Ring, between Dungarvan and Helvick head.</p> <p>9:09 Description of the history of GAA in Abbeyside. Existence of photographs of teams from 1917 and 1918. Record of a team having part in a championship in 1887, the same year as the establishment of the GAA in Kilmacthomas. Inaugural county championship in December 1887.</p> <p>10:48 Description of the pre-eminence of Gaelic football in the fledgling years of the GAA and the reasoning behind it.</p> <p>11:14 Description of the history of the GAA in Abbeyside from 1887. Club loosely established in 1917, and then formally established in 1927, Establishment of a ground of their own in 1959.</p> <p>12:06 Description of relative poverty of club in the early days of the GAA and the slow introduction of gate admissions.</p> <p>14:19 Description of his family's involvement in the GAA including his grandsons Aaron and Conor O'Brien from Cork, and his daughter in Kildare, Aoife O'Brien.</p> <p>15:38 Description of his earliest memory of hurling and football; cycling to matches.</p> <p>16:21 Description of travelling as young teenager to Waterford v Dublin in 1938 on the train.</p> <p>17:45 Recalls going to Croke Park for the first time. Description of the stadium and trying to find Michael O'Hehir. Recalls huge crowd going despite the poverty of the country.</p> <p>19:20 Recalls lack of private transport to games in the early days of the GAA, rather a huge reliance of trains and buses. Quotes 'Fitzgerald's History of the GAA'.</p> <p>20:30 Description of hurling in the school system in Abbeyside. Recalls how it begun in 1940 with the arrival of a hurling orientated teacher, Michael Ford from Dungarvan. Description of the promotion hurling received following Waterford's minor and senior victories over Kilkenny and Dublin respectively. Finally a description of the Waterford schools hurling competition.</p>
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	<p>22:12 Description of GAA in Secondary Schools in West Waterford during his years growing up.</p> <p>23:15 Description of the role of the GAA in helping organisations such as schools and churches. Annual tournament played in Cork to help a local hospital.</p> <p>25:05 Description of the role of the GAA around in building a community spirit and in forming an identity for parishes citing examples from his own parish, including the honour brought to your parish by making the county team.</p> <p>27:19 Description of the way the GAA made people celebrities because of their status as players including Christy Ring in Cork, John Doyle in Tipperary, John Keane in Waterford, Mick Mackey in Limerick, Jimmy Smith in Clare, Edder Keher in Kilkenny. Footballers including Nick O'Connell, Pat Spillane, John Joe Sheehy and Jack O'Shea.</p> <p>29:38 Descriptions of his heroes of the GAA including John Keane of Waterford, Charlie Ware (who played fullback for Waterford in the 38 All Ireland Hurling Final), Lory Meagher of Kilkenny.</p> <p>30:50 Reflects on the growth of the GAA from humble beginnings to its vast value today, and the debt owed to the GAA on a parish level.</p> <p>32:50 Description of the rivalry between Abbotside and Dungarvan (both separated by the Colligan river).</p> <p>33:45 Description of him getting involved in the GAA, played football for Cathal Brugha in Dungarvan for two years. A man called Eddie Fitzgerald was responsible for this break away club from Dungarvan forming. Played Minor hurling for Abbotside also.</p> <p>34:40 Accounts for the progression of the intensity of the game today compared to in the past, including the increased training and the cost associated with this progression. Notes that cost of Waterford's training is exorbitantly high. He cites murmurings that Pádraig Duffy and Christy Cooney are expressing concern about the issue. He encapsulates that Waterford's only reward for all this expense was a Munster Senior Hurling and promotion for the footballers in the league.</p> <p>38:30 Discusses the issue of payment to managers. Cites the fact that Pádraig Duffy has called an investigation into the matter.</p> <p>39:45 Description of hurling training on urban council property</p>
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	<p>and how it changed the more if a club would progress in the championship.</p> <p>41:07 Description of his mother making his knicks and his experience collecting door to door to raise money for his hurl</p> <p>42:08 Recalls the importance of Minor hurling during the early era of the association, and that Waterford won the Minor All Ireland in 1929 and 1948.</p> <p>44:07 Discusses the issue of financing of jerseys and hurleys during the era in which he played. Recalls that hurleys had to be bought in Kearns in Dungarvan and Randalls of Wexford were the supplier of hurleys.</p> <p>45:56 Recalls circumstances of becoming secretary of Abbeyside, after attending a meeting of the Legion of Mary in a room at the Scouts Den in Abbeyside.</p> <p>47:54 Recalls roles and duties he had at the club. Negotiated the purchase of a field in 1959. Recalls players who made a big impression with Waterford at Senior Level, particularly at the All Ireland in 1957, Austin Flynn, Johnny O'Connor, Dónal Whelan, Dominic and Pat Enright.</p> <p>48:46 Recalls leaving the club in 1960 to as he was elected secretary of the Western board in that year. This also led to becoming a member of the executive of the county board.</p> <p>49:26 Recalls unsuccessfully standing for county secretary in 1971 in the place of Declan Goode who held the position for thirty three years. His opponent was Séamus Grant, the secretary of the Eastern Board at the time.</p> <p>50:20 Description of positions he held on various committees. Recalls setting up Bord na n-Óg in 1966 in West Waterford and its role in football and hurling. Lists people involved, Michéal Killue, Harry Conway, Jim Cullen, Jamie Moloney, all helped promote the organisation. First competition held in 1966. Notes the underage structure that exists in Waterford today. Description of receiving a shield from a Waterford man named Mr. Curran in Dublin as a trophy for the competition.</p> <p>54:27 Descriptions of the achievements of Waterford at underage level.</p> <p>57:40 Description of his role as Abbeyside secretary. Fields had to be rented locally. The chairman, a farmer, Michael Fives, granted the club the use of a field.</p> <p>58:27 Recalls an incident on 'Fair Day' in 1957 involving</p>
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	<p>cattle going missing that he was keeping for a farmer.</p> <p>01:00:39 Recalls buying two fields, selling them and moving to their current location.</p> <p>01:01:38 Recalls standing for secretary of the Western Board of Waterford in 1959. Elected in 1960 in a schoolhouse in Ballinameela. Recalls his role as secretary and the changing nature of club GAA during his reign as secretary. Recalls the purchase of Shandon Field and its re-naming as Fraher Field after Dan Fraher. Recalls negotiating the purchase in 1971 and the opening of the field in 1973</p> <p>01:05:57 Recalls the changing role of secretary during his twenty one year reign and also recalls the changing nature of the county championships.</p> <p>01:10:08 Recalls the methods of communication during his reign as secretary. Recalls the grievances procedures for clubs in the Waterford following matches.</p> <p>01:15:12 Description of the role of the Irish language in the affairs of the club in the past, the changes in its importance and how it reflects broader changes.</p> <p>01:18:15 Description of the Irish cultural and nationalist role of the organisation in the past. Céilis were held and those attended dances would be suspended, states that inter county players were suspended for attending rugby and soccer dances.</p> <p>01:20:31 Describes his experience of the ban on foreign games (Rule 27) and the implications of the ban.</p> <p>01:22:08 Recalls the efforts of Tom Wolfe to have the ban removed, his motion reaching congress from the Dublin county board in 1971. Waterford's Past Fanning was the president at the time and it was held in Queen's Hall in Belfast, and the ban was removed. Recalls Fanning's role in handling the debate.</p> <p>01:26:09 Recalls the atmosphere in the room the day and describes the day of the vote and the media attention it received. Recalls the efforts of Pat Fanning to keep rugby and soccer out of GAA grounds, the establishment of his charter and placing Pádraig Macnamee at the head of a committee which brought out the Macnamee report in this regard.</p> <p>01:29:23 Gives his personal thoughts on the ban, stating that emergence of televised rugby and soccer had an effect on the</p>
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	<p>viability ban.</p> <p>01:30:55 Recalls the ban being implemented in Waterford. Spies sent out to soccer matches in Kilcohan Park to identify members of the association going into matches.</p> <p>01:33:45 Describes his reasoning behind supporting the ban and the reasoning for support of others for it. Recalls his view on the removal of the ban.</p> <p>01:38:56 Recalls his election to central council. Dónal Whelan's election as trustee left a Waterford seat vacant on central council and gave him an opportunity. Took his seat the same year that Liam Mulvill became Ard Stiúrthóir. Lists the eleven presidents that he served under; Con Murphy, Paddy Fanning, Paddy Buggy of Kilkenny, Mick Loftus of Mayo, John Dowling from Offaly, Joe McDonagh from Galway, Seán McCague from Monaghan, Seán Kelly of Kerry, Nicky Brennan and Christy Cooney of Cork.</p> <p>01:42:00 Recalls his experience of soccer and rugby being allowed into Croke Park. Describes the financial benefit of opening the stadium and how that was used to help the clubs of the association.</p> <p>01:47:06 Description of his personal opinions on the opening of Croke Park, being against its opening but voted with the county board in favour of it. Describes the influence of Seán Kelly in getting the proposition through and the reaction of Seán O' Donoghue.</p> <p>01:51:06 Description of the level of discussion surrounding the proposition at central council level and the implications for central council of the success of the central council.</p> <p>01:53:29 Recalls his experience of the development of Croke Park, working with John Dowling and Liam Mulvihill. The redevelopment of the Cusack Stand in 1990. Describes the negotiation of the acquisition of land from Belvedere College and the Jesuits for the stand. Offered £100,000 and was refused but told by the then president Seán Dowling that he had an offer of £500,000 refused. Purchased in the end for nearly £2 million.</p> <p>01:57:15 Recalls that when building was underway Peter Quinn became president of the GAA and under his reign the decision was made to redevelop the entire stadium. Describes the issue of cost and method that were used to decrease costs. Government funding was an example of one such method.</p>
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	<p>02:02:34 Description of the type of investment that redeveloping Croke Park was, citing the many uses the building now has, apart from its playing surfaces.</p> <p>02:04:10 Description of the relationship between the GAA and residents surrounding the stadium during the re-development of Croke Park. Describes some of their grievances and the ways that the residents were compensated.</p> <p>02:06:05 Description of the changes in the organisation of the GAA during his thirty one years on central council. This includes a detailed description of the first attempt to abolish Rule 21 in 1998. Describes how a special congress was held at the Citywest Hotel to allow for this motion to be debated and voted on, however it was eventually defeated without a vote even being taken.</p> <p>02:13:45 Description the reaction from the North to the defeat of the proposition at the special congress.</p> <p>02:15:33 Description his personal feelings surrounding the Gaelic Players Association (GPA). Dessie Farrell was one of the main founders. Accounts for the growth of the organisation, encompassing the respective Cork hurlers' strikes. Finally the GPA received recognition.</p> <p>02:19:49 Accounts for sponsorship in the GAA over the years. Wexford county board submitted the motion for its introduction nearly twenty years ago and was carried. Gives his opinion on the issue of sponsorship by drinks companies in the GAA.</p> <p>02:24:00 Description of the introduction and the roll out of the back door system in the Hurling and Gaelic Football Championships. Gives the example of how the system worked for the Kerry footballers who were beaten in the Munster Championship, yet won the All Ireland Championship in 2009.</p> <p>02:26:30 Gives his views on the huge increase in inter county in recent years and the effect of this on the club scene, including training etc.</p> <p>02:28:35 Description of his views on how the association is run today with to the management and structure down to club level and describes his views on professionalism in the GAA.</p> <p>02:34:00 Description of his views the importance of amateurism and volunteering within the GAA and the future of them in the association.</p>
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	<p>02:36:38 Description of his experience of volunteering and balancing it with family life. Compares volunteering in his era to that of today.</p> <p>02:37:59 Description of the styles of hurling and football over the years and how they have changed. Refers the Down victory over Kildare and the Cork victory over Dublin in this year's championship, and the Galway versus Tipperary game in the Hurling Championship.</p> <p>02:42:30 Description of his experience as a journalist for the Dungarvan Leader over the last fifty three years.</p> <p>02:43:30 Description the highs and lows of his involvement with the GAA, including Waterford's victory in the All Ireland hurling final 1959. Gives his opinion on the five-year-rule..</p> <p>02:48:03 Description of what he might have did, had he not have been involved with the GAA.</p> <p>02:50:00 Gives his views on the future of the GAA. Again cites his concerns about the possible emergence and professionalism.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<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 ✓ 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 minor and juvenile hurling and football with Abbeyside.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Abbeyside GAA: Held many positions including Secretary in 1953 for 7 years. Managed and selected teams at club level</p> <p>West Waterford GAA: Secretary in 1960.</p> <p>Waterford GAA: Member of executive for 21 years. Established Bord na nÓg in Waterford in 1966; Established Scór in Waterford in 1973; member of county communications committee. Managed and selected teams at inter-county level.</p> <p>National GAA: Elected onto Central Council in 1979 (ongoing); Chairman of National Bye-Laws Committee (6 years); Munster delegate to Games Administration Committee (6 years); Twice on the GAA Management committee (3</p>

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	years each time); Member of Croke Park Development Committee (14 years).
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 2:52:35
Language	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: 21st June 2012