

## GAA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## Interview Report Form

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Noel Byrne
<b>Date of Interview</b>	30th Mar 2010
<b>Location</b>	CRC FM
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Patsy Horkan
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1930 <b>Home County:</b> Mayo
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary:</b> National School <b>Secondary:</b> St Gerald's Castlebar
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> 8 Brothers 2 Sisters <b>Current Family if Different:</b> 6 Brothers 2 sisters
<b>Club(s)</b>	Castlebar Mitchels GFC [Mayo] Boyle GAA [Roscommon]
<b>Occupation</b>	Retired
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Shopkeeper [Mother]; Engineer Western Health Board [Father]
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	N/A

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<b>Date of Report</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2010
<b>Period Covered</b>	1940 – 2010
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Mayo, Roscommon
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Childhood, Alcohol, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy/ Economics
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>Born in 1930 in Castlebar, Horkan was a young child when Mayo won their first All-Ireland in 1936. His introduction to playing gaelic football was on 'The Mall' in Castlebar and describes the informal manner in which teams were selected and rules were devised for the game they played, as well as the improvisation goals and balls used. He talks about the place of sport in the school routine, the limited sporting choices to young people of the time and the reasons for the pre-eminence of Gaelic football. The importance of the town leagues is discussed at length, with reference to the geographic boundaries used, the characters involved and the type of football that was played. Horkan reflects on the strongholds of Mayo football in the 1930, 40s and 50s, touching on issues of a rural/urban divide. He talks of playing minor football for the club and the experience of travelling to games across the county. Despite moving to Boyle temporarily for work, Horkan was a member of the Castlebar Mitchels five in a row winning championship team in the early 1950s. He reflects on the players he played alongside, the training methods that were adopted, the quality of administration in the club, the games played and won, the venues used and the celebrations that followed. One of the venues for games was McHale Park in Castlebar and Horkan discusses the renovation of the ground in the 1950s, the fundraising initiatives that were undertaken and the voluntary effort involved. Horkan explains the reasons behind his retirement from Gaelic football in the early 1960s, a decision which came a few after he joined his team-mates on a tour to the United States and he tells of the difficulties the travelling party had in crossing the Atlantic.</p> <p>On his retirement from the playing side of GAA life, Horkan maintained his involvement through various administrative roles, including the stewarding of games at McHale Park and later, as chairman of the club.</p> <p>Horkan talks about the voluntary contribution of individuals</p>

	<p>other than himself to the club and tells a number of stories to illustrate various points along the way. Towards the end of the interview, he selects some highlights from his long GAA involvement and reflects on the players he has admired, the sociability of Gaelic games and the friendships he has made. He also considers the perceived ills of the modern game and how they might be eradicated and offers a less than flattering commentary on the way the GAA is currently run. For all that, he comments on his lack of regrets and his good fortune to have been involved with a good club.</p> <p>00:00:05 Introduction</p> <p>00:00:35 Horkan was born in Spencer St. Castlebar</p> <p>00:00: 50 Refers to first Mayo All Ireland victory in 1936. Mentions Mayo staying in Molly Redmond's guest house, hearing stories about the team and subsequently meeting the players, including Josie Munnelly.</p> <p>00:01:30 Talks about playing football games on the Mall, objections from some locals in the area and threats of being taken to court.</p> <p>00:02:16 Mentions School leagues.</p> <p>00:02:23 Talks about attending St Gerald's College and the influence of teacher, Mr Nally, who had responsibility for sport. Comments on Nally's attitude to officiating games, his love of tackling and reluctance to blow a whistle.</p> <p>00:03:09 Playing minor for Castlebar. Tells story of first game they played against Swinford with an over age player. Tells of attempts of Fr Towey, from Swinford, to catch the overage players with a camera and the reaction of the player in question. Refers to an objection being registered after the game.</p> <p>00:04:42 Recalls the numbers playing on the Mall, with competitions between the higher-ends and the lower-ends, teams that were based on local geography. Tells of an occasion when, following a row, one of the team's who owned the ball took it home.</p> <p>00:05:29 Mentions the absence of rules or a referee on the Mall, as well as the use of trees and coats as goalposts.</p> <p>00:05:57 Refers to using a leather ball, as well as to the use of a pig's bladder.</p> <p>00:06:22 Football at St Gerald's: play was designated for the</p>
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	<p>last hour on a Wednesday evening.</p> <p>6.44 Discusses the 1936 All Ireland team and makes particular reference to goalkeeper, Tom Burke, who later coached him. Refers to Burke's football philosophy.</p> <p>00:07:15 Refers to the strength of specific clubs such as Castlebar Mitchels, Ballina Stephenites and Westport in the mid to late 1930s.</p> <p>00:07:43 Mentions that, prior to McHale Park, Castlebar Mitchels played in field near hat factory and then pigeon park.</p> <p>00:08:29 Discusses other games being played including soccer and rugby and refers to playing rugby with Michael Heverin and others. Says he played in lineout, then returning to Westport.</p> <p>00:09:37 Talks about one and only attempt at soccer, scoring a goal from kick-off.</p> <p>00:10:17 Considers the attraction of Gaelic over soccer in those days; mentions the numbers playing and the role of the Christian Brothers.</p> <p>00:10:37 Comments on the absence of school teams and the nature of training received in school.</p> <p>00:11:00 Joining Castlebar Mitchels and the quality of its organisation. Refers to Gerry McDonald, TP Flanagan and Tim McDonagh. Says McDonagh spent most of his spare time in McHale Park.</p> <p>00:11:49 Recalls walking to McHale Park, knowing every house and the people living on McHale Road. Mentions the keys left in doors.</p> <p>00:12:43 Talks about the McHale Park pitch, timber planks on concrete.</p> <p>00:13: 09 Mentions planks disappearing during the heavy snow of 1947/48 – suggests they were taken for firewood.</p> <p>00:13:20 Refers to restriction of teams fielded by Castlebar Mitchels at the time to the junior and senior team.</p> <p>00:13:34 Start of the town leagues and their importance to Mayo football – refers to teams from the hat and bacon factories, an amalgamation team from Ballyburke, a college team and St. Mary's. Discusses the eligibility criteria for town league teams and tell stories of the participation of players</p>
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	<p>from Leinster and elsewhere in Connacht coming to play.</p> <p>00:15:35 Describes the football played in the town leagues as 'good' and 'tough'. Mentions the competitiveness of the games and the times of year they were played.</p> <p>00:16:20 Reflects on the skill levels of players and the emphasis on catch and kick. Explains the reason for the lack of soloing – concern at running into danger.</p> <p>00:16:39 Discusses some of the 'characters' who were involved in the town leagues, including the 1936 Mayo goalkeeper, Tom Burke. Others named: Josie Munnelly, the McGowans, the Flanagan, Jimmy Rigney, Christy Hegarty.</p> <p>00:17:38 Comments on the support each team received from the people of their own area.</p> <p>00:18:13 Discusses Josie Munnelly and recalls the county final in Charlestown, Castlebar v Claremorris. Talks of how Jack O' Flannelly had bet of £100 on the match and Josie's appeal to team before the game. Refers to being in Val Harrisons after game when Jack bought two bottles of whiskey, presenting one to Josie and the other to Patsy Horkan. Tells story of what happened to Josie's bottle.</p> <p>00:21:45 As a minor with Castlebar Mitchels, he considers the pedigree of other minor teams. Refers to Ballina, Swinford, Westport and the absence of rural teams.</p> <p>00:22:16 Discusses travelling to away games with the club by car or bus, but mentions an earlier time when notices and bicycles were used. Says many supporters travelled by bicycle.</p> <p>00:22: 50 Reflects on the level of interest in the Mayo county team. Tells story about Johnny Mulvey from Louisburgh and the handling of his car registration by the Courthouse staff when he was sick. Says he travelled to many games in Mulveys car.</p> <p>00:23:57 Refers again to minor game in Foxford when they played Swinford and the priest tried to get a photograph of overage player, Tommy Lacey.</p> <p>00:24.29 Going to Boyle for work and playing with Boyle junior team. Refers also to getting a run with the Roscommon senior team.</p> <p>00:25:10 Comments on 'well organised' nature of club football.</p>
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	<p>00:25:25 Recalls going to play a match, togging out in car and washing legs in a drain. General remarks about facilities at GAA grounds.</p> <p>00: 26:14 Breaking into Mitchels Senior team in 1948, missing the 1949 season, returning in 1950, but not playing as he was illegal. Says he was togged out but only there in case he was needed. Refers to his brother Peter, who played centre field and later went to America.</p> <p>00: 27:19 Talks about being involved with Castlebar Mitchels 'five in a row' row. Talks about his position on the field and the opponents he met. Says there was one player he wouldn't like to have marked was his own full back Phil Mongey.</p> <p>00:28:10 Refers to the physicality of senior football in Mayo and names numerous individuals he played alongside on Castlebar Mitchels teams, including, for a year, Padraic Carney.</p> <p>00:29:36 Comments on Mitchels training and preparations, especially during the summer months. Refers emphasis on backs and forwards, with little exercise and running.</p> <p>00:30:06 Discussion the quality of Castlebar's administrators - Gerry McDonald and Sam McCormick.</p> <p>00: 30:43 Talks about playing Claremorris, when they were perceived to have been the better teams. Says it was the most difficult championship of the five in a row.</p> <p>00:31:29 Refers to the media coverage of Castlebar games in <i>Connaught Telegraph</i> and <i>Western People</i>.</p> <p>00:31:43 Discusses poor facilities for teams outside a number of venues in the county.</p> <p>00:32:11 Talks about the work of coaches trainer Paddy Quinn and Tom Burke.</p> <p>00:32:37 Discusses his most admired county footballers - Paddy Prendergast, Eamonn Mongey, Mick Flanagan, Peter Solan and others.</p> <p>00:33:50 Recalls celebrations after County final. Going for a drink in Paddy Moclair's in Ballina and returning home afterwards.</p> <p>00:34:29 Refers to the type of football played in the 1950s</p>
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	<p>and voices frustration at the overuse of the modern hand pass, as well as his opposition to the 'mark'.</p> <p>00:35:58 Tells of the use of the 'shoulder charge' and best of friends after.</p> <p>00:36:20 Talks about socialising with members of opposing teams reminiscing years later.</p> <p>00:36:58 Says he made a lot of close friends through football.</p> <p>00:37:28 Employment of players: remarks that most were employed locally but a few would be working outside county.</p> <p>00:37:43 Progress development with McHale Park. Recalls the use of seats for firewood in 1947 and their replacement with concrete seats. Tells of being in charge of one of the 'concrete mixers'.</p> <p>00:38:55 Talks of the local donations that helped fund McHale Park renovation.</p> <p>00:39:30 Comments on the Castlebar Mitchels standing within their community and the absence of club games beyond their own borders.</p> <p>00:40:20 Reflects on the heavy wool material of the jersey and heavy leather ball. Tells of repairing balls.</p> <p>00:41:00 Recalls how, after the war, pigskin was used for boots and how they would be rendered 'useless' when wet.</p> <p>00:41:24 Says jerseys for training were washed at home and club jerseys were collected by Chas Heraghty, who worked in the hat factory, after game.</p> <p>00:42:17 Waning fortunes of Mitchels after five in a row and playing his last game in 1963/4.</p> <p>00:42:30 Talks about Castlebar Mitchels trip to the States in 1960. It was 'some trip'. Recalls travelling to Shannon, the delay in the plane's departure due to lack of finance to refuel the plane; seeing sparks coming out of an engine and landing at Gander; engine problems again on arrival to the States; his brother waiting for three days for the team to arrive.</p> <p>00:45:19 Says the visit was in response to an invite from a Chicago team who previously visited to Ireland.</p> <p>45.47 Talks about the Josie Munnely's last game for Mitchels in the States, refers to his profile and his character as a man</p>
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	<p>and a player; remarks on his 'radar' for goal.</p> <p>00:46:58 Tells of Sam McCormack, assistant secretary and Treasurer, who went missing in a pub prior to departure for fear of flying.</p> <p>00:47:50 Describes as 'great' the reception in Castlebar for the touring team.</p> <p>00:47:54 Discusses the financing of the American tour, referring to the functions held and the personal saving. 48.23 Ending playing career, marriage and family.</p> <p>00:48:45 Continued involvement in administration. Talks about involvement on committee and McHale Park development. Talks about Mick Flynn and his contribution to the club – says he looked after McHale Park 'as if it was his own. He was McHale Park and his house was always available.'</p> <p>00:50:32 Talks about the people behind McHale Park developing into stadium and fundraising that was done – tells of Henry Hoban who did the priests collection in Castlebar and was replaced by Gerry McDonald and Sam, who took up collection and got a drink in every house.</p> <p>00:53:02 Mentions that he was in charge of looking after pitch for big matches. Referred to having a 'team' to help steward McHale Park, a ground with a capacity of more than 30,000.</p> <p>00:54:15 Tells story of a big crowd at Connacht final, where a large number of spectators pressed for entry to sideline, taking the money at the gate, filling his pockets and taking it to the court house for counting.</p> <p>00:56:17 Refers to preferred hosteleries of Castlebar Mitchels, including Ray Prendergast's and Mick Byrnes.</p> <p>00:56:40 Comments on the influx of outsiders to Castlebar on big match days and 'camaraderie' among them.</p> <p>00:57:16 Refers to the reliability and quality of volunteerism, especially Mick Ruane's crew which would steward pitch, a crew which included Paddy Kerrigan and John Joe Walsh. Tells story of the day the crossbar broke during Connaught final and the repairs that were done.</p> <p>00:58.38 Talks about serving as Chairman of Castlebar Mitchels in the 1960s and the achievements of the club. Refers also to the involvement of the players in the 'running of the club.'</p>
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	<p>59.49 Offers criticism of the modern game of Gaelic football, citing examples from a recent club game involving Castlebar Mitchels. Contrast the game unfavourably with what went before and suggests ways in which it might be improved. He is particularly critical of the short-passing hand-pass game.</p> <p>1:01:31 Comments on the fitness levels of modern player.</p> <p>1:01:44 Considers the future of a GAA club in a GAA in big town.</p> <p>1:02:07 Reflects on the contribution of Brother Francis, who started a league in juvenile football. Talks of him cycling from monastery to McHale Park and raising money from underage players for footballs – believed they would appreciate it more.</p> <p>1:03:17 Tells two stories, one involving his riposte to one critic: ‘Moran give up bloody talking, you would’t kick snow off a rope.’</p> <p>1:04:50 Best memories: selects the winning of County Championship in Charlestown and his first game with Castlebar Mitchels against Claremorris in Mayo Abbey. Tells story of getting a ‘skelp’ from an umbrella and ‘letting go’. Says that the man with the man with the umbrella man, Jimmy Curran, had to go to a dentist.</p> <p>1:08:00 Reflects on some standout players: Nacy Dowd, Padraic Carney Josie Munnely, Mick Stewart, John McCormick Mick Flynn Jimmy O Reilly, Tom Burke, Mick and Pat Flanagan, Paddy King.</p> <p>1:09:20 Says he would approach football the same way if had his time again: Straight, direct, honest.</p> <p>1:09:36 Comments on his lack of regrets and says it was ‘a great thing to be involved with a good club’ – refers to the outlet it provided and friendships made.</p> <p>1:10:22 Comments on his poor regard for the GAA as it currently stands, especially its rush to change rules.</p> <p>1:11:07 Final comments: advises anyone to get involved with ‘something’, anything.</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 checked="" 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>

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<b>Record as a Player</b> (Titles won; Length of time played)	9 County Senior Gaelic Football medals. Connaught Jnr Medal
<b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)	Chairman Castlebar Mitchels GFC
<b>Format</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
<b>Duration</b>	Length of Interview: 01:12:00
<b>Language</b>	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:            Noel Byrne

Date:              30 March 2010