

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Noel Byrne
Date of Interview	15 th Dec 2010
Location	CRC FM Castlebar
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Mick Byrne
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1957 Home County: Mayo
Education	Primary: St Patricks Boys NS Secondary: St Gerald's Castlebar and St Jarlath's Tuam
Family	Siblings: 2 Sisters, 1 brother Current Family if Different: Married with 1 child
Club(s)	Castlebar Mitchels GFC [Mayo]
Occupation	Publican
Parents' Occupation	N/A
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Castlebar Golf Club and Castlebar Rugby Club [Mayo]

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Date of Report	15 th Dec 2010
Period Covered	1960s – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Mayo, Galway, Kerry. Dublin, Carlow, Cork, Meath, Antrim
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Alcohol, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Food and Drink, Socialising, Economy/ Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Mick Byrne family roots the GAA run deep, his great grandfather having been the goalkeeper on the very first Castlebar Mitchels team in the 1880s. Byrne grew up in Castlebar and he talks fondly not only about the informal games he played in The Mall in the town, but about watching the Mayo team train in McHale Park and listening to Michael O’Hehir match commentaries on the radio. The importance of football in the local life was heightened by the absence of alternative social opportunities. The role of the town leagues is discussed: it organisations, the teams, the jerseys, the finals in McHale Park and parade before them. Byrne’s attended the football nursery of St. Jarlath’s, Tuam, for secondary school and he discusses the rivalries between different colleges in the early 1970s, the quality of players involved and the games played. It was also in Jarlath’s where he became involved in refereeing and a number of his memorable experiences are recounted.</p> <p>Throughout his life, Byrne has been an avid supporter of Mayo teams and he charts his experiences of following Mayo teams through the decades. From 1981 to 1997, he says he never missed a match, travelling as part of a group known as ‘Byrnes babes’. He recalls some of the days out, the pubs visited and the ‘craic’ had – he even appeared on ‘The Late Late Show’ and ‘Up for the Match’. Byrne also retained a deep attachment to the Castlebar Mitchels club and served in various administrative roles, including club chairman. He discusses the place of the GAA in the life of Castlebar, the fluctuating fortunes of the club team (they reached an All-</p>

Ireland club final in 1994), the support received from the townspeople etc.

Repeatedly, Byrne stresses the fun and craic he has elicited from Gaelic games and the social life around them. Stories are told about numerous characters met along the way. Byrne is strong in his praise of what the GAA has achieved across the country and what it has given him personally; but he is not uncritical. He draws unfavourable comparison between the game past and present and voices concerns about modern pressures and the impact on the social aspects of GAA life. For all that, he remarks that he 'never had a bad day in the GAA.'

00:00.25 Discusses his early involvement of the GAA in the early 1960s.

00:00.48 Family background in the GAA: mentions 2 Uncles that played on first Mayo minor winning team, 1953; and first cousin was Dermot Earley and his great grandfather was a member of the first Castlebar Mitchels team, 125 years previously.

00:01.17 Growing up in Castle Street in Castlebar and meeting Mayo footballers regularly. Refers to absence of television, to playing football on the mall.

00:01.32 Mention Mayo players going to Cafe in Castle St and getting footballs from Johnny Mulvey.

00:01.5 Refers to the absence of alternative social opportunities.

00:02.02 Talks about playing football on the Mall and going up to McHale Park to watch Mayo train.

00:02.20 Tells of Micheal O Hehir commentary in which he stated the game v Galway was the All Ireland Final.

00:02.33 Describes McHale Park 'as our Croke Park' and tells of crowds of 35,000 at games. Refers to 'craic, banter and goodwill around games.

00:02.57 Names a number of Galway footballers he considered as 'class'. These were member of the 1960s 3 in

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	<p>a row wining team.</p> <p>00:03.20 Describes football on the Mall was as 'dog eat dog' and says he was guaranteed a game because he owned the ball. Refers to numbers of young people around and the 'craic' and 'banter' that was had through football.</p> <p>00:03.50 Comments on the existence of town league with team names – Davitts, Emmets Pearses, McHales etc . Refers to the intensity of those games; to the absence of competition from soccer and rugby; to the use of jumpers as goalposts;</p> <p>00:04.38 Names some of those who also played in the town league: Joe Lvelle, Vinny Farrell, Ringo Reynolds etc.</p> <p>00:04.53 Mentions Jodie Munnelly whose father was his 'idol'.</p> <p>00:05:05 Mentions have teams of 20 or 25.</p> <p>00:05.12 Recalls scoring two own goals from full back position – they were own goals.</p> <p>00:05.25 Mentions absence of jerseys except when playing for school or town league teams.</p> <p>00:05.46 Mentions final for town league was played McHale Park, preceded by a parade through the town.</p> <p>00:06.04 Town league celebrations involving sweets lemonade.</p> <p>00:06.23 First memory of television was the minor team of 1966, beating Cork in final. Recalls Tom Cafferkey from Achill and rumours that he was over age. Says he never met him but attended his funeral.</p> <p>00:07.31 Refers to some of the greats of Mayo football involved.</p> <p>00:07.42 Mentions following Mayo in 1967 semi-final and 1969 semi-final.</p> <p>00:07.54 Refers to his passion for Mayo and Castlebar football and names those he regarded as great players.</p> <p>00:08.18 Talks about differences in football past and</p>
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	<p>present: 'catch and kick' and big players down the middle. Says football has become 'too technical' and has been 'ruined.</p> <p>00:09.00 Tells story about a Mayo fullback who was told to vary kick outs in a match. 'I did he said I'm using my left foot instead of my right'.</p> <p>00:09.50 Refers to 'great friends' made in the GAA.</p> <p>00:10.05 Comments that the GAA is for the 'ordinary' fellow on the street.</p> <p>00:10.24 Comments on the experience of supporting Mayo.</p> <p>00:10.30 Attendance at St Jarlath's in Tuam, a 'nursery of football' – lists some of the great footballers who attended the school, including Henry Gavin from Castlebar, an 'idol' of his who captained Hogan cup team in 1974.</p> <p>00:11.27 Mentions that Gavin marked Ogie Moran of Kerry in Hogan Cup final against Gormastown.</p> <p>00:11.38 Tells story about Tom Vaughan from Clifden played with Jarlath's when they lost to Gormanstown in 1973 and the following year lost with Gormanstown against Jarlath's. Refers to the 'serious rivalry' in Colleges football.</p> <p>00:12.30 Says the finest college footballer ever seen was Morgan Hughes from Galway and explains why.</p> <p>00:13:49 Discusses the 'catch, kick and hit' type of football played in the town leagues, and the craic and banter, and the few classy players.</p> <p>00:15:08 Expresses views on the excessive approach to Gaelic football, with reference to dieticians, training, half-time speeches etc.</p> <p>00:15:50 Returns to town leagues and advantages of being big and being classed a good footballer if picked on first 15.</p> <p>00:16:33 Talks about Connacht colleges final in Tuam as a senior reference as a senior referee, aged 17 or 18. Being taken by car with teacher, going for the meal – mentions St. Nathy's as a great place to go for a post-match meal.</p> <p>00:17:19 Refers to Fr. Der Maloney, team manager and 'one</p>
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	<p>of nature's gentlemen', picking the team. Refers also to 30 lads training every team, from different teams.</p> <p>17.42 Mentions Pauric Jordan from Castlebar, an excellent athlete who couldn't solo the ball he was going so fast - he later represented Ireland in Athletics.</p> <p>00:18:10 Refereeing: discusses the 'craic' to be had refereeing with visiting teams playing Jarlath's for match practice – included Dunmore McHales, Tuam Stars. Refers to the Donnellans playing in these games.</p> <p>00:18:56 Refers to refereeing a county under 21 semi final in Galway.</p> <p>00:19:12 Mentions going to Tuam Stadium every Sunday as referees invariably did not turn up. Mentions bringing umpires with.</p> <p>19.37 Refers to getting three pound from each team and stopping off on way back and have a couple of pints.</p> <p>00:20:06 Leaving Jarlath's and getting involved in Castlebar Mitchels. Refers to being PRO for a few years and winning county title in 1978 - mentions Mick Ruane, team manager, and a number of the players, including Henry Gavin.</p> <p>00:21:05 County title celebrations lasted about 3 months.</p> <p>00:21:12 Talks about Connacht final in Tuam against Killereerin. Tells story of how, at half time, the key of dressing room went missing and team talk was given outside dressing room. Mentions that names 'the key man' was called.</p> <p>00:21:49 Discusses passion for Castlebar, the part the club played in his life, his friendships, serving as club chairman in mid 1990s when they were 'fighting relegation.'</p> <p>00:22:14 Mentions great people involved, including Mick Ruane who 'done everything'. Talks about some of the work they did and bringing 'barrel' out on a Saturday evening for a drink.</p> <p>00:23:10 Mentions Michael O Hehir and Michael Muriearchataigh – both described as 'class' – coming down and 'Telecom' putting in the 'lines' for the commentary.</p> <p>00:23:30 Tells story of how, as chairman, he was told not to</p>
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	<p>open the pitch by grounds-man. Mentions the reaction this received, thinking world war 3 breaking out and an individual ringing the GAA President and Minster for Sport to get pitch open.</p> <p>00:25:07 Describes the 1970s as a 'lean' period for Mayo football.</p> <p>00:25:22 Accepts differences of opinion on championship format but says Provincial championship is 'an occasion...a day out'. Mentions the upset of not seeing county win provincial title in the 1970s.</p> <p>00:26:05 1981: mentions Mayo winning Connacht title after 'barren' spell and being destroyed by great Kerry team, not scoring in the second half.</p> <p>00:26:47 Recalls day Dermot Geraghty at corner back holding Jason Sherlock scoreless and Dublin not scoring for a long time.</p> <p>00:27:29 Says his idol in Mayo was Josie Munnely and explains why. Tells story of being in Dublin at semi-final and asking Munnely who was the greatest he had ever. The answer was Sean Purcell, who he later approached on Grafton Street for his autograph. Refers to the 'time' that Purcell gave him.</p> <p>00:29:28 Football in Jarlath's: the importance of football and interest every September in the team for the year. Recalls match in Limerick in 1973 when Jarlaths played St Brendan's of Killarney. Says that O Muirheartaigh described it as one of the finest colleges games he ever saw.</p> <p>00:31:50 Mentions that on leaving Jarlath's you would always follow them for a couple of years and meeting players from previous generations. Mentions Billy Flynn, who had been on the first Jarlath's team to win an All Ireland in 1947, also Tommy Lyons's father who was in goal.</p> <p>00:32:36 Discusses Castlebar Mitchels reputation in the county in the 1960s and their rivalry with Ballina. Refers to smaller number of GAA clubs in the county at the time.</p> <p>00:33:16 Says that Castlebar were considered the 'team to beat' and tells story of a player taken off in a county semi-</p>
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	<p>final when they were 'cruising' and heading to pub.</p> <p>00:33:50 Talks about the relationship between drink and football and tells of a player who had six pints on the eve of a big game and having the 'game of his life' the next day.</p> <p>00:34:27 Mentions Mitchels being called the league of nations because people came to work in town to work and ended up playing with the club.</p> <p>00:35:00 Reflects on the fortunes of the club in the 1970s and 80s.</p> <p>00:35:16 Recalls getting to All Ireland club final in 1993-4, winning county and provincial championship, meeting Eire og of Carlow in semi-final and then Nemo Rangers in final. Says they were 'annihilated'.</p> <p>00:36:57 Mentions again the 'great craic'. Mentions that he was a publican and formed 'Byrnes Babes' supporters club, which never missed a Mayo match from 1981 to 1997. Recalls the venues they travelled to, and the large group of men on a bus, entering pubs and ordering pints. Acknowledges that they were a 'publicans delight'. Mentions the conversations about football, getting a pass into games etc.</p> <p>00:39:19 Refers to Jack O Shea taking over as Mayo manager and first match against Kilkenny. Tells of going into Kilkenny pub in 1993 and publican remarking that he had never seen a football match in Nowlan Park.</p> <p>00:40.19 Tells story about coming back from Killarney, being stopped in Gort at 3 am and two Gardai getting on to bus.</p> <p>00:41:00 Remarks on the fun and the absence of trouble at any point.</p> <p>00:41:10 Comments that GAA has 'changed considerably' and refers to rule changes to hand pass etc. Expresses sympathy also for referees and the job they have to do.</p> <p>00:42.13 Mentions Croke Park and the vision they possessed 15 previously.</p> <p>42.21 Says he was 'privileged' to have been in Croke Park when England played rugby there for the first time. Refers to</p>
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	<p>the atmosphere, the crowd on that occasion.</p> <p>00:42:30 Remarks on the developments around country to various county grounds.</p> <p>00:43:15 Considers the highlights of his tenure as Chairman of Castlebar Mitchels. Talks about the response to the 1994 All-Ireland defeat, players retiring and young players coming in.</p> <p>00:44:05 Talks about the development of McHale Park as a great success and refers to the capacity of the revamped ground.</p> <p>00:44:51 Not same success on playing side as development side.</p> <p>00:44:55 Refers to struggle for funds and demands on pitches.</p> <p>00:45:08 Pays tribute to all the people behind the scenes.</p> <p>00:45:50 Struggles on the field and going to play Davitts in Ballindine to avoid relegation.</p> <p>00:46:26 Describes Castlebar as a very good sports town and refers to Castlebar Mitchels and Castlebar Celtic.</p> <p>00:46:50 Recalls the support and comraderie he received from people of Castlebar when GAA club chairman.</p> <p>00:47:10 Discusses various characters he encountered through the GAA: tells of a fellow from Ballinrobe who came with 'babes' to Tullamore and never got a sandwich, but ate a Swiss roll with his soup.</p> <p>00:48:06 Names some of the characters, GAA men, he has fond memories of. Tells of going to Kiltimagh in 1979 after being defeated by Knockmore and competition for heaviest man, with bets placed on outcome.</p> <p>00:49:43 Other Characters: Tommy Staunton, Mickey P, Tom Tom Dennigan</p> <p>00:50:03 Mentions a Volkswagen Beetle being bought and painted in Mayo colours before 1996 All-Ireland final. Mentions travelling around country in the car, demands for use of the car. Tells story of people in Meath organising a</p>
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	<p>fundraiser took the car and looked for a ransom but we didn't want the car back</p> <p>00:51:28 Refers to bringing out a Song Sam Maguire Is Coming Home to Mayo. Mentions that was rated among the worst GAA song of all time in the Sunday Tribune.</p> <p>00:52:04 Appearances on 'Up for the Match' and the 'Late Late Show' – says song got to No 5 in Irish charts, the highest ranking for a Castlebar act.</p> <p>00:52:42 Arriving in Amiens St to Lloyds pub which was owned by Kerry man, who would wear a Mayo jersey. Mentions gathering of Mayo people and singing songs.</p> <p>00:53:13 Comments on the loss of craic and the reasons for it: modern pressures on time, economic climate, drink driving.</p> <p>00:54:00 Most memorable games: minor match in 1966 and other occasions, winning league in 1970-71, relegation matches in Roscommon, All-Ireland club semi-final and final in 1994.</p> <p>00:55:06 Mentions 1996 All-Ireland final and quotes lines of song - to win just once!</p> <p>00:56:07 Reflects on All-Ireland semi-final and final of 1996 and remarks on the county 'taking eye off the ball' in 1997. Mentions Maurice FitzGerald's famous point from sideline in final.</p> <p>00:56:50 Talks about desire to win Sam Maguire</p> <p>00:57:05 'Never had a bad day in GAA' – general reflections on his GAA involvement.</p> <p>00:58:06 Laments loss of characters and comments on the passing of a number of them in the club in 2010.</p> <p>00:58:50 Finals comments: refers to big step up from minor and under 21 football to senior; general reflections on passion for club and county; on supporting whatever team comes out of Connacht.</p>
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Involvement in GAA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person <input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	N/A
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Chairman Castlebar Mitchels [Mayo] 5 years PRO Castlebar Mitchels [Mayo] 5 Years
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01.00.38
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Noel Byrne

Date: 15th Dec 2010