

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

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| Name of Interviewer | Aidan O'Donoghue |
| Date of Interview | 17 th Nov 2009 |
| Location | Interviewee's home, near Dingle, Co Kerry |
| Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname) | Fr Tom Looney |
| <u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u> | |
| Gender | Male |
| Born | Year Born: 1945 Home County: Kerry |
| Education | Primary: Presentation Convent and Monastery, Killarney, Co. Kerry Secondary: St Brendan's Seminary, Killarney Third Level: St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare; IT Tralee |
| Family | Siblings: 4 siblings |
| Club(s) | Dr Crokes, Killarney [Kerry]; Desmonds [Kerry], Kilmoyley [Kerry], London [England]; Kilcummin (near Killarney) [Kerry] |
| Occupation | Roman Catholic Priest |
| Parents' Occupation | Bootmaker in Hilliards & Palmer Killarney [Jack, Father]; Housewife [Alice O'Neill Mother] |
| Religion | Roman Catholic |
| Political Affiliation / Membership | N/A |
| Other Club/Society Membership(s) | N/A |

REFERENCE NO. Y/1/13

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| Date of Report | 17 th Nov 2009 |
| Period Covered | 1886-2009 |
| Counties/Countries Covered | Kerry, London, Great Britain, Peru, Americas |
| Key Themes Covered | Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy / Economics |
| Interview Summary | <p>This interview covers issues relating to the Fr Looney's life and also to Kerry GAA and its history. Fr Looney comes from a strong GAA family and has a keen interest in history so names, dates and connections between people are prominent throughout the interview. There is also strong emphasis placed on remembering the people who founded clubs during the late 1800s. Emigration and exile are strong themes in the interview, as Fr Looney spent some years in England and Peru. Fr Looney's knowledge is vast, and he talks about aspects of the GAA from the foundation of his local club Dr Crokes in 1886 to the organisation it has become in 2009.</p> <p>00:38 Talks about his family background. Mother grew up on a farm. His family lived in different locations around Killarney</p> <p>01:27 The neighbours and their involvement in football</p> <p>01:44 Father worked in a boot factory and was a member of Dr Crokes GAA club</p> <p>02:13 Talks about his brothers and sisters</p> <p>02:30 Strong GAA tradition in family; his great grandfather moved from Glenflesk which is just outside Killarney</p> <p>03:18 Grandfather lost county final in 1889; in 1892 Laune Rangers lost the All-Ireland club final</p> <p>05:35 Some GAA pictures on the wall of the family home growing up and the spirit of the club was strong within the</p> |

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| | <p>family, but people were very humble - no talk of heroes in the family; also no glorification of the individual like there is today. People were just proud of the team.</p> <p>07:25 Believes that Killarney is not as interested in its GAA heritage as Tralee is. Tells a story of when he was living in Kilcummin and a Monaghan man arrived, looking to see the house where former GAA President Seán Kelly grew up. Believes Killarney could do more for its GAA heritage when you have people like that expressing an interest.</p> <p>08:00 There are more GAA streetnames and monuments in Tralee.</p> <p>08:24 Killarney's Fitzgerald Stadium is named after Dick Fitzgerald, and there is a street in Killarney named after him. Dick Fitzgerald's name is on the street when you look at official maps, but the name is nowhere to be seen on the actual street.</p> <p>09:00 Thousands of people go to Fitzgerald Stadium throughout the year but there seems to be a shyness in acknowledging the role of the GAA in local life in Killarney</p> <p>09:40 Recalls playing football and rounders on the streets as a child</p> <p>10:19 There were no underage teams back then but there were great school teams, with East Kerry leagues and also leagues within individual schools</p> <p>11:28 'The Sem' in Killarney had a great footballing tradition. They lost the Hogan Cup in 1963 but won it in 1969</p> <p>12:48 An U-16 league was started in East Kerry and he was asked to play. There was no training and no coaching, they all just got on a bus to go to the game</p> <p>13:33 Dr Crokes had just one set of jerseys in the period around 1969. They had only one football, and a woman in the town minded it so if you wanted to use it you had to ask her if you could borrow it</p> <p>14:35 Mentions local rivals Legion who broke away in 1929 - they were mostly from the opposite side of the river</p> <p>15:00 Some of the reasons for the breakaway were that not everybody could get a game because the population was growing. The world wars and domestic wars were over too which meant more people were coming home, so it made sense to form another club</p> |
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| | <p>16:00 There was a rugby team in the town too. They played in the cricket field, as did the GAA club. All that changed when Fitzgerald Stadium opened in 1926</p> <p>16:56 Soccer started up in the 1950s and 60s. The ban was strong but he played it with his friends anyway and nobody ever bothered them. Basketball was played too, but like soccer you just had to organise it yourself informally</p> <p>17:37 When he started playing he only had one football boot. Then his friend broke his leg, and sold him his boots for ten shillings. He wore them in a game but lost two toenails - the boots were too small</p> <p>18:30 Clubs were not well off at the time and East Kerry was not highly organised for underage football. Football was better organised in the schools but not all boys went to secondary school - many of them went to England</p> <p>18:52 In 1956/57 German crane company Liebherr opened a plant in Killarney and that was a turning point because it meant that there was a lot less emigration what with there being jobs available at the factory</p> <p>19:20 Was minor secretary for Dr Crokes in his last year in Killarney (1961-62). Went to AGMs and enjoyed them - it was the best place to have rows, more appropriate than doing it through the media like today. It was very democratic.</p> <p>20:25 In 1956 there came a huge moment in his GAA life. His father introduced him to Martin Kissane, the last surviving founder of the Dr Crokes club. He cannot remember what was said between them, but he is very grateful to his father for that introduction</p> <p>22:25 Dr Crokes was founded in secret in 1886 by a group of 19, who were often referred to as 'The 19 dangerous dreamers'.</p> <p>22:45 Martin Kissane was by trade a French polisher. It was the end of the 1800s and at the time there was a great tourism trade in Killarney in Arbutus furniture</p> <p>24:55 Says that the people who founded Dr Crokes were visionaries and that we have a lot to be grateful to them for</p> <p>25:56 1,600 Kerry families lost their homes in the 1880s and it was total devastation. There was no social welfare. The Famine was only one generation previous. But still these people had dreams and their values are worth knowing about.</p> |
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| | <p>They had idealism, a sense of vision and purpose.</p> <p>26:50 He originally had notions of joining the franciscans. But while they were studying they were not allowed to leave the grounds and go to see any games, so he decided against joining them because of that.</p> <p>27:20 Did the Leaving Cert in 1962 and went to Maynooth, where there was a great sporting life.</p> <p>28:13 In 1962 19 of his class fellows were county minors. two were on the Mayo minor team and should have been in Croke Park in September for the All-Ireland final but they were in retreat at the college at the time, so they could not go to the final. As time went on those rules were relaxed and later others did get to go out to play in big games.</p> <p>29:44 Refereed games in Maynooth for 5/6 years, played games against visiting colleges, and played handball</p> <p>30:37 Mentions 'The great Fr Jones', a world champion handballer who was ordained a priest in 1900 and worked in Kerry. A supreme athlete who, it is said, put himself through Maynooth college on handball earnings. In 1888 he played in an All-Ireland series where the sidebets were 400 pounds. There is a Fitzgerald-Jones club in Tralee named after him and another man</p> <p>31:52 When he was ordained he was sent to England. He had wanted to do a radio course but the bishop had other ideas so he missed the 1969 All-Ireland final against Offaly where Johnny Culloty, representing Dr Crokes, lifted the Sam Maguire for Kerry. He was in Wembley that day listening to the game on the radio. It was his first Sunday in England</p> <p>32:35 Got involved with Desmonds club in Wembley, young lads mainly from the Munster area. He was president and full forward. Desmonds went on to become a formidable force in London</p> <p>34:00 London teams finished by October, but the All-Ireland championship in Ireland was played in later months when the weather was poor. It was not fair on the London lads who were not used to played on bad pitches in harsh conditions - you never got boggy fields in England</p> <p>35:20 Members of Desmonds squad signed a hurley for him as a gift, one of the members made hurleys himself in Essex. After a match, man who made the hurls said that he had got very emotional during the national anthem, not because of the occasion but because a few months previously his daughter</p> |
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| | <p>had been brutally attacked at the railway station - he had been thinking about her and was glad that she was alive</p> <p>37:00 Was very proud to be involved with GAA in London. Kingdom club was very powerful over there</p> <p>37:09 Mentions a Canon Denis Curtain who in 1963 proposed at an Ardfert football club meeting to have an under 21 football championship. The motion was passed, went on to Kerry County Board, and within a year Kerry were Munster champions and it had become an intercounty competition</p> <p>39:00 In 1970 he chartered a plane himself for 1200 pounds to bring people from Sneem, Kerry and Killarney to a reunion in London. The next year they brought the Dr Crokes club and they stayed with host families in Wembley. Many of the lads stayed with a Kerry legend, Brendan Galvin. They also brought Killarney Legion GAA club over. In 1973 the Spa club from near Killarney went over - they stayed in a hotel in Paddington. Great occasions for establishing a connection between clubs at home and the emigrants. People got to meet former schoolmates, their relatives and their old friends. 2009 is the 40th anniversary and there is a reunion and the bishop of Kerry is going</p> <p>43:20 Good to see teams like London and New York in the senior championship but you don't want to see them pulverised either. Great New York teams used to beat Kerry in national league finals in the 50s. Brilliant footballers.</p> <p>44:17 Mentions a young man from the Ballymun Kickems club and his father was a Dingleman. The younger man was getting married to an American girl and the previous year (2008) he won the American Junior Championship with the Texan Cowboys. He was immensely proud of his medal. It meant the world to him.</p> <p>45:05 In 1976 he was in Peru and arranged to meet his mother in California. She travelled with the All Stars and the Kerry team who were on a tour and playing games. There was also a game between the Irish clergy in California and the Irish lads who were building the Alaska pipeline in Balboa Stadium.</p> <p>46:40 He played a game in Rome in 1971 with the Irish clergy against Aer Lingus, an annual event played in the grounds of the American College. He scored a great goal in the first half but the following day the credit for the goal in the Irish Press was given to an Edwin Irwin. The American clergy in Rome</p> |
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| | <p>would be looking on at the games bemused.</p> <p>49:30 Sometimes there are fallouts in the GAA, especially when it comes to boundaries. The parish of Firies in Kerry is vulnerable as nine parishes bound the Firies parish, so if 2 players joined each of the surrounding parishes Firies would lose 18 players</p> <p>50:45 Was working in Peru and went to the beach pucking around. It was winter time and not many on the beach, 8 or 10 of them playing. A young man came over and asked if he was dead or alive. He was asleep and woke up and thought he was dead and in heaven when he saw the group pucking around. Turned out he was a student from Limerick who had gone to South America on a holiday but became involved in drugs and was now washed up there. They offered to help him. He declined as he did not feel that he was ready. Nobody knows what happened to him.</p> <p>54:15 Very reliant on BBC World Service while in Peru. Wrote to a Jacob de Freece at BBC regularly asking for GAA results from home. He would read them out on the World Service. Priests in other parts of the world benefited from that too and actually heard some of the letters being read out. The BBC presenters were hopeless at reading out the results so he wrote again, asking if they could get a commentator from Ireland to read out the GAA results. This was not possible due to union issues.</p> <p>56:00 In London in 1972 trying to listen to the replay of the All-Ireland between Kerry and Offaly. In a garden on a wet Sunday with a radio tied to a telegraph pole listening to the match. Might have looked a bit suspicious to the locals seeing as there were bombs going off around London at the time.</p> <p>57:20 One of his greatest GAA memories is listening to the radio in 1955 when Kerry beat Dublin because some of the Dr Crokes players were on the team. Some of his ancestors were involved with the 1903 team and he feels a connection with that</p> <p>59:25 Great memories of when Dr Crokes won the All-Ireland club championship in 1992. He said mass for the team that morning in the Grand Hotel in Malahide.</p> <p>01:01:15 Kerry missing out on the five-in-a-row was a low point. He was walking through Dublin in the rain feeling miserable after the game when a joyful Offaly supporter was walking towards him. Turned out he knew the man from London. The man, McGinty was a musician. It was good to</p> |
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| | <p>meet McGinty so happy, but he himself was feeling down.</p> <p>01:01:45 To be gracious in victory and gracious in defeat is important. 'A bad winner is bad news'.</p> <p>01:02:25 One year Dr Crokes lost five finals but they went on to win the All-Ireland club championship in 1992.</p> <p>01:03:10 Knows some of the descendants of the Kerry hurlers who won the county's first ever All-Ireland in 1891. The team paid their own way to the final - 16 shillings a man. A man named Willie O'Connell's grandfather was on that team. They arrived back to Tralee on the train late at 1am. They stayed the night in Tralee as it was so late. It was 21-a-side at the time. Willie O'Connell got home at 12:10 the following day and his mother ordered him to get outside and cut the briars before he would be given any dinner - not a great welcome for a man after winning an All-Ireland medal.</p> <p>01:05:00 In 1892 Laune Rangers played the club final in Dublin and lost, said they were not used to the constant hissing and booing of the 'metropolitans'. They arrived into Dublin for the game at 5am. In later years they went on to win titles. The hurlers and that football team were the basis for Kerry's future success and great credit is due to them.</p> <p>01:07:23 GAA at the moment is great, but not the corporate boxes. Recalls a time when it was frowned upon for people working in the banks to play football; now you have the Bank of Ireland All Stars and the AIB club championship - a huge mindshift.</p> <p>01:09:45 People criticise prices for All-Ireland tickets but they pay twice as much to go see Neil Diamond or Leonard Cohen</p> <p>01:12:30 Radio na Gaeltachta do a great job of covering local games that national media cannot.</p> <p>01:14:30 Disempowerment of the clubs - voice of the club must be listened to. Mentions Ford sponsoring the centenary championship in 1984 even though they were closing down in Cork. More and more, clubs are less listened to by county board, especially junior clubs. Club convention should also be held before county convention - not the case in Kerry at the moment. The club is the heart and soul of the GAA.</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 type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person <input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Historian of the GAA |
| Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played) | Dr Crokes [Kerry] player 1959 - 1969; Desmonds London [England] player 1969-1973 Titles: U-21 East Kerry 1964 O'Donoghue Cup (East Kerry) 1962 |
| Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for) | N/A |
| Format | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual |
| Duration | Length of Interview: 01:20:00 |
| 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: Aidan O'Donoghue

Date: 25th Nov 2009