

GAA Oral History Project
Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Arlene Crampsie
Date of Interview	17 th Feb 2010
Location	The Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Joe Flynn
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1947 Home County: Leitrim
Education	Primary: Kilnagross NS, Co. Leitrim Secondary: St. Mel's, Longford, Co. Longford Third Level: UCD
Family	Siblings: 2 brothers & 4 sisters Current Family if Different: Married to Mary with 3 sons and 1 daughter
Club(s)	Kiltubrid; St. Mary's, Carrick-on-Shannon
Occupation	Retired Teacher
Parents' Occupation	Shop, Post Office and Farmer [Father]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil
Other Club/Society Membership(s) (Optional)	Musical Society, Church Choir, Historical Society

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Date of Report	15 th August 2012
Period Covered	1920s - 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Leitrim, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Dublin, Galway, Cavan
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA Abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, Irish Language, Culture, Scór, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Alcohol, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Food and Drink, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Joe has been involved in the GAA in his native Leitrim and beyond all his life – as a supporter, player, coach and administrator. He recalls his early days in Carrick-on-Shannon and how the priests helped to establish the club. The community were involved too, raising funds to purchase grounds and participating in GAA events. Joe has experienced many aspects of GAA life – from the simplicity of the association in his youth to the disappointment of losing an All-Ireland Colleges final with St. Mel's to the highs of Leitrim winning a Connacht championship. He was also very much involved in Scór. He sees the GAA as a life-enhancing force and despite his long involvement, he still marvels at what it, and the men, women and children who make it what it is, can achieve.</p> <p>00:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:20 Earliest GAA memory is back when he was in primary school near Carrick-on-Shannon. The local club was St Mary's. Their house was on the edge of the parish near the border. His principal was fanatical about GAA and got him into it. The neighbouring club was Kiltubrid and he played for them. A Brother Placid from the secondary school gave him a trial for the Under-14 team and selected him. He was on the first St Mary's championship-winning team, claiming the minor championship in 1965. The players still get together to this day.</p>

03:20 He was a border at St. Mel's in Longford, a GAA nursery. A lot of Leitrim players attended either there or St. Pat's in Cavan. St. Pat's took part in the MacRory Cup and St. Mel's in the Leinster Cup and the Hogan Cup. At St. Mel's footballers had a better time of it. He was on the junior team and then the senior team, contesting 4 All-Irelands and winning two. They beat St. Jarlath's of Tuam in 1962. They came up against St Brendan's of Killarney and Northern Ireland side Abbey CBS. St. Finian's Gormanston were also good. In the 1960s the Down team that featured Joe Lennon revolutionised the way the game was played. There were only 120 boys in St Mel's but they enjoyed huge success. It was mostly only the borders that played football. Football was something to look forward to at school, and you could get away with certain things if you were on the team that other pupils could not.

07:30 He played for the Leitrim minors around that time, where former St. Mel's trainer Fr Manning was in charge. He had training methods that were of a higher standard. He was parish priest in Annaduff and chairman of the board.

08:45 He became involved in administration early - as chairman of the club, selector and team manager. He enjoyed it. It kept him in touch with the youth over the years. He was also a teacher at Leitrim VEC and worked with school teams until he retired. He never had difficulty in a classroom as a result - there was a mutual respect there. The school won many Connacht Under-15 junior titles, as well as a Connacht senior title.

10:30 In 1994 the vocational sector had a county team, which he managed. In 1995 they reached the All-Ireland in Croke Park and lost to a Donegal team. He met a lot of people through it, and got a taste for administration and represented Leitrim vocational schools on the Connacht Council as a delegate. When his involvement with the school ended he became the Leitrim delegate on the Connacht Council but the 'five-year rule' meant he had to move on. He was also on the executive of the Leitrim County Board. He also became involved with Páirc Seán MacDiarmada. George O'Toole was chairperson of the club, of Leitrim and of the Connacht Council and Joe helped him out, working as chairperson of the Páirc Seán Committee. Health and safety regulations hit attendances and something had to be done. They bought extra land around the pitch. He worked closely with the county board on completing a new stand in Carrick-on-

Shannon. Leitrim has not had much success at national level but that does not dampen enthusiasm for the GAA in the county. Their supporters are resilient.

15:40 Leitrim went 67 years without tasting success. There were some victories, like an Under-21 Connacht title in 1977. The minors reached the All-Ireland final in 1956. In 1998 they won a Connacht championship. Those little things keep people going, and locals put their hands in their pockets to help out.

17:05 They have had major success with Scór. He was in a ballad group that got to the All-Ireland final two years in a row - 1981 and 1982. The whole county owes a debt of gratitude to the GAA as an organisation for what it has done.

18:40 Ladies football is big in Leitrim. Some people think camogie is the most suitable sport for ladies but Joe disagrees. Women have done a lot for the GAA and this ought to be recognised. There was a time when the last thing you would think of when building a facility was to include ladies toilets; now it is one of the first things to be taken care of as women attend games in large numbers. There is still room to improve facilities for women.

20:45 When he was young there were often 12 of them travelling in a car. Many had no gear and they togged out in the field. In Carrick-on-Shannon there was 'the bull field' and they togged out in sheds along the side of the field. They often played in Cloone and washed their feet in the river that ran alongside the field.

22:45 Joe came from a farming background and if there was a match on you got your farming duties done early so you wouldn't miss anything. They cycled to and from games often. One time he was playing with a person who told him that they had been playing golf beforehand. Joe had been spraying potatoes all day, which involved walking backwards. He was too embarrassed to tell him that. They were naturally fit from all the cycling and farm work, although they did train every day at college's level. There were less games back then and other things like going on holidays or stag parties never interfered with fixtures - Sunday was for football and that was it.

26:10 Football was very important at St. Mel's. It was almost an unofficial part of the entrance exam. There weren't other sports played there except for handball. The priests had the

	<p>same timetable as the students, so when everybody's day was done they had football training for an hour and a quarter. The seniors and juniors trained together and it was very competitive. Joe played with Liam Mulvihill at St. Mel's. Liam won an All-Ireland with St. Mel's and many of the players at St. Mel's went on to play senior football with their counties - Leitrim, Longford, Offaly. Michael Ryan, later an Offaly full-back, was at St. Mel's. There was a great bond between the lads and it meant everything to them.</p> <p>30:00 When playing for the college you always got in to various county grounds and there were inter-county referees like Eamon Mowles, John Dowling or Simon Deignan from Cavan officiating, so the boys felt very important. After a game they were brought to a hotel for a big meal. They really enjoyed that - as borders they did not really have a 'home' and the food at school was mostly bland, so eating at a hotel was a real privilege. They didn't like to play against Finian's of Mullingar, a diocesan college because they would be brought back to their refectory to eat and the food was no better than at their own college. Joe really enjoyed those days and has good memories of it.</p> <p>32:05 The other pupils in the school could not go to games to support Joe and their friends. There was no way of transporting them, unless it was a provincial final; allowances would be made then. In 1963 there was the incident which became known as 'the big breakout'. The supporters were not allowed to go to the All-Ireland final but they did anyway. They left the first years behind but everyone else went. Some senior students organised it - you paid a senior student to take you under his wing and get you a train ticket. At Edgeworthstown they were afraid a car would be waiting but it wasn't. They made it to Dublin and the team won. Vincent Gill of The Longford News wrote about it in a humorous way and they found it very funny, although the boys faced a major inquisition back at school.</p> <p>35:45 Joe was on the losing All-Ireland team to St. Jarlath's of Tuam the following year. There was a lot of hype leading up to the game. They drew the first game and it went to a replay. Some of the Mel's boys came down with the flu but the game could not be postponed with the Leaving Cert coming up. The weather was awful on the day and they lost.</p> <p>37:05 The GAA has dominated his entire life. He was an officer of the county board, a development officer, a Connacht Council delegate, chairperson of the board. He trained school</p>
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and club teams, participated in Scór. The GAA took precedence over his other interests. His wife was involved in the GAA too, as were his children. He loves to see people involved in sport. He played hurling and they were quite strong in the 1960s. This would happen as a result of an outsider with an interest in hurling coming to work in the locality. One such person was Tomás O'Riordan, a Limerick man who would have hurled for his county. He promoted it a lot in Leitrim, and he played football with a local club, going on to win a county championship with them. Joe played hurling up to Under-16 level but his eyesight was not good enough for it. In the 1970s they had an underage team that made an All-Ireland final, and that was down to a few select people who put everything into it.

41:35 The Carrick-on-Shannon club was founded in the late 1940s. The Presentation Brothers came to the town and they got things going. The parish priests came together and formed the club. The club did not have a pitch. The 'bull field' was in Roscommon and they played games there. It was a community field and they shared it with Shannon Gaels. Livestock would also be sold there on certain occasions. George O'Toole bought some ground in the middle of the town and eventually sold some of it to the club, which was chaired by Pat Murtagh at the time. Sean Murray was also involved and the two of them did the deal. The pitch was in a very central location but was ultimately too small. In the 1960s Fr Claffey, a curate in the town from Offaly, felt that St Mary's should have a proper pitch - at the time Leitrim were playing their home county games in either Roscommon or Ballinamore.

45:05 When buying the pitch they worried that they would be charged a higher price if the seller knew the GAA was after it. There was a farm for sale outside the town so they approached a businessman in town named Kevin Doherty and asked him to purchase it on their behalf. The auctioneer said a bid of £2,000 had been made on it but Kevin Doherty did not believe this and decided to call his bluff. Kevin was wrong. Six months later the GAA approached the man who bought the farm, offered him £2,000 for half of it. That's how their pitch came about. The rest of the farm has been bought by the GAA since.

47:55 Páirc Mac Diarmada, named after the Leitrim patriot Seán MacDiarmada, came into existence in 1964. It is on the N4 and has good parking close by. Joe is very proud of it. On the opening day Leitrim played Donegal and Down played

	<p>Galway. There were no dressing rooms at the time. John D Hickey and other writers at the time came to watch. It was only a challenge game but attracted 5,000 people. The ground was used by the club and also by the county, so that sometimes led to conflict between the club and county committees over ownership and upkeep issues. The club did not get a ground of their own until 2000. They did have the smaller ground in the 1960s but that was not suitable for adult games.</p> <p>53:00 For Joe, the GAA is very much modelled on the organisation of institutions like the Church, where strong figureheads were seen as important. And the Church had a huge influence on the GAA. When a small community was in a final everybody went to Mass that morning, and the cup would be returned to the church. Priests would enter the dressing room before the big match. The support of the Church lent an element of credibility to the GAA.</p> <p>56:55 Pádraig Ó Ríocháin was once secretary of the county board, back in the 1920s. He was a teacher and the first to introduce a school team in Joe's school. Joe played football games on school sports days and one of his first games was against Kiltoghert. Pádraig had taught them all the skills and introduced them to club football. In secondary school teachers encouraged him to play too. Many teachers have occupied administrative roles in the GAA in Leitrim. National GAA figures who were teachers include Seán Ó Síocháin, Liam Mulvihill, Pádraig Ó Duffaigh, Joe McDonagh, Seán McCague. In Leitrim you had Tommy Moran and Antón McGowan occupying major roles.</p> <p>01:02:20 Primary school is a very formative time for children and Cumann na mBunscol is strong in Leitrim. Female teachers are prominent too, like Marie Lee from Kiltubrid who is in the Hall of Fame. The teaching profession has given a lot to the GAA.</p> <p>01:01:40 Celebrations can often be over the top. Joe sees too much drinking going on, but sees this behaviour as accepted as normal by society. In the past Joe won a minor championship and they went home afterwards. That would not happen now. They didn't have big celebrations in the past. There wasn't much money around and many did not drink until they were 21.</p> <p>01:03:55 For fundraising they often had raffles, or 'the American Tea Party, or 'the Chicken Supper', which allowed</p>
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the bar to serve later than usual. Permission from the courts was needed for this. The American Tea Party was when people would invite a table of people, prepare tea and cakes for them, and then charge an entrance fee. They also had card nights and Christmas raffles. Animals were often offered as prizes.

01:08:35 In 1963 when Joe was 16 he won a Cusack Stand All-Ireland final ticket in the club draw. It was his first time going and he hasn't missed one since. He travelled with his neighbour in a car to that first final and was in awe of Croke Park. People were sitting on walls all around the perimeter of the pitch.

01:10:15 When Joe was in school in the 1950s, education finished for many people at sixth class. That changed when free education came in 1967. Joe became a teacher in 1968. Clubs welcomed teachers. Joe started off as a delegate from the club at county board meetings. Then he was nominated for a place on the county board. Then he allowed his name go forward to be nominated for a position. He was also chairman of Bórd na nÓg. Being involved in one thing led you to being invited to get involved in other projects/committees. Joe has great admiration for people who have combined administrative positions with their own everyday jobs. It is not an easy thing to do. Some counties paid administrators but Leitrim GAA could not afford this. Joe would like GAA funds to be distributed more equally.

01:17:15 Joe enjoyed his time with Connacht Council immensely. During that time he was at Croke Park on the GAC (now the CCCC). He got to know many people. Connacht adopted London and New York into their competitions so he got to visit there and saw the efforts people were making overseas. At Gaelic Park in New York people stayed behind after the game, having a drink and a chat. He worked with Tommy Moran on the Connacht Council, a Leitrim man and a real character. It was a good experience. The furthest he has gone for a match is to Boston. He was a Coaching and Games Development Officer for the Connacht Council. They brought players to Boston and New York on a trip.

01:21:30 The economy has always had an impact on the local pitch. They now have good facilities. The employment situation of players affects things. Communications have improved with technological developments. There is less insistence on the use of Irish for communications - something

which was taken too far in the past. Getting wholehearted volunteers was always difficult but they still manage to get people.

01:25:45 Scór was the winter sport for Joe. They sang in English and in Irish. Joe was always in a novelty act and one time they were disqualified and contested the verdict. He also took part in quiz competitions. They had a lot of fun because you didn't take it too seriously. On Friday nights they ran an Irish night in a local hotel and tourists would come along. All the Scór groups got involved and the tourists loved it. There was also Scór na nÓg and parents loved to see their kids involved in that. Joe won a Connacht title with a ballad group in 1981/82 and went straight through to the All-Ireland final Dublin. RTÉ took an interest in this and wanted them to sing in 1981 but they refused.

01:33:20 Joe's GAA hero was Packie McGarty, a great Leitrim servant who played from the 1950s to the 1970s. He could have played for any county. Michael Martin from the local club was another one, he became an All-Star. In terms of administrators he admired Tommy Moran from Leitrim, Central Council delegate and a county secretary. Liam Mulvihill is another admired by Joe. President Joe McDonagh was very flamboyant.

01:36:00 Joe made headlines in 1990 for advocating the allowing of foreign games in Croke Park. He voted to open it up and feels that the GAA has benefited greatly from opening up. He didn't agree with the banning of foreign games. As a student in Dublin in the 1960s he would attend soccer games in Milltown on a Sunday. For Joe, the GAA is conservative but not narrow-minded. Change comes about slowly. Some of the criticism of the GAA is motivated by jealousy. It could be argued that some of the bans served a purpose at the time.

01:40:15 His best GAA memory is 1994 when Leitrim won a Connacht championship by beating Mayo. The team got a great welcome home and Joe helped organise the welcoming party. There was such euphoria in the wake of that victory. Sligo won it in 2008 and it was great to see Eamonn O'Hara lift the cup and the pride amongst the supporters.

01:44:25 Disappointments include Leitrim losing the Connacht championship by two points in the 1950s. Packie McGarty almost beat Galway single-handedly that day in Hyde Park. Losing the Colleges' All-Ireland final was tough as well. But losing is important for one's development as a

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	<p>person.</p> <p>01:46:20 The GAA is a way of life for Joe and his family. It helps them bond. One of his sons is involved in the GAA in Wexford, others train teams and Joe is delighted to see this.</p>
Involvement in GAA	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	<p>Played until he was 26 or 27, then came back at 32. Won minor championship with the club, Leinster colleges junior and senior and a senior league.</p>
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	<p>Has been involved in administration since the 1970s,</p> <p>Club: Chairman, Secretary</p> <p>County: Chairman (2009+), Development Officer (c. 1983), Chairman Bord na nÓg (1990 - 1992), Chairman Leitrim Vocational Schools (c. 1980), Delegate to Connacht Council (1994 – 2010).</p>
Format	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
Duration	<p>Length of Interview: 01:52:56</p>
Language	<p>English</p>

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: _____Arlene Crampsie_____

Date: _____15/08/12_____