

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Mark Farrelly
Date of Interview	23 rd Aug 2010
Location	NUI Maynooth, Co. Kildare
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Proinnsias Breathnach
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: N/A Home County: Waterford
Education	N/A
Family	N/A
Club(s)	Abbeyside GAA Club [Waterford]
Occupation	N/A
Parents' Occupation	N/A
Religion	N/A
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

REFERENCE NO. WD/1/4

Date of Report	24 th July 2012
Period Covered	1950s – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Waterford, Kildare, Kilkenny, Cork, Tipperary, Tyrone, Armagh, Westmeath
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Education, Religion, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Challenges, Politics, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>This interview begins with Proinnsias Breathnach reflecting on growing up in Waterford of the 1950s. This was a golden age of hurling in the county and he recalls listening on radio to the 1957 All-Ireland hurling final, in which Waterford appeared. The team included a number of players from Breathnach's local club of Abbeyside, which had been defeated in two county finals in the 1950s to a 'great' Mount Sion side. Breathnach talks about the geography of Gaelic games in Waterford and the pre-eminence of hurling in the city and other urban areas, exemplified in the popularity of the street leagues. Breathnach talks about his father's interest in Gaelic games and varied sporting interests of his siblings, which range from rowing to tennis. In addition to hurling, Breathnach also played soccer and he discusses the attitudes of the Christian Brothers towards the playing of 'another code'.</p> <p>Breathnach took up a job as an academic in Maynooth in 1972, moving to the area in 1975. He talks about becoming involved once again. He talks about playing internal leagues in the college and the levels of involvement in sport among clerics and academics. Breathnach also became involved in club activity in Kildare and he contrasts the organisation of games in Kildare with his home county. A critic of GAA administration at local and national level, Breathnach raises issues of political 'bias' when examining the failings of the GAA in Waterford. Breathnach is also critical of the coverage – past and present – of Gaelic games in local newspapers and on local radio, which has tended to be dominated by GAA officials. In the interest of providing more independent analysis, he became a contributor through letters to the local</p>

	<p>Waterford press. Later, he contributed a blog to the An Fear Rua website. His fascination with statistics encouraged him toward the statistical analysis of Gaelic games and working with the Waterford hurlers. He assesses the growing role that match analysis plays in Gaelic games. Towards the end of the interview, Breathnach considers ways in which the GAA might be improved, urging, for example, a greater emphasis on club over county activity. A supporter of the GPA, he concludes by expressing a fascination.</p> <p>0:25 Earliest memories of the GAA: recollections of going to Fraher field for matches on a Sunday. Refers to 'rows, fights and pitch invasions.'</p> <p>1:00 Listening to the All-Ireland hurling final in 1957 at 8 years of age, when Waterford lost by a point.</p> <p>1:10 Mentions local club Abbeyside reaching 1955 and 1957 county finals against the 'great' Mount Sion. Lists some of the Mount Sion players: Philly Grimes, Seamus Power, Frankie Walsh, Larry Guinan, Martin Óg Morrissey.</p> <p>1:30 Talks about how Mount Sion were viewed during the 1950s by Abbeyside.</p> <p>1:48 Hurling in primary school and in the local farmer's field.</p> <p>2:00 Comments on being raised in a housing estate and the absence of football. 'You can play hurling and soccer on the street, but you can't play gaelic football.' Mentions that football was played in the rural parts of parish, with hurling and soccer in the town parts.</p> <p>2:25 Refers to his involvement in soccer. Remarks that Christian Brothers didn't like it.</p> <p>2:30 Underage games: Talks about inter-schools primary competition in the diocese. Says the local club didn't have a pitch, so games were organised in fields. Reference to lack of structure, although an Under 16 competition was introduced in the 1960s. Abbeyside lost an Under 16 football final by 2 points in 1965.</p> <p>3:18 Talks about street leagues organised by club when he was 12 or 13 years old.</p> <p>3:25 Remarks on the quality of the current club organisation and the numbers of children involved. 'Hundreds and hundreds of kids...'</p> <p>3:35 Describes the GAA as a 'fantastic part of the</p>
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	<p>community’.</p> <p>3:45 Parental interest in sport and the geography of Gaelic games in Waterford. Comments on the difference in interest levels among his mother and father and the places where hurling and football are played. Remarks that father came from the Ring Gaeltacht and was a ‘good’ football – played with Dungarvan in the 1930s and 40s.</p> <p>4:30 Being brought by his father to the 1963 All-Ireland hurling final between Waterford and Kilkenny. Mentions that his father was a lorry driver and would bring people on the back of the lorry to matches. Describes him as a ‘big influence’.</p> <p>4:50 Recounts story told by his father about playing in county football final in Dungarvan. Relates to an individual picked on the basis of his brother’s involvement with county board. Mentions that when he got ‘hit’ in the game, a team-mate told him not to get up.</p> <p>5:50 Recounts another story from his father. Relates to a club called Ballycoe in the parish which won junior football championship in 1949-50, but didn’t want to go senior. They rustled up a lot of older players and the following year when they met Dungarvan, they lost heavily, but didn’t concede a goal. Tells of the report in the local newspaper and ‘standard phrases’ used.</p> <p>7:20 Refers to some of the phrases used by newspaper journalists – e.g. ‘another code meant soccer’.</p> <p>7:35 Regret in not sitting down and getting all his father’s stories.</p> <p>8:05 Talks about having poor eyesight, wearing glasses and not being particularly good. Describes his physical attributes. Says he played junior hurling ‘at home’ and senior club hurling in Kildare. Comments on the difference in standard between Waterford and Kildare.</p> <p>8:40 Mentions ‘playing a lot’ in the college where he works. Playing with the students in internal competitions during the 1970s, when there were a lot of clerical students in Maynooth.</p> <p>8:50 Talks about the ‘hostels’ in the college, the senior and junior section of the seminary and the ‘externals’ – as the lay students were known.</p> <p>9:14 Says he started in 1972 in Maynooth and that hurling is</p>
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	<p>not 'nearly as well organised' as it was then.</p> <p>9:20 Remarks on his lack of serious involvement with the organisation or administration of hurling in Maynooth.</p> <p>9:40 Mentions that there were several professors in Maynooth who had an interest in the GAA: Liam Ryan, who played with Limerick in the 1950s; Gerry Maher from West Tipperary. Mentions also Malachy O'Rourke, who was 'famously fired' by the college when he stopped being a priest in the late 1970s. Says he was in charge when Maynooth won Sigerson Cup in 1976; Tom Marsh from south Tipperary, described as a 'very good coach'.</p> <p>10:35 Mentions that they have, for the most part, outside coaches in now.</p> <p>10:40 Remarks on leaving Waterford at 17 and refers to getting a lift in a back of a lorry and changing at the side of a field.</p> <p>11:10 Describes junior hurling as 'notorious', combing old players who were unfit and 'dirty as hell' and up and coming players.</p> <p>11:40 Comments on suffering from 'corner forward syndrome' and explains what it is.</p> <p>12:00 Also remarks on 'bias in selection' in the GAA and the existence of cliques.</p> <p>12:30 Talks about moving to live in Maynooth in 1975 and mentions not playing Gaelic for 8 years over an incident as a juvenile in 1966. Recalls that he playing soccer, as well as hurling – remarks on how unfavourably it was viewed but that the ban didn't apply until you were 18.</p> <p>13:00 Mentions playing in Cappoquin with the bare 15 and scoring three goals. Mentions that for the next round there were 35 available after all the 'boys scouts' returned and he wasn't picked. Recalls mentor, a 'big republican', making a speech about the intolerability of having a player in their midst who played another code.</p> <p>13:45 Mentions not picking a hurley for eight years afterwards.</p> <p>14:05 Recalls taking the game back up: having Sean Silke form Galway studying geography in Maynooth and going for a puck around and getting involved in internal leagues. Mentions that 'contact lenses' helped greatly.</p>
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	<p>14:30 Mentions that Waterford had a very strong soccer team in the 1960s.</p> <p>14:50 Joining the Maynooth club and playing with them until they folded. Remarks on the fragility of hurling in parts of Kildare.</p> <p>15:01 Decision to join Leixlip and playing for a few years. Mentions that he was 42 when he finished hurling and explains the decision to retire.</p> <p>15:25 Reflects on the nationalist/republican reputation of the Christian Brothers in Waterford and their attitude to his involvement in setting up a youth soccer in his leaving cert year. Comments that they banned all the soccer players playing for school team and the student's response.</p> <p>16:20 Remarks that they couldn't pick on him because he was good at school, but that others weren't as fortunate. 'They seized their opportunity to victimise them...'</p> <p>16:45 Talks about Mount Sion putting in a soccer team in the 1960s and being refused by the Christian Brothers play in a final.</p> <p>17:00 Remarks on current attitudes to soccer and rugby and opposition to the opening of Croke Park. Comments that any sport should be encouraged and that competition between sports should be 'friendly'. Criticises 'old fashioned' ideas.</p> <p>17:35 Tells stories about not being able to play Gaelic games if you became a cleric. Mentions that it is only recently that they continued to play after becoming priests. Refers to Liam Ryan, Professor of Sociology, stopped playing hurling.</p> <p>18:45 Tells story of Limerick winning Munster hurling championship in 1955 and playing first round in 1956 against Cork – the clerics on the team couldn't 'get out' for the Cork game and they lost.</p> <p>19:28 Recounts story from Liam Ryan about Limerick in the 1957 championship and being beaten by Waterford in first round. Ryan became a priest after that.</p> <p>20:00 Reflects on the differences in playing hurling in Waterford and Kildare – remarks that half the team in Maynooth were 'blow-ins' but there were other good hurlers.</p> <p>20:40 Talks about clubs in Kildare that would be strong at hurling – Broadford on the border with Meath (refers to a 'belt' of hurling clubs in Meath); Ardclough, where UCD had the</p>
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	<p>Lyons estate and where hurlers from the country would have worked on the farm; Coill Dubh, which was formed from Bord na Móna, who built a housing estate and whose workers came places like Tipperary.</p> <p>21:50 Talks about hurlers being ‘mainly blow-ins’ as well as the current profile of Kildare hurling teams – the county’s performance in Christy Ring Cup and their minors appearance in the ‘B’ final.</p> <p>22:10 Says his main interest in hurling was following Waterford – ‘that was my big passion’.</p> <p>22:17 Regrets that his first championship match to attend was in 1960, a year after they won All-Ireland in 1959. Talks about attending the 1963 final, driving up and paying at the gate.</p> <p>23:00 Mentions his brother being on holidays in Butlins in 1977 ringing to go to 1977 All-Ireland semi-final between Kerry and Dublin. Contrasts their ability to walk up and pay in with the necessity for tickets today. Remarks on the popularity of the GAA and the need to control crowds.</p> <p>23:50 Talks of how ‘enthraling’ it was to go up to Limerick for Waterford matches. Recalls the crowds of Waterford supporters on train; the walk up to pitch and the colour on the road, including the ‘three card trick’ people. Getting ‘hooked’ on the excitement of the game and the occasion.</p> <p>25:30 Recalls Waterford playing a league game in Cork 1961 and getting a lift, aged 11, and getting the train home on his own.</p> <p>26:38 Talks about Tom Cheasty, his ‘unusual style’ and how he started with Waterford.</p> <p>27:16 Mentions that his own club had three players on Waterford team in the 1950s, including Austin Flynn and Donal Whelan. Tells story of how Austin Flynn was notified that he was about to debut for the county.</p> <p>28:50 Mentions seeing Christy Ring playing in Dungarvan in 1962. Says he was also too late to see the ‘great John Keane’ play.</p> <p>28:45 Recalls Eddie Keher making his debut with senior team in 1959. Refers also to Ollie Walsh.</p> <p>29:11 Comments on Wexford hurling in the late 1950s, early 1960s. References to Nicky Rackard, Billy Rackard and Nick O’Donnell.</p>
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	<p>29:20 Comments on Cork hurling, with reference to Jimmy Brohan.</p> <p>29:24 Describes Tipperary as the 'big team'. Between 1956 and 1966, Cork never won a Munster championship. Mentions the rivalry between Waterford and Tipperary. Refers to Tipp players, John Doyle, Tony Wall, Jimmy Doyle, Donie Nealon, Mackey McKenna.</p> <p>30:00 Talks about looking back on past games now on television and changing his view on their quality. Remarks also on the changes in the shape of the hurley and the decline of ground hurling.</p> <p>30:32 Leaving Waterford for UCD in late 1960s, then to Canada and then to Maynooth. Having a job meant he could afford a car and he could travel to matches himself.</p> <p>30:55 Reflects on Waterford hurling fortunes in the late 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s. Recalls Waterford losing to Mayo in a league and being 'murdered' by Cork in two Munster championships in 1982 and 1983.</p> <p>31:25 Remarks on 'massive improvement' in Waterford at underage level in the late 1980s, early 1990s and developing a 'constant stream' of quality of players. Comments on the transformation of the county's fortunes.</p> <p>31:55 Spending a year in Canada on sabbatical in 1978 and driving to a park where he heard there was hurling played – there was nobody there.</p> <p>32:25 Says he didn't follow Kildare hurlers, but would go occasionally to watch their footballers. Remarks that he served on committee of his local club in Kildare, as well as PRO.</p> <p>32:50 Describes himself as a 'Waterford man'.</p> <p>33:05 Recalls Kildare losing 1998 All-Ireland football final to Galway. Went to Australia the following day.</p> <p>33:20 Remarks on the difficulty of following Kildare hurlers when you're going to watch the likes of Waterford and Cork.</p> <p>33:35 Remarks on his lack of major interest in Waterford football.</p> <p>34:12 Considers the geography of Gaelic games in Waterford and Clare and explains the reasons. Mentions the role of geography in Cork, Kerry and Wexford.</p>
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	<p>35:05 Talks about the strength of hurling in urban areas in Waterford. Remarks the 'hurling on the greens' scheme in Waterford City, with tournaments organised in estates.</p> <p>36:20 Leaving club 'under a cloud' over the row he had, but would still support them in limited ways. Mentions also that he is no longer an active member of Maynooth club, but would continue to support them at matches.</p> <p>37:00 Reflecting on his work as PRO and coaching kids. Mentions the opening of dressingroom and challenge game against Fermanagh.</p> <p>37:15 Remarks on being a 'busy academic' and the difficulty in devoting time to sport.</p> <p>37:40 Attitudes towards sport among academic community: recalls a staff soccer team called 'Academicals' and playing in internal student leagues.</p> <p>38:40 Remarks that very few academics play support and mentions that sport conversations almost always involve English soccer. Says some staff object to the preoccupation with sport.</p> <p>39:45 Talks about the 'relief of getting out of an obsessive environment.' Mentions his partner, a Dublin woman, has an interest in going to games.</p> <p>40:32 Mentions having a house in Dungarvan and visiting regularly. Says you go into a local pub and start talking hurling right away.</p> <p>40:45 Mentions his brothers sporting interests: one playing soccer ahead of hurling; another brother had a passion for rowing and another who had an interest in tennis.</p> <p>41:30 Mentions that one sister would be interested, but the other three wouldn't.</p> <p>42:00 Reflects again on his brother's varied passions for sport.</p> <p>43:00 Remarks on being a regular letter writer to local newspaper in Waterford, mostly complaining about how county team was organised and suggesting alternatives. Says it's a testimony to the GAA that it has survived the people who have run it.</p> <p>43:35 Mentions becoming involved with website An Fear Rua, writing reports on hurling matches. Now has a blog called An</p>
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	<p>Móltoir, doing statistical analysis of matches.</p> <p>44:07 Discusses involvement with Waterford supporters club in Dublin.</p> <p>44:40 Describes himself as an ‘independent voice, but not a crank’. As a social scientist, he says he looks for patterns when analysing hurling matches.</p> <p>45:20 Criticisms of the administration at local and county level in Waterford. Remarks on its ‘incompetence’ and suggests that Waterford GAA was run by a ‘Fianna Fáil clique’. Recalls Waterford in 1980s when Eamon Murphy, a non-Fianna Fáiler, got elected chairman. Recalls his achievements and the attacks he endured because he wasn’t an insider.</p> <p>46:44 Mentions that county board had only two secretaries between 1950 and 1995 – this meant that the same ‘old attitudes’ persisted.</p> <p>47:15 Contrasts the administration in Waterford with that he found in Kildare. He points to local Kildare website and newspapers and seeing the number of fixtures, the quality of organisation.</p> <p>48:05 Points out that senior club championship in Waterford closes down during the summer – ‘it’s crazy’. Points to row in Waterford over conceding home advantage for a sum of €50,000. Describes them as a ‘bit petty’.</p> <p>49:00 Recalls ‘famous case’ of the hurling manager county Down – described as a good motivator - and the reaction he got in Waterford. Suggests an inferiority complex in Waterford when it came to meeting Cork or Tipperary.</p> <p>50:00 Belief that the county board agenda was to secure ticket for an All-Ireland final – they had ‘no ambition’ for the county.</p> <p>52:20 Discusses his lack of support for Justin McCarthy as manager of county team and telling a county board official ‘we have to get rid of him.’ Remarks on the lack belief among county board officials that Waterford hurlers were a ‘big brand’.</p> <p>50:50 Offers criticism of local newspapers in Waterford, all four of which have GAA columns written by a local official. Says it precludes independent or critical analysis.</p> <p>51:40 Criticism of local radio coverage of the GAA.</p> <p>51:50 Remarks on lack of proper debate and his reasons for</p>
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	<p>writing to the newspapers.</p> <p>52:16 Comments that the website, An Fear Rua, generates public discussion, but that most county board in Waterford ‘don’t know how to use a computer’.</p> <p>52:53 Praises the work of Bord na nOg in Waterford, but questions quality of leadership at adult level. Mentions that Waterford doesn’t have a ‘decent county ground’ and refers to have different boards for east and west and two poor grounds.</p> <p>54:24 Talks about being approached in Parnell park to do statistical analysis for county team. Describes the work he does: trends over a period of matches, puck-outs won and lost, player errors etc. Says it’s a hobby and time-consuming.</p> <p>56:40 Talks about becoming aware of a scientific approach to sport, recalling a GAA column in the Evening Press by a ‘Tom Browne’ who observed the pattern of games. Discovered that Tom Browne was a schoolteacher, Jim Brennan.</p> <p>57:55 Mentions that it easier to have a structure in football, but comments on the impression made by Tyrone’s football’s strategy on Kilkenny’s Brian Cody.</p> <p>58:45 Considers the strengths of the Kilkenny hurling team – comments on their skills levels, their strength, their physicality.</p> <p>59:20 Considers the role that tactics can play in hurling: refers to Waterford’s defeat of Cork in 2010 Munster final and his preparation of a report on each Cork player in advance. Discusses his analysis of the Cork team and the way that individual players, like Cathal Naughton, play.</p> <p>1:02:30 Mentions the role of statistician with Armagh team in 2002 and the way they were structured and how they played e.g. the diagonal ball from Kieran McGeeney to inside forward line, Oisín McConville.</p> <p>1:03:33 Remarks on Tyrone and the role played by Brian Dooher.</p> <p>1:03:50 Offers criticism of Justin McCarthy – remarks that he had no game plan and didn’t believe in tactics. Mentions Eoin Kelly’s arrival on the scene in Waterford and how opposition got wise to the type of cross field ball he was being given.</p> <p>1:04:25 Recalls Dublin V Tyrone in 1995 and his surprise that Tyrone didn’t have a strategy for getting ball into Peter</p>
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	<p>Canavan. Contrasts this with the game-plan of Westmeath minors in getting ball to Dessie Dolan.</p> <p>1:05:40 Recalls meeting of Clare-Offaly in 1998 and the Offaly half-backs moving ball to Joe Dooley. Stresses the need to exploit weaknesses in opposition.</p> <p>1:06:11 Reflects on recent performance of Waterford in losing to Tipperary in a Munster final and their failure to identify flaws in their puck-out strategy.</p> <p>1:06:55 Mentions that all counties now have statisticians. Mentions that players are 'big' into it.</p> <p>1:07:50 Believes the GAA puts too much emphasis on county team to the detriment of clubs. Remarks on the need for a 're-balance'. Remarks also on the GAA's adoption of a county system and his belief that it built 'inequity' into the system. Also describes the provincial system as 'way out of date' and argue in favour of an open draw.</p> <p>1:09:00 Delight in seeing rise in popularity of club championships and expresses a preference for the replacement of county championship with an elite club championship. Refers, by way of example, to the profile of Carlow teams in club championship.</p> <p>1:09:40 Comments approvingly on Sean Kelly's introduction of junior and intermediate club championships.</p> <p>1:10:03 Comments on over investment in grounds in Munster, facilities that are hardly ever used.</p> <p>1:10:30 Comments on improvements in GAA administration and expresses his admiration for Sean Kelly, itemising his achievements – the introduction of Lory Meagher, Nicky Rackard and Christy Ring cups.</p> <p>1:10:50 Questions the resources invested in county teams.</p> <p>1:11:17 Believes the GAA is a very good organisation 'in most ways'.</p> <p>1:11:27 Comments on the absurdity of deciding rules at a national congress – suggests some of the delegates shouldn't have anything to do with it.</p> <p>1:12:00 Considers the GPA: recalls seeing Henry Shefflin in an advertisement and considers whether he had an arrangement with other members of panel. Suggests a 'pool system' for splitting endorsements.</p>
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	<p>1:13:00 Talks about the education of the players, and supporting the players in disputes in Limerick and Cork. Recommends tax relief for top athletes and fully supports idea of GPA – players need their own association.</p> <p>1:14:20 Final comments on GAA: reflects on its rise in popularity; the increase in coverage on television; the merchandising of the Association; the growth overseas. Stresses the need for a big sociological study and suggests the GAA – Aussie Rules notwithstanding - is without parallel.</p> <p>1:15:20 Mentions how GAA centre in Maynooth is used for parties, the aftermath of funerals etc. Says it's a community centre in a town without a community centre.</p> <p>1:50:50 Reference to Tom Humphries 'great book' Four Green Fields and the role of the GAA in creating communities in suburban Dublin, like Kilmacud.</p> <p>1:16:18 Mentions a cousin who is involved with an organisation trying to start small businesses – have decided to use GAA as a means of contacting people, as well as using their facilities. Reference also of Mary McAleese initiative to use GAA as a means to get retired people involved.</p> <p>1:16:55 Refers to his fascination with the non-sporting dimension to the GAA.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input 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>
<p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>N/A</p>

REFERENCE NO. WD/1/4

Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 1:17:10
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: Mark Farrelly

Date: _____ 24 July 2012 _____