

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

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| Name of Interviewer | Regina Fitzpatrick |
| Date of Interview | 18 th September 2013 |
| Location | Jack's home, near Blessington, Co. Wicklow. |
| Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname) | Jack Boothman |
| <u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u> | |
| Gender | Male |
| Born | Year Born: 1935 Home County: Wicklow |
| Education | Primary: Blessington Church of Ireland National School Secondary: The Kings Hospital, Dublin (1948-52) Third Level: Veterinary College, Shelbourne Road, Dublin. |
| Family | Siblings: 1 brother and 3 sisters Current Family if Different: Nuala (wife) and 6 children. |
| Club(s) | Blessington GAA [Wicklow] |
| Occupation | Veterinary Surgeon |
| Parents' Occupation | Farmers |
| Religion | Church of Ireland |
| Political Affiliation / Membership | None |
| Other Club/Society Membership(s) | None |

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| Date of Report | 20 th September 2013 |
| Period Covered | 1880s - 2013 |
| Counties/Countries Covered | Wicklow, Kildare, Dublin, Tyrone, Kilkenny, Derry, Down, Clare, Wexford, Offaly, Westmeath, Donegal, Carlow, Cork, Tipperary, Galway, Americas |
| Key Themes Covered | Administration, All-Ireland, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Ban on Security Forces, Career, Celebrations, Challenges, Childhood, Club History, Coaching, Commiserations, County History, Culture, Earliest Memories, Economy/Economics, Education, Emigration, Facilities, family involvement, food and drink, fundraising, GAA abroad, grounds, identity, impact on life, Irish history, Irish language, managing, media, Northern Ireland, opening of Croke Park, playing, politics, professionalism, purchase of grounds, refereeing, relationship with Association, relationships, religion, retirement, rivalries, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Club in the Community, Role of Women, Sacrifices, Socialising, Sponsorship, Supporting, The Troubles, Training, Travel, Violence, Volunteers |
| Interview Summary | <p>00:00:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:00:23 Born in Johnstown, Co. Kildare but raised in Blessington. Mother's Scottish background. Parents were farmers. His grandfather working for Lord Waterford in the Wicklow Mountains and later for the Palmerstown Estate near Johnstown. His mother attending the national school in Blessington.</p> <p>00:02:49 Married his father who was a small farmer in Blessington. Parents as hardworking, strict but liberal parents. Talks about his mother's Scots Presbyterian background and the influence of that on family/farm life. Talks about Sunday Observance in the Church of Ireland. His father's interest in going to football matches which started his interest in Gaelic games.</p> <p>00:04:30 Blessington GAA buying a field from his father near their home, running down to play there as children. Being taken to matches around West Wicklow by his father on an ass and cart. Growing up supporting and playing for Blessington. His understanding of the GAA as an association at the time.</p> <p>00:05:33 Talks about his involvement in GAA resulting in a sense of religious tolerance and a tolerance of all sport. Talks</p> |

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| | <p>about his parents as very principled people which influenced him greatly throughout his life.</p> <p>00:07:42 Attending the local Church of Ireland National School in Blessington and getting extra preparation there for applying for a scholarship to The Kings Hospital in Dublin as a boarder. Attending the Veterinary College and qualifying as a Veterinary Surgeon in 1959. Worked around Ireland and in Cornwall in England. Starting his own practice in Blessington in 1963. Mentions work place accident previous to this. Meeting his wife in Blessington and living in Cornwall for a couple of years.</p> <p>00:09:46 Father's background, old Blessington family. His father recovering the family farm and building it up over the years. Grew up in a hard working family.</p> <p>00:11:11 Description of Blessington when he was growing up. Talks about the steam tram that used to service Blessington running from the GPO to Poolaphuca and the number of accidents on the line.</p> <p>00:12:44 Mentions football and cúirting as pastimes. Centrality of Blessington GFC in life in Blessington. Gentry would fish and shoot. River Liffey running close to their family farm until it was flooded by the electrification scheme to create the Poolaphuca Dam and the Blessington Lakes. Swimming and fishing in the Blessington lakes. Lots of outdoor activity.</p> <p>00:14:40 Blessington club using various fields on his father's farm before they bought a field from him in 1946. The purchase of the field. Moving grounds during the Celtic Tiger.</p> <p>00:16:30 Playing football for Blessington. Lack of underage football in West Wicklow until the formation of the juvenile structures in the 1950s. Watching and playing with older players. Learning the skills there.</p> <p>00:17:58 Participation of Church of Ireland families in Gaelic games in West Wicklow. Sunday Observation as a barrier to playing but not to supporting the local club.</p> <p>00:19:04 The media more pre-occupied than the members of the GAA by Jack being the first Church of Ireland President of the GAA. It was never an issue in the GAA always treated with respect in the North and all around the country.</p> <p>00:20:05 His faith never an issue in the local club either. Talks about immigrants playing Gaelic games now and incidents of racism within the GAA now and when he was</p> |
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| | <p>playing.</p> <p>00:22:25 Talks about play being stopped at matches in Hollywood at 6pm for the Angelus.</p> <p>00:23:43 Church of Ireland's response to his involvement in Gaelic games.</p> <p>00:24:38 Childhood heroes: Wicklow players including Paddy Sullivan, Jim Rogers, Gerry Reilly. Rugby heroes when in college - the triple crown winners of the 1940s including Karl Mullen, Jackie Kyle. Knowing Karl in his adult life. Hurling heroes included Christy Ring, Mick Mackey, Jimmy Doyle. Friendships with John Doyle and Donnie Nealon.</p> <p>27:22 Local interest in racing given proximity to Punchestown. Closure of local national schools for the Punchestown Races every year. Getting off school in the Kings Hospital to go to Punchestown. Family interest in racing. His grandfather keeping race horses. Talks about local farmers races.</p> <p>00:28:57 No Gaelic games played in either the national school or the secondary school he attended. Playing Gaelic football among friends in The Kings Hospital on the rugby pitch. Handball, tennis and cricket played at school. Hitting the ball over the wall into Collins Military Barracks and the process of recovering it. Law Society now occupies the old Kings Hospital School which moved to Palmerstown.</p> <p>00:31:07 Enjoyed secondary school and the experience of being a boarder. Loved playing rugby there.</p> <p>00:31:27 Continued to play football in Blessington during the holidays. Talks about children today being brought home from the Gaeltacht to play matches. Talks about the important role of parents, particularly mothers in bringing their children to and from games and training. Voluntary workers as a key strength of the GAA.</p> <p>00:34:03 Enforcement of 'The Ban' in Wicklow. Suspensions for attending matches. His view on 'The Ban'. Talks about vigilance committees in Wicklow. The challenge of writing the history of the GAA.</p> <p>38:58 Blessington rivalries – mentions Manor Kilbride, Hollywood, Vallemount and other clubs around the lake. Rarely getting to play in Aughrim or 'across the hills'.</p> <p>00:40:07 Good pitch and facilities in Blessington club. Importance of having a fenced pitch in West Wicklow. Fighting at matches, toughness of games and division in</p> |
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| | <p>Wicklow.</p> <p>00:41:45 Returned to Blessington in 1963 and getting involved in Blessington GAA committee. Biggest challenge was manpower. How he became involved in the committee. Enjoying the organisational side of things. Being mentored by former GAA President Hugh Byrne. His approach to managing meetings and getting decisions passed. Enjoying the cut and thrust of meetings.</p> <p>00:45:57 Biggest issue for the club at that time were finance and manpower. Discusses the on-going issue of finance in the GAA in general.</p> <p>00:46:53 Getting involved in the West Wicklow Board, made up entirely of junior clubs. Becoming a delegate to Wicklow County Board. Becoming Chairman of the West Wicklow Board. His enjoyment of that position and the tight organisation of the West Board. Mentions Peter Keogh, his secretary at the time who went on to Chair Wicklow County Board and who is now President of Wicklow GAA. How Jack managed disciplinary issues.</p> <p>00:51:26 Geography of the GAA in Wicklow. Talks about being on Kildare and Carlow boarder. The mountain range dividing West Wicklow from the rest of the county. Felt that this left them at a disadvantage. Using illegal players. Not feeling like they could get fair play at the other side of the mountains.</p> <p>00:53:40 First impressions of Wicklow County Board when he became a representative in the mid-1960s.</p> <p>00:54:53 Same issues then as now, finance, fixtures, bad referees, grounds, etc. The development of grounds in Co. Wicklow. High Byrne's promotion of securing club grounds. Discusses the hard work that goes into developing a pitch in clubs, mentions Co. Tyrone.</p> <p>00:58:02 Being Vice-Chairperson of Wicklow County Board and what that involved. Being Chairman of the fixtures committee. Disappointment that he was never Chairman of Wicklow County Board. Enjoyment of all of the roles he held in the GAA.</p> <p>1:01:20 Regrets about losing time with his family, particularly when he was President of the GAA. Balancing work at the Department of Agriculture, family and GAA commitments.</p> <p>1:02:54 Important to him to bring his wife Nuala to as many functions as possible for support but also to highlight the</p> |
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| | <p>importance of Nuala as part of the team. Role of women in GAA.</p> <p>1:04:56 Perception of Wicklow as a weaker county and as frightening opposition when he was involved in the 1960s and 1970s. Finance and the lack of good GAA second level colleges as factors in holding Wicklow GAA back. Mentions success at vocational schools level. Reflects on how big GAA schools like St Kieran's, Kilkenny and St Flannan's, Ennis will fare with the end of the boarding school era.</p> <p>1:09:40 Comments on the amount of money spent on county teams today and the impact of that on the games.</p> <p>1:11:23 Place of hurling in Wicklow. Importance of underage structures for hurling in particular.</p> <p>1:12:39 Becoming involved in Leinster Council. Enjoyment of Leinster Council meetings and the people involved in the 1970s.</p> <p>1:15:35 As Chairman of Leinster Council being Vice-President of the GAA and having a seat on Central Council and the Management Committee in Croke Park.</p> <p>1:16:06 Finishing on Leinster Council in 1989, running for GAA President and losing to Peter Quinn. Running again in 1993 and being elected President Elect. President from 1994-1996.</p> <p>1:16:57 Running for president in 1989. Being put forward for the office to Wicklow County Board by Baltinglass GAA. Talks about Peter Quinn and his financial acumen. Disappointment at not winning, lessons learnt from the experience. Being in poor health at the time.</p> <p>1:20:18 Becoming secretary again of Blessington GAA between presidential elections.</p> <p>1:21:30 Running for president the second time. Decision to run again. Being put forward by Blessington GAA. Running against his friends Jimmy Gray and Joe McDonagh.</p> <p>1:22:39 Canvassing for the presidency. His popularity in the North because he went to so many matches up there in the height of The Troubles, despite people's concern that they would not vote for him because he was a member of the Church of Ireland.</p> <p>1:27:05 The Congress in the Burlington Hotel at which he was elected. Friendship with Joe McDonagh. Celebrations that</p> |
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| | <p>night.</p> <p>1:29:58 Subsequent changes in presidential electoral system. Year as President-Elect. Working relationship between President and President-Elect.</p> <p>1:33:03 First impressions of Central Council and the Management Committee. Being a good Chairman.</p> <p>1:34:45 Objectives for the presidency – re-engagement with clubs in light of Croke Park re-development, trying to keep them on board. Visiting as many clubs as he could during presidency. Importance of visiting as many schools as possible across the country. Enjoyment he gained from visiting school – all types of schools. Schedule and organisation for visiting schools. Engaging local media in the process. Establishing ground rules for visits. Transport between schools. Story about visiting a school in Malin Head and saying he supported Glasgow Rangers. Mentions Manchester United and Glasgow Celtic.</p> <p>1:44:48 Highlights of his presidency – Clare winning the All-Ireland Senior Hurling All-Ireland; work getting underway for the development of the Cusack Stand. Achievement of games carrying on in Croke Park right throughout the re-development of the grounds. The effort put into achieving this. Talks about the vision and leadership of Liam Mulvihill. Discusses the re-development design and process and trying to imagine what the dimensions of stadium would be like. Comparing the height of the Cusack Stand to the new Liffey Valley bridge. Objections they met along the way from local residents and from Dublin City Council. His own pride in being involved in the process. Liam Mulvihill’s management of the project. Atmosphere at meetings about the re-development.</p> <p>1:52:36 Biggest challenges of his presidency – finance and the re-development of Croke Park. Trying to sell the concept of the new Croke Park eg. corporate boxes, suites etc. Mentions going to Wembley, Twickenham and Old Trafford. Talks about atmosphere at some of the soccer matches he attended there. Including a museum in the plans. Talks about visiting stadia in America. Counteracting the perception of the corporate sector amongst the membership.</p> <p>1:57:16 Adjusting to life after the presidency and to being out of the system. The power and prestige of the office – access to people, being known by people. Meeting people now in Croke Park who come up to shake his hand.</p> <p>2:00:52 Opening of Croke Park to other sports and his</p> |
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| | <p>opposition to that decision. The perception and the reality of that opposition. Disappointment over treatment of some key GAA figures by people involved in the debate.</p> <p>2:04:09 Friends he has made throughout the years of his involvement in the GAA.</p> <p>2:05:12 Rule 21 – championing the deletion of this rule. His understanding of the sensitivities of this in The North. Fear always that a GAA action would lead to recriminations there. Importance of getting the timing of this right.</p> <p>2:08:14 Reflecting back on his life and the GAA – proud of his son playing on a Wicklow championship winning senior team at the age of 18 and of the club itself. Proud to have been there when Clare made the break-through. Proud of the emergence of Tyrone and the northern counties. Proud of putting the issue of child abuse onto the agenda of the GAA and producing guidelines to deal with this. Proud of the introduction of the back-door system in hurling. Mentions Offaly, Clare and Wexford. Enjoyment of life with the GAA. Travelling to America and Dubai among other places and seeing things he thought he would never see. Friendships.</p> |
| <p>Involvement in GAA</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Úachtaráin CLG 1994-1997.</p> |
| <p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p> | <p>Played junior football with Blessington GAA. Won a tournament medal.</p> |
| <p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p> | <p>Member of the Blessington GAA committee from the 1960s onwards. Served as Secretary and Chairman of the club and is currently Life President of the club.</p> <p>Club representative to West Wicklow District Board; Chairman of West Wicklow District Board; West Wicklow representative on Wicklow County Board; Vice Chairman of Wicklow County Board;</p> <p>Wicklow representative on Leinster Council; Vice-Chairman of Wicklow Leinster Council.</p> <p>Managed Leinster Railway Cup Football team in the Mid-1980s.</p> |

REFERENCE NO. WW/1/12

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| | Member of Central Council and Management Committee in Croke Park. Member of many committees in Croke Park down through the years. Úachtaráin CLG, 1994-1997. |
| Format | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual |
| Duration | Length of Interview: 2:14:30 |
| 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: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 20th September 2013