

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Ann-Marie Smith
Date of Interview	20 th Nov. 2008
Location	Toomebridge, Antrim
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Roddy Gribbin, Christened Rodger
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1924 Home County: Derry
Education	Primary: Anahorish Secondary: Third Level:
Family	Siblings: 6 boys and 3 girls Current Family if Different: Married with children
Club(s)	Newbridge, Derry
Occupation	Farmer
Parents' Occupation	Farmer [Father]
Religion	N/A
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A

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Date of Report	2 nd Feb 2009
Period Covered	1920s-2008
Counties/Countries Covered	Derry, Antrim, Dublin, Cavan, Donegal, Tyrone, Galway, Down
Key Themes Covered	Childhood, Travel, Celebrations, All-Ireland, Playing, Managing, Politics, Opening of Croke Park
Interview Summary	<p>In this interview Roddy Gribbin talks about his childhood growing up in South Derry and the fact that he had to leave school at an early age to work on the family farm. He talks about playing for his club Newbridge for the first time and putting on the Derry jersey for the first time. He talks about Derry winning the National League title for the first time in 1947. He talks about being player/manager for the All-Ireland Football Final in 1958 and the excitement and hype in the county coming up to the final. Derry were beaten by Dublin in the 1958 Final and Roddy believes that Dublin were a more experienced team and this was evident on the day. He also talks about retiring from the game and the short time he spent in prison in Belfast. He discusses recent changes in the GAA such as the opening up of Croke Park and some of the challenges facing the association.</p> <p>Start: Introduction to interview. Name of interviewee.</p> <p>0.29: Place and date of birth.</p> <p>0.45: Seamus Heaney wrote a poem about the area Anahorish. He lived in the farm next door.</p> <p>1.08: There were 6 boys and 3 girls in the Gribbin family. Two of the girls died at a young age. The third girl died at the age of 21.</p> <p>1.23: The family lived on a farm. The father was a pig dealer and times were very hard.</p> <p>1.30: Roddy was 14 years of age when he left school.</p> <p>1.35: Roddy attended the same school as Seamus Heaney; Anahorish School. Roddy's brother, Henry was friends with Seamus.</p> <p>2.12: Father needed cheap labour on the farm so Roddy</p>

	<p>worked on the farm. If there had been a local secondary school near by he would have attended it</p> <p>2.55: Roddy has been farming all his life. There were 6 boys in the family; 3 were educated and the land was divided between the other 3.</p> <p>3.17: The 3 brothers who got the land were Willie, Eoin and Roddy. Eoin got the home place, Willie got a small piece of land close to where he was a pig dealer and Roddy got 25 acres.</p> <p>3.37: Roddy's father was a great supporter of the GAA. The GAA became firmly established in Derry in 1933. However Newbridge set up a club in 1925 and they played competitions in South West Antrim.</p> <p>4.06: Roddy's earliest memory of the GAA was attending a match with his father and 2 brothers between Newbridge and Ballinderry (East Tyrone). It was 6 pence to get in and the gate took in £2.15p.</p> <p>5.30: As young boys, Roddy and his brothers played all the time in the fields.</p> <p>5.48: Roddy's first serious attempts to play the game were in the early 1940s when he became involved with the club in Newbridge. The 1940s saw many of the top players emigrating due to war and scarcity of work in the region.</p> <p>6.04: As a result of so many men emigrating, young men were being called up to play for the club; men as young as 18 years of age. Roddy was among those that were called up.</p> <p>6.11: Newbridge got to the final of the McGlinchy Cup, which was a 13-, a side competition. Newbridge won the final.</p> <p>6.31: Harry Owens, a referee and an official of the County Board queried as to why Roddy had not yet been picked to play for the county. The next day, Roddy's name appeared in the papers as one of the players on the Derry team.</p> <p>7.00: There were no Newbridge men on the county team at that time.</p> <p>7.10: Playing for the county was a whole new experience for Roddy. His first county match was in Magherafelt. Roddy remembers that no one spoke to him on; someone threw him a jersey, togs and socks. He recalls that at half time, Tommy King came over to talk to him. Roddy said that it was a lesson that he would use during his time both as player and manager; that he would never leave any new player out.</p> <p>8.08: He also recalls that during his first outing for the county, he got the ball 4 times and scored each time.</p> <p>8.34: Derry won the Junior Championship in 1944 and became a senior team in 1945. The year 1945 also saw the</p>
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	<p>county winning the Ulster title.</p> <p>9.17: Roddy first senior match for Derry was against Donegal in Donegal.</p> <p>9.22: "I left home at 5.30 on a Saturday evening on my bicycle and went to Magherafelt which is five miles away with my football boots tied on the bar and left the bike with an aunt of mine. I got the 6 o'clock bus to Derry, there were travel restrictions you see and you weren't allowed to travel. I took the bus to Derry, and then transferred from the bus to a train to Letterkenny. I stayed the night in Letterkenny. I got a cup of tea after the match and raced to get the train. By the time I got home it was near 9 o'clock. That was my experience of my first senior match."</p> <p>10.30: Roddy recalls that the bus and train fares were paid for the players.</p> <p>10.47: He cycled to all local matches and buses brought the players to matches in other counties.</p> <p>11.28: Newbridge had a strong team in the 1940s; there were 6-7 players from the club on the county team.</p> <p>12.22: No training for the county team except during the latter stages of the championship.</p> <p>13.36: Newbridge club had a great hall and there was a chéile there on the 1st Sunday night of each month. Roddy said it was the highlight of the month.</p> <p>14.09: Roddy remembers very little about matches.</p> <p>14.19: In 1958 Derry beat Tyrone and went on to play Galway in Wembley. Roddy said it was a great experience.</p> <p>14.40: The five years from 1945-1950 were great years for Derry football. During this time they won 2 Dr. McKenna Cups, 2 Dr. Lacken Cups and a National League title. Their National League win in 1947 was historic due to the fact that it was the first time a county from the 6 counties had won the title. It was definitely a highlight for Roddy.</p> <p>15.08: The 1947 league final was played in Croke Park. Roddy didn't travel with the team because his father had died just 2 weeks before the final. John Murphy, one of Roddy's team-mates and Roddy stayed in a private house in Phibsborough, while the Derry team stayed in a hotel.</p> <p>16.53: There were no parties to celebrate the team's victory in the league final; no fans or supporters came out on the streets when they travelled back to Derry.</p> <p>17.37: Roddy says that Cavan were the team to beat in the 40s. Although Roddy began playing senior for Derry in 1945, it wasn't until 1958 that he won his first Ulster medal. In 1958 Derry beat Cavan in the semi final of the Ulster Championship</p>
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	<p>and they went on to beat Down in the final.</p> <p>18.32: In 1958, Roddy was player/manager but was mainly concentrating on the managing side. In 1960 he played a game or two and then he gave it up.</p> <p>19.00: Roddy plays down the fact that he was chosen to be the county manager, he says that the job was given to the oldest player on the team.</p> <p>20.10: As a manager, Roddy had no special tactics. He said that he just tried to get the best out of each player.</p> <p>20.33: During the 1958 championship, the Derry team trained in Newbridge. There was great excitement in the build up to the semi final and especially as the All Ireland Final drew closer with people looking for tickets.</p> <p>21.37: Roddy says managing the team at the time was a full time job. The telephone would ring constantly and people would be coming looking for interviews during the day time when Roddy would be out working on the farm.</p> <p>22.32: Derry beat Kerry in the semi final. Roddy recalls that the newspapers said that Roddy came on as a sub during the match but he doesn't remember playing in the match at all.</p> <p>22.51: Derry now had to face Dublin in the final. Roddy says that it was hard to for them to think that they had a chance against Dublin.</p> <p>23.14: There was unbelievable excitement in the lead up to the final.</p> <p>23.56: Roddy asked Paul Russell who was a Kerry footballer to help coach the Derry team. Roddy recalls that Russell was all for "blood thunder." He believed that if you got yourself killed, well there was someone else there to take your place. Roddy says that this was all new to Derry.</p> <p>25.00: According to Roddy, Derry weren't smart enough. He says that they should have been out watching Dublin play, checking out their tactics. He believes they weren't prepared enough. "I feel a bit guilty. I think I should have done something different as a manager, to give us a better chance if I had of known this type of football."</p> <p>25.25: Pdraig Haughey played on the Dublin team in 1958. Roddy received a letter from Pdraig's mother, Sarah who was from Derry. However in the letter she stated that she would have to support Dublin because her son was playing on the team. Roddy was in the Haughey house in Dublin before the final.</p> <p>26.04: Pdraig Haughey was named man of the match in the All Ireland Final of 1958.</p> <p>26.15: Derry team were not happy that they didn't get a</p>
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	<p>chance to meet the Dublin team after the match. In fact the first time Roddy met the Dublin players was in 2008, 50 years after the final.</p> <p>27.03: Roddy remembers very little about the final itself, apart for the final 10 minutes of the game. Derry went ahead, however the Derry left back fell and Dublin scored a goal.</p> <p>28.00: The team were disappointed but they felt that they had done their best.</p> <p>28.20: There was a reception for them in Maghera.</p> <p>28.43: When Roddy got married and started having children, it was difficult to devote so much time to the GAA. He feared getting injured because who would provide for his family.</p> <p>29.06: He did suffer one major injury whilst playing football. He dislocated his hip when a player jumped on him. He was laid up in bed for 6 weeks and was unable to play football for a year. He returned to football after his injury.</p> <p>30.09: Roddy says that he didn't miss the game too much when he retired. He says that he had his wife and family and also the farm size increased as he bought more land to keep the family going.</p> <p>30.50: Roddy isn't very involved in the club.</p> <p>33.03: Roddy's father was interned in Frongoch.</p> <p>33.50: Roddy says that he encountered very little trouble travelling through Protestant areas while playing GAA.</p> <p>34.25: Roddy and his brother Willie were interned for 2 weeks at one point. Roddy says that if you were involved in Gaelic at all, you were under suspicion.</p> <p>34.50: On the first occasion, Roddy and his brother Owen were arrested and they were brought to Belfast, but were released within 2 days.</p> <p>35.19: Three weeks later, Roddy and Willie arrested. Roddy feared that he would be imprisoned this time for a long time. Roddy recalls many of the lads from the local area were in prison at the same time.</p> <p>35.42: Roddy talks about his time in prison. He says that their dinner was served in a dog's dish.</p> <p>35.52: He wasn't married when he was arrested.</p> <p>36.16: He was interrogated several times and he describes it as being rough at times.</p> <p>36.41: Roddy shared a cell with Colin Mulholland who also played for Derry.</p>
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	<p>37.30: They did get outside to play football.</p> <p>38.33: Roddy says that one of the detectives was an ex Armagh player who had been expelled from the GAA.</p> <p>39.06: Roddy spent a month in total in prison.</p> <p>39.25: He says “always under suspicion because you are a GAA person in times of trouble like that.”</p> <p>39.39: He says that Sinn Féin would try and work their way into the GAA clubs.</p> <p>44.47: Roddy says that the one of the challenges facing the GAA is excess alcohol.</p> <p>47.29: Roddy was in favour of the opening up of Croke Park. He believes it was good that the money stayed in the country.</p> <p>47.52: Roddy believes that the GAA has made progress since the time he was playing.</p> <p>48.40: Roddy is happy that the linesmen assist the referee more now than his playing days.</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 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>Won the final of the McGlinchy Cup with Newbridge. During his playing career with Derry, he won 2 Dr. McKenna Cups, 2 Dr. Lacken Cups and a National League title. As player/manager with Derry he won an Ulster Championship and got to the All Ireland Football Final</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Format</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p>Duration</p>	<p>Length of Interview: 50 minutes 19 seconds</p>
<p>Language</p>	<p>English</p>

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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: _____Ann-Marie Smith_____

Date: _____7/04/09_____