

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

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| Name of Interviewer | Regina Fitzpatrick |
| Date of Interview | 19 th July 2010 |
| Location | Interviewee's home, near Abbeyleix, Co. Laois. |
| Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname) | Billy Phelan |
| <u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u> | |
| Gender | Male |
| Born | Year Born: 1946 Home County: Laois |
| Education | Primary: Abbeyleix NS |
| Family | Siblings: 3 brothers and 6 sisters Current Family if Different: Wife and 2 sons |
| Club(s) | Abbeyleix Hurling Club [Laois] St Fintan's Hospital GAA Club [Laois] Ballyroan GAA Club [Laois] |
| Occupation | Psychiatric Nurse, St Fintan's Hospital Portlaois |
| Parents' Occupation | Carpenter and Builder [Father] |
| Religion | Roman Catholic |
| Political Affiliation / Membership | N/A |
| Other Club/Society Membership(s) | St Fintan's Hospital Badminton Club Abbeyleix CYMS Blandsfort Gun Club |

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| Date of Report | 31 st May 2012 |
| Period Covered | 1946-2010 |
| Counties/Countries Covered | Laois |
| Key Themes Covered | Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Education, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Professionalism, Retirement, Food and Drink, Socialising, Relationships, Economy/ Economics |
| Interview Summary | <p>Billy talks about his many years of involvement with the GAA. Originally from Abbeyleix in Laois, he took to hurling from a young age and enjoyed success at club level before being selected for the Laois minor team. They went on to claim a Leinster title and reach the All-Ireland minor hurling final of 1964. Billy enjoyed playing sports and competed in inter-hospital leagues whilst working at St Fintan's Hospital. He later coached club underage teams and was invited to be a selector for the Laois minors. His enthusiasm for the Association never waned and he enjoyed a long playing career, eventually finding himself lining out on a team that featured his son when he was 50 years of age. Billy reflects on his experiences - good and bad - and shares his opinions on the state of the GAA in both Laois and the country as a whole in 2010.</p> <p>00:15 Born in 1946 Tonduff in Abbeyleix. 00:35 GAA in the area. John Burke and the Rings hurling with him when he was young. 01:05 Family's GAA involvement. Father a secretary and treasurer of the Raheen club. Many Phelans involved. 01:55 Dooleys on his mother's side. Lar Dooley hurling with Raheen, St Fintan's Hospital and Clonad. 02:30 Hearing stories when he was young. 03:10 Story of a dispute at a tournament in Ballyfin. 03:55 Prominence of hurling in the family. Enthusiasm for the sport. 04:55 His brothers playing hurling. Brother Joe playing for the technical school. Brother John close to the county team in the 1980s. Laois playing the Centenary All-Ireland against Cork.</p> |

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| | <p>05:50 Ten in the family, four boys. Girls' enthusiasm for the games.</p> <p>06:50 Hurling with Laois minors.</p> <p>07:15 Earliest GAA memory - winning an Under-14 championship in 1960 with Abbeyleix.</p> <p>07:35 Brother Alban from Cork coaching and influencing them. Taking them to Kilkenny to play a challenge game.</p> <p>08:30 No football in the school.</p> <p>08:45 Working in the sawmill and playing football at lunchtime.</p> <p>09:40 Paying football with Ballyroan minors and getting on the county minor football team.</p> <p>10:15 His opinions on the adequacy of the system in place at the time.</p> <p>11:20 Playing for St Fintan's Hospital in Portlaoise in later life.</p> <p>12:10 Brother Raymond coaching them at school, which ran the juvenile club.</p> <p>12:35 Success of Abbeyleix.</p> <p>13:00 Winning an Under-16 title.</p> <p>13:15 Winning a minor title with Abbeyleix in 1963. Being captain of the Laois minor team in 1964 as a result.</p> <p>14:00 Rivals included Portlaoise, Rathdowney, Borris-in-Ossory and Durrow</p> <p>15:05 Training they did.</p> <p>16:15 Cycling to Ballinakill for games. Bobby Taylor driving them in a hackney car. Sometimes a parent had a car.</p> <p>18:05 Players he admired - Paddy Lawlor who played in the 1949 All-Ireland with Laois. Paddy Brennan played with Leinster. Christy O'Brien and Ollie Fennell were also good.</p> <p>19:15 Going to Croke Park and seeing Christy Ring in the Railway Cup. Pat Henderson, Christy O'Brien, Mick Mahon and Eddie Keher were also good.</p> <p>20:15 Listening to games on the radio. Micheál Ó hÉihir broadcasting.</p> <p>21:20 Attitude as a player. Pre-game ritual.</p> <p>22:50 Inter-county career.</p> <p>23:15 Losing to Portlaoise in the county final in 1964 after winning it in 1963.</p> <p>23:45 Being selected for the county minor hurling team.</p> <p>24:30 Local man Billy Whelan a selector for the county minor team.</p> <p>25:25 How he felt having been selected. Pressure during trials.</p> <p>26:35 Paddy Lawlor telling him to always take the advantage when he won the toss before a game.</p> <p>27:25 Winning the 1964 Leinster final. Getting the cup some time later.</p> <p>28:10 Reaching the All-Ireland minor final and worrying about</p> |
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| | <p>having to give a speech.</p> <p>28:25 Winning the Leinster title without having trained together as a team.</p> <p>29:00 Selector Billy Whelan working in the sawmill with him. Story behind Billy Whelan's nickname - 'Saboo'.</p> <p>29:45 Speech on his mind before the final. Sister working in Paddy Lawlor's grocery shop and she getting help for him with the speech.</p> <p>30:45 Losing the All-Ireland and people talking about it again and asking him questions about it years later.</p> <p>32:20 Losing the Leinster final to Offaly in 1964.</p> <p>32:40 Playing football with St Fintan's Hospital. Inter-hospital leagues and the Connolly Cup. How that worked. Mickey Fray and Liam Tierney - who played for Ireland in the Compromise Rules - playing.</p> <p>34:25 Starting out at the hospital in 1964.</p> <p>34:35 Meeting Britain's Princess Margaret when she visited the area and the sawmill.</p> <p>36:50 Playing music for Britain's Prince Michael.</p> <p>36:20 Change from working in the sawmill to working in St Fintan's. Process of securing the job. Dr Grace from Kilkenny on the interview board. Being asked about his GAA involvement.</p> <p>37:40 Size of hospital and nature of work there.</p> <p>39:10 Living on the hospital grounds.</p> <p>40:10 Training for the job - practical work and lectures.</p> <p>42:20 Gender breakdown of workers there. Women having to leave if they got married.</p> <p>43:35 Promotion system and how that changed.</p> <p>43:55 Introduction of integration system.</p> <p>44:20 Physical nature of work.</p> <p>45:15 Working hours and how it affected his ability to play. Trying to swap shifts in order to be able to play a game.</p> <p>47:20 Playing badminton. Liam Quinn from Carlow playing with him. Agreeing to play in Kildare Open. Clash with an Abbeyleix game and how he dealt with that.</p> <p>50:35 Role of sports in hospital life. Patients' leagues. Buses going to games. Female staff playing.</p> <p>51:50 Joe Shrahan and Tom Daly starting ladies football at the hospital. Ladies playing matches before the men played their games.</p> <p>53:40 Social life at the time.</p> <p>55:05 Balancing GAA commitments and work commitments.</p> <p>57:30 Playing until he was 50. Playing on a team with his sons.</p> <p>59:20 All-Ireland referee Pat Downey getting him involved in an over 40s hurling competition. Playing for Laois in that competition, which was dominated by Tipperary and Kilkenny.</p> |
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| | <p>Eddie Keher and Joe Hennessy playing. Galway and Kildare difficult opponents.</p> <p>01:01:10 Proposing that a junior section be introduced to the competition. Laois winning a B All-Ireland by beating Carlow.</p> <p>01:02:40 Following Laois hurlers and local teams in 2010.</p> <p>01:03:00 Life after playing GAA and what he thinks of it.</p> <p>01:03:50 Nearby teams are Shanahoe, Coaches, Ballypeak, Ballinakill.</p> <p>01:04:30 Patrician Brother arriving from Longford and promoting football. Less emphasis on hurling. Larry Hearn moving from hurling to football.</p> <p>01:06:30 Billy trying to promote hurling again and reasons for that.</p> <p>01:07:45 Training underage teams. Féile na nGael in Laois and Offaly.</p> <p>01:09:05 Training the Under-14 hurling team in Abbeyleix. Winning a championship and Laois Féile na nGael.</p> <p>01:10:25 Coaching methods he employed.</p> <p>01:12:25 How the team fared after their successes.</p> <p>01:15:35 His son getting injured playing hurling at college.</p> <p>01:17:20 Involvement with Laois underage structure. Johnny Dooley and Joachim Kelly coaching. Johnny Dalton asking him to help with coaching. Pat Delaney and Ollie Byrne also helping out.</p> <p>01:20:25 Laois losing an Under-16 game in Moneygall and his son telling him what was wrong with the set-up afterwards. Taking action.</p> <p>01:23:10 Team's success at a Nenagh tournament. Competing in a Leinster blitz.</p> <p>01:24:00 County board doing interviews for a trainer for the minor team. Opinion of that decision. A new man getting the job.</p> <p>01:26:15 Changes he has seen at underage level over the years. Facilities improving.</p> <p>01:28:45 Opinion of underage structure in Laois when he was young. Problems when they played the All-Ireland final in 1964.</p> <p>01:32:05 Laois Under-21 footballers in an All-Ireland final and treatment they got.</p> <p>01:32:25 Hurling/football divide in Laois. Trying to compete with Kilkenny and Tipperary in hurling. Small population in Laois.</p> <p>01:34:50 Future prospects for Laois GAA. Need to get a lot of good players at the one time.</p> <p>01:37:15 Effect of lack of inter-county success on club scene in Laois. Inferiority complex. Prioritising clubs.</p> <p>01:38:35 Supporting other counties in the All-Ireland Championship.</p> |
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| | <p>01:39:25 Best GAA memories. Taking pride in club and county successes.</p> <p>01:42:00 Life without the GAA.</p> <p>01:43:15 What the GAA has meant to him. What he would change if he could do it again.</p> <p>01:43:45 Training with the Laois senior hurlers. Work interfering.</p> <p>01:46:35 Being a selector with Laois Under-21s. Tom Hassett training the team. Matthew Keegan and Pat Whelan also selectors. Games clashing with county senior games. Meeting senior hurling manager Paudie Butler to negotiate. Joe Fitzpatrick needed for both teams. Not being familiar with certain players because of their involvement with the senior team.</p> <p>01:49:55 His thoughts on what happened with the Under-21 team.</p> <p>01:51:00 Future of the GAA.</p> <p>01:51:55 Level of training done by players.</p> <p>01:52:15 People getting paid for their involvement with clubs.</p> <p>01:53:10 Opinion on player-power disputes in Cork, Limerick, and in Waterford with Justin McCarthy.</p> |
| <p>Involvement in GAA</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input 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> |
| <p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p> | <p>Played hurling age 12-50 years.</p> <p>Played U14, U16, Minor, Intermediate and Junior hurling with Abbeyleix</p> <p>1964 - Captained Laois Minor Hurling Team, won Leinster Championship, 1964.</p> <p>1964 – Laois Minor Football Team</p> <p>Played Senior Hurling with Laois</p> <p>Played with St Fintan’s Hospital in the inter-hospital league</p> |
| <p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p> | <p>Member of Abbeyleix GAA committee for many years</p> <p>Managed and coached teams in Abbeyleix</p> <p>Selector for underage and U21 Laois teams.</p> |

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| Format | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual |
| Duration | Length of Interview: 01:56:47 |
| 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: 31st May 2012