

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	John Phelan
Date of Interview	11 th Oct 2010
Location	John's home, near Kilkenny City
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	John Phelan
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1952 Home County: Laois
Education	Primary: Knock NS; Borris-in-Ossory Convent of Mercy BNS Secondary: St Kieran's College, Kilkenny
Family	Siblings: 7 siblings Current Family if Different: Wife & 3 children
Club(s)	Borris-in-Ossory GAA [Laois]; Kilrush GAA [Clare]; Clarecastle GAA [Clare]; Lisdowney GAA [Kilkenny]; O'Loughlin Gaels GAA [Kilkenny]
Occupation	Credit Management
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Credit Union Movement; Kilkenny Cycling Club; NACA Kilkenny

Date of Report	12 th June 2012
Period Covered	1881 - 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Kilkenny, Laois, Clare
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Identity, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Violence, Politics, Relationship with the Association, Retirement, Food and Drink, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy/ Economics
Interview Summary	<p>John tracks his GAA experience through his involvement with many different clubs over the years. Originally from Laois, he played hurling with Borris-in-Ossary when he was young, before going to St Kieran's College in Kilkenny as a boarder. Hurling was popular at the school and he spent a lot of his time playing the sport there. He later moved to Clare and played hurling and football for different clubs there, as well as running an inter-firms team. He still found time to play for Borris-in-Ossary and in 1972 they won their first county title, a special memory for John. He represented Laois at Under-21 and senior level briefly and was also involved in administration in Kilkenny. John tried his hand at coaching with the Lisdowney camogie team in Kilkenny and they were very successful in the 1980s, as were the Kilkenny camogie team. John talks about his work during those years and his efforts to improve the standing of camogie in the county. He always had an interest in local history and has published his work on the GAA in Laois, and plans to release an extensive history of the GAA in the area sometime in the future.</p> <p>00:35 Family's GAA involvement. Father playing with Ballacolla in Laois. Uncles also playing.</p> <p>01:00 Treacys on his mother's side playing. Seán and Joe Treacy playing. Joe playing for Patrician College Ballyfin and stopping St Kieran's College going for a five-in-a-row. Fr Willie Treacy playing for Maynooth and Borris-in-Ossory.</p> <p>02:00 Visiting local houses when he was young and hearing their stories. Writing histories of the parish and the GAA later</p>

	<p>in life.</p> <p>02:45 Born in Garran Castle. Rural area.</p> <p>03:15 History of Gaelic games in the area. Borris-in-Ossory, Éire Óg, Kilcotton, Knocks, one of the local teams. Going to Daisy Delaneys and playing games.</p> <p>04:00 Making their own hurls.</p> <p>04:15 Physicality of games and how that stood to them when playing for Borris-in-Ossory.</p> <p>04:45 Club success on the pitch.</p> <p>05:10 Talk of hurling in the house. Listening to Micheál Ó Heiher on the radio in Daisy Delaney's.</p> <p>05:40 Joe Kennedy having a television. People flocking there for games. Watching the Railway Cup and Christy O'Brien playing for Leinster.</p> <p>06:15 Playing with Christy later in life. Thrill of that.</p> <p>06:40 Borris-in-Ossory and Kilcotton two separate clubs. Watching games with his uncle Jack.</p> <p>07:05 Playing with Borris-in-Ossory school team and playing with the club.</p> <p>07:25 Borris-in-Ossory winning senior titles in the 1950s and 1960s.</p> <p>07:55 Other pastimes when he was growing up, like pitch-and-toss and skittles.</p> <p>08:45 Visiting Tim Scully and hearing his stories. Ker Fitzpatrick telling stories.</p> <p>09:55 His mother tracing people's lineages.</p> <p>10:55 Importance of hurling in Borris-in-Ossory. Walking to training. Cycling to games.</p> <p>12:10 Siblings and their interest in GAA. Paying his brother to play with him.</p> <p>13:55 Playing when he was young. Christy Jones a talented</p>
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	<p>player. Getting on the local team when he was 11.</p> <p>13:30 Murty O'Donnell an administrator in Borris-in-Ossory and very enthusiastic. Murty helping him with a book. Murty's mother giving him hurleys and washing jerseys.</p> <p>14:30 No dressing-rooms at the time. Changing in Murty's house or at Dr Cosgrove's in the 1950s.</p> <p>15:05 Borris-in-Ossory getting a pitch in the late 1940s through the Land Commission.</p> <p>15:25 Pitch named after Bob O'Keefe. Cup also named after him. His contribution in Borris-in-Ossory pre-1915. Death in 1949, they day Laois won the Leinster final. Born in 1881.</p> <p>17:50 Going to school in Knock. Being transferred to the Convent of Mercy in Borris-in-Ossory.</p> <p>19:40 John Guerin from Cooraclare his teacher when he was young. Interest in hurling. Books he wrote.</p> <p>20:40 Teachers in Borris-in-Ossory when he was there. Marble competitions in the yard.</p> <p>21:10 Murty O'Donnell taking care of underage hurling.</p> <p>21:45 Training they did under Murty, who was a talented hurler.</p> <p>22:20 Talking to Christy O'Brien about Murty.</p> <p>23:10 Underage success they enjoyed. Winning Borris-in-Ossory's first county title.</p> <p>23:45 His playing career. Position he played. Kieran Carey also playing.</p> <p>24:20 Improved fitness when playing minor. Reasons for that.</p> <p>25:25 Playing for St Kieran's College in Kilkenny. How he fared. Maurice Daly a substitute goalkeeper on the team. MEP Liam Aylward playing. Maurice stuffing a pair of boots so that they would fit him.</p> <p>26:50 Experience of St Kieran's from 1965-1970. Running away in his first year. Being driven to his cousin, Frank Hyland's house. Sleeping in his shed. Local priest Fr Phelan</p>
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	<p>and his father out looking for him.</p> <p>28:50 Going to see games in Kilkenny. Billy Fitzpatrick, the Fennellys, former GAA President Nicky Brennan, Kilkenny hurling manager Brian Cody in St Kieran's at the same time as him. Supervising Kevin Fennelly and his local parish priest Fr Frank Purcell in study.</p> <p>29:35 Dedicating his book, In the Shadow of the Goalposts, to Brendan Power of Stradbally, who was a first cousin of Fr McEvoy in Enistioge. Reason for that.</p> <p>30:45 Tom Barry from Windgap a friend of his at St Kieran's. Tom winning a minor All-Ireland with Kilkenny in 1970. Tom's later career.</p> <p>31:15 Competitions in St Kieran's.</p> <p>31:25 His son going to St Kieran's. Differences in how things are run compared to his time.</p> <p>32:40 How he ended up at St Kieran's. Going to visit John Doherty and coming home late.</p> <p>34:00 Economic health of the family. Parents bringing him food. Bullying at the school. Trading food. Trying to steal food.</p> <p>36:50 Daily schedule at St Kieran's. Prefects and what they were like. School hours. Saturday lessons. Playing grounds.</p> <p>40:30 Other sports played the school. Sportsday. Prizes.</p> <p>41:05 Running cross-country and famous athlete Eamon Coughlan there. Passing out Mick Byrne, who finished ahead of him. How that happened. Fr Bell of Castletown with them.</p> <p>42:50 Making friends in St Kieran's. Nicknames.</p> <p>44:25 Fr Tommy Maher training them in hurling at St Kieran's. His contribution to Kilkenny hurling.</p> <p>45:25 Fr Maher's team talks and instructions. The 'Fr Tommy Maher pass'.</p> <p>46:15 Coaching course in Gormanstown College in Meath. Michael Delaney of the Leinster Council, Laois hurler Mick Mahon, Snitchy Ferguson, John Hanley and Seamus Cahill</p>
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	<p>from Rathdowney there. Helping his friends in an exam. Inter-county hurling manager Justin McCarthy there.</p> <p>47:45 What they did on the course. Approach to the game.</p> <p>45:00 DJ Carey school similar to Gormanstown course.</p> <p>49:45 Competition at St Kieran's to get on teams.</p> <p>50:20 Returning to Borris-in-Ossory. Working for the Kirwans.</p> <p>51:00 Going to Kilrush in Clare and working in a timber factory from 1971 to 1976. Justin Sheridan, a brother of Fr Con Sheridan in Laois, the owner of the business. What Kilrush was like. Staying with PJ and Maureen Kennedy. PJ a former Clare player and county board secretary.</p> <p>53:30 Playing football illegally in Clare. Training with Eddie Purcell of Kilkenny. One of them playing with Pound St, the other with Pellow Road.</p> <p>54:40 Playing with Kilrush Shamrocks in football, Ballyea juniors and Clarecastle seniors.</p> <p>55:20 Playing for Clarecastle against Roscrea. Marking Francis Loughnane. What that was like.</p> <p>56:00 Playing for Ballyea in a county semi-final.</p> <p>57:00 Meeting people in Clare through the GAA.</p> <p>57:15 Taking over the Kilrush factory team. Going to meetings. Involving players from other businesses. Success they enjoyed. Clare senior players Dillon brothers, Crowe and Johnny O'Hare on the team.</p> <p>58:50 Playing Under-21 football in Clare. Suggesting to Malachy Walsh that they go to a game in Ennis. Man in Ennis approaching him about the fact that he was playing illegally.</p> <p>59:40 Going back to Borris-in-Ossory at the weekends. How he travelled.</p> <p>01:00:00 Sleeping in phone boxes.</p> <p>01:01:10 Buying a motorbike. Problems with that.</p> <p>01:01:40 Borrowing a Honda 90 and getting a puncture.</p>
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	<p>01:02:25 Thumbing on the road and his boss passing him out.</p> <p>01:03:05 Putting a bet on Clare to win an All-Ireland.</p> <p>01:04:20 Having a car and falling asleep at the wheel.</p> <p>01:05:00 Feeling that Borris-in-Ossory team did not realise the efforts he made to get home.</p> <p>01:05:35 Expenses he got. Recording his earnings at the time. Other things in his diaries.</p> <p>01:12:45 Involvement in inter-firms competitions. Organising the workers.</p> <p>01:15:00 Entering a team and John O'Hare from the ceramic factory joining them. Getting Mangan Brothers Cash and Carry in Ennis involved.</p> <p>01:15:45 Designing their jerseys.</p> <p>01:16:05 Reaching a Munster final. Teams they played against.</p> <p>01:17:15 Success they had.</p> <p>01:17:30 Travelling to games in cars.</p> <p>01:18:00 Impact of team on work environment.</p> <p>01:18:10 Workers breaking away to form Woodfab in Wicklow. Breakaway group 'lacing me up'. Kilrush losing good workers.</p> <p>01:19:15 Talking about the team at work. Banter.</p> <p>01:20:25 Playing football before he went to Clare. Having a hard time in a junior game. Clashing with an opponent and result of that.</p> <p>01:21:45 Being a substitute on a B All-Ireland winning team in 1978. Why he wasn't a first-team player.</p> <p>01:22:40 Laois style of hurling different to Kilkenny style.</p> <p>01:22:50 Dermot Healy bringing the Kilkenny style to Offaly. Impact of that.</p>
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	<p>01:24:25 Expectations on him as a player when he returned home from St Kieran's.</p> <p>01:24:55 How playing at St Kieran's helped him.</p> <p>01:25:20 Marking Francis Thompson in a game.</p> <p>01:25:55 Christy Jones, Brendan Dullard in the Borris-in-Ossory back line with him. Being switched to the forwards.</p> <p>01:26:35 Having a bad accident in a game. Being seen by Dr Lyons.</p> <p>01:27:20 Suffering delayed concussion. Medical procedures after that.</p> <p>01:27:50 Feeling his teammates weren't fit enough to win a county final.</p> <p>01:28:25 1972 a successful year for Borris-in-Ossory seniors. Christy O'Brien playing well in a semi-final against Camross.</p> <p>01:29:15 His father and Christy O'Brien discussing his game and how to improve it.</p> <p>01:30:25 Christy O'Brien's talent.</p> <p>01:31:10 Larry O'Mahony the referee in the Camross game. Violence after the game.</p> <p>01:31:30 Meeting Ballyfin in the final. His father complimenting him.</p> <p>01:32:15 Celebrations after the win. Going to The Rockland for food.</p> <p>01:33:05 Running battles with Camross. Titles that got away.</p> <p>01:33:45 Preparations for the county final.</p> <p>01:34:35 Looking up to Christy O'Brien.</p> <p>01:35:20 Getting on the Laois panel in 1972.</p> <p>01:35:35 Playing Offaly in Birr in an Under-21 game. Ambrose Larkin from Portlaoise a friend of his. Having a big feed with him. Being picked to play unexpectedly. Marking</p>
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	<p>Joe McKenna of Limerick.</p> <p>01:37:10 Career with the seniors. Playing in Croke Park in a B game in 1978.</p> <p>01:37:40 Playing against Galway. Niall McInerney of Galway making an impact.</p> <p>01:38:15 Playing in Over-40s competitions.</p> <p>01:39:10 Working in Rathdowney in 1976.</p> <p>01:39:30 Working in Athy.</p> <p>01:39:45 Jim Bergin of Glann Bia recommending him for a job. Getting a job for them from 1976-2003.</p> <p>01:40:45 Playing with Borris-in-Ossory until the 1980s.</p> <p>01:40:50 Involved in an All-Ireland against Tina Mines. Tom Royal their manager. Celebrating in Hayes Hotel in Thurles.</p> <p>01:41:35 Chairman of a junior Avonmore team that reached an All-Ireland. Having an accident the night before the All-Ireland. Making it to the game.</p> <p>01:42:30 Buying a house in Lisdowney and being asked to play intermediate by Lisdowney.</p> <p>01:42:50 Mary Moylan asking him to help her run the camogie team.</p> <p>01:43:45 Success that team enjoyed.</p> <p>01:44:15 Administrative positions he held.</p> <p>01:44:35 Camogie in the 1980s.</p> <p>01:44:50 Training underage teams.</p> <p>01:45:15 Finishing with hurling earlier than he would have liked.</p> <p>01:45:40 Fundraising initiatives.</p> <p>01:46:00 Driving people to games.</p> <p>01:46:30 Wanting Lisdowney to be as good as Kilkenny's St</p>
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	<p>Paul's.</p> <p>01:46:55 His approach to the job.</p> <p>01:47:45 Having to be tough with people in order to be successful.</p> <p>01:48:20 St Paul's players refusing to join Lisdowney unless he resigned. Leaving the club.</p> <p>01:48:45 Celebrating whether they won or lost.</p> <p>01:49:20 Marina Downey, Katherine and Áine Dunne the stars of the team.</p> <p>01:49:35 Relationship between the camogie club and the GAA club.</p> <p>01:50:15 Difficulties in 2010.</p> <p>01:50:35 Hurling club's attitude to camogie.</p> <p>01:51:00 Hurling club not trying enough in his opinion.</p> <p>01:51:40 Difficulty in getting back to senior level in Kilkenny after dropping down from that level.</p> <p>01:51:55 Kathleen Whitehead firing a shot at a nine-year-old girl in goals.</p> <p>01:52:55 Support camogie team got at games.</p> <p>01:53:40 Camogie scene in Kilkenny. Rivalry with Freshford. Ballycallan a good team.</p> <p>01:54:40 Going to the All-Ireland finals on buses. Taking a detour to Ballyragget.</p> <p>01:55:20 Giving a speech when he was chairman.</p> <p>01:55:40 Trying to secure a dressing-room at Croke Park for Kilkenny.</p> <p>01:56:15 Why they wanted the dressing-room. Superstitions.</p> <p>01:56:55 Carmel Savage, Billy Malone, Teresa Dillon and Tom Ryan selectors. Jokes Carmel told.</p> <p>01:57:25 Carmel saying a prayer before games.</p>
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	<p>01:57:40 Fun they had with the six-in-a-row team in the 1980s. Bridie McGarry, Gillian Dillon, Deirdre Malone, Tracy Mullea, Sinéad Mullea, Marina Downey, Clare Jones all on the team.</p> <p>01:58:20 Differences between camogie and hurling teams.</p> <p>01:59:10 Training the Clara camogie team. Stopping in the 1990s.</p> <p>01:59:45 Approach to camogie.</p> <p>02:00:25 Being strict with the players. What he wanted from them. Devising strategies.</p> <p>02:00:50 Need for a good goalkeeper.</p> <p>02:01:50 Presentation, St Brigid's in Callan, Loreto the main camogie schools in the 1980s.</p> <p>02:02:05 Getting players from Lisdowney, Ballyragget and Johnstown.</p> <p>02:02:15 Pushing for every GAA club in Kilkenny to have a camogie team.</p> <p>02:02:45 Mary Fennelly promoting camogie in the county.</p> <p>02:03:15 Bringing senior teams from around Ireland to Kilkenny for a tournament. Deciding on 15-a-side for games.</p> <p>02:04:25 Involvement in camogie administration. Being a delegate for Lisdowney. Bringing motions to county conventions. Joining the county board and what he did there.</p> <p>02:05:20 Marina Downey sent off for having a hooked hurl. Taking action. Problems over hooked hurls.</p> <p>02:06:25 Making sure that every competition had medals.</p> <p>02:06:45 Reorganising structures.</p> <p>02:07:10 Getting Kilkenny jerseys from O'Neills in Dublin. Problems over that.</p> <p>02:08:30 Being seen as a rebel.</p>
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	<p>02:09:05 Challenges facing camogie in Kilkenny at the time.</p> <p>02:10:15 Mary Fennelly, Pat Conway and Annette Stapleton working hard.</p> <p>02:10:40 Taking junior team to London with Billy Malone.</p> <p>02:11:10 Working with Ted Carroll, Nicky Brennan and Carmel Savage to secure sponsorship. Arguing with the county board.</p> <p>02:12:20 Getting grounds. Need for smaller pitch and posts.</p> <p>02:12:55 Leaving in 1992 and Kilkenny not winning a camogie All-Ireland since.</p> <p>02:13:35 Working with the Downey sisters, Ann and Angela.</p> <p>02:14:50 Impact of success of six-in-a-row team within the county. Eamon Langton treating them well.</p> <p>02:16:00 Developments he has seen in camogie over the years.</p> <p>02:16:50 Ann Downey doing a good job with the senior team.</p> <p>02:17:20 Relationship with Camogie Association, which had broken away from the GAA in his time.</p> <p>02:17:55 Prospects for ladies football. Scene in Kilkenny.</p> <p>02:18:45 Relationship between GAA and Camogie Association.</p> <p>02:19:35 Concerns people have about joining up fully with the GAA.</p> <p>02:20:40 Prospects for profile of women's sports.</p> <p>02:22:00 What the GAA has meant to him. Benefits of the GAA.</p> <p>02:23:35 1972 final featuring Borris-in-Ossory and what it meant to him. Admiration for Christy O'Brien.</p> <p>02:24:15 Feeling sad when he goes back to Borris-in-Ossory and is not known.</p>
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	<p>02:25:15 GAA as part of his identity.</p> <p>02:26:25 GAA disappointing him.</p> <p>02:27:30 Not liking there being two senior teams in one parish.</p> <p>02:27:45 Being at an awards night in Roscrea and Kyle players praising him for his book.</p> <p>02:28:45 Need for clubs to co-operate more.</p> <p>02:30:10 Children's GAA involvement. Son playing for O'Loughlin's at minor level. Daughter playing camogie.</p> <p>02:31:30 Children supporting Kilkenny. Taking them to Croke Park with Joe Cody, former Dublin mayor.</p> <p>02:32:10 Kilkenny's prospects for the 2010 All-Ireland. Henry Shefflin and Michael Rice's involvement.</p> <p>02:32:35 Need for more teams to be competitive in hurling. Disparity between certain county teams.</p> <p>02:33:25 Christy Ring Cup having a positive effect. How Christy Ring games ought to be promoted.</p> <p>02:34:50 Offering to assist O'Loughlin's. Putting forward his ideas. Problems.</p> <p>02:36:10 Living in the 1960s and 1970s. People supporting each other.</p> <p>02:37:15 Tailteann Games medal Laois man Malachy Kelly won in 1924. Rose Cronin a friend of Malachy. Trying to track her down.</p> <p>02:39:10 Jack Carroll winning a Croke Cup medal and giving it to Harry Drennan. Scanning the medal for the book.</p> <p>02:40:25 Getting Murty O'Donnell's medals. Other medals he got.</p> <p>02:41:00 Visiting houses for material for his book. Time it took to put the book together.</p> <p>02:42:15 Working on a 'Laois GAA bible'.</p>
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	<p>02:43:20 How his book was received.</p> <p>02:45:00 Setting up a Borris-in-Ossory website.</p> <p>02:46:30 Need for a comprehensive history of Laois GAA.</p>
Involvement in GAA	<p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach ✓ Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member ✓ Grounds-person</p> <p>✓ Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer ✓ 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>Borris-in-Ossory from 1968: Won 2 U21 Laois Hurling Titles, 1968 & 1970; won Junior Laois Hurling title in 1970; Won Brady Cup in 1972 & 73; Played with Laois Minor and U21 hurling teams; played with Laois Junior & Senior Football teams; played inter-firm football with Avonmore Creamery; Senior Football medals playing with Kilrush, Co. Clare; played junior hurling with Ballyhea and senior hurling with Clarecastle; also played hurling with Lisdowney, Co. Kilkenny.</p>
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	<p>Trained Lisdowney and North Kilkenny camogie teams; held various positions in Kilkenny Camogie County Board inc. Vice-Chairman, 1986-87; Chairman, 1988; Treasurer, 1994. Selector for Kilkenny Senior Camogie 6 in a row team, 1986-91; Trained Kilkenny junior camogie team; coached and trained camogie in Clara, Co. Kilkenny.</p>
Format	<p>✓ Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
Duration	<p>Length of Interview: 02:47:17</p>
Language	<p>English</p>

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 12th June 2012