

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Joe Jordan
Date of Interview	3 rd Feb 2011
Location	N/A
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Stephen McDonald
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: N/A Home County: Armagh
Education	Primary: Glasdrummond P.S. Secondary: Yes Third Level: Yes
Family	Siblings: N/A Current Family if Different: Married with two sons
Club(s)	Middletown GAA Club [Armagh]
Occupation	N/A
Parents' Occupation	N/A
Religion	N/A
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

Date of Report	13 July 2012
Period Covered	1940s - 2011
Counties/Countries Covered	Armagh
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Education, Media, Emigration, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Rivalries, Scór, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Relationship with the Association, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Stephen McDonald is a former player and Chairman of the Middletown GAA club. At the time of this recording, he occupied the role of club Treasurer. McDonald opens the discusses his introduction to Gaelic football and the informal games that were played in the Primary School in Glasdrummond. His first organised game came at the Middletown Sports, but the beginning of his competitive sporting involvement came with the Middletown club's Under 16 team. He recalls playing on 'strong' underage teams up to Under 21, the highlight being the defeat – for the first time – of Pearse Ógs in the Armagh Under 21 championship of 1978. By then, he was a senior footballer, but his arrival into the adult ranks coincided with a decline in the club's fortunes following junior and Intermediate successes they had enjoyed in 1974 and 1976 respectively. McDonald stresses the enjoyment he derived from football – he didn't play hurling – and playing with the club through the 1980s.</p> <p>After injury prematurely ended his playing career at 29, the nature of his association with the Middletown club changed. He remained involved as a coach to underage and adult teams and through service on committees. He also began work on a history of the club, which was published in 1993. He talks about what went into the book and the value of bringing a range of historical materials together. He reflects on his father and his generation and the enjoyment they derived from the social aspect of the GAA, including the dinner dances. At the same time as he began work on the book, McDonald also became involved in Scór, joining an illustrious quiz team and assisting them in reaching the All-Ireland final in the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin. His interest in the</p>

	<p>Scór quiz is shared by his wife and his two sons and he discusses the engagement of each of them with the club.</p> <p>On the administrative front, McDonald discusses in detail his current work as Treasurer in the club highlighting the costs involved in the running the club and how it is funded. He discusses, for instance, the innovative fundraising ideas the club has promoted and comments on the high levels of support the club draws from across the parish. In addition, he talks about the structures in the club and considers the current standing of the club within the county. Looking across the sweep of the club's history and the current contribution of players and administrators to the county, he remarks on how Middletown has been to the fore in many of the key developments in Armagh's GAA story.</p> <p>00:00:05 Stephen McDonald introduces himself as Treasurer of Middletown GAA Club.</p> <p>00:00:10 Mentions being involved as an underage player, a football player and in administration. Has served on the Committee since the late 1980s and being Vice Chairman and Chairman before taking up the role of Treasurer.</p> <p>00:00:38 Discusses his first 'informal' involvement with Gaelic football at Glassdrummond school. Refers to teachers Sean Barrett and Pat McCann and to the absence of organised games. Informal matches would have been played.</p> <p>00:00:50 Recalls playing his first organised game at Middletown Sports and scoring a goal.</p> <p>00:01:05 Underage football in Middletown and playing with his brothers Brian and John. Mentions there was a 'good group of fellas' spanning a five year age-group. Says they were good at a mid-Armagh level.</p> <p>00:01:30 Recalls his first competitive game at Under 16, a 'combative' affair. Says that Middletown had a strong team from underage up to Under 21.</p> <p>00:01:45 Recalls the Under 21 team of 1978 when Middletown beat Pearse Óg's for the first time. Players involved included John McDonnell, Declan McBride, Peter McArdle, O'Gorman brothers, Frankie McAtavey.</p> <p>00:02:20 Starting to play senior football in 1977, when Middletown were in the 1st Division. Mentions that Middletown had won the junior championship in 1974 and an Intermediate</p>
--	---

	<p>championship in 1976.</p> <p>00:02:55 Refers to the 'lean period' which followed the departure of the team of the 1970s. It continued through the 1980s. Says the club had little success in championships or leagues, but that he has 'great memories' of playing football throughout the period.</p> <p>00:03:17 Mentions that he was studying and living in Belfast and remarks on his enjoyment of returning for training and matches.</p> <p>00:03:40 Stopping in 1989 after receiving a 'serious' leg injury. His last game was in Mullaghbrack in an end of season Division 3 or 4 fixture.</p> <p>00:04:00 From that point on, he remained involved with the club on committees. Remarks on his continued involvement at administration level and helping with underage football.</p> <p>00:04:30 Remarks on his enjoyment of hurling, but his lack of aptitude for it. Mentions that he never played the game, but is proud that the club promotes both codes.</p> <p>00:05:00 Talks about visiting the old school where his brother attended and comments that he would have been among the first intake to the new Glasdrummond Primary School.</p> <p>00:05:40 Talks about playing football during the break, but didn't play against other schools. Refers to others who attended the school at the time, including the 'Lennons from Derrynoose', the Gaffneys, the Currys. Says that though they didn't realise it, they were all receiving 'coaching' from teachers Sean Barrett and Pat McCann. Reference to age range playing football at the break and how it was 'every man for himself'.</p> <p>00:06:50 Interviewer comments that the first time 'Under 14 came on stream' would have been 1974.</p> <p>00:07:10 McDonald says he would have been Under 14 around this time, but can only remember playing at Under 16 grade.</p> <p>00:07:35 Interviewer comments the setting up of divisional boards in 1973.</p> <p>00:07:44 Reflects again on winning the mid-Armagh league at Under 21 – he would have been 18 at the time. Comments the age profile of the Middletown group and having 'great matches' against Grangemore. Refers to his brother John</p>
--	--

	<p>playing with the county Under 21s and getting a trial for the senior team.</p> <p>00:08:55 Interviewer recalls John playing against Fermanagh c. 1977 and 1978, when they were beaten.</p> <p>00:09:22 McDonald mentions that Eoin Lynch was playing at that time as well. Describes as a 'big, strong fella'. Describes Mickey Gorman as a 'great players...very skillful'.</p> <p>00:09:39 Says that it's only been in recent years since Middletown has had as good an Under 21 team, although there were good teams in the late 1980s.</p> <p>00:10:00 Interviewer and McDonald considers the impact of the 1980s recession and the loss of players to emigration.</p> <p>00:10:35 McDonald points out that they still had 'good enough teams' and recalls beating Mullaghbawn in the championship in Keady in 1987. Says it was a 'big shock' to beat an up and coming Mullaghbawn team.</p> <p>00:10:58 Talks about the families and players who backboneed the team when he started playing and the younger generation who came later. Remarks that small country clubs are going to have 'lean spells'.</p> <p>00:11:25 Remarks on his regret at having to give up playing football, when he was only 29 years old.</p> <p>00:11:40 Taking on a project to write the club's history, which was published in 1993. Mentions talking to people and pulling the photographs and newspaper articles together, and also get people interested in their club.</p> <p>00:13:10 Interviewer mentions that interviewee's father , Packie McDonald, had stressed the need in the early 1970s for a club history to be produced.</p> <p>00:13:40 Stephen talks about his late father as having never played football or hurling, but who enjoyed the social aspect of the GAA, going away on buses and enjoying the 'craic'. Comments also on his love of the dinner dances in the late 1960s, early 1970s.</p> <p>00:14:35 Recalls attending dinner dances. Mentions that they were still going strong in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Recalls also the celebrations after championship victories of 1974 and 1976. The dinner dances were the big nights of the year and mostly held in Monaghan.</p> <p>00:15:17 Joining the Scór quiz team in 1990. Mentions that</p>
--	--

	<p>he had been involved with Scór at underage level in the 1970s, but joined a great quiz team which included Seamus Mallon, Joe Jordan and Brendan McDonnell. Says that these three, along with Patricia McArdle and Sean Barrett had brought 'great honour' to the club through Scór.</p> <p>00:15:50 Refers to his 'trepidation' at joining a hugely successful Scór quiz team, filling Joe Jordan's shoes. Mentions that they got to an All-Ireland final in the Gaiety Theatre and the 'super night's craic' they had afterwards. The 'camaraderie' of the weekend 'summed up the GAA'.</p> <p>00:16:40 Recollections of Peter Woods shop. Likens it to a 'speaker's corner' where the great and good would gather. Recalls his frustration as a child when his father would stop for the conversation. 'There was no need for parish bulletins' – the news from that place would have been spread.</p> <p>00:18:35 Discusses the local men who would gather and their support for Armagh county teams – says a lot of them never lived to see Armagh win the All-Ireland. 'They would have loved that'.</p> <p>00:19:00 Discusses the women who were involved in the GAA. Mentions his mother and Mary Casey, who rarely attended matches but knew what was going on and 'washed jerseys'. Says they were a 'great support to their husbands, to their sons'. Says they saw the enjoyment that people got from it and the 'social cohesion' it created. Describes that as the 'bedrock' of support who don't look for credit.</p> <p>00:20:17 Discussion about the January 1972 Dinner dance in the Hillgrove, the first big social event in Middletown and how, according to Joe Jordan, it was the first time that the women got a 'night out'.</p> <p>00:20:45 McDonald refers to 'growing up in the GAA' and not being able to imagine life without it.</p> <p>00:21:00 Leaving Glassdrummond P.S. for college. Mentions being 'small and light' and not being involved much with football in college, although he had a 'few trials' and featured in B matches.</p> <p>00:21:15 Attending university and not having any involvement with the GAA – says he would return mid-week to train with Middletown.</p> <p>00:21:50 Refers to getting into underage and senior management after finishing as a player. Says he has continued an involvement in underage football since the early</p>
--	--

	<p>1990s.</p> <p>00:22:10 Discusses the great changes in the club, in particular the improvement of facilities which young people take for granted. Remarks on there being plenty of competitions and good coaching available in the club, though he questions the level of bureaucracy and how it affects players' development. Mentions some players who were late developer and made a</p> <p>00:24:20 Interviewer recalls the association of himself and Francie Casey with the parish leagues in the early 1970s prior to the establishment of Divisional boards. Mentions players who grew up very quickly and looked serious footballers...</p> <p>00:24:40 McDonald refers to the club's pride in the parish league initiative.</p> <p>00:24:50 Interviewer reflects on the parish league's origins in 1970, the idea of Pat McCann in Glasdrummond. Says it was intended to keep the young fellas pointed in the different direction as the 'Troubles' began to take off.</p> <p>00:25:18 McDonald talks about the benefit of the parish league to the club and how it has been 'kept going' at Under 14 level, played at the end of the season.</p> <p>00:25:58 Interviewer discusses the very first parish league and the 'amazing' amount of interest in 1970. It 'went to the sire' and Francie Joe McArdle arrived at the venue on the night of the final matches with a van of minerals and buns. Remarks that everyone got a medal.</p> <p>00:26:25 McDonald mentions that they now play for the Vincent Gormley Memorial shield, donated by the Gormley family for the parish league. Talks about the enjoyment the boys derive from the league and refers to its original incarnation in the 1940s, when there was no organised club in existence. Remarks that this original league led on to the establishment of the junior club.</p> <p>00:27:20 Comments that even in year when there are small numbers the players know they are going to get competitive games in the parish league.</p> <p>00:27:30 Discusses how there has always been football and hurling played in Middletown since the 1970s. Considers this a 'big achievement'.</p> <p>00:28:15 Discusses his administrative involvement with Middletown. Mentions being Vice-Chairman and Chairman.</p>
--	---

	<p>Talks about his current position of Treasurer and how 'busy' the role is: remarks on attending regular meetings with a club officer group and acknowledges the support he get from his predecessor, Gerry Mallon.</p> <p>00:29:11 Talks about the sub-committees which work beneath the main committee. Mentions involvement in finance sub-committee and refers to the success of the lotto, which was taken over from the parish and which funds day to day expenses. Remarks that the lotto gets 'great backing from the parish' and suggests it's one of the best and most consistent fundraising initiatives in Co. Armagh.</p> <p>00:29:50 Comments that the lotto has approximately 35 collectors each week and reaches all parts of the parish, touching people who not involved day to day with the club.</p> <p>00:30:20 Talks about the costs of running a club: €45-50k. Says they are 'proud' and 'glad' to spend the money and the lotto is the staple income used to fund it.</p> <p>00:30:40 Refers to the costs of being a dual club and fielding underage teams from ages 8 to 18 and through to senior.</p> <p>00:31:03 Refers to the club's transport costs for underage teams in 2010 being approx €5-6k.</p> <p>00:31:20 Interviewer refers to Charlie McGuinness who claimed in an interview that a bus to Poyntzpass in 1952 was was £2 10s.</p> <p>00:31:48 McDonald claims that transport is a major costs, as are affiliation fees, physio, maintenance on two full-size pitches. Credits the community with always weighing in with support.</p> <p>00:32:05 Discusses various special fundraisers since 2005 – a pig racing day in Middletown, which, he says, subsequently took off in other clubs. 'The village was jammed'. Says the event took place at the time they were developing Barrett's field.</p> <p>00:32:50 Describes a 'big gala' in Monaghan as the club's biggest ever fundraising event. Talks about the great work of the organisers, George Carville, Pauline McDonnell, Audrey Donnelly. 'We had a super night...' Remarks also that it 'broke the back' of the fundraising for the pitch.</p> <p>00:33:40 Describes the pitch as one of the 'best in County Armagh' and many 'marvel' at it.</p>
--	---

	<p>00:33:52 Mentions other fundraisers: boxing nights.</p> <p>00:34:12 Refers to a conversation with Brian McGuinness, a clubman in Madden, about doing something big every couple of years. It helps 'bring the club together'.</p> <p>00:34:45 Talks about the community reach of the club. Says it reaches into every family in some way and that they will help you if they see you doing something.</p> <p>00:35:50 Mentions also friends overseas who help out and keep in touch. Mentions the intention to develop a club website to enable people follow developments.</p> <p>00:36:28 Talks about his own family's connection with Middletown GAA. Mentions wife's involvement with first aid, with Scór and with underage teams. Their two boys are also involved. Remarks on son Niall, away in College in England, having played up to Under 18 and being interested in the media side of the GAA. Describes him also as a 'great Scór quiz man'. Both sons won Scór titles for underage quiz in Armagh. Other son Christopher plays hurling and football and won a junior championship medal.</p> <p>00:37:30 Reflects on his generation of player who just missed out on the 1976 championship and their joy in looking on at the latest junior championship success. Reflects on the players who played in teams which never won a title.</p> <p>00:38:40 Acknowledges that the teams he played on built a platform for subsequent junior championship success.</p> <p>00:39:10 Hopes that teams will look to emulate the achievement of the 2009 team as they did the team of the 1970s.</p> <p>00:39:34 Considers the future of the GAA. Believes the club structures need to stay the same, but worries about the threat of emigration. Comments that the emigration is different to the 1950s in that they can 'come back within weeks'.</p> <p>00:40:10 Says the GAA is 'strong' but it can't complacent. Stresses the need to maintain the element of enjoyment and not getting 'bogged down' in the running of it. Says you couldn't put 'a value' on the friendship made.</p> <p>00:40:50 Reflects researching the book and talking to men in their 80s and hearing stories about the 1920s and before. Mentions his neighbour Pat McCann who came from a great GAA family and who, into his 90s, could chat away to an</p>
--	--

	<p>underage player on the same topic.</p> <p>00:42:30 Mentions the shared sense of attachment among young and old people.</p> <p>00:42:40 Remarks on the upswing in Armagh's fortunes in hurling and football over the previous 10 years and says it would be great to get back to Croke Park.</p> <p>00:43:20 Mentions Middletown-men Martin Maguire and on Alan O'Hagan on the Under 21 team and James Hughes on the Minor football panel. Remarks also on the number of club players on the county hurling teams at underage and senior.</p> <p>00:43:50 Considers Middletown one of the leading clubs in Armagh in contributing to county teams and to county administration.</p> <p>00:44:15 Suggests that club has 'punched above its weight' and reflects on the role of PJ O'Neill in securing the Athletic Grounds in the 1930s/40. He was a 'leading man' in the GAA.</p> <p>00:44:30 Interviewer remarks that 2 Middletown men contributed the most money toward the purchase of the Athletic Grounds and PJ O'Neill was the county secretary. Mentions that PJ was also secretary when Armagh an All-Ireland in 1949 and another Middletown man was chairman when they won their next All-Ireland.</p> <p>00:44:50 McDonald remarks that the club has been 'at the helm' and to the fore in making things happen.</p> <p>00:45:00 Describes Armagh as a 'small county' and the clubs are all close to each other. Refers to the rivalry between them.</p> <p>00:45:25 Refers to recent change of structure at underage football between north region and south region. Says they don't play teams like Madden or north Armagh teams as much, but boys are beginning to meet teams from outside their school area. Believes the changes will 'revitalise' the underage structure.</p> <p>00:46:10 Interviewer reflects on Armagh visionaries and the decision in the 1950s to establish an all county league and subsequent adjusting of structures as population shifted and grew.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p>

REFERENCE NO. AR/1/36

	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person <input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	N/A
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Club Vice Chairman, Club Chairman and Club Treasurer.
Format	<input type="checkbox"/> Audio <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 00:47:13
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: Joe Jordan

Date: 3rd Feb 2011