

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	5 th June 2013
Location	Croke Park Stadium, Dublin.
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Liam Ó Maolmhichíl
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1946 Home County: Longford
Education	Primary: Ballymahon National School, Co. Longford. Secondary: St. Mel's College, Longford. Third Level: St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin.
Family	Siblings: 7 brothers and 2 sisters Current Family if Different: Married to Máire with one daughter and three sons
Club(s)	Kenagh GAA [Longford]; Donaghmore Ashbourne GAA [Meath]
Occupation	Primary School Teacher; Schools' Inspector; Árd Stiúrthóir CLG (1979-2007)
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

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Date of Report	12 th June 2013
Period Covered	1920s-2013
Counties/Countries Covered	Longford, Armagh, Cavan, Great Britain, Cork, Carlow, Meath
Key Themes Covered	Facilities, Playing, Administration, Celebrations, Religion, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Identity, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Family Involvement, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Opening of Croke Park, Politics, Professionalism, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships
Interview Summary	<p>In this, the second of two interviews, Liam talks about life as Ard-Stiúrthóir of the GAA. He outlines the various big issues that emerged in the course of his career in Croke Park including The Troubles in Northern Ireland, the Re-Development of Croke Park, Sponsorship and rule changes. He talks about the many people he worked with along the way and the impact of his role on family life. He reflects on his daily routine, travelling around the country and internationally on GAA business and the place of the GAA in Irish society.</p> <p>00:00:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:00:30 Liam's first experiences of GAA at national level on central council. Description of central council as an entity. Different approach of Ulster counties to appointing delegates to central council. Mentions Gerry Fagan, Armagh; Mickie Duffy, Monaghan; Tommy Diamond, Derry; Phil Brady, Cavan. His own experiences of central council and relationship with its members.</p> <p>00:04:30 Mention of the political situation in Northern Ireland in 1979-80 - H-Block crisis, Hunger Strikes, occupation of Casement Park, issues at Crossmaglen grounds. Mention of marches and protests on these issues. Being part of a delegation to Westminster organised by Tommy Walsh (Liverpool GAA) to discuss these issues. Mentions Con Murphy's chairmanship of a committee to resolve the Crossmaglen issue. Liam reflects on his learnings from this process. Reference to internal memos in English political system and their view of the Irish at the time. Reflects on progress that has been made in the intervening years.</p> <p>00:08:12 Travelling regularly to Northern Ireland; awareness that his car was being monitored; being stopped at the</p>

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	<p>border.</p> <p>00:08:50 Congress in Queen's University Belfast in 1984. Decision to hold congress there, associated planning and security logistics. Mentions Queen's Elms accommodation. Incident with Cork delegates. Tension present at the time, what it meant to the GAA counties in Northern Ireland – statement of support and loyalty from the rest of the Association. Differences between clubs in the North and the South. Mentions Alf Murray. GAA as a political organisation.</p> <p>00:13:30 Traditions of Ulster Council eg. having its meetings in Irish up until the 1990s and why this changed. Commitment of Ulster counties.</p> <p>00:16:30 Response of MPs in Westminster to GAA delegation and their perception of the GAA as an organisation. Mention of the IRA. Mention of Bloody Sunday (1920).</p> <p>00:18:48 British Ambassador to Ireland's wish to issue a public apology to the GAA for Bloody Sunday around the time that Croke Park was going to be opened to soccer and rugby.</p> <p>00:20:30 Agenda for meetings in Westminster. Meeting Prime Minister, Northern Ireland Secretary, a number of other MPs lined up by Tommy Walsh and also civil servants. Mentions occupation of GAA property and H-Block crisis. Three meetings in total.</p> <p>00:21:55 Reference to Cardinal O'Fiaich's commitment to building bridges and being unfairly referred to as 'The IRA Cardinal' in Westminster. Liam's regular invitations to Ara Coeli (the Cardinal's residence) for gatherings of people from across communities. Reference to singing ballads, getting to know people, mentions Con Shortt.</p> <p>00:25:50 Nationalist community representatives' disillusionment with Margaret Thatcher regime in Britain. Reference to British policy in relations to Northern Ireland at the time. Mention of British Army intimidation using low helicopter flights.</p> <p>00:27:38 GAA withdrawal from formal efforts to influence events behind the scene. How GAA communities north and south viewed GAA intervention in political affairs. Walking 'the tight rope' between these views. Difficult task Paddy Mac Flynn had at this time in keeping the Association together. Mentions Tom Wolfe.</p> <p>00:31:47 Talks about the removal of 'The Ban' in its various guises and compares the atmosphere then and during the H-</p>
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	<p>Block crisis. Seán McCague's work and consultation on the removal of the ban on security forces. Impact of removal of this ban.</p> <p>00:34:36 Removal of ban on the use of GAA property by other codes under Seán Kelly. Implications of that decision.</p> <p>00:36:45 Ways in which Liam could and did give his personal opinion on GAA matters as Ard-Stiúrthóir. Mention of his annual reports at Congress.</p> <p>00:38:40 Development of GAA social centres. Mention of Jim Ryan. Pioneer and publican lobbies in GAA. How the GAA handles change. Reference to corporate boxes and sale of alcohol in Croke Park.</p> <p>00:41:35 Controversy around the campaign about the rating of GAA property by local authorities. Decision not to extend invitations to politicians to games for one year in protest. Reference to Garrett Fitzgerald. Reference to GAA banning of Douglas Hyde.</p> <p>00:46:37 Reference to an unfortunate incident with the President of Ireland on the day of an All-Ireland Final one year.</p> <p>00:51:33 Dealing with politicians on All-Ireland Final day. Reference to parties for volunteers on the evening of the All-Ireland Final.</p> <p>00:53:38 Personal toll of early years in the role of Ard-Stiúrthóir. Getting married in 1981. Living in Carlow. Description of a typical day/routine at the time. Moving to Ashbourne, Co. Meath.</p> <p>00:56:32 1984 – GAA Centenary year – events, committees, planning - explosion of GAA involvement that year. Long term impact of that year on the Association and its position in Irish life. Opening up of GAA to sponsorship.</p> <p>00:58:52 Near disaster at the All-Ireland Football Final, 1983 in terms of crowd control. Pivotal moment in the decision to re-develop Croke Park. Mentions Michael Horgan with whom he discussed possible improvements to the grounds. Re-building of Hill 16. Beginnings of consultation on the 'new' Croke Park.</p> <p>1:05:20 Early 1980s. Going to British Sports Council to get recommendations for stadium designers. Mention of various stadium designers recommended to him– one in Split in modern day Croatia; an Italian stadium designer called Piano;</p>
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	<p>HOK who had designed stadia in the USA. HOK's Ron Labinski's trip to Ireland to address central council. He had designed Giants Stadium and the stadium of the Miami Dolphins. Mention of club seats. Lobb Partnership, an Australian company also approached, mentions Rob Sheard who worked on the Arsenal Stadium, Epsom and Ascot in England. Later designed Olympic Stadium in Sydney, did some work at The Curragh. Selection process. Mentions John Dowling. Decision to go with a joint bid of HOK and Lobb.</p> <p>1:11:55 Logistical issues before re-design of stadium could get started eg. purchase of Belvedere field from the Jesuits. Negotiations with Arch-Bishop of Dublin about acquisition of land at Clonliffe College. Idea of moving Croke Park to a green field site. Visiting many stadia including at Madrid, Barcelona and Naples. Design negotiations.</p> <p>1:16:44 Long term impact of bringing Lobb and HOK together. Reference to influence of Croke Park design on the new Arsenal Stadium. Speculation on life-span of current Croke Park. On-going involvement of Lobb and HOK in the stadium eg. on the addition of floodlights and other possible future improvements. Further discussion on Croke Park design and its future. Croke Park based on the design of Arrowhead Stadium, Kansas. Purchase of properties around Croke Park.</p> <p>1:25:08 Getting support for the re-development of Croke Park. Mentions discussions around Premium level; cost of Cusack stand; club seats; success of phased development approach. Reference to government support. Influence of stadium on people's perception of the GAA and on the GAA's perception of themselves.</p> <p>1:30:57 Challenging relationship with Dublin City Authorities.</p> <p>1:32:43 Impact of re-development on Liam's daily schedule, particularly from 1989 onwards when the building work began. Role of Peter Quinn in the process. Bringing of Dermot Power on board to take care of selling the boxes, premium seats and club seats. Mentions involvement of Frank O'Rourke of Bank of Ireland; Des McMahon (architect); Frank McMurray (engineer); Chris Gogarty; John Dowling (former GAA president). Influence of the size of a sliotar in the design of the stadium.</p> <p>1:42:20 Government support of re-development. Years of lobbying. History of government funding of Croke Park. Reference to Tailteann Games in 1920s; lobbies that objected to the GAA getting government funding with reference to the various bans. Relationship with Bertie Ahern and Albert</p>
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	<p>Reynolds. Reference to 'Bertie Bowl'. Dealings with the Department of Sport and the Department of Finance. Mentions Danny Lynch and his experience in the civil service. Reference to bringing the motion to open Croke Park to Congress.</p> <p>1:49:04 Nature of negotiations with government on funding for Croke Park.</p> <p>1:50:24 Maintaining All-Irelands in Croke Park during the re-development with reduced capacity. Reference to 1984 All-Ireland in Thurles. Reference to head quarters for handball. The completion of the project.</p> <p>1:53:05 Talks about his personal life during and after the re-development project - his daughter, Daráine's illness (2000) and his own subsequent illness. Re-evaluation of his position and how long he would continue in the role. Announcing his retirement in 2007.</p> <p>1:55:54 No regrets on retirement. Relationship with Páraic Duffy, approach to retirement.</p> <p>1:57:17 How the role of Ard-Stiúrthóir developed during his time. Key changes discussed include: Centenary year, re-development of Croke Park; increased commercialisation of GAA; sponsorship; changes in attitude; sponsorship of All-Ireland series. Mentions Guinness and Irish distillers – reaction to sponsorship by alcohol drinks companies. Mentions Bank of Ireland.</p> <p>2:01:09 Controversy around alcohol drinks company sponsorship. Mentions Mick Loftus.</p> <p>2:02:05 Identifies confidence as the biggest change in the GAA. Talks about gap between 'top clubs' and struggling clubs and finance. Also identifies the change in the perception of the GAA in modern Ireland through facilities, re-development of Croke Park. Mentions development of GAA in Ulster and the end of 'The Troubles'. Mentions Danny Murphy in terms of cross community work.</p> <p>2:05:49 Story about Martin McAleese's work in cross community work and bringing people from non-nationalist backgrounds to Croke Park.</p> <p>2:09:17 Work of Ulster Council in reaching out to other communities in the North. Role of GAA in peace process.</p> <p>2:10:05 Loss of commitment within the GAA in terms of</p>
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	<p>cultural aspects of the GAA eg. Irish language.</p> <p>2:10:56 Modernisation of the games themselves. Mentions Wexford and Kilkenny in terms of the development of the game of hurling. Rules changes and experimentation in games. His own views on the changes in the games.</p> <p>2:13:00 Influence of International Rules experience on experimentation in Gaelic football and in Australian Rules football.</p> <p>2:14:37 Croke Park committee system and growth of voluntary involvement in Croke Park and increase of regulation in Ireland in general eg. in areas of child protection, drug and drink awareness campaigns. Pressure on modern day administrators. Influence of external authorities on the GAA. Child abuse within organisation. Work of Danny Lynch in developing protocols in dealing with those types of issues early on.</p> <p>2:16:15 Increase in number paid staff at Croke Park overall in Liam's time. Mentions Con O'Leary (grounds man) and other paid positions.</p> <p>2:19:02 Decision to set up a stadium operation to manage the stadium and to appoint a stadium manager to take over the stadium duties of the Ard Stiúrthóir.</p> <p>2:20:05 Development of the GAA Museum. Visiting other sports museums – mentions visiting soccer museum in Barcelona with stadium design team and finding some unexpected similarities between the Barcelona club and the GAA in reference to regional identity.</p> <p>2:24:12 His own personal view of the Museum. Mentions the museums at Twickenham and Wimbledon.</p> <p>2:26:30 Story about the arrest of Roger Casement and the GAA connection. Mentions Micheál O'Rourke, Dan Spring and the Brosnans in Kerry.</p> <p>2:28:12 Story about Luke O'Toole giving evidence at the Bloody Sunday inquest. Reference to O'Toole's involvement in War of Independence.</p> <p>2:30:15 Reflects on how political the GAA is today. Mentions community involvement, the Irish ideal, being part of the establishment. Reflects historically on the relationship between GAA and government. Mentions Eoin O'Duffy and Garda involvement in GAA; Douglas Hyde episode;</p>
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	<p>imposition of taxes on the GAA in the 1930s; Jack Lynch.</p> <p>2:34:08 Conversations with newly elected GAA presidents about what laid in store for their term.</p> <p>2:35:15 Trip to Australia with Paddy Buggy in 1982. Meetings about International Rules competition in 1984. Meeting GAA units around Australia and the impact that meeting Irish people there had on Liam. Nature of emigration from Ireland to Australia at the time. Style of Gaelic football they played there at the time. Mentions Jim Farman, secretary of the GAA in Australia at the time.</p> <p>2:40:55 Reflects on his approach to the role of Ard Stiúrthóir. Mentions the extent to which people know and recognise him around the country. Mentions Seán Ó Síocháin. Dealing with different organisations, institutions, governments etc.</p> <p>2:44:10 Support, understanding and involvement of his wife and family throughout the years. Máire being able to accompany him on some trips before he retired.</p> <p>2:46:33 Story about security guards and coming in early in to work. Mentions Frank Hughes.</p> <p>2:39:30 Life after being Ard Stiúthóir. Involvement with the GAA in Meath and Longford and in his local club in Donaghmore Ashbourne GAA. Involvement in various committees. Adapting to retirement.</p> <p>2:51:04 Liam's legacy – change of attitude towards the GAA as an association.</p> <p>2:52:46 Story about Marcus de Burca's father and grandfather's involvement in GAA. Mentions grandfather's involvement with Arravale Rovers football team, Co. Tipperary and a controversial All-Ireland Final against Navan Pearse O'Mahony's in the early years of the GAA. Marcus's involvement in the GAA in Meath. Story about Marcus's father and Bloody Sunday.</p> <p>3:07:13 Story about a referee producing a gun at a match involving Rathkenny GAA in Co. Meath in 1920. Mentions JT Blake former GAA General Secretary of GAA.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ 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>

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	✓ Other (please specify): Ard Stiúrthóir CLG, 1979-2007.
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	Played with Ballymahon National School. Played with Kenagh Club from U16 level. Won U21 Longford football championship with Kenagh in 1963, later won junior and intermediate county football championships. Played with St Mel's from 1959. Won 4 Leinster Senior Colleges and two All-Ireland Senior Colleges with St Mel's (1960-64). Played minor and U21 football for Longford. Played football at St Pat's and won Dublin U21 football championships.
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Selector on U21 Longford football team (1960s); Various positions in Kenagh GAA club; Kenagh Delegate to Longford County Board; Vice-Chairman of Longford County Board (1969); Chairman of Longford County Board (1970). Longford Central Council representative (1972); Member of Central Council (1972-2007); Ard Stiúrthóir CLG (1979-2007).
Format	✓ Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 03:10:28
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: 12th June 2013