

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Aoife Doherty
Date of Interview	27 th July 2010
Location	Interviewee's home, Near Newry, Armagh
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	John O'Reilly
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1935 Home County: Armagh
Education	N/A
Family	Siblings: 10 Current Family if Different: 7 children
Club(s)	Crossmaglen Rangers GAC [Armagh]
Occupation	Retired
Parents' Occupation	Barber [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Rotary Club

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Date of Report	13 th July 2012
Period Covered	1951 – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Armagh
Key Themes Covered	Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Fundraising, Education, Religion, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Identity, Irish Language, Culture, Scór, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Politics, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Professionalism, Relationships
Interview Summary	<p>John O'Reilly charts Crossmaglen's historical links with the GAA and how the role of the GAA has changed and developed since he first played with the club in 1951. O'Reilly administrative involvement in GAA affairs began in the mid 1950s and continued in subsequent decades. Among the roles he held were chairman of the Crossmaglen, Chairman of the Armagh County Board, President of the Ulster Council and chairman of the first 'hearings' committee in Croke Park. The fortunes of Crossmaglen and Armagh teams are considered with special mention made of Armagh's All-Ireland success in 2002.</p> <p>The Troubles impinged greatly on his GAA experience and alongside the contribution of the GAA to the development of an Irish consciousness, he discusses the relationship between sport and politics and the reaction of the Crossmaglen club to the occupation of its grounds by the British army. Other themes addressed are those of club and community, volunteerism and professionalism and the Irish language and Scór. The interview concludes with O'Reilly raising concerns about the development of a semi-professional game in the future.</p> <p>00:00:30 Comments on the longstanding links between the Crossmaglen and the GAA.</p> <p>00:00:40 Remarks on the lack of family involvement in the GAA.</p> <p>00:00:50 Discusses the changes in the GAA since he first played for Crossmaglen in 1951. Refers to the progress of the underage provision.</p> <p>00:01:35 Refers to becoming Assistant secretary of Crossmaglen club in 1956 and what this involved – meetings</p>

	<p>were rare and not much money was needed.</p> <p>00:02:10 Reflects on the importance of volunteerism and expresses a concern over people now been paid within the Association.</p> <p>00:02:44 Makes a statement on place of club in community.</p> <p>00:02:55 Reflects on the differences of GAA experience north and south. Comments on the role played by the GAA in nationalist/Catholic community during the Troubles.</p> <p>00:03:35 Discusses the various roles/positions he has occupied within the GAA, including two terms as chairman of Crossmaglen between (1963-68 and 1971-72) and chairman of Armagh County Board (1977-81 and 1987-88) and President of Ulster Council (2002-04). Refers also to being first chairman of the 'Hearings' committee in Croke Park.</p> <p>00:05:28 Comments on the contribution the GAA has made to shaping his personal identity and his idea of Irishness. Remarks on the relative absence of nationalism in Crossmaglen forty years previously.</p> <p>00:06:00 Reflects on the relationship between sport and politics and remarks on politicians taking advantage of the GAA – mention is made of the number of politicians in attendance at Clones for big games.</p> <p>00:07:10 Discusses response of the club to the occupation of the field by British army – says this was more important to them than the hunger strikes. 'We had a war of our own'.</p> <p>00:07:40 Discusses the impact – negative and positive - of the army occupation on the club.</p> <p>00:08:20 Comments on the nature of British army interference on the club – interference from helicopters etc. Mentions the efforts of the club to calm passions of its members.</p> <p>00:09:22 Acknowledges that the occupation of the Crossmaglen grounds contribution to an upsurge in republican activity in the area.</p> <p>00:09:41 Discusses the Crossmaglen record of achievement from 1947 onwards.</p> <p>00:11:00 Discusses the campaign of opposition to the British army's occupation of the club grounds, the non-violent approach used etc.</p> <p>00:11:40 Reflects on the meaning of being from</p>
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	<p>Crossmaglen.</p> <p>00:12:10 Discusses some of the stand-out players for the club – refers to Thomas McCreesh in the 1960s, the McEntee brothers in the 1990s.</p> <p>00:12:48 Comments on the lack of Irish language use in the club, but mentions that language is an ‘essential part’ of the Association.</p> <p>00:13:20 Remarks on the poor record of the Crossmaglen club with Scór and contrasts it with that of the club which his own family is now involved with – mentions that three of his family of All-Ireland medals for Scór.</p> <p>00:13:50 Remarks upon the impact of both the language and the Troubles on the forging of nationalist identity in the area.</p> <p>00:14:05 Selects as the highlight of his GAA involvement Armagh’s All-Ireland success in 2002.</p> <p>00:14:28 Reflects on some of the low points of his GAA involvement – ‘there are always tragedies in clubs’.</p> <p>00:14:50 Remarks on the difficulty of comparing teams from different generations – styles of play change etc. Even so, mention is made of Kerry as having many fine teams.</p> <p>00:15:40 Expresses a desire to see an improvement in refereeing standards – suggests the need to re-examine the rules.</p> <p>00:16:35 Concluding comments on the importance of the GAA’s ‘Irishness’ and amateur ethos. Criticises the payment of managers of club and county teams and voices concerns about the development of a semi-professional game in the future.</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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" 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>Player (1951-56)</p>

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Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Club Chairman, 1963-68; and 1971-72; County Chairman, 1977-81 and 1987-88; Provincial Chairman, 2002-04
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 00:17:39
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Aoife Doherty

Date: 27th July 2010