

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	14 th April 2011
Location	Mick's home, near Birr, Co. Offaly.
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Mick Spain
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1933 Home County: Offaly
Education	Primary: Killyon NS, Co, Offaly. Secondary: Vocational School Birr
Family	Siblings: 7 sisters & 5 brothers Current Family if Different: Wife (Kathleen Gardiner), 3 boys & 1 girl
Club(s)	Drumcullen GAA [Offaly]; Clareen GAA [Offaly]; Birr [Offaly]; Mountrath GAA [Laois]
Occupation	Carpenter; Clerk of Works for Offaly County Council.
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholics
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

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Date of Report	25 th July 2012
Period Covered	1928 - 2011
Counties/Countries Covered	Offaly, Tipperary, Laois
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, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Alcohol, Violence, Politics, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Retirement, Food and Drink, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Mick heard a lot of stories about Offaly's hurling traditions as a young boy and it fed his desire to create some history of his own. After playing informally when he was growing up he joined clubs such as Drumcullen, Mountrath and Birr. He was soon on the county minor, junior and senior teams. When time allowed he switched his attentions to Drumcullen and their championship-winning efforts. Mick later became a selector with the Offaly team, and was part of the management set-up as the county claimed an All-Ireland hurling title in 1981. He describes putting the building blocks in place for this achievement, and recalls the small breakthroughs that were made along the way. There was further All-Ireland success in 1985 and 1994, and Mick has unique memories of each of these triumphs. He also dedicated his time to administrative and county work, and managed to referee the odd game as well. His significant contribution to the Association was the result of hard work, honesty, understanding, good planning and an appreciation of the value of never taking anything too seriously.</p> <p>00:15 Born in 1933. Originally from Killane. Seven sisters and five brothers.</p> <p>01:10 Family's GAA involvement. Uncle, Frank Reddin, on Offaly All-Ireland junior winning team of 1915, beating Tipperary in Athlone. His uncles, Mick and Jack, playing for Offaly. Talking to Sim Walton of Kilkenny about his uncle.</p>

	<p>02:35 Hearing stories of hurling exploits growing up. Frank telling them stories of walking home from a game in Portlaoise. Mick playing at wing-back, Frank and Jack playing in the back line. Stories they told him.</p> <p>05:25 GAA not very organised in late 1800s. Jack winning titles and being presented with golf medals. Where they came from.</p> <p>06:25 11 cricket clubs in his parish of Drumcullen before the GAA was founded. Hurling pitch in the area in 1828. Different estates playing each other. Gentry stewarding the games on horseback. Captain Waters mapped the field in as a hurling field on a map.</p> <p>09:30 History of Drumcullen. Founded 1893. First official game in Offaly a football game played in 1893 in Killane between Coolderry and Drumcullen.</p> <p>10:35 Playing games at lunchtime in school. Playing in fields after school. Father bringing him to a game in Claghareen. Walking across fields to school. Mrs Hanrahan and Mrs Gangan at the school. Girls playing hurling.</p> <p>13:35 Father making hurls. Going to Birr sawmills. What they used for a ball and wore when playing. Blackthorn boots that were made in Dundalk. Age he was when he got his first pair. Getting a pair after helping out with thrashing. What that was like. Dances held after. Mother an accordian player. Neighbours' and family's musical skills. Frequency of dances.</p> <p>19:25 Hurling seven nights a week. Where they played. Playing with his brothers on a field that was part of their land.</p> <p>21:10 Going to vocational school in Birr. Playing there despite lack of structure.</p> <p>22:25 Playing minor hurling with Clareen in 1947. Drumcullen's minor team later organised by Fr Clarke. Training in Rath. Success in 1949. Playing county minor in 1951. Position he played in. Birr, Coolderry and Banaher all strong at the time.</p> <p>25:40 Watching Galway play Cork in Birr in 1946. Cycling to the game. Cycling to Tullamore the following year to watch Drumcullen.</p> <p>27:15 Playing for the county minors. Joe Dooley their club secretary at the time. Little communication on whether he had been selected for the team. Reason for that. How he felt when hearing he had been selected. Marking Newt Wheeler</p>
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	<p>of Wexford at Nowlan Park in Kilkenny. Wexford a talented team at the time. Rackards, Podge Keogh, Tim Flood some of their better players. Jim Langton, Dan Kinly, the Hogans of Tullaroan, Seán Cloghessy also quite good. His brother hurling against Limerick's Mick Mackey. Josie Gallagher a good Galway player. Tipperary had many talented players. Tony Reddon a good player.</p> <p>33:10 Many All-Ireland semi-finals played in Birr. Kilkenny and Galway playing in 1947. Watching games in Roscrea and Birr. What Birr was like on a match day.</p> <p>35:05 Listening to games on the radio. Micheál Ó Heiher bringing games to life. Reading the Midland Tribune, the Irish Press and the Independent newspapers.</p> <p>36:15 Working in Mountrath with Loughnane building contractors. Hurling with Mountrath in the evenings. Hurling in Monaghan. What that was like. Hurling in Nenagh in 1952. Returning home. Playing with the county junior team in 1953. Playing Tipperary in an All-Ireland junior final in 1953. Seán Rafter and Seán Robbins training them. What the All-Ireland final was like. Toggling out in a hotel. Walking to Brendan's Park from hotel. Theo English and Mick Kennehy playing for Tipp.</p> <p>42:00 Type of player he was. How style of modern-day game is different from in his time. Tactics when he was playing. Training they did.</p> <p>44:50 Drumcullen championship-winning team of the 1950s not drinking alcohol. Numerous titles they won during that decade. Organising training themselves. Coolderry rivals of theirs during that period. Number of senior titles they have played. Coolderry refusing to play a game in Birr. 1947 final lasting ten minutes. Reason for that. Frequency of rows on the field. Reason for that.</p> <p>51:45 Tournaments he played in. Gold watch tournament in 1950s. Ahane of Limerick playing, as well as Thurles Sarsfields, Tullaroan, Carrickshock, Laois side Clonnane, Camross, Ballinasloe, Castlegar. Dances afterwards. Maple floor in Birr. Who ran the dances.</p> <p>54:00 Prominence of GAA in Drumcullen. Support they got from community in the 1950s. How people travelled to games. Celebrations after a win.</p> <p>56:25 Playing for the Offaly senior team. What the set-up was like. County board secretary and chairman running the team.</p>
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	<p>How selectors were appointed. How he became a selector.</p> <p>01:00:05 How they travelled to games with the county team. Number of Drumcullen players on the team. Offaly's style of play through the years. Players from different teams not mixing after games. Andy Dunne, Harry Gray, Billy Bohan, Timmy Maher of Laois good players.</p> <p>01:05:35 Working as a carpenter and later as a foreman at a runway in Shannon Airport. Working with CIE and then Offaly County Council. Balancing work and hurling.</p> <p>01:07:40 County set-up gradually improving in 1960s. Role of county secretary John Dowling in that. How things changed.</p> <p>01:11:30 Being club captain, Birr trainer, county team selector. Familiarity with players around Offaly. Dermot Healy, Andy Gallagher, Tony Murphy, Podge Mulhaire, Tommy Daly all selectors over the years. Enjoying it. Shift from being a player to being a trainer and selector. His approach to the task.</p> <p>01:14:30 Birr the first team that he trained. Importance of players having the right mentality. Need to fulfil potential. Getting message across to players. Approach of legendary Kilkenny hurling manager Brian Cody. Over-coaching in modern game.</p> <p>01:19:25 Being part of management set-up when Offaly won their first All-Ireland hurling title in 1981. Offaly County Board changing their organisational approach in 1970s. Work put in by management team. Andy Gallagher manager in Tullamore. Proposing an outside trainer. Interview process. Interviewing Éamonn Creegan. Deciding on Dermot Healy. Fr Healy asking him his opinion on the appointment. Healy's attributes.</p> <p>01:26:20 Belief they had in Offaly team and driving that home to the players. Healy's speech at half-time in 1980 Leinster final against Kilkenny. Players focusing on task in hand. What it felt like to win Leinster final. Visiting Sun Rafter in hospital after the win. His reaction. What they did night of Leinster final win. 1981 celebrations. 1981 captain Pádraig Horan's reaction to All-Ireland win. Players who missed out on an All-Ireland win despite years of service.</p> <p>01:33:25 Memories of 1981 final. Pat Carroll scoring a goal. Damien Martin making a big save. Paddy Delaney, Brendan Bermingham and Johnny Flaherty combining. Eugene Coughlan impressing at full-back. Homecoming celebrations.</p> <p>01:38:20 Impact of All-Ireland win on club scene in Offaly. St</p>
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	<p>Rynaghs, Lusmagh, Clareene and Kinnitty playing better and improving Offaly hurling as a result.</p> <p>01:39:50 His own clubman, Paddy Furey, captain of the Offaly team. He, Daithí Regan and Michael Duignan going on to have media careers. Joe Atken training camogie teams. Character of players on the team.</p> <p>01:42:35 Success in 1985. Players training hard. Working with Rynaghs and Kinnitty on availing of players' services.</p> <p>01:44:20 Involved with county set-up until 1994. Working with PaJo Faoláin. Decision to walk away. Pressure. Organising bus to Dublin in 1994. Speaking to journalists. Problem with buses indicating to him that it was time to go. Things quietly unravelling.</p> <p>01:50:15 Getting separated from their bus at Croke Park in 1984. Problems gaining access to dressing-rooms.</p> <p>01:52:00 Importance of routine on days at Croke Park. Players getting over-excited before 1994 final. Importance of psychology. Combating nerves. Change in player attitudes over the years. Increased media scrutiny.</p> <p>01:58:00 Winning a first Leinster title with Offaly a highlight. Beating Kilkenny and what that meant. Playing Galway in Mudford the following year. Speaking to Dermot Healy after the game. Feeling confident.</p> <p>01:59:35 Winning the All-Ireland final in 1985 and why that was special. 1994 and 'unreal' nature of victory.</p> <p>02:01:05 Role as a referee over the years. Approach to the task. Respecting players. John Maloney a local referee he admired. Enjoying his time as a referee. Not expecting players to be angels.</p> <p>02:05:10 Player refusing to give him his name. How he dealt with that. Aftermath of the decision.</p> <p>02:07:15 Inter-county refereeing. His brothers Johnny and Matt refereeing. Matt refereeing an All-Ireland final between Tipp and Galway.</p> <p>02:07:55 Nerves before refereeing a game.</p> <p>02:09:10 Involvement in administration. Having a secret ballot on abolition of the Ban. His thoughts on the Ban.</p> <p>02:12:00 Being on county board finance committee. Meeting in Bolger's Hotel, Tullamore in the 1960s. Getting an</p>
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	<p>expenses bill from a county player. Dealing with that. Other work on finance committee.</p> <p>02:14:50 Working on disciplinary committee. Not enjoying that.</p> <p>02:16:15 Being chairman of Drumcullen and of Birr. Commitment that required. Time away from his wife, Kathleen, and family.</p> <p>02:17:40 Pride in development work they did. Joe Dooley secretary of the club. Discussing club funds with him. Raising funds.</p> <p>02:19:10 Being chairman of a group water scheme for laying pipeline. Work they have done.</p> <p>02:20:15 Enjoying his involvement in committees and why.</p> <p>02:21:25 Playing the game the highlight of his GAA involvement.</p> <p>02:22:25 Trouble with Offaly selectors in the 1980s. Newspapers finding out. His cousin asking his wife about it. What her response was. Taking things in his stride.</p> <p>02:24:30 Talking to legendary Offaly hurler Tommy Erraghty about friendships within the GAA.</p> <p>02:25:35 Ability to remember faces. Offaly playing Clare in Croke Park in 1996. Having words with someone in the Hogan Stand. Bumping into each other some time later.</p> <p>02:28:20 What he would like to be remembered for.</p> <p>02:31:35 Eyesight trouble and fear that brings him. Faith he has.</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 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 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 with Drumcullen from underage upwards. Won 1949 Offaly Minor Hurling Championship; played Minor Hurling with 1947-8: Played minor hurling with Clareen.</p> <p>1950-21: Played minor hurling for Offaly.</p>

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	<p>1950: Played hurling with Mountrath</p> <p>1951: Played hurling in Monaghan and played on Monaghan county minor team.</p> <p>1952: Played hurling with Nenagh</p> <p>1953-1960: played hurling with Drumcullen and won 6 Offaly Senior Hurling Championships (1953-58)</p> <p>1953: Played junior hurling for Offaly and won Junior Hurling All-Ireland.</p> <p>1953-1970: Played senior hurling for Offaly</p> <p>1961-1980s: Played hurling with Birr and won 1971 Offaly Senior Hurling Championship</p> <p>1979 – 81: Played intermediate hurling for Drumcullen.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Trained Birr Senior Hurling team (1971); Selector for Offaly Senior Hurling Team (1980s-1994); Hurling Officer with Offaly County Board; Chairman of Drumcullen GAA; Chairman of Birr GAA; Treasurer of Drumcullen GAA; member of various disciplinary, finance and development committees.</p>
<p>Format</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p>Duration</p>	<p>Length of Interview: 02:35:08</p>
<p>Language</p>	<p>English</p>

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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: 25th July 2012