

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	16 th Nov 2010
Location	Nicky's home, near Crossabeg, Co. Wexford.
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Nicky Cowman
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1936 Home County: Wexford
Education	Primary: Kyle NS, Crossabeg, Co. Wexford Secondary: CBS Wexford
Family	Siblings: 2 brothers & 3 sisters Current Family if Different: Wife & 1 daughter
Club(s)	Crossabeg-Ballymurn GAA [Wexford]; Shemaliers GAA [Wexford]; Ard Colm, Castlebridge GAA [Wexford]
Occupation	Retired Farmer / Forrester
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Athletics Association of Ireland; Irish Timber Growers Association; Crossabeg Community Car Committee; Macra na Feirme; Irish Farmers Association.

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Date of Report	27 th June 2012
Period Covered	1880s – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Wexford
Key Themes Covered	Supporting, Grounds, Playing, Training, Coaching, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Education, Religion, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Alcohol, Relationship with the Association, Retirement, Food and Drink, Socialising
Interview Summary	<p>Nicky discusses his involvement with Crossabeg-Ballymurn GAA Club. He recalls his time playing for the club and his various administration roles in the club. He outlines the history of the repeated amalgamation and splitting of Crossabeg and Ballyburn and the benefits of amalgamation. He describes his earliest memories of visiting Croke Park and his admiration for the Wexford hurling team of the 1950s. He also explains the benefits of his involvement in Macra na Feirme and ponders the significance of the GAA in his life.</p> <p>00:18 Outlines his family history in Crossabeg, his father living in Crossabeg all his life, his mother returning from America in 1932 for the Eucharistic conference and staying home. Recounts stories of his ancestors' personal lives, dating back to 1800.</p> <p>02:22 Explains that he was born in 1936. Worked in forestry after he retired from farming.</p> <p>02:50 Discusses his father's involvement in the GAA. His father playing hurling for the club Sally Beachers in Castlebridge. The amalgamation of Crossabeg and Castlebridge clubs in the 1920s. Playing in Cullitins' field in Ballyboggin. Mentions Mike Culleton playing with his father. A senior hurling team that was briefly successful. Their strategy of passing the ball. His father possibly secretary of the club. His father giving up hurling when he got married, common practice at the time. Speculates about the reasons for this.</p> <p>06:53 Mentions a book by Annis Lancaster-Kehoe about the history of the GAA in Crossabeg. Playing 21-a-side in 1884. In the beginning, Crossabeg playing a club from Limerick in football, despite not being a football area. In the 1880s, Crossabeg competing in football county final against a team</p>

	<p>from Our Lady's Island. Commemoration of this game about 20 years ago. Mentions St. Mary's and St. Fintan's GAA clubs. Crossabeg's lack of football skill. Ballymurn's skillful artistic hurlers, compared to Crossabeg's more robust hurlers.</p> <p>10:25 Discusses parish boundaries. Crossabeg's bigger farms, Ballymurn's small farms. Tensions between the two communities which caused divisions in the GAA clubs. Recalls playing and training in Ballymurn. Cycling 4 or 5 miles to training.</p> <p>12:12 Discusses class distinctions between Ballymurn and Crossabeg. Strength of community in Ballymurn. Recently both communities pulling together because of a strong senior team that reached the county final. Mentions the McDonnells and O'Leary families from Crossabeg who helped to bring Ballymurn and Crossabeg together. Strength of juvenile team strong today due to amalgamation. Winning county titles.</p> <p>14:24 Recalls hurling in Crossabeg with farmers' sons and men working in agriculture. No local industry. In 1955, the electricity network spreading in the parish, creating jobs with the ESB. Telephone companies also employing players, but not in his time. Mentions Michael Whelan, Tom O'Connor, Paul Fortune, Paddy McDonald, McDonnells of the Ferry, Father Fintan.</p> <p>16:41 Recounts his earliest memory of hurling: Dennis O'Keeffe, a national school teacher in Crossabeg, encouraging juvenile hurling. O'Keeffe's concerns about hurling injuries. A skillful hurler who didn't like robust style of Crossabeg hurling. O'Keeffe organising a school sports day on Patron Day in Crossabeg in July, a match between the two halves of the parish. Hard-fought matches. A shin injury he received in one such match.</p> <p>19:02 Describes his time in the CBS Wexford. Mentions Brother Perkins, who later coached minor teams in Tipperary. Brother Perkins's encouragement of the boys from the country. Reaching the Leinster semi-final. Sub on team, didn't get to play because he was sick.</p> <p>20:19 Recalls joining Ardcolm GAA Club in Castlebridge aged 16, which catered for minor and juvenile only. Players could be picked from several parishes then: Castlebridge, Crossabeg, Oylegate, Ballymurn, Screen, Curraclloe. Playing with Ardcolm for a couple of years. Outlines the progress of Ardcolm. Playing his first junior match aged 16 against the Faythe Harriers, Mulgannon. Recalls playing against Leo Goodison, related to Wexford footballer Wille Goodison.</p>
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	<p>Playing wing-back. Travelling by bicycle to Mulgannon. Major occasion. Lack of success of club due to lack of players.</p> <p>22:46 Recalls coaching Under-12 and Under-14 teams in Crossabeg. Shortage of players in parish in that age group in the 1990s. Playing with Ardcolm, mentions Brother Jerry, who died in 1980. Good hurler who failed to get on county team. Nicky's youngest brother Don, who was left-handed, playing at minor county level. Forced to play like right-handed players. Describes left-handed children being forced to write with their right hands in the 1950s.</p> <p>26:24 Recalls playing with his brothers on the farm, whenever a hurling ball was available. Shortage of balls in the 1950s. Matches being stopped until the ball was found. Getting hurls from Tommy Kinsella from Oylegate for free because Tommy cut ash trees from their farm. Mentions Alf Morris who did the same. Compares Morris's lighter style of hurley with Kinsella's. Also mentions Randalls of Killoran, which made hurls for the 1950s Wexford hurling team. Mentions other hurl makers Johnny Stafford and Mickey McDonnell.</p> <p>29:48 Discusses the growth of ash in the area.</p> <p>30:17 Recalls playing in Foleys' field in Crossabeg. Listening to matches on the radio in Joe Frayne's farmhouse. All the local men congregating in the house for matches, young lads sitting outside on windowsill, in the early 1950s.</p> <p>31:03 Recalls his first trip to Croke Park in 1951. Neighbours John-Joe and Tom Martin bringing him in their van to see Wexford playing Tipperary in a league match. Recalls Paddy Kehoe of Gusserane playing and young goalkeeper Ray Brennan from Davidstown. Mentions Nick O'Donnell coming to play for Wexford when Pat Nolan was Wexford goalkeeper. Outlines the successes of 1950s Wexford team. Mentions the strength of Nicky Rackard and his family, their charisma attracting Wexford people to the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final. Mentions Larry Flynn who charged money to drive people to Croke Park. Describes standing in Cusack Stand in 1956, the crowd swaying. People in front blocking his view. Passing trucks, Staffords in Wexford's coal trucks, filled with men on way to match. Exuberance of supporters. Support from Wicklow people too.</p> <p>34:40 Discusses his early impressions of Croke Park. After matches, gathering money from the steps. Size of Croke Park. Describes how, in the 1968 in All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final, Offaly beat Kerry. Mentions Derby scoring last minute goal. Crowd rushing forward and trying to get on pitch.</p>
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	<p>Bringing chicken and stuffing sandwiches made by mother and flasks of tea. No fast food outlets then. Stopping at a pub on the way home. Recalls in 1951 stopping at the North Star Hotel for a meat tea, John Joe and Tom drinking whiskey. Lax drink-driving laws. Nicky aged 15, drinking lemonade. Visiting pub in Slaney Street, Enniscorthy, at 2am, till daylight, Nicky sleeping in the van.</p> <p>41:12 Discusses the excitement of following hurling in the 1950s. Efforts to get to Croke Park, Wexford Park, Nolan Park. Travelling to Wexford Park on bicycles. His brother Jerry travelling with him, sometimes on the one bike. Others walking to match, 8 miles each way. Mentions going to Nolan Park with Willie Roche and Larry Flynn. In 1968, school friends Tom and Paul Fortune buying a Volkswagon, driving him to matches then. Also mentions Paddy Bryan.</p> <p>44:30 Recalls the celebrations when winning Wexford team came home in 1955, which rivalled the visit of JFK in Wexford. Crowds and festivities. Team on back of truck. No cameras in 1955, 1956. Cycling home in the early hours.</p> <p>49:58 Describes the circumstance surrounding Wexford's success in the 1956 All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final. Explains that in 1955, Wexford had beaten Cork in the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Final. Christy Ring playing that day, Art Foley making famous save. Recalls Bobby Rackard breaking his collarbone in 1954. Mentions Bobby Rackard marking Christy Ring successfully in 1956. The strength of the Rackards: Nicky, Billy, John, Jimmy in goal for Wexford. Recalls Wexford beating Tipperary in a match, his mother calming him down when he was got over-excited. Lack of other distractions in Ireland at the time, so huge excitement in going to Croke Park.</p> <p>55:28 Recalls specific incident after 1968 All-Ireland final between Rackards and Cork's Christy Ring. The Rackards lifting Ring onto their shoulders and carrying him across Croke Park.</p> <p>56:43 Describes hurling in the same era as the Rackards. No hope of getting on the team. Quality of the subs not that good in the 1950s. Mentions skill of smaller players, Art Foley, Jim English. Also mentions Nick O'Donnell.</p> <p>58:05 Recalls his own playing career. Starting as corner forward, playing St Mary's in Wexford Park. Mentions Sean Foley on his team. Preferred wingback position, where he played when he was on Shelmaliers team. Always playing midfield in Crossabeg Ballymurn because he was very fit.</p>
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	<p>Doing his own speed endurance training in his own field alone at night. Also running cross-country. On Sundays, hare-hunting with beagles, running 10 or 15 miles with them. Not drinking or smoking. Also doing tough farm work every day. Mentions marking the late Seamus Lacey.</p> <p>01:02:54 Explains his realisation of the quickest way to get fit with endurance training. His involvement in athletics after he gave up hurling. Spent four years as county secretary in IFA.</p> <p>01:05:14 Discusses being approached to play for Shelmaliers by Paddy Donoghue. Also his brother-in-law Tommy Neville asking him to hurl with him. The challenge of obeying the GAA rule of starting and finishing with same amount of players. Players cycling to matches and arriving late. Recalls injuring his back. In the county final with Shelmaliers in Enniscorthy, too injured to hurl. Discusses his membership of Macra na Feirme, winning medals there in various events.</p> <p>01:08:49 Outlines the development of Crossabeg club. Secretary of Crossabeg team aged 16 while Peter Murphy was chairman. Recalls specific incident in 1952 or 53, receiving a solicitor's letter looking for money. Meeting with Jim Devereux and Michael Sinnott of Crossabeg and Larry Doyle of Ballymurn about issue. Describes repeated cycle of amalgamation and splitting. His lack of interest in bickering. No league then, just junior championships, the club's lack of progress. Lack of turnout for practice matches. Lack of enthusiasm in the 1960s, despite the success of the county team.</p> <p>01:16:46 Discusses how places were earned on the team. Mentions several nicknames in Ballymurn: The Skin Walsh, Nick Loo, The Ronnie, The Screw, The Deadle to distinguish between different Murphy families. Mentions Little Johnny, a son of Jack the Post, who played midfield for Wexford. Mentions Brian Cody's criteria for the Kilkenny team. Mentions George O'Connor's injuries on hand from putting it up.</p> <p>01:19:35 Discusses the end of his hurling career. Problems with his back, slipped disc. Mentions Heffernan in Fethard in Tipperary who relieved the pain. Also Teran Singh who relieved him of pain. Describes getting married in 1972, when he was 36, his father dying that year, taking over the farm, and stopping hurling. Losing interest in hurling, more involved in farming and IFA and Macra na Feirme. Playing some football with them, lack of skill and training. Recalls a soccer game he played in Malawi on a sponsored trek.</p>
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	<p>01:25:38 Reflects on the challenged of his time as chairman of Crossabeg-Ballymurn. Difficulty of getting commitment from players to attend all training and matches. Mentions Court na Cuddy players, who were bigger. His frustration when skilled players wouldn't get fit. Mentions being a selector, training and coaching underage players after he gave up playing himself in 1980. Mentions Bridie Doyle who won a camogie All-Ireland final also involved in training. Lack of teams' success in the Rackard League due to shortage of players.</p> <p>01:29:26 Explains that by the 1980s, the amalgamation issue was sorted. Money not a major issue then. Recalls running a dance in the old school in the 1950s to raise funds. Mostly set dances: Walls of Limerick, Siege of Ennis. Strict priest in Ballymurn.</p> <p>01:32:09 Ponders the relationship with the club and the county board. Mentions those involved at a district level: Peter Murphy, Michael Sinnott, Nicky himself, Larry Doyle. Amicable relationship between them and county board.</p> <p>01:33:50 Explains how Macra na Feirme honed his communication skills when he joined in the mid-1950s. His mother brining him to first meeting in Castebriidge. Activities he was involved in in Macra na Feirme. Using these skills in the GAA and now as his roles as chairman of the Leinster Board of athletics. Also on national juvenile board.</p> <p>01:36:11 Discusses role of chairman frustrating him the most. Ballymurn players' lack of enthusiasm for training. Playing his highlight.</p> <p>01:37:13 Considers his views on the GAA today. His beliefs on the widening gap between hurlers and Croke Park. His disappointment in the hierarchy in the organisation. Describes attending a county convention, Micheal Kehoe speaking in Irish, excluding uneducated members. Less hierarchy in athletics.</p> <p>01:39:43 Describes his mother going to America, returning to Ireland for Eucharistic Congress in 1932. Her passage paid for by distant relation Annie Moffatt, née Roche. Religious and political fervour in Ireland at the time. Huge significance of Eucharistic Congress, many returning from America at the time for it. His mother's refusal to return to America even for a holiday.</p> <p>01:44:23 Recalls the excitement surrounding JFK's visit to Wexford. JFK's oration skills. Mentions Jim Dillon speaking</p>
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	<p>well in Macra na Feirme. The respect of Wexford people for JFK, and that of the Wexford people. His strategy of getting to shake JFK's hand. Going to Wexford Park, JFK leaving by helicopter. Huge celebrations. Recalls his shock and sadness when JFK was shot. Others' reactions.</p> <p>01:51:40 Ponders the significance of the GAA in his life. When he was a teenager, the GAA and Pioneers (Total Abstinence Association) the only two in the parish. An outlet for socialising and exercise. His enjoyment of Gaelic Games. Participation in the community. His hopes for more culture and music associated with the GAA. The role of the GAA in holding Ireland together. Far more important role in the past than today. Lack of decent athletics facilities. His belief that the GAA should return to being more involved in athletics.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input checked="" 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 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 from age 9/10yrs until he was 36 yrs. Won 1 medal – with Shemaliers in a Junior Hurling Championship.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Managed and coached Crossabeg-Ballymurn juvenile and minor teams for many years; refereed at all levels; has filled the roles of chairman, secretary and treasurer of Crossabeg-Ballymurn GAA.</p>
<p>Format</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p>Duration</p>	<p>Length of Interview: 01:59:21</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: 27th June 2012