

## GAA Oral History Project

## Interview Report Form

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Regina Fitzpatrick
<b>Date of Interview</b>	24 October 2009
<b>Location</b>	St Michael's Irish Centre, Liverpool
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Tommy Walsh
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1930 <b>Home County:</b> Liverpool/Galway
<b>Education</b> (Optional)	<b>Primary:</b> St Vincent's, Liverpool <b>Secondary:</b> St Edwards (Orphanage)
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> 3 sisters; 1 brother <b>Current Family if Different:</b> Son
<b>Club(s)</b>	John Mitchels Liverpool
<b>Occupation</b>	Retired Shop Manager
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Docker [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	Labour

<b>Date of Report</b>	17 September 2009
<b>Period Covered</b>	1930s - 2008
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Lancashire, Great Britain, Galway
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Fundraising, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Irish Language, Culture, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Outsider's Perspectives, Politics, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>Introduction.</p> <p>0:20 Born in 1930 in Liverpool. Born and raised there. Father from Carraroe, Co. Galway</p> <p>0:28 Father emigrated in 1922 to Huddersfield and then down to Liverpool. His mother from Liverpool, her mother from Wexford, she had a lodging house for Irish people. This is where his parents met for the first time.</p> <p>1:08 Father spoke no English until he went to the UK. Heard some stories growing up, seasonal stories. He didn't play sports but was interested in the GAA, interested in everything Irish. Sport wasn't very well organised at that time but remembers when they got a community pitch for the first time in Carraroe.</p> <p>2:25 Getting involved in the Gaelic League in Liverpool when left school. The Gaelic league one of the few places he was allowed to go. Eldest sister a member of the Tadhg Ó Donovan branch. The local GAA club, St Patrick's had their meetings there and that's how he first became involved in the GAA.</p> <p>3:05 Involved on committee before in the games. Destined to be an administrator more than a player but was very interested in the games. Enjoyed refereeing more than playing, refereed for over 25 years all over Great Britain. Played for John Mitchels and subbed for Lancashire. Then more involved in administration.</p> <p>4:02 GAA in Liverpool different from home – a conscious</p>

	<p>decision to go, it was not of the community. His father only started coming to games after Tommy became involved. Tradition of football games between Huddersfield and Carraroe which Tommy used to referee. His father would come to see his nephews and grand nephews play on the Carraroe team.</p> <p>5:25 Started going to the Gaelic League in 1946. Started going to GAA meetings in 1947 and was elected Treasurer.</p> <p>6:15 Céilís an important aspect of Gaelic League activity in those days. His favourite activity; never went to a modern dance. Three branches of the Gaelic League in Liverpool at the time, Seán O'Donovan branch particularly active in organising céilís. Very high standard of céilí dancing – it was strictly céilí dancing. Tommy became MC for the céilís – so many of them in Liverpool, he would often MC 15 or 16 nights in succession.</p> <p>7:17 Going to Dublin for matches in Croke Park. Finding the céilís in the Mansion House which became almost a bigger attraction than the matches. Organised groups went over for them.</p> <p>7:40 Irish people coming in from Ireland in the late 1940s weren't interested in the Gaelic League or céilí dancing and they found that strange. They were more interested in places like the Shamrock Club and Lawlors in Islington where they had céilí and old time dancing together. Different dances that they danced Siege of Ennis, Walls of Limerick, High Court cap, sixteen-hand reel etc.</p> <p>8: 40 Gaelic League never benefitted from Irish coming into Liverpool but the GAA did, they became much stronger.</p> <p>8:55 'The Second Diaspora' when the Irish flooded into Liverpool from Ireland after World War II, from about 1947 on. Dramatic expansion of the GAA. The GAA as a barometer of the economy of Ireland - influx of players from Ireland, carried on through the 1950s, 60s, early 70s.</p> <p>9:40 Irish people stopped coming over. Difficulty of getting players. Irish people going home. GAA in Britain struggled. Began to promote underage football and bring young players on.</p> <p>10:15 Need for Irish born players on a team. English born players good to a point, competitive within England but cannot compete with Irish teams. The odd player is an exception to that, his son Colin included.</p>
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	<p>11:05 Players need to be born to football and have it fostered in school. Don't have the resources to foster it in England. Comparison with hurling and football counties.</p> <p>12:14 Gaelic sports in schools in Liverpool - Recently at Lancashire county final, a team from St Francis Xavier and Cardinal Heenan School fielded a team who played an exhibition game. Two players on the John Mitchels team are teachers in those schools.</p> <p>13:20 After World War II, had people from all over Ireland - so hurlers and footballers, often inter-county level players. Got lots of good club players. Diminished in the 1970s. Now university students come, play very high quality Gaelic Football at university and then stay on to play with John Mitchels. 1940s –priests and mainly people working on the buildings, some doctors but mainly construction workers. Today, none of their players work in construction.</p> <p>15:53 All the women were nurses - National Health Service started in 1948. NHS recruited in Ireland and thousands of Irish women arrived in Liverpool. 1960s – starting an Irish Centre building fund – fundraising in Liverpool hospitals – almost all of the staff were Irish nurses. They filled the dancehalls. Irish people in Liverpool married other Irish people and their children are the main source of the Irish community in Liverpool today.</p> <p>18:16 Many of their Irish dancers are grand daughters and great grand daughters of those people who arrived in the forties or fifties,</p> <p>18:50 Post war – people looking for a job and digs. Sought out Irish people to start them off. GAA clubs as community care organisations. More than a sports organisation. Some sought out GAA clubs to get started in Liverpool, for others it was unexpected.</p> <p>21:24 Example of Tommy Shale – arrived in Liverpool, went to mass, went to priest to enquire about a football or hurling club. Sent to Fr Tommy Spain (an Irish priest) who sent him to a match and he was playing that afternoon.</p> <p>22:30 Irish priests had a strong role in the GAA in Liverpool. Only anti-Irish feelings that he has ever experienced in Liverpool came from the Catholic Church.</p> <p>24:10 GAA administration career – Seán McInerney – Born in Liverpool of a Clare family. Administrator of John Mitchels and of Lancashire. Took Tommy to County Board meetings</p>
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	<p>and then provincial board meetings and then to Congress in 1948. Never played, always an administrator. Tommy became the youngest president of the provincial council ever and remains only the second English-born person to have held that position, Sean McInerney the only other one. Description of what that was like.</p> <p>27:32 Published a history of the GAA in Britain – launched in the Irish Embassy – all the other counties were there.</p> <p>28:00 Very young filling the position – shortly after that, Pádraig Ó Caoimh died – five provincial presidents carried his coffin. Exposed to the personalities in Ireland. Alf Murry president at the time, the greatest president of the GAA in his lifetime. Became life long friends with Pat Fanning and Con Murphy who he regards as really great presidents of the GAA in his lifetime.</p> <p>29:54 Qualities of a great president/chairman – to have your authority accepted by the floor.</p> <p>31:30 Description of Pádraig Ó Caoimh’s funeral – state funeral – showed him the extent of the GAA – far more than a sporting organisation – capuchin annual – status of the GAA</p> <p>34:00 Perceptions of non-Irish people in Liverpool towards the GAA.</p> <p>35:18 Description of Seán McInerney funeral</p> <p>36.24 Leading a double life in England. Working for Liverpool Football club (retail manager). Liam Mulvahill visited Anfield when the development of Croke Park was happening.</p> <p>38:12 Network of GAA friends in the UK. Contacts and friends in every town in England through the GAA.</p> <p>38:45 Challenges of holding such a role in England. Married into a GAA family. His son now Chairman of a Cork GAA club. Need for family support.</p> <p>40:23 GAA circumstances around which he met his wife. Meetings in people’s home. Michael Redmond, father figure of GAA in Liverpool, sliothars used to be repaired there, jerseys washed. St Patrick’s Hurling Club</p> <p>42:23 Flan McCarthy – good at stitching sliothars and repairing hurleys.</p> <p>43:35 Fr Spain – insistence on having a pitch – unusual in the UK. His influence on the club – fundraising – concerts in the Philharmonic Hall – keeping in touch with his club at home –</p>
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	<p>a Tipperary club – information on Len Gaynor – Drove Irish community in Liverpool.</p> <p>47:41 Changes – technology - now chairman of the disputes resolution board in Britain – remembers having to write on paper where the Irish watermark was clear – role of the GAA. Irish made goods – Irish language – level of formality – end result is the game on the pitch.</p> <p>50:48 Going to a funeral in Birmingham recently, GAA funeral, nothing has changed in that tradition.</p> <p>52:02 Irish culture and the GAA – for many it’s just a game of football – same role as it has always had in Irish culture – badge of identity – GAA is good when it comes to funerals and difficult times – even more than other Irish organisations, that’s particular to the GAA. Younger people respect that and emulate it.</p> <p>54:40 Why people join the GAA in Liverpool now – some for the game – then they see the role of the GAA in the local community- the social life – the marriages – the facilities – recognising it as something important and valuable from home and they feel it right to keep it going there.</p> <p>56:45 Very little non-Irish involvement. English people’s attitude towards the Irish tends not to want to become or be like one. Similar in Irish dancing, though it is more accessible.</p> <p>59:35 Highlights – Gaelic games at Wembley stadium on Whit weekend – All-Ireland football and hurling champions. First sign of great Down team of the 1960s was in Wembley when they defeated Galway. One year – an all-Britain team played there against Donegal.</p> <p>1:01:30 At their best in funerals. Bartley Cahill’s funeral in Cavan. Graveside oration by Joe McDonagh. Took remains over from the UK. Wrote an article about it in the Irish Post. Description of the experience. Arriving at night – the organisation – the respect.</p> <p>1:03:38 Difficulties of being involved in the GAA. Sometimes difficult but must believe that it’s more than a sporting organisation.</p> <p>1:04:47 Biggest challenge as an administrator – chairing provincial conventions – relationship with the GAA in London – insuring justice for smaller counties – overcame it by being fair – the GAA as a democratic organisation.</p> <p>1:07:53 Involvement in Casement Park Committee to get the</p>
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	<p>British Army out of Casement Park and on the Crossmaglen Grounds committee. That committee selected by Crossmaglen and sent to Cardinal O’Fiaich – members of committee.</p> <p>1:09:04 His role in the process of getting the British Army out of Casement Park and Crossmaglen – meetings in the House of Commons with representation from Croke Park and Crossmaglen – getting labour MPs to the meetings. Description of how the process worked.</p> <p>1:11:08 How they succeeded – justice – the attitude of the British government – why they chose to have their army base in the heart of Crossmaglen. The Northern Ireland situation.</p> <p>1:13:50 Connection between the GAA and Irish nationalism in Britain. Majority of Irish people in Britain don’t get involved in British politics.</p> <p>1:15:08 During the troubles – impact on Irish centre – lots of abusive phone calls – after the Birmingham bombings, police presence outside the Irish centre – essential not to give in and to demand justice - case of the Birmingham Six – The ‘Appalling Vista’ speech.</p> <p>1:19:38 Reaction in the Irish community to these events. Involved in Birmingham Six campaign to get them out – made speech against the Prevention against Terrorism act – Irish people kept their heads down – difficult to be Irish in Britain at that time – Guilford Four.</p> <p>1:21:00 Pause while Tommy attends to a visitor.</p> <p>1:23:32 British justice – they’re not particularly worried that they got the wrong people with the Birmingham Six – as long as they were Irish.</p> <p>1:24:48 Didn’t really see the effect of it in the GAA, but it may have been the case. Every time there was a bomb in England there was a drop off in the numbers attending Irish dances. Fear that an Irish dance hall would be bombed in retaliation.</p> <p>1:25:40 Grand daughters involved in Irish dancing. Grandson too young yet – his son in Cork involved – his other son Nick in New York involved there– went to Cavan and Kerry played in New York in 1997 – happy that they are involved but equally wouldn’t mind if they weren’t. His daughters teach Irish dancing there and take their children to Irish dancing classes.</p> <p>1:30:39 What the GAA means to him – identity- retaining what</p>
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	<p>makes Irish people different, special – role to back up the playing of the games – most democratic organisation in the world – also involved in Comhaltas – difference between Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the GAA.</p> <p>1:33:32 GAA unique Irish organisation – because of its history – why it was founded – need for administration – as important now as it was then.</p> <p>1:34:30 Opening up of Croke Park to other sports – believes in democratic process – why rugby should be allowed and why allowing soccer in contradictory to the constitution of the GAA. Talking to Seán Kelly about it. Question of the border. Difference in belief about what the GAA is about – games or national identity.</p>
<p><b>Involvement in GAA</b></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): President of the Provincial Council of Great Britain</p>
<p><b>Record as a Player</b> (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Lancashire County Championship and League</p>
<p><b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Club – every position; County – every position. Provincial President and delegate. Central Council 15 years.</p>
<p><b>Format</b></p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p><b>Duration</b></p>	<p>Length of Interview: 1:40:43</p>
<p><b>Language</b></p>	<p>English</p>



**REFERENCE NO.** GB/01/01

**To be filled in by Interviewer:**

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 17 September 2009