

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	26 th Jan 2011
Location	Micheál's home, near Tombrack, Ferns, Co. Wexford
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Micheál Ó Neill
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1934 Home County: Wexford
Education	Primary: Tombrack NS, Co. Wexford. Secondary: St Peter's College, Wexford Town
Family	Siblings: 6 brothers Current Family if Different: Wife (Mary), 5 daughters & 2 sons
Club(s)	Ferns St Aidan's GAA [Wexford]
Occupation	Farmer
Parents' Occupation	Secretary of Leinster Council, 1927 – 1969 [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Irish Farmers Association; Pioneers Total Abstinence Association

REFERENCE NO. WX/1/40

Date of Report	27 th June 2012
Period Covered	1887-2011
Counties/Countries Covered	Wexford, Wicklow, Americas, Kerry, Cork, Dublin
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Emigration, Involvement in GAA Abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Politics, Northern Ireland, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Food and Drink, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Economy/ Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Micheál reflects on his involvement with the GAA at a club and county level. He outlines the O'Neill family history of involvement in the GAA, dating back to his great great grandfather's role in the Wexford convention in 1887. He discusses the roles played by his father, Martin O'Neill, as player for Wexford and Leinster football teams, as referee in the 1947 All-Ireland Senior Football Final in New York, and as secretary on the Leinster Council. He mentions his father's participation in all three Tailteann Games. Micheál also describes his own involvement in football and hurling in St. Peter's College, his various administration roles in Ferns St. Aidan's GAA Club, and his current role in Coiste Sean Ghael. He discusses his pride that his son Desmond O'Neill is chairman of Ferns St. Aidan's and ponders his concerns for the GAA in the future.</p> <p>00:45 Micheál describes being born in 1934 into Republican Gaelic family.</p> <p>01:29 Explanation of family history. Mentions the involvement of the Byrnes of Ballymanus in the 1798 rebellion. Vinegar Hill. His great great grandfather living in Tombrack, Ferns, Wexford, where Micheál lives. Mentions great granduncle John emigrating to America. Playing handball and Irish dancing.</p> <p>03:15 His great grandfather Martin's involvement in the fight for independence and in the early years of the GAA. The history of the affiliation of Ferns club and Wexford county board. His great grandfather and his neighbour, Lambert. acting as delegates to the Wexford convention in Thurles in</p>

	<p>1887. Involvement of Martin O'Neill and his wife, a descendant of the Byrnes of Ballymanus, in the GAA. Vice president of the club in Ferns.</p> <p>05:50 Description of Ferns winning their first county championships in 1912. His grandfather Michael and Michael's brother John both on that team. Mentions John Moynihan on team, his own wife's great grand uncle.</p> <p>07:00 Explanation of the club's name change from Ferns to Ferns St. Aidans. Lack of interest in village of Ferns causing other clubs to spring up in parish in 1920s. Outlines how Effernogue and Ballingale clubs fared in hurling.</p> <p>09:16 His father, Martin O'Neill, describing his greatest thrill as beating Ballingale when he played with Ferns St. Aidans in Arklow.</p> <p>10:06 Description of Ferns St. Aidans' success in juvenile championships in Wexford in the 1940s. Recounts story of his name being falsely used in club to play an overage team. His father's reaction as chairman of Ferns and Leinster secretary. Emergence of Wexford hurling team in 1951.</p> <p>12:06 Recalls being on two junior hurling panels in Ferns in 1952, not being allowed out from school to play final on Sunday.</p> <p>13:05 Playing 5 Leinster finals with St. Peter's College, Wexford up to 1952. Beaten in all. Football and hurling. Mentions rivals St. Mel's, St. Finians, Roscrea. Recounts some playing highlights: a 1950 junior hurling final against a Dublin Christian Brothers team, Wexford county championship in 1953. Mentions being beaten by Cullitin brothers, Paddy Kehoe, Larry Larkin on Gusserane team.</p> <p>15:38 Outlines how Ferns St. Aidan's fared against Gusserane. Playing against St Mun's of Dunoon in final. In three county finals in senior football. Also mentions Castletown. Playing with two of his brothers. No success in hurling in that time.</p> <p>17:16 Discussion about Ferns St. Aidan's winning junior hurling championship in 1956 and 1957. Start of intermediate hurling. Success of club in football and hurling. In 2007, celebrating 50th anniversary of the club's most successful year. Mentions Nickey Brennan, chairman of Leinster Council, presenting plaques to former players.</p> <p>18:53 Outlines mixed history of club from 1960s. Role of chairman of club in 1964. Mentions Seán Browne, chairman</p>
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	<p>of Wexford County Board, dismissal of the club's objection to illegal player in match.</p> <p>20:01 Recent success of Ferns. Winning at intermediate level but not winning county finals at senior level. Playing against Oulart the Ballagh last year. His hope for the future, with a young skillful team.</p> <p>21:11 Explains that his son is currently chairman of Ferns St. Aidan's Club. His ambitions for the club.</p> <p>22:03 Recounts negative reaction to his comments about the club's lack of success, when he was club chairman. Mentions the next chairman, John Walsh, a hurler. Also mentions Padraig Bailey on Wexford intermediate hurling team, his son in law. Wexford winning first intermediate championship at that time, when Micheál was chairman.</p> <p>23:58 Description of his tenure as chairman. Also delegate to county board. Attending county board meetings. His whole family's involvement in football in the parish. His grandfather Michael O'Neill, founding member of Ferns GAA Club, and granduncle winning junior B football and junior hurling for Ferns in 1912.</p> <p>25:36 The club's lack of success until 1927. His father in being chosen for Leinster team that won 1924 interprovincial, despite not having played for Wexford county.</p> <p>26:35 Discussion about the Wexford senior football team's success in All-Ireland and Leinster championships in 1910s. Students at St. Peter's practising against senior Wexford county footballers. Micheál's father impressing Wexford selectors who chose him for Leinster team. Father's first appearance in Tailteann Games. Playing in three Tailteann Games. Mentions Tug of War.</p> <p>28:30 His father, Martin O'Neill, playing with Wexford in 1924 and 1925. Winning Leinster Senior Football Final against Kildare in 1925. Wexford eliminated after beating Sligo in semi-final due to an objection. Recounts his father's football career. Kildare's lack of success now.</p> <p>30:11 Description of history of Tailteann Games, held between 1924 and 1932. His own disappointment the games were discontinued. Revival of the Willwood Tailteann Games in the 1980s. His father's nomination as secretary of the Leinster Council in 1926, beaten by Joe Lyes elected secretary in 1927, over 40 years tenure as secretary. Recounts various GAA people calling to the family home in Bray.</p>
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	<p>32:40 His grandfather relocating to work in the GPO in 1924. Involved in the Republican movement. Suspected of passing information to Republicans fighters about movement of troops when he worked in Ferns post office. Imprisoned in Richmond Prison in England.</p> <p>34:22 Description of his father and Luke Sherry of Waterford winning two All-Ireland handball competitions in 1930 and 1931. Representing Wicklow. Mentions their manager Matt Britton in Bray. Rubbing them down with poitín to keep them warm. His father's role of secretary of the Leinster Council of Handball Association, under auspices of GAA. Description of his father's other successes and failures in handballs.</p> <p>37:01 Discusses a movement in early 1930s to bring Bray back into Wicklow county championships. Bray Emmets GAA Club playing in Wicklow in 1934. Success of Bray Emmets in handball. Bringing goat to Croke Park dressed in Wicklow colours in 1936 All-Ireland Junior Football Final. Mentions his father's friendships with Dan Kerrigan, Billy Lawless, Hugh Byrne and his brother, Matt Britton's son, and Joe Kenny's, son secretary of Dublin County Board. Also Donegan.</p> <p>41:43 Discusses his father refereeing some All Ireland Senior Football Finals in 1930s, including Kerry vs. Cavan in the 1947 All-Ireland Senior Football Final in the Polo Grounds, New York. His father negotiating insurance for players with broker Willie Crane. Fear of flying, travelling by boat, the <i>Mauritania</i>. Mentions general secretary Paddy O'Keeffe's role in organising final. Players and officials travelling by boat and plane.</p> <p>44:26 Recalls listening to Micheál Ó hÉithir's commentary on radio while he was in St. Peter's College. Ó hÉithir's appeal for extra time at the end. Late start of game. New York mayor Bill O'Dwyer's photographs with teams. Poor quality ground. First All-Ireland Senior Final played outside Ireland. Recalls All-Ireland Hurling Final played in Thurles when Croke Park was being refurbished. The Kerry team's belief in the injustice of the final result. Explains difference in rules about precedence of free kicks. Mentions Bat Garvey on Kerry team. Also John Dowling, injured during game. Also mentions players Mick Higgins, Simon Duignan, Tony Tighe, John Joe O'Reilly, Father Jim Duignan, on Cavan team.</p> <p>51:33 Recalls meeting some of the Kerry team in 1997 at the 50th anniversary celebrations of New York match. His brother Ciaran asking Liam Mulvihill to allow Micheál to go to 50th anniversary match instead in Downings Stadium, New York.</p>
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	<p>52:55 Recounts his father's experience in 1947 in America. Meeting his uncle in Chicago who had emigrated. Uncle playing handball with a cousin. Micheál's grandmother Mary Lawlor playing camogie in Wexford. Camogie organisation initiated by Sean O'Duffy in Dublin in 1904. First match in Phoenix Park.</p> <p>54:32 His father's trip around America by car. Visiting Texas, New York. Getting a silver medal for refereeing All-Ireland final. Discusses reasons his father almost missed the trip to America.</p> <p>57:47 Recalls his own playing career in St. Peter's College. Picked for interprovincial colleges team in 1953. Recounts successes. Mentions Ryan playing for Good Counsel at that time. Osbourne from Wicklow. Player from Good Counsel going on to play soccer in England. His only colleges medal. Compares his own success to his that of father's. His father giving away medals.</p> <p>01:00:56 His father's role of selector on Wexford football team in 1945. Wexford one of first teams that had collective training. Also mentions Wicklow. Collective training for Wexford in Rosslare. Wexford winning the Leinster championship that year, beaten by Cavan in semi-final. Mentions Wexford players Tom O'Reilly, Willie Goodison, Jackie Cullen, Ger Cody, Paddy Kehoe, Podge Kehoe, Des O'Neill.</p> <p>01:05:00 Recalls his uncle Des O'Neill playing with Wexford and Wicklow. Also mentions his uncle Joe O'Neill playing with Wexford in the 1950s. Beaten by Meath in the 1954 Leinster Football Final. Micheál playing with Joe on 1956 Wexford team. Successes and failures of that team. Six of his father's nine brothers playing intercounty for either Wicklow or Wexford. Also mentions his uncle Aodh O'Neill winning boxing competition with An Garda Síochána , winning All-Ireland. Article about O'Neills of Bray printed by Free Press and later about O' Neills of Ferns in <i>Ireland's Own</i>. One of his brothers playing inter-county hurling with Wexford. Rathnure. His brother Martin playing for Wicklow and Wexford.</p> <p>01:10:53 Outlines how he and his brothers Martin and Seán played senior football in Ferns. County championship against Castletown. His cousins and two of his sons playing inter-county for Wexford. His son playing football and hurling. Another son Micheál playing underage football then losing interest.</p> <p>01:13:33 Discusses his various administration roles in the</p>
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	<p>GAA. For example: officer of his club, team manager, county delegate. His son Desmond's recent appointment as chairman of club. His hopes the O'Neills will continue to be involved in the club. Importance of tradition.</p> <p>01:14:50 Recounts family history of camogie. Sean O'Duffy starting camogie. Mentions O'Hanrahan from New Ross secretary of Wexford county board. His grandmother Mary Lawlor's involvement in camogie in Bray. Her daughters playing with Bray Emmets in Dublin county championship. Playing hurling with their brothers improving their skills. Mentions Sophie Brack. Also mentions Downeys of Kilkenny and O'Learys of Wexford.</p> <p>01:19:38 Moving to Charlesfort in Ferns. Matches on Sunday afternoons during holidays for local boys and girls. Boys going back to farm work.</p> <p>01:21:30 Discusses marrying and having five daughters. Chairman of GAA club and officer of the committee. His cousin asking him to be officer of Community Games. Mentions his mother's relatives, the O'Dowds from Croghan, Roscommon, who represented Ireland in cross country running. Michael O'Dowd winning the Transport Mile Race in Dublin, with Dublin City Harriers. Prize of a granddaughter clock.</p> <p>01:23:52 Describes how his cousin asked him to go on national committee for Community Games in 1990. His daughters Melissa and Majella reaching All-Ireland camogie final. Their progress in the sport. Winning Under-14 camogie in Wexford in 1992. Daughter playing with Buffer's Alley, returning to Ferns. A Ferns St. Aidan's team with five of his daughters. Mentions Maher and Murphy. Two daughters of Tom Guinan also playing. Success of this camogie team. Mentions Ann Murphy. Also mentions Margaret O'Leary winning camogie All-Ireland. Two Ferns girls on All-Ireland winning team last year. Mentions Catherine Murphy. Celebrations in Ferns after team won, driven up street in pony and trap.</p> <p>01:34:55 Reflects on his father's personality. Full-time job, lots of travelling. His mother, Brigid, looking after family. After secondary school, Micheál looking after farm. Father very interested in politics, nationalist background. Some members of O'Neill family involved in pseudo-political organisations. Recalls his father bringing him to matches. Sitting outside Langtons, Barry's hotel in Dublin, father socialising inside.</p> <p>01:38:54 Recalls death of GAA president Paddy O'Keeffe,</p>
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	<p>O'Keeffe's brothers interested in Martin O'Neill as successor, father staying with Leinster. In early 1950s. Mentions Jack Boothman increasing his father's pension. Mentions other chairmen: Tommy Walsh, Jack Fitzgerald, Bob Aylward.</p> <p>01:41:25 Explains the connection between his father's involvement in the GAA and his pride in his Irish identity. Establishment of GAA to foster Irish culture and identity. IRB infiltration. Nationalist sympathies of many members. Negative impact of politics on the GAA during civil war.</p> <p>01:44:42 His father playing in the three Taliteann Games. Also playing Leinster football. Programs of games archived.</p> <p>01:46:01 Recounts his father's stories: the first time he played for Leinster, learning to play his own game. Being left his father's collection of GAA memorabilia on condition he made it available to his family. Another former player's collection sold to the Croke Park museum.</p> <p>01:50:59 Suggestion that the collection be given to Croke Park Museum. His brother Ciaran working there. Reasons for not donating. Mentions John Doyle, Christy Ring.</p> <p>01:52:16 His satisfaction that his son is carrying on the role of chairman of the club. His son's busy schedule. His oldest daughter's involvement with the GAA in a girls' school in Stranorlar, Donegal.</p> <p>01:54:39 His father first full-time secretary of the Leinster Council.</p> <p>01:55:51 Explains process of his father getting job. Mentions Father Lory Kehoe. His father working from family homes in Dublin, Bray, and Ferns. Mentions Canon O'Connor in Ferns asking his father to take a farm.</p> <p>02:00:10 His awareness in Bray of people coming and going to the family home for his father's job. Playing football in the back garden, breaking panes of glasshouse.</p> <p>02:03:29 Description of moving to Ferns. No football field. No encouragement from school to play football, fear of broken windows. School principal John Moynihan who won Wexford county championship in 1912. His father telling him Ferns St. Aidan's had got field from the Land Commission far away. Mentions Canon O'Connor's advice to refuse this field. Disappointment of locals in Ferns.</p> <p>02:06:05 Mentions John F. Doyle making Palace Lawn available to club. Mentions treasurer of Wexford County</p>
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	<p>Board, Anthony Holden telling his father about ground for sale from Miss O'Neill in 1943. Outlines purchase and development of ground and facilities. Current facilities include 3 full-size pitches, hurling wall, walking track, 2 tennis courts. Plans to build handball alley and more dressing rooms. Ladies Football team being set up. Mentions Tom Guinan and Dominic Murphy. Involvement of Tom's family in local Gaelic Games.</p> <p>02:14:14 Discussion of his time in St. Peter's College. Various members of his extended family attending. Playing on all St. Peter's College teams from 1949 to 1953, along with 2 of his brothers. Success in reaching Leinster football and hurling finals. His youngest brother winning All-Ireland hurling championship with St. Peter's. Another brother, Sean, winning All-Ireland football final with Ballyfin.</p> <p>02:17:38 Description of St. Peter's in the post-war era. Starting in 1947 with brother Tomás. Boarding in primary school for 2 years before secondary. Tomás studying for priesthood. Harsh lifestyle. Food coupons. No heating in dorms. Mass every morning.</p> <p>02:20:10 Gaelic games encouraged at St. Peter's. Hurling and football. Rugby forbidden. His father's support of this, in favour of the ban on foreign games. Discusses his father's views on the origin of the ban on handball in the barracks. Mentions earlier presidents Paddy O'Keeffe, Gerry Arthurs in favour of the ban. Recalls the confiscation of a rugby ball in St. Peter's. Students from various counties. Mentions past pupil, comedian Des Bishop.</p> <p>02:24:28 Strict rules, corporal punishment, particularly for smoking. Recounts story of 1945 team being banned from playing for playing pitch and toss against the rules. Mentions The Rhino, school president. Mentions hurler Father John Butler in charge of games.</p> <p>02:27:24 Describes being on junior football and hurling team in 1949. Many school presidents anti-hurling, fear of injuries. Mentions president Father Hugh O'Byrne as the first to allow a hurling team. Also mentions teacher Ed Power from Kilkenny, key in establishing hurling. Playing Roscrea in hurling and St. Finian's in football.</p> <p>02:30:19 Rivalries between St. Peter's College and Good Counsel, St Kieran's, Kilkenny CBS. Satisfaction in beating them.</p> <p>02:30:54 Discusses Andy Holden's key role in buying club</p>
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	<p>grounds, acting as guarantor with Martin O'Neill. Andy's disregard for rules about ages and parishes. Recounts story of going to Andy asking him to play juvenile when he was overage. His own response. Andy driving team in his van.</p> <p>02:34:28 Description of the Four County League. Tombrack had team with three O'Neills on it. Wexford, Carlow, Laois, and Wicklow. His involvement. Tombrack's record at junior, intermediate, and senior levels. His own career with the club. Wexford winning junior football in 1963.</p> <p>02:40:30 Recalls his joy at being selected for and playing for county team. Wexford's lack of strength then. Playing in league, grouped with Kerry and Cork. Travelling around to play matches. Playing Kerry's three Sheehy brothers, sons of John Joe Sheehy; two Murphys including Donie Murphy; two Lyons.</p> <p>02:43:00 Discusses meeting some of the 1947 Kerry team at the 50th anniversary celebration of the New York All-Ireland Senior Football Final. Meeting Bat Garvey, whose goals had been disallowed by Martin O'Neill. Also mentions Canon O'Connor visiting Kerry with Martin O'Neill and meeting former players Joe Keohane and John Dowling.</p> <p>02:49:03 Recounts his father's visit to his uncle, chief of police in a Chicago precinct. Gift of a baton. Micheál has it now. Description of other memorabilia they have of father's life.</p> <p>02:51:29 His father's travelling for matches. Volunteers. His own involvement volunteering. Mentions travelling to Nowlan Park, Carlow, Portlaoise, Tullamore, Newbridge, Aughrim. Being regraded to play on Wexford junior despite playing club senior. Mentions hurler and footballer Ted Morrissey, now on Coiste Sean Ghael.</p> <p>02:54:37 Describes retiring from playing, had young family. Details of club involvement, including roles as chairman in 1960s and on fundraising committee. Field days for fundraising. Reasons for not getting involved at county administration level.</p> <p>02:55:56 Recalls people calling to the family home in Charlesfort when he was young. His father buying turkeys and boxes of chocolates for volunteers at Christmas, going to Dublin to deliver them. Mentions Dr. Stuart, chairman of Leinster Council. Also mentions Paul Russell, Kerry footballer. Also mentions Seamus Ryan, Pat Fanning. Recalls Seven brothers from Cork vs Seven brothers from Wexford, seven</p>
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	<p>O'Neills officiating. Mentions the Doyles.</p> <p>03:00:46 Reflects on his involvement in Coiste Sean Ghael. His duties as committee member. Satisfaction of his role. Annual presentation of awards to acknowledge players and officials in camogie, football, hurling, handball. Socialising, tea and sandwiches, drinking. Changed eligibility criteria. Mentions Paddy Kehoe's absence. Describes John Farelly, Larry Larkin, Gerry Cullitin from Gusserane, (his brother John Joe had died), and other inter-county Wexford players sitting near each other. Players' families invited. Speeches. Stories of Gaelic games in the past. His father among the first recipients of the award.</p> <p>03:07:20 Mentions those responsible for establishment of Coiste Sean Ghael: hurler Tomás O Murchú who was interned in the Curragh for IRA involvement. Also mentions Paddy Roche, secretary of the Wexford County Board. Also Canon Murnagh treasurer of the Wexford County Board. Coiste Sean Ghael thriving. Mentions Liam Mulvihill, Seamus Meath attending. Christy Cooney's absence this year.</p> <p>03:11:14 Mentions Liam Mulvihill's secretary Joan Cooney. Difficulty of getting tickets to the All-Ireland Senior Football Final. Atmosphere in Croke Park when northern Irish counties playing. Swapping Tyrone badge for flag with supporter.</p> <p>03:14:46 Reflects on the importance of family, neighbours, GAA, and sports in his life. Involvement in athletics. Mentions his cousin O'Dowd chosen to go to 1932 Olympics as marathon runner. Attempt to get handball included in Olympics. His desire for Coiste Sean Ghael to extend through Ireland. His belief that the GAA should encourage handball. Compares Wexford's Coiste Sean Ghael to similar schemes in Dublin, Tipperary, and Offaly.</p> <p>03:20:46 His concern that the GAA isn't as attractive to young people as other games. The need for the GAA to attract players. Huge dedication required of inter-county players. Mentions letter from John Kerry O'Donnell about banning players in America. The games' strength in Boston and New York then. Challenges for GAA in rural areas now. Need to have an insurance scheme for players. Expense of GAA membership in a recession. Rise of soccer. Need to examine financing of GAA clubs.</p>
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<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input 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>Played hurling and football from childhood until 1962. Played with Ferns St Aidan's and Kilrush GAA; Won Wexford Junior Championship in 1952; Won Wexford Intermediate Hurling Championship in 1958; Member of the Wexford Senior Hurling team, 1953 – 57. Played Leinster Colleges hurling and football with St Peter's.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Member of Wexford Coiste na Sean Ghael (currently); Chairman of Ferns St Aidans (4 years in the early 1960s); Delegate to Wexford County Board in the early 1960s.</p>
<p>Format</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
<p>Duration</p>	<p>Length of Interview: 03:27:35</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