

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Julian O'Donoghue
Date of Interview	26 th Oct 2011
Location	Blarney
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Denis Lyons
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1930 Home County: Cork
Education	Primary: Scoil Tobair an Dauhnaigh Secondary: Scoil Ard Mhuire Nor Third Level: UCC
Family	N/A
Club(s)	Blarney [Cork], Gleann na laoi [Cork]
Occupation	N/A
Parents' Occupation	N/A
Religion	N/A
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A
Date of Report	26 th Oct 2011
Period Covered	1940-2011
Counties/Countries Covered	Cork
Key Themes	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training,

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<p>Covered</p>	<p>Managing, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, Irish Language, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Outsider's Perspectives, Alcohol, Violence, Politics, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy / Economics</p>
<p>Interview Summary</p>	<p>Denis Lyons, a former politician and Minister of State, opens the interview by discussing his family background in the GAA and his early personal experiences of travelling to matches in Cork and beyond. Lyons talks about the place of the GAA club in local community life and discusses the local geography of Gaelic games in the Blarney and mid Cork region. The acquisition of the Blarney club grounds – and the means of its financing – in the late 1950s is discussed, as are some of the highs and lows of the club's playing record over the subsequent decades. The club's trip to America in 1980 is also dealt with.</p> <p>Lyons was a friend of Christy Ring and he considers that player's place in the hurling pantheon. Consideration is also given to the relationship between the GAA and politics, to media coverage of Gaelic games and, in particular, the GAA's changing role in relation to the promotion of the Irish language.</p> <p>00:00:30 Earliest memory: recalls involvement in district juvenile hurling leagues in the 1940s.</p> <p>00:01:12 Family background: mentions his Kerry-born father's interest in Gaelic games and him reading Dick Fitzgerald's book on Gaelic football.</p> <p>00:01:43 Refers to father's move to Cork and playing with St. Nicholas on the north side of city in the middle to late 1920s.</p> <p>00:02:30 Talks about moving house to other suburb of Cork, Clogheen, and other club. Reference to having only two things to do in Clogheen.</p> <p>00:03:28 Talks about travelling to games on bicycles, on the back of lorries and getting out before reaching pitch because it was illegal.</p> <p>00:04:19 Recalls also living close to UCC grounds in Mardyke</p>

	<p>and going to watch matches. Refers to admission price and the ritual of gaining entry into the match.</p> <p>00:05:53 Mentions tournament (fundraising for religious causes) games between Cork clubs and those from other counties.</p> <p>00:06:47 Recollections of attending Cork county matches in the Cork Athletic Grounds or travelling to Limerick or Thurles. Mentions that his brother owned a 'baby Ford'.</p> <p>00:07:50 Going to watch Cork-Kerry matches in Killarney and Cork Athletic grounds in the 1950s and 60s.</p> <p>00:08:30 Talks about initially bringing sandwiches to games and later, once they acquired 'a small bit of affluent', availing of other opportunities. Refers to getting a 'plain tea' or a 'meat tea' in Killarney.</p> <p>00:09:35 Discusses the cost of access to matches for adults and juveniles and puts the prices in context. Mentions five year plan for Croke Park and the cost of subscription and tickets. Comments that prices charged were 'always relevant to the economic circumstances of the time.'</p> <p>00:11:35 Comments on subsequent redevelopment of Croke Park and describes the 5 year All-Ireland ticket as 'unacceptable'. Mentions Cork County Board attempts to have recognition to older citizens and have a 'reasonable charge' apply.</p> <p>00:13:00 Refers to existing economic crisis (2011) and the cost of All-Ireland final tickets.</p> <p>[There is a short break in the recording at this point]</p> <p>00:13:30 Interviewer holds a 1959 senior hurling programme for a game between Tipperary and Limerick, refereed by Charlie Conway.</p> <p>00:14:15 Denis Lyons tells a story about Christy Ring being sent off by Charlie Conway. Mentions his moved to Blarney in 1959, organising a parish league and contacting Christy Ring to throw in ball for first game.</p> <p>00:16:50 Discusses the teams involved in the parish leagues, the geography of the area and where the teams were organised. Mentions Whitechurch winning Canon Sheahan memorial trophy for hurling and investigations into the legality of the Rathpeaken team in the football competition.</p> <p>00:20:00 Refers to role of parish competition to the success</p>
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	<p>of Blarney club in mid Cork and county Under championship in 1959. Refers to three members who went on to play Cork Minor.</p> <p>00:21:20 Talks about his move to Blarney and joining local GAA club, local church and 'local political organisation'.</p> <p>00:22:10 Discusses the green grass square in centre of village where another code is now played. However, Lyons recalls the same square being used in the late 1950s for an internal 7 a side hurling competition. Remarks on not 'sparing the ash' and the competition going unfinished.</p> <p>00:24:44 Tells story of Blarney winning county title in the 1930s and one player, Charlie Conway, not receiving his medal and the decision, thirty years later, to present it to him.</p> <p>00:26:55 Discusses at length Christy Kelleher and the acquisition of 7 acres of land for club grounds near the village in 1958. Refers to involvement of parish priest, the holding of public meeting and the collecting of public subscriptions.</p> <p>00:30:10 Considers the influence of the Canon, parish priest, in the community and tells story of a woman who, on the priest's suggestion, contributed the 5 shillings every month 'religiously'.</p> <p>00:31:40 Coming up £100 short, calling in Christy Kelleher and the holding of a bazaar. Refers to Kelleher's efforts to source flood damaged stock for the bazaar. Mentions also his other supports to the club's fundraising.</p> <p>00:33:50 Discusses the different roles he has held within the Blarney club: talks about the small number of individuals involved in administration when he joined club and contrasts it with the current situation. Refers that he was Chairman of the club 'so many times'; he was secretary; board delegate; Culture and Irish officer. Mentions also the roles he held with the Cork county board and the fact he now holds a 'pass' from the County committee.</p> <p>00:39:10 Mentions current involvement with Blarney club, collecting money for car boot sale.</p> <p>00:39:55 Discusses his friendship with Christy Ring, his place in the hurling pantheon, his message to younger players, his longevity.</p> <p>00:43:02 Considers the reputation of Christy Ring in relation to modern players and remarks on the changes in the game</p>
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	<p>of hurling. 'It's a different game...'</p> <p>00:44:30 Selects the 1966 All-Ireland hurling victory of Cork over Kilkenny as his greatest game and explains why.</p> <p>00:45:30 Assesses the importance of Blarney's 1993 Junior county success, the 2008 county Intermediate success and the subsequent All-Ireland victory.</p> <p>00:47:06 Refers to the disappointment of losing to Inniscarra in the 1970s when Blarney were chasing their fourth mid Cork championship in a row.</p> <p>00:48:01 Assesses the significance of the mid Cork championship and the intensity of competition between clubs in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.</p> <p>00:48:50 Discusses the place of the Blarney GAA club in the community – describes it as 'the focus of community effort'.</p> <p>[The interview is temporarily interrupted, but resumes on the same issue of the GAA and community]</p> <p>00:49:50 Reads an extract from a certificate of affiliation for the club by T. O'Riordan in 1884. Mentions that a reproduction of certificate was produced for a trip to America by the club in 1980 and that a copy recently went missing from club.</p> <p>00:52:07 Discusses various clubs and pastimes catered for in the Blarney region since the GAA founding. Refers to the GAA and Blarney Harrier club as being the only two constants, but mentions also the Blarney athletic and Cycling club and the Blarney Boxing club</p> <p>00:53:30 Talks about the prioritising of hurling by the Blarney club at the expense of football and how this has impacted on the development of football.</p> <p>00:54:10 Talks about the plans for an American trip in 1980, the preparations, the establishment of a committee, the production of a book, the costs of flights, the booking of hotels in Boston and New York.</p> <p>00:57:12 Tells story about Ollie Kelleher, a club member, in Boston being mistaken for a 'leprechaun' while travelling with hurleys on the tram to a game.</p> <p>00:59:00 Arriving at the wrong field in Boston and being helped by rugby club members to find ground.</p> <p>00:59:43 Arriving at GAA field in Boston amid a downpour</p>
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	<p>and taking shelter in a pub.</p> <p>01:00:25 Tells story about an incident when playing a team from Limerick in Gaelic Park, New York.</p> <p>01:01:55 Describes the Blarney GAA trip to America as an ‘adventure’ and recites a message of goodwill received from Cardinal O Fiaich, Archbishop of Armagh, prior to departure.</p> <p>01:02:46 Discusses his limited participation in Gaelic games in primary school and contrasts this with his Gaelic games experience in North Mon. Tells stories about the requirement to go to the field for exercise on a Wednesday afternoon and to the use of corporal punishment on pupils.</p> <p>01:06:00 Discusses his admiration for Con Murphy, for Cork player and GAA President. He ‘epitomised everything that was good’.</p> <p>01:07:00 Tells story of attending a vote on the ban on foreign games (Rule 27) at Cork county board. Includes reference to Cork county players having being suspended under the rule.</p> <p>01:09:35 Discusses the retreat from the Irish language in the GAA and provides examples of ‘shoneenism’, of how its profile has been diminished – signing correspondence in Irish, filling team sheets in Irish, use of cheque books in Irish etc. Stresses the GAA wider cultural purpose.</p> <p><i>01:12:43 Míníonn sé cad as ar spreagadh an tsuim s’aige sa Ghaeilge. Luann sé múinteoir bunscoile dá chuid, Risteárd Ó Murchú. Déanann sé tagairt don tréimhse a chaith sé ag freastal ar an Mainistir Thuaidh. Luann sé Gaelcholáiste Mhuire chomh maith.</i></p> <p>01:16:10 Talks about the state of Irish nowadays. Refers to Gaelscoils and national schools.</p> <p><i>01:16:10 Labhraíonn sé faoi stádas na Gaeilge sa tír na laethanta seo. Déanann se tagairt do mhúineadh na Gaelcholaistí agus sna gnáthbhuncoileanna.</i></p> <p>01:18:12 Emphasises the importance of using Irish outside of school – refers to Irish used in certain businesses. Mentions Gael Taca, South County Bar and Griffins Garden Centre.</p> <p><i>01:18:12 Cuireann sé béim ar úsáid na Gaeilge lasmuigh den chóras oideachais – san earnáil phríobhídeach gnó ar leith. Luann sé Gael Taca, South County Bar and Griffins Garden Centre.</i></p> <p>01:21:17 GAA and politics: Reflects on the political and</p>
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	<p>cultural influences which informed the GAA's founding. Assesses the reasons for the absence of 'party politics' in the GAA and considers the Association's role in 'restoring unity' post Civil War.</p> <p>01:25:03 Tells story of standing in a local elections in the 1970s when he was standing for re-election and being told he had secured a vote because he 'never brought politics into the club'.</p> <p>[01:25:25 Interviewer clarifies that Denis Lyons had served as a Minister of State]</p> <p>01:28:24 Recalls being a selector with Blarney club, aged 50, and playing a game at the UCC grounds on a Sunday morning when he was required to tog out to make up 15. Tells of exchange with corner back after being hit with a shoulder.</p> <p>01:30:45 Talks about being a selector with Muskerry in 1981 and having a game clash with a political party selection convention.</p> <p>01:32:30 Refers to absence of word 'manager' from vocabulary and his frustration at bringing in people from outside club to train players.</p> <p>01:33:55 Reflects on media coverage of Gaelic games over time, touching on the importance of newspaper reports, Michael O'Hehir, Michael O Muircheartaigh, local paper <i>The Examiner</i> and the <i>Evening Echo</i>.</p> <p>01:35:15 Considers the need for the GAA to use new technology.</p> <p>01:37:07 Talks about the changes in equipment and training for Gaelic games across different eras, as well as lifestyles. Talks about watching a Kilkenny county hurling final and the 'physicality' of it.</p> <p>01:41:40 Recalls attending his first All-Ireland and standing in the 'long stand' (c. early 1950s.). Comments favourably on the subsequent improvements to Croke Park and the provision of facilities by county boards and clubs, citing examples of 'progress' from mid Cork.</p>
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Involvement in GAA	<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 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person <input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	N/A
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	N/A
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01:46:11
Language	English/Irish

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: Julian O'Donoghue

Date: 26th Oct 2011