

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

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| Name of Interviewer | Regina Fitzpatrick |
| Date of Interview | 27 th May 2013 |
| Location | Croke Park Stadium, Dublin |
| Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname) | Liam Ó Maolmhichíl |
| <u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u> | |
| Gender | Male |
| Born | Year Born: 1946 Home County: Longford |
| Education | Primary: Ballymahon National School, Co. Longford Secondary: St. Mel's College, Longford. Third Level: St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin |
| Family | Siblings: 7 brothers and 2 sisters Current Family if Different: Married to Máire with one daughter and three sons |
| Club(s) | Kenagh GAA [Longford]; Donaghmore Ashbourne GAA [Meath] |
| Occupation | Primary School Teacher; Schools' Inspector; Árd Stiúrthóir CLG (1979-2007) |
| Parents' Occupation | Farmers |
| Religion | Roman Catholic |
| Political Affiliation / Membership | N/A |
| Other Club/Society Membership(s) | N/A |

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| Date of Report | 10 th June 2013 |
| Period Covered | 1920s-2013 |
| Counties/Countries Covered | Longford, Roscommon, Mayo, Dublin, Kerry, Meath, Kildare, Galway, Tipperary, Offaly, Carlow, Kilkenny, Laois, Limerick, Wicklow, Clare, Americas |
| Key Themes Covered | Facilities, Playing, Administration, Celebrations, Religion, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Identity, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Opening of Croke Park, Professionalism, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships |
| Interview Summary | <p>In this, the first of two interviews, Liam talks about his childhood growing up in Kenagh, Co. Longford. He talks about family life, the GAA tradition within his family and about the place of Gaelic games in life in Kenagh and Ballymahon. He outlines the place of Gaelic games in school life and in college life, reflecting on his experiences in both St. Mel's and St Patrick's College Drumcondra. He describes life as a young teacher in Ballinacarrigy and as a school's inspector for the Department of Education. He outlines his involvement as a player and administrator in the GAA throughout his life and the various characters he met along the way. The interview ends in the opening years of his role as Director General of the GAA.</p> <p>00:00:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:00:30 Liam talks about growing up on a farm in Kenagh, Co. Longford and describes the area. Farm bordering three parishes, Kenagh, Carrick Edmund and Ballymahon. Father from Ballymahon and so family identified closely with Ballymahon.</p> <p>00:02:27 Eldest of ten children, role of eldest child in families. Family life growing up in a large family. Description of farm life and work – physical labour of cutting and turning hay, growing of turnips and mangles, thinning and harvesting vegetables. Family interest in horses. Neighbours coming in for the threshing, reference to working men on the farm.</p> <p>00:07:10 Economic conditions of farming in Ireland in 1950s and 1960s. Reference to Economic War. Reference to tillage and dry stock farming.</p> <p>00:08:30 Reference to his father looking after the upkeep of</p> |

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| | <p>private roads around the farm and the County Council taking responsibility for private roads in 1960s. Reference to opening and closing gates to get out on to public roads.</p> <p>00:10:12 All father's brothers and sisters lived close by. Mother from Newtowncashel near Lanesborough on the Longford-Roscommon border.</p> <p>00:11:38 No industry in the area. Mills around the countryside and there was a saw mill in Ballymahon but no industry other than that. Bord na Móna started harvesting peat in Co. Longford in the 1960s. Provided employed for many people in Kenagh. Power station in Lanesborough harvested, dried and burned milled peat which also provided employment.</p> <p>00:13:50 Pastimes in the area when he was growing up. Popularity of fishing and hunting – shooting grouse, curlews and pheasant on the peat land. Hunting foxes and badgers mentioned – special dogs for flushing out burrows. Pitch and toss very popular on Sundays. Gaelic football very popular in the area – hurling almost non-existent in Longford at that time. No handball in their area.</p> <p>00:16:31 History of Gaelic games in parent's families. Involvement on both sides. Father's uncles involved in Ballymahon, playing an in administrative roles. Mother's brothers very involved in Kenagh.</p> <p>00:17:30 Starting to play Gaelic football in school. Previously Ballymahon NS has won two schools championships. No victory in Liam's time but it was enjoyable. Reference to county's school team playing other counties. Liam being selected for county's schools team. Playing U16 with Ballymahon as a 13 year old and Kenagh lodging objection because he was from the parish of Kenagh. Having to change at that point and play with Kenagh. Challenge of changing clubs. Standard of Kenagh club at the time. More memories of valiant defeats than victories.</p> <p>00:20:19 Description of Ballymahon NS. Starting in Ballymahon convent as everyone did and then moving to boys school in 1st class. Number of family members in school. School being condemned when he finished 5th class. Decision to close school down and build new school and so he had no 6th class as the school was not built in time. Reference to scholarship examinations for secondary school. Family tradition of boys being sent to St Vincent's Boarding School, Castleknock. Liam wasn't happy to go there as it was a rugby school and so asked to be sent to St Mel's in Longford where he ultimately went. Absence of secondary school in area,</p> |
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| | <p>convent in Ballymahon decided to take boys in that year also. Cousins attended Bellecamp school in Coolock. Brother also attending St Mel's.</p> <p>00:26:23 Football the main reason that Liam wanted to go to St. Mel's. Was a student there in the era of their best success. Playing with St Mel's with old National School classmates from Ballymahon. Reference to Tom Casey who took care of the Ballymahon national school team – also a St Mel's past-pupil. Tom Casey setting up a GAA club in the school and introducing hurling to the school. Tremendous influence of Tom Casey who later became one of the first teachers in Ireland to be trained as a career guidance teacher.</p> <p>00:30:01 Influence of his uncles on him. Talks about tragedy in his father's family. Uncle's involvement in point to point racing and a riding accident at Punchestown. Father banned from going to matches because of his heart condition his mother's brothers would take them to matches.</p> <p>00:33:30 Excitement of mother's family at matches. Recounts story about his taking his mother's brother, Patrick, to the Connaught final (Roscommon v Mayo) in Roscommon on year. Funny exchange between Patrick and Dr Kinnane, Archbishop of Tuam. Mentions Dr Donal Keenan as the man in charge of Hyde Park at the time. Development of Hyde Park.</p> <p>00:40:00 Story about meeting Shane Curran's (Roscommon goalkeeper) father and recounting the story to John Prenty who told him about this man bringing a group of patients from the mental hospital in Castlereagh to the same Connaught Final mentioned above. Mention of Dermot Flanagan (Mayo Captain).</p> <p>00:45:36 Entering St Mel's College in 1959 coincided with a great era in football for the college. Mention of St. Finian's who defeated them in Leinster Colleges Final 1959. Never beaten in Leinster thereafter for the duration of his stay. Mentions a draw with O'Connell's schools in his final year. Describes his playing career there and winning 4 Leinster Senior Colleges and two All-Ireland Senior Colleges. Beaten in two All-Ireland Senior Colleges. His brother Tom also on team in his last year at St Mel's. Rivalry with St Jarlath's Tuam.</p> <p>00:49:37 Story about defeating St Brendan's College, Killarney in the Senior Colleges All-Ireland in Croke Park in 1963. Defeating Abbey CBS, Newry in semi-final. Mis-</p> |
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| | <p>behaviour of some St Mel's students at the colleges All-Ireland the previous year leading to a ban on students from the school going to the colleges All-Ireland that year. Story about how the innovative way in which students overcame the ban. Reaction of school president. Mention of hotel opposite the Town and Country Ballroom [site of current Gate Theatre] in Dublin. National league football final being played on the same day, Kerry v Meath. Mentions Tim Tiger Lyons. Close connection of team mates. The feeling of winning an All-Ireland in Croke Park.</p> <p>00:58:20 Playing in Croke Park for the Longford minor football team when he was 15. Had beaten a very good Laois team but were defeated by Meath on that day. St Mel's had banned members of the college team from playing with Longford.</p> <p>00:59:45 Influence of Fr. Jimmy McKeown in St. Mel's football. Catchment area of St. Mel's – Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise.</p> <p>1:01:11 Training regime and daily routine in St Mel's. Rituals/traditions around the games at St. Mel's eg. when students were allowed to go to support the college team; menu for players; celebratory jam for all students for tea if the college team had won.</p> <p>1:06:16 First impressions of St. Mel's. Description of daily life and living conditions at St Mel's. Discipline, corporal punishment and treatment of students at the college. Story about an exchange he had with a dean in the college. More about special treatment of players in the college. Decision not to send his own children to boarding school, despite his own positive experience at St Mel's.</p> <p>1:22:33 The place of football in St Mel's. Centrality of football to school ethos, morale, academic achievement. Benefits of being a footballer in the school. Bond with players from others schools in years thereafter.</p> <p>1:24:28 Finishing at St Mel's and considering his options for the future. Turning down university scholarship and the decision to do primary school training at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. His brother, Tom, entering seminary in Maynooth and subsequently leaving to do a degree in agriculture.</p> <p>1:27:30 Description of life at St Patrick's College. Run by Vincentians at the time. Going home at weekends to play with Kenagh. Winning U21 Longford football championship in</p> |
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| | <p>1963. Whole panel that year were pioneers.</p> <p>1:31:05 Liam's own development as a player when he was at St Mel's and thereafter. Playing at St Pat's. Winning Dublin U21 football championships. Playing in Dublin senior championship and being beaten by Clan na nGael and St Vincent's teams at the time which included: Kevin Heffernan, 'Snitchy' Ferguson, 'Blackie' Cohen, Mick Kissane and Tony Hanahoe. 'Fast one' pulled by St Vincent's on St. Pat's. Mentions Tom Walsh from Galway, a St Pat's team-mate. Not taking football as seriously in St Pat's as he had in Mel's.</p> <p>1:36:49 Starting as a young teacher. Playing U21 football for Longford. Mentions John Donnelly and Pat Mangan (Kildare footballers). Becoming a selector on the Longford team. Rule about selectors not being allowed to be players. Decided he had had enough of playing at that level in 1967 and stopped playing for the county but continued to play with Kenagh. Fortunes of that Longford football team. Brother Tom playing for Longford.</p> <p>1:40:07 Dispute within Longford team and county board in 1968-69. Player suspended with reference to GAA rule about discrediting the association. Subsequent split in county. Half of executive of county walked out. Difficult situation lasting up to 12 months. Settlement eventually reached in which a three year schedule of retirement for all of the officers of the county board was agreed. Longford winning Leinster title in 1968 – Mick Higgins involved in that team. Defeat by Kerry subsequently.</p> <p>1:43:39 Describes how he first became involved in GAA administration at a county level. Becoming vice-chairperson of Longford County Board. Mentions Jimmy Flynn from Ballymahon who was County Chairman at the time. Outlines club administration experience. Becoming Chairman of Longford County Board. Mentions Seán Donnelly a former player who became secretary around the same time. Also mentions University College Galway and former Galway players – Enda Colleran, John Donnellan, Pateen Donnellan, Noel Tierney and Martin Newell.</p> <p>1:48:33 Immediate challenges of trying to unite the county after the split; improve financial situation and discipline. Very young county board. Mentions his uncle Tommy Donnellan who was club registrar. Getting involved in going to Croke Park for Central Council meetings and convention. Briefly mentions achievements of classmates at St. Mel's.</p> <p>1:52:02 Describes his life at the time, living at home, teaching</p> |
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| | <p>at Ballinacarrigy, Co. Westmeath and training school team. Mentions priest from Ballinacarrigy who was starting up a club in Ballyfermot at the time and recruiting players from St Pat's to teach there.</p> <p>1:53:29 How he ended up becoming principal of the national school in Ballinacarrigy straight out of St Pat's. Mentions parish priest of Ballinacarrigy, Fr Kilmartin and recounts some stories of his first impressions of him and their relationship thereafter. First impressions of the school.</p> <p>1:58:03 Description of Ballinacarrigy school - one boys' school and one girls' school. Mentions controversy over confirmation ceremony. Mentions Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, Cathal Daly. Mentions introduction of English to Catholic ceremonies. Mentions Dr McCormack, Bishop of Meath.</p> <p>2:06:53 Amalgamation of boys and girls school in Ballinacarrigy. Mentions Fr Kilmartin as having served on the missions in Nigeria and his interest in politics.</p> <p>2:09:05 Appointment as an inspector for the Department of Education in 1972. His own approach to education, nature focussed.</p> <p>2:13:04 Doing an arts degree in Irish, English and History at University College Dublin. Going on to doing his HDip in Education in Maynooth. Studying, teaching, training teams and Chairman of County Board all at the same time.</p> <p>2:18:54 Mentions working as an inspector in Nenagh, covering North Tipperary, part of Co. Offaly and part of Limerick city; later working in Carlow.</p> <p>2:20:26 Still playing football with Kenagh but decided to resign as Chairman of County Board as he was now living in Carlow. Becoming Longford representative to Central Council in 1972. Mentions Fr Finn McGee.</p> <p>2:23:34 Living in Carlow. Description of inspector role. Covering Carlow, parts of Laois, Kildare, Kilkenny and West Wicklow. Having a good memory for faces and names. Mentions another inspector, Frank Donoghue.</p> <p>2:29:37 Mentions inspecting diploma teachers and meeting his wife, Máire who was a teacher in Athy through his work.</p> <p>2:31:40 Seán Ó Síocháin stepping down as Ard Stiúthóir in 1979, potted history of how Seán came on to the staff in Croke Park. Reference to the appointment of Paddy O'Keefe</p> |
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| | <p>as General Secretary in 1929. His retirement in 1964, Seán Ó Síocháin, Con Murphy, Kevin Heffernan, Liam Hastings and Maurice Hayes among others all applied to fill the position. Appointment of Seán Ó Síocháin. Mention of Bridie Moriarty.</p> <p>2:39:06 Seán Ó Síocháin announcing his retirement as General Secretary in 1979. Con Murphy had become president of the GAA the previous year. How Seán's replacement would be selected. Liam's situation at the time. Seán Donnelly suggestion that Liam put his name forward for the position. Seán's ambitions at the time. Applying for the position of General Secretary. Mentions other candidates for the position including Kieran O'Neill, Noel Drumgoole, Tom Garry and Pat Guthrie. Interview process. Interview panel including Chief Executive of EBS and Secretary of Department of Labour, Con Murphy (President), Paddy Mac Flynn (President-Elect). Mentions Hugh Byrne, Jim Ryan and Alf Murray who were the Irish language examiners. Story about Con O'Leary.</p> <p>2:46:31 Appointment of Liam as Ard Stiúrthóir (age 32). Mention of Tom Downes from Clare, Gerry Fagan from Armagh, Donal 'Duck' Whelan and Con Murphy. Subsequent Central Council meeting, reference to Tommy Mellon from Derry and his republican beliefs. Story about Tommy Mellon's funeral.</p> <p>2:54:35 Announcement of Liam's appointment as Ard Stiúrthóir to Central Council. Mention of Gerard McKenna from Kerry.</p> <p>2:57:42 Announcement of Liam's appointment at Congress. Media reaction and impact of announcement on family.</p> <p>2:59:32 Seán Ó Síocháin remaining on Croke Park staff to fundraise for new offices at Croke Park.</p> <p>3:00:53 Working his notice as a school's inspector and starting to work in Croke Park.</p> <p>3:01:46 Rapport with Paddy Mac Flynn, new GAA president at the time. Reference to 'Móibhí' Máire Ní Dhrioscól, secretary to Seán Ó Síocháin and mother of Noel O'Leary, Cork footballer. Reference to Seán's retirement from Croke Park and going on to work for Shane Redmond Insurance – first national insurance scheme for GAA players.</p> <p>3:04:30 Story about meeting Hugh O'Byrne at congress in the Gresham Hotel, Dublin and as a schools inspector. Also coming across him as a player in St Mel's when they played</p> |
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| | <p>in Kiltegan and Hugh came in to speak to the players as GAA president. Mention of Hugh's wife, Rose.</p> <p>3:12:53 Tradition of Liam, Paddy Mac Flynn and Hugh O'Bryne going down to Wicklow for a long walk the morning after the All-Ireland. Relationship between the three men.</p> <p>3:14:04 Story about Hugh O'Byrne's election as President of the GAA.</p> <p>3:15:57 Stories about Hugh O'Byrne's 'impish' sense of humour.</p> <p>3:18:40 Reference to Dr Joe Stuart from Clare, former GAA president who was also Master of the Coombe.</p> <p>3:20:33 Story about addressing a county convention in Monaghan when Páraic Duffy was County Chairperson. Reference to Páraic's father, Mickey Duffy. Reference to Seán McCague who was at St Pat's at the same time as Liam.</p> <p>3:23:40 Stories about an unnamed chairperson of the Leinster County who was a bit of a character. Reference to John Kerry O'Donnell of Gaelic Park, New York and the Cardinal Cushing Games. Reference to H-Block Protest at an All-Ireland semi-final/final in which Offaly were playing. O'Donnell's withdrawal of invitation extended to Offaly to Cardinal Cushing Games. Subsequent unusual entry in Central Council minutes.</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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Ard Stiúrthóir CLG, 1979-2007.</p> |
| <p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p> | <p>Played with Ballymahon National School. Played with Kenagh Club from U16 level. Won U21 Longford football championship with Kenagh in 1963, later won junior and intermediate county football championships. Played with St Mel's from 1959. Won 4 Leinster Senior Colleges and two All-Ireland Senior Colleges with St Mel's (1960-64). Played minor and U21 football for Longford. Played football at St Pat's and won Dublin U21 football championships.</p> |
| <p>Record as an Administrator</p> | <p>Selector on U21 Longford football team (1960s); Various positions in Kenagh GAA club; Kenagh Delegate to Longford</p> |

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| (Positions held; how long for) | County Board; Vice-Chairman of Longford County Board (1969); Chairman of Longford County Board (1970). Longford Central Council representative (1972); Member of Central Council (1972-2007); Ard Stiúrthóir CLG (1979-2007). |
| Format | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual |
| Duration | Length of Interview: 3:28:33 |
| Language | English |

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 10th June 2013