

Participating in the GAA Oral History Project: Guide for Secondary Schools

Project Aim

The GAA Oral History Project aims to record the fullest possible picture of what the GAA has meant to the Irish people, in their own words. The project will record face-to-face interviews with thousands of people in Ireland and internationally, including GAA members and supporters, current and former players, managers, officials, administrators and, indeed, anyone who has been involved in GAA activities from washing jerseys to driving buses and beyond. These interviews will then be preserved as a permanent resource on the history of the GAA and Irish society. Some of the recordings may also be used in a series of exhibitions, publications and broadcasts to celebrate the organisation's 125th anniversary. Project staff will record many of the interviews, but in order to reach the maximum number of people, the project is extremely interested in engaging with secondary school students.

This **Field Kit** will provide you with all you need to know to identify interview candidates, conduct successful interviews and submit them to the project.

There are eight simple steps to follow in order to participate in the project, each of which is explained below.

1. Learn more about the GAA Oral History Project
2. What is expected from every student and from every teacher
3. How to select suitable interviewees and prepare for the interview
4. How to conduct interviews
5. Completing the relevant forms
6. Collecting photographs and documents
7. How to complete questionnaires
8. Additional Information

1. Learn more about the GAA Oral History Project

It's important that you understand the aims and methods of the GAA Oral History Project. Prospective interview candidates will want to know what their contributions will be used for, and you need to be able to show them that they are contributing to a worthwhile cause. The "Project Aims" statement at the beginning of this document is a good starting point. Remember, you can find out much more about the GAA Oral History Project on our website - www.gaahistory.com

What is Oral History?

Oral history is the gathering and recording of people's memories and opinions. It enables us to see the human side of historical events, rather than relying solely on books and records. It also allows us to challenge assumptions about our recent past by asking direct questions to people who lived through those times. Oral history is particularly valuable because we can seek out the views of all elements of society, including people that are often left out in general history books. There are challenges - people's memories can be flawed, or they may not feel able to talk openly about certain things - but in conjunction with other historical methods, oral history gives us a much richer understanding of our recent past.

Why an Oral History of the GAA?

The history of the GAA is a people's history. In an organisation of volunteers the thoughts of ordinary members and supporters should be recorded along with those of champions and presidents. We have alive in Ireland today a group of people who can tell us exactly what it was like to play hurling with Christy Ring, or cycle to Croke Park from Kerry for the All-Ireland final. We need to preserve as many of those voices as we can. By recording the widest possible selection of interviews, we can create an unmatched resource for ourselves and for future generations of scholars and fans.

2. What is expected from every student and from every teacher?

Students

Each student participating in the project is asked to:

- Conduct at least two interviews.
- Find at least three people to fill out questionnaires.
- Fill out a questionnaire themselves.
- Send an original or digital copy of any interesting photograph or document they find.
- Fully complete *all* the paperwork for *each* interview, questionnaire, photograph and document.

It is vital that all paperwork in conjunction with the interviews, questionnaires and photographs is filled out. Failure to complete all the relevant paperwork will mean that the material collected cannot be included in the archive. For further information on filling out the forms, see Section 5 below.

Teachers:

It is the responsibility of every teacher to ensure that students have completed the necessary paperwork for every interview.

Those schools who are only using questionnaires to participate in the project and are not recording interviews should post the completed submissions to: GAA Oral History Project, Boston College, 42 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2 or email them to info@gaahistory.com.

Where students are digitally recording interviews, teachers should ensure that the interviews are properly stored on computers. Teachers should then contact the researchers on the project to arrange for collection of the material.

If all the required paperwork has been submitted, you will receive an acknowledgement from the GAA Oral History Project. Your submission will then be put into the archive and will eventually be available for viewing at the GAA Museum and Archives.

3. How to select suitable interviewees and how to prepare for the interview

Selecting Interviewees

If you are working in your own locality, start by deciding if any of your family and friends would be a good interviewee, or ask them to suggest some likely candidates. Obviously, your local GAA club should be a rich source of interviewees. Local nursing homes or retirement clubs may also have a number of people with insights into the GAA in previous eras.

Remember that the project aims to capture the widest possible picture of the role of the GAA in the lives of Irish men and women- so as well as former players, administrators or managers, try to find people, especially older people, who can talk about the GAA in their community in their early years. Even if they weren't actively involved, they may be able to offer an interesting perspective on the GAA from the outside. Obviously, as far as possible, try to select interviewees who have interesting things to say.

Approaching Interviewees

Once you have identified an interviewee, make an initial contact to find out if they are willing to take part. You can do this in person or by phone. You should find that most people are willing to have their memories recorded once you explain the goals of the GAA Oral History Project, and the possible uses for the recording. Some people might feel that they have nothing of interest to say, so reassure them that the project aims to record the experiences of all types of people, not just GAA heroes. If people refuse after some gentle persuasion, respect their decision and thank them for considering your offer.

If your subject agrees to take part, specify a time and place for the interview (the interviewee's own home is usually best) and be punctual. It would be useful to send out the interviewee pack to your subject at this point, as it explains the background to the project and how the interview will work. You can also include the appointment details and your contact number in the boxes provided.

Preparing for the Interview

Do some homework before the interview. In your initial contact with the interviewee, try to get a feel for what they will want to talk about. If the interviewee has some specialist knowledge, for example, on handball or the Irish language in the GAA, you'll be able to prepare questions on that. If interviewing a player or manager, research their career details, including major successes and failures. It's often useful to bring some prompts to get the subject talking: lists of honours won by a relevant team, team sheets from big games, quotes or photographs would all be good examples.

Preparing Questions

We have provided a basic questionnaire which students might find useful when conducting interviews. Remember though, the interview will work best if you follow the structure loosely and react to what the interviewee says during your conversation, rather than simply reading a list of question after question.

It's useful to record a mock interview with a friend or family member before you start. This will allow you to practice with the equipment, and get a feel for the probable duration of the interview. You should have a strong idea of the general areas you want to cover in the interview to avoid constantly referring to your notes, which can be distracting for the interviewee.

What kind of recording device should you use?

As far as possible, interviewees should conduct their interviews on digital recorders; producing WAV files (size 48/16). Digital recorders which can be used for this project can be purchased for around €200. The project research team can advise on equipment.

Schools which do not have (or cannot purchase) digital recorders can still take part in the project. It will be possible to transfer files which are recorded on cassette tape, or on mp3 files. In the interests of quality and standardisation, however, WAV files are preferable.

A further alternative is to simply base the project on the completing of questionnaires.

Choosing a location for your interview:

- Pick a quiet location and ensure the interviewee is seated comfortably in a fixed chair. A carpeted room with soft furnishings is ideal for sound quality
- As far as possible minimise background noise - no television, radio, telephone, open windows, traffic noise, humming appliances, running water, pets etc
- Try to ensure that you will not be interrupted. Put a sign on the door and switch off all mobile phones
- It's best to be one-on-one with the interviewee. Other people present can be a distraction or inhibit a frank conversation.
- If you are visiting the interviewee's home you may be offered tea or coffee. In any case make sure that both you and the interviewee have a drink available.

Pre-Interview Checklist

Before going to your interview, please check that you have a:

- Working recording device
- Surplus of tapes and batteries
- Copy of the questionnaire
- Copy of the forms for completion
- Notebook and pens
- Lists of questions and prompt items

4. How to conduct interviews

Each interview will be different. Your most important job is to make the participant feel comfortable and help them to tell the story of their involvement with the GAA in their own words. Here are some general rules you can follow to help the interview go well.

- Before you start the tape recorder take time to explain how the interview will work and have some small talk to put the interviewee at ease.
- Explain the goals of the project and how welcome their contribution is. Ensure that the interviewee understands and approves.
- Run a quick test of your recording equipment before you start to make sure the microphone is picking up both you and your interviewee.
- Fill out the required paperwork with the interviewee, including the biographical data sheet and the release form. Or you may show them the release form now, and then have them sign it once the interview is complete.

The interview itself

At the start of each interview, once you've started the recorder, clearly state on tape:

- The date and general location of the interview (**do not** give the exact address of the interview if it takes place in the interviewee's own home, parish/town and county is sufficient)
- The name of the interviewee and their year of birth
- A very brief description of the interviewee's relationship with the GAA
- Your own name and relation, if any, to the interviewee
- That the interview is being recorded for the GAA Oral History Project

For interviews that span several tapes, record the date, general location, interviewee name and tape number onto each new tape.

Dos and Don'ts of Interviewing

- **DO** keep the tape recorder going and the interview flowing
- **DO** allow the interviewee to go at their own pace, but stop them drifting off the subject completely
- **DO** ask neutral questions rather than leading ones – “How did you feel about Kerry’s success?” rather than “How jealous were you of Kerry’s success?”
- **DO** listen carefully to what the interviewee says and use what they say to guide your questions
- **DO** get the subject to talk about things they experienced first hand or “eye-witness testimony”, rather than describing things they heard about. If they listened to a match on the radio, have them talk about what that felt like rather than the details of the match
- **DO** make it personal. If the interviewee is simply describing events, follow up by asking them “How did you feel about that?” or “Why do you think that happened?”
- **DO** ask personal and direct questions, but respect the interviewee’s right not to answer them
- **DO** be aware that an interviewee may need a break or breaks during the interview. Make sure the interviewee knows they can take a break at any time. Some interviews may need to take place on separate days.
- **DO** ask impromptu follow-up questions if the interviewee mentions something interesting but unexpected, or if you need to clarify a factual point like a name or date
- **DON'T** use phrases like “Yes” or “I see” to encourage the interviewee. Nod and smile approval instead.
- **DON'T** interrupt the interviewee or offer your own opinions
- **DON'T** limit the interviewee to talking solely about what you think they should talk about

- **DON'T** rush interviews with former players, coaches or administrators straight to their peak years. Take time to get detail on their family and community background and early influences
- **DON'T** be afraid of a little silence. Let the interviewee think about their answers and fill the silences themselves
- **DON'T** ask questions that lead to simple yes or no answers. Ask open-ended ones instead
- **DON'T** ask controversial or emotional questions too early in the interview. Leave them to near the end when you have built up a rapport

The most important interview tip of all is to respect the interviewee. They have granted you the privilege of sharing their memories and thoughts. Make sure you respect that.

Keep an Interview Log

Keep a log of each interview, noting timings of subjects covered and make a special note of quotes of particular interest, for example:

<u>Time</u>	<u>Subject Discussed</u>
1min 10secs	Family background in GAA
2min 05secs	Learned to play hurling at CBS
2min 35secs	Interesting story on why he switched from hurling to football
4min 30secs	First appearance for County as minor at age 16

After the Interview

Don't rush away once the interview is finished. Reassure the interviewee that their contribution was useful and have them sign the release form. Ask them if they know of other people who might be interesting to talk too. They may even have documents or photos that they can show you. Give them your contact details and be very clear as to whether you intend to return for a second interview. Remember to send the interviewee a thank-you note as soon as possible after the interview.

5. Completing the relevant forms

The main goal of the GAA Oral History Project in collecting these interviews is to preserve a record of the GAA's impact. However, interviewees and interviewers should be aware that the interviews are also intended as a resource that can be drawn upon, both now and in the future. Teachers, historians and academics may want to use extracts from the interviews in their work. The GAA may use archive submissions in exhibitions on the organisation's history. Broadcasters may also use the archive in creating radio or television programmes about the GAA, especially as we approach the GAA's 125th anniversary. In order for these interviews to be used in this way, there are a number of forms which must be filled out. Failure to fill out these forms will mean that the interview cannot become part of the archive.

FORM 1: Interview Report Form

The interview report form is a list of important questions about the person being interviewed. It contains vital contact details for the person being interviewed, information about their life (biographical summary); the key issues covered during the interview and a short note of any documents they offer and/or important contacts they give during the interview. At the end of the form is a section which the interviewer should sign. By signing this form you are simply giving the GAA Oral History project permission to use your interview in the ways listed above. Please note: If you are 18 years or younger you must get your parent / guardian to sign this form for you. Failure to do so will mean that we cannot accept your contribution for the GAA Oral History Project Archive.

FORM 2: Clearance Form

The clearance form for interviewees allows the GAA Oral History Project to use the interview for all the purposes listed above. It also means that they are giving copyright of the material to the project on the understanding that it will not be

used in a derogatory manner and that they will be properly identified in all uses of the interview.

FORM 3: Deposit Agreement

This form is only needed if someone gives material for the project. It is a legal document which means that the person is giving the GAA Oral History Project full ownership and copyright of the items (or the copy of the items). There are two parts to the document. Section A should be filled in by the person giving the material and signed by them. Under no circumstances should you sign the section 'Signature of Project Team Member'. Section B should be filled in by you and should be just a short description of the material you have been given.

6. Collecting photographs and documents

A central aspect of the project is the collection of photographs and documents. We are seeking interesting photographs – ones which document anything that happens around matches and not necessarily team photographs or action shots. Equally, relevant documents – old minute books, letters, diet sheets, notes, etc – will be vital to the archive we are constructing. There is a great reservoir of GAA-related material in parishes all across the countryside: the aim of this project is to collect this material and to preserve it for posterity.

Students who collect documents and photographs must ensure that the Deposit Agreement (Form 3) is properly completed.

7. How to complete questionnaires

There is no minimum or maximum length for answers, but we would appreciate as much detail as can possibly be given. People completing the questionnaire should feel free to expand the boxes or attach additional sheets of paper if their answer is larger than the space provided. Please note: Students who are eighteen years or younger must get their parents to sign the required section of

the questionnaire. Failure to do so will mean that their contribution cannot be added to the GAA Oral History Archive.

Questionnaires can either be handwritten, or submitted by email. The preferred method of completion is by email. To do this, please save the questionnaire as a word document on a computer and type the responses in the boxes provided. Then email the finished document to info@gaahistory.com

8. Additional Information

We greatly appreciate you taking the time to participate in our project and look forward to receiving your submissions.

Please ensure you store your recordings safely and if you require copies of your recordings or questionnaires, please make them before submission. Unfortunately, the GAA Oral History Project will not be able to provide you with copies of your responses after submission.

Please contact our research team with any questions or feedback you might have at:

GAA Oral History Project,
Boston College,
42 St. Stephen's Green,
Dublin 2.

Phone: +353 (0)1 662 5055

Email: info@gaahistory.com

Web: www.gaahistory.com