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Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

Peace



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Northern Ireland - Ireland

European Regional Development Fund

Coiste um Fhorbairt Pobail Aitiúil
Dhún na nGall
Donegal Local Community Development
Committee

Echoes of the Decade – Oral History Strand

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date(s) of Interview(s)	22 October 2020; 30 October 2020.
Location	Web-based interview – Regina in Co. Kilkenny, Mary in Co. Donegal
Name of Interviewee	Mary Harte
Gender	Female
Year of Birth	1954
Interview Synopsis	<p>Mary Harte is a journalist and broadcaster with an academic background in Politics and History. She worked with BBC Northern Ireland for almost 25 years. She was a news reporter based in Derry covering the 'Troubles' and the transition through the Peace Process. Mary's father was Paddy Harte who served for 36 years as a Fine Gael TD for Donegal North East and who is also known for his role in remembering Irish soldiers who fought and died in World War I. Mary's interview spans the story of generations starting in the revolutionary period documenting her grandparents role in the War of Independence and Civil War, her father's political career and her own experiences growing up close to the border and reporting on the Northern Irish Troubles. Major themes and topics in this interview include politics, media, education, Northern Irish Troubles, the Irish in World War I, the Peace Process.</p>
Time-Coded Interview Summary	<p>Interview 1: 22 October 2020</p> <p>00:00 Introduction to the interview.</p> <p>00:33 Born in hospital in Lifford in 1954. Mother was from Raphoe, father was from Lifford. Mary lived on her father's family farm outside Lifford.</p> <p>01:55 Grew up on the farm. First grandchild on both sides. Grandfather (on father's side) a prominent person in the community. Farm near Lough Foyle. Reared and slaughtered their own cattle, they were a family of butchers. Mary's memory of seeing the slaughtering of cattle; seeing the threshing, cutting of corn, taking tea and bread up to the workers in the fields with her grandmother. Happy memories of</p>

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growing up on the farm.

04:25 Death of her grandfather, buried on Mary's second birthday. A very loving upbringing. Her father then had to take over running the farm and the butchering business.

05:40 Birth of her younger brother and the move to Raphoe. Farm sold in later years. Mary and her 8 siblings were raised in that house in Raphoe where her mother still lives.

06:45 Both her parents were young when they married. Mother had worked in a bacon factory office. Butcher shop on the premises of their home. Her father, Paddy Harte's election to Dáil Éireann in 1961.

08:09 Mary's paternal grandfather, Jim Harte, born around the turn of the century. Died when he was 49 in 1956. He was born into a prominent Lifford family. Had butchering businesses and a bar – her father was born over a bar. Jim Harte stood for Donegal County Council once. Very involved in community events, sponsored greyhound cups, involved in football. Joined the Free State Army, went to Portobello Barracks before he got married and was stationed there. He was a very strong Fine Gael supporter, influence of Michael Collins. Mary has some of his letters looking for a leave of absence as his father was ill, he subsequently left the army to take care of the family business after his father died young.

10:43 Jim Harte's best friend in the army was Dan O'Boyle from the Waterside in Derry. He had worked as a messenger boy in the post office in Derry and may have been a messenger for Michael Collins. Story about how Jim Harte ended up marrying Dan O'Boyle's sister Mary. Dan stayed in the army and ended up running the Curragh Camp. He married Margaret McGuinness from Derry. They went on to rear a family of 16 some of whom went on to join the army and the Gardaí. Describes Dan O'Boyle. When Mary went to university in Dublin, so would sometimes go with her father to visit them in Carlow where they lived. Talks about family reunion.

14:22 Mary's awareness of the Irish Army growing up. Dan told her about German Prisoners of War who had been held at the Curragh during World War II.

15:20 Mary's paternal grandmother was from the Waterside in Derry which was predominantly Protestant, but they were Catholic. Her parents were Maggie and Paddy O'Boyle. Paddy was a plumber and electrician and worked for Londonderry Corporation. When the border was formed, animosity against Catholics grew east of the border and his family lost their contracts with the corporation because they were Catholic. They subsequently moved to Dublin in the 1920s. Mary remembers her great grandmother.

17:25 Mary O'Boyle married Jim Harte and moved to a farm outside Lifford. Describes her grandmother who held strong political views. Story about her grandmother's disapproval of a magazine about the British royal family which Mary had as a child. Reference to Raphoe being a predominantly Protestant town. Reference to her father later meeting Queen Elizabeth II. Story about her uncles taking a union flag and throwing it over her aunt's bed as a prank. Nothing British

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was acceptable that household.

22:11 Mary's describes her father's political influences, particularly Michael Collins. Mentions Béal na mBláth. Fine Gael branch in Lifford was called the Michael Collins branch, this was where her father first joined in the 1950s. Has her father's documents.

26:10 Relationship across the treaty divide. Her perception of Fianna Fáil people growing up. Her mother's family also very pro-treaty. This percolated to her generation in the 1950s and 1960s and shaped her political views. Families did not switch politics. People categorised by their politics rather than their religion.

28:24 Election campaigns in the 1960s. Her father's elected in 1961. Mentions Neil Blaney who stood for Fianna Fáil and her father who stood for Fine Gael. Canvassing at election time with and for her father. Public political debates in the 1950s and 60s in places like the Market Square in Letterkenny - Fianna Fáil / Fine Gael rallies. Nature of the debates. What election time was like for the family, being at election counts.

31:08 By the 1960s the raw bitterness of the Civil War was mostly passed, though people would be pointed out / known who were involved in various ways during the Civil War. Mentions her grandmother's brother, who was active in the Civil War, was still alive in the 1960s.

33:08 Mary heard stories from her grandaunt on her father's side who was from South Donegal but lived in Dublin (from the Derry side of the family). One story about a postman who was killed by the anti-treaty side and the subsequent retaliation. Her views on Eamon de Valera and the Treaty having studied history and politics at UCD. Residue of the Civil War percolated to her generation in the 1960s. Families bitterly divided by the Civil War in Donegal.

36:46 Mary's grandmother on her mother's side had lived with Mary as a child. From a poor background. Her grandfather was Dan McGoldrick and he and his sister were the cook and sacristan and driver for the parish priest. First Model T that was registered in Donegal was owned by a local doctor and was driven by her grandfather.

38:08 Her mother grew up on Irish Row in Raphoe which is where Catholics generally lived in Raphoe. Her mother's siblings emigrated to the Gorbals in Glasgow. Her grandparents house was called 'The Dáil' because people would meet to discuss politics during the War of Independence and the Civil War. Heated debates that would take place there. After one meeting there was a shooting in the town – both parties had been in the house earlier that evening. Talks about the subsequent court case in which her grandparents gave evidence.

40:48 Mary does not have any memories of these grandparents being very political. Her grandmother loved to read *The Daily Mail* and had to see the Queens speech at Christmas. But pro-Treaty and Irish and bitterly against de Valera – 'Up Dev Free Beef'. The similarities and contrasts between her Donegal and Derry grandmothers. Her Donegal grandmother born around 1890 and married around 1920.

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44:10 No involvement in the War of Independence or the Civil War on her mother's side. Two McGoldricks did serve in the British Army and fought in World War I. There were her mother's uncles. One subsequently emigrated the other was shell shocked thereafter.

45:34 This was not talked about in the family and Mary did not learn about this until her father's work remembering those from Donegal who fought in World War I. In Raphoe 42 people lost their lives in World War I. Presumption that they were from the Protestant community as commemoration only took place in Protestant church etc. It was only later that it was recognised that Catholics also served and lost their lives. Talks about her trips over to the World War I cemeteries in Flanders with her father – seeing all the Irish regiments and Irish names

47:53 Interview ends abruptly as we lose our internet connection.

Interview 2 – 30 October 2020

00:00 Introduction to interview.

00:47 Mary's childhood. Moving to Raphoe when she was three years old. Growing up in the Diamond. Being a young family in the town. Attended St Eunan's National School. Banter between Catholic and Protestant children who did not mix. Mary played badminton in the town.

03:20 Upbringing immersed in politics. Her father elected to the Dáil for the first time in 1961. Their home was a political hub. There was poverty in the area in her childhood. Constituents coming to visit the house because they needed things, style of politics in the 1960s.

04:39 She was politically aware as a child. Excitement of elections jobs the children were given during an election. Mary was the eldest of 9, role of the eldest child. Father very mindful of education. Mary did her Primary Certificate in 1967 leaving primary school. Mary was the first generation of free education in the Republic. Who went and who didn't get to go to secondary school.

06:47 Mary's secondary school education was at boarding school in Scoil Mhuire Buncrana. Family connection to Buncrana. First generation in that school where there were male day pupils. Friendships and reunions from her school days. Awareness of the importance and privilege of education.

10:02 Attended UCD for her undergraduate degree. Father in the Dáil every week in those days. Feeling isolated in UCD as many of her friends went to college in Galway. Studied archaeology, politics and history. Regularly went into Dáil Éireann and sat in the public gallery listening to TDs. Mentions James Dillon and being so impressed by Noël Browne when he spoke. Her impression was that the TDs of the 1960s and 70s were very dedicated. Remembers old Liam Cosgrave. Knew Garrett Fitzgerald through her father, met a lot of politicians and politics rubbed off on her in a big way.

13:11 Seeing TDs who had been involved in the Civil War made a big impression.

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Knew PJ Ward who was their neighbour in Raphoe who had served in the first Dáil.

13:47 Her time in UCD and studying Politics and History. Being a Stagiaire in Brussels in 1978. Awareness of Ireland's importance in the European arena in that era. The influence of Garrett Fitzgerald as Irish Foreign Minister at that time. Ireland becoming a very dedicated European County.

15:52 Life as an Irish Stagiaire in Brussels in 1978. Her affinity with Europeans. Worked in the Press and Information Directive on the first direct elections to the European Economic Community. Visited Berlin while she was there, the experience of visiting East Germany. Going to the European Parliament. Going home and plans to go back. Mentioned Liam Hourican who invited her to go back and work for him.

24:30 Unemployment in Dublin in 1979-80. Difficulty of getting into journalism. Working at Jurys Hotel Coffee Dock all night and then freelanced and wrote articles during the day to get experience.

25:50 Worked in the Fine Gael Press office when Garrett Fitzgerald was over Fine Gael. Admiration for Garrett Fitzgerald. Got to know a lot of politicians at that time. Wrote for Fine Gael monthly magazine for a while.

27:40 Started freelancing for the Irish Press a job which she got through Dermot McIntyre, a sub-editor who was a friend of her fathers. Being interviewed by Tim Pat Coogan for the job. Politics of the Irish Press and Fianna Fáil. Story about Gerry O'Hare who worked with her in the Irish Press - a republican from Belfast, member of the IRA, served time in Portlaoise Prison and was a friend of Dáithí O'Connell and Seán Mac Stíofán.

30:42 Experience of working at the Irish Press. Wrote a lot of features also covered press conferences. Mentions one investigative report about how much garda drivers for TDs were paid. Mentions Albert Reynolds. Became friendly with Neil Blaney.

31:10 Being a woman working of the Irish Press in the early 1980s. Mentions Ann O'Flaherty, Fergal Keane. Learning how to do court reports. De Valeras still owned the paper so it was still Fianna Fáil leaning but reasonably balanced. Talks about how staff were subsequently treated. Had good fun working there, meeting up in Mulligans.

34:28 Gaining practical skills through a FÁS course –shorthand, how to type etc. Did a little bit of secondary school teaching at Greenhills Comprehensive School in Walkinstown. Brought pupils to visit the Dáil and the National Museum. Women in journalism at the time.

38:05 Most of her work was investigative reporting. Tells the story of her role in the circumstances surrounding a meeting - which she happened upon in the Aisling Hotel. Albert Reynolds, Seán Doherty, Ray MacSharry meeting during the heave on Charles Haughey. Tipping off the Irish Press and the Sunday Press who had the scoop.

39:56 Studying Politics and History in UCD. Mentions Maurice Manning and Brian Farrell, Philip Pettit and Fergal O'Connor who were teaching in the Politics

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Department at the time. Mentions Charlie Doherty and Ruth Dudley Edwards in the History Department. University life was at that time was about a broad experience of learning.

43:43 Doesn't remember the Revolutionary period being talked about in great detail at the time but when it came up, there were fierce arguments. The Troubles were raging in Northern Ireland when she was UCD. Her accent was Northern, she was friendly with lots of people from the North at UCD, including Deirdre McDermott who had spent time in Portlaoise Prison with Martin McGuinness, Marion Coyle and Donnie McGuinness.

46:30 She knew a lot of republicans in Dublin. She was also in Dublin when the Dublin car bombs exploded. Travelling home almost every week from Dublin on the bus or hitchhiking, being held up at the checkpoints at Aughnacloy. Northern Ireland politics was to the fore of discussions in UCD at that time.

47:58 How people from the North were treated in Dublin - people in Dublin not understanding what was going on in the North so people from the north stuck together. North considered more advanced and modern than the South at the time.

50:14 Culturally identifies more with people from the North rather than people from Dublin or southern Ireland. Use of the term 'Ulster' – use of the term 'Radio Ulster'. Sense of place and cultural identity, which has changed over the past 25 years. The gap widening between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

53:16 Commemoration of the 1916 Rising when she was in school in 1966. Learning *Fáinne Geal an Lae*. A lot of the primary school teachers were from the Gaeltacht in those days, mentions Carysfort and St Patricks College. Talks about her sense of a Republic when she was growing up. Use of the term 'the Free state' in the North. Schools in the North didn't learn about the Republic in Catholic or Protestant schools

56:29 Doing a FÁS course *Countdown to Local Radio* with Gavin Duffy at Carr Communications in Cork – mentions pirate radio stations. Went to Derry to get radio experience with Paul McFadden at Radio Foyle.

57:54 Going to work in Derry in 1984. Derry a very violent place at the time. How much she had to learn at the time about her new environment. Recalls phone calls of bomb warnings. Didn't understand the education system or political administration systems etc. Living in Derry, working there for 25 years.

1:00:12 Difficult time to be there, witnessing atrocities, crossing the border every morning and evening. Everyday life was covering shooting and bombings. Talks about getting to know Martin McGuinness. Getting to know John Hume who she knew through her father and from working in the EU. Describes John Hume and shares some stories about him. Knew his wife Pat well. Her admiration for him especially his role in bringing the Americans on board to help broker a peace deal. Fate of the SDLP after the Peace Process. Talks about political extremes in Northern Ireland – Sinn Féin and the DUP. John Hume's illness.

1:08:03 How she was perceived working at Radio Foyle – only journalist working on one side of the border and living on the other side. Advice she received from a Garda

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Superintendent. Learning to adjust to life in the North, learning to say nothing. Perceived to be on the nationalist side. She was 'the new Ireland' not the country Catholics / Nationalists from Derry felt affinity with. From the Unionists point of view, because of her name, some of them assumed she was Protestant and mostly felt quite comfortable there. Treated with some suspicion, sense that because she was not from the North that she did not understand it. She as from the Ireland of Seán Lemass and Garrett Fitzgerald, not de Valera's Ireland

1:12:39 She was immersed in Northern Ireland since the Battle of the Bogside. Paddy Harte one of the few Irish politicians who spent time in the North, he had relatives in Derry. Her experience of working in Derry.

1:15:12 Her paternal grandparents were republican but she does not believe that they would have supported the IRA struggle in Northern Ireland. 'What ifs' of history. Her views on 1916 and War of Independence. Martin McGuinness's legacy and relationship with her father. Her father meeting the IRA in Dublin in the early 1970s.

1:20:52 Her father's political views were shaped by her grandparents. Changing perception of Michael Collins.

1:21:45 Covering the Northern Irish Troubles, coping with conflict on a daily basis. Getting statements from the IRA taking responsibility for shootings etc. Her approach to reporting the story and interviewing the main personalities at the time. The broadcasting ban.

1:24:00 Covering the Greysteel massacre as the pool reporter for the BBC at Altnagelvin hospital.

1:26:16 Covering the story of an IRA execution and arriving at the scene where the body was left. The impact that this had on her emotionally.

1:30:07 Her father laying a wreath at Omagh at the roadside on the site where an army lorry of British soldiers was blown up. This was one of the first times an Irish politician had done this. Southern politicians often stood back from the Troubles.

1:31:35 Impact of the border TDs in generating an understanding of the North among politicians in Dublin. Her father's role in talking across the community in Northern Ireland, talking to unionists etc about a peaceful future. Her father's 'hands across the border' attitude. His involvement with commemorating Irish soldiers who fought in World War I.

1:34:03 The context in which her father was campaigning for this commemoration, at a time when people were trying to keep at a distance from about the British Army, around 1996. Mentions the killing of Paddy Gillespie.

1:35:21 His father's first visit to Flanders and the impact of that visit on him. His determination to find out about Irish people involved in World War I. Government response to this. It could not have happened before the peace process. The Peace Park was opened in Belgium in 1998 by President Mary McAleese and Queen Elizabeth II – the first time an Irish president and British monarch had met in a public forum. This started the train through which she could come to Ireland. Her father

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meeting the Queen and encouraging her to come to Ireland. Her father well-placed to do this. Threats he received during this time. Her father's role in the peace process and in the commemoration of the Irish in World War I.

1:39:24 Story about a family she met the opening of the Peace Park who had a relative who died in World War I but it was not known by the family. Memories of family members who fought in World War I put into boxes and into the attic.

1:42:30 Mary talks about her father's legacy. That he had a state of grace, stood his ground, opened up the 'locked biscuit tins' helping people to be proud of the relative that went to war and didn't come home. Mary's pride in him. His ability to have people come on board with him. Peace Park built with a huge generosity of people from all walks of life in Ireland. This opened up the conversation and helped to pave the way for the Queen to come to Ireland. Martin McGuinness's view of him.

1:44:57 Mary's characterisation of the Revolutionary Decade and its legacy in Ireland.

1:48:26 Interview ends.

[After reviewing her interviews, Mary asked to add the following. Neil Blaney had been her father's political opponent in Donegal East standing first for Fianna Fáil and later for Independent Fianna Fáil. After Mary had worked in Brussels and worked for the Irish Press, Neil offered her a job as his press secretary in Brussels. Mary declined but as a result of this they became friends. In the months leading up to Neil's death in 1995, Mary's father Paddy visited Neil regularly in Raheny. Mary reflected on this friendship as indicative of the improving relations between Fianna Fáil and Fianna Gael at the time]

Language	English
Restricted Information	None
Field Notes	This interview took place using a podcast platform called Squadcast which allowed for a video conversation with audio only recording. Mary lost her internet connection at the end of interview one and so this interview ends abruptly. The second interview takes place, also using Squadcast, with Mary in her mother's house in Raphoe, where the broadband connection was more stable. Mary also contributed photographs of medals owned by her grandfather, Jim Harte. These date from 1924 and are from the Curragh and Portobello Bararcks Sports Days. The medal dating from 1897 belonged to her great grandfather O'Boyle from Derry. His son, Dan was a good friend of Jim Harte in later years and his daughter Mary later married Jim and became Mary's grandmother.

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Audio File Details

Recording Format: 48kHz 16 bit stereo

Length of Interview(s): Interview 1 (47:53); Interview 2 (1:48:26)

No. of Files: 4

File Types: 2 uncompressed WAV files and 2 corresponding MP3 copies

Documentation Completed by Interviewee

- ✓ Registration Form
- ✓ Pre-questionnaire Monitoring Form
- ✓ Participation Agreement
- ✓ Post-questionnaire Monitoring Form
- ✓ Recording Agreement
- ✓ Participant Sign-in Sheet
- ✓ Photograph of Interviewee

To be completed by Interviewer:

I hereby assign the copyright of the content of the above to the Cultural Division, Donegal County Council on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the Culture Division, Donegal County Council the right to use and make available to the public the content of this interview.

Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 18 December 2020