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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)	1 October 2020; 2 October 2020; 8 October 2020
Location	Phone interview – Niall in Co. Donegal, Regina in Co. Kilkenny
Name of Interviewee	Niall McGinley
Gender	Male
Year of Birth	1938
Interview Synopsis Niall is from Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. He had a long career as a secondary school teacher and has published several books on the history of Donegal. Niall's father was Dr Joseph P McGinley who was a medical practitioner, a Sinn Féin TD in the second Dáil and the Fine Gael candidate in Donegal East for 25 years. Niall is also the second cousin of Major General Joseph Sweeney who was Chief of Staff of the Irish Army from 1929 – 1931. In this three-part interview, conducted in Irish, Niall talks about the role of his family in the revolutionary period and about the period 1912-1923 in general. He also talks about his life growing up, his education and career. Topics and themes in this interview include: the political, economic and social history of Donegal in the twentieth century; education, World War I and the research conducted by Niall for his various publications.	
Time-Coded Interview Summary Interview 1: 1 October 2020 00:00 Introduction to interview. 00:58 Niall was born in 1938 and grew up on New Line Road, Letterkenny. Mentions the Garda Barracks, Letterkenny Workhouse, McGee's Chemists, Beechfield. 02:41 Suburbs spreading out from the town of Letterkenny around the time he was born, mentions Ard O'Donnell being developed in the 1944/45.	

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03:12 His father, Joseph P McGinley was originally from Breenagh. His mother, Madeline Sweeney was from Dungloe.

04:03 He had four brothers, one of whom died in childhood and he had three sisters. Niall was the second youngest in the family.

05:52 Describes a busy household growing up. In 1923 his father started working as a surgeon and dispensary doctor in the old hospital on High Road, Letterkenny and he was the county surgeon until around 1960.

07:02 His father did not receive his MCH from Queen's University Belfast until 1947

08:35 His mother was a doctor but did not practice as a doctor in Niall's lifetime.

09:15 Description of Letterkenny when he was growing up. Mentions population, the railway lines, that it was a busy town and that the majority of businesses were in Protestant ownership.

11:12 Relationship between Catholics and Protestants in the town when he was growing up.

12:07 Sport in the town in his childhood – an active boxing club, Gaelic football club, soccer. There was also cricket and netball in the town which was mostly played by Protestants.

13:36 Dances in the town. Mentions 'Civic Year' celebrations in 1950s, tents erected with dances every night.

13:56 Talks about going to see cowboy films in La Scala Cinema.

15:05 Economic life in the town during World War II – rationing, lack of cars.

16:31 Importance of radio when he was growing up, mentions Radio Luxemburg, Raidio Éireann, BBC. Story about listening to a programme called 'Dick Barton, Special Agent' on BBC with his neighbours, the McLaughlins. He had little interest in any radio programmes other than the news.

18:38 He was mostly interested in being outside as a child growing up.

19:03 Attending the Presentation Brothers National School in Letterkenny. Mentions Hugh Ferry who was a teacher in the school and tells a story about Brother Wilford who was very anti-Treaty.

24:27 Talks about his brother Joe's interest in 'glass alleys' as a pastime.

25:27 How Brother Wilford taught history. No memories of learning about the Revolutionary period in school, except that he knew Brother Wilford's views, his father's views (who was pro-Treaty) and the views of other children would always be clear around election time.

27:30 Very little Irish in school in his time. There was very little Irish at home either.

28:44 Description of The Republic of Ireland Act, 1948 as a 'damp squib'.

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30:06 Going to secondary school at St Vincent's Castleknock College, Dublin in the 1950s for seven years. His brothers also attended the school, one of whom went on to join the priesthood.

33:58 The school was not very strict. He was not interested in sport but loved the farm attached to the school and the grounds around the school. Also loved reading in the library, authors such as Seán Bán McMenamin who his father knew.

36:21 No nationalist ethos in the school.

37:42 He did not have much interest in schoolwork but developed a stronger interest in secondary school and left with honours in the end. Mentions Fr McCarthy, the Irish teacher at the school at the time.

38:48 Not allowed to leave the school without permission, would go to a shop in the Strawberry Beds. Loved to spend time outdoors.

39:53 Left Castleknock College after finishing his studies there, aged 18. Went on to join the Vincentians seminary in Blackrock, Dublin and remain with them for 4 or 5 years before he left deciding not to become a priest.

42:06 Mentions his brother Brian who also studied for the priesthood for a while before going on to work for the European Patent Office.

42:43 His years with the Vincentians in Blackrock, studying at UCD, playing rugby, walking.

43:58 Studying Irish, Latin and English at UCD in Earlsfort Terrace at the end of the 1950s. Mentions Micheál Ó hAodha, a professor of Irish at UCD who had been Ceann Comhairle in the Dáil. Also mentions Tomás de Bhaldraithe. Reflects on his experience there.

46:31 Completing his degree in Irish in Galway and teaching for two years in Oldcastle, Co. Meath. Went on to teach in the vocational school in Letterkenny and continued there until his retirement 1999.

49:30 The development of his interest in history, partially due to an illness during which he lost his voice for year. Mentions Rory Delap who encouraged him to write a book about his father's life.

50:25 Talking to his father, about his life and documenting his story from his hospital bed before he died in 1974. This was the only time his father spoke with him about his involvement in the War of Independence. Mentions that his father had forgotten a lot. Niall went on to do further research to write his first book, *Dr McGinley and his Times*.

53:06 Story about his father, during his time in Mountjoy Prison, writing a letter to Seán McGlinchey. Niall found came across this letter during his research in Dublin Castle.

55:00 A lot of his father's former comrades still alive when Niall was researching and writing his book in the early 1980s and he was able to speak with them eg. James

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55:54 End of interview 1.

Interview 2: 2 October 2020

00:00 Introduction to the interview.

01:03 Story about travelling with various drivers in lorries for Charlie Kelly's haulage company when he was a teenager. Charlie was married to Niall's sister Muriel. Talks about travelling all around Donegal and around Ireland. Delivering feed for animals, flour, building supplies etc.

04:07 Talks about the drivers he travelled with, Frank Bradley, Paddy McGattigan, Eddie Greene, Eamonn O'Donnell, Cormac Gallagher and others and doing this job for three summers in the 1950s

07:20 The only grandparent he knew was his maternal grandmother who from Kildare and married in Dungloe.

09:56 His paternal grandfather, Pat McGinley was a member of the Irish Volunteers, he was Chairman of the Volunteers in Temple Douglas, 1913. He was a quiet man, interested in wrestling. He was always anti-English.

12:37 Pat McGinley, was one of 5 brothers. There was story that they were evicted from their home near Dunfanaghy and then they settled in Breenagh on poorer land. Saw a lot of injustice in the landlord era.

15:11 Pat was a member of the Irish Volunteers since the beginning and Niall's father, Joseph McGinley was a member of the Irish Volunteers at the same time as his father having signed up as a student at Queens University Belfast. Very nationalist household, recalls a story in which his uncle shouted 'Up Sinn Féin' outside a dance.

16:00 His grandfather, Pat McGinley, died in 1937. Grandfather or father unaware that the Easter Rising had happened until they read about it in the newspaper. His father received his degree that year and he was at the Races in Dublin when he heard that the Rising had taken place, so he did not take part in it.

18:29 His mother's cousin Joseph Sweeney and two of his father's cousins Eunan McGinley and his brother (Conor) were also there and all three were in the GPO. Eunan was pro-treaty, his brother (Conor) was anti-treaty. Joseph Sweeney was pro-treaty. Eunan killed in a road accident in 1923. The 1916 Rising was over before it was known about in Donegal.

22:56 Talks about his father's life and the research for his book *Dr McGinley and his Times*. Mentions his role as a dispensary doctor in Letterkenny. He was turned down for the role initially as the Poor Law union felt he should have been fighting in World War I and it was given to a protestant doctor who was older. He ultimately got the job. [Niall subsequently added that this doctor's name was Dr Walker]

26:19 His father was a doctor during the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic but never

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spoke much about that. His father's views on World War I.

[Niall subsequently added that in a speech in 1917, this father gave a speech saying that Irish men should serve 'neither King nor Kaiser']

28:15 His father's involvement in Sinn Féin and the 1918 General Election. Remembers Joseph Sweeney's wife who lived to an old age. His father canvassing for Joseph Sweeney on Arann Mór island. His father did not tell him very much about it. Mentions Sweeney's success in that election and the success of Joe Ward.

31:00 His view is that the first incident of the War of Independence took place at Meenbanad, describes this incident. [Niall subsequently added that this incident took place on 4 November 1918]

31:58 His father only spoke about the War of Independence on his deathbed and the only incidents he spoke about were Fanad Coastguard Station, the raid on Drumquinn Barracks, accounts of which are outlined in Niall's book. Also mentions raids on the railways and trying to make it difficult for the police to rule.

34:17 Niall had no awareness of his father's involvement in the War of Independence when he was growing up.

35:10 His father didn't talk much about politics when Niall was a child, he was very busy in his role as a doctor. Talks about Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in his childhood.

36:20 Asking questions of his father's former comrades while he was conducting research for his book, mentions James McMonagle and Pat Dawson in particular. James was in the army and Pat was a member of the Gardaí. Most of the people involved at in the War of Independence just got on with ordinary life afterwards.

38:08 Some dissatisfaction afterwards that some got state jobs and others didn't. Mentions Joseph Sweeney becoming Major General in the Irish Army.

38:55 Describes first incident of the Civil War in Newtowncunningham. Mentions the bank robbery of the Royal Bank in Buncrana by the Carndonagh irregulars. Goes on to talk about Drumquin ambush, mentions Jack Sweeney and Charlie McGinley. His own research on this period as his father had forgotten much for it.

42:45 People who were involved in the Civil War were happy enough for him to ask them questions about it, spoke with Jimmy Ganilagh in Dublin about it also.

43:29 His conversation with Joseph Sweeney about the period, only asked him one question about it which concerned the 1916 Rising. Mentioned St Enda's School. Did not question him about Drumboe.

45:10 His father's career as a TD in the Second Dáil. His views on the Treaty as expressed during the Treaty Debates.

46:24 Description of his father as a man as action, had little time for talk – in medicine and in all aspects of life. When the War of Independence and the Civil War was over he returned to being a doctor.

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47:42 Stood for Fine Gael in the 1948 General Election and did not win a seat. Neil Blaney won the seat.

50:30 Talks about Fianna Fáil in government, IRA pensions and who got jobs at the time.

52:46 By the time he was in school, people had forgotten about the War of Independence and the Civil War, issues such as unemployment were more pressing. Niall only learned about this period through research for the book.

53:52 Talks about the shelling of the Four Courts.

55:36 His father's reflections on the role he played in the revolutionary period and on his life as a doctor. Returning to university to get his surgical qualifications (MCH) in 1944.

58:48 Sixteen years of Fianna Fáil rule. [Niall subsequently adds that Fianna Fáil would have a lot of people around polling stations on election days in the 1930s and 1940s and that there was a threatening atmosphere on those days.]

59:23 End of interview 2.

Interview 3: 8 October 2020

00:00 Introduction to the interview

00:50 Niall talks about his book *Donegal, Ireland and the First World War*. World War I was not taught in schools in his childhood. Talks about his father treating soldiers returned from the front in 1916. He knew lots of the returned soldiers. Mentions Charlie Collins who Niall spoke with as part of his research for the book.

03:02 Wanted to meet people who had been in the North Irish Horse, found a man from Enniskillen who met him and showed him pictures. Mentions Harry Alcorn who also served in the British Army during World War I and who told him about why he joined up.

06:00 Mentions WJ Acheson, Patrick Bonar, Connell Boyle, James Boyle (who was awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions) and Barry Duggan all of whom fought in World War I and who Niall spoke with about their experiences of war before they died.

09:01 Reasons these men enlisted in the army. Mentions WJ Acheson who was a protestant and member of the Ulster Volunteer Force and joined up with them. Talks about Charlie Collin's experiences and how he also tried to enlist in World War I.

10:48 Mentions William Sweeney. Spoke with mostly Catholics but also Protestants about their involvement. In some cases, Niall was the first person who had ever asked them about their experiences, and they were surprised that someone might be interested in talking with them.

12:22 How the soldiers were treated on their return to Donegal. Dissatisfaction they felt when they returned that there were people who opposed their involvement in the

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War.

14:22 Reaction he received when the book came out.

15:23 No public commemorations of the World Wars in Donegal to his knowledge in his time, people may have gone to Derry for commemorations.

16:20 Silences around in the involvement of these men in the War. Niall's view that these men had had a hard time in the British Army. Mentions Douglas Haig and the upper classes who did not die in the same numbers as ordinary men. Rewards received by generals; ordinary men did not receive anything.

19:40 Some returned men took part in the War of Independence afterwards, including Charlie Collins. William Sweeney became a bodyguard for Ernest Blythe.

22:15 The Drumquin Ambush.

23:40 Changes in public attitude towards the Irish men who fought in World War I. More people realising that they had relatives involved and learning more about it.

25:40 Involvement of women in Cumann na mBan. Talks about the split in the Irish Volunteers.

28:11 Niall's teaching career, starting in Oldcastle, Co. Meath and then as a teacher of Irish and English in the vocational school in Letterkenny, until his retirement in 1999 after 35 years teaching there.

29:30 Changes he saw in life in Donegal at that time. More people had cars, more wealth in the 1960s. From the 1980s, the job got more difficult.

32:00 Emigration in the 1980s to England, Scotland, America, Australia and New Zealand, more people remaining in Ireland in the 1990s.

33:25 Teaching in Letterkenny throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

33:38 Changes he saw in the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Letterkenny in his lifetime. Mentions Harry Patterson who used to be involved in the pantomimes in Letterkenny.

38:26 Growth of Letterkenny after the Troubles in Northern Ireland ended. A lot of wealth nowadays, lots of big houses owned by ordinary people around the county.

38:25 Decade of Centenaries. Talks about what is commemorated and the impact of Covid 19 on commemorations. Commemorating partition and the Civil War. Mentions the shelling of the Four Courts.

42:06 What his father might have thought of the current Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael coalition.

43:23 Legacy of his father's role in the events of that period.

44:43 His own brief involvement in politics in the 1960s.

45:21 Hopeful about the future that border will no longer exist, the island would

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reunite.

46:00 Reflections on his book *Donegal, Ireland and the First World War* and the changes in his views in the second edition of the book published in 2008.

48:54 Talks about another book he wrote in 1989 *Donegal, My Native Soil*. Talks about the Irish language and mentions John Hunter.

50:20 Talks about other books he wrote *Letterkenny Past and Present; Donegal Songs, Poems and Pilgrimages; Uproar in Dungloe; Our Town: Letterkenny and its Hinterland*. Importance of documenting history.

52:50 Talks about the future and his interest scientific developments.

56.45 Niall concludes the interview reciting *Trees* by Joyce Kilmer. This poem has connections with World War I.

59:17 End of Interview 3.

[In a subsequent conversation with Niall, he wished to add the following information and clarifications:

They used to travel frequently across the border into Derry and that it was very intimidating crossing the border.

The surgical hospital closed in 1960, it had been a fever hospital and it was demolished in the 1960s, Department of Social Welfare offices were built on the site.

There were two train lines in Letterkenny which made it a busy town. One line was the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railways (LSR) from Derry to Burtonport and the second was a rail bus operated by County Donegal Railways (CDR) which went from Letterkenny to Lifford. He remembers the smoke coming out of the engines with fondness.

He had an early interest in history and bought a book called *The Irish in France* when he was just fourteen or fifteen years old. He was older before he started to notice the history around him among local people.

He was unsure whether to teach at a secondary school or a vocational school. He chose the vocational school as the secondary schools had school on Saturdays.

Niall married a woman called Maria from the Netherlands and they have one son and one daughter.

In 1974, he bought a house near Glenveagh and got a horse and trap, which he used for many years to travel in and out of Letterkenny]

Language	Irish
Restricted Information	Niall has requested that his interview only be made available to those conducting research in the archive and not on-line. He is happy for the Interview Report Form to go

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	on-line.
Field Notes	Niall was very keen to conduct the interview in Irish. We had lots of enjoyable chats in preparation for the interviews and conducted the interviews over the phone due to the restrictions in place during the Covid 19 pandemic. After Niall had reviewed his recordings, he called me to add in some additional information which can be found in square brackets throughout and at the end of the interview summary. During interview 1 (at 52-53 minutes) a rain shower starts, the noise in the background is the sound of the rain hitting the skylight window in my home office. The section was edited as much as was possible.
Audio File Details Recording Format: 48kHz 16 bit stereo Length of Interview(s): Interview 1 (55:54); Interview 2 (59.23); Interview 3 (59.17) No. of Files: 6 File Types: 3 uncompressed WAV files and 3 corresponding MP3 copies	
Documentation Completed by Interviewee <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ 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:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

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Date: 18 December 2020