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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)	15 October 2020
Location	Internet based interview. George in Co. Donegal; Regina in Co. Kilkenny
Name of Interviewee	George Mills
Gender	Male
Year of Birth	1952
Interview Synopsis	<p>George Mills was born and raised in Culdaff House, Co. Donegal. Culdaff House is the ancestral home of the Young family. In this interview George talks about the very rich history of the Young family and Culdaff House. He tells the story of his mother and father's lives, their unlikely marriage and the unusual circumstances in which his mother ended up managing the Young estate. He also talks about the burning of Culdaff House during the Civil War and his own life in Culdaff. Themes and topics featured in this interview include: World War I; the War of Independence, the Civil War, partition, World War II, Northern Irish Troubles, agriculture, education, religion, politics and rural community life in Culdaff in the twentieth century.</p>
Time-Coded Interview Summary	<p>00:00 Introduction to interview</p> <p>00:59 George born at home in Culdaff House in 1952.</p> <p>01:45 Father was Aongas Mills and his mother was Olive Young, this is the 11th generation of the Young family to live there since 1661. The passing down of the house and estate from one generation to the next. How the house came into the possession of George's mother from her brother, the practice of the first-born son inheriting the estate.</p> <p>03:14 His mother's lifelong interest in farming on the estate. She worked as a Wren</p>

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in the Signals in Derry during World War II. Married a Stanley Winton, a Naval Lieutenant from Scotland who came into Derry in 1942. He died 3 months after their marriage. His mother's inheritance from this marriage which enabled her to purchase the estate from her brother.

05:07 His mother moving into the house after the war as a widow with her new-born baby. Recounts the work she did when she started running the farm. Her relationship with and marriage to the foreman of the estate in 1950. Their romance dating back to the 1930s when he was a farm hand. George was the second of the four children they had together.

06:44 The contrast between his parent's backgrounds. His father raised in a thatched house, one of a family of nine with only 3 months of formal education. Story about his father's first pair of shoes.

07:44 History of the Culdaff House and the Young family of Inishowen recounted in a book written by his grandmother Amy Isabelle Young in 1927 called *300 Years in Inishowen*, recently re-printed. Her research mostly conducted before the destruction of the records in Dublin during the Civil War.

09:39 Talks about what he knows about Amy Isabelle Young who was from the Stewart family of North Antrim. Mentions connection with the Gages of Rathlin Island.

11:14 The Young family connections with lots of landed gentry across Ireland, intermarriage of that class. Mentions the Chambers family of Letterkenny.

12:18 Description of George Laurence Young landlord at the turn of the century. Mentions the Wyndham Act, Michael Davitt, Charles Stewart Parnell, Home Rule. Talks about the land being returned to the tenants and this man's assistance to tenants in the legal work required to get their free hold. Talks about the Culdaff Loan Fund Company, an early credit union set up by his great grandfather and Richard Fleming a local businessman. Stories about the enterprises of Richard Fleming.

16:24 No record of any animosity between the Young family and the local population up until the Civil War. Mentions that members of the household fought in World War I. Good relationship between the family and local families and a loyalty to them, workers and tenants were well-treated. Believes that locals would have been divided on the burning of the house in 1922.

18:55 Role of the Young family in the community in Culdaff. They were employers, supportive of the local community, they were good landlords. No record of any evictions on the in the 19th century (over 10,500 acres).

21:14 Little recorded on life there during the Great Irish Famine, possibly due to their proximity to the shore, mentions people surviving on 'strand meat', eating crabs and lobsters and fish and so the area may not have been as badly effected as other parts of the country who were so dependent on the potato crop.

22:44 Description of the estate. Mentions the Griffith Valuation Maps and indexing of the tenants on the Young Estate the estate. Mentions nearby Inishtrahull Island evacuated in the 1930s. Mentions McDaid's in Glengad who came in from the island.

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The changing of names in townlands. Tracing his own Mill family heritage, linked to the Cornish family.

26:25 Description of the house his father grew up in and his father's memory of seeing Culdaff House burning as a child in 1922.

27:00 His father's family were Church of Ireland, dispelling the myth that there were no poor protestants in Ireland. His father had memories of raids and would have mentioned seeing the Black and Tans. He remembered the coach and horses at Culdaff House, he would have driven ladies from Culdaff House to balls in Birdtown House.

29:06 His father worked for Richard Fleming in fishing and transport more than he worked in Culdaff House. His brother John and Raymond Mills worked on the Young estate more than him. His uncle Raymond was in charge of the horses and was an accomplished ploughman. His relationship with his uncle Raymond.

30:45 His paternal grandfather died when he was very young. His paternal grandmother had died before he was born.

31:34 His father's oldest brother, George, emigrated like so many to America in 1921. Did not return until 1971 to visit. Buried in New York. Unusual for people who emigrated to ever return. Mentions his granduncle's friend who emigrated with him and was never heard of again.

32:42 Talks about the liners that went to America coming into anchor in Lough Foyle just off Moville, the paddle steamers coming down from Derry with the passengers and tenders going out from Moville as well. This is how his uncle George would have started his journey to America, going on around Malin head and out into the Atlantic for America. His mother going to the top of the cliffs and lit a bonfire with friends and neighbours to say goodbye to her son. Emigration in an age of no airplanes or phones.

33:57 His uncle lived a good life in America, married a wonderful woman and George met them both in 1971 when they returned to visit. Family reunion when he returned home.

35:05 Protestant emigration. Presbyterian emigration from Ulster.

35:48 Talks about partition - the Free State becoming a cold place for Protestants and the North becoming a cold place for Catholics. Place of Catholics and Protestants on either side of the border.

36:51 Mentions Michael Collins and the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations. Mentions North-South Council that came into existence after partition. Migration of Protestants from the South to the North after partition.

38:19 Mentions 'Ne Temere' decree. Talks about his grandfather transition to living in the Free State. Talks about discrimination against Catholics in the North and the subsequent Troubles. His belief in the peaceful path.

40:16 Talks about his admiration of John Hume. Talks about the 'All-Island Forum'

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and also about Brexit. The impact on Inishowen of a hard border outcome to Brexit. Talks about the A5 and crossing the border to get to Dublin.

42:35 Mentions the research of Rachel McGowen and Seán Beattie on the history of the Young family and the house in the 1910s. The Young's family role in the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant. Partition was accepted by the family even if it wasn't what they wanted. Compares the unity of East and West Germany with the unification of Ireland.

46:05 Talks about World War I. Talks about the members of the Young Family who fought in World War I and visiting the war graves in Belgium with the Friends of Messines. The experience of visiting his grandfather's brother-in-law's grave there. Talks about how the Irish soldiers who returned from World War I were treated. His great-grandfather's ability to look beyond this. Also mentions the family's losses in World War II.

49:05 The burning of Culdaff House during the Civil War in 1922. Family were staying at Shane's Castle at the time where his grandfather was working as an Agent for Lord O'Neill. Mentions Fr McWilliams, the local parish priest who was very supportive of the family at the time. Mentions Hugh McGuinness's attempts to save the horses. The impact on and death of George Lawrence Young. The re-building of the house.

55:13 The trauma of the events of that decade on the Young family.

56:13 Mentions Guy Young who was gassed in World War I and the impact of that on his life thereafter.

57:42 Talks about Fort Dunree and its role in remembering the Irish who fought in World War I. The people of Inishowen who fought in World War I from all backgrounds.

59:27 Commemorations of World War I in George's lifetime. Talks about the importance of commemoration to his mother because of the losses she suffered in the two World Wars. Talks about the poppy and Remembrance Sunday. Apprehension around remembrance in George's lifetime. Talks about the Greysteel Massacre. Talks about his feelings about the poppy as a symbol of remembrance.

1:02:45 Commemorations at Fort Dunree, cross-community element to these commemorations. Mentions that his partner is German.

1:05:12 Mentions Paddy Harte and Glenn Barr from Derry as pioneers of the remembering of Irish soldiers who fought in World War I along with support from Mary McAleese. Mentions that Queen Elizabeth II was there for the opening of the Peace Park in Messines. Talks about the cross-community trip that he went on to Messines.

1:07:30 Influence of Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Ireland. Talks about his love of the Irish language and how impressed he was when the Queen spoke Irish in her speech. Quotes from her speech. The bravery of Martin McGuinness in shaking her

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hand.

[We took a short break and started the interview back up again at 1:10:30, the two interview files have been stitched together.]

1:10:33 George talks about the physical damage to Culdaff House when it was burnt during the Civil War and about the rebuilding project. Talks about what a fine building the newly re-built house was in the 1930s and 1940s.

1:13:20 His mother demolished half of the house in the 1950s as it was too large to manage, and the government rates were excessively high. She moved in as a World War II widow with a new-born baby and the house was a lot to manage. Describes the parts of the house that were demolished and what was left. Family memories of the large reception rooms before they were turned down. Talks about the system of servants' bells.

1:16:46 The task of maintaining the house today.

1:17:21 Describes his mother and the heartache she had in her life. Talks about her losing her first husband in World War II and then her son from that marriage in a car accident in 1968 when he was just 25. Talks about the line of succession in the estate and the unusual circumstances through which his mother came into the possession of the house. Talks about how his mother met her first husband when she was a Wren in Derry and got married in 1942. Taking over Culdaff House after her husband's death.

1:22:00 George talks about his mother's relationship with George's father, who was a farm labourer in the 1930s. The story features a letter discovered decades later written by George's mother to a maid that had emigrated from the house to America, Mary Crampsie, asking for her assistance to elope. Relationship brought to an end by her parents. Their reunion after World War II when she returned to the estate and he was a farm manager.

1:26:00 How his parents' relationship developed on her return. Talks about her buying him a motorbike, jeep and motorboat. Her mother Amy died in 1949 and they got married in 1950 and went on to have four children of whom George was the second. Mentions the death of his older brother Des.

1:27:43 Their wedding in the Cathedral in Derry, the local reaction when they returned home, the celebrations on the farm on the evening of their wedding – music, dancing and drinking.

1:31:15 How accepted their marriage was, the mixing of classes, the uniting of communities. Mentions the Blunden family whose estate was in Kilkenny and how much they accepted George's father. Going hunting together etc. Parents love story and how the letters emerged. Talks about Mary Crampsie with whom his mother.

1:34:45 What it was like growing up in Culdaff House.

1:36:39 George born in 1952, the 1950s as a peaceful period, economically a struggle but life was settled after the World Wars and before the Troubles. Talks

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about his elder half-brother's (Stanley) education being taken over by his uncles (the brothers of his mother's first husband) and he being sent to Portora Royal School in Enniskillen as a border when he was 9 years old and later to England for boarding school before he went to Australia to learn modern farming methods. Returned in 1967 with great plans to modernise the farm before he was killed suddenly in 1968 when George was 16. George left school after that

1:39:25 George attended the local protestant national school and then went on to the Royal and Prior in Raphoe for secondary school. Segregated education for the most part. George has a different approach with his children and sent them to the nearest school with their neighbours and friends.

1:40:32 Talks about his eldest brother Stanley, his mother's eldest son. Mentions local development committee.

1:41:21 Good relations between Catholics and Protestants in his area in the 1950s and the 1960s. Farming might have influenced this. Talks about the threshing and how neighbours helped each other out. Everyone sitting in for dinner together.

1:45:12 George has been farming since he left school. His brother Des was following a Naval career with the Merchant Navy. His younger brother studied Agriculture at Gurteen College in Co. Tipperary went on to work with the Department of Agriculture. Three of the brothers worked together on the farm for a time.

1:46:43 Entering and winning competitions at the RDS for bullocks. His brother Des a great judge of cattle. Talks about rearing animals and entering them for competitions. Mentions Walter Short from Omagh, who was a great judge of cattle.

1:48:43 Parents died in the 1980s. George had moved into the house at that stage. His mother died at home aged 1965. Brothers lived in other houses on the estate.

1:49:50 His mother was very accepting of how the world had changed around her. Memory of his mother who had a photograph of the Queen on her desk. Talked about the workers, Catholic and Protestants coming into the office for their wages and his mother recording them on her tape recorder doing party pieces – songs, recitations.

1:52:32 George discusses identity. His mother would have regarded herself as Irish and as a Donegal person as does George. Talks about identity crisis in Northern Ireland.

1:53:57 His career working in transport, had a cattle lorry in the 1970s and also drove trucks all over Europe to subsidise his farm income.

1:54:30 Talks about his own sense of identity and being respectful of the identity of others. Remembering the past respectfully and moving on into the future peacefully.

1:56:30 George's thoughts on the Northern Irish Troubles. Talks about the Civil Rights Movement, gerrymandering, housing etc. His admiration of the Peace Process.

1:59:54 His thoughts and concerns about Brexit and its impact on Northern Ireland

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and the Good Friday Agreement, reawakening identity crisis and difference. Talks about his own campaigning against Brexit – ‘Border Communities Against Brexit’

2:04:29 George talks about driving trucks with fish down to Dublin mostly during the night throughout the worst years of the Troubles, going through checkpoints, mentions bombs, bridges being blown up, detours, hijackings, atrocities.

2:07:12 The change in life after the Peace Process. Physical border went from customs in 1993, army checkpoints left after the peace process. Freedom of being able to drive into Derry and not to see soldiers. Talks about amnesty of prisoners as one of the difficult points in the agreement. His admiration of George Mitchell, Bill Clinton. John Hume, David Trimble. References the formation of the Stormont Assembly and power sharing.

2:09:52 George’s reflections on the legacy of the period 1912-1923. His memories of his parents adjusting to the changes they lived through. Talks about the depiction of the 1910s in the television series *Downton Abbey*.

2:13:28 Description of his mother as a rebel and a tomboy. Talks about memories documented in his great aunt’s writings.

2:15:6 The future of Culdaff House. George’s son interest in farming. Hopes the house will always be there for the family. Talks about being so lucky to be living there especially during the Covid 19 pandemic.

2:16:57 Conclusions and thanks.

2:17:49 Interview ends.

[After the interview George and his cousin Rachel McGowan found some references to large boilers ordered for the house to feed the poor locally during the Great Irish Famine. The references to this are as follows:

References to Famine boilers at Culdaff House– in the possession of Rachel McGowan

- 6 Feb 1847: Letter from Brooke Young of The Warren, requesting 2 x 70 gallon boilers to be sent via Derry (Brooke was Secretary of the Culdaff Relief Committee; his cousin's son George Young JP, of Culdaff House, was the Chairman). He says the Committee had already organised boilers locally, but as the numbers of destitute people was rising so fast they feared they would soon be needing additional capacity
- 2017: Photo of the Brochan House. You can just about see one of the boilers - it's the large black cylindrical shape on the left, now used as a planter, on the roof of the little shed
- 2017: Memorial stone at the Brochan House

Rachel also contributed a PDH of a book entitled *Memories* written by Rachel and George’s great aunt Dorothy Gage Young (b. 11 Dec 1889) documenting the changes in Culdaff House in the period 1912-1923.]

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Language	English
Restricted Information	None
Field Notes	<p>This interview took place using a podcast platform called Squadcast which allowed for a video conversation with audio only recording. Uta Haas, George's partner organised the technical side of the recording on George's side. George was keen to conduct the interview in one sitting. The experience of meeting George and Uta was wonderful and it was a pleasure to record the wealth of knowledge that George has about his family. George's cousin, Rachel McGowan, who lives in England and who is very knowledgeable about the Young Family and Cudaff House joined our email correspondence in preparation for the interview and subsequently contributed the material and information outlined above. It is noteworthy that this interview took place in the context of Level 4 lockdown during the Covid 19 pandemic. Additionally, negotiations were underway between the EU and Britain around Britain's exit from the EU with its consequences for the Northern Ireland border still unclear at the time of the interview.</p>
Audio File Details	
Recording Format: 48kHz 16 bit stereo	
Length of Interview(s): 2:17:49	
No. of Files: 2	
File Types: 1 uncompressed WAV file and 1 corresponding MP3 copy	
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	

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To be completed by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 18 December 2020