

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	6 th July 2009
Location	St Patrick's, Coatbridge, Scotland
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Eamonn Sweeney
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1945 Home County: Mayo
Education	Primary: Ballycroy, Co. Mayo Secondary: St Nathy, Ballyaghadreen, Co. Mayo Third Level: St Peters Seminary Wexford.
Family	Siblings: 6 sisters; 4 brothers
Club(s)	Ballycroy GAA club; St Peter's College (Wexford); Burishule, Rosses (Glasgow), Hamilton Clan na nGael, Wishall;; Beltane Shamrocks
Occupation	Parish Priest
Parents' Occupation	General Merchants and Farming
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fianna Fáil

Date of Report	23 November 2009
Period Covered	1840s- 2009
Counties/Countries Covered	Mayo, Wexford, Roscommon, Donegal, Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, Great Britain, Scotland
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Outsider's Perspectives, Politics, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism
Interview Summary	<p>0:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:18 Born in Ballycroy, Co Mayo in 1945.</p> <p>00:32 Ballycroy – small rural parish between Achill and Belmullet on the west coast of Mayo – rich in salmon fishing – at the foot of the mountains</p> <p>1:12 Parents were general merchants in the village – sold groceries, clothing, farmers wear, fertilisers, feed, undertaking – also had a small farm</p> <p>2:04 When he was a child – people came to the shop for social reasons as well – people coming in for tea – sing songs – Christmas time always exciting as a child.</p> <p>3:12 When he was a child – no television, radio just coming in – families with a radio would have people calling into hear the commentaries from Croke Park – radio was very exciting – when he was a child Mayo were dominant, they won the All-Ireland in 1951 – he believed they were invincible.</p> <p>4:25 Ballycroy was a junior club – not a dominant club in the county – a small country club – occasionally a some players that were of county minor standard – but a strong identity – lots of folklore attached to it – great achievements in the parish folklore.</p> <p>5:34 Tug of war, weight throwing, bicycle races were also dominant in the town</p> <p>6:26 Older brother, Tony was a very good player – didn't get</p>

	<p>the exposure that he would have had today</p> <p>5:56 Earliest memories of playing – in the school yard, no training, everyone chasing the ball, playing other primary schools.</p> <p>7:33 No formal tactics used – more like a game of ground soccer – pair of hobnail boots – remembers getting a pair of boxing shorts to play in – everyone wearing their regular clothes not jerseys – often playing with a rubber ball.</p> <p>8:34 Football in St Nathy's Ballaghadereen where he went to secondary school – he was more involved in playing handball and basketball – only when he went to the seminary that he took up Gaelic football again and started playing for Ballycroy</p> <p>9:18 Had no gear when he went to boarding school (St Nathy's) and so felt like everyone had over taken him and so even by second year he wouldn't have been considered a footballer – considered a handballer.</p> <p>10:03 Rich tradition of Handball in St Nathy's had All-Ireland champion for five or six consecutive years – traditionally strong – and also in basketball got to All-Ireland several times – not him personally. He always played handball.</p> <p>10:42 St Jarlath's in Tuam was dominant in Gaelic football – St Nathy's had a good history in football but always in the shadow of St Jarlath's.</p> <p>11:18 Travelling around to different schools playing handball in a car – not like when footballers played and five buses would be filled with players and supporters- football more dominant.</p> <p>11:55 Pat McGrath who went to schools in St Nathy's won three all-Ireland medals in handball despite overcoming Polio.</p> <p>12:25 Growing up and going to matches – didn't go to inter-county matches and only went to club games that were played at home – when his older brother played for the local club he had his boots thrown across the handlebar and he could have cycled 20 miles – no transport for the supporters.</p> <p>13:18 Wouldn't have seen Mayo play until he was in the Seminary – jumping into a car and driving to Galway or Roscommon. Wasn't in Croke Park until he went with St Peter's secondary school in Wexford who were very successful – seeing Croke Park for the first time.</p> <p>14:40 First impressions of Croke Park –visual impact of Croke</p>
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	<p>Park – atmosphere was congenial - difference between atmosphere at Gaelic matches and soccer matches – Gaelic games are seen not in an end in themselves but as a way of bringing people together – a social aspect to it – there is respect on the field and on the sidelines.</p> <p>17:02 Joining the seminary in Wexford – no seminaries in the west of Ireland – all choices were on the east coast – always happy he went to Wexford – when he went to secondary school he didn't go prepared to play football, when he went to St Peter's he was prepared to play – brought his football gear – started playing there – importance of playing football while studying.</p> <p>18:37 Restrictions around priests playing football – priests playing at county level playing under assumed names as the church authorities frowned on it – priest who played with the great team of Mayo in the 1950s under an assumed name – he may have been sanctioned had he been called up – frowned upon as it was seen as physical thing – risk of injury or outbreak of violence in which it wouldn't be considered appropriate for a priest to be involved.</p> <p>19:55 Priest that played for Mayo – known that he was a priest – but brought home from abroad to play so his own authorities would have been oblivious.</p> <p>20:32 Playing in St Peters – internal league system – all seminarians and also college team which was a selection of players – played against all clergy team from the diocese - also played police teams, very physical games – also played other colleges – very competitive – doesn't remember achieving a lot with the team – small college and many students were not into the games.</p> <p>21:50 Gaelic football and hurling would have been the predominant sports – they also played soccer – most played a little of everything.</p> <p>22:16 Had local rivals – Kilkenny, Kiltegan, Waterford – always had tea or a social afterwards – story about a tea in Kiltegan after a match.</p> <p>23:08 Being in a seminary in the 1960s in Ireland – 1963 – still tight disciplinary regime – lots of rules for the sake of discipline to train you in the area of discipline – Vatican II came in when he was there – relaxation of rules – students given more personal responsibility to express their own personalities – 'The college I left was quite different from the</p>
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	<p>college I entered.'</p> <p>24:38 Tension between the older and younger generation of priests – difficult for older priests to adapt to the reforms of Vatican II – younger priests were trained that way – many older priests tried hard to adapt.</p> <p>25:24 Had a month holidays after he was ordained. System of fees and being adopted by a diocese – he applied to Motherwell – getting the night boat from Dublin to Scotland in 1964 to go for his interview for the diocese of Motherwell – the interview – and then directly back that night to Dublin – travelled with a classmate from Galway.</p> <p>27:54 Moving to Scotland in the 1960s – differences from Ireland – opted to move out of Ireland as he had been in a rural, quiet, slow parish – priests weren't active in the community beyond mass on Sunday – moved on from that parish after three months – in Coatbridge for fourteen years.</p> <p>30:14 How he got involved in the GAA in Scotland – had a friend in Scotland who was ahead of him in the seminary and he visited him when he arrived in Scotland and he took him to the football park – he proved himself to be enthusiastic and so first got involved as a player and then was invited to get involved with the county board,</p> <p>31:55 First team he was involved with was Rosses-Rovers, a Donegal based team – mainly west Donegal men – only one football ground in Scotland – any fixtures were fulfilled there – now clubs played on rented council grounds.</p> <p>32:55 In the 1969 – Gaelic football was quite weak in Scotland – a reorganisation at that time into three teams – Rosses-Rovers; Mulroy Gaels (also Donegal based team); South O'Hanlons – made up of men from all of the other counties in Ulster and the odd person from the South – mainly Ulster people – standard was very poor – sometimes had to agree to 10 aside as they would struggle to field a team – lots of familiarity, played each other frequently – after that the GAA in Scotland went into further decline.</p> <p>35:12 In 1984 – got a call from the Western People, Mayo newspaper – told him about a homecoming tournament in Ballina – teams coming from all over the world to have an exiles tournament – by this stage the three time league had disappeared, mustered up one team at times to play visiting teams – no formal team or manager etc. – also involved in Ulster club championship – travelling to Belfast to play teams – usually beaten – going over and back in one day – Exiles</p>
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	<p>tournament only got four committed men in the end – arranged to meet a bus load of players from Donegal to make up the team and fulfil the fixture - they never showed up – made a team up from his own friends and some from the crowd – didn't win.</p> <p>41:32 Revival of the games in Scotland - 1984 on the point of being extinct – had a dinner dance to celebrate the centenary – all those who had been involved throughout the years invited –four men decided that night that they couldn't get it die: himself; Michael Moran (Co. Mayo); Eamonn Cullen and Seamus Sweeney (Co. Donegal) – decided to recruit coach and develop four youth teams – except Eamonn. Eamonn started recruiting teenagers and teaching basic skills to them – all Scottish born lads – many Soccer converts – looked out for lads with coordination – had practice matches with each other and it gradually came on and they eventually started a championship.</p> <p>46:23 Eamonn tapped into a colony of travellers from Co Mayo some of whom were good football players – one played under 21 for Mayo – they were working in Scotland and formed the backbone of the Hamilton team – however they were working and moved a lot and so were unreliable – but it developed further from there.</p> <p>47:50 Disappointed that he wasn't in that parish for long enough to consolidate the team and it eventually disappeared.</p> <p>48:24 Developed another team in his new parish – circulated parishes to recruit players – rented a field from the council – first day scheduled for training there was six inches of snow on the ground and fifteen men still showed up and they still fielded a team – also hospital chaplain at the time and always had to carry a pager – occasionally he was called away and so tried to established a network of support there to carry it on. – had good footballers there – had a squad of thirty players – had support for training, managing, fundraising – had a busload of supporters for away games – up to 300 at matches – had a press officer – went twenty something games without defeat – could beat junior teams in Ireland.</p> <p>51:45 In Hamilton, 1984 – Young girl from Ballycroy who had Leukaemia and needed a bone marrow transplant – went to Glasgow for operation – family came over with her nad got in contact with Fr Sweeney and they were take care of through that network – lots of media attention – Evening Times newspaper in Glasgow – journalist looked for story about the girl – he said that he would give them updates about the girl if</p>
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	<p>they published a positive article about the development of Gaelic football in Scotland – great response from that.</p> <p>54:49 One of those who responded was called Joe Bradley – he started to play for the first time and soon started his own team in Coatbridge – also had youth teams – Wishall team was strong – he was the only Irish person on that team - but three years after he moved on to a new parish it became defunct.</p> <p>57:17 Motivation for having Gaelic games in Scotland – There was a county board in Scotland at the beginning of the twentieth century – important for him personally to play Gaelic football and for many other Irish people who went there. A lot of his experience over there was with people who weren't brought up with a tradition of it but were coached into it – important to keep that alive.</p> <p>58:55 Many of the Scottish players came from an Irish background and so wanted to be involved – Wishall team had players from a non-Irish background – protestant Rangers supporters – no element of sectarianism.</p> <p>59:58 Being a parish priest and involved in the GAA – at first the parish wouldn't have been aware that he played – sometimes parishioners became interested and played – sometimes professional soccer players and senior soccer players – often their clubs wouldn't have known – likewise the ban was still enforced in the GAA.</p> <p>1:02:01 Often said mass in dark glasses to cover a black eye or had a twisted finger, burst ankle – all of the injuries you would get playing Gaelic Football – gradually people knew he played but not like home when the whole parish would know the team was playing.</p> <p>1:02:32 Some teams had a stronger identity with the parish for example in Hamilton.</p> <p>1:03:00 Difference between being involved with a team that was predominantly Irish born and a team that was predominantly Scottish born – no formal structure when he became involved in teams in Scotland – Irish players often coming from a radius of 15 miles apart - in Wishall, the parish team were only from a half a mile radius – were trained by a professional soccer player – very fit team – when working with local players there was greater commitment, it was geographically more convenient.</p> <p>1:05:44 The clergy and the GAA – In the 1950s and 60s in</p>
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	<p>Ireland everything revolved around the priest, the teacher and the garda – often they were the only educated people – doesn't think that was a good thing – the GAA always belonged to the people and despite a lack of education often they were well able to coach and organise functions and get a team together – priest was often seen as a leader in the parish – identity between parish and club - in Scotland very few priests involved despite there being so many Irish priests there – the amount of young Irish priests going to Scotland has died out – Kiltegan fathers had a house near Stirling and they had young Irish priests some of whom played for the county, played for Scotland.</p> <p>1:09:07 What the GAA means to him – an integral part of Irish life – the GAA established almost everywhere – transcended politics, religion – embraced everything – has held the county together in the most difficulty times – survived the civil war – difficulties in the church in Ireland – GAA will play its part in healing that too – Church and GAA were always close knit – the Church is still there for the people – the GAA have a part to play in trying to bring support back to the Church.</p> <p>1:11:10 Stopped his involvement in the GAA because of his parish duties – in Ireland – wouldn't be surprised if priests wanted to withdraw involvement from any activities that involve children.</p> <p>1:12:45 GAA has been a great support to him. Listening to reports of games from Croke Park – has been a great support and physically great.</p> <p>1:13:35 History of Coatbridge - population 60,000 people – population explosion in mid-nineteenth century – influx of famine immigrants from Ireland – large Irish community in Coatbridge who worked in the coal mines and steel foundries - mainly Catholic – only town in England or Scotland with a majority of Catholics over Protestants – proud of Irish roots – nine Catholic parishes in Coatbridge – only town in Scotland where the church on the main street is the Catholic church – often referred to as little Ireland. Very little sectarianism – issues with local Orange Lodge.</p> <p>1:17:09 Ecumenical spirit – church land was given by a protestant landowner – parish dates back to 1845 – church re-build in 1896 – gradually other churches grew up around – donation of a church organ from the local parish church – story about getting the organ for the parish church.</p> <p>1:20:13 Final reflections – most exciting memories – first time going to inter-county matches – disappointment of losing, the</p>
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	<p>thrill of winning – in a vast arena in a rural area – In Scotland – best memories are from the teams he started especially when they were winning – still in touch with the GAA at home – listens to Raidio Éireann through the TV – watched games on Setanta – Mayo reaching the All-Ireland on a couple of recent occasions – in the All-Irelands when Mayo are playing he'll dress up in the Mayo colours going out to Mass – showing match on the big screen in parish tea room – motivating parishioners to come along.</p> <p>1:24:02 Mayo getting stage fright when they play Kerry</p> <p>1:24:10 Major changes – 'professionalism' – level of training, coaching, financing are bordering on professional in Ireland – nephew is a sports therapist for Mayo team – they train at an unbelievable level – travelling, commitment and expectations involved – compared to the players of the 40s and 50s.</p> <p>1:26:22 Story about a local sports day in Ballycroy – a bicycle race – weren't as concerned about the rules in those times.</p> <p>1:26:34 Noticed in Scotland that everyone knew the rules of Gaelic football but each were operating from different rules.</p>
Involvement in GAA	<p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer ✓ Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p>✓ Other (please specify): County Board member</p>
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	Scottish Championship: Hamilton; Wishall
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Secretary of Scottish County Board (1970-1995); Match Secretary of Scottish County Board
Format	✓ Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 1:26:06
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

I hereby assign the copyright of the content of the above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this interview.

Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 23rd November 2009