

## GAA Oral History Project

**Interview Report Form**

<b>Name of Interviewer</b>	Arlene Crampsie
<b>Date of Interview</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> Nov 2008
<b>Location</b>	Northern Regional College, Magherafelt, Co. Derry
<b>Name of Interviewee</b> (Maiden name / Nickname)	Sean Gunning
<b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>	
<b>Gender</b>	Male
<b>Born</b>	<b>Year Born:</b> 1968 <b>Home County:</b> Derry
<b>Education</b>	<b>Primary:</b> St Johns PS, Swatragh, Derry <b>Secondary:</b> St Patricks College, Maghera <b>Third Level:</b> UU Jordanstown
<b>Family</b>	<b>Siblings:</b> 1 brother & 5 sisters <b>Current Family if Different:</b> 3 children – 2 boys & 1 girl
<b>Club</b>	Michael Davitt's, Swatragh; Watty Graham's Glen
<b>Occupation</b>	Lecturer in IT
<b>Parents' Occupation</b>	Lorry Driver [Father]; Secretary [Mother]
<b>Religion</b>	Roman Catholic
<b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>	N/A

REFERENCE NO. DY/1/3

<b>Date of Report</b>	8th Oct 2009
<b>Period Covered</b>	1970s – 2008
<b>Counties/Countries Covered</b>	Derry
<b>Key Themes Covered</b>	Coaching, Training, Playing, Administration, Officials, Politics, The Troubles, Northern Ireland, Grounds, Facilities, Childhood, Family Involvement, Earliest Memories, Club History, Identity, Fundraising, Rivalries, Role of the Club in the Community, Media, Education, Material Culture, Travel, All-Ireland
<b>Interview Summary</b>	<p>Sean Gunning was born and raised in Swatragh and was a member of Michael Davitt's club. He is currently a member of Watty Graham's Glen, since he moved away from Swatragh and his children play for the Glen club. He is PRO of Derry County Board, but his real love is coaching. Sean recalls his delight and disappointment at reaching but not winning a county final, he discusses the role of the club in the community, especially while he was growing up, the state of the grounds, the development of facilities, travelling to matches around the North and in the Republic, the impact of the Troubles on GAA in the North, fundraising, the various functions associated with his roles as PRO and coach and the skills he tries to develop in training underage teams.</p> <p>0.00 Introduction</p> <p>0.25 'We were brought up what I would term a very strong GAA family. My father played football for the local club, Michael Davitts in Swatragh, for numerous years. I can recall us growing up that would be an excursion every Sunday morning to a football match that me da would have been playing.'</p> <p>0.50 He was also club secretary and secretary of the South Derry Board.</p> <p>1.10 'My best memories would have been going to Derry matches ... I can always recall my first visit to a Derry game would have been Derry's All-Ireland semi-final ... I mind being taken to Croke Park, me da and ma crammed six of us into the back of an old ford zodiac ... we headed off in a convoy of cars, there could have been about 6 cars left the wee village of Swatragh heading to Dublin, as much as we might have had our flags out the window and things like that I can recall</p>

	<p>one of the cars in front, they had gone to the extreme of welding poles onto the roof of the car and had the flag across the whole car they were going to make sure that everyone knowed we were going to Dublin.’</p> <p>2.05 ‘I can remember and I always will remember taking the steps up into the Hogan Stand and the minute you walk out and see the size of the place and the green field – that memory will remain with me probably forever.’</p> <p>2.35 Born and reared in Swatragh, his home club was Michael Davitts, but at the moment his club is Watty Graham’s Glen ‘simply because I’m married and left Swatragh and living there at the minute.’ His two sons play football and his daughter plays Camogie.</p> <p>3.00 Played for Swatragh from U-12 to Senior. His biggest claim to fame is getting to the county final in 1993 – the year Derry won All-Ireland.</p> <p>3.30 ‘I can recall the county final wasn’t played until Boxing Day 1993 ... that day there was an inch of ice or snow on the pitch, I’m going to use that as an excuse why we didn’t won the county final that year.’ Anthony Tohill was also on the Swatragh team.</p> <p>4.23 Sean is now a coach – he coaches U-6, U-8, U-10, U-12. ‘I remember going to U-12 training and me probably 7 years old ... it gave us something to belong to, something to be part of, somewhere where we met.’</p> <p>5.10 ‘Every evening after school it was down to the local play park or local pitch to play football and that was every night of the week as soon as we came home from school, school bags into the corner, a quick bite to eat and down to the pitch to play a game and hi that could have lasted for two hours.’</p> <p>5.50 Father was involved in Swatragh from early stage. Two men important in setting up Swatragh club were John McCormick and Willie O’Kane.</p> <p>6.20 Willie Turner was ‘nabbed coming out of the chapel one Sunday morning and being given the task of going round door to door to collect money for just to buy a set of jerseys to allow Swatragh to get a football club formed.’</p> <p>6.40 Father was club secretary – Bingo was one of the big fundraisers, his Dad called numbers at the Bingo every Saturday night. ‘Every Christmas they had the annual Christmas Bizarre I remember you used to be infatuated looking up at the stage and you seen all this rows and rows of</p>
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	<p>toys and boxes of sweets and chocolates and everything else ... and as years went on, you might have got the job as you got a little bit older of selling tickets at that.'</p> <p>7.40 The gaelic club was the focal point of the community.</p> <p>8.10 'It was the thing to be in.'</p> <p>8.20 While he was growing up the facilities were totally improved. 'I can remember the first time playing U-12, U-14 ... they played in what the called the wee back pitch behind the Hib hall, it was remarkable because when you stood in one of the goals you couldn't see the other goals, there was that big of a hill just in the middle of the pitch, you couldn't see from one goals to the other.'</p> <p>9.00 In 1977 they opened the new Davitt pitch in Swatragh. They went from the worst facilities to the best. They had a level pitch, places for people to view the game, changing rooms with chairs and a meeting room.</p> <p>9.35 It was all done as voluntary work, there were fundraising activities but 'I must boast that ever single ounce of labour that went into that project was done voluntary.'</p> <p>10.00 Swatragh was a third division club, but today they are a senior club.</p> <p>10.20 'I got married and moved out of Swatragh, am now living in Maghera ... Paul got the age of wanting to go and play football ... I could put him in the car and drive him to Swatragh and bring him up in the club that I played for .. .wouldn't want him to have to think he has to play for this fixed club.</p> <p>11.00 Welcomed with open arms into Watty Grahams Glen. He's a coach and was registrar on the committee last year.</p> <p>11.25 'That's one of the beauties too about the GAA, it doesn't matter if you belong to this club or that club as long as you're part of the GAA you will be welcomed anywhere.'</p> <p>11.50 'If you cut that arm open and blood came out there would still be green and white blood come out of the veins, I'm always very proud to say I am a Swatragh man and always will be a Swatragh man.' In his role as PRO he's been welcomed back to do MC for various functions in Swatragh.</p> <p>12.30 'I have the added bonus at the moment of being part of two clubs.'</p> <p>12.45 Role as PRO of Derry County Board – 'It's not a job I</p>
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	<p>would have wanted ... my first love at the minute would be coaching, I would rather be running up and down the sideline coaching a game as opposed to administration.'</p> <p>13.20 Been assisting Club Derry in casual (IT) role. Club Derry is the fundraising arm of Derry County Board and got to know members of the County Board. Derry has introduced a five year rule, trying to break the monotony of long term members. The gentleman who was PRO had done his five years and stepped down. Sean knows very little about it, but let his name go forward, but he's really enjoyed the last year and got to know lots of people in Derry and other counties.</p> <p>14.50 Biggest job is gathering team information and releasing it to the press. Need to be careful how you word news to press – it's a balancing act between press and team managers. He's also responsible for other publications, match programmes etc and they're now putting together the year book, which will be ready for December.</p> <p>16.40 'My first love is coaching and taking an active part in the playing of Gaelic games, this year I have managed to balance the two roles of acting as Derry PRO and coaching the U-12 side for my local club Watty Grahams Glen, however should I progress from U-12 up to a higher level I don't think I could balance the two roles ... it's a decision I'm going to have to make.'</p> <p>17.45 Coaching Roles –progressed from U-8's to U-12's. Would love to take higher team and maybe coach a senior team. At the minute it's one night a week. 'We promote the go-games from Croke Park, which has the big benefits of ... we can field three, nine-a-side teams, you group the children into like abilities and they're playing children of similar abilities on other teams, they're guaranteed more games, more touches of the ball, more fun.'</p> <p>19.20 'It's really, really fulfilling.'</p> <p>19.40 U-12 in Swatragh when he was small 'You were always lucky if you could manage to get fifteen, 16, 17 boys ... I can recall us going to training sessions, fifteen / 16 guys and only one ball ... you could have thirty children and you'd expect to have at least maybe fifteen balls.' Working with ladders, cones, domes everything. Stress the ABC – Agility, Balance and Co-ordination.</p> <p>20.30 The first thing that makes a good player is will to win.</p> <p>20.40 Biggest factor at age-level he's coaching is fun and</p>
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	<p>participation. Need to have ambition to stay with it 'skill level may not be enough to take them through.'</p> <p>21.35 Need to be able to come down to level of children. 'What I would try and do is try and take the positives out of anything that they do. I'm a great believer in the philosophy – a child will remember one bad thing that you tell them, but if you can tell them ten good things it's more beneficial to them.'</p> <p>22.25 Not coaching his own children at the minute. Pros and Cons to that – 'the biggest advantage of that was whatever night that training session was the two of us left the house at the same time.'</p> <p>23.00 'Probably the one that would have suffered the most would have been my own child, because if it came down to picking two children of the same ability I would have picked the other child before I would have picked my own just because I was always wary of showing favouritism.' Not an issue at the moment.</p> <p>23.45 It's great when we can all go out together and go to the one thing.</p> <p>24.05 Doesn't serve any role with Glen committee this year. Last year he was registrar – 'that job was made very, very, easy too by the new system incorporated into Croke Park where all club members were registered in a central database in Croke Park ... the beauty of that was you could extract all the reports you wanted.'</p> <p>24.50 It's sometimes hard to get personal information e.g. dates of birth from older club members.</p> <p>25.25 Served as youth committee officer on Swatragh Committee for two years. 'I'm not a lover of meetings.'</p> <p>26.15 Hasn't witnessed strong personality clashes or anyone trying to push something through.</p> <p>27.15 We're all aware that we face challenges e.g. children being attracted to other sports. The best way to keep them is to give them plenty of games and maximise their enjoyment and playing time.</p> <p>28.00 'Communications and IT make it very simple.' 'I often think how hard it must have been ten / fifteen years ago.' Great for programmes publication and even the Derry GAA yearbook – all they had to do was request information from clubs and 'we're getting everything returned electronically.'</p>
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	<p>30.00 'Plus side of the job is getting to travel along with the team.' Trip to Kerry – 'we drove to Dublin, we got on a plane in Dublin and we flew from Dublin straight into Killarney, stayed in Killarney that night and played the game in Killarney on the Sunday.' Sean can recall driving to Wexford – getting up at crack of dawn, maybe six o'clock to get there for a game and then home again.</p> <p>31.25 He would love to make the All-Ireland a fixed day on his calendar.</p> <p>31.45 Derry Minors in final in 1983, Dublin vs Galway in senior final. 'We were positioned in a small enclosed area between Hill 16 and the Nally stand ... I mind being in awe just standing looking at the masses of people, some of them at that time with their hair died blue, two shades of blue.'</p> <p>33.05 The All-Ireland weekend is one of the occasions where he pays back his wife for being so tolerant all the other weeks of the year and stay over for the weekend.</p> <p>33.35 'We have a small touring caravan at the house ... over this past two years we haven't had an opportunity to take the caravan out.'</p> <p>34.00 My children are actively involved, one playing U-14, one playing U-10 'and the wee girl is playing U-8.' 'It gives them a sense of belonging.'</p> <p>34.45 Troubles: 'I'll recall funny one of the days, there was a Camogie match on at Swatragh ... at every game that was played in Swatragh the tricolour was flown at all gaelic games ... I may have been only 5 / 6 at the time ... the pitch was just situated along the main road, the traffic passed constantly along the main road and I can recall one time ten land rovers pulling up alongside the main road. I can recall word had got round anyway that maybe a few weeks earlier the troops had gone into a playing game and removed the tricolour at a game ... It was a wonderful experience to watch everybody gathered round the tricolour, the camogie game was stopped temporarily and I never seen so many hurls or camogs being passed out to men – men that let me tell you would be proper gentlemen, really mild, no sense of (I'll use the word) violence or anything like that. I'll never forget seeing so many men crammed around the tricolour holding these camogie bats and then that no way would anybody come into this ground and take down the tricolour.'</p> <p>36.35 I was engrossed with fear.</p>
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	<p>37.10 'You left the house and you'd have stuck the flag out the window ... we were always warned that certain towns when you went through you had to take the flag down and put it in the car.'</p> <p>37.40 Talks about getting stopped at checkpoints and wariness of it.</p> <p>38.15 During the hunger strikes there was a debate about whether GAA clubs should participate in games or not. 'Our club played on.' They wanted to separate sport and politics. Some teams did pull out, but Sean can understand why. The hunger strikes did have an impact on everybody.</p> <p>39.40 Kerry team of '79+ were his favourite team. Jack O'Shea was his hero. When Kerry lost their attempt to make it five-in-a-row he can recall one of the founding members of Swatragh John McCormack calling in to his father 'it was a great day for GAA the fact that somebody else another county had won the All-Ireland final'.</p> <p>41.05 If there was any event on, the club would try and have the parish priest there, any draw, any raffle. There'd be great camaraderie between the two.</p> <p>41.50 Best experience – 'Getting to play in a county final in 1993 ... my biggest disappointment was not winning that final in 1993.'</p> <p>42.10 Improved youth structure in Swatragh, no coincidence that they had a new principal - Master Cleary came from Sligo, he was passionate about GAA and that brought new impetus to the team.</p> <p>43.10 Played county final against Lavey, had won club in 1991.</p> <p>43.30 Lavey were biggest rivals at that time, but some of the team were classmates of Sean during school. You leave the rivalry on the pitch 'once you come off the pitch you forget about it.'</p> <p>44.55 Ballinderry are the strongest team in Derry at the minute.</p> <p>45.25 His inter-county rivals would be Tyrone, but 'You have to take your hat off to them.'</p> <p>45.50 GAA means everything to him. 'I think if I wasn't part of the GAA I wouldn't be the same individual, I wouldn't have the same sense of belonging ... it gives us a great sense of</p>
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**REFERENCE NO. DY/1/3**

	<p>belonging.'</p> <p>46.15 Really glad his children are involved in it too. 'It's something that they have got involved in by their own choice and I'm glad to say they're enjoying it and its something that we're really, really all proud to be part of.'</p>
<b>Involvement in GAA</b>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<b>Record as a Player</b> (Titles won; Length of time played)	Sean played from he was 8 years old until 2007. He won a Senior County Final with Swatragh, 1993.
<b>Record as an Administrator</b> (Positions held; how long for)	Club coach – 7 years, 2 in Swatragh, 5 in Watty Grahams; County PRO; County Registrar.
<b>Format</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
<b>Duration</b>	Length of Interview: 46min 36secs
<b>Language</b>	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

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_Arlene Crampsie\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_8/10/09\_\_\_\_\_

