



The Travellers Times

ONLINE FAQ PACK

GYPSIES

&

TRAVELLERS

LIFESTYLE, HISTORY & CULTURE

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TRAVELLERS TIMES



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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For further reading, resources and links to other National Campaign Groups visit www.travellerstimes.org.uk

1.

INTRODUCTION



From the 16th century to the present day, no ethnic groups in Britain have aroused as much curiosity, romance, hatred and fear as Gypsies and Travellers. Often misunderstood, maligned and exoticized, most people's perceptions of Britain's Gypsies and Travellers are based on a mixture of romanticism, prejudice and ignorance.

To most people, "True Romanies" - the swarthy, freedom-loving strangers of the past - have very little in common with dirty modern "pikies" or "gyppos". But ask most people what has actually happened to the carefree nomads once romanticised as "lords of the heath" by Victorian artists, anthropologists and aristocrats and few people would be able to say. The truth is that we have gone nowhere, we are still here, but living modern lives that are as sometimes as controversial as the ones our ancestors led. Yet 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers live in Britain today, and many of us want greater understanding within the wider community. This education pack is an attempt to help produce that understanding.

2.

WHO ARE GYPSIES & TRAVELLERS?

The term Traveller refers to anyone who has a nomadic way of life. It describes someone's lifestyle and, in the age when everyone from gap year students to businessmen are traveling more than ever before, it is an increasingly meaningless term. However, it is a catch-all phrase that also applies to anybody living in vehicles such as caravans, buses or campervans. Travellers can be divided into two groups, those that are ethnic Travellers, such as Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers, and those who live on the road for purely economic reasons such as New Travellers and Showmen. In reality, there isn't one Traveller community but many, each with their own particular culture and history.

Ethnic Travellers

Ethnic Travellers are people who are born into traditionally nomadic cultures. Just like someone who is Black or Asian, their identity is defined by their race. The two groups recognized by British case law as ethnic groups are Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Although both groups have lived and travelled in the British Isles for many hundreds of years, it has only been relatively recently that they have been recognized under the Race Relations Act. To do so, they had to prove, in landmark legal cases, that they met the following conditions, known as the "Mandla Criteria".¹

4.

¹ Romany Gypsies recognised 1989 (CRE v Dutton) because of a 'No Travellers' sign; ethnic status defined under Mandla Criteria. Irish Travellers were recognised in 2000 in an extension of the finding in CRE v Dutton

- Long shared history
- Cultural tradition of their own
- Common geographical origin
- Common language
- Common tradition
- Common religion
- Characteristic of being a minority or being oppressed by a dominant group within a large community

ROMANI GYPSIES

Romani Gypsies have been in Britain since at least 1515 after migrating from continental Europe. The term Gypsy is a corruption of “Egyptian” which is what the settled population perceived them to be because of their dark complexion. In reality, linguistic analysis of the Romani language, proves that Romani Gypsies have come from India.

ROMA

In the last two decades a sizeable number of Roma - Romani people from continental Europe - have settled in Britain, perhaps 250,000 in all. They share cultural and linguistic heritage with Britain's long-established Romani Gypsy community and keep to many of the same rules and taboos on things like cleanliness and social behaviour. However, it is very rare for them to live in mobile accommodation as their families generally stopped living nomadic lives generations ago.

IRISH TRAVELLERS

Irish Travellers are a separate and distinct ethnic group that has come from Ireland. They share some of the same cultural values as Romani Gypsies, such as a preference for self-employment and living and traveling in caravans or “trailers”, but there are also big differences. For example most Irish Travellers are catholic and their language – Cant – is not related at all to Romani.

Non-ethnic Travellers

There are other groups and individuals who call themselves Travellers. They may be individuals who have chosen or been forced into a life on the road. Or they may be part of larger cultural groups, who aren't part of an ethnic minority but who do share a common culture. In Britain, the main groups are:

NEW TRAVELLERS

The term New Travellers refers to people sometimes referred to as "New Age Travellers". They are generally people who have taken to life on the road in their own lifetime, though some New Traveller families claim to have been on the road for 3 consecutive generations. The New Traveller culture grew out of the hippie movements and free-festival movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Because of this New Traveller vehicles are generally more colourful and self-built than other Travellers.

SHOWMEN

Showmen are a cultural minority that have owned and operated funfairs and circuses for many generations. Though culturally similar to Romani Gypsies (some Showmen are of Romani descent) their identity is connected to their family businesses. They operate rides and attractions that can be seen throughout the summer months at fun fairs. They generally have winter quarters where the family settles to repair the machinery that they operate and prepare for the next traveling season.

Other Travellers

There are other groups of Travellers who may travel through Britain, such as Scottish Travellers and French Manush Gypsies, which have a similar origin and culture to Romani Gypsies. There is also an increasingly large population of Roma immigrants that have come to Britain from long-settled communities in Eastern Europe.

Population Size

There are no reliable estimates of how many Gypsies and Travellers there are in the UK, because Gypsies and Travellers are not specifically included in any ethnic monitoring. Academic estimates vary from 120,000 to 300,000, which would make the population of Gypsies and Travellers as large as the Bangladeshi community.

Around half of all Gypsies and Travellers nowadays live in houses, the other half live in caravans on private caravan sites, public (council) caravan sites and on unauthorized encampments wherever they can find land that is suitable. So the community is diverse in its racial background and living conditions. The community consists approximately of the following groups:

PROPORTION OF THE COMMUNITY*	ETHNIC TRAVELLERS		CULTURAL TRAVELLERS	
	ROMANI GYPSY	IRISH TRAVELLER	NEW TRAVELLER	SHOWPEOPLE
HOUSED (50%)	35	5	-	-
PRIVATE SITE (16.6%)	11	2	4	6
PUBLIC SITE (16.6%)	11	2	3	2
ROADSIDE (16.6%)	11	3	3	2
TOTAL %	68%	12%	10%	10%

3.

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER CULTURE AND HISTORY

the myths and the truth



There is no one Gypsy and Traveller culture, just as there is no single Gypsy and Traveller community. But most Gypsies and Travellers have certain cultural things in common, which have evolved over time in response to the conditions created by life on the road. For example, a traditional preference for self-employment and a suspicion of authority created after centuries of persecution, is something that many Gypsies and Travellers share. There are also great differences, for example, Romani Gypsies have strict taboos about which implements can be washed in which bowls and how men and women should interact, that aren't shared by New Travellers. In many ways, it is easier to define Gypsies and Travellers by what they are not, by looking at the myths which are spread about them.

The media - a true reflection of Gypsies and Travellers?

Gypsies and Travellers are modern people who are often very well integrated into the communities through which they pass or permanently live. Most people walk past Gypsies and Travellers every day without knowing it. The media, however, continues to spread the myth that Gypsies and Travellers are strange, exotic and deviant characters that blight British Society. The following headlines, taken from one week's local newspaper headlines, draw on a certain myths and arguably do more to make conflicts between Travellers and the settled community worse than actually report or explain them.

PEOPLE LIVE IN FEAR OF THE INVADERS

Police warn landowners over travellers

**Gypsies
bombed out by
arsonists**

**Beware of working
travellers warning**

**Knife wielding youths
attack gypsies in Hyde
Park**

**GYPSIES
LEAVE EVEN
MORE MESS**

**Travellers breach
caravan defences**

Travellers need to clear off

Winning the war against travellers

**Gypsies leave
devastation**

**TRAVELLERS DOG BIT
ME ON THE ARM**

But change the ethnic group being described, and the inherent prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers suddenly becomes far more apparent.

PEOPLE LIVE IN FEAR OF THE INVADERS

Police warn landowners over Blacks

**Beware of working
Irish warning**

**Jews bombed
out by arsonists**

**Knife wielding youths
attack Japanese in
Hyde Park**

**ASIANS
LEAVE EVEN
MORE MESS**

**Gays breach
caravan defences**

Nigerians need to clear off

Winning the war against women

**Fat people leave
devastation**

**BLIND MAN'S DOG BIT
ME ON THE ARM**

This single week's headlines reveals that what is written about Gypsies and Travellers would never be tolerated by any other ethnic group. Prejudice against Travellers and Gypsies is so deep-seated many people don't even realise it exists. It is only when you exchange words, as we have done here, that it becomes apparent. But what are the myths such coverage draws and what is the truth?

Myth

Gypsies are foreign. Much media coverage talks of Gypsies and Travellers "invading" places. Invasion is a military term used about armies. How can it be used about a community that has been a part of British society for centuries.

Truth

Gypsies and Travellers have been part of British society for over 500 years.



An Elizabethan engraving shows a Gypsy being chased from a village. The bellows on his back show his trade of blacksmithing, the dog is biting his leg.

Gypsies on Mitcham Common, Surrey in 1881. The same families, found in the census of that year can still be found living throughout the same county. The same evidence can be found in census and county archives across Britain.



Gypsy looks are as diverse as the ways Gypsies have lived.

Linguists and historians say that Gypsies come from India and there is a lot of linguistic and cultural evidence for this, but Gypsies and Travellers are equally from Britain. If Gypsies and Travellers are not British after 500 years then they never will be. Irish Travellers also have a cultural root in another country, Ireland, but most Irish Travellers in Britain were actually born in Britain, although they may have a lot of family in Ireland.

The myth of the pure bred Romani (or real Gypsy) romanticised by Victorian folklorists is no more than a myth. Romani academics such as Professor Ian Hancock and Doctor Brian Belton have revealed that there never was a race of pure bred, dark-skinned nomads and exposed a far more interesting truth: five hundred years after arriving in Britain, the Romanies of Britain today are much as they always were – a hybrid nation made up of the descendents of original Indian nomads, sturdy beggars, landless poor and the economically displaced. In many ways, Gypsies and Travellers are Britain's internal refugees. And communities like Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers have always lived alongside and inter-married with each other.

From blonde-haired, blue eyed scrap metal dealers to dark-skinned cockneys; Gypsy looks are as diverse as the Romani language itself, a mixture of English slang and Asian words more closely related to Sanskrit than Hindi.

Language: the cultural DNA of Gypsies and Travellers



The Romani language has its roots in northern India, but linguistic analysis also shows that Romani has words that have been picked up from every country it has passed through along the way. It borrows words from Sanskrit, Dardic, Burushaski, Persian, Kurdish, Georgian, Ossetian and Byzantine Greek

Within Europe, where the majority of the world's Romani Gypsies live there is a wide diversity of Romani dialects. The one spoken in Britain is known as Poggadi Jib, or broken language because it largely consists of Romani verbs and nouns but uses many English words. It is a very effective way of retaining a language and excluding people from outside the culture who you don't want to understand what you are saying

For example:

- If **Mande rokkered** the **poggadi jib tutti** wouldn't **jin** what **mande** was **pukkering**
- *If I spoke the broken language you wouldn't understand what I was saying*

Irish Travellers speak a language called Gammon or Cant which also uses English words but mixes them with ancient Gaelic words. It is used in a very similar way as Romani. One particularly interesting thing about Wales is that Romani was spoken in a much purer way here than the rest of Britain until very recently.

Myth

Gypsies are dirty



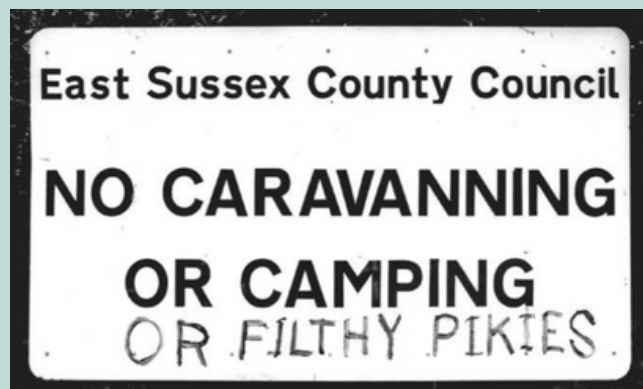
Truth

Gypsy culture is built upon strict codes of cleanliness learnt over centuries of life on the road. Concepts such as mokadi and mahrim place strict guidelines, for example, on what objects can be washed in what bowls. Gypsies view gorgias (non Gypsies) as unclean because of the way they live. For example, Gypsies and Travellers rarely let animals inside their homes, because they believe them to be carriers of disease.

Myth

Gypsies are criminal

The sign enforces the 1960 Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act, which permanently closed commons to Gypsies and Travellers. The graffiti someone has added is perhaps a little more honest. Many Gypsies and Travellers say that legislation passed to curtail their traditional way of life is inherently racist.



Statistics show that Gypsies and Travellers are more likely to be in prison than people from other backgrounds. This is frequently pinned simply on Gypsy and Traveller cultures being accepting of criminality, but many factors are probably at play here. The low school attainment and high exclusion rates seen among Gypsies and Travellers have been linked to a higher incidence of criminality in people of other ethnicities. Legal professionals have also noted an increased tendency for Gypsies and Travellers to receive custodial sentences and be labelled as 'flight risks' by the criminal justice system regardless of their circumstances. Ever since Gypsies arrived in Britain in the 16th century, they have aroused fear, loathing and occasionally fascination. When Henry VIII sat on the throne, the penalty for simply being a Gypsy was execution. The 1554 "Egyptians Act" forbade Gypsies from entering England and imposed the death penalty on those that remained in the country for more than a month.

In more enlightened times, the death sentence was reduced to transportation. The 1597 Vagrancy Act made it possible for those that "will not be reformed of their roguish kind of life" to be conveyed to "parts beyond the seas". Nowadays, official policy towards Britain's travelling population recommends "toleration". The relationship between Britain and its Gypsy population has come a long way in five centuries. But many within the community feel its time the culture was not just tolerated, but celebrated.

The twentieth century saw a rise in the conflict between Britain's nomadic and settled population that has still to be resolved. Despite the widespread and continuing closure of traditional stopping places, enough common land had survived the centuries of enclosure to provide enough lawful stopping places for people whose way of life was or had become nomadic. But in 1960, the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act gave local authorities the power to close the commons and other traditional camping places to Travellers, which many proceeded to do with great energy. After a wide-ranging campaign of resistance to evictions, a new Caravan Sites Act was passed in 1968, ordering local authorities to provide sites for all Gypsies residing in or resorting to their areas. For the first time in 500 years, the British state had recognised its responsibility to provide secure, legal stopping places for British Gypsies.

Few non-Gypsies have ever visited an official Gypsy site. Many epitomise the definition of a ghetto – a racially segregated and enclosed settlement. Many have been built near rubbish dumps, sewer works or noisy industrial facilities. In 1994, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act removed the legal obligation to provide even these sites. As a result, some local councils have privatised and closed many of the legal stopping places available to Britain’s travelling population. Government policy currently recommends that travellers should house themselves, but Gypsy families that attempt to live on their own land are often denied planning permission. Over 80% of planning applications from settled people are granted consent, while more than 90% of applications from Gypsies are refused. The current conflict over “illegal” Travellers sites is in part caused by this history. 2

Within the past 50 years the Gypsy and Traveller community has experienced dramatic and often traumatic change as economic change and draconian legislation have undermined its traditionally nomadic way of life. The community’s usefulness as agriculture labourers has declined due to mechanisation and the importation of cheaper eastern European and asylum seeker labour.

A result of this and other forms of social exclusion has resulted in some Gypsies turning to crime to survive. But there are many more Gypsies who have legal businesses that contribute to society. Crime rates can actually go down when Gypsies move into an area. There is no evidence that offending is any higher among the Gypsy and Traveller population than any other.



2. In 1997, Research by ACERT (Advisory Committee for the Education of Romanies and Travellers) showed that whereas 80% of all planning applications were accepted, 90 per cent of Gypsy and Traveller applications were initially rejected (although more were passed on appeal). Reference: ACERT and Wilson M. 1997. Directory of Planning Policies for Gypsy Site Provision. Bristol: Policy Press

Myth

All Gypsies live in caravans

Truth

Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic minorities with their own culture, language and beliefs. Yet planning law defines Gypsies simply as people with a nomadic way of life. While this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies across the world now live in houses. Being nomadic is more common in Western Europe. But even here only 50% of Gypsies live in caravans. Gypsies also live in houses but they take their culture indoors with them. As these two pictures illustrate.



Myth

Gypsies and Travellers are work shy

Truth

Gypsy and Traveller labour formed the bed rock of the agricultural economy until mechanisation. Many Gypsies also sacrificed their lives for this country in the 1st and 2nd world wars.



A travelling knife grinder and metal smith plies his trade

Myth

Gypsies and Travellers have become rich through avoiding paying tax.

Truth

There is no evidence for this at all. Both Romani Gypsy and Irish Traveller culture values portable wealth and unlike non-Gypsy culture this wealth is often highly visible. A Gypsy man with a new car and caravan may look flash, but his wealth is just more visible. The amount of capital their home is worth is far less than the equity many non-Gypsies have in their houses but is constantly depreciating in value.

Myth

Gypsies are endowed with special supernatural powers, including the ability to curse and see the future.

Truth

Some Gypsies may well have psychic powers, but no more than anyone else. But some myths can be turned to a community's advantage. A nation without an army is forced to defend itself with curses and superstition. Gypsies have also earned a living by exploiting the myths that have been created about them. Gypsy and Traveller fortune tellers have exploited and cultivated the mystery that has always surrounded Gypsy culture.



Myth

Gypsies have a genetic wanderlust



These two pictures, taken 80 years apart reveal a common eviction tactic of removing Gypsy caravans onto the road.

Persecution has always been a factor in nomadic life



Truth

Some Gypsies like travelling and others don't. The urge to travel is no genetically stronger amongst Gypsies and Travellers than anyone else in the community. Nomadic life has been created by two factors, the pull of economic opportunity and the push of persecution. Gypsy and Traveller culture has adapted to suit this by continually working within trades that are highly mobile. Historically, that may have meant working as agricultural labourers, nowadays, it means providing services in the building trade or products that can be easily transported.

Myth

Gypsies and Travellers have never contributed anything to the economy or mainstream culture

“The mental age of the average adult Gypsy is thought to be about that of a child of ten. Gypsies have never accomplished anything of great significance in writing, painting, musical composition, science or social organisation. Quarrelsome, quick to anger or laughter, they are unthinkingly but not deliberately cruel. Loving bright colours, they are ostentatious and boastful, but lack bravery.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1954.

This “fact” in the Encyclopaedia Britannica was printed Ten years after thousands of Gypsy men died fighting for this country in the Second World War.

Do you recognise these famous Gypsies and Travellers?



Credit: REUTERS



Credit: Mailonline

However, there are some fundamental truths about Gypsies and Travellers that everyone should bear in mind

Truth 1

Romanies are Europe's largest and fastest growing ethnic minority

Truth 2

Execution, deportation and toleration have not dealt with the "Gypsy problem." Gypsies and Travellers are here to stay and are becoming increasingly good at demanding that their culture and way of life is accommodated

Truth 3

The current conflict over Gypsy and Traveller site provision is in nobody's interests, it is in everyone's interest to resolve it through educating the wider public about Gypsy and Traveller culture and needs.

4.

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE COMMUNITY

After 500 years in Britain, Gypsies and Travellers still face many obstacles in living their traditional lives. The agricultural economy they were once a crucial and vibrant part of is now largely mechanised or dependant on cheap Eastern European labour. Old trades like knife grinding and horse-dealing have very little relevance to the modern information economy. Yet the economic challenges facing the community are not by any means the only ones. All Gypsies and Travellers have problems accessing services that many within the settled population take for granted.

Accommodation

The greatest single issue facing Gypsy and Traveller families, is finding suitable accommodation where they can live in their caravans. And the struggle to find this accommodation is one with a long bitter history. In 1994, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act effectively outlawed the Gypsy and Traveller nomadic way of life. Among its many provisions it strengthened police eviction powers to evict Gypsy encampments and removed the statutory duty on local councils to provide caravan sites established under the 1968 Caravan Sites Act. Current government policy recommends that Travellers should house themselves on their own land. But Gypsy families who attempt to do so are often denied planning permission. The government's own studies state that over 80% of planning applications from settled people are granted consent, while more than 90% of applications from Gypsies are refused.



Sylvia Dunn, President of the National Association of Gypsy Women, knows this history better than most because she helped write it. She says “We paid for the 1968 act with blood. It took the death of three young Gypsy children before the government finally realised we needed somewhere to stop.” She explains how in the Brownhills area of Birmingham in 1966, police arrested all the adults during an eviction of a Gypsy encampment. A tent later caught fire killing three Gypsy children. But nearly 30 years later she fears history is repeating itself.

High profile evictions of Gypsies and Travellers from their own land regularly make the headlines. The settled community where the sites are, often say that if Gypsies and Travellers want a settled base, they should move into houses like everyone else, the Gypsies and Travellers say that they need a settled base from which to travel and where they can get access to education and healthcare for their families. Research published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that there is an accommodation crisis within the community. In July 2003, it estimated that Between 3000 and 4500 pitches were required to provide secure accommodation for Gypsies and Traveller.

The author Pat Niner, wrote:

“We estimate that between 1,000 and 2,000 additional residential pitches will be needed over the next five years. Between 2,000 and 2,500 additional pitches on transit sites or stopping places will also be needed to accommodate nomadism. The latter need to form a national network.” 3

3. Source: Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England
July 2003, Pat Niner
Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London
ISBN 1 85112 650 3

Access to health care

Gypsies and Travellers are widely recognised to be Britain's most marginalised community. A third of its nomadic population is homeless, it suffers from the highest rates of infant mortality, the lowest life expectancy and highest rates of illiteracy of any ethnic group.

The young ages on Gypsy and Traveller gravestones tell a tragic story: that the health of Britain's 300,000 Gypsy Travellers is often bad, and that their life is often short.

Yet health has always been important to Gypsies and Travellers. An old Gypsy proverb says Gypsies value three things: freedom, health and love, for without freedom there can be no health and without health love cannot be enjoyed. But if Gypsies value health above almost anything else, why is it in such a bad state?

In the winter of 2002, academics from the University of Sheffield's School of Health and Related Research began the first national study designed to answer that question. Funded by the Department of Health, using researchers trained by Gypsies and Travellers themselves, and with the active co-operation of the community and community organisations, they have found some answers. Published in September 2004, *The Health Status of Gypsy Travellers in England* is the first-ever academic study on Gypsy and Traveller health.

It found:

- Health problems amongst Gypsy Travellers are between two to five times more common than in the settled community
- Gypsy Travellers are more likely to be anxious, have breathing problems (including asthma and bronchitis) and chest pain. They are also more likely to suffer from miscarriages, still births, the death of young babies and older children.
- Gypsy Traveller women are twice as likely to be anxious than Gypsy

The report also looked at the reasons Gypsies and Travellers often have such bad health, such as:

- The blatant discrimination, bad communication with and ignorance about Gypsies and Travellers within the healthcare system
- Traveller attitudes to health including a traditional belief in relying on your self or family, suspicion of health services and a belief that treatment won't do any good anyway.
- The effect that lack of access to education and decent accommodation has on Gypsy and Traveller health.

Education

The blatant racism against Gypsies and Travellers in the health system has also been experienced in schools. Bullying by pupils and staff, under achievement and a traditional lack of literacy skills have often placed Gypsy and Traveller pupils at a disadvantage in schools. There are also cultural reasons why Gypsies and Travellers do not value formalised education as highly as the settled population. Gypsies and Travellers expect to be discriminated against in the labour market and so value forms of self employment much more highly than formal education and employment.

Education remains a double-edged sword for many Gypsies and Travellers. It is valued as a way of learning to read and write, but distrusted because of the “cultural pollution” that comes with it. The parents of today’s young Gypsies and Travellers (many of whom received little or no schooling) are suspicious of what comes with education. They see school as a source of what can only be described as “gorgification” (becoming like a non-Gypsy): a process that weakens Gypsy and Traveller identity and values

Parents feel that school introduces their children to drugs and courting with non-Travellers and can even affect the way they speak and see themselves. They also see schools as places where children will be bullied for being Gypsies and Travellers. For these and other reasons, Gypsies and Traveller parents keep their children away from school. There are economic reasons too, teenage Traveller girls are often expected to help at home or with caring for their younger siblings and teenage Traveller boys are often expected to be working with their fathers receiving in effect a de facto apprenticeship in how to earn a living. There are also Gypsy and Traveller children who do not want to go to school for their own reasons. Chief among these are they see it as being irrelevant, they view the teachers and children as being racist and don't like the bullying they encounter there.

Racial discrimination

On October 25th 2003, the relationship between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community reached the national headlines when members of the Firle village bonfire society in East Sussex burnt effigies of a Gypsy family in a caravan complete with the number plate "P1 KIE". At that moment, the underlying racism against Britain's largest rural ethnic minority found physical form and a symbol more at home in the deep south of the United States than the Southern England was created. But it was also a very British burning. There were no white hoods in Firle that night and the bonfire was part of a rowdy and ancient local tradition that gave birth to the phrase "reading the riot act". The twelve people arrested by Sussex Police eventually had all charges against them dropped because of lack of evidence, but Britain's 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers were outraged. Basil Burton, a veteran Romani campaigner of seventy-seven summed up how many of the Gypsy and Traveller community felt when the charges were dropped. "The reason there was little evidence is because the lord of the manor told the villagers what to say - he even provided the caravan." Another Gypsy said: "You would get the same result if you collected evidence at a lynching." Gypsy opinion was unanimous: if a car filled with black effigies and the number plate "N1 GGER" had met the same fate, the legal result would have been quite different.

But racism against Gypsies and Travellers isn't just symbolic. Firebombings of Gypsy caravans and physical assaults are also common. In May 2000, a young Irish Traveller called Johnny Delaney was beaten to death in Merseyside for simply being a Traveller. In April, 2003 The Commission for Racial Equality published its first strategy on Gypsies and Travellers. Its chairman, Trevor Phillips, also sees parallels with the way blacks have been treated in the past.

"There is no question that Gypsies and Travellers are probably the single most intensely discriminated against group in the country." says Phillips. "I've described it as a case of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK being akin to [what] black folk were in the deep south of the USA forty years ago. It is awful and it seems that almost anybody can say or do anything they like to Gypsies and Travellers simply because of what they are."

The commission's top priority is to secure better site provision for Gypsies and Travellers and get the statutory duty to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers re-instated. It has also decided to appoint its first Gypsy commissioner. But racial discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers is rarely reported because the community distrusts the police to do anything about it, largely because the community still feels the police is racist towards the community. But a lot of work in different areas of the country is being done to improve relations between Gypsies, Travellers and the police.

A CD, entitled "Del Gavvers Pukker Cheerus" or Give The Police A Chance, aims to increase the reporting of racist incidents against Gypsies and Travellers



5.

FURTHER READINGS & RESOURCES

For further readings, resources and links to other National Campaign Groups, visit

WWW.TRAVELLERSTIMES.ORG.UK

