



# Gypsy Roma Traveller

## History

### **Introduction**

All schools and educational settings should be aware of the needs of this marginalised community. The GRT pupils are one of the lowest achieving groups of children in our schools, it is therefore important that every-one involved in the education of these children and young people are both aware of their history, culture and traditions and have strategies and teaching approaches in place to overcome barriers faced.

The aim of all schools is to raise the attainment of all their pupils including their GRT pupils whether they are ascribed or not and to promote their cultural identity throughout school. Building good, effective relationships with the children, parents, carers, families and communities is paramount for schools to succeed in their aims of integrating GRT children into their schools and the education system. GRT pupils can be as successful as any other pupils and have the right to do so.

### **Getting to know Travellers**

Gypsy, Roma and Irish Travellers of Irish heritage are protected by the Race Relations Act of 1976 and have ethnic status in law. "Traveller" is an all embracing term for those groups who do not have this status. There are several distinct groups. Some terms are interchangeable but it is important to approach the question of identity with respect and for individuals to self ascribe.

### **Gypsy/Romany**

Evidence suggests that Gypsy people originally descend from India and migrated in the Middle Ages arriving in Britain in the 15th Century. When they first arrived in England they had dark skin and were thought to come from Egypt and were called Egyptians, which was later shortened to Gypsy. Indigenous travelling people already existed in most of Europe and in Britain they worked at a variety of trades, along with being important bringers of news and information. Gypsies today may identify themselves as English/Scottish/ Welsh Romany and/or Travellers. Many will maintain aspects of their Romani language, which itself has roots in Indian languages. They have a very strong sense of culture, religion and traditions and strive to follow them whenever possible.

### **Irish Travellers**

Although the movement of Travellers from Ireland to England began several centuries ago, the first reliable report of the presence of Irish Travellers dates from 1850. They found work as skilled ironmongers and general metal workers. After the Second World War, many came over here to work on the development of English motorways and later as labourers for local councils, as well as scrap metal dealers. Their way of life, experiences and expectations are similar to those of other Gypsies. They have their own language called Cant, Gammon or Shelta. The study of this language has proven their long history.

### **European Roma**

The Roma populations across European countries descend from India, and as such share a heritage with English Gypsies. Roma is the general term used to indicate Romany people from European countries. There are a number of different terms used to ascribe Roma, for example in Germany they are known as 'Sinti'.

Members of these European communities come to the United Kingdom, seeking asylum from persecution in their home countries. Many, who's home countries are now part of the EU come as migrant workers. The situation for Roma in each country varies, although it is likely that all Roma migrating or seeking asylum will have suffered great discrimination and prejudice, including direct discriminatory legislation from local and national governments. Some will have suffered physical attack there are alarming numbers of well documented cases of this.

### **Fairground Travellers**

Fairs have been held since the earliest of times and traditionally brought together the important elements of trade and festival. In the Middle Ages, Royal Charters gave the fairs legal status and this developed their economic importance. Between 1200 and 1400, over 4860 charters were granted as it was realised that these events had become of significant economic importance. Traders came long distances to sell their goods and so too did the travelling performers who did good business keeping the traders and customers amused.

By the early 18th century the trading aspect of these charter fairs had diminished and the fairs consisted almost entirely of amusements. With the advent of technology, these amusements have slowly evolved into the modern day travelling fairs that we know today. The men, women and children who live and work at travelling fairs today are known as Showmen. Much time is spent travelling with the fair. Some families have winter quarters, where they can spend winter and stop travelling to repair their equipment and rides and prepare for the following season.

### **Circus Travellers**

The first modern circus is thought to have been presented in London in 1768. Circuses were introduced throughout Europe so that by the beginning of the 19th century there were permanent circuses as well as travelling ones. The travelling shows would have included musicians, jugglers and acrobats performing in open spaces. This developed into performances for which admission was charged, with tents being introduced around 1820. Performances then evolved to include clowns, wild animals, equestrian acts and acrobatics. Circus families have a seasonal pattern of travelling and may spend the winter season at their home site or abroad, having toured around the UK and possibly Europe. Children who travel with the circus may either be performers themselves, or children of performers. Performers may come from many different countries and their first language may not be English.

### **New Travellers**

The newest of the Traveller communities many having taken to the road for a variety of reasons in the last 30 years. Their history and culture are still very much evolving. Their roots lie in the majority settled community although in recent years many children have been born into a Travelling way of life and know no other lifestyle.

## **Bargees**

This community traditionally worked on the canal system throughout the UK and today is the smallest of the travelling communities. The Bargee population is much greater in European countries where waterway systems are used as a means of industrial transportation.

In the UK there is a known small population of families living on seagoing coastal boats that travel between small harbours and ports on the south coast during the summer months.

## **Historical Timeline**

**53 B.C.E** Fairs are being held in Britain after the Roman invasion.

**c.1000 C.E** Groups of Roma, originating in Northern India, reach modern Greece and Turkey.

**1100s C.E** Travellers first recorded in Ireland. Travelling smiths mentioned in Scottish records.

**1200s C.E** Many fairs are created by Royal Charter, including Bridlington (1200) and Hull (1299). By the turn of the 13th Century Roma begin to arrive in Western Europe.

**1498** Four Gypsies travel to the New World with Christopher Columbus.

**1505** King James the Fourth of Scotland pays seven pounds to “Egyptians” stopped at Stirling, who may have come from Spain. Parish records from around this time show that Irish Travellers are already living in England.

**1530** Gypsies are forbidden to enter England under Henry VIII. Those already there are deported.

**1554** Queen Mary of England passes the Egyptians Act. Being a Gypsy is punishable by death, as is being found in “the fellowship or company of Egyptians”. This is the only time that fraternizing with an ethnic community has been punishable by death.

**1570s** Scottish Gypsies are ordered to stop travelling or leave the country. First records of the Kale Gypsies in Wales. The first recorded Gypsy presence in Leeds is in the Leeds Parish registers of 1572.

**1650s** Last known hanging for the crime of being a Gypsy, in Suffolk, England. Gypsies are deported to America.

**1660-1800** English Gypsies calling themselves Romanichals survive by working for trusted non-Gypsies who know them. Appleby Fair granted chartered fair status in 1685 by James II. Ballinasloe Fair receives its royal charter in 1722.

**1714** British Gypsies are shipped to the Caribbean as slaves.

**1768** The first modern Circus is held in London.

**1780** Some English anti-Gypsy laws begin to be repealed.

**1800s** Fairs start to include mechanical rides, as they still do today.

**1820s** Tents start to be used for fairs under George IV.

**1830s** Covered horse drawn wagons begin to be used by Gypsies in Britain. Many Gypsies live in the more makeshift bender tents, and will continue to do so until the mid-late 20th Century.

**1880s** Agricultural depression in England. Many Travellers and Gypsies are poverty stricken and move to urban squatters’ areas. Hundreds of Irish Travellers leave Ireland for Britain.

**1889** Showmen in Britain form the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Association, later called the Showmen’s Guild, to fight the Moveable Dwellings Bill, which restricts Travellers’ movements.

**1908** The Children's Act makes education compulsory for Travelling children in England by The Children's Act, but only for half the year.

**1930s-60s** Groups of European Roma come to live in Britain.

**1934** Django Reinhardt introduces "swing jazz" to the world. A major influence on the development of Jazz.

**1939-45** World War II. Nazis compose lists of English Gypsies to be interned. In Britain, the government builds caravan camps for Gypsies serving in the forces or doing vital farm work. These are closed when the war finishes. Roma, Sinti and other Gypsies are stripped of all human rights by the Nazis. As many as 600,000 are murdered in camps and gas chambers. This is Porrajmos (the devouring), the Roma holocaust in Europe.

**1945-60** Travellers start to use motor drawn trailers, and some buy their own land to stop on with them.

**1960** New private sites are banned from being built in England by The Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act. Mass evictions and public harassment of Gypsies and Travellers. Irish Government "Commission on Itinerancy" begins a programme to assimilate Irish Travellers.

**1968** Lord Avebury helps to pass the new Caravan Sites Act. From 1970, the Government have to provide caravan sites for Travellers.

**1970s-1990s** People from the settled community start to take to the road and live in caravans. They are known as "New Age Travellers" in the media.

**1994** The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act abolishes the Caravan Sites Act. This is disastrous for all Travellers living in Britain, and more than 5,000 families now have no legal home. Local councils became duty bound to identify land for private purchase by Travellers. Not one local council adhered to this.

**1997** Slovak Romani refugees arrive in Dover, England. The media reaction is openly hostile.

**2000** The amended Race Relations Act recognises Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority. This has not yet happened in Ireland, where they are seen instead as a "social minority". Scottish Travellers are still not recognised as an ethnic minority in Scotland. In England, Gypsy-led protests at the ban of the 600 year old fair at Horsemonden in Kent are successful and the ban is finally lifted in 2006.

**2003** Irish Traveller Johnny Delaney, 15, is kicked to death in Cheshire for being "only an f\*\*\*ing Gypsy", as Eyewitnesses report. The Judge at his murderers' trial rules that it was not a racially motivated attack and sentences the killers to 4½ years.

**2003** 12 Sussex Bonfire Society members arrested for incitement to racial hatred after burning an effigy of a caravan containing images of Gypsy women and children, and pained with inflammatory slogans.

**2004** The labour government makes it a legal duty to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Traveller.

**2005** The Sun newspaper launches its "Stamp on the Camps" campaign against Gypsies and Travellers. The Conservatives try to get re-elected by targeting Gypsies supposed flouting of planning laws.

**2006** BBC starts Rokker Radio, the first programme for Gypsies and Travellers in its history.

**2008** Britain celebrates the first Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. But in Italy, Roma camps are firebombed by neo-Nazis.