



Briefing Note Number: 17

Gypsy and Traveller Culture

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1. Executive Summary

The various travelling communities are often confused with one another and it can be difficult to understand what the differences between a Romani Gypsy and an Irish Traveller or a New Traveller are.

This briefing note gives information about all the Gypsy and Traveller groups found in Plymouth and how their history and culture differ. Information can be found on:

- Which groups are covered by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000?
- What jobs do the different groups do?





2. Introduction

While Gypsies and Travellers are united by their travelling lifestyles each community within this racial classification has its own distinct culture. Romani and Roma Gypsies and Irish Travellers are all recognised ethnic minorities with distinct traditions around cleanliness and gender. Other groups are recognised as Travellers through their patterns of movement and the requirements they have for specific accommodation, but they too have their own history and aspirations for the future.

The different groups seen in Plymouth include:

- Circus families
- Fairground and Showmen
- Irish Travellers
- New Travellers
- Romani and Roma Gypsies

'Traveller' is a generic term defining diverse cultural and ethnic communities who have a similar, essentially mobile way of life. Most Traveller families have strong family and social networks (whether in housing or in caravans), live within close-knit communities, and often travel as such. This is a key feature of the traditional way of life that has an impact on planning for their accommodation locally.

	<p align="center">Romani/Roma Gypsies</p> 	<p align="center">Irish Travellers</p> 	<p align="center">Fairground/Circus Families</p> 	<p align="center">New Travellers</p> 
History	<p>Romani and Roma Gypsy roots lie in Northern India, where nomadic groups first started moving towards Europe around 1000 years ago.</p>	<p>Irish Travellers were originally forced to lead a travelling lifestyle through poverty, evictions and famine, eventually leading to metalworking becoming one of the first trades.</p>	<p>In the thirteenth century, the creation of fairs by royal charter was widespread. The Van Dwellers' Association (later the Showmen's Guild) was founded in 1889 to protect the interests of travelling showpeople.</p>	<p>The first 'New' Travellers appeared as part of the sixties 'hippy' generation as people were brought together to support the anti-war and free love movement.</p>
Ethnicity	<p>The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 defines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English, Welsh and Scottish Gypsies and European Roma • Irish Travellers • Showmen and Circus families <p>as distinct ethnic minorities because of their long shared history, with family and cultural traditions that distinguish them from other groups.</p>			<p>This community does not receive the protection of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, but are considered Travellers in relation to the needs they have for mobile/flexible accommodation and the support they require from health and education services.</p>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct language – Romani. • Although Gypsies today speak fluent English, much of their language is derived from the ancient Sanskrit language of India. • Many of the words used today have been adopted into the English language of today. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelta (also known as Gammen, Sheldru, Pavee, or simply the Cant) is a language spoken by parts of the Irish Traveller community. 	N/A	N/A

	<p>→ 'chav' is derived from the Romani word 'chavies' meaning children.</p> <p>→ 'mulla' a common slang word for money is a Romani word.</p> <p>→ 'cushty' – immortalised by 'Del-boy' Trotter.</p>			
Traditions and Culture	<p>Cleanliness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gypsies would not wash their hands in the kitchen sink, as this sink is for the specific and exclusive use of dishes and pots and pans. Hands are washed in the bathroom. Gypsies and Travellers believe the use of toilets within the vehicles to be unhygienic and the toilets are therefore removed when the vehicles are purchased. <p>Gender roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gypsy culture still holds 'traditional' views of male and female roles within the family males go out to work and women look after the home and the children From the age of 12 years onwards it is common for young boys to go out to work with their fathers, uncles and grandfathers. There are also strict values around sex education, pregnancy and young women. Families do not generally approve of early sex education within schools, as they do not see it as 	<p>Cleanliness</p> <p>As for Romani Gypsies</p> <p>Gender Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the marriage customs, allow for 11 year old girls to be engaged to be married to 20+ year old men. Weddings occur as young as 16, often to a first or second cousin. The bride's parents pay the groom's parents a dowry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entry to the Showmen's Guild, with it's many responsibilities, rights, and privileges, is tightly controlled, and the Guild has established itself as a firm regulatory body for it's members, with increasing commitment to education. <p>Circus Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like Showmen, circus families have a long heritage as travelling entertainers. Tend to experience less discrimination, harassment or isolation than Gypsy or Irish Traveller groups. Show and Circus children successfully access school, even when highly mobile, particularly during the primary school phase. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are now seeing third generation 'New' Travellers who have been born into this culture and feel a strong alliance to the values and traditions. Core to the culture of this community is the element of choice and this leads to a vast level of diversity amongst the individuals and families. The motivation of many is to lead a wholly self-reliant lifestyle, providing for one self and family. Others wish to lead a more sustainable lifestyle and see the benefits in living outside of mainstream society in order to make ethical personal choices around sustainability and electricity, for example.

	<p>necessary due to the cultural 'taboo' of sex before marriage.</p> <p>European Roma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the Roma Gypsies within the UK today do not live in trailers and do not travel. However, this does not weaken their alliance with the Roma culture and many families still get together for social events, despite, sometimes, being placed in housing far away from each other. 			
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers can experience illiteracy issues • Therefore, they have developed a tradition of story telling and singing as a way of passing on their knowledge to future generations • Modern schooling (with the support of the Travellers Education Service) is much more advanced and most schools are capable of teaching Gypsy and Traveller children with the help of long distance learning packs and broadband connected laptops. 			
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional crafts such as spoon mending, metalwork and flower making have died out now as a result of urbanisation and the introduction of plastic and industrial technology. • Commonly sell goods such as three-piece suites, electrical goods and generators when they stop in towns and cities throughout the county, as well as the more traditional occupations within the building trade. • Agricultural work (daffodil picking, farm labour) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows and fairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment varies: • Some families travel around festivals and fairs in the summer months • Agricultural work • Teaching and other professions 	

Travelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly travel between March and September • Travelling patterns relate to the seasons (and work available in those seasons) as well as the cultural importance of visiting relatives. • Modern Irish Travellers who visit Plymouth every year often use the Catholic Churches and prefer to send their children to Catholic schools. • Gypsies and Travellers visiting the city also commonly use the port to visit France and Spain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel established routes through the summer season, passing on rights to pitches at particular fairs sometimes from generation to generation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel around festivals and fairs • Agricultural seasons 	
Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most require some sort of winter 'base' site. • Sites are either provided for privately or through the local authority. • Families on sites pay a licence fee, council tax, water and electricity rates. • Families can register with local GP's, Dentist and schools at the site • Sites are used as a base to travel from when working or visiting family. Then returned to throughout the winter months. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showmen mostly have established winter quarter's sites, which they traditionally occupy from November to March. • During the working season the local authority or private landowners hiring the circus or fair provide sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some do not want provision of sites at all, but instead would be satisfied with a review of the squatting laws to allow them to use public disused spaces without being subjected to criminal sanctions. • Others need the provision of public sites, but for them to be ecologically friendly and sustainable in their development. 	
Additional sources of information:		For more information, visit the Irish Traveller Movement website: http://www.itmtrav.com/	More detailed information can be found at the Showman's Guild website: http://www.showmensguild.com/index26.html	For more information, go to the Friends, Families and Travellers website: http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/

For more information please contact Social Inclusion unit on 01752 30 4321.