WHAT MAKES A HOME?
Introduction

During Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, we celebrate the unique and diverse histories, cultures and languages of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK, and also the considerable and outstanding contributions made by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and communities to wider society.

In this booklet, you’ll find brief introductions to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories and cultures, but there are plentiful resources already out there which can support your understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller experiences through history and today.

Travellers’ Times have produced a short video ‘Roads from the Past’ which provides a brief overview of the histories of some of the largest Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK.

This year our theme for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month is ‘What Makes a Home’.

We are asking people across the UK to consider ‘What Makes a Home’ for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people - and how you can better understand and practice being welcoming to local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, we are asking organisations to consider whether your services are open and inclusive to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. This might look different for different people.

If you work in TV or media industries
This might mean considering whether your portrayals of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people provide an authentic representation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller home life and whether they encourage audiences to be welcoming and accepting to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

If you work for a Government organisation
This might mean considering whether your policy work and service delivery gives honour to the historic rights of Gypsies and Travelers to travel and live in culturally appropriate accommodation.

For individuals
This might mean expanding your own awareness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller lived experiences - including histories and cultures and making efforts to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to uphold their rights.

Thank you for joining the 2022 celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month!

Every June since 2008, people from across the UK have celebrated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month (GRTHM). With celebration, education and efforts to raise awareness of the histories and experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, GRTHM helps to tackle prejudice, challenge myths and to amplify the voices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and the generations who came before them often have warm and impressive stories of migration, around the UK, Ireland, across Europe and the world. The understanding of what makes a home can change with locations, people, historic places and more.

This year, the Government are bringing in new laws within the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which will criminalise the nomadic way of life. For many Gypsy and Traveller families in England and Ireland, home and nomadism are weaved together.

Nomadism, a way of living which is over 500 years old, bonded families and communities together, through travel, celebration, community care and collaboration with settled people.

The new laws within the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill threatens to crush this traditional way of life.

Warmest wishes
Sarah Mann
Director

We would love for you to take part in our celebrations this June and we hope that within this resource pack you will find inspiration and information to get involved.

To bring this work together, we received support, knowledge and input from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and nomadic people across the country - I’d like to send a special thanks to all of our colleagues and friends who contributed.

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Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people through history

The rich and diverse histories of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are largely absent from classrooms, books and museums. The timeline across these pages gives a small glimpse into the international histories of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers.

There are many different people and groups who fit under the umbrella term ‘Gypsies, Roma and Travellers’ used in society. This can include Roma people, Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsy Travellers, New Travellers, Liveaboard Boaters and Travelling Showpeople.

In the timeline below, we include key dates in history for people of Romany Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma and Scottish Gypsy Traveller ethnicities. We include the events below as a starting point for your further reading and learning.

1500s
Romany Gypsies first recorded in England were incorrectly thought to have travelled from Egypt. In 1530, Henry VIII’s ‘Egyptians Act’ expelled Romany Gypsies in England. In 1554, Queen Mary ruled that being a Gypsy was punishable by death.4

1600s
Irish people began to split from the general population around 12 generations ago in the 1600s – ‘an lucht siúil’ (the walking people) became known for storytelling and sharing songs from city to city.5

1650
Last known hanging for the crime of being a Gypsy in Suffolk, England.6

1850
Romany people historically travelled with elaborately made ‘bender tents’. From 1850 onwards, Gypsy Wagons are used to travel, with bender tents used alongside.

1940s
Roma and Sinti people, sometimes called the ‘forgotten victims’ of the Holocaust were deported to concentration camps, subject to mass murder and horrific medical experimentation by Nazi soldiers. Over 200,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered or died as a result of starvation or disease.7

1940s-1960s
General adoption of a mechanised caravan, rather than a horsedrawn wagon.8

1963
The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy is the first systematic attempt by the Irish government to settle Travellers in Ireland, aiming to force families off the road, into bricks and mortar accommodation.9

5. https://www.nature.com/articles/srep42187
Romany Gypsies were recognised in Britain as a distinct ethnic minority group under the 1976 English Race Relations Act.10

Germany officially recognise the genocide of Roma and Sinti people in the Second World War.11

Roma communities begin seeking asylum in England through the 1990s.

Following expansions of the European Union, there is an increase in migration of Roma people to the UK from across Europe.

Scottish Gypsy Travellers recognised as an indigenous ethnic minority group in Britain.12

Ireland 2020
Eileen Flynn becomes the first Irish Traveller to become a senator in Ireland.

England 2020
The High Court rules that Local Authorities are no longer able to issue blanket bans on Gypsies and Travellers stopping on parcels of land, recognising that ‘the Gypsy and Traveller community have an enshrined freedom not to stay in one place but to move from one place to another’.14

2022
The Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill proceeds through the Houses of Commons and Lords with MPs and peers voting to criminalise trespass. The new laws will mean nomadic Gypsy and Traveller people are at risk of having their vehicle (home) confiscated, fines and imprisonment.

1. https://minorityrights.org/minorities/romagypsiestravellers/

Photograph of Eileen Flynn: “Creative Commons Seanad Éireann - First Sitting of the 26th Seanad - 29 June 2020” by Houses of the Oireachtas is licensed under CC by 2.0
Davie

My name is Davie, I’m a Scottish Traveller. I’ve lived in houses my whole life and I live in a house now, but seasonally my family have always gone on the road and ‘moving’ into a trailer each year. Sometimes a home can be a piece of land, a layby or a side of the road where that your family has called home for thousands of years. Our house is where we keep our things, but on the road, it feels more natural.

For me, it was more about the place where the trailer was parked, rather than the trailer itself. When we camped in cities, we stopped on industrial estates and the like - because there was nowhere else to go. My dad and cousins would work, and we would move on after a couple of weeks.

I didn’t get that feeling of being at home, you felt scared; unsure if people in cars were planning to report us or start a fight. But on camps, being told stories of people who had lived there for hundreds of years, people you haven’t met, but you’d met through stories. That’s when I felt truly at home, when you’re in those places.

For me, cooking on the fire feels like home. Getting bought or inheriting your first cast iron pan is a right of passage. Cooking on the fire is a link to life on the road. It gives a sense of peace and safety.

My grandad and granny would have lived in similar ways to me, but they would have lived in a bow-tent. My granny’s people owned wagons periodically, but mostly would have lived in a tent. Most Travellers then would have lived on the road. Home for my grandparents would have been anywhere they were surrounded by their family. Although, in her day, there still will have been ancestral camps that will have been used for a long time. We have camps here, that some say were stopping places during the Roman times. I can only assume she would have the same feeling that I did, camping in places like that.

There’s a big sense of pride when you’re shifting with family and loved ones on the road. You’re free to be you.

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What makes a home?

We asked Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and nomadic people across the UK to tell us what they think of, when they think of home. We heard that home means family, acceptance, food, historic places, heirlooms, community and much more.

Mania

I am a Roma woman, I am 49 years old. I am Eastern European/Balkan Roma. I don’t feel like I’ve found my home in a particular country yet, feeling home for me would mean acceptance - the place where I feel like I can be myself. I was born in Croatia, in a tent.

My mother and father ran away together, because they were from different Roma communities. My family, and I as a baby, were living in a tent at that time, but enforcement authorities were coming and breaking the tent everyday, telling us to leave. We had to run away from the country, without any documents. We arrived in Italy at a camp with lots of Roma people from many of the Balkan states and across the world; Roma people from many subgroups and speaking different languages. We lived in tents with our family, eating food cooked on the fire.

We couldn’t go to school because we didn’t have paperwork. From there, with other families, we moved to Sweden, Holland, France, Germany, Belgium and more. We would have to move when the authorities forced us away from the country, or when country people (gorja) were violent towards us.

I feel at home when I’m eating barbeque with my family. The smell, the way it carries through the home; it brings back good memories of being together.

My grandfather on my father’s side was an amazing man. He married just before the Second World War and his wife had a baby. They were captured by the Black Legion and put in concentration camps with his mother, father, brothers and sister.

All the family were killed apart from my grandfather and his brother. They were experimented on by Nazi soldiers. Home for our family has been difficult, as we have been chased away from so many places. Roma people are so often not accepted.
I’m an Irish Traveller, born just outside Manchester in England. I’m married with 3 wonderful children and a beautiful wife. I live in bricks and mortar at the moment, but plan on bringing my family travelling again.

I was born in the 80s on a Traveller campsite. I was one of nine children. There were a lot of different families on the camp. They were tough days, but that was my childhood and I’m proud of them. We were travelling for a few years, from place to place, until my mother fell ill, and we had to move into a house because it was better for her health.

When we moved into the house, our neighbours didn’t like us, there were petitions, calls to the council and all sorts, but we stayed where we were. I miss the trailers, sites, camps - it’s in our blood, it’s who we are. There’s a sense of belonging when we’re roadside with our family, these people mean something to you. It’s the community, the closeness - the sense of being part of something bigger than yourself.

Wherever my family is, that’s my home.

We’d travel for weddings, events, to see someone who was ill or to pay our respects. To me, home is where my family is. Wherever my family is, that’s my home. I grew up with my cousins and my family and when we were younger, we would be camped together - the relationships we had were more than friendships, it’s brotherly; as an adult, we live in different places, but there’s a longing to see each other and speak about the old times.

Sometimes there would have been four or five generations of family on a camp. My grandmother would have lived in bow tents. I have beautiful memories of her, she came to visit us as often as she could. If I was asked what home for her was, it would have been her children - having her children round her. She also loved all of her grandchildren and enjoyed spending time with us. My uncle still makes the old tents - he teaches young Traveller children to make these tents in back in Ireland, so they can understand the ways we used to live.

I’m Romany Gypsy. The first place I remember living was on yard in a small tourer, it had a log burner for wood or coal. There was a stream down the side. I remember being scared by thunder and lightning on the yard, one day when I was out without my brother. We were inseparable.

After that, we moved in to a big Showman’s trailer which was red and silver on the outside, there was a living space and two bedrooms in it. We lived next to Cordona’s funfair.

In the Summertime, I would look after my younger brother, who had a heart condition, helping wash, clean and cook. My older brother would work at the Fair. From when I was about 12, I would work at the bingo.

We would go to the cafes and the shops - everyone got on really well.

It wasn’t like now. The Cordona’s owned a disco place - one day Leo Sayer sang to me. I didn’t have the common savvy then to know it was a big thing. We stayed on a residential outside Aberdeen for a while and then we had to move into a house for my brother’s medical issues.

History repeats itself, because I’m doing the same with my daughter now - living in a house to receive medical support. My brother and I were traumatised by the house. What made me feel like home, was not just being in the trailer, say the hobby, with the rain on the roof - but having my people around me. I wasn’t scared. When I feel isolated from my people, it gives me anxiety.

That’s why we need more sites. Everyone needs to feel, where they are, we belong. I feel safe, in my trailer, on a site.

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Tyler

My name is Tyler, I live in South London but am originally from West Oxfordshire. I’m a Showman, up until I was 7 I lived in a huge trailer which we would take to different fun fairs around the country. We’d leave around March and be out until about October.

In the Winter we didn’t have a permanent base for ages so we used to spend different Winters in different places, but always in the same trailer. Because Showmen have lorries, we can pull bigger units. The wagons we had were massive, about 40 foot long, and had central heating - it was a decent space. I used to really enjoy it.

Now I live in a flat in Lewisham. Because I didn’t have a house I grew up in, and the trailer we had when we were younger probably doesn’t exist anymore, there’s not a place I can go specifically that feels like home.

But when I think of home, it’s more like spaces - that park feels like home because I felt comfortable there. As a Showman, we get to go there year after year, we see cities and places change. There’s something about a big fair that you know will be really busy - everyone will be there, people you haven’t seen for ages.

With everyone getting ready to set up, and then doing the thing that you’re best at - that can feel like home. It’s common for Travellers of any description to keep things that remind them of home - I have lots of pictures and books about funfairs in my home. My great aunt Annie Hatwell was one of those people who was incredibly old my entire life. She had a tiny trailer where she made candy floss and toffee apples to sell on a kiosk at the fair. I woke up one morning, really early when no one else was up. She was showing me how to make toffee apples and talking to me.

She would rarely use electric, because she grew up in a time when it wasn’t used. She made me a cup of tea in this tiny space. She moved into a house when she was older, to a house with loads of blankets - she was always making cakes. That house has been knocked down now, and where they’ve built new houses, it’s called Hatwell Row.

Showman

When I think of home, it’s more like spaces - that park feels like home because I felt comfortable there.

Savannah

I’ve stayed on the water, because I really do feel that this is my home. When you pull up somewhere new, it feels so refreshing. Your plans can change in a moment when you see someone you know, you all pull on to the side together, that’s it - the kids are playing, the dogs are put out, someone’s got a fire pit, someone’s wrapping potatoes. It’s that moment of joy, seeing someone you’ve not seen someone you know for a long time.

I remember feeling at home for the first time, with my big shoes, next to my daughters. We’ve spent the last couple of years planting daffodils everywhere we stop - when we’re passing places now, my daughter wonders if the daffodils we see in the hedges are ones that we planted.

I grew up in a flat in Swindon and currently live on the Kennet and Avon canal. My family lived in a flat until I was 10, which is when we moved onto a boat. We lived in a 60ft boat for about a year and a half and then a tiny little wooden boat, all 5 of us. We lived on there for a couple of years - I actually moved out when I was 15 and had a little boat that was towed behind, to give me a bit of privacy.

My mum’s grandmother was Romany Gypsy, we had buses and trucks and all sorts when we were kids. We had done a lot of camping and exploring when we were younger. My dad now lives in a truck on the road, my mum lived in a caravan and then a house.

I’ve stayed on the water, because I really do feel that this is my home. When you pull up somewhere new, it feels so refreshing. Your plans can change in a moment when you see someone you know, you all pull on to the side together, that’s it - the kids are playing, the dogs are put out, someone’s got a fire pit, someone’s wrapping potatoes. It’s that moment of joy, seeing someone you’ve not seen someone you know for a long time.

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Some words and phrases in Romani dialects

Roma, Manouche, Kale, Sinti, Romany Gypsy and people from the Romani diaspora live across the world.

There are more than 10 million people of Romani descent in Europe alone. Romani, Romanes or Romani čhib (Romani tongue) is a rich family of languages with an Indo-Aryan root. It is the only Indio-Aryan language that has been spoken exclusively in Europe since the Middle Ages.

Much of the vocabulary and grammar are related to Sanskrit. The language used by Romani people is a source of great pride, it facilitates connection and communication between the Romani diaspora across the world. Nearly all Romani speakers are multilingual (speak another language) and will use the language of the majority population where they live. It is estimated that there are 4.6 million Romani speakers in Europe.

There are many different dialects of Romani spoken in England alone. The language is historically fluid, adapting with location and between families. There may be differences in words or structure commonly spoken across Europe and there may be a difference in spelling or pronunciation.
BEAUTIFUL

Galicia (Rumungry)
Szukar
Kalderash
Sukar
Lovari
Sukar
English Romaniachal
Rinkeni

FOOD

Galicia (Rumungry)
Haben
Kalderash
Haben
Lovari
Habe
English Romaniachal
Hobben

MY HOME HAS...

Galicia (Rumungry)
Dre mindoro kher
Kalderash
Moro char sas
Lovari
Ande moro ker si
English Romaniachal
Adrey mandies kher/kenna amandies diks

PETS

Galicia (Rumungry)
Macka (cat) Rukono (dog)
Kalderash
Animale chereske
Lovari
Muci/Goukel
English Romaniachal
Jiviners

IN MY HOME

Galicia (Rumungry)
Kie mande khere
Kalderash
Ando moro char
Lovari
Ande moro ker
English Romaniachal
Adrey mandies kher/kenna

WE COOK

Galicia (Rumungry)
Talas
Kalderash
Amen chiravas
Lovari
Chi ravas
English Romaniachal
Amandies ker hobben

WE PLAY

Galicia (Rumungry)
Baszalas
Kalderash
Amen chelasamen
Lovari
Ame kelasaman
English Romaniachal
Amandies kel

WE DANCE

Galicia (Rumungry)
Khelas
Kalderash
Amen chelas
Lovari
Ame kelas
English Romaniachal
Amandies kel

WE SING

Galicia (Rumungry)
Gilalas
Kalderash
Amen ghilabas
Lovari
Ame ghilabas
English Romaniachal
Amandies kom gilling

We would like to thank Gabriel Covaci, Monia Molek, Mattey Mitchell and Sonia Michalewicz for supporting us with these translations.
Hello
Grālt’a

Good morning
Slum hawrum

Good evening
Slum dorahog

It’s good to see you
Tome ta Soonee ya lace

You are looking well
Yoordjeele’s soonee-in munya

See you later
Muni got-in to

This is my home
Mwiša’s havari

My home
Mo havari

Family
Tribli

Beautiful
Bura/Buri

To cook
T’ērp

To make
Grati

To sing
Swurk

To dance
Dausa

Some words and phrases in Scottish Cant

Scottish Cant is spoken between Scottish Gypsy Traveller or Nacken people.

While there can be general strains of Cant, localised dialects mean there are infinite evolutions of words and phrases. The language is almost entirely oral and differs between geographical locations or through family and social preferences. The language is constantly evolving.

For Scottish Gypsy Travellers, Scottish Cant is often the first language for children, but will be accompanied by other languages used by parents. Scottish Cant shares greater commonality with Romanès than with Gaelic languages, revealing the lineage of Scottish Gypsy Travellers from Northern India, with Roma peoples. It is part of the phenomenon of Indic diaspora languages spoken by travelling communities of Indian origin outside India.

There are different dialects of Scottish Cant and in Scotland alone, there can be differences in words commonly spoken across the country and differences in spelling between people.

We would like to thank Davie Donaldson for supporting us with these translations.
Celebrating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month on social media

This June, we would be delighted to see people across the country harness the positive power of social media to raise the profile of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month and to celebrate the contributions people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have made to your local area.

For the month of June, you can share your Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month activities on social media using these hashtags. You can also find other Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month projects, activities and events around the country and get involved.

What can I do right now?

Copy and paste the messages below to Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!

**Post 1**

This June, I’m celebrating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. Are you?

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have diverse and rich histories and cultures in the UK.

This year the theme for #GRTHM is #WhatMakesAHome?


**Post 2**

Through education and celebration #GRTHM challenges prejudice and shares the rich and diverse Gypsy, Roma and Traveller histories.

This year we’re asking #WhatMakesAHome?

Roads, water, fairgrounds, family. Home comes in many shapes and sizes.


Use these hashtags to shout about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month

#WhatMakesAHome #GRTHM #GRTHM22
Quotes from ‘Bullied, Not Believed and Blamed’ an Anti-Bullying Alliance and Friends, Families and Travellers report:

“They should tell people all the contributions Gypsies and Travellers have made in history.”

“Sometimes they think we’re one but you’ve got Romany Traveller, Irish Traveller, Mixed English. There’s like loads of different ones but they just throw us all in together.”

“Don’t teach nothing about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history or culture. Makes you feel like no one understands.”

“You don’t see any representation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller in schools. We are invisible.”

With thanks to all who made contributions to this work

Abiline McShane
Chelsea McDonagh
Chris McDonagh
Davie Donaldson
Emma Nuttall
Gabriel Covaci
Lucy Hetherington
Luke Wenman
Mania Malek
Mattey Mitchell
Maxine Lambert

Mihai Bica
Roma Support Group
Rosa Cisneros
Savannah Norcliffe
Sonia Michalewicz
Suzanna King
Traveller Pride
Tyler Hatwell

Design by studionovello.co.uk
Friends, Families and Travellers: Working towards equality

We work to end racism and discrimination against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life.

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Like us on Facebook /FriendsFamiliesandTravellers
Follow us on Twitter @GypsyTravellers
Follow us on Instagram @FriendsFamiliesandTravellers

SUPPORT OUR WORK