

# 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.

**998AD**  
People with Roma heritage travelled from northwest India as prisoners, slaves and soldiers. Theories suggest 60,000 Roma people were forcibly enlisted to the army of Mahmud of Ghazni and after his death, were expelled from Indian territories and driven to nomadism.<sup>1</sup>

**1100s**  
Ancient laws in Scotland recognise a community of people called 'tinklers' from their occupation as tinsmiths. They are viewed differently to mainstream society, seen to have their own customs and dialect.<sup>2</sup>





**1200s**  
Roma people in the territories of modern day Romania were taken as slaves and forced to work in monasteries, mines and in fields. Slaves were the property of their owners, bought and sold in their hundreds. It was not until 1856 that the Moldavian and Wallachian Assemblies abolished slavery within their principalities.<sup>3</sup>

**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.<sup>4</sup>



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



**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.<sup>5</sup>




**1940s-1960s**  
General adoption of a mechanised caravan, rather than a horsedrawn wagon.<sup>6</sup>

**1650**  
Last known hanging for the crime of being a Gypsy in Suffolk, England.<sup>6</sup>

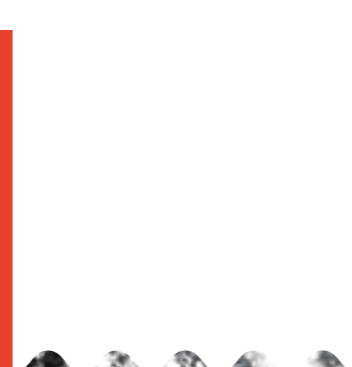
**1940s**  
Roma and Sinti people, sometimes called the 'forgotten victims' of the Holocaust were deported to concentration camps, subject to mass murder and horrific medical experimentation by Nazi soldiers. Over 200,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered or died as a result of starvation or disease.<sup>7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

**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.<sup>8</sup>



1. <https://kopachi.com/articles/a-new-look-at-our-romani-origins-and-diaspora-by-ronald-lee/>
2. <https://www.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/gt-timeline-A4-web.pdf>
3. <https://romediafoundation.wordpress.com/2014/04/18/roma-slavery-in-the-romanian-territories-a-catch-22-of-history-and-recognition/#>
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z2b36fr/revision/2>
5. <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep42187>
6. <https://www.historytoday.com/reviews/gypsies-england>
7. <https://www.hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/nazi-persecution/the-porrajmos/>
8. <https://www.salford.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/info-for-parents-students-and-teachers/ethnic-minorities-and-travellers/traveller-wagon-project/history-of-wagons-and-wagon-building/>
9. <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/AssimilationPolicies.pdf>

**1976**  
Romany Gypsies were recognised in Britain as a distinct ethnic minority group under the 1976 English Race Relations Act.<sup>10</sup>




**1982**  
Germany officially recognise the genocide of Roma and Sinti people in the Second World War.<sup>11</sup>





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



10. <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/romagypsies/travellers/#>
11. <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/sinti-and-roma-federal-republic-germany/>
12. [https://cross-examines/docs/gypsy\\_travellers\\_in\\_contemporary\\_scotland.pdf](https://cross-examines/docs/gypsy_travellers_in_contemporary_scotland.pdf)
13. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/travellers-formally-recognised-as-an-ethnic-minority-1.2994309>
14. <https://ukhumanrightsblog.com/2020/01/27/court-of-appeal-upholds-the-right-to-roam-of-romany-and-travellers/>

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



**2008**  
Scottish Gypsy Travellers recognised as an indigenous ethnic minority group in Britain.<sup>12</sup>

**2000**  
Irish Travellers recognised in British law as an ethnic group, following a legal challenge in court brought by eight individuals refused service at five pubs in London.

**2017**  
Irish Travellers are recognised as a distinct ethnic group in Ireland, and recognised as Ireland's only indigenous community.<sup>13</sup>

**2004/2007**  
Following expansions of the European Union, there is an increase in migration of Roma people to the UK from across Europe.





**FRIENDS, FAMILIES & TRAVELLERS**

**JUNE 20 22 GYPSY, ROMA and TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH**

Every June since 2008, people from across the UK have celebrated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. Through celebration, education and raising awareness, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month helps to tackle prejudice, challenge myths and to amplify the voices of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in wider society.

**#WhatMakesAHome #GRTHM #GRTHM22**  
[gypsy-traveller.org/grthm](http://gypsy-traveller.org/grthm)



**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'.<sup>14</sup>



**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.