'We are invisible!'

Ensuring Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children do not feel unseen in the history classroom

Richard Kerridge and Helen Snelson present a brief sequence of lessons using the life of the Gypsy woman Mary Squires as a way into the changes of industrialising Britain. More significantly, they also present a compelling rationale for why history teachers should be slotting in the stories of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to broaden inclusive representation and challenge intolerance. They provide useful links and resources for this specific area of inclusive teaching, as well as broader suggestions for how to portray the history of all the people in Britain in the history classroom.

Richard Kerridge and Helen Snelson Richard Kerridge is a Fellow of the Historical Association and Helen Snelson is PGCE History Curriculum Leader at the University of York. Towards the end of last summer, I (Richard) was part of a social gathering celebrating a fiftieth birthday. People were excited to be socialising and conversation turned to recent holidays. One of those present at the party regaled a story of staying on a beautiful campsite: 'the view was amazing, except for the [P-words] in the way.'

I was shocked by that comment. Maybe I shouldn't have been. The Traveller Movement produced a report in 2017 calling racism against the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller [GRT] communities, 'the last acceptable form of racism'.¹

Judging by the agreement around the table I was certainly witnessing a degree of discrimination and prejudice that the report exemplifies. Schools have a responsibility under the 2010 Equality Act to 'make sure that pupils of all races are not singled out for different and less favourable treatment from that given to other pupils.'² This article suggests how the history classroom can be a place to support this work.

To be able to fulfil our responsibility we need to acknowledge the racism that exists and then work to counter it. While researching this article and the work related to it, I came across a website on Ebay selling what was described as a 'men's funny T-shirt'. It was a T-shirt parodying a Roger Hargreaves Mr Men character: he was called Mr [P-word], had scruffy hair and was dirty. The Traveller Movement Twitter site, @GypsyTravellerM, called for Ebay to stop advertising the item.³ Ebay withdrew the sale following complaints. In the Traveller Movement report 77% of respondents said they had been the victims of hate speech or hate crime, with 91% experiencing discrimination.⁴ Fast forward to February 2022. A well-known *comedian* justified an outrageous *joke* about the GRT community and the suffering they faced during the Holocaust as raising awareness of this part of the genocide.⁵ For those of you teaching something about the history of the GRT community in your school, thank you. For everyone else, this is for you.

A more representative past

It is quite simply better history to teach a more representative past. In 2020 the Council of Europe [CoE], of which the UK is a founding member, announced that it was calling on its 47 member states to 'include the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials'.⁶ The three examples of prejudice and discrimination in the above paragraphs would seem to support the CoE recommendation that educating the population, starting with young people, is key to combatting hatred, discrimination and prejudice and would help to improve the understanding that these groups are an integral part of societies. The CoE's 'Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025)' calls for the 'promotion of the teaching of Roma and Traveller history and the Roma Holocaust and inclusion in school curricula and textbooks, also through training of trainers and teachers.'⁷

Furthermore, shouldn't all students in the classes we teach see themselves in the past that is taught? W E B Du Bois, although writing about Black Americans and their history, has a quotation which resonates with and can equally be applied to children of GRT ethnicity: 'Africa has no history and no culture and they [Black American children] became ashamed

Figure 1: A selection of groups that can support the teaching of GRT histories

Awareness raising History The Roma Stories Oral History Project has The following organisations work for equality and an end to discrimination. Their work can lesson resources and source material: support knowledge and awareness about GRT www.romaoralhistory.com communities and the issues they face: The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust has resources to support teaching relating to The Roma Support Group: the Porajmos (genocide of Roma and Sinti www.romasupportgroup.org.uk people): Friends, Families and Travellers: www.hmd.org.uk/learn-aboutwww.gypsy-traveller.org the-holocaust-and-genocides/nazi-The Traveller Movement: persecution/the-porrajmos https://travellermovement.org.uk Travellers' Times Heritage: www.travellerstimes.org.uk/heritage Gypsy Traveller Project centred in Doncaster: www.proudgypsytraveller.co.uk

of any connection with it'.⁸ In a similar vein, if the GRT students do not see themselves in your classroom there is a danger they will become ashamed of a connection with their heritage. Students themselves want to see their history in the curriculum. One young person claims, 'You don't see any representation of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in schools. We are invisible.'⁹

This is not a lone voice. At a recent online conference hosted by Friends, Families and Travellers, the Traveller Education Services at Salford stated that their research shows only a minority of schools are paying attention to the needs of GRT communities, especially their histories, with the result that students feel ashamed that their identities are hidden and must be kept hidden for fear of discrimination, and that this often leads to exclusion.¹⁰ The Government's own statistics show that Gypsy and Roma pupils had the highest temporary exclusion rates in the school year 2018-19, with one in five pupils having a fixed term exclusion.¹¹ Meanwhile the Government's Race Disparity Audit (2018) states, 'Pupils from Gypsy and Roma, or Irish Traveller background (which are not included in the White British category), had the lowest attainment and progress, and were least likely to stay in education after the age of 16.12 It is fair to say that GRT pupils have the lowest attainment and the least engagement of any ethnic group. There are clearly issues here that extend beyond the history classroom, but making the GRT community visible should not only address du Bois's concerns: it should also enable other children to learn that GRT people have a rich and varied past.

The barriers already mentioned are challenging. We also have to factor in school issues. The twin barriers of subject knowledge and time in the curriculum mean that it is easier to continue the path well-trodden. Current textbooks, if they mention the GRT community at all, will likely focus on their treatment at the hands of the Nazis. This can be done very well in the hands of a skilled practitioner.¹³ It was, though, no surprise to the authors that at the Inclusion Conference Marco Pecak, Research Officer at the Roma Education Fund, found that clusters of references to Roma people in textbooks are mainly found in Eastern European countries and Germany as victims of genocide.¹⁴ It was into this environment that the authors first stepped in late 2020.

We are not pioneers

Important work has been, and is being, done by many other people and groups. Individual history teachers have long brought reference to people from the GRT community into their teaching of topics from World War One to the Irish Question. A current example of a teacher developing resources in response to the needs of pupils is Alex O'Bourne-Lynch of Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham.¹⁵ Concerned about how the content we teach and the resources we employ in our lessons can contribute to the marginalisation of our Roma cohorts, Alex is working on capturing oral histories of recent Roma migration to the UK by working with children and families in the local school community.¹⁶

Groups that work to support and advocate for GRT communities also produce resources. These can loosely be categorised into resources to raise awareness of GRT communities and resources that can be used to teach GRT histories. Figure 1 shows some of the groups that can offer support for teachers of history developing resources, and there is a useful set of links on the HA website.¹⁷

We have focused our efforts on creating resources that every history teacher could work with, adapt and fit into their existing curriculum. We are very aware of the crowded nature of the history curriculum and associated pressures. We have been inspired by the work of Kesterton and her idea of 'big story frameworks' and 'plug the gap narratives' and we have built on the work of Lingard and Snelson and consulted with Classifying groups of people is problematic. Here we first present an official categorisation, then a short comment which illustrates why individuals may find these inaccurate, incomplete or inadequate. We also show that official estimates of population numbers are contested.

According to House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 08083:

The term 'Gypsies and Travellers' [includes distinct ethnic groups]: Romany Gypsies, Welsh Gypsies, Scottish Gypsy Travellers and Irish Travellers. There are also Traveller groups which are generally regarded as 'cultural' rather than 'ethnic' Travellers. These include 'New' (Age) Travellers and occupational travellers, such as showmen and waterway travellers... For the first time, the 2011 census included an ethnic category to collect data on Gypsy, Traveller and Irish Traveller Traveller communities.

However, as Professor Becky Taylor points out,

Anyone who thinks of themself as a Gypsy might also use the descriptor 'Romany'. But in the House of Commons definition above, Romany Gypsy seems to stand solely for 'English Gypsy', as it separates them from Welsh Gypsies. Added to this, some hereditary nomads in Scotland prefer to reclaim the word 'Tinker', while others define as Scots Gypsies rather than Travellers. These latter are traditionally associated with southern Scotland, notably the 'Gypsy village' of Kirk Yetholm. And to add a final layer of complication, since the emergence of New Travellers in the 1970s and 1980s, some are now second- or thirdgeneration New Travellers, thus blurring the lines between 'cultural' and 'ethnic' Travellers.

York Travellers Trust argues that the annual estimate of GRT people in the UK of c.300,000 is inaccurate as it is based on a count of caravans with four-person occupancy. First, this is probably too low an occupancy rate and, second, about 50% of people who identify as GRT live in 'bricks and mortar'. Roma are classed as EU citizens and have had to claim settled status as EU citizens post-Brexit.

GRT community groups and academic historians.¹⁸ This has enabled us to create resources that teach existing curriculum topics through the lens of Gypsy Traveller history, and developed narratives that can be slotted into existing topics. While we do seek to make the histories of GRT people and communities explicit, we do not advocate a separate, bolt-on topic that stands alone and is never revisited. As Boyd argues in relation to the histories of women, inclusive teaching is not achieved by holding certain histories as distinct from the rest of the curriculum.¹⁹

This is not easy

Teaching History is full of examples of history teachers drawing on the work of historians in a variety of ways in order to create excellent practice in the classroom.²⁰ For most topics taught in schools history teachers can draw upon a rich and extensive range of scholarship. This is not the case for the history of GRT communities. There are certainly historians working in the field, but relatively few compared to other topics. We have had many conversations with Professor Becky Taylor of the University of East Anglia in the course of our work. She has been so supportive and helpful and has also confirmed that it can be hard for teachers to find histories to read. As David Cressy states: 'The social marginality of Gypsies, past and present, is matched by their marginality in modern scholarship.²¹

It is also hard to write history, as people from GRT communities usually appear in the written records of people who regarded them with suspicion, such as in the records of the justice system. It is true that in the 19th and early 20th centuries self-styled 'gypsiologists' had a fascination with 'true Gypsies and Gypsy culture' and, as a result, the 'Gypsy Lore Society' amassed a wealth of material that survives. But all of it is coloured and framed by the fascination of people outside GRT communities.²² So much of the oral culture of GRT communities has been lost and so historians need to work against the grain, to read into the spaces, to take the fragments that exist and infer what might have been the case. We were struck by the work of Olivette Otele who focuses on individual lives of African Europeans.23 She argues that when stories of individuals survive in the record, they are effectively challenging the habitual obscuring of their past. These narratives, set in historical context, can reveal otherwise hidden pasts. We felt that the same approach was relevant to our work and this has informed the sequence we have developed using the story of Mary Squires.

You will have noticed that we have been using the phrase 'GRT communities' here. There are different identities and pasts among people who are usually styled as 'Gypsy, Roma, Traveller'. This umbrella styling includes many different people, and we explain some of the complexity of this in

Enquiry question: How much did Gypsy and Traveller life change in Britain 1753–1914?

This is a four-lesson sequence that focuses on the history of Gypsies and Travellers from the start of the first industrial revolution period to the eve of the First World War. By completing this sequence pupils will not only learn about a period of British Gypsy and Traveller history; they will also learn about some of the social and economic changes in Britain in the period. They will consider how much changed in society and how much changed for Gypsy and Traveller people.

Lesson 1 Gypsy and Traveller life in the 18th century	 Teacher reads the story of Mary Squires (see Figure 4) and the students collect information on a data capture sheet about Mary Squires herself, information about the Squires family and people like them, and information about what life was like in this part of England at the time. Students use a factsheet to collect more evidence about what life was like for Gypsies and Travellers in the period. The enquiry question is introduced at the end of this lesson.
Lesson 2 The backstory: Gypsies' arrival in and experience of life in Britain before 1753	 Use a variety of sources and interpretations to learn the history of Gypsies in Britain up to 1750. Use a historian's account of this period with a supported listening guide that focuses on key moments of change.
Lessons 3 and 4 Change in Britain 1753–1914	 Lesson 3 is focused on gaining knowledge about key changes in Britain in the period and how they impacted British society and Gypsies and Travellers in particular. Lesson 4 then uses this knowledge to answer the historical enquiry question through a class discussion exemplified with tabards. This enables students to create their own answer to the enquiry question.
All resources and further explanation are freely available via:	

https://yorkclio.com/2022/05/13/teaching-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history

Figure 2.²⁴ In addition, different groups of people have not been recognised officially until relatively recently. This can make it hard to find people in the written record. For example, we have no way of knowing how many Gypsies and Travellers fought in World War One as the military records do not recognise them as separate from everyone else.

Developing a sequence

In developing a short sequence to support colleagues wanting to teach something of the Gypsy and Traveller past we, of course, wrestled long and hard with a question to frame the learning journey.²⁵ We were particularly concerned with the ethics of our enquiry.²⁶ In this case, to make sure that the Gypsy and Traveller people whose past was being explored were not presented as people with no agency, but as a part of British society impacted by events and changes. The sequence we created is shown in Figure 3.²⁷ The whole sequence, with teacher guide and resources, is available to download via the Historical Association website and on yorkclio.com. We settled for a fairly straightforward question: 'How much did Gypsy and Traveller life change in Britain 1753-1914?' Social and economic changes in Britain in this period are commonly taught in schools. By developing a short sequence about them framed through the lens of the Gypsy and Traveller past we wanted to show how teaching this sequence can enrich the existing curriculum. We both felt that our teaching of this period had sometimes lacked a strong chronological framework and had lost sight of the impact of great change on people's lives. This sequence can complement a more specific study of aspects of the period by covering a sweep of time and by highlighting the impact of great change on particular people in centre stage.

When we were conducting our research, we were struck by the story of Mary Squires. In brief, Mary was a Gypsy woman who was falsely accused, tried, and condemned to death for abduction in 1753. Sufficient leading people were convinced the verdict was unsound to prompt further investigation. Mary was totally exonerated. The result for historians is an unusually large body of evidence about a Gypsy woman of the Mary Squires was a familiar face in the Dorset village of Abbotsbury. The local people made their money fishing, and by making rope, baskets and cotton stockings. They could not make everything they needed to live and so they would buy goods from Mary, such as needles, pins and pots, when she came to the village. And Mary would buy bread, cheese, tobacco and tea from the local shops and use the village water pump. Sometimes she could afford to buy a fish or a bit of meat.

period. We did not focus on the trial, but did use the material about Mary, her family and her world that survives as a result. And so, our enquiry begins with the story of Mary Squires journey across southern England in the early months of 1753: see Figure 4. Through her story students learn something of her world: a world of moving from place to place selling; a world of difference, of bad roads, slow news, illiteracy and local entertainment.

The enquiry question title is introduced after this story telling. That is, after students have engaged with Mary as a person, and not as a person with a label about which they may already have preconceptions. The first lesson then continues with an exploration of life for poorer people in Britain in the middle of the 18th century, including Gypsy and Traveller people. Lesson 2 explores the past of the Gypsy and Traveller communities of Britain up to the time of Mary Squires. The enquiry then continues with a focus on change in six key areas: travel, freedom (to live), urbanisation, jobs, education, and fairs. This final area is important because so much can be learnt about macroeconomics from learning about the role of fairs and how they changed over time. Students consider change for wider British society as well as change for the Gypsy and Traveller communities. There is, of course, overlap, and this is one of the core pieces of learning we want our students to have

The final lesson considers 'extent of change' using tabards and a line of change and continuity. This core activity, prior to writing a response to the enquiry question, adapts an activity developed by Ian Dawson about the Norman Conquest.²⁸ It enables students to discuss and visualise the change. The teacher debrief encourages a consideration of the changes Gypsy and Traveller people faced in the context of wider British society. For example, while a greater access to elementary education at the end of the period is usually seen as an overall societal benefit, it widened the gap between the Gypsy Traveller communities and the rest of society as school attendance was incompatible with a nomadic lifestyle. As a further example, pupils learn that the improvement of roads using tarmac enabled Gypsies and Travellers to use wagons and to trade over greater distances. When we trialled the materials with a class of students they particularly engaged with the story of Mary Squires and found the tabard activity helpful to organise their thoughts. See Figure 5 for further student responses.

Developing slot-in material

The sequence that begins with the story of Mary Squires's lifestyle is an example of how key knowledge from a

commonly taught topic can be framed through the lens of the changes for Gypsies and Travellers. A similar approach could be taken with other topics. For example, a sequence on the impact of the post-1945 welfare state could be framed through the impact on Gypsy and Traveller people. Sequences such as these do not substitute the teaching of some histories to replace them with others. Instead they include a wider variety of people and diversify existing topics.

Another way to diversify and include more histories within a crowded curriculum is to use stories and examples by 'slotting in.²⁹ For example, the topic of Britain and World War One is taught in many schools. Slotting in a personal story can help students to realise that all experiences of this huge conflict were not the same.³⁰ It can challenge unacceptable generalisations and keep history messy and complex.

For example, the story of Jack Cunningham VC is useful: see Figure 5.³¹ He was born in 1897 into a Traveller family and volunteered for the Hull Pals in 1914. In 1916 he won the VC at the very end of the Battle of the Somme. He served to the end of the war and was permanently disabled as a result. He struggled to return to civilian life. His is a complex, human story of World War One. It can be used in various ways. Some suggestions are provided below.

- At the start of learning about World War One to stimulate student engagement and hypothesising, students could piece together Jack's story and then ask questions about World War One and its impact. The teacher could then teach the topic, providing answers to students' questions and referring back to the story to ask, 'how typical was Jack's war?'
- While studying the Battle of the Somme, to introduce a human story to the big narrative and to take away from the focus on the first day. The story can provide a bridge from 1916 to the later part of the war on the Western Front.
- Following a study of the course of World War One, Jack Cunningham's story could form part of an enquiry into the impact of the war on the survivors.
- As part of a battlefields tour when visiting the Serre Road, Beaumont-Hamel and Thiepval. Jack Cunningham won his VC for action just north of the village of Serre

This slot-in does many things, including introducing a person of Traveller heritage as part of the wider story of Britain. Other adaptable slot-ins and ideas for slot-ins can be found on the Historical Association website and on yorkclio.com. I like the mystery in the story at the start.

It was all really interesting and I would like to know more about Gypsy history.

I think I could plan and write a lot now because the big piece of paper is a good way to visualise the changes. I really like the way we are learning about normal people of the time and how society changed too.

There's no thoughts about human rights then and how people might feel. People were not accepting.

Early thoughts about principles

In developing, and continuing to develop, resources that colleagues can use to bring the past of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to the history classroom, we have thought about certain principles that we think should underpin similar work. These thoughts have emerged from our attendance at awareness-raising sessions with GRT community groups and our discussions about how to apply our learning to the history classroom. We hope other colleagues will be inspired to teach more about the histories of these communities and that these ideas for some principles will therefore be useful.³²

• Don't be avoidant.

That is, do not use lack of time, lack of knowledge, pressures of exam specifications etc as reasons for not engaging with the need to ensure every child sees themselves in the history curriculum and all British people's pasts are part of the history we call 'British'.³³

- Ensure appropriate representation. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people should not just appear in class as a solitary hero or villain, or as victims of oppression, although the level of oppression they have suffered also needs to be taught and acknowledged.
- Think about sources.
 If the sources we use to enquire about the past are always the written, the well archived and the popular, then GRT people are less likely to be represented.
 Follow the historians who are using a wider range of sources, including oral history accounts, and also consider how historians are reading into the gaps in the records.
- Work together. History teachers together have a lot of professional agency and historians are keen to help. It can be

difficult and time consuming to develop knowledge and resources to change the curriculum. By working together and sharing constantly this work will be of higher quality, less lonely and more impactful.

Don't worry about 'getting it wrong' Do not let fear of being unaware and misspeaking put you off teaching. Be prepared to learn that some of what you teach is emotive and sensitive, but have the courage to teach topics that are sensitive for some people in a respectful way. In Figure 1 we share links to organisations that can help develop your own awareness.

What next?

Now it is up to you. Will you ignore our explicit challenge to teach GRT history or will you make the change? All the resources we have produced so far are available on the HA website, alongside other resources to support teacher knowledge. Whether you use our resources or make your own, either is good but do something. Please let us know what you develop and what works in your classroom and share the results via the onebighistorydepartment blog. At a time when societies are becoming increasingly less tolerant and looking for scapegoats the GRT community presents an easy target. History teachers can be part of the solution to the problem of intolerance.

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Jack Cunningham in 1917

This is some old film footage of the East Yorkshire Regiment in the autumn of 1917: https://film. iwmcollections.org. uk/r/2820. In the last minute of the film there is film of Jack Cunningham VC sharing sweets with some children and playing with a dog.

Still from the film:



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 ¹³ Kennett, R. (2017) *Living Under Nazi Rule 1933-1945*, London: Hodder, pp.
- ¹³ Kennett, R. (2017) *Living Under Nazi Rule 1933-1945*, London: Hodder, pp 60-61.
- ¹⁴ Friends, Families and Travellers op. cit.
- ¹⁵ www.djanogly.notts.sch.uk/: the academy celebrated the school Roma community and its heritage in GRT month in June 2022.
- ¹⁶ History teachers have been engaging pupils in oral history work as part of the curriculum. For example, Helen Snelson gave an SHP conference keynote on this topic in 2018. For general guidance about how to work with oral history in the classroom you could start here with the Historical Association's advice: www.history.org.uk/ha-news/categories/455/news/3586/a-guide-to-oralhistory-for-schools-and-youth-grou, retrieved 2022-07-30.
- ¹⁷ Historical Association, www.history.org.uk/secondary/categories/613/ resource/10115/teaching-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history, retrieved 2022-07-30, originally compiled by Jamie Byrom; links in Figure 1 all retrieved 2022—07-30.
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- ²⁶ This idea is discussed by Mohamud, A. and Whitburn, R. (2019) 'Anatomy of an enquiry: deconstructing an approach to history curriculum planning.' in *Teaching History, 177, Knowledge Edition*, pp.28-39.
- ²⁷ Further detail on this sequence and further resources can be found at Yorkclio's site: https://yorkclio.com/2022/05/13/teaching-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history/, retrieved 2022-07-30. It can also be found on the HA site as resources from the authors' HA Conference session 2022: Snelson, H. and Kerridge, R, (2022) 'Do Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children see themselves in your history classroom?' www.history.org.uk/secondary/categories/606/module/8794/do-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-children-see-themselv, retrieved 2022-07-30.
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- ²⁹ For a fuller explanation of the concept of slotting in stories, go to Lingard, R. and Snelson, H. (2018) 'Hidden in plain sight: bringing the past of people with disabilities into the history classroom,' in *Teaching History, 173, Opening Doors Edition*, pp.24-29.
- ³⁰ This was modelled by Simon Bendry, now Head of Education and Engagement at Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as part of the staff and pupil training sessions run by the Centenary Battlefields Programme between 2014 and 2019. Resources are available at https://www.centenarybattlefieldtours. org/teaching-resources, retrieved 2022-07-30.
- ³¹ War Office Cinema Committee (1918) 'The East Yorks Regiment,' Imperial War Museum, www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060008250?_ ga=2.32970302.1294493168.1659182376-1524280841.1659182376, retrieved 2022-07-30.
- ³² In 2007 the HA published the *Teaching Emotive and Controversial History Report* [T.E.A.C.H]: www.history.org.uk/secondary/resource/780/the-teach-report, retrieved 2022-07-30. This work is being updated and there are ongoing discussions about the principles that should underpin the teaching of histories that are emotional and controversial which will also be relevant to this topic.
- ³³ For help with ensuring that the curriculum is representative there is a helpful list of questions to guide thinking available on the HA website (2019) 'How diverse is your history curriculum? www.history.org.uk/secondary/resource/9620/howdiverse-is-your-history-curriculum, retrieved 2022-07-30.