

GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

LEEDS

BASELINE CENSUS

2004 - 2005

Maureen Baker MBE  
LEEDS REC  
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REC  
Sheepscar House  
15 Sheepscar Street South  
LEEDS  
LS7 1AD

Tel: 0113 275 8735 / 2438421

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## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research constitutes the first attempt to establish baseline demographic data about the Gypsy and Traveller communities in Leeds. It is the most extensive and detailed study of these communities in Leeds so far. Nevertheless we are conscious of the many areas of concern which have not been addressed.

While we are sure we have not reached 100% of house dwellers we are satisfied we have included most of those living in caravans regardless of site status.

We have excluded Gypsy and Traveller visitors to Leeds as well as Showpeople and New Age Travellers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is a need for a well resourced study to develop this work further and explore the service needs of the communities in depth.

As academics and professionals testify it can be difficult to access the Gypsy and Traveller communities. In addition to the data a positive outcome of this census has been the establishment of a level of trust and a small group of community members able and willing to participate in detailed studies. It is suggested that any further research incorporates and develops these community based skills.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

We have identified 345 Gypsy and Traveller families in Leeds (1071 people). 58% of respondent families live in private or social housing (Table VI). The balance live on their own land or blind eye sites and on the council owned Cottingley Springs site.

42 families live on the roadside (unauthorized sites) and are subject to continual evictions.

There are no transit sites in Leeds so most visitors also have to use unauthorized sites (up to 100 families per year).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a consensus amongst the Leeds (and national) Gypsy and Traveller communities that small sites for about eight/ten family units are safer and more easily managed than large sites like Cottingley Springs (46 families). This means that to accommodate the roadside families Leeds needs five small permanent sites. (Appendix 1).

Niner (2004) estimates the national need for transit sites to be between 2000 and 2500 pitches. With up to 100 families visiting Leeds each year we believe five of these sites should be in Leeds. (Appendix 1).

Government has, by including Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in the Regional and Local Authority Housing Needs Assessments (2004), placed the funding for their accommodation on par with the settled community and the responsibility for providing permanent and transit sites on the regional and local authorities. While this is a most welcome development there is a great danger that, unless local politicians take a pro-active lead, site provision will be lost in the bureaucratic system for many years.

The primary barrier to site provision is resistance from the settled community. Fed by centuries of myth and prejudice updated by contemporary negative media images and language it is possible to understand, but not accept, the poor perception most of the settled community has of Gypsies and Travellers.

To change this situation requires the combined efforts of all the parties concerned. It is for politicians to lead public opinion and for the media to present balanced reports (eg to point out that unauthorized site rubbish

accumulates because the LA does not generally provide wheelie bins or collect bin bags). Gypsies and Travellers need to open communication systems with the settled communities to share experiences and problems and build bridges of understanding and trust.

According to Saunders et al (2000) Leeds City Council planned to develop fifty additional pitches for families in the early nineties. Almost fifteen years later there are still forty two families waiting for pitches. In the words of Hillel (2nd century AD) 'If not now, when?'

## HEALTH

Perhaps the most powerful indicator of the health status of the Gypsy and Traveller communities in Leeds is a life expectancy of about 50 years compared with a Leeds average of 78.2 years. Nowhere is this, more exemplified than in Table IV (Age Profile) which shows for example that while almost 20% of the general population is over 60 years less than 2.5% of Gypsies and Travellers are in that category.

While it is accepted that living on unauthorized sites can exacerbate health problems national and local research make it clear that, regardless of accommodation type, poor health is a feature of the daily life of these communities. The particulars of health needs are well rehearsed (see bibliography) and will not be detailed further except to say on the basis of our findings there is a health crisis in the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That in the short term (one year) PCTs, Social Services and local authority establish small task forces jointly with community members and their representatives to positively implement culturally sensitive health and social care policies. The health bus should be adapted to meet community

needs.

In the short to medium term (one to three years) a One Stop Shop should be set up in south Leeds with health facilities in addition to advisory and training resources.

The long term objective of improving the health status of Gypsies and Travellers can only be met by involving the communities and by changing the culture and ethos of health and social care providers.

All professionals involved should be cognisant of the affect of racism, poor education and accommodation on health and adjust their policies and practices accordingly.

## INTRODUCTION

Every ten years the National Census of Population provides a snapshot of the condition and disposition of the people of England and Wales. The Census for Scotland and Northern Ireland are published separately.

In order to attempt to properly reflect the ethnic composition of the population the government has consistently broadened the number and range of ethnic categories on the census forms (16 in 2001). Nevertheless Gypsies and Travellers have always been omitted from the census.

The IPPR estimates (2004) that there are about 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. That is more than, for example, the Bangladeshi population (280,830) the Chinese (226,948) and many other ethnic groups recognized in national or local authority demographic profiles. (However see Niner below).

While it is possible to speculate why Gypsies and Travellers have been excluded from the civil rights agenda a contributory factor has got to be what Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, called “the last respectable racism in Britain”.

Gypsies and Travellers (other than New Age or travelling Showpeople) were only recognized as an ethnic group (Race Relations Act 1976) in 1989. The RR Amendment Act 2000 extends the civil protection Gypsies and Irish Travellers should expect from local and national authorities and institutions. This legislation is now reinforced by the EU Human Rights Act 1998 (UK Oct 2000). On the other hand the range of legislation, from the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act to Planning and Housing Acts and a multiplicity of new and old local authority bye laws and DoE Circulars, Directives and Guidance Notes means that for Gypsies and Travellers the concept of civil rights can appear very remote.

## ETHNIC IDENTITY

Although they share many characteristics and traditions Gypsies and



Travellers are not a homogenous group. Ethnic identity is established by self-ascription and by the acceptance by others of the individuals membership of the community. The distinctive and inclusive nature of the groups is confirmed in part by their community languages, mainly Romanes and Cant, in addition to English, and by the domestic value systems reflected in part by their household composition (Table V).

Nomadism has traditionally been a feature of Gypsy and Traveller culture. While many continue to travel for part of the year this has become increasingly difficult as families are forced into housing with no facilities for parking caravans and limited transit sites in other parts of the country.

Despite the tardiness of UK law in extending recognition to Gypsies and Travellers ethnographers and linguists have long accepted the ethnic origins of Gypsies in India almost 2000 years ago with a migratory pattern through Europe of over 1000 years. Travellers, also known as Irish Travellers, have their origin in Ireland in the fifth century. While there is some evidence of Gypsy and Traveller communities as far apart as North America and Zambia little research has been done on identifying migratory patterns anywhere in the world. Thanks to the work of Saunders et al (2000) we have a starting point in Leeds of written records of Gypsies and Travellers as early as 1572. However, given the nomadic way of life of both groups, and the paucity of documentary evidence we must approach these relatively modern records with caution. The probability is that the true history of Gypsies and Travellers in Britain rests in the hands of the archeologists, linguists and ethnographers.

A common error in the general population is to assume that Irish Travellers only arrived in Britain as a consequence of the 19th century famine in Ireland. However, as we have seen above there is substantial evidence of their presence for almost 500 years.

Within the communities individuals may describe themselves as 'Gypsy', 'Traveller', 'Irish Traveller' or 'English Traveller'. As we did not seek to distinguish between the communities for the purposes of this study we have used the terms Gypsies and Travellers.

## LEEDS GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

In common with the rest of the UK the history of Gypsies and Travellers in Leeds is one of exclusion and discrimination. Demands for justice and equality have usually been voiced by a few courageous individuals representing the community, very often without voluntary sector or institutional support or response.

Until fairly recently the only consistent external support the community received has been from the well respected Travellers Education Service and the Leeds Racial Equality Council. The Travellers Health Partnership was formed in 1999 and VOICE appointed a part time post to work on Travellers issues. In 2000 Leeds Justice for Travellers, a community organisation, joined the Race Equality Advisory Forum (REAF) and focused attention on the almost total absence of services for Gypsies and Travellers. Two years later a second community based group formed the Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (GATE) and REAF established the Gypsies and Travellers Working Group. Shortly after the LCC, through the Equality Unit, developed a senior officers group which considers matters pertaining to Gypsies and Travellers across the LCC major service delivery functions. (The relationships between these groups will be explored in the forthcoming (2005) REAF Working Group report).

While all groups made some headway a problem they all shared was the absence of a data base against which to identify need and assess progress. In March 2004 the REC, with some financial support from the LCC Equalities Unit undertook a census of the Gypsy and Traveller community in Leeds.

## NATIONAL DATA

In terms of official data collection locally and nationally, this consists of a 'Gypsy' caravan count twice yearly. The count distinguishes between authorized and unauthorized sites and the resultant tally of caravans and families appears to be multiplied by two to give a total number of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. The most recent published report (Niner ODPM

2003 p25) explains the assumptions and multiplier used in reaching an approximate total population of 82,000 for England.

*'Local authorities in England provide a count of Gypsy caravans in January and June each year to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The January 2002 count was 13,612 caravans. Applying an assumed 3 person per caravan multiplier would give a population of about 41,000. Again applying an assumed multiplier and doubling this to allow for Gypsies and other Travellers in housing, gives a total population of around 82,000 for England.'*

Niner emphasizes the inconsistency and probability of under-enumeration in the 'Caravan' count and questions the use of an 'arbitrary' multiplier.

Even accepting the Niner caveats it is extremely difficult to suggest any reconciliation between the ODPM data and that of the IPPR. It must be said however that the IPPR figure of about 300,000 (2004) is the one accepted by most Gypsy and Traveller groups and many voluntary organisations.

Given the objectives of coherent policy development and service delivery monitoring it is obvious that there is an urgent need for a national census of the Gypsy and Traveller population of the UK. Some of the potential problems inherent in such a study emerged during the census undertaken in Leeds in May-July 2004.

## THE LEEDS CENSUS

### BACKGROUND

After centuries of stigmatization and discrimination there is an understandable reluctance within the Gypsy and Traveller communities to engage with the settled community and in particular with the institutions of state. The low literacy level throughout the community leaves it vulnerable to information conveyed almost solely by television and the tabloid press. (It is difficult to remember a positive image of the Gypsy and Traveller community in the media over the past 40 years).

The recent interest in the community by national and local institutions has led to an increase in awareness of the extremely high level of disadvantage experienced by Gypsies and Travellers. While in some areas this has been translated into action particularly in the fields of education, health and welfare, with minimal support for self help groups, the major issue of accommodation has not been addressed.

So far as can be ascertained all attempts to quantify the extent of inequality in service delivery have been based on accessible samples or focus groups (see bibliography). While very useful in their own right they can result in grossly inadequate provision being made. For example an intermittent 'Health Bus' scheme or a part-time social worker for more than a thousand disadvantaged people.

Over the past 25 years most minority ethnic communities have come to terms with the value of ethnic monitoring and recording. It should be remembered however that the first national attempt to include race/ethnicity questions in the 1971 Census was a failure. The reluctance of those communities to participate in monitoring was only overcome through extensive consultation and seeing some positive outcomes. It is suggested the same effort will have to be directed to the Gypsy and Traveller community in order to gain their confidence and cooperation.

## OBJECTIVE

Despite the need for a broad spectrum of information the very limited resources available to this study meant the objectives had to be restricted to the collection and analysis of baseline demographic data.

## METHODOLOGY

A range of relevant reports and documents were considered.

Following consultation it was agreed that all enumerators would be drawn from the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

A questionnaire was piloted and rejected as being too intrusive.

The revised questionnaire emerged from discussions with the enumerators and was designed to elicit the same basic information about household composition, age profile and type of accommodation.

In view of the low literacy level within the community and enumerators the questions were set in a graphic format requiring only a tick or number as a response. All questionnaires were numbered.

All respondent/heads of families were interviewed by the enumerators. In order to avoid duplication the enumerators (6 female and 1 male) agreed to divide the task according to the type of accommodation and area. This meant that e.g. one enumerator met with only nine families and, at the other end of the spectrum, another enumerator completed seventy two questionnaires. Enumerators were advised to use the 'snowball' \* system to extend the number of respondents from those known to them to the unknowns. Visitors to Leeds were excluded from the survey. Completed questionnaires were collected weekly and checked. Although most of the work was completed by the end of July 'unknowns' were still being identified up to Nov 2004.

All respondents were assured of confidentiality.

\* This involved asking known respondents for addresses known to them but not to the enumerators thus enlarging the list of respondents.

## THE ANALYSIS

As far as possible the data from this study has been compared with the 2001 national census figures and categories. (Leeds. The Big Picture). We have also made reference to the scoping work done by Leeds Travellers Education Service and Education Leeds data.

Table 1 shows the total population of Leeds and the Gypsy and Traveller respondents.

Table 1

### Demographic Profile

Leeds Metropolitan District

Total Population	Number	Rate (%)
All People LMD (2001 Census)	715,402	100
Gypsies and Travellers (2004 Census)	1,071	0.15

It is not suggested that this study has achieved 100% cover of the Gypsy and Traveller communities in Leeds. Additionally we are aware of families who moved into housing almost a generation ago or who have married outside the community who no longer self identify as either Gypsies or Travellers. (Nevertheless, many of these families access community support services accounting for some of the discrepancies between service delivery and census data). Pressure of time and resources also meant that this study had to be curtailed leading to further omissions.

Table II

**Education Information**

School Population	2001-2	2002-3
<b>White Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma</b>	272	201
<b>White British</b>	99,465	96,039
<b>Total</b>	<b>99,737</b>	<b>96,240</b>

Source: Education Leeds

Education Leeds data at Table II for 2001-3 (the latest available) cannot be presented as a fair indicator of the number of Gypsy and Traveller pupils on roll in Leeds schools. In common with other LCC departments the systematic collection of Gypsy and Travellers data only started in 2002. Pending a review of ethnic monitoring forms schools have to 'write in' Gypsy and Traveller pupils on the annual (Jan) pupil count. Additionally schools are dependent on parental or pupil information and, as was discovered in the course of this study, some housed families, while accessing Gypsy and Traveller support services, were reluctant to self identify as Gypsies or Travellers in official records.

It is suggested that the figures from Travellers Education Support Service (Trav. Ed.) (Table III) are a more reliable source particularly as they can be fairly well reconciled with the data from this study.

Table III

**Children 0-16 yrs**

Ages	0-4	5-16
<b>Trav. Ed.</b>	130	574
<b>Census 2004</b>	173	304

In conducting this census we adhered to the original brief and excluded visitors to Leeds. We did however note at least eighteen families visiting from one to four weeks during the ten week census period (including 30-35 children). We know from Leeds Gypsies and Travellers and from LCC data that between sixty and one hundred families visit over the period of a year. In the absence of transit sites Gypsy and Traveller visitors to Leeds have no option but to camp by the roadside.

Trav Ed is a pro-active support service with a very effective communication network within the travelling community. Within a week of visiting families arriving in Leeds Trav Ed will have support services in place for pre nursery, nursery and school age children. This can account for up to 150 children excluded from this census, which is concerned solely with Leeds residents.

Additionally Trav Ed services are accessed by many housed families who, are omitted from, or did not wish to be included in, this census.

In the course of this study we became aware of the immediacy and complexity of Trav Ed services to the Gypsy and Traveller communities. In particular it is the one statutory service which all the community trust, and the positive relationships they have built with a range of primary and high schools who, with Trav Ed support, incorporate Gypsy and Traveller pupils into main stream education (This does not mean there are no problems for Traveller children in the education systems but that Trav Ed has made inroads in the inclusion agenda which has, so far, eluded other departments of the state or local authority).

## AGE PROFILE

It is evident from table IV that the age profile of the Gypsy and Traveller community is strikingly different from the settled population. (The comparator data for this and all tables unless stated otherwise, is taken from the 2001 Census Leeds, The Big Picture).



Table IV

**Age Profile**

Age Profile	Gypsies and Travellers 2004	Rate (%)	LMD 2001	Rate (%)
Total Populations	1,071	100	715,402	100
People aged: 0-4	173	16.15	40,871	5.71
5-16	304	28.39	102,220	14.29
17-60	569	53.13	429,596	60.05
60 +	25	2.33	142,705	19.95

There is a general consensus in the literature on the poor health status of Gypsies and Travellers. Nowhere is the evidence of this more starkly revealed than in table IV.

Given the high percentage rates for the under sixteens in comparison to the Leeds 2001 rates we would normally expect to see this reflected in the 17-60 group and the over sixties. Instead there is a drop in the rate for both groups and, in the case of the over sixties this is catastrophic and reminiscent of a developing country. (The average life expectancy for the general population of Leeds is 78 years for Gypsies and Travellers it is about 50 years).

The range of physical and mental ill health and the high rate of accidental injuries and death are well rehearsed. However what is evident from this census is that there is a health crisis in the Gypsy and Traveller communities in Leeds. \*

\* Note: It should be remembered that while some migrant groups may display a fairly similar age pattern for one or two generations this is due to the age bands of the original economic immigrants (generally 18-40 yrs). On the other hand the Gypsy and Traveller communities have been settled in Leeds for about 500 years and should, many generations back, have reached parity with the general population.

## HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Much of the cultural beliefs and practices of the Gypsy and Traveller communities focus around the family. Traditionally, while marriages are not formally arranged, boys and girls are expected to marry young, within the community and become part of the extended family which provides care and support across three/four generations.

Unfortunately the lack of sites or space on the council site means that increasingly newlyweds have to move into housing or join their family on the roadside. Nevertheless the abiding strength of Gypsy and Traveller domestic culture is still reflected in table V.

Table V

### Household Composition

	<b>Gypsies and Travellers</b>	<b>Rate (%)</b>	<b>LMD</b>	<b>Rate (%)</b>
<b>All Households</b>	345	100	301,614	100
<b>Married Couple Households</b> (with children)	214	62.03	100,587	33.35
<b>Lone Parent Households</b>	48	13.91	29,589	9.81
<b>One Person Households</b> (16-60yrs)	31	8.99	52,142	17.29
<b>One Person Household</b> (Pensioner)	6	1.74	43,309	14.36
<b>Couple Households</b> (no children)	46	13.33	75,987	25.19

While there are significant differences in all the data between the settled community and the Gypsies and Travellers perhaps the most obvious is in the very low percentage of lone pensioner households and the very high number of married households with children.

All the lone parents had been married. Most were separated or divorced and a few were widowed (reflecting the low life expectancy of about 50 yrs). Some of the separated/divorced lone parents reported spouses who had returned to the nomadic way of life. The majority of lone parents live in housing or on council sites.

## ACCOMMODATION PROFILE

Over the past forty years there has been a substantial number of research projects on Gypsy and Traveller issues. Almost without exception these reports dwell on accommodation regardless of the primary subject of the research. There is a remarkable level of agreement in these studies that the basic problem is the inadequate provision of permanent and transit sites.

Until 2004 in planning for accommodation for all other communities both central and local government had to take account of generational growth, culture and family structure. There was also a duty on local authorities to meet the housing needs of all groups except Gypsies and Travellers who wished to live in caravans..

The Housing Act 2004 and Planning Act 2004 now place a statutory duty on local and regional authorities to assess Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs and develop strategies to meet those needs. Where councils fail in this duty the Secretary of State has the power to intervene and require the council to do so.

Table VI provides evidence of the current (2004) accommodation position in Leeds. We are satisfied we have included most families on the roadside (unauthorized sites) privately owned, and 'blind eye' (tolerated) sites. As stated elsewhere we have omitted visitors to Leeds, Showpeople and New Age Travellers.

Table VI

**Accommodation Profile**

<b>Gypsies and Travellers</b>		
<b>House/flat Social/Private</b>	199	families
<b>Council Site</b> Pitches	41	46 families
<b>Roadside</b> (families)(Unauthorized)	42	families
<b>Own Ground</b> (Private Sites)	2	with planning permission
<b>Tolerated Sites</b> (Blind Eye)	4	2 with adverse possession title

Slightly more than half (58%) of the accommodation occupied by Leeds Gypsies and Travellers is in housing (see Niner 2003). Even allowing for omissions from this census this is a surprisingly low number given the pressures on caravan dwellers. Other research suggests the transition to housing can be traumatic for families both physically and psychologically. Despite this, apart from Travellers Education Support Service, there is little evidence of any culturally specific statutory services for house dwellers.

There are 41 pitches (46 family units) on the council owned site at Cottingley Springs. Although there has been improvement in service delivery over the past two years health and social care problems remain unacceptably high, as they are on the 'blind eye' and privately owned sites.

Conditions for the forty two families living on the roadside are intolerable. Usually without water, sanitation facilities or rubbish disposal. These families are moved on or evicted on average every two or three weeks. Their access to medical or social services is severely restricted regardless of age or need. The only regular support they receive is from Travellers

Education Support Services. This group consists of five extended families all either born in, or with long-standing connections with Leeds.

## AREAS OF SETTLEMENT

Whether in housing or caravans the majority (about 85%) of Gypsies and Travellers in Leeds live south of the river in areas where there have been community settlements for almost 500 years. This includes the two families living on their own land (with planning permission). There are a number of families in north Leeds and 'blind eye' sites are divided between the rural periphery and south Leeds.

When the families on unauthorized sites move, wherever they can, they also tend to prefer south Leeds.

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Unlike most minority ethnic communities in Leeds Gypsies and Travellers do not have a community centre and, apart from minimum statutory services, receive no communal support from the local authority.

The two community run voluntary organisations, on whom the local and national authorities rely for consultation, operate from a private residence and a small corner shop.

From village halls to discrete centres majority and minority communities have a space which is theirs. Gypsies and Travellers do not.

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