

**Gypsy, Roma, Travellers
in Wales**

The story of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Wales is a long one that begins in antique lands, during earlier times...

Introduction

The photographs and recorded stories, told by Gypsy and Traveller people themselves in this book, and the accompanying “**Family Lives, Family Trails**” exhibition (itself part of the “**Tales From The Trailers**” project), are a testament to the vibrancy and continuing vitality of communities that make up the complex ethnic and cultural mosaic of modern Wales, and that has been a feature of these lands since time immemorial. The interviews of Gypsies and Travellers aged between 20 – 85 years old, are primarily from those living on caravan sites across the country, and some who have settled in houses in recent years for a variety of reasons related to accessing health and care services. Their life experiences and narratives of journey have much to tell us of the ordinary and everyday lives of Gypsies and Travellers in modern Wales, their hopes, their experiences and their aspirations for their children and the future of their communities. Some of these narratives are deeply personal and record a picture of the past when Gypsies and Travellers were far more mobile than they have been able to be of late. The ‘golden age’ of travelling and working around the countryside and towns of Wales, during 1900 – 1968 (a period that Dennis Harvey referred to as “**waggon time and after**” in his wonderful description of British Gypsies and Travellers, 1979), is sometimes reflected in these personal stories about growing up, or parents’ lives, as remembered by their descendants. Some of the descriptions of life on the road or on-site are wryly humorous or sad, reflecting how hard it has been for Gypsies and Travellers to maintain their cultures, languages and beliefs in the face of daily prejudice and discrimination. Others celebrate the joys of family events, births, and marriages in the communities, or sadness at the passing of elderly people. Occasionally there are recollections of tragedy and loss that individuals or families have experienced, asking all of us who listen to them, to recognise the common humanity in such stories that all of us share in our lives.

One of the implicit threads in the narratives here is the idea of a diverse and multi-cultural Wales, a country that has always had different communities living side-by-side, though not always peacefully. In this way, the narratives not only remind us that we live in a changing network of inter-dependence and inter-relations, but that this

has always been the case, it is not new. The notion that Wales is, or has been until recently, a country of largely uniform population and singular in its culture, is a myth. The indigenous ancient British inhabitants of the plains and valleys were, as described in the earliest sources we have, a small, dark people with a culture that was akin to that in south-western England and across Europe. These people raised the bluestones at Stonehenge and the burial sites at Pentre Ifan Dolmen, during the late Neolithic (2,500 to 2,000 BCE [before common era]), whilst new populations arrived during the early Bronze Age (2,200 to 800 BCE). Whilst the genetic inheritance of Wales may be more directly connected with the ancient past than anywhere else in the British Isles (according to research at Oxford University, 2012), the combination of British, central European, Ibero-Celtic and Irish elements in the population during these ancient times tells us that diversity was always part-and-parcel of the people in what might best be called, **Brythonic Wales**.

The Roman legions of Emperors Claudius (ruled 41 to 54) and Nero (54 to 68) marched into Welsh lands (47 – 68) under Quintus Veranius and Suetonius Paulinus, defeating the **Silures**, **Deceangli** and **Ordovices** tribes and the Druids of Mona (Anglesey), as part of the effective conquest of Britain (43 – 84). These troops were drawn from across the Empire and, in the case of the IX Hispania in particular under their commander Gnaeus Hosidia Gaeta, brought black north African legionaries into the British Isles and southern Wales in some numbers. Many of these legionaries settled in Roman Britannia following their military service, during the four centuries of direct Roman rule, whilst the following centuries saw further influxes of Germanic, Scandinavian and French peoples into the Welsh lands, especially in the coastal plains and lowlands. Post-Roman governance (410 to 700) in Wales saw the so-called ‘age of saints’ and the gradual Christianisation of the country under monastic establishments led by David (500 – 589), Teilo (500 – 560) and Illtud (c.600). This period also saw continuing colonisation by Irish peoples such as the Uí Liatháin, Laigin, and the Déisi Muman, who used ogham inscriptions on marker stones, in the Dyfed kingdom. The mediaeval period saw the Welsh kingdoms of Powys, Gwynedd and Deheubarth

“The entire history of this race is in its idiom...”

— Alexander Paspati, 1863 —

emerge, despite the incursions of the Saxons into the Powys region (Llanidloes), further adding to the ethnic complexity in mid-Wales. Later Norman and Angevin conquest (1066 – 1277) brought additional change to the diversity of the population.

In the case of Gypsies or more properly, Romani people, whether Welsh **Kalé**, English **Romanichals** or **European Roma**, the ancestry of these peoples is ultimately to be found in India, many centuries before. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, a Turkic-Persian empire, ruled by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (now in modern Afghanistan), raided north-western and north-central India from 997 to 1030, capturing many thousands of Indian soldiers and their families, bringing them to his capital as captive soldier-slaves and forcing them to fight for him in his armies. These became the Ghaznavid household troops, with their families, servitors and auxiliaries loyal to the sultan and his dynasty (his son, Masood, 1030 to 1041). When the Ghaznavids were themselves defeated (1040) by another Turkic group on their way to establishing their own great empire across Persia, Anatolia and Syria – the Saldjuks – these soldier-slaves fled their enemies and migrated westwards to the Byzantine Empire of the Greeks, as the remainder of a once powerful military force. Evidence for their arrival in the 1050's, during the time of Emperor Constantine Monomachus IX (1042 to 1055) lies in the lives of saints (i.e. the **hagiography** of Saint George the Athonite of Iviron Monastery, c.1060). Further evidence is found in interdictions by priests, clerics and even the Patriarchs of the eastern Orthodox Church, condemning the Byzantine population for seeking their divinatory advice for the future (fortune telling) at this uncertain time. The Empire faced invasion by the Saldjuks that would eventually mean the loss of Anatolia and the Islamification of the whole region, after 1071. Living as small groups in an effort to survive after their defeats, these people with their mixture of Indian, Persian, Armenian and Greek languages and heritage, and their skills of fortune-telling, metallurgy, acrobatics, story-telling and musical entertainment, had established themselves in the Empire and the settled throughout the south-east European provinces, by the fourteenth century.

In the fifteenth century these groups of **‘Egyptians’** as the Byzantine Greeks had called them (because of their magic and fortune-telling, for all magic was supposed to come from the Pharaohs of Egypt) had begun to travel to central and western Europe and were in the German lands, France and Spain early in the century. The Byzantine Empire fell (29th May 1453) to an emerging world power, the House of Osman or Ottomans and the ‘Egyptians’ became incorporated into this multi-ethnic, multi-religious Turkish empire as **‘Çingene’**, where they created guilds of dancers, armourers, canon-makers, horse dealers, acrobats, metal-workers and basket-makers. Some Ottoman Gypsy (Çingene) guilds became so wealthy that they could give gifts to the sultans; the basket-makers built a small palace for the sultan, on the shores of the Golden Horn in Istanbul in the seventeenth century that survives to this day, the Sepetci kasrı. Individual **‘Çingene’** could rise to become engineers, administrators and even military commanders. In Cyprus, Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Arabia, the Domari Gypsy populations travelled and worked as a part of the nomadic peoples, with great herds of goats, sheep, camels and horses, providing the owners of these herds, the Turkmen and Yoruks, Bedu and Wahhabi, with important blacksmithing skills, and as dancers and singers of the epic poetry and ballads that were at the cultural heart of these communities.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the **‘Egyptians’** or **‘Gypsies’** had come to the British Isles, going on from there to Denmark and Sweden, pushing into Scandinavia. They had spread across the Iberian peninsula, throughout the Italian lands and the territories of Muscovy (Russia) as blacksmiths, actors, fortune-tellers, dancers, musicians, **‘cunning’** people (healers) and horse-traders. The territories of Europe became harsher and more violent in their treatment of the **‘Egyptians’** and in many central European kingdoms and principalities, the punishments were both severe and appalling merely for being a **‘Gypsy’**. The former practice of travelling in large groups was discontinued, as these made the Gypsies vulnerable and obvious to arrest and punishment. Many individuals and extended family groups maintained a military life-style, travelling in **‘companies’** as seen in engravings from the early-seventeenth century France

by Jacques Callot, (1592 – 1635). The **“Marching Gypsies”**, hired themselves out to monarchs and princes who needed soldiers in the European religious wars of the time (1560 – 1715).

The period under the Tudors, themselves of Welsh heritage, saw the last remnants of Welsh law and independent governance finally removed and the incorporation of Wales, legally and administratively, into the English kingdom of Henry VIII (1491-1547). This coincides with the period of the first arrivals in England, Wales and Scotland of Romani people, the ‘Egyptians’, ‘Gypcians’ or Gypsies, though it is likely that the ancestors of the Irish Travellers (**Pavees** or **Minkiers**) arrived earlier with Irish immigration to Wales from c.350 (early history for Irish Travellers remains highly contested). These Romani arrivants came into conflict with the legal administration not long after, as the earliest reference to them as **‘Gypsies’** in Wales concerns the Sheriff of Radnor having difficulty feeding forty of them charged with vagrancy, in the local gaol (1579). The increasingly draconian laws against vagrants, beggars, sturdy-men and **‘counterfeit’** Egyptians, came into being during the reigns of Edward VI (1537-1553) and his successors. The frequency with which the origins of these **‘Egyptians’** was speculated upon in print at the time, shows that the concerns and interest in them remained high throughout the sixteenth century, though the changing attitudes from what might be described as **‘enchantment’** and benign curiosity to outright persecution and attempted eradication, fuelled the question of who the Gypsies were, in different ways.

The Gypsies in Wales remain relatively undocumented during these turbulent times, and it is not until the eighteenth century, with the arrival of Abram Wood and his family in 1730, that we can see more evidence of their historical presence. The arrivals of the Lees, Lovells and Locks (or Lockes) in Wales began to establish what was a definably Welsh Romani community, as opposed to the itinerant **Romanichals** (English Gypsies) who had travelled to Wales prior to this period. The Kalé (related to the Spanish Caló, Finnish Kaalé and other Romani communities), maintained a dialect of Romanës (Rromani-chib or Romani language) that lasted until the 1950's and a musical tradition that saw

them praised, and awarded trophies in local and national competitions. Many Kalé in Wales today are descended from these migrants in the eighteenth century. The presence of Irish Travellers was also strengthened during this period, as conditions in Ireland worsened and many removed to Wales for better opportunities, fleeing hunger and starvation in the mid-nineteenth century.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also saw greater diversity in Wales in general, as populations of Lascars (sailors from the Indian and Malaysian lands east of the Cape of Good Hope) came to reside in Welsh ports. Black African and Caribbean people were forcibly brought to Wales during this time as slaves, whilst at the end of the nineteenth century, Italians and Chinese people also migrated to Wales. The industrial base of southern Wales and the mines of the valleys attracted labour from across what was then the British Empire and the later growth of cheap means of transport, with canals and then railways, gave further impetus to the movements of people across Europe.

The most recent migrations to Wales have seen numbers of Roma from central, southeastern and eastern Europe arrive in southern Wales, bringing together Romani communities that have previously been separated by many centuries and great distances. The increasing inclusion of Roma into Welsh society is another example of the continuing pattern of diversity and development of the complex ethnic and cultural mosaic of the country, and one that adds another Romani element to the population. The ongoing documentation of the Welsh Romani and Traveller communities in this project, will see the addition of stories of their migration and movements that are not hundreds of years old, but very recent indeed, as Roma become a living part of this multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, Welsh heritage.

Le paramichi le Rromendar thai le Phirutnendar and’o Kardifo

Croeso i’n harddangosfa
Kushti to dik tuttis akai dre the exhibition.
Welcome to our exhibition

Paramichi le vurdonestar















Lachno graast
chiivar si
jungali farba

Nid yw ceffyl da fyth yn lliw gwael
A kushti grai kekka diks wafedi
A good horse is never a bad colour











Lachi baxt
thai lacho
sastipen











Pirutnipe kai mangas







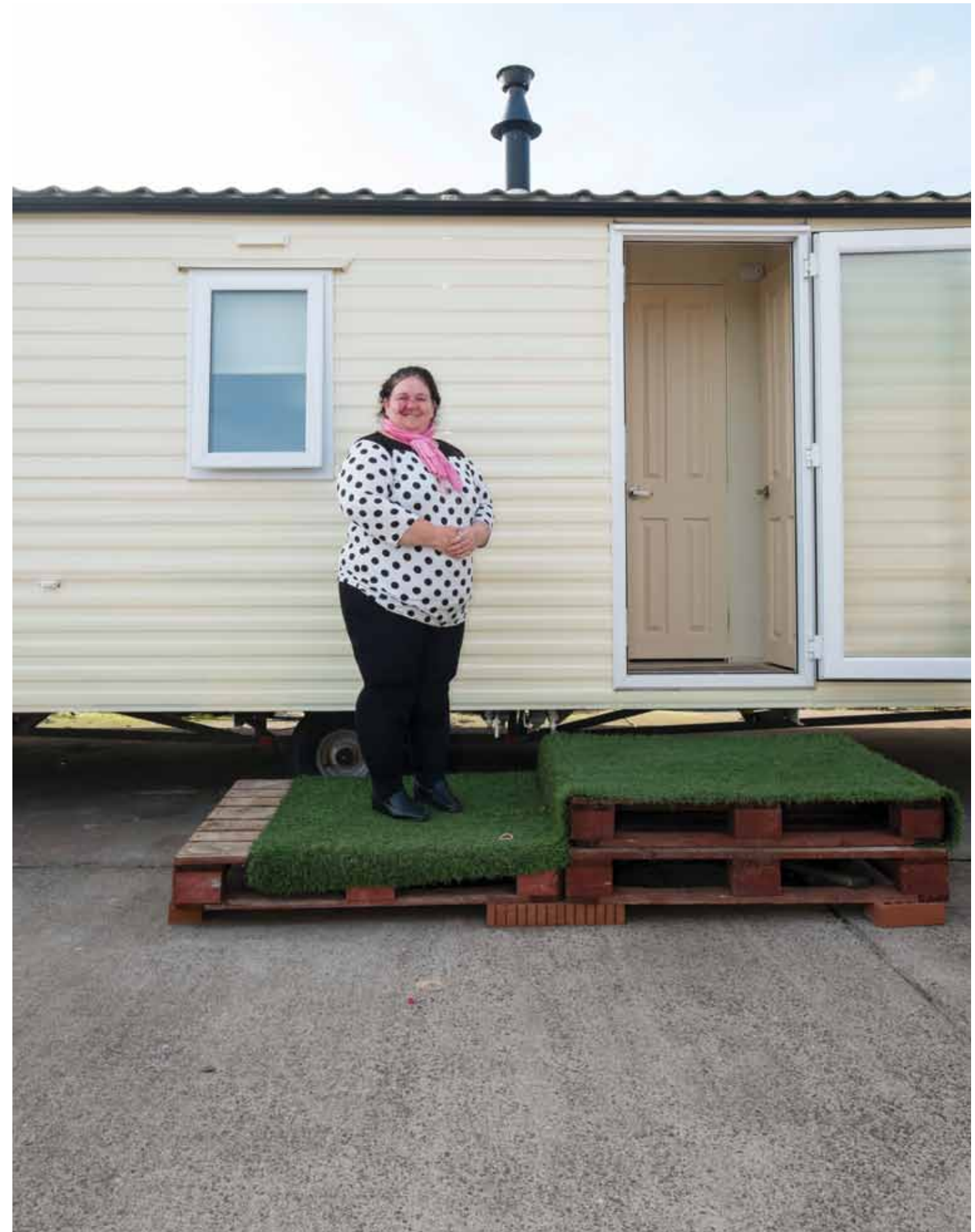




Jasa pala i kipsi

Dilyn y fased

Jelling after the kipsi
Following the basket











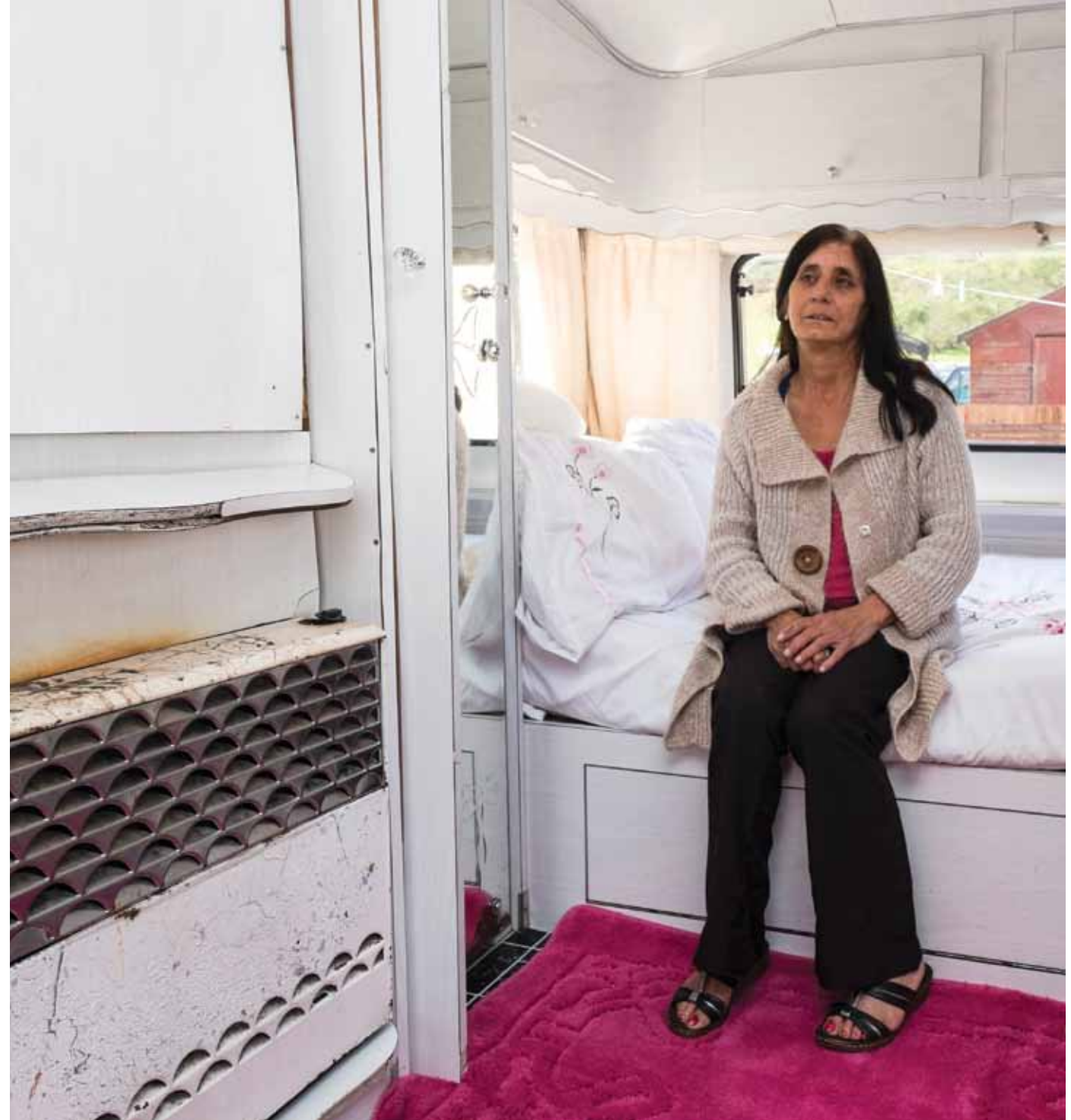
Drabbarimos

Dweud ffortiwn
Drookin, Dukkering
Fortune telling









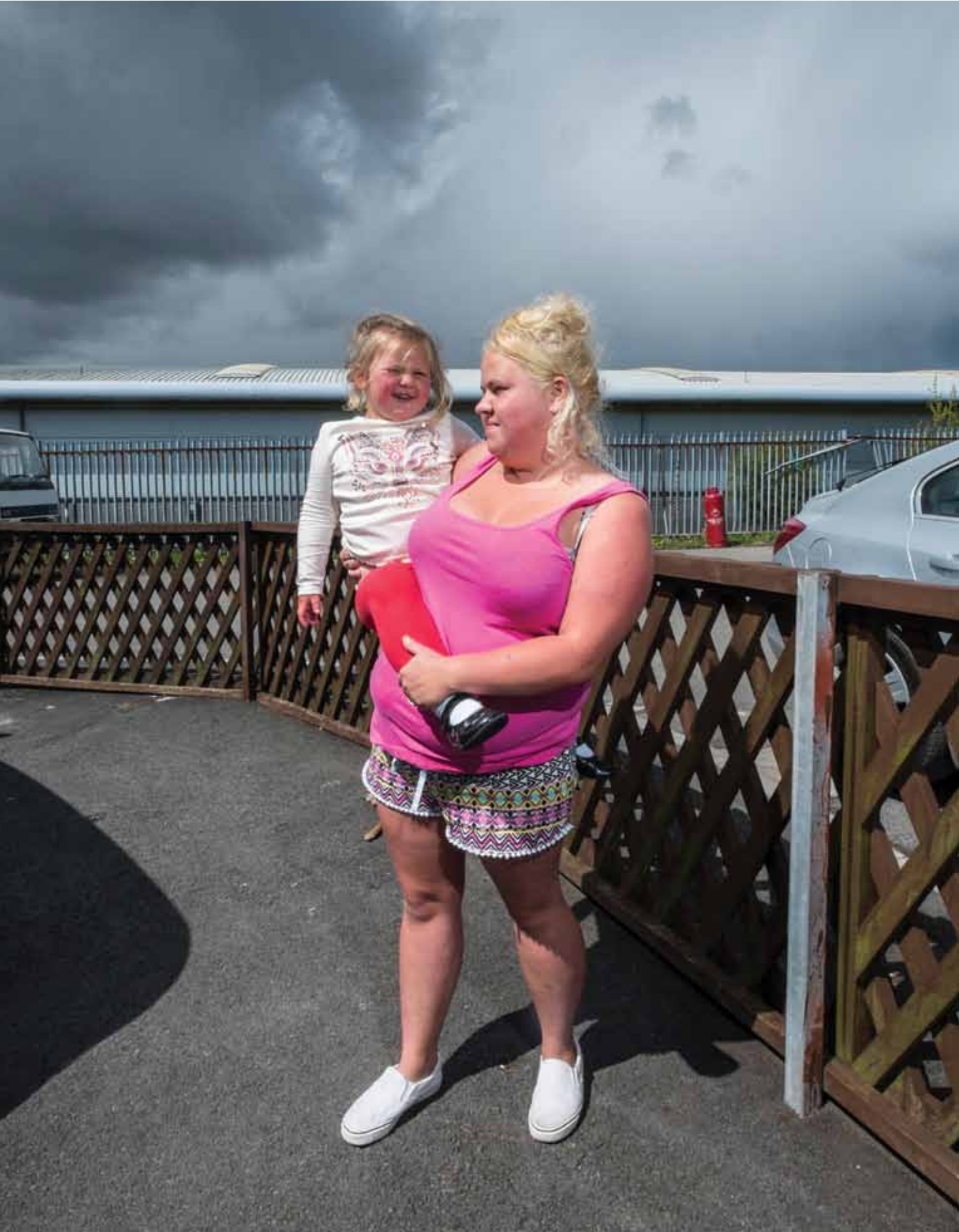




Rainier Rai



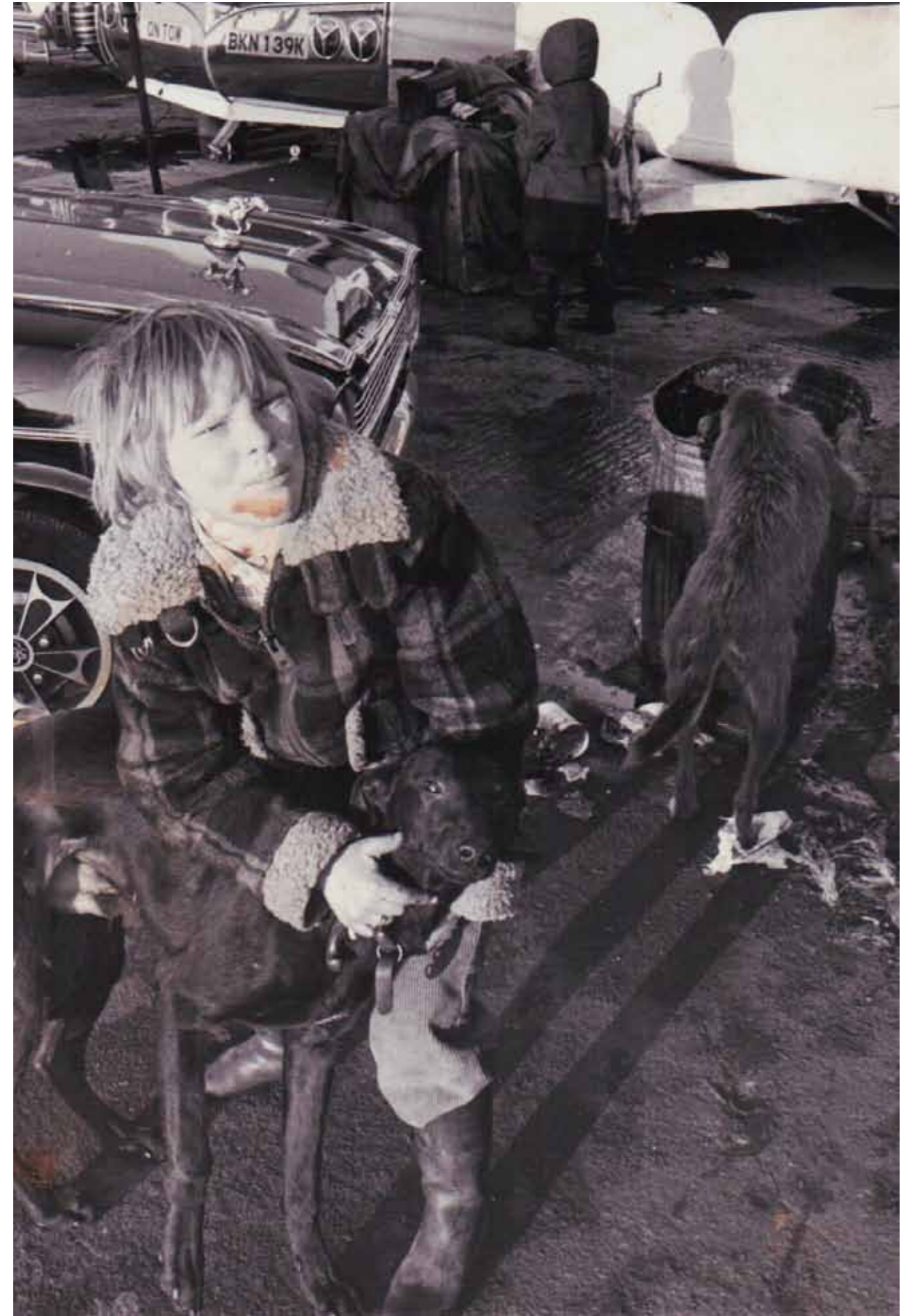






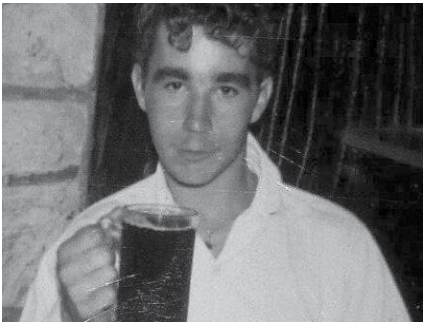












English/S.Welsh Romanes
Cymraeg
English

Rook

Coeden
Tree

Saster

Haearn
Iron

Kitchema

Tafarn
Pub

Bikhin

Gwerthu
To Sell

Vongra

Arian
Money

Mutramengri

Paned o De
Cup Of Tea

Jukel

Ci
Dog

Gry-Engro

Deliwr Ceffyl
Horse Dealer

Nav

Enw
Name

Pooroben

Oedran
Age

English/S.Welsh Romanes
Cymraeg
English

Drom

Ffordd
Road

Mawra

Bara
Bread

Dadus

Tad
Father

Chavies

Plant
Children

Yog

Tân
Fire

Putchem

Gofyn
Ask

Sooshi

Cwningen
Rabbit

Shunta

Gwrandu
Listen

Ladged

Cywilydd
Ashamed

Kooramengrer

Paffio
Boxer

History Timeline

Follow the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller journey throughout British History



53 B.C.E
Fairs are being held in Britain after the Roman invasion.

c.1000 C.E
Groups of Roma, originating in Northern India, reach modern Greece and Turkey.

1100s C.E
Travellers first recorded in Ireland. Travelling smiths mentioned in Scottish records.

1200s C.E
Many fairs are created by Royal Charter, including Bridlington (1200) and Hull (1299). By the turn of the 13th Century Roma begin to arrive in Western Europe.

1498
Four Gypsies travel to the New World with Christopher Columbus.

1505
King James the Fourth of Scotland pays seven pounds to “Egyptians” stopped at Stirling, who may have come from Spain. Parish records from around this time show that Irish Travellers are already living in England.

1530
Gypsies are forbidden to enter England under Henry VIII. Those already there are deported.

1554
Queen Mary of England passes the Egyptians Act. Being a Gypsy is punishable by death, as is being found in “the fellowship or company of Egyptians”. This is the only time that fraternizing with an ethnic community has been punishable by death.

1570s
Scottish Gypsies are ordered to stop travelling or leave the country. First records of the Kale Gypsies in Wales.

The first recorded Gypsy presence in Leeds is in the Leeds Parish registers of 1572.

1650s
Last known hanging for the crime of being a Gypsy, in Suffolk, England. Gypsies are deported to America.

1660–1800
English Gypsies calling themselves Romanichals survive by working for trusted non-Gypsies who know them. Appleby Fair granted chartered fair status in 1685 by James II. Ballinasloe Fair receives its royal charter in 1722.

1714
British Gypsies are shipped to the Caribbean as slaves.

1768
The first modern Circus is held in London.



1780
Some English anti-Gypsy laws begin to be repealed.

1800s
Fairs start to include mechanical rides, as they still do today.

1820s
Tents start to be used for fairs under George IV.

1830s
Covered horse drawn wagons begin to be used by Gypsies in Britain. Many Gypsies live in the more makeshift bender tents, and will continue to do so until the mid-late 20th Century.



1880s
Agricultural depression in England. Many Travellers and Gypsies are poverty-stricken and move to urban squatters’ areas. Hundreds of Irish Travellers leave Ireland for Britain.

1889
Showmen in Britain form the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Association, later called the Showmen’s Guild, to fight the Moveable Dwellings Bill, which restricts Travellers’ movements.

1908
The Children’s Act makes education compulsory for Travelling children in England by The Children’s Act, but only for half the year.



1930s–60s
Groups of European Roma come to live in Britain.

1934
Django Reinhardt introduces “swing jazz” to the world. A major influence on the development of Jazz.

1939–45
World War II. Nazis compose lists of English Gypsies to be interned. In Britain, the government builds caravan camps for Gypsies serving in the forces or doing vital farm work. These are closed when the war finishes. Roma, Sinti and other Gypsies are stripped of all human rights by the Nazis. As many as 600,000 are murdered in



camps and gas chambers. This is Porraimos (the devouring), the Roma holocaust in Europe.

1945–60
Travellers start to use motor-drawn trailers, and some buy their own land to stop on with them.

1960
New private sites are banned from being built in England by The Caravan Sites (Control of Development) Act. Mass evictions and public harassment of Gypsies and Travellers. Irish Government “Commission on Itinerancy” begins a programme to assimilate Irish Travellers.

History Timeline



1968
Lord Avebury helps to pass the new Caravan Sites Act. From 1970, the Government have to provide caravan sites for Travellers.

1970s–1990s
People from the settled community start to take to the road and live in caravans. They are known as “New Age Travellers” in the media.

1989
Romany Gypsies are first recognised under the Mandla criteria CRE v Dutton.

1994
The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act abolishes the Caravan Sites Act. This is disastrous for all Travellers living in Britain, and more than 5,000 families now have no legal home. Local councils became duty bound to identify land for private purchase by Travellers. Not one local council adhered to this.

1997
Slovak Romani refugees arrive in Dover, England. The media reaction is openly hostile.

2000
Irish Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority under the Mandla criteria CRE v O’Leary v Allied Domecq. Scottish Travellers are still not recognised as an ethnic minority in Scotland.

In England, Gypsy-led protests at the ban of the 600 year old fair at Horsemonden in Kent are successful and the ban is finally lifted in 2006.

2003
Irish Traveller Johnny Delaney, 15, is kicked to death in Cheshire for being “only a f***ing Gypsy”, as Eyewitnesses report. The Judge at his murderers’ trial rules that it was not a racially motivated attack and sentences the killers to 4 ½ years.

2003
12 Sussex Bonfire Society members arrested for incitement to racial hatred after burning an effigy of a caravan containing images of Gypsy women and children, and pained with inflammatory slogans.

2004
The Labour Government makes it a legal duty to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Traveller.

2005
The Sun newspaper launches its “Stamp on the Camps” campaign against Gypsies and Travellers. The Conservatives try to get re-elected by targeting Gypsies’ supposed flouting of planning laws.



2006
BBC starts Rokker Radio, the first programme for Gypsies and Travellers in its history.

2008
Britain celebrates the first Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. But in Italy, Roma camps are firebombed by neo-nazis.

Scottish Gypsy Travellers are recognised for the first time under MacLennon v GTEIP

2009
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company was formed in Cardiff, UK by Romani Gypsy Isaac Blake.

2010
After a successful debut, Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month enters its second year.

2011
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company is visited in Cardiff by the Latvian Ambassador

2012
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company is invited to visit the UK Prime Minister in London at 10 Downing Street.

2013
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company launched ‘Tales From The Trailer’ in Cardiff.

2014
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company organised the Great Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Debate

2015
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company organised the first Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Arts & Culture National Symposium

2016
The Romani Cultural & Arts Company launched ‘Family Lines, Family Trails’ in Wales.



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Photo 1: National Library of Ireland on The Commons – Travellers’ Decorated Caravan, July 1954; Family in their decorated caravan en route to the Cahirmee Horse Fair at Buttevant, Co. Cork. The fair is located at Buttevant and still attracts large numbers of Irish Travellers

Photo 2: A Gypsy Family, Welsh title: Teulu o sipsiwn, Ffotograffydd/ Photographer: Geoff Charles (1909–2002): Douglas and Elizabeth Hern and their eight children, who had been living in a [house] for six years and who were back in their caravans to travel from Bala to Swansea. June 22, 1951

