



Private Past, Public Future

Encouraging greater access to the South East's museums, libraries and archives for Gypsies and Travellers

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About the Author

Jake Bowers is one of Britain's few Romani journalists, and director of the Gypsy Media Company. He is a regular contributor to the Guardian, Independent BBC Radio and Television, the Big Issue, Travellers Times and the Ecologist on environmental and minority rights issues. He trained as a staff journalist with one of Britain's biggest regional publishers Johnson Publishing.

He combines a journalists respect for the truth, with a Gypsy's insight into his own community, to conduct research and cultural awareness training for central and local government, statutory agencies, voluntary groups and the media. He is in the process of starting Britain's first Romani radio station.

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Sonia Rasbery of the SEMLAC Cultural Diversity Network

Foreword

I would like to begin by thanking everyone who has so far participated in 'Roads to Your Past' - especially members of the steering group. It has been a real pleasure.

At the beginning (which is far too many years ago), was a desire to explore the potential of museums, galleries, archives and libraries to meet the needs of Travellers. This report is based on the principles of Action Research: not simply to ask, but to develop a research framework in partnership. This report does not - and did not attempt to - record the very many projects, exhibitions and permanent collections of Gypsies' and Travellers' culture. The actions which are called for in this report will be taken forward that much more quickly, more effectively, and

with greater impact because of those earlier initiatives and existing resources.

It is very easy to fall into speaking of 'us' and 'them': 'us' being, in my case, the staff of cultural institutions, and 'them' being Travellers. The us/them divide is not a good thing for two reasons. First, it suggests antagonism and hostility, where there should be only mutual understanding and acceptance, and secondly, it suggests homogeneity. Gypsies, museums, Showmen, archives and other institutions and groups are complex, dynamic, and diverse.

But as this research revealed, there is another 'us' (perhaps without a 'them'): the 'us' who are concerned to preserve,

understand, commemorate, record, account for and celebrate our human past. What we are inheriting from Travellers is of different significance for each of us, but it is an important part of our patrimony.

While being firmly rooted in the needs and concerns of Travellers, many of the themes and concerns identified by the Travellers who took part in the research echo the concerns current in cultural institutions. These range from the ethical questions of ownership, and rights to interpret and be present, to the practical questions of preservation methodologies, and classification terminology.

Pat Reynolds
Surrey Museums Development Officer
Surrey Museums Consultative Committee



Maurice Barr and Fiance Barr (nee Orchard), grandparents of one of the 100 Gypsies and Travellers who contributed to this research.

Summary

This research has demonstrated that by using Gypsies and Travellers researchers and their advocates, the community is not, as sometimes described, “hard to reach”. The overwhelmingly positive response to this research shows that there is both a phenomenal need and a desire within the community to share and preserve its history. Unfortunately, there is also a quite uniform experience of being ignored by museums, libraries and archives.

The settled population, who can make very little link between the romantic images of the past and the deprived and excluded images of the present, are also denied opportunities to learn about and interpret this recent history. At times, British Gypsy history may have been a painful and controversial story, but it is still a part of our national narrative.

The report concludes with a series of key recommendations:

- Remember Gypsies and Travellers in everything you do
- Work in partnership, including financially valuing Gypsies and Travellers as equals
- Produce materials that accommodate the communication needs of Gypsies and Travellers

Concrete actions recommended for the Roads to Your Past Project, and other initiatives:

- Cultural Awareness Training
- Cultural Audits (audits to identify and categorize Gypsy and Traveller material already held. A cultural audit should also identify gaps in collections, and develop proactive collection policies for the future).
- Active / Contemporary Collecting
- A Travelling Exhibition
- Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Heritage Centre



Lucky heather. Photo: Courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum.

1. Introduction

From Oxford's Gipsy Hill and Windsor's Tinkers Lane to Worthing's Romany Road, the historical contribution of Britain's 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers is hinted at in place names across the south-east of England. Yet despite being here for at least 500 years, the history and culture of Britain's travelling peoples has rarely been visible within public museums, libraries and archives in the region. But Roads to Your Past, an innovative new project, based at Surrey History Centre is set to change all that.

Funded by the European Union

and the South East Museum Library and Archive Council, and seeking funds for continuation from other bodies, the Traveller Project is designed to encourage greater access to the region's museums, libraries and archives for the region's large Gypsy and Traveller population. The project is the British contribution to a 3-year pan-European effort to remove barriers in accessing cultural heritage.

The first phase began in December 2004, when Romani journalist Jake Bowers was employed as the project's researcher. His work

until April 2005 began with identifying collections currently held within the region's museums, libraries and archives. He went on to consult members from all of the region's travelling communities: English Romanies, Romani refugees, Irish Travellers, New Travellers, Showmen and Circus People, about how best to preserve and celebrate the unique heritage of travelling people. His research, published in this report, will inform the future work of museums, libraries and archives in the area.

At a time when anti-Traveller hostility is on the rise, it is extremely important to recognise the long history of travelling people in the south-east of England. This project is not only designed to celebrate that history but to make it more accessible and visible in a way that is informed by the community itself. By doing so we hope to develop some innovative pilot projects that will encourage more Gypsies and Travellers to explore their history and create some understanding in the wider community about all of Britain's nomadic cultures.



Showwoman and Parish Councillor Sue Peak, one of the 100 Gypsies and Travellers interviewed for this research with granddaughter. Photo: Matt Cardy.

2. Methodology

The research consisted of two elements: research within the existing museums, libraries and archives community to identify current good practice, and action research within the community to identify ways of building upon this good practice. Existing good practice was documented where possible as tangible examples of how Gypsy and Traveller heritage is currently preserved, celebrated and represented. The current good practice served as a departure point from which to develop innovative ideas to further improve the representation of Gypsy and Traveller culture within the region's museums, libraries and archives.

The community research consisted of two stages. An initial series of qualitative, in-depth interviews with leading Gypsy and Traveller activists, historians, family history researchers and craftsmen focused on common themes and ideas about how those already looking at heritage issues would like to see the Gypsy and Traveller heritage work develop. The insights gained by these interviews are repeated and attributed throughout this research. See qualitative stage below.

A second series of interviews informed wider ranging, but less in depth, quantitative interviews which consulted Gypsies and

Travellers of all ethnic backgrounds and accommodation situations in all south eastern counties about how the community would like to see its history and culture preserved and represented. The quantitative research also examined existing use of and attitudes towards museums, libraries and archives in order to provide a baseline with which to judge whether long term work has been successful. Half of these 100 interviews were done by the author, but the other 30% were done by Traveller Education Service or other local authority staff in an attempt to increase the sample size, geographical coverage and statistical validity. A further

20% of results were gained through sending the questionnaire out to members of the Romany and Traveller Family History Society (RTFHS). The responses from all quantitative interviews were recorded anonymously. But the ethnic background, sex, age and accommodation status were recorded to ensure the research was balanced and broadly representative.

The interviews took place individually or in small groups, with the written consent of their parents if they were under 16. The interviews were recorded by a third party filling in a standard questionnaire. The interviews took place at a time and a location chosen by the person interviewed.

The questionnaire consisted of a mix of open and closed questions. Results from the closed questions (those with a yes, no, or don't know response) have been analysed and are presented as statistics within this report. Results from the open questions provide themes to be explored later in this report. See appendix 2.

Qualitative stage:

Before starting this research, personal experience suggested that while public museums, libraries and archives have already gone some way to engaging Gypsies and Travellers, the greatest work by far to preserve the community's heritage had been done by private individuals and institutions. The qualitative stage therefore focused on in-depth

There is strong evidence that Gypsies and Travellers represent the largest ethnic minority in counties such as Kent, Hampshire and Surrey and are significant minorities in many other south-eastern counties.

interviews with 8 of these movers and shakers.

They were:

- Janet Keet-Black of the Romany and Traveller Family History Society.
- Gypsy activist and author Len Smith who designed the Romany Museum at Paulton's Park in Hampshire.
- Gary, Obie and Frank Brazil who have received heritage lottery funding for their private Romany museum in Marden, Kent.
- Henry and Paula Elliott who are establishing a Romani museum in Cranbrook, Kent.
- Gypsy historian Simon Evans in Kent.

All of these individuals live within the south-east region. And all of these individuals, with the exception of Simon Evans - who has done a lot to improve the representation of Gypsies and Travellers in

museums and libraries - are from the community.

Their insights, as people who have not only helped invent the wheel of preserving Gypsy and Traveller heritage, but set it in motion, were invaluable in setting the agenda in this research.

All ethnic and occupational Traveller communities were included. Roma refugees from Eastern Europe were not included, because although they form part of the wider Gypsy community in Britain, their experience of being excluded from mainstream services differs from indigenous communities because of differences in lifestyle and national origin.

The communities were:

- English Romanies
- Irish Travellers
- New Travellers
- Showmen

The south-east is home to the second highest population of Gypsies and Travellers according to the Office of the Deputy Prime Ministers Bi-annual Caravan Count.¹ Despite being recognised as separate ethnic minorities under British race relations legislation (by a decision of the Court of Appeal: see Commission for Racial Equality v Dutton, Court of Appeal, 1988), English Gypsies and Irish Travellers are absent from the census and most forms of ethnic monitoring. But there is strong evidence that Gypsies and Travellers represent the largest ethnic minority in counties such as Kent, Hampshire and Surrey and are significant minorities in many other south-eastern counties.

¹ For more information on the Biannual Gypsy Caravan count see: http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_housing/documents/page/odpm_house_027373.hcsp

is also strong.

The following tables show the number and diversity of subjects that were interviewed. There is a natural bias towards greater representation in the three counties of Hampshire, Surrey and Kent where Gypsy and Traveller numbers are large and the political will to celebrate Traveller heritage

These numbers are broadly balanced and were constantly reviewed to deliberately reflect the diverse backgrounds and accommodation situations that Travellers experience. The consensus among Travellers groups and researchers is that approxi-

mately 50% of traditional Travellers are now housed. Of those remaining in caravans, 70% are thought to be living on either private or public sites and 30% are living in unauthorised (roadside) encampments. It also is based upon the assumption that 80% of Travellers in the south east are Romani and

Number of ethnic Travellers interviewed by county and ethnic background

	Romani	Irish	Total
Surrey, Bracknell Forest / Slough / Windsor and Maidenhead / Wokingham / Reading, Berkshire	24	4	28
Kent / Medway / Thames Gateway, Brighton and Hove, East and West Sussex	22	4	26
Hampshire / Southampton / Portsmouth / IoW, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes / Oxfordshire	23	2	25
Total	69	10	79

Number of occupational (non-ethnic) Travellers interviewed by county

	Showmen / Circus	New Traveller	Total
Surrey, Bracknell Forest / Slough / Windsor and Maidenhead / Wokingham / Reading, Berkshire	3	3	6
Kent / Medway / Thames Gateway, Brighton and Hove, East and West Sussex	5	5	10
Hampshire / Southampton / Portsmouth / IoW, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes / Oxfordshire	3	2	5
Total	11	10	21

Note: Unlike ethnic Travellers occupational Travellers are defined by their lifestyle. That is, an occupational Traveller ceases to be a Traveller as soon as they move into bricks and mortar.

Accommodation situations of those interviewed

	Public site	Private site	House	Roadside	Total
Surrey, Bracknell Forest / Slough / Windsor and Maidenhead / Wokingham / Reading, Berkshire	6	7	12	6	31
Kent / Medway / Thames Gateway, Brighton and Hove, East and West Sussex	10	4	9	10	33
Hampshire / Southampton / Portsmouth / IoW, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes / Oxfordshire	10	10	12	4	36
Total	26	21	33	20	100

This research actively sought to consult Gypsies and Travellers in housing as part of a conscious attempt to include the hidden majority within an invisible minority.

20% are of Irish Traveller heritage.

tion.²

over 65.

Travellers in houses

An estimated 50% of all Travellers are now housed, either through choice, or often through lack of accommodation. But statutory and voluntary services are primarily targeted towards Travellers living in caravans, whether at the roadside or on private or public sites. They are, after all, the most visible part of the Traveller population, but like the tip of an iceberg they do not represent what lies beneath the surface. In some cases this is understandable, Traveller Education Services, for example, specifically target Travellers living in caravans or on Gypsy sites and have difficulty identifying housed Travellers, often because they do not reveal their ethnic backgrounds to education authorities.

But in other cases, however, service providers are still very much using a gorgia (non-Gypsy) definition of what a Traveller is. That is, they are defined by their lifestyle (living in caravans) rather than by their ethnicity. But an English Romani or Irish Traveller does not lose their culture and heritage as soon as they move into housing. Research suggests that Travellers in housing are often more vulnerable to ill health, racist abuse, isolation and assimila-

Travellers in housing appear to be at either ends of the wealth spectrum. They are either in houses because they are wealthy enough to buy their own houses and have chosen to live that way, or they have been forced into social housing. Whether in housing through choice or compulsion, travellers in housing are often in the most urgent need of service provision and arguably have the most to gain from accessing and celebrating their cultural heritage. They are isolated from their community, unable to live a traditional lifestyle, and sometimes, because of this, in conflict with those around them. For many in housing, the picture is bleak and their accommodation is perceived as a very real attempt to assimilate them into mainstream gorgia (non-Gypsy) society.

Therefore, this research actively sought to consult Gypsies and Travellers in housing as part of a conscious attempt to include the hidden majority within an invisible minority.

Age and Sex

35% of those interviewed were men and 65% were women. 14% were under 16, 17% were aged between 17 and 30, 41% were between 31 and 45, 27% were between 46 and 65, and 1% were

Accessible to all

This research is presented in two forms: the written research you are currently reading and an audio form.

The audio form of this research consists of a 20 minute audio documentary featuring the executive summary and highlights of the quantitative and qualitative interviews. The research is presented in an audio form because many within the community have limited literacy skills, but still need to be informed of the results. The audio report will also give the community ownership of the research and allow them to press for its recommendations.

The written report, audio interviews and photographs taken will also be incorporated into a DVD used throughout Europe to train heritage professionals as part of ACCU: Access to Cultural Heritage, an EU wide project looking at removing barriers in accessing cultural heritage.

² For more information on the ill-health experienced by Gypsies and Travellers in England, please see the University of Sheffield report "The Health Status of Gypsy Travellers in England." Available at: www.shef.ac.uk/scharr



A travelling 'Egyptian' blacksmith being chased from a village. Metal work remains an important trade for some Gypsies and Travellers. Photo from 'Stopping Places: a Gypsy history of south London and Kent' by Simon Evans.

3. Findings

This research has looked at two basic issues: the community's experience of how it has been served by museums, libraries and archives in the south-east in the past, and the way in which it would like to be represented in the future. But none of this can be discussed in isolation from Gypsy history in England, because it is this very history that has informed the experiences, views and attitudes recorded in this report.

A short Gypsy history

Ever since Gypsies arrived in Britain in the 16th century we have aroused fear, loathing and occasionally fascination. When Henry VIII sat on the throne, the penalty for simply being a Gypsy was execution. The 1554 "Egyptians

Act" forbade Gypsies from entering England and imposed the death penalty on those of us who remained in the country for more than a month

The earliest record found to date in Surrey, dates back to 1st March 1569.³ A copy of a letter sent from the Privy Council to William More describes Queen Elizabeth's concern at disorders created by a "universal negligent and wilful permission of vagabonds and sundry beggars commonly called rogues and in some parts Egyptians [Gypsies]."⁴ In October of the same year, a letter from the Privy Council to the High Sheriff and Justices of the Peace in Surrey, orders that "Egyptians" and other rogues be arrested and treated as vagabonds "whereby they may be driven by punishment to change that wicked and dangerous form of life."

In more enlightened times, the death sentence was reduced to transportation. The 1597 Vagrancy Act made it possible for those that "will not be reformed of their roguish kind of life" to be conveyed to "parts beyond the seas". Nowadays, official policy towards Britain's travelling population recommends "toleration". The relationship between Britain and its Gypsy population has come a long way in five centuries, but it still has a long way to go. Many within the community feel its time our culture was not just tolerated, but celebrated.

The twentieth century saw a rise in the conflict between Britain's nomadic and settled population that has still to be resolved. Despite the widespread and continuing closure of traditional stopping places, enough common

³ Loseley Manuscripts in the Surrey History Centre, Woking. Reference: 6729/11/52

⁴ Surrey History Centre reference LM/COR/3/561

land had survived the centuries of enclosure to provide enough lawful stopping places for people whose way of life was or had become nomadic. But in 1960, the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act gave local authorities the power to close the commons to Travellers, which many proceeded to do with great energy. In the 1960s the pressure for the continual eviction of Gypsies with bulldozers and private security firms reached crisis point. In 1964 the leader of the Labour group on Birmingham Council called for “the extermination of the impossibles”.

After a wide-ranging campaign of resistance to evictions, a new Caravan Sites Act was passed in 1968, ordering local authorities to provide sites for all Gypsies residing in or resorting to their areas. For the first time in 500 years, the British state had recognised its responsibility to provide secure, legal stopping places for British Gypsies.

Few non-Gypsies have ever visited an official Gypsy site. Many epitomise the definition of a ghetto – a racially segregated and enclosed settlement. Many have been built near rubbish dumps, sewer works or noisy industrial facilities. In 1994, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act removed the legal obligation to provide even these sites. As a result, some local councils have privatised and closed many of the legal stopping places available to

Britain’s travelling population. Government policy currently recommends that travellers should house themselves. But Gypsy families that attempt to live on their own land are often denied planning permission. Over 80% of planning applications from settled people are granted consent, while more than 90% of applications from Gypsies are refused. The current conflict over “illegal” Travellers sites is in part caused by this history.⁵

Within the past 50 years the Gypsy and Traveller community has experienced dramatic and often traumatic change as economic change and draconian legislation have undermined its traditionally nomadic way of life. The community’s usefulness as agricultural labourers has declined due to mechanisation and the importation of cheaper eastern European and asylum seeker labour. Yet despite the huge upheavals, the community has done its best to preserve its own heritage with the resources it has had at its disposal.

Whenever genuine requests to explore and represent that heritage have come from outside the community they have been enthusiastically responded to. What follows is a description of some of the results of those efforts and the key characters involved in preserving Gypsy and Traveller heritage to be found in the south-east of England.

It is not an exhaustive description

of all the good practice to be found, partly because some of the best examples of work to preserve and celebrate Gypsy and Traveller heritage, such as Peter Ingram’s Romani Museum in Selborne Hampshire, no longer exist. But the case studies below do illustrate the general point that the community’s heritage has almost exclusively been preserved by private individuals and institutions and largely ignored by public heritage bodies: despite the fact that Gypsies and Travellers probably constitute the south-east’s eldest and largest ethnic minority.

The case studies below exemplify some of the good practice that has got the ball rolling. In some cases, they are as a result of partnerships between private institutions and individuals, occasionally they are the result of partnerships between private individuals and public authorities, but they all draw on the dedication of individuals who have dedicated their lives to preserving the community’s heritage. Gypsy people usually judge a character on the basis of quality of their work and the company they keep. So there can be no better way of introducing the movers and shakers of Gypsy heritage in the south-east than by what they have already achieved. They haven’t just invented the wheel of preserving Gypsy heritage, they have set it in motion and their pioneering work provides solid foundations for future efforts which are discussed later in this report.

Over 80% of planning applications from settled people are granted consent, while more than 90% of applications from Gypsies are refused. The current conflict over “illegal” Travellers sites is in part caused by this history.

5 In 1997, Research by ACERT (Advisory Committee for the Education of Romanies and Travellers) showed that whereas 80% of all planning applications were accepted, 90 per cent of Gypsy and Traveller applications were initially rejected (although more were passed on appeal). Reference: ACERT and Wilson M. 1997. Directory of Planning Policies for Gypsy Site Provision. Bristol: Policy Press



Obie, Frank and Gary Brazil of the South East Romany Museum, Marden, Kent. Photo: Jake Bowers.

4. Private Past: Qualitative Research

4.1 The Brazil Family and The South East Romany Museum

www.medwaytownsrc.co.uk/SERM%20Home.htm

Tel: 01622 831681

Situated in Howlands Lane, Marden in the heart of the Kent countryside, the working museum is in the early stages of development. The museum plans to exhibit Romany culture and life.

It is very much a living museum as the site is the home of the Brazil family. The museum has already had several official visits from

schools, individuals and libraries and is viewed as an important project for bringing Romany culture into the community.

Visitors can expect to see several traditional wagons including those of Reading, Burton and Barrel types, two of which require restoration and pre-date the first world war. Also on display is an assortment of carts and trolleys and large-scale models of Reading and Ledge wagons.

The preservation work, building and painting of wagons is undertaken by the Brazil family in an open workshop that houses

artefacts, wagons, craft tools and items of Romany and Traveller interest.

Future plans include the building of a conference room, wagon shelter, tea room, picnic area and visitor facilities. At present visits are arranged by appointment only and there is no admission fee but donations are gratefully received. The museum has applied for charitable trust status.

Inside their mobile home, Gary, Obie and Frank have a lot to say about the way their culture has been treated in the past and what they are doing. But its Frank that

does most of the talking. Walking into their home, you get to see Gypsy life as it is today and always has been. But not a thing is preserved in a glass case.

Why are you involved in preserving Gypsy and Traveller heritage?

"This has been our way of life ever since I can remember." says Frank. "We've messed about with wagons, all Gypsy type of things. Its just a way of life to us. And now its time for people to see how Gypsies do live and how they carry on."

"Gorgia (non-Gypsy) people used to come down here and say it was like going back in time. They said it was like a museum. So we thought why not turn it in one and show people how we still live!"

They have had a few problems, but still feel that they've achieved a lot and have great plans for the future.

What obstacles have you encountered?

"We've had problems with the local council. They don't like Gypsies in the local area anyway. We've been here for 32 years and the council still treat us like foreigners and outsiders. We've had parties of school children

**"And now its time
for people to see
how Gypsies do live
and how they carry
on."**

down here from all over Kent and people have really liked what we are doing. It has opened their eyes to the fact that we are not all vagabonds or rogues."

What more would you like to do?

"In the future what I'd really like to do is get it up and running as a museum. Not just to have nice pretty things on show, but to show everything of the old ways. They weren't all rich people, they had good and they had bad. And I'd like to show all aspects of the Gypsy life, down to the tents, wagons and all the crafts that go along with it, like repairing wagons and bringing them back to the full glory."

4.2 Janet Keet-Black, Secretary of the Romany and Traveller Family His- tory Society and Editor of Romany Routes

<http://website.lineone.net/~rtfhs/>

Janet Keet-Black is, by her own admission, no stereotypical Gypsy. As secretary and editor of the Romany and Traveller Family History Society, Janet has helped create a family history society has that has probably done more to foster Gypsy and Traveller pride in their history and culture than any other single organisation in the UK. Based in East Sussex, she had this to tell me about her work.

"We collect as much material as possible from archives. But also from the community, simply because we feel it is important before it is all lost. There's an awareness amongst a lot of Gypsies and Travellers that they do want to know about their history and culture now."

Why have you done this?

"Because I'd went to a funeral for my Uncle Jobie and it occurred to me that all the old folk were dying and taking a lot of their history and culture with them. So I decided that I wanted to find out as much as I could before they all went. But unfortunately they have

" I'd went to a funeral for my Uncle Jobie and it occurred to me that all the old folk were dying and taking a lot of their history and culture with them."

all gone now."

What obstacles have you encountered?

"I think in most museums and libraries, when I started out they had never really encountered anybody that wanted to research Gypsies and Travellers. So they didn't really have any knowledge of what they had, so I found that difficult. So it was ignorance really. I don't think it occurred to people that Gypsies and Travellers would want to do that kind of thing."

What have you achieved so far?

"A lot. I think we've given a lot of Travellers the confidence to go in and do a bit of research themselves. And we've given the older Travellers an opportunity to get together and talk about the old times at our open days."

4.3 Len Smith, creator of The Romany Experience, Paulton's Park, Hampshire

Len Smith, creator of the Romany Experience and Gypsy activist with the Gypsy and Traveller Law Reform Coalition.

"My name is Len Smith and I am an English Traveller originally from Yorkshire, although I've lived in the New Forest for the last 47 years. I've made my living for most of my working life as a carriage builder and obviously within that trade I did a few wagons, a bit of restoration and bit of building. Because I was doing that sort of thing I ended up getting involved with Paulton's Park, the visitor attraction near Romsey who established a big Romani exhibition

"It teaches... what the way of life was like in the past, and with a history it helps reinforce your identity."

and I got involved as an adviser."

Why have you done this work - why has it been important to you?

"It's been important to me because locally in the New Forest for instance Gypsies were accepted for hundreds of years and yet in more recent years had to endure a lot of discrimination. But more to the point, my grandparents were the ones who talked to me about Romani life and culture and trade practices and things like that."

What obstacles have you encountered when you've been doing this work?

"Well luckily I didn't encounter any obstacles with this particular project because they came to me in a sense and asked me to do it. So any possible obstacles were removed by that. But I did obviously find some obstacles in matters of detail because the particular orientation of the exhibit that I've done is as a visitor attraction.

I found obstacles in the sense that I had to orientate it towards visitors rather than purely as a museum exhibit."

So there were commercial considerations?

"Yes, to make it entertaining rather than merely to inform, which I would have preferred to do, but equally you've got to take what you can get and this at least has put a very large exhibit in front of a very large number of people."

So were there censorship issues going on where you thought you couldn't approach something because it's going to put people off - it's not going to be commercially attractive?

"Not really - never thought of it in that way but equally I suppose that did operate because we were choosing the things that were more commercially attractive - I didn't reject anything on the basis that it wasn't but equally chose the things that were more commercially attractive than otherwise."

What do you feel that you've achieved?

"Well although in one sense there's a disappointment in so far as this exhibit is all totally rooted in the past. But what it has achieved, is it teaches a lot of young traveller kids and the settled community about Gypsy and Traveller culture, what the way of life was like in the past, and with a history it helps reinforce your identity. Plus the huge numbers of people that go through this exhibit every year - running into hundreds of thousands. Then if you only change the perceptions of even

1% of those people it makes a very big impact."

What more would you like to do?

"In general I'd like to see something much more rooted in the here and now, the problems that gypsies and travellers are facing as well as the enjoyment of Gypsy and Traveller culture - I think you need to reflect the whole bracket of Gypsy life as it is in the here and now because I think British society is inherently racist largely because of ignorance. If you can remove that ignorance by the same stroke you remove some of the racism."

4.4 Henry and Paula Elliott, Cranbrook

Henry and Paula Elliott's smallholding in Cranbrook, Kent exemplifies the Gypsy community's historical and ongoing place in the British countryside, part nursery, part home and potential museum it illustrates that in Gypsy culture there is no real division between work and home, or past and present.

"My name is Henry Elliot, also known as Stamford and my dad's family was always known as the Bacons, the Bacon boys and I am also known as Henry Bacon."

"I'm Paula Elliott also known as Stamford, Henry's wife, a non-Gypsy married into the Gypsy community and we've got a nursery and small holding and that's what we do."



Paula and Henry Elliott of the Twin Oaks Romany Museum in Cranbrook, Kent. Photo: Matt Cardy.

How are you personally involved in preserving Gypsy and Travellers history and culture?

"We're trying to set up a museum here which we will do eventually. We've got six wagons and other carts and different bits and pieces that Travellers and also non-Travellers would have used over the years."

"We've also got loads of other artefacts that Travellers and Gypsies would have used like all the old pots and the kettles and the kettle irons. We've got models of wagons and carts and china horses and all the things that travellers would have had and used over the years."

"We've got a lot of old bits of harness and bridles. Also we can talk to people about our way of life and what we used to have to do and what we still do have to do."

"So that is something that we want to do, we just keep our culture going and talk to people about it, invite anyone who wants to, to turn up here they're welcome to come, have a cup of tea, have a chat. If we're eating bread and cheese they can have bread and cheese, if we're eating a bit of steak they can have a bit of steak. It's as simple as that - what we've got, we share."

4.5 Simon Evans

Simon Evans' work as an author radio journalist and photographer has drawn on the rich Gypsy heritage of Kent in much of his work.

Although a gorgia (non-Gypsy) he is widely accepted by the Gypsy community, particularly in Kent. He has recently brought years of research on Gypsy history together into a book called

"We've got a lot of old bits of harness and bridles. Also we talk to people about our way of life and what we used to have to do and what we still do have to do."

Stopping Places – A Gypsy History of South London and Kent. Some of his contemporary photographs are also used throughout this report.

How are you personally involved in preserving Gypsy and Traveller history and culture?

“Through my work mainly as a writer broadcaster and photographer. I’m a documentary photographer of contemporary Gypsy lifestyles – also a Gypsy historian so I have done a lot of work on Gypsy history in Kent and also I do a lot of radio work with the travellers around Gypsy culture.”

Why have you done this work?

“I don’t know it’s just one of those things that you get latched into. I first got involved 20 years ago. Once you are involved you are involved and its gone from there. Also I recognise from my own family because half of my family come from the East End of London and I just see cultural connections between history culture and gypsy culture in the south east of England so it’s been part of a wider working class culture of Kent and south east London. It all fits into that.”

What obstacles have you encountered in this work?

“Obstacles usually arise from misunderstanding of what I’m doing and why I’m doing it. Or what it is exactly that I’m after. In terms of broadcasting or making radio programmes or taking photographs there are two obstacles. The first is travellers’ reluctance to be involved but once they know me and what I do then that reluctance tends to dissipate.”

“Also the obstacles are the people who may be commissioning programmes might also have misunderstandings about what the gypsy and romany culture is that I’m trying to put forward. For instance the commissioning editor at Radio 4 – we had an exchange of emails about doing Romani culture or Gypsy culture. He emailed me back and said that in his experience it was difficult to get folklore on radio 4. He thought Romani culture was just about the past and its folklore rather than contemporary culture that’s here and now.”

“As far as writing is concerned and the research in secondary sources such as museums and libraries the obstacles are that stuff is not necessarily categorised under romany studies or Gypsy studies because there isn’t such a categorisation so you’ve got to know how to explore libraries and archives to find the information and that can present considerable difficulties because the bottom

line is you usually are having to wade through vast quantities of material, lots of indexes in order to locate stuff which may or may not be of use for what you are trying to do.”

What do you feel you’ve achieved?

“It’s one of those things really – I don’t know. What I’ve physically achieved is a number of radio programmes and a book. What achievement that represents in cultural terms for Gypsy culture or Romani culture I wouldn’t like to say – time will tell.”

What more would you like to do?

“Well continue along that line really – I like to be doing more in terms of contemporary Romani Gypsy and Traveller culture as it exists mainly now in its sedentary form because historically of course the traveller culture has been dependent on nomadism. So the area I’m particularly interested in is what is the difference between a nomadic and sedentary cultures. There is friction between them and how does also a hitherto nomadic culture or transient culture then make that transition into a sedentary one. What may be lost or gained in the process but that’s the area I’m increasingly interested in moving into apart from the historical side although that’s the bedrock of all of it.”

“I’m particularly interested in is what is the difference between a nomadic and sedentary cultures. There is friction between them and how does also a hitherto nomadic culture or transient culture then make that transition into a sedentary one.”



Romani mothers and children on the Epsom Downs. Photo: Courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum.

5. Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate two of the pioneering partnerships that have been undertaken to preserve the heritage of Gypsies and Travellers in the south-east of England.

5.1 St. Barbe Museum and Art Gallery

In 2003, the St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery in Lymington, Hampshire, organised an exhibition entitled "Sven Berlin - paintings from Shave Green" which featured many paintings by the colourful, bohemian artist Sven Berlin on the fiftieth anniversary of his journey from St. Ives to the New Forest in a Gypsy wagon.

Curator Steve Marshall describes the exhibition. "Disenchanted with

"The Gypsies had been barred from camping in the open forest in the 1920s and were given the choice of living in one of six compounds or in council housing."

life in Cornwall, Berlin and his wife Juanita went in search of the Forest Gypsies with whom they were to develop a remarkable close relationship. The Gypsies had been barred from camping in the open forest in the 1920s and were given the choice of living in one of six

compounds or in council housing. Conditions at the camps could be atrocious, most have no running water and the inhabitants were banned from building any kind of permanent structure and lived in caravans or tents.

Yet amongst such sadness Berlin was to find inspiration for one of the most creative periods of his career. His pictures represent an honest and at times heart-rending record of a people trying to retain their dignity in the face of overwhelming odds. Few people have ever been as accepted by the Romani people in quite the same way as Sven Berlin, and it is a tribute to his integrity as a man and an artist that he was allowed such freedom to record the Gypsies last days among the trees of the New Forest.

5.2 Bourne Hall Museum Exhibition

In 1999, Jeremy Harte, Curator of the Epsom and Ewell museum created an exhibition about Gypsy history in cooperation with residents at the local Cox Lane Gypsy site in Epsom. The exhibition was shown for 4 months to wide acclaim from people within the community and continues to be remembered as an example of good practice by Gypsies and Travellers in Surrey. Among other things, it drew on the experience of local Gypsies and explored not just the community's general history and culture but also its deep and ongoing connection with a very specific event and place in Surrey. The exhibition revealed a hidden history that many did not know about it. It stated:

Every year, Gypsy families meet at the Derby. The painted vans may have been replaced by stunning chrome-covered trailers, but for many families the get-together is as important as it was two hundred years ago. A certain amount of horse trading still goes on, but dealing now centres on cars, vans and other commodities. The Gypsy community and the Derby have developed together. Until the 1820s, the race was of little interest to the general public. Epsom Downs was a sheep

pasture, and Gypsies stopped here as they would on any other open land. Seven families were camping out on census night, 1861: they were making a living by making mats and baskets, sharpening knives and selling from door to door. Ten years later there were eleven Gypsy households.

By 1891 there were forty Gypsy households. This was a time when Gypsies were arriving from all over southern England for the race meeting. Derby Day mania reached its height in Victorian times. Along with the crowds came the travelling people - Gypsy fiddlers, flowersellers and palmists, of whom the 1829 *Times* said they were 'capable of telling everybody's fortune but their own'. Spielers shouting the attractions of the booths or sideshows were there, as were the wandering pedlars, entertainers, acrobats, stiltwalkers, and the men with their three-card or thimble-rigging tricks.

Epsom's response to this influx of outsiders was mixed. Some local people campaigned in their support, like Thomas Hersey the bicycle dealer of South Street. Others suspected that they were bringing in trouble. In 1895 there was a scare that they were bringing infectious disease with them - something unlikely, as Gypsies rarely stay in one place

long enough to pick up an infection.

Derby Day, with its colour and excitement, has long been a magnet for artists - and the Gypsies are part of its attraction. After the drab years of World War I, the race seemed to be a celebration of everything that was alive. Sir Alfred Munnings wrote: 'Never have I quite felt the alluring, infectious joy of the races, the tradition of Epsom, as I did in that first year after the war, 1919'. Munnings was a professional painter of horses and their jockeys, but he had an eye for the Gypsies, too - they struck him as a picturesque, swarthy crowd, especially the women, with black ringlets and heavy ear-rings visible under their large black ostrich-plumed hats.

In the 1930s, when Gypsies were faced with attempts to remove them from the Downs, they found an unexpected champion in Lady Sybil Grant. She was the daughter of the fifth Earl of Rosebery, who had had been Prime Minister in Queen Victoria's days. She was herself fond of caravanning and also held a hawker's licence so that she could sell from door to door for charity.

There was conflict between the Gypsies and the Downs administrators at this time, and Lady Sybil hoped to defuse it by

"Derby Day, with its colour and excitement, has long been a magnet for artists - and the Gypsies are part of its attraction. After the drab years of World War I, the race seemed to be a celebration of everything that was alive."

letting them camp on her land at The Bushes. In 1932 she issued a public statement, saying 'I am hoping to organise the van dwellers into a humble little guild which will have the advantage of protecting the working gypsies and getting rid of those undesirable members who are to be found in every community'.

In 1936, an Act of Parliament created the Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators, and gave them authority to run the Downs for the benefit of the public. One of their first decisions was to ban Gypsies. Lady Sybil considered this was against the Gypsies' rightful heritage, not to be able to camp where they had done for hundreds of years. She

immediately gave them the use of a field, called The Sanctuary, in Downs Road. It was near the Downs, and ideal for horses as it was thick with grass.

The ban on camping carried on through the 1930s. Gypsies offered to pay to stop on the Downs at a £1 a wagon. It was decided to refuse them, in the belief that it would cost far more to remove rubbish after they left. Relations between the two groups had turned into a running battle, which came to a head in 1967, when summonses for illegal camping were served on 40 families. In 1969 the Downs Conservators handed the job over to a security company which provided 24 hour patrols to warn

off campers. The Gypsies said that if they were prevented from parking they would stop the race. At the beginning of Derby week, two hundred trailers arrived and parked up as usual and the next day another hundred settled down on Derby Day. 160 summonses were issued but the race was not stopped, since as the Gypsies' leader said, 'we are on the Downs so we have won'. Only 29 summonses had been served, each carrying a fine of £3 for trespass and three guineas costs. Disputes like this continued until 1984, when a new Act was passed for the regulation of the Downs. Under this Act, Gypsies have a right to stay on the approved site on the Downs.

At the beginning of Derby week, two hundred trailers arrived. 160 summonses were issued but the race was not stopped, since as the Gypsies' leader said, 'we are on the Downs so we have won'.

Gypsies camped at Epsom at the time of the Derby. Photo: Courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum.





Tammy Vallor, Louise Smith and daughters. Cox Lane site, Epsom, Surrey. Photo: Matt Cardy.

6. Public Future

6.1 Experiences of museums, libraries and archives

The work of Gypsy heritage pioneers demonstrates that, apart from the honourable exceptions, the best work to preserve and celebrate the history of Gypsies and Travellers has been done by private individuals often motivated by the desire to tell a story that has not yet been fully told.

Given that Gypsy and Traveller communities constitute the largest ethnic minorities in many south-eastern counties there has been a startling omission in celebrating the history of a large section of the community. Many within the community feel this has been

“the best work ... has been done by private individuals often motivated by the desire to tell a story that has not yet been fully told.”

motivated by underlying racism by museum, library and archive staff, others are more charitable and put the omission down to sheer ignorance. Whatever the cause, the community is united in its belief that something should be done to plug the gap and place the history of Gypsies and Travellers alongside that of the settled

community as an important segment of the history and diversity of British Society.

Before exploring possible solutions, it is worth bearing in mind the community's current use and experience of museums, libraries and archives. The results from 100 quantitative interviews revealed the following statistics:

82% of Gypsies and Travellers in the southeast can read and write, but only 17% were members of a local library.⁶

Only 19% of them had ever used an archive or county record office to research their own family history, although 36% said they did know of someone within the large and often close knit community that had.

⁶ For comparison: over 600,000 adults (7%) in the region lacked basic literacy skills in 2001 (Source: South-East Regional Assembly <http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/news/releases/2001/19jun.html>)

The lack of access was not down to overt discrimination, only 5% said they had been denied access to a museum, library or archive because of their identity

Overt discrimination in museums, libraries and archives

But some did mention experiencing more subtle forms of racism than actually being barred on the grounds of their race. Gypsy family historian Janet Keet-Black was one.

"I was in a library once and I heard someone say "well of course all the real Romanies are filthy rich and living in houses!" And I just leant over and said to her "well I can assure you that I'm not filthy rich!" It's that sort of thing that you overhear and this woman knew that I was from a Traveller background."

As a result, Janet Keet-Black says that she feels museum, library and archive staff should be given Gypsy and Traveller cultural awareness training. Including how to identify and deal with racist incidents where the racist behaviour is by someone other than a member of staff.

"They should be trained properly in cultural awareness, including that of Gypsies and Travellers, because they are not, and have absolutely no idea about what Gypsies and Travellers are or what their history is. And this is sometimes reflected in how they treat you. I went to the research

centre down in Lyndhurst. And even though the chap there knew I was a Gypsy, he insisted on telling me that they locked Gypsy material up because Gypsies come in and steal it. The thing is I'm not your stereotypical Traveller, so I probably get treated differently to other Travellers. You should ask someone like my friend Betsy Stanley who is stereotypical, she's an old Traveller woman. She's uncomfortable going into places. She's come up against prejudice just standing in the street!"

But thankfully such experiences were rare. The community feels not so much barred or actively discriminated against as omitted – or written out of local and national British history. Some might argue this is a far more insidious and powerful form of racism. Those who write a nation's history, or even present a nation's history, have the power to consign individuals and entire communities into the limelight or the shadows.

The past representation of Gypsies and Travellers in museums, libraries and archives

The results from the 100 quantitative interviews revealed the following statistics:

50% had seen something about Gypsies and Travellers in a museum, but only 15% thought it represented the "truth".⁷ A staggering 98% of people thought museums should present Gypsy and Traveller culture and history. 44% of people had seen something

"Only 2% thought museums, libraries and archives had done enough to celebrate and represent the history and culture of Gypsies and Travellers in the past."

about Gypsies and Travellers in a library, but only 25% thought it represented the "truth". An equally resounding 96% of people thought museums should present Gypsy and Traveller culture and history.⁸ 11% had seen something about Gypsies and Travellers in an archive, but only 17% thought it represented the "truth".⁹ But 96% of people thought archives should have documents, photographs and other information about Gypsies and Travellers.

Put into a nutshell, people thought that museums, libraries and archives had done badly in the past and should do far better in the future:

Only 2% thought museums, libraries and archives had done enough to celebrate and represent the history and culture of Gypsies and Travellers in the past. 100% thought museums, libraries and archives should do more to celebrate the history and culture of Gypsies and Travellers.

⁷ For comparison: 37% of all adults in the South East had visited a museum in one year (source: Arts in England: Participation and Attitudes 2001 Research Report 27)

⁸ For comparison: 45% of adults in the UK visited a library in the last year (Data manipulated by PLB in Users and Non-Users of Museums Archives and Libraries : Review of Available Data (<http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/id630rep.pdf>) from data in Skelton, A (2002) Arts in England: Attendance, Participation and Attitudes in 2001)

⁹ For comparison: 1.3% of all adults in the South East had visited an archive in one year 104,221 visits in the South East. Source CIPFA (2003) Archive Service Estimates 2003-3, and population of 8,122,200 Source: South East England Development Agency (<http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/>)

6.2 Could do better

But why does the community think museums, libraries and archives have done so badly? To find answers, we need to listen to our movers and shakers again. I asked them all: "Do you think museums, libraries and archives have done enough to make Gypsy and Traveller heritage visible and accessible?"

Simon Evans said:

"Historically, no! Before you can make it visible, those who look after museums, libraries and archives would have to recognise there is such a thing as Gypsy culture. One of the major problems has been that it has been an oral culture. Libraries, museums and archives actually rely upon tangible evidence, that is in the written word or artefacts. Now if the written word isn't there one of the major problems is that things are written about Gypsies and not by Gypsies. Outside people looking in."

"So historically there's a problem. Also there's a class problem as well because history and the written word as found in libraries, tends to be from the literate classes or historically the middle classes and upwards so there's a problem where the working class culture is represented in these institutions - let alone Gypsy culture. But having said that strides are now being made and I do find that there are some quite powerful allies within for instance Kent County Council arts and libraries who really want to do something about this."

Like almost all of the Gypsies and Travellers across the south-east, Len Smith feels it's down to prejudice:

"Oh no - you can count the visibility of Travellers and Gypsies in museums on the fingers of one hand and very often just in token ways for instance the wonderful museum in ... - a fantastic museum - has a token Gypsy caravan totally out of setting in a Victorian street. "

"The museum of rural life at ... has some small Gypsy representation and there probably are little snippets here and there but certainly not enough. It's largely because of the discriminatory attitude of the settled population towards Gypsies."

And many Gypsies weren't just critical of that which doesn't exist, they also had a lot to say about exhibitions that already existed. The Paulton's Park exhibition was widely known about and liked within the community, but it also had its critics - largely from people who complained that it romanticised the past.

Frank Brazil felt strongly that museums should represent a living culture:

"The museums that I have seen are a hands-off experience, you can't touch it, you can't look into it. In our museum, we want a hands on experience. If something breaks it can be repaired. Other museums are dead museums, we are a living museum for a living culture. If you go down to Paulton's Park it is a hands-off experience. All of the wagons which are displayed are top of the range ones, which not every Gypsy had. So they are not displaying it properly. It's not the truth."

And Frank also had definite ideas about what heritage bodies have -

"One of the major problems is that things are written about Gypsies and not by Gypsies. Outside people looking in."

or haven't done - for Britain's 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers. In some cases it has been too little or even insulting.

"They ain't pushed our culture. They've just ignored us as if we don't exist. But we are getting recognised more. What they are starting to do now is have one Gypsy wagon, but it is poked away around the corner and they are not properly displayed and you bump into it."

"If Museums, are going to display something, it should be done properly. With a Gypsy thing they should display it in the proper setting. They should explain how they lived and their culture and heritage."

Yet despite the criticisms, Gypsies and Travellers felt that museums, libraries and archives had a very powerful role to play in educating the wider population about Gypsy and Traveller culture.

6.3 A role in education

I asked: "Do you think museums, libraries and archives have a role in educating the wider public about Gypsy and Traveller culture and history?"

Paula Elliott echoed the thoughts for many when she said: "Well it is the only way to educate them isn't it really? Where does everyone get their information about any culture or any race from other than through libraries, museums and education? So yes, they've got to play a role haven't they? but likewise Gypsy people have got their role to play as well. Like Henry [her husband] doing what he is doing."

6.4 Improving the use of museum, library and archive services

I also asked what could be done to encourage more Gypsies and Travellers to use the services provided by museums, libraries and archives?

Simon Evans said: "The representation in libraries, museums and archives is probably hidden and inadequate. For instance, if you do have a local museum, then I think efforts should be made to ensure that the museum fairly represents all the cultures that exist in that area historically. And that simply isn't the case."

"Also I think for school libraries - when I was doing a project in a local school a couple of years ago - a young teenage traveller said to me if I go into my school library and ask for books on my culture or my people's history it's not

"All I think it requires really is that there is representation there Travellers will go and use that resource but they are not going to want to go to these places to constantly get Gorgia history. It's racism by omission."

there - it's absent. "

"So all I think it requires really is that there is representation there in books on the shelf or artefacts in museums, or displays in museums and the Travellers will go and use that resource but they are not going to want to go to these places to constantly get gorgia history. It's racism by omission."

6.5 A cultural audit

All of the movers and shakers were enthusiastic about the idea of cultural audit which would locate the many resources already possessed by county record offices and archives in the region. Simon Evans said:

"I think they could usefully undertake a cultural audit whereby they'd go through their collections, to ascertain exactly where material or books or information relating to Gypsy and Traveller culture is. "

"It is there - there's no doubt about it. But the major problem is of categorisation. That was one of

the major problems I had when researching my book. For instance I would go into the Centre for Kentish Studies and say could you bring me your photographs of Gypsy life in Kent. They rather sheepishly brought me a folder with six pictures in it. I said, actually as they are the largest single ethnic minority, is that all you have got!"

"That's representative of it. They said 'yes', but when I then asked them to bring me their photo indexes I spent the next couple of hours ploughing through all the thousands of photographs in their collection I found pictures. For example, "pea pickers" evening meal. I asked them to bring me the picture and of course there was some bender tents and a fire and some people cooking their evening meal in a pea picking field. Then there was a whole section on hop-picking and when I went through the pictures it said "hoppers' encampment - Maidstone."

"This photograph was of a whole load of Gypsy wagons in a field, so it's all there. But it is not accessible or categorised as being there, so I suppose if it's to be made accessible then a lot of work has to be done in finding out exactly where all this material is in the collections and indexing it."

6.6 Future collecting practices

Given that there will inevitably be gaps. I asked what information or resources people would you like to see included in future collecting practices? The answers were wide ranging, but some expressed a concern that the information may be used in sinister ways. Frank Brazil said:

"I'd like to see them collect the truth. They want to do it right, but not use it against us the same as the Germans did in the 2nd world war. If something did go wrong, they would know where every Gypsy is and who their ancestors were."

Janet Keet-Black felt similarly, but the issue was partly how the information would be made available, and one of over-exposure rather than invisibility. She said: "There is a site on the web called 'Passing Through' and it's a just a woman whose great granny was one of the Coopers up in Surrey. And she's putting out so much stuff like baptisms and burials which I don't think should be out there. I don't know of any other ethnic minority that has all their ancestors on the web. I'm not just talking about general history but baptism, burials and marriages. I'm actually uncomfortable with that."

"But I think where there are records relating to Gypsies, if they just give out the basic information that's fine. There should be no sites aimed at any ethnic group simply because of what went on the 30s and 40s. I'm uncomfortable with the idea that my Grannies baptism might be on there".

"Particularly, as I know where my family all settled in their tents. I know that the incumbents of that particular parish between 1934 and 1942 put a small "g" next to every Gypsy. My husband said

'that's sinister given the period of time'. Since then I'm uncomfortable with it being on the web. I'm guilty of publishing things in paper form, but then I think it's got a limited audience. I had to tell this woman to take some off because she had stuff on there from the 30s and these people are still alive!"

"The Nazis used genealogy and had British [Gypsy] families as well. Which made me suspicious when I saw these pencilled in "g"s next to my family and every other Traveller family in the parish."

Aside from the quite natural suspicion, Gypsy historians like Simon Evans felt there was enormous scope within a new category of "Gypsy and Traveller history":

"I just think that if that category exists, then as material is gathered it will naturally fall into it. I mean if there was a section which said Gypsy Travellers as well as a section which said hop pickers, then certain pictures or certain books would go into the Gypsy Traveller section and not the hop-picking section. So it's that kind of awareness raising of staff and people who are looking after these collections and administering them."

"There are ways of collecting that are probably unique in terms of oral history. There is that, and I get the impression because of financial constraints most museums and archives are reactive rather than proactive in terms of their

collections. They tend to hold stuff which is given to them or things that they come across. But I do think it is beholden upon these institutions, if they feel that there is an ethnic imbalance, that they should seek to redress that.

"If you have a hitherto oral culture then oral history is a very important tool. As is visual imagery because there are an enormous amount of historical photographs of Gypsies and Traveller culture and lifestyles in the south-east and when you put them together across the ages, it's like putting together a historical jigsaw puzzle."

"For a community of people who historically haven't used the written word it means that just having books about Gypsies isn't enough really, because the written word is not accessible to a large section of the Gypsy Traveller population whereas visual information is. So yes, I think to be proactive in acquiring photographs or family history projects whereby families may be willing to share their photographs - to have them scanned together with their personal histories or oral histories."

Henry and Paula Elliott agreed:

"Well obviously one of the main ways, especially for travellers, is photographs because there are still a lot of travelling people that can't read or write so they could have a book stuck in front of them. It could tell you everything

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the same as the Germans did in the 2nd world war.
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about their family that they won't know unless there are photos. I suppose really photographs and going round to different Travellers and Gypsies, talk to them and put down some of what they say actually in there."

But a community also has a physical heritage that needs preserving beyond its memories and personal stories. So I asked what objects in particular should be preserved. There was an interesting difference in views from those, like Simon Evans, who produced things about the culture and those from within the culture.

Simon Evans said: "Preservation is a difficult thing because we seek to preserve everything. We are a kleptomaniac society and it's a difficult circle to square for a Gypsy culture which is historically non-materialistic, which hasn't acquired great amounts of possessions, doesn't have grand buildings and doesn't have anything which the National Trust can support and look after and have great parklands and things to look after. So there's a problem in a sense of what to preserve."

So I asked what about places - they could preserve ancient stopping places?

"They could be and that could be quite interesting. Another problem is of course Gypsies when they left a place, they would leave it as if they had never been there and that philosophy goes right the way through. The whole materialistic thing is that you don't actually leave anything behind to the extent that when someone dies all their possessions are burnt as well so it's a way of moving through the world - travelling light as it were."

"There are problems with organi-

sation like English Heritage or National Trust - these kind of bodies whose remit is in one box heritage and the other box is the built environment. Now that becomes problematic when a whole section of the community that you are set up to serve doesn't have a built environment to look after, so you have to find imaginative ways around these things and it goes back to things like oral history and actually gathering together information. We are talking more about information than we are actual artefacts."

"Stopping places have always been important to Travellers and I think there's other things you can do in terms of mapping which is [to create] Gypsy maps if there were such things - actually they're maps in the mind - maps of tradition. They are circuits which the Travellers followed but do not follow administrative boundaries so again there's a problem because in the south east for instance we've got these county councils of Surrey, East Sussex, Kent, Essex but there is a community of people to whom all of those counties are home simultaneously and always have been."

"So I think looking at attitudes to area and the kind of stopping places - Epsom Downs would have been a place people stopped on during race week, Mitcham Common - lavender growing areas of Mitcham which were big places in Surrey for the Gypsy travellers, the main hop growing areas of Kent and amongst those and all the traditional stopping places, the Thameside stopping places - I think people and place is quite interesting."

Len Smith and others with a background as craftsmen had

different views:

"Well I don't think there's anything that shouldn't be. I think particularly the vulnerable artefacts such as things that are made of wood, wagons and things like that and I think we need to have some national policy on preservation of things like that."

Henry and Paula Elliott said:

"All of it - anything like the Gypsy used to do to earn a living for their bit of enjoyment, their entertainment, the food they used to eat, the way they used to go about getting a bit of food or preparing it. Getting a rabbit or pheasant and getting it done ready."

"You've got to preserve it all you can't just preserve one little bit. You've got to preserve everything, you've got to have a knowledge of everything - you've got to pass that on to other people so everybody's got a knowledge of what you've done and what you used to have to do - what you used to do to have to survive. Life isn't hard to us now as it used to be years ago for travellers."

"When you look round what the old people used to have to do to provide for their family. I got up in a morning got in my motor and gone out with just enough petrol money to get a load on to get to the iron yard to get a bit of money so I could get a bigger load so that I can take some money home for grub at the end of the day. There's a lot of travellers that has had to go through that and there probably still are a lot of travellers that have to do that".

"But it's the whole thing that needs to be preserved - the whole aspect of it. You can't just pick

out one bit of it and say you need to keep that more than something else. It's a complete way of life."

6.7 Representation

Putting a culture on show, means presenting it to the outside world. I asked if there is anything that people felt shouldn't be included. Opinions were divided, particularly on whether the Romani language should be included. The issue was so important it was also one I tested on a much wider scale, with all 100 of the people interviewed. See 6.15.

Len Smith said: "I think that everything should be represented, but equally there are some items that need a huge amount of respectful interpretation. Such as funerals and that type of thing. I think if you are going to do the thing right you've got to show it all."

"But equally there are some parts of Gypsy and Traveller culture that need representing in a highly sensitive and highly respectful way; not just simply a statement such as "Gypsies used to burn their wagons after somebody died"

not just a bald statement like that. It needs to be done in a sensitive and respectful way."

For others there were different issues. Janet Keet-Black said: "There are certain photographs that shouldn't be accessed at all from a cultural point of view. Children, for example, particularly when their knicker legs are showing because I'm uncomfortable with that. Certain things shouldn't be seen." She also mentioned issues to do with sex and issues that may embarrass older Gypsies and Travellers.

"Traveller girls are no different to other girls these days. I was a teenager in the sixties so I wore miniskirts, but they were not as short as now! Those sort of things. The tribes of India have similar taboos, particularly to do with women's things."

6.8 The right medium

How the community should access its heritage was also an important question. So I asked, "How do you think Gypsies and Travellers would like to access this information?"

"There are some items that need a huge amount of respectful interpretation... Not just simply a bald statement such as "Gypsies used to burn their wagons after somebody died" "

Len Smith said: "I think you've got to explore everything - websites maybe. Gypsies and Travellers are coming online much more these days. I think a static attraction probably means more in the way of film and photographs and commentary."

"There needs to be an emphasis at the moment anyway - maybe for the next 20 years or so on other forms of communication rather than necessarily the printed word. Equally, in nearly every family now there are articulate and literate people. If a booklet is well-illustrated with good captions then those who can't read and write can relate to the pictures and have the captions explained to them by somebody who can."

The Elliotts agreed:

"Well it's got to be through pictures hasn't it? But a lot of librarians are pretty clued up on what books they're letting out you know. Well if a Gypsy went into there and couldn't read or write, and he was to ask for something, it would be nice if that librarian would also know what they are talking about, to be able to provide them with the right sort of

Ben Birch (second from left) one of the 100 Gypsies and Travellers interviewed for this research, and residents of the Hatchintan Site, Surrey. Photo: Matt Cardy.



information.”

“You can also get a book along with a tape so that a traveller could listen to the tape if they can’t read.”

Simon Evans said: “ These days the idea of what a library or museum is, extends far beyond just the notion of books and there is an awful lot of visual material, video tapes, CDs, audio tapes, CD roms and internet.”



The racing, breeding and selling of trotting horses is a modern expression of the Gypsy and Traveller culture's affinity with the horse. Photo: Simon Evans.

6.9 Power without responsibility

But, I wondered, is there any information that should only be made accessible to the community. Just because we have the means, through all kinds of digital technology to examine the culture in great detail, does that mean we should look at everything? Opinions were divided between those that had explored Gypsy and Traveller culture in their research, and members of those communities.

Simon Evans said: “I think one gets into great difficulties when you start censoring people’s access. Again historically invisibility and secrecy has been part of the ways in which Gypsies and Travellers have protected themselves from the hostility of the outside world. So things like language, and maybe certain other cultural ways of

behaving and carrying on, tend to remain within the Traveller culture.”

“Travellers tend to recognise each other in ways that the sedentary population may not quite see or understand. On the other hand I think maybe in the new sedentary world, which by and large it is, perhaps that protection is no longer necessary and that invisibility can mitigate against having a culture recognised and understood.”

“If people don’t hear a language, or see a language they can deny that language exists. Also I think a lot of young people recognise that they know a lot less of it than perhaps their grandparents or great grandparents did, and certainly within a school environment some of the young people have asked me to work on lan-

guage with them and to bring more words back into their vocabulary.”

Len Smith also didn’t think anything should be off limits: “I’ve said if you’re going to represent it, and if you want to get the message across to other people apart from just the community, then you have to represent everything.”

I asked “Even the myth that Gypsies are somehow inherently criminal, is that not an issue?

Len replied: “That can be addressed in other ways, by pointing out that these things aren’t true and are discriminatory and stereotyping. Obviously, if you are going to represent discrimination and stereotyping, then you also have to represent the other side of the coin which is that the reasons why these things are discrimination and stereotyping is because they’re

“Historically, invisibility and secrecy has been part of the ways in which Gypsies and Travellers have protected themselves from the hostility of the outside world.

So things like language, and maybe certain other cultural ways of behaving and carrying on, tend to remain within the Traveller culture.”

not true. You have to raise the myth in order to dispel it."

Many within the wider community felt very strongly that the Romani language should not be shared with gorgia people.

6.10 Segregation and inclusion

Given that until now Gypsy and Traveller heritage has largely been preserved by the community itself, I wondered if that should continue into the future. So I asked: "Do you feel that collections should be segregated (in specific Gypsy and Traveller museums, libraries and archives) or should they be included within mainstream public services?" Many felt it wasn't an issue of either being included in the mainstream, or be left to do it yourself. There was a consensus that inclusion in the mainstream and the independence of community operated institutions were of equal importance.

Simon Evans said: "There needs to be both probably - we have all sorts of museums and archives. When you've got a museum like Kent life for instance, it is very much dependent on acquiring and getting funding for acquisitions. However, if you call yourself a museum of Kent life, then I think you are beholden to represent all sections of Kent life. On the other hand, if you are a museum of transport then perhaps there should be some Gypsy wagons in there and why not?"

Frank Brazil said: "It should be part of gorgia museums. But there should be pure Gypsy museums as well. Exhibitions should be for both Gypsies and gorgias. They should be proud of who they are.

"Exhibitions should be for both Gypsies and gorgias... Gorgias should also know about us... because we are British."

But gorgias should also know about us. I want to involve both sides, because we are British.

6.11 Exhibitions

Given that exhibitions are one of the main ways of increasing the visibility of a community at museums, libraries and archives, I explored what the content of such exhibitions could be and where they should be held. I asked: "What venues would you like to see display exhibitions about Gypsies and Travellers?"

Simon Evans said: "Anywhere - where they have a right to be - in places which are publicly funded or publicly accessible, cultural institutions of course the Romani culture, the gypsy culture should be represented in there."

"At the same time you could have exhibitions anywhere you like. I had a travelling exhibition of Travellers photos some years ago in the Kent mobile arts unit and it was very interesting because it's a converted mobile library, gallery, exhibition space in a lorry. It was on the road for about 10 days.

"I used to book pitches in Maidstone market and put it there on market day and you got a kind of an audience coming into that exhibition that you would never

get going into an art gallery, so I think there are very good reasons for taking exhibitions and displays out of libraries and museums.

"I think if your culture has no history of using these places, they are seen to be gorgia places and if your literacy is not very good then you feel quite intimidated by the environment, so it's good to get it out to other places."

Len Smith said: "Obviously when you get national exhibitions such as the millennium dome, then I think if you're going to represent British culture as a whole and all its subdivisions, then Gypsies and Travellers need to be represented on an equal footing with all the other ethnic minorities."

Janet Keet-Black had more local suggestions:

"I'd like to see libraries [host exhibitions] because they are less intimidating than museums. Just about everywhere, even doctors waiting rooms because some surgeries aren't very welcoming at all. Places like that. Libraries have big foyers so Gypsies and Travellers don't have to go into the libraries themselves. But they can feel more welcome in the foyer."

Frank Brazil said; "I'd like to see us in all places like the British museum. They've got cultures from all over the world at the British Museum. Go and find anything on Gypsies - you can't. We should be at the heart of everything!"

6.12 Partnership

In every area of communications, whether that's the media, the arts or exhibitions there are very important issues of editorial

control, particularly for a community that has been so badly represented in the past. But exercising good editorial judgement requires more than just an inside knowledge of a community, it requires professional skills to have a real impact, skills which aren't that abundant within the community. So who should be in control of exhibitions about Gypsies and Travellers? I asked: "Who should curate such exhibitions, Gypsies and Travellers, or gorgias?"

Frank Smith said: "The only way you can put on an exhibition is with Gypsies, but the gorgias have got to be involved. Without Gypsies, it's like having a trial and having an all white jury trying a black man. It's the same thing. You've got to have a part of my culture on the committee as well!"

Paula Elliotts said: "Well I think it's got to be a bit of both, because I don't think that a non-Gypsy person can solely create it on their own, because of not having the knowledge or the insight on the culture. Yet later on, once we get all these museums and everything going, then people obviously are going to have an insight and the knowledge of the culture. But I think it needs to be a non-Gypsy person and a Gypsy person working together to create the

right sort of thing."

Janet Keet-Black said: "Both. Because at the moment the expertise is with those who work within museums services but they should consult with Gypsies and Travellers and bow to them."

6.13 Outside help

In what way could the skills and resources of public heritage bodies be used to help the community preserve its own heritage?

Frank Brazil was straight to the point, public heritage bodies have to correct a past mistake and that involves putting their money where there mouth is.

"They should give us grants so we can promote our heritage. To show people what we are and where we are coming from, that we've been in this country for a long time. Now is the time to come out and speak your mind, when you've got a lot of other races in this country doing it. They don't look after us or recognise us at all. We should show our culture and heritage people and then let them make up an opinion. We are not just rotten stinking old Gypsies."

Len Smith said: "With expert advice - there's people who are in the trade now - they will have the knowledge of how things can be preserved. Employ the experts."

6.14 Exploring Content

This research has shown that there is a very strong desire within the community to have Gypsy and Traveller culture and history properly represented in museums, libraries and archives. It has also shown that until now the community's visible omission from these institutions is perceived as a subtle form of racism by the community.

But how would the wider community like to be represented in the future in all of these institutions? One aim of this research was to consult the community about that very issue. The representation of Gypsies and Travellers in the media and the arts continues to be a controversial subject. Many in the community feel that whenever they are talked about, old stereotypes are resurrected that either misrepresent them or actively malign them.

The two stereotypes that are continually exploited in the arts and the media are either, the romantic, noble savage, the carefree "True Romany" or its

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opposite - the filthy degenerate, thieving "gyppo".

To most Britons, "True Romanies" - the swarthy, freedom-loving strangers of the past - have very little in common with dirty modern "gyppos". They are in many ways opposites of each other. Yet these same people cannot say what happened to the carefree nomads romanticised by Victorian artists, anthropologists and aristocrats as "lords of the heath". As a result, most people's perception of Europe's fastest growing ethnic minority is still based upon a mixture of myth, prejudice and romanticism. Therefore, any work within museums, libraries and archives has the potential to either undermine or re-inforce these stereotypes.

The truth about Britain's travelling communities is actually far more complex and interesting. It is a truth that is being increasingly explored by Gypsy and Traveller academics and activists and it is this: there never was a race of pure bred, dark-skinned nomads. Five hundred years after arriving in Britain, the Gypsies and Travellers of Britain today are much as they always were - a hybrid community made up of original Indian nomads, sturdy beggars, landless poor and the economically redundant.

But consulting a community that has a limited experience of museums, libraries and archives is difficult because it has few reference points within that world. Or to put it another way, through an analogy, Gypsies and Travellers have rarely even been let into the restaurant, let alone allowed to choose from the menu! So this research developed a technique for consulting the

community about the inclusion of subjects that might adequately represent them. A menu of possible exhibition subjects was developed, based upon personal knowledge of the community and issues that are important to it.

This "menu" of subjects formed the basis of a list of choices that each of the 100 quantitative interview subjects expressed an interest in. The results from that exercise reveal some interesting attitudes about how Gypsies and Travellers feel they should be represented, what aspects of their culture represents them and what they'd like to keep for themselves.

In it, Gypsies and Travellers were asked to score, out of ten, subjects they would like to be included in a potential touring exhibition that represented their lives. But before that, they were asked to rank the potential mediums they would like to be represented in, and the venues they would like a representation of their culture to be shown in. This is what they said.

They were asked "How would you like your culture to be represented?" the most popular answers were:

1. Exhibitions
2. Films
3. Talks / slideshows
4. Books
5. Audio CDs

They were also asked "Where would you like this to be done?" The most popular answers were:

- 1st: In existing museums, libraries and archives
- 2nd: In public places such as shopping centres
- 3rd: On Travellers sites

"Taken together, the results reveal that the community wants to be represented through visual exhibitions in public places that anybody can access."

Taken together, the results reveal that the community wants to be represented through visual exhibitions in public places that anybody can access.

6.15 Results of the "menu"

100 interview subjects were asked to score each of the following subjects out of 10. Their responses were entered into a spreadsheet and added together. If, for example, all 100 people had voted 10 for a subject it would have scored 1000 points, giving it an approval rating of 100%

Attitudes were wide ranging and varied, but there were clear favourites and contentious issues. The resulting approval ratings show the popularity of the subjects in the community. The figures, however, may mean very little to someone from outside the community and require some interpretation for anyone interested in developing materials which properly represent the Gypsy and Traveller community. So some closer analysis reveals some interesting truths.

Firstly, any subject which was related to Gypsies and Traveller

from outside the British Isles scored significantly lower. This points to the fact that while British Gypsies and Travellers recognise a historical and cultural link to continental Gypsies, they are far keener to emphasise local Gypsy culture and history. This applies to everything from “foreign Gypsy life” and “foreign Gypsy music” (such as flamenco) but does not apply to the holocaust which although it did not have a massive impact on British Gypsies and Travellers, is felt to be an important part of the community’s history.

Another significant area where there was disagreement was on the issue of sharing knowledge of the European Romani and British Romani languages or the Irish Travellers language known as Cant. Opinions were pretty evenly divided between those that felt that language was threatened and actively needed preserving (and therefore would have given it a high score), and those that were adamant that it was one element of Gypsy and Traveller heritage that should be kept for the exclusive use of the community (and would have given it a low score.) The scores for these three languages straddle the 50% approval rating. There is an ongoing enmity between some members the English Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities which prompted some English Gypsies to suggest that Irish Traveller Cant should be included, and vice versa. But there was a widespread concern that Romani, in particular, should not become public property.



Berkshire resident and former British middleweight champion ‘Gypsy’ Johnny Frankham floors sparring partner Cassius Clay at an exhibition fight. Boxing remains a very popular sport in the Gypsy community and young Gypsy fighters are often in the English national team. Photo: courtesy of the Frankham family.

“While British Gypsies and Travellers recognise a historical and cultural link to continental Gypsies, they are far keener to emphasise local Gypsy culture and history. ”

The attitude was articulated well by Frank Brazil who said: “The language belongs to us. Gypsies should keep that, they’ve got to keep something of their heritage.”

In general, it would seem wise that

only those subjects that had an approval rating of over 75% should be used in materials about Gypsy and Traveller history and culture. This level of acceptance provides a threshold over which all the subjects would not be viewed as contentious by the community.

Two other exhibition topics had notably low scores. Hare coursing received a low overall score because some felt it was cruel to animals. Plays are, at least in Britain, a relatively new way of exploring Gypsy and Traveller culture. The low score that particular subject received may reflect that unfamiliarity, and the use of drama to interpret Gypsy and Traveller culture could be explored further with the communities.

The Approval Rating of subjects to be used in Gypsy and Traveller exhibitions

History / Politics

Approval rating:

Modern Gypsy/Traveller life	79.1%
Foreign Gypsy/Traveller life	65.9%
Past Gypsy life	85.9%
The Gypsy Holocaust	82.0%
Modern persecution of Gypsies	82.4%

Music

Foreign Romani music, such as Flamenco	52.9%
British Romani music	78.2%
Country western	71.3%

Sport

Trotting	80.5%
Boxing	77.8%
Hare coursing	66.3%

Language

English Romani	66.8%
Irish Cant	47.4%
Eastern European Romani	52.0%

Famous Travellers

76.5%

Gypsy and Traveller Religion

76.1%

Health

Old Gypsy Traveller remedies	73.2%
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Customs

Weddings	81.8%
Funerals	82.7%
Gypsy and Traveller men and women's trades	82.9%

Art

Gypsy and Traveller stories	84.0%
Gypsy and Traveller plays	69.0%



Gypsies on Mitcham Common in 1881. Photo: Courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

Gypsies and Travellers are sometimes referred to as a “hard to reach group”. Gypsies and Traveller society is also sometimes referred to as a closed or secretive society.

This research has demonstrated that by using Gypsies and Travellers researchers and their advocates, the community is not hard to reach at all, as long as it is approached in the right way and with the right motivations. The overwhelmingly positive response to this research shows that there is both a phenomenal need and desire within the community to share and preserve its history. Unfortunately, there is also a quite uniform experience of being

“Now is the time for museums, libraries and archives to start exploring an exotic and hidden culture in its midst that has been a crucial part of British society for 500 years.”

ignored by museums, libraries and archives.

The long term social exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers from mainstream British society is an issue that local and central government is beginning to tackle. But this exclusion is mirrored in the work of public heritage

bodies. This has forced the community to preserve its own heritage, which it has done with incredible tenacity.

But as the community becomes more sedentary, educated and integrated, the cultural traditions are under threat and the preservation of heritage is also threatened. But if education and integration are a threat, they are also an opportunity. Now is the time for museums, libraries and archives to start exploring an exotic and hidden culture in its midst that has been a crucial part of British society for 500 years. And there is an urgency to this work.

The fieldwork required for this project has demonstrated an

urgent need to preserve the memories, photographs and artefacts of older community members. These people have experienced an extreme transition in their lives which mirrors the often traumatic changes in lifestyle that the community has experienced.

Some born into bender tents or horse drawn wagons have witnessed the forced ending of a nomadic way of life that had survived with a language and traditions that can be traced back to India a millennium ago. Now living in private and social housing or static council or private sites, they are the only ones that can make sense of their history and help their descendants adapt to a more sedentary future.

But that history and transition is not a uniquely Gypsy experience, the settled population who can make very little link between the romantic images of the past and the deprived and excluded images of the present also need an opportunity to learn about and interpret this recent history. Because Gypsy history is also an important part of British history. Not just in their role as eternal outsiders, but also as integrated citizens who have operated businesses, fought in wars and represented this country in sports and the arts. At times, British Gypsy history may have been a painful and controversial story, but it is still a part of our national narrative.

It has been said that the way a society treats its minorities is a litmus test of its civilisation. Therefore a refusal to accept this history into the mainstream is also a reflection of how willing we are to face up to WHO we are and WHAT we have done. The Gypsy

contribution, through our part in the agricultural economy and the armed services also demonstrates that there have been good and positive moments.

This research has also demonstrated that the community feels its place at the heart of British heritage work is missing, and there is a desire to plug a gap. That desire represents a challenge to those involved in interpreting British history, but it is a challenge the community is quite happy to help meet. But in doing so, heritage professionals need more than just good intentions, because good intentions haven't always stopped people making disastrous mistakes in the past. Therefore the next chapter in this report, recommendations, is divided into two sections, General Principles and Concrete Actions.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 General Principles in improving the visibility and representation of Gypsy and Traveller heritage and culture.

Remember Gypsies and Travellers in everything you do

Every town, village and county in the south-east of England has a hidden Gypsy and Traveller history. Local history work can often be criticised as focusing too narrowly on the place rather than the people that inhabited it. Gypsy and Traveller culture is viewed by mainstream society as being transient and from elsewhere, and so not really of a place. But the culture has been permanently

"It has been said that the way a society treats its minorities is a litmus test of its civilisation."

transient in every place and so, quite rightfully, has a right to be represented as part of every place. The history may be hidden, but it is there in the living memories of residents and Gypsies. It is also in the archives and the names of places.

Please make an effort to find it, or contact local Gypsies and Travellers, ideally through local Gypsy and Traveller support groups, family history researchers or Traveller Education Services that have very good links with Gypsies and Travellers in every county.

By the people, and for the people

When you produce materials about Gypsies and Travellers, please do it in partnership with the community. We should never be talked about in our absence. Materials should not only be produced about the culture, they should be by and for people from the culture itself. Only then will you achieve a balanced and true

"At times, British Gypsy history may have been a painful and controversial story, but it is still a part of our national narrative. "

representation of the community.

Beware those academics, researchers and council employees who describe themselves as “Traveller professionals” and who talk about “my Travellers”. Please accept the principle that the only true experts on a community are people from the community itself. They have gained this expertise by living within the community and the older they are, the more expertise they have. Often they may not have the skills to produce high impact materials on their own, but they will willingly work in partnership with those that can, as long as they have some editorial power and the last word.

Gypsy and Traveller communities have very few functioning institutions of their own. We have no real Gypsy Councils, Gypsy Kings or Gypsy Queens or leaders. The only real institution is that of the family, and no Gypsy or Traveller can claim to represent more than their own family. The community is also diverse, so please endeavour to represent a variety of voices from all traditional travelling communities.

Audio visual materials

Literacy is still a huge challenge for people in the community. So please endeavour to produce materials that accommodate this. Using all the mediums and senses available to us will help to produce materials that are not only engaging for the community, but for others as well. A community that has traditionally expressed itself through music, oral history, craft, music and dance cannot be captured and represented just through the printed word. Internet access within the community is very low, but growing.

“Please accept the principle that the only true experts on a community are people from the community itself. They have gained this expertise by living within the community and the older they are, the more expertise they have.”

Educational attainment is also traditionally low, but growing, and should not be confused with ignorance or stupidity. Older Gypsies and Travellers in particular have very good memories and an enhanced ability to judge people and situations that many more “educated” people have not. There is a world of difference in attaining knowledge and wisdom.

Put your money where your mouth is

Really accepting that Gypsies and Travellers are the only true experts on their culture has a financial implication. They must be financially valued as equal partners. Their time and expenses must be paid for and never taken for granted. Otherwise they will not feel valued and they will not have any commitment to a project.

Payment is an issue of equality. If you are being paid, so should they. If you are a volunteer then they can be too, but they should never

be the only unpaid person in the room.

7.2.2 Concrete Actions

The recommendations below are in a sequence that would allow a Gypsy and Traveller heritage work to develop in a logical order.

1. Cultural Awareness Training

Museum, library and archive staff are no different from other members of the community. Their knowledge of the Gypsy and Traveller community is probably limited and based upon a mixture of romanticism, prejudice and half-truths. The only way to overcome this rapidly is through cultural awareness training.

Independent and public museums, libraries and archives should commission cultural awareness training delivered by members of the community itself. Police and other public agencies have already begun to do this, and other organisations should too. The best way of delivering this information is through informal, but structured, training that explores the community's local knowledge and experience of an area.

To do this please contact, a local Gypsy support group, Gypsy history researcher, or specialist (see www.surreymuseums.org.uk/interesting/Travellers.htm for a list of people and groups who can deliver cultural awareness training).

2. Cultural Audits

Gypsy historians and family re-

searchers have all experienced the problem of finding materials about their culture in the archives. Yet persistence has proven that the material is there, but the systems used to categorize material do not identify, or have not been used to identify Gypsy and Traveller culture.

Museums, libraries (including school libraries) and public archives should commission a cultural audit which seeks to identify and categorise the Gypsy and Traveller material it already holds. A category of Gypsy and Traveller history should be created alongside any other ethnic minority history work. This work is also best undertaken in partnership with local Gypsies and Travellers, and family historians who will recognise material as they see it. A cultural audit should also identify gaps in collections, and develop proactive collection policies for the future.

3. A Noah's Ark

There is an urgent need to go and record and capture Gypsy and Traveller history from a generation of older Gypsies and Travellers who have experienced a dramatic change in their lifetimes. With every year that passes, more photographs rot and more memories go to the grave. Recording this information before it is too late is an important part of celebrating a forgotten history before it is lost forever.

Museums, libraries and archives should commission work that actively records this history. The people doing it must be highly mobile, and equipped with the ability to digitally record oral history and photographs, possibly with minidisc recorders and portable scanning technology. They should also look out for artefacts that can be left.

4. Travelling Exhibition

Independent and public museums, libraries and archives in the south-east of England should cooperate in producing a travelling exhibition that celebrates the history of Gypsies and Travellers in the region. It would draw on all the resources identified in the steps taken above.

Once created, it could be on permanent tour in recognition of the Gypsy and Traveller community's permanent transience in the south-east of England. Such an exhibition would have a valuable role to play in educating the wider public over current accommodation conflicts. Its materials could also be used in schools and other educational contexts to help combat prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers.

5. A Big Idea

But all of these ideas, whilst a welcome step forward, repeat a continual problem. They are short-lived and transient and do not

reflect the permanent and enduring contribution of the Gypsy and Traveller community to this country. Efforts such as these could culminate in an institution that would have a lasting effect on the way the community is perceived.

Nomadic communities leave no trace and have no institutions, but a community that is historically nomadic and increasingly settled certainly deserves one.

Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Heritage Centre

A place of our own

Gypsies and Travellers have been in Britain for over 500 years and represent the biggest ethnic minority in the south-east, but their historical and contemporary contribution is largely unrecognised and uncelebrated.

Recent tensions, particularly over Gypsy sites, have highlighted that anti-traveller feeling is still quite prevalent among the settled community. A perception that travellers contribute to rural crime, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour is widespread. Travellers themselves also feel some hostility to the settled community.

From toleration to celebration

British policy towards Gypsies and

**"With every year that passes, more photographs rot
and more memories go to the grave.
Recording this information before it is too late is an important part
of celebrating a forgotten history before it is lost forever."**

Travellers has come along way in the 500 years we have been in Britain - it has moved from outright persecution and extermination to one of toleration. A Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Heritage Centre would, for the first time in British history, move the policy forward to celebration.

A Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Heritage Centre would help promote community cohesion recognising the historical and ongoing contribution of the Romani community to Britain.

Remembering the past

The centre would house a permanent and continually evolving exhibition looking at the Gypsy and Traveller contribution to British rural life, from the time of mass agricultural labour to more recent times when families have settled. More specifically it would look at Gypsy and Traveller history in the rural and urban environments. Through photography, video and audio recording of oral history the exhibition would look at the changing relationship between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community caused by the decline of agricultural labour.

Influencing the future

But the GTCHC wouldn't just look at the past - it would recreate a common space, now sadly lacking, for the meeting of the different communities. The centre would explore present and future



In September 2000, the ancient Gypsy horsefair at Horsmonden, Kent, was banned by the local parish council. Local Gypsies and residents protested at the cancellation of the annual celebration of the end of the hop-picking season and return every year to campaign for its re-instatement.

opportunities for community cohesion, cooperation and economic development. It would also act as a major local and national force for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gypsy and Traveller community. By providing a place in which the Romani language, trades and best practice could be nurtured, the centre would provide local employment and stimulate development which would have a direct impact on the local community.

Unlocking potential. Creating opportunity

The GTCHC would be a community-based project with a national impact. As a base for national projects, such as a national, internet-based Gypsy and Traveller community radio station and a Scandinavian-style Gypsy and Traveller "people's high school" it would nurture Gypsy and Traveller talent from the grassroots up.

Education

The GTCHC, could provide a base

for community-based vocational education. Working along the same lines as the Scandinavian Folkhogskola (People's High School) system, the GTCHC would offer practical courses looking at modern applications for traditional Romani crafts and trades, such as metalsmithing, horse management, wood working and building skills. Courses would be open to all irrespective of educational or ethnic background.

A guiding star

Currently, there is no institution that even approaches this level of ambition, though many in the community have often talked of having one. But not that far away, in Sweden, a model already exists. The Sami (formerly known as Lapps) have a cultural heritage centre that is a good model. The Ajtte museum in Jokkmokk, Sweden has already achieved a level of recognition and acceptance for the formerly nomadic Sami community that we would like to have here.

For more information, please see: www.ajtte.com

8. A Final Word

Frank Brazil:

"You go from one county to another and they don't want you there. So you go back to your own county and they still don't recognise you as a local. So where do you belong? It's time to make a stand. Its time to come out and be proud of who you are and be proud of what you are. We are a separate cultural people to the rest of the people in this country. I think the gorgias could benefit from it. If they understood us, they would know how to live with us."

Len Smith:

"Museums, libraries and archives could be powerful places for us if we can make them accessible. The way to make them accessible is do something good and it will draw people in and that spreads out in a pyramid."

"You bring two people in, and they tell four people and the four people tell another four people and it can start giving Gypsies and Travellers a bit more pride - we have a private pride in our culture - we need a public pride. We need a public face to our pride."

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