



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

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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 -

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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

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"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 its 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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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?"

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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

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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

**"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"**

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."

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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%