

## **An Introduction to GRT Folks and Our History in Warwickshire**

**by Gemma Lees**

### **What Does GRT Mean?**

GRT stands for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller. It's used as a catch-all term to describe a number of distinct ethnic groups, including: English Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies, Welsh Gypsies, Scottish Travellers, Irish Travellers, Romany Gypsies, Roma and more. Non-ethnic travellers, communities who are cultural or occupational travellers include: showmen, circus people, new travellers, boatmen and van dwelling people. If you don't know how someone identifies, it's best to ask!

### **What Does The Equality Act Say?**

Under the 2010 Equality Act in England, Wales and Scotland and the 1997 Race Relations Act in Northern Ireland, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller folks are protected against discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity with Romany Gypsies, Scottish Gypsies/ Travellers and Irish Travellers all named as legal races. The act, however, does not protect non-ethnic travellers.

### **Who Are GRT People?**

Most Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people share collective cultural norms, traditions and values. Nomadism is one of the most widely known of these, yet approximately only 5% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller folks live on the road. Some travel only during the Summer months and settle the rest of the year. Successive government acts have made a nomadic live increasingly difficult, so the vast majority, approximately 75% live in brick-and-mortar housing, with the remaining living on permanent sites, some council owned and some privately owned.

Irish Travellers can be traced back to 12<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain. A traditionally nomadic ethnicity, they are distinct in culture and heritage from other Irish communities. They may speak in Cant/ Gammon/ Shelta.

Romany Gypsies trace back to Northern India, having left in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, probably due to an invasion by the Ghaznavid Empire, and arriving in Britain in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Britons mistook the dark skinned Romanies for Egyptians, so started calling them 'Gypsies'. They may speak Romani/Romanes.

Eastern European Roma are also originally from India, but their migration to the UK has more to do with contemporary conflicts and oppression. Many do not use the term 'Gypsy' as it has a deeply pejorative connotation in their home nations. They may also speak Romani/Romanes along with their first languages.

Scottish Gypsies/ Travellers (also referred to as Nachins or Nawkins) also trace back to around the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. They are an indigenous sub-group of Scotland with a long history of nomadism in the Scottish Highlands, Lowlands and Borders. They may speak Scottish Cant.

### **What Is Important To GRT People?**

Traditional occupations for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller folks are: fortune tellers, musicians, entertainers, rag and bone people, artisans, blacksmiths and horse traders. Many still work in the contemporary forms of those jobs as: vehicle traders, skilled trades such as builders, decorators and gardeners, scrap collectors, storytellers, artists, entertainers, professional sportspeople or as digital nomads, who work remotely via the Internet whilst travelling. Many highly value self-employment and the family business with trades and skills passed down from parents to children.

Family, including extended family and cultural networks are incredibly important for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, as is respecting older generations and getting together to celebrate big life events and milestones. Some Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people marry young and have many children, while some don't.

Many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are practicing Catholics or Evangelical Christians, some follow other religions and some are not religious at all. Many value tidiness and cleanliness, with some following strict hygiene rules called 'Mochadi', and some not doing so.

### **What Oppression and Racism Do GRT People Face?**

Sadly, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller folks have been oppressed both in the UK and globally for centuries, oppression that is still going on to this day. History has seen Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people banished, enslaved, coercively or forcibly sterilised and forced to assimilate. During the 'Porajmos', ('The Great Devouring'), in WWII, between 200,000 and 500,000 Roma and Sinti men, women and children were murdered by the Nazis. Recognition of the Holocaust and access to reparations was not granted until 1982. Today, there is still widespread oppression of Roma people in Europe, with some subjected to: inferior schooling, poverty, police brutality/torture, barring from standing for public office, and settlements which lack basic hygiene and power supplies.

In the UK, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people can be some of the most socially excluded and the media can be incredibly unkind, often representing them as ignorant and dirty, the men as violent and the women as vapid. The general public and some celebrities, such as comedians, seem to be a lot more comfortable making racist statements and 'jokes' against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people than other minorities.

## **What Is GRT History Month?**

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History month, which takes place every June, seeks to tackle prejudice, change the rhetoric and amplify the voices of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, showmen, boatmen and new travellers. Local councils, schools, media and government organisations are all encouraged to take part and celebrate the diverse history of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and the contributions they have made to British art, literature, entertainment, sport, infrastructure, business and society.

## **What History Do GRT People Have In Warwickshire?**

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have lived, worked in and travelled through Warwickshire for hundreds of years due to employment opportunities, family ties and excellent road connections. Gypsy Lane in Nuneton is thought to have been named after 19<sup>th</sup> century Gypsy encampments. There is evidence of this in some different places, although some has been lost due to a strong oral storytelling culture rather than histories always being written down.

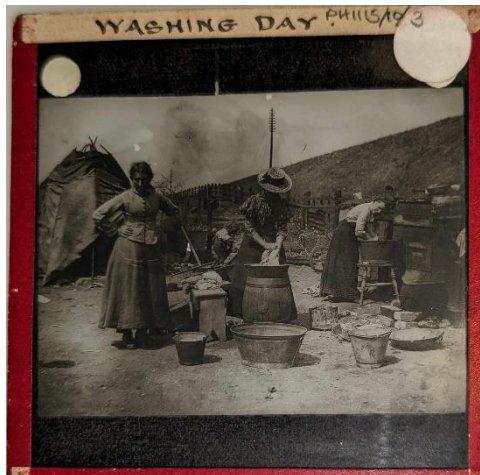
Wolvey CofE school who educate 25% of Warwickshire's Gypsy and Traveller children have enrolment records going back over 100 years. A search of these found several mentions of 'Traveller children' who left the school due to nomadism. The earliest direct mention was a record made in 1964 which lists three Brazil children, Mark, Sylvia and Susan, belonging to two fathers, Mark and Henry. The note made by the school staff member reads, "parents are dealers – caravan – always moving place to place". The records made between 1978 and 1997 identify Gypsy and Traveller children with the following names: Barnard, Fury, Johnson, Jones, Lee, Nicholson, Penfold, Smith, Valler and Welch, travelling from: Bolton, Darlington, Doncaster, Scotland and Wales.

Warwickshire's County Records Office has Victorian and Edwardian photographs showing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller folks with bender tents and wagons on Black Patch, an encampment that was looked after by King and Queen Esau and Henty Smith whose descendants still live nearby, police records mentioning the issuing of a fine of £10 to a Traveller, (the equivalent of £1233 now), for 'Hawking Without a Licence', for selling ceramics without a licence. There was also a poignant death recorded in the Long Compton Parish Register of a four-year-old who died in 1902 and was described as a 'showman's child'.

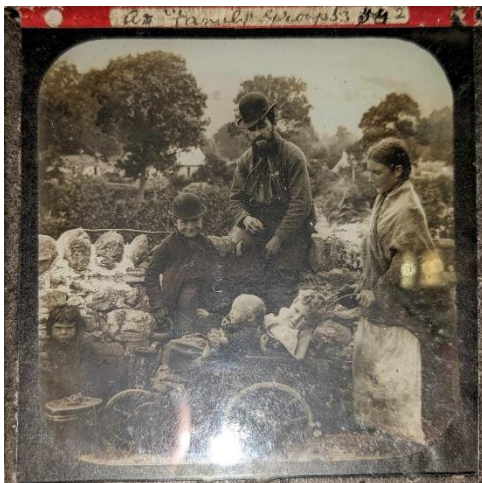
There are currently four council-run sites where Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people live in Warwickshire: Alvecote in North Warwickshire, Griff in Nuneton, Pathlow in Stratford-Upon-Avon and Woodside in Rugby. Over 75% of sites are privately owned in areas such as: The Paddocks in Newlands, The Hill in Charlton, The Orchard in Badsey and Blossom Hill in Aldington. Between these sites, approximately 400 pitches are available.

## How Is Warwickshire Looking To The Future?

The Warwickshire “Strategic Framework for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller provision in Warwickshire 2020-2025” aims to: recognise, understand and positively promote Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture and history, address the existing health, social and economic inequalities and provide an adequate number and quality of pitches.



*Gypsies on the Black Patch  
(PH1115/10/1-4)*



*Hoop Top Wagon  
(PH1035/B7498)*





*Horse Drawn Wagon, Rugby (PH352/152/86)*



*Shipston Horse Fair, 1910s (PH352/158/166)*

Records from Wolvey CofE Primary School, 23/10/64

23	10	64	} Parents are dealers -
23	10	64	
23	10	64.	
			} Caravan - always moving
			} place to place.