

find his caravan site had been broken up by the police and he had to return to barracks not knowing where his family was, whether they were still alive or perhaps had been killed in a bombing raid.

It is often forgotten that, in addition to the Jews, Nazi Germany tried to wipe out Romanies, homosexuals, socialists, trades unionists, Jehovah's Witnesses and persons with disabilities. Some Romanies were aware that, across the Channel, Hitler's Germany was planning to annihilate them. In 1942, preparatory to a planned invasion of Britain, the Central Security Office in Berlin started to collect information on the Romany population of England.

The war over, there was a brief period after 1945 when Gypsies were able to live at peace with their house-dwelling neighbours. The coming to power of a Labour Government brought a new tolerance generally towards minorities; casual work was available for all with post-war reconstruction and, with many bombed-out or demobilised families living in prefabricated houses or mobile homes, the Gypsies in their caravans were no longer an anomaly. However, within a few years a shortage of land arose and led to problems as we shall see below.

Work

Success in most European countries is viewed in terms of career achievements. In Romany society as a whole, however, work is considered not to be an end in itself but a means of earning money while staying economically independent. Independence requires mobility and adaptability. Gypsies have the power to adjust and have adapted their trades successfully to growing industrialisation. They rarely have one single occupation but practice a combination of trades, such as scrap collecting, tarmac'ing, hawking, fortune-telling and so on. These trades also require a minimum of tools, which in turn enables them to stay mobile.

In contrast with sedentary people, Gypsies of all the groups have until recently not sought permanent jobs as this would go against their preference for the flexibility of self-employment. They generally work as a domestic or family unit and will, therefore, rarely have the need to employ others. This way of working also enables them to avoid becoming employees which would entail having a fixed address. Sedentarisation can occur at either end of the economic scale. When

The two biggest events in the year are the fairs at Stowe (May) and Appleby (June) where Gypsies meet members of their extended families, do business and young people have an opportunity to form relationships.



Two horse traders discuss the days business alongside the trotting track at Appleby; photograph by David Gallant



Two Irish Traveller girls amused by the camera at Stowe Fair; photograph by David Gallant

prosperous, a Gypsy may open a business such as a scrap yard or plant nursery that in turn demands the employment of labour and a fixed abode. Also, when destitute or tied to a site with no work area a Gypsy may have to resort to accepting a permanent job.

Seasonal work provides an ideal source of income. Particularly in rural areas where fruit and vegetable pickers are still needed, Gypsy families constitute an ideal labour force. They appear when work needs doing and disappear when it is finished. They provide their own accommodation and are not likely to go on strike for higher wages.

Patterns of movement and work vary, which cutdown on competition from other Gypsies but it is dangerous to generalise. However, traditionally, Gypsies winter in one place and may then set off shortly after Easter for early farm work, such as picking daffodils in the West Country and touring around to see when soft fruit is likely to be ready. June brings Epsom Races for fortune-telling and horse-dealing or just meeting friends and relatives. Some may go instead to the big horse-fair at Appleby or stop in Cambridge during the *Midsummer Fair*.

Many of the traditional fairs that Gypsies visit, such as Doncaster St Leger, have been closed down. All without exception are under threat from local councils who dislike the influx of caravan dwellers to their areas. Barnet, Horsmonden, Newcastle Hoppings, Stow on the Wold and others survive from year to year, although in a much reduced form. These gatherings serve several functions for the Romany community who trade among themselves, particularly for horses and harnesses, which will then be sold elsewhere at a profit. They also provide an opportunity for young people to meet and are vital if the community is to survive. New Travellers have found a similar problem with their festivals (see chapter six for further details).

In mid-summer, work is to be found at the seaside, telling fortunes for the women, moving deck chairs by lorry for the men. Otherwise, a dry summer is ideal for repairing roofs, landscape gardening and gate-making. Autumn brings a chance for plum and potato picking and then it is back to the edge of a town to seek a suitable site for the winter.

Work patterns distinguish the Romanies and Travellers from other groups of migrant workers who rarely remain as independent of wage labour as the Gypsies. Unfortunately, nomadism combined with the avoidance of conventional employment and their dependence on the

sedentary population, has conjured up the unfounded stereotype of the Gypsies as parasites. There has to be symbiosis – demand from the house-dwelling population for the goods and services the nomads supply – and both sides benefit from these transactions.

In caravans and houses

Nomadism is the most notable feature of the Romany lifestyle in Britain and one that has perhaps created the most misunderstanding. The image of the 'wandering Gypsies', alien everywhere they roam, has hounded them in the past in every country through which they have travelled. This nomadism is in contrast with modern European society where the populace remains largely sedentary.

Not all Romany Gypsies are nomads and not all nomads are Romany Gypsies and a Gypsy is not merely 'a member of a wandering race' as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary. Some Gypsies live their lives by the seasons, as previously mentioned. They may remain sedentary in the winter months and then travel in the spring, while others may stay in the same place for several years, moving only ten or fifteen times in their lives. Yet a third pattern is for families to move all the time if they have occupations which require a continual supply of new customers. Some travel throughout the British Isles while others will never leave a particular county. Nomadism is a state of mind rather than a state of action. Even when sedentary a Romany remains a nomad in his values and spirit. If he buys a bungalow he may well keep a small touring caravan in the backyard, just in case.

During a survey conducted by Cardiff Law School, an Area Housing Manager in Wales commented:

There have been numerous traveller families waiting for Local Authority housing for years but after they had been living in the house for a short while they found they were unable to settle to the different lifestyle. There have been cases where the family had moved into a house but in fact had chosen to live in the caravan parked in the garden.

A resident on the Cardiff Gypsy site said:

It would be wrong to put Gypsies into houses. They would be taking away all our culture. And we wouldn't be able to keep pets: chickens and

horses. I'd feel lost in a house 'cause of all the space, it would make me feel ill.

A Romany settled in a house may still be referred to as a Traveller by other Romanies, for, in addition to its practical functions, nomadism is a part of Romany identity and distinguishes them from the Gorgios. It has helped Gypsies in Britain to safeguard their culture as it has enabled them to avoid too much contact with the non-Romany. They travel not because they are asocial or anti-social but because travel is part of their heritage. In the debate leading up to the 1968 Caravan Sites Act, Parliament accepted this and proposed the setting up of a national network of sites between which Gypsies could move and preserve their way of life. Many Gypsies moved on to these sites as they opened, thinking they would be able to move from place to place, but now, increasingly, stay put because there is nowhere for them to move to, as there are insufficient pitches. Table B above shows that upwards of 2,500 Gypsy families have nowhere to stop. This lack of spaces on authorised caravan sites and the consequent harassment they encounter on roadside encampments is a major problem for Gypsies in Britain today.

Local authorities have at times attempted settlement policies to alleviate what they see as the 'Gypsy problem'. A few have been well-intentioned and have aimed at improving the poor living conditions that some Gypsies had to endure. One such example was the setting up of centres in the 1960s by Hampshire County Council. Many Gypsies who had been living in huts took advantage of these centres that provided them initially with basic accommodation. If they showed a willingness to assimilate to house-dwelling society by abandoning their dogs and their distinctive colourful clothing, normal council housing accommodation was offered.

In other cases, local authorities have been reluctant to accommodate those Gypsies who wish to be housed although the Homeless Persons Act gives them this duty in the case of any Gypsy without a legal pitch. A south London council demanded that one family (who had registered as homeless) stay on their illegal site until the bailiffs (acting under the order of the same council) arrived, then leave their caravan and report to the Housing Office. However, even if families are technically ruled to be 'intentionally homeless', they can now, if there are children, be housed under certain sections of the Children Act.

This reluctance to house Gypsies is, in some cases, due to fear of hostility by the local population towards their future Gypsy neighbours. A poll in 1963 conducted by Gallup found that 60 per cent of Britons do not want to live next to Gypsies, a higher percentage than for any other ethnic minority. This hostility sometimes comes out into the open.

Margaret M. and her five children wanted to move from the official caravan site in Winterbourne into a council house in Bristol for the sake of her son who suffered from kidney problems and had undergone a brain operation. The potential neighbours organised a protest meeting in a local school, attended by more than 100 people. Following this, the housing department decided to review the offer.

Mrs B describes her experiences:

I was put into temporary accommodation in a very high class area and the neighbours didn't like us because we are Gypsies. Even though we have not said any wrong or bad words against anyone. The neighbours started to complain about rubbish but the rubbish wasn't ours. It was there before we moved in. And also our dog, but he is a puppy and couldn't make a loud bark if he tried. They also said we have been threatening them but we haven't. The neighbours twice complained to the police that we had stolen electrical goods in the house and the police broke down the door while we were out. But they found nothing. Now we are told we have to leave because of our 'anti-social behaviour' and the council will not re-house us.

Of greater importance than possible hostility from neighbours in the comparatively low take-up of housing are the psychological problems that the Gypsies themselves may face at the prospect of permanent housing. Housing takes away any possibility of freedom and mobility which Gypsies want. Working from a house has its problems, too. A Gypsy in Essex was refused permission to conduct a car valeting service in his extensive grounds, although the nearest neighbour was a lorry park on the opposite side of the road.

One Romany family said that they concealed their origins and were accepted by their neighbours. Then, suspicions were aroused by the vans the Gypsies parked outside their house, visits by relatives with dark faces and the women's long dresses. Their identity revealed, they were ostracised by the neighbours and in the end moved back into caravans.

Not all experience hostility and, if entered into for positive reasons,