

ITINERANT MINORITIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN THE NINETEENTH  
AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES: A STUDY OF GYPSIES, TINKERS,  
HAWKERS AND OTHER TRAVELLERS

by

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Abstract of: 'Itinerant Minorities in England and Wales in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Study of Gypsies, Tinkers, Hawkers and Other Travellers'.

The term 'Romany' immediately conjures up notions of race and ethnicity, accompanied by images of a separate and distinct culture. Many writers, past and present, have contributed to this essentially mythical, racial construct. Although nineteenth-century travellers were varied in terms of their habits, aspirations, wealth, type of dwelling and the like, the attempt to draw between the travellers cultural lines of divide based on racial determinants contains serious flaws in assumptions, methodology and evidence.

Moreover, although varied, the travellers were bound together by certain common features, notably by their position as a minority group in relation to settled society. Resultant upon their travelling way of life was a conflict with the 'centre', or with the institutions and structures of a sedentary-based society, in this instance organised around a capitalist political economy. The nature of this relationship with the dominant economic, social and political structures can be explained summarily by reference to the attempts to christianise, educate, settle and sanitise the travellers, and which were carried out with various degrees of coercion and compulsion. Formal and informal upholders and agents of the 'new morality' worked together to bring about these desired ends.

The position of travellers was also necessarily affected by general trends taking place within the economy and society as a whole. Changed perceptions about them, responses to them, and the conditions under which they lived, were a reflection of more general developments. For example, economic trends affected their employments, and where they were carried out, which in turn altered their relations with the sedentary community they served. Similarly, racial theories concerning the 'Romany' assumed a position of pre-eminent status only with the related growth of, and deference to, scientific knowledge from the mid-century onwards.

A study of this marginal social group thus touches on many themes that assumed special significance from around the 1880s, when, in its main essentials, society took on a shape recognisable to us today, in which the existence of anachronistic social groupings had to be controlled and circumscribed.

David Mayall

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Notes on Footnotes

- i. All books were published in London unless otherwise stated.
- ii. Where two dates of publication are given, the first is the date of the original publication, the second is the date of the volume consulted. If the place of publication on either occasion is other than London this is also noted.
- iii. Full location references to Parliamentary Papers appear in the Bibliography but not in the text.

## INTRODUCTION

The travelling population of the nineteenth century has been featured only sparingly in historical texts. Some considerable and substantial work has been done on that section of itinerants most closely linked to sedentary society by occupational and cultural ties, the tramping artisan, and the issue of the vagrant and tramp has also merited occasional comment. Yet these are only the beginnings and in any event touch only the fringes of the travelling community. Gypsies, tinkers, hawkers and the like have been heretofore denied academic attention of any serious kind. Yet a study of these travellers, who can be deemed tentatively as a sub-class, touches on many themes of historical and contemporary relevance. These can be summarised as: those of itinerancy and the role of travellers as a nomadic labour force; secondly, their marginality to the structures of an industrialising society, and, finally, their place as a minority group in society, whether described in racial or cultural terms.

In the early decades of the century the travellers performed significant roles in the imperfect supply and demand conditions of the time, contributing goods and services to the economic and social life of the village. It was when the emphasis within the domestic economy had shifted from the rural to the urban sector that this role was exposed as an anachronistic and unwanted vestige of a past stage in economic development. Always morally and ideologically dysfunctional to the dominant culture of the sedentary society the travellers had, by the latter decades of

the nineteenth century, also lost, significantly, much of their importance and relevance in the socio-economic spheres. At this moment the marginality of travellers to the structures of a sedentary-based, industrialising, capitalist state became increasingly apparent. The problem of the accommodation of the travelling population then became a matter of much concern. The travellers were seen to stand apart from the cultural and ideological pressures towards conformity with a settled way of life, and so with regular employments and deference to strict time-discipline, both ideological currents that were becoming more forceful as the century progressed. Their way of life and marginality was thus seen to be untidy and unnecessary, and was thought to cause more problems, of a practical and ideological nature, than their existence was likely to solve. The state had come to play a growing part in controlling the industrial workforce, in relation to employment and social life, and this group existing on the margins of society was not to be exempted from this attention.

This, though, is to express the problem in terms of the specific context of the relationship between travellers and the structures and mechanisms of a developing, capitalist state. Clearly, a study of travellers in nineteenth-century Britain has to be viewed from this limited perspective for any discussion of travellers in relation to the social totality must recognise the specific political nature of that totality. However, while the specific context should not be forgotten in relation to responses, it is also necessary to widen the frame of reference. Antipathy to travellers was not restricted

to a particular epoch nor to a particular political system, but was rooted in a long-standing conflict between a travelling way of life and one based on sedentarisation.

The expression of this conflict in the late nineteenth century came most vociferously from the supporters of the emergent bourgeois ideology, who denigrated the traveller and the travelling way of life for standing opposed to forces of civilisation and advance. Arguments borrowed from various sources permitted them to couch the problem in racial categories which established a hierarchy containing Romanies, didakais or half-bloods, and gorgios, or non-gypsies.

From the twin elements of nomadism and racial separateness developed a host of stereotypes about travellers which in turn profoundly affected responses. In general, all classes were united in their antipathy but, unlike the case of other minority groups, whether racially or culturally defined, popular persecution of travellers was not rooted in fears of real or perceived threats to jobs or status, but rather in contempt for a parasite made such by the travelling way of life and/or hereditary factors.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the association of a group of travellers with a Romany race came with the formation of the Gypsy Lore Society. In 1877 Colonel Prideaux wrote to the Journal Notes and Queries requesting that interested persons set

about collecting gypsy songs and ballads while it was still possible. He felt that the gypsy camp was soon to become a thing of the past and unless the gypsies were contacted immediately, and tapped for their history, then it would be too late. A reply from W. J. Ibbetson suggested that a club or correspondence society be formed for this purpose.<sup>1</sup> From these initial suggestions, and under the initiative and leadership of David MacRitchie of Edinburgh, the Gypsy Lore Society (G.L.S.) was founded in 1888.<sup>2</sup>

The declared objective of the Society was to investigate the gypsy question "... in as thorough and many-sided manner as possible".<sup>3</sup> Membership was to be world-wide, and the hope was to save gypsy lore from extinction in every corner of the globe. The members' findings and results were to be published quarterly in the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society. In practice, the 'thorough' investigation of the gypsy problem meant research into the language, history, ethnology and folk-lore of a gypsy race. Essentially, the members of the Society saw the gypsy problem in terms of questions concerning their origin, and the intentions and concern of the lorists were to identify the 'true' gypsies and locate them as a race apart. The lorists were thus firmly set in the conservative, social-anthropological tradition.

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1 In Notes and Queries, 7th Ser., Vol.4 (12 November 1887), p.397.

2 Ibid., 7th Ser., Vol.5 (16 June 1888), p.480. It was claimed that MacRitchie first showed that 'Gypsy' was derived from 'Egyptian' and so should be spelt with a 'y' and not an 'i' (C. G. Leland, 'What we have done', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, hereafter J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.3, No.4, 1892, p.193).

3 Printed circular, undated, in box of miscellaneous printed items, Gypsy Lore Society Archive. See also E. R. Pennell, Charles Godfrey Leland: a biography, Vol.2 (1906), p.197.

The emphasis was firmly and almost exclusively on kinship and cultural patterns and not on social change and politics. The Society appeared at the time of the debate surrounding the registration and regulation of van- and tent-dwellers, by means of the Moveable Dwellings Bill, yet the contributors to the Journal obliviously continued their search for a dying language and genealogical lines. Controversial issues were avoided. Members were concerned about a decaying language and culture but not about a threatened and persecuted people. By avoiding such problems as registration, enforced settlement and harassment the members of the G.L.S. distanced themselves from the present-day reality of gypsy existence and submersed themselves in the myth and mystery of gypsies in the past.

However, by 1892 the Journal had ceased to exist and the Society had begun a period of decline that was to last for fifteen years. The Journal was distributed only to members, so there was little chance of arousing the public interest and finance needed to keep the Society alive. Membership was measured in tens rather than hundreds, thus contributing to the relative scarcity of the first series of the Journal. But the Society was revived in 1907, and by 1909 membership totalled 49 libraries and institutions and 145 individuals. Moreover, the Society's rebirth witnessed a realisation that the gypsy did not live in a social and political vacuum, immersed in strange taboos and ancient rites. It was realised that in these opening years of the new century the gypsy was under the threat of persecution and harassment almost as great as anything that had been experienced in the past. In England there were attempts at control by means of the Moveable Dwellings

and Children's Bills and by active persecution by local authorities. It was even rumoured that England was to send representatives to a proposed European conference, to be held at Berne in the summer, 1908, to discuss means of ending for good the gypsy problem. The proposal, real or imagined, met with mixed responses:

"If this is to be accomplished it will be a really good day's work done. It is a disgrace to any civilised nation to harbour these dregs of humanity in idleness and vagabondage, and make no effort to amend their condition".<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, support was not so forthcoming;

"It would seem that, though civilisation may have rendered our methods of persecution less crude, we have not advanced very far from the barbarous ideas which prescribed the punishment of death for all who might be convicted of being gipsies or of consorting with them ... the statesmen of Europe are conspiring to wipe out the last traces of the Romany from the Western Continent".<sup>5</sup>

I can find no mention that the Conference ever took place, or that the proposals for it were anything more than worried speculation or wishful thinking, yet the fact that the idea of it was speculated on illustrates well the mood and feeling of the period. The Society responded to this by publishing a number of articles relating more to political issues than had previously been the case.<sup>6</sup> However, concern about social and political issues did not last for long, and the social-anthropological content remained dominant. The discovery

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4 H. E. J. Gibbins, Gipsies of the New Forest (Bournemouth, 1909), pp.41-2.

5 Quoted from the Tribune, 3 January 1908, p.6. See also printed notices, 28 January 1908, May 1908, in box of miscellaneous printed items, Gypsy Lore Society Archive.

6 See especially J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1 (1907-8).

of new dialects excited more interest among the Society's academicians, philologists and ethnologists than did new instances of repression and persecution. The war caused the Society again to wind up its affairs, and it was not to revive until 1922.

The contemporary importance of the various issues surrounding a nomadic population is made readily apparent by even a cursory look through recent newspapers or by glancing at the television. Relations between a travelling and a settled society still show the same degree of conflict and antagonism seen in the nineteenth century, and often the same arguments, based usually on inaccuracies, myths and generalisations, are repeated time and again. Newspaper reports illustrate the persistence of persecution and local authority harassment, television programmes can still take the title of 'They Steal Children, don't they?', and active members of the local population can still join together in Anti-Gypsy Groups, and shout about the "filth and pestilence" surrounding a group who "are not humans", and offer petrol bombs as their solution.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the notion of the 'true' gypsy is still called forth with the same degree of conviction now as at the end of the nineteenth century, and the superstitious aura surrounding the Romany lingers on, with, for example, the disastrous fire at the Alexandra Palace in London,

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7 'They Steal Children, don't they?' was the title of a Man Alive programme, shown on BBC2 on 28 October 1980. The petrol bomb solution was proposed by the Anti-Gypsy Group at North Swansea, who were allowed to present their views on a Brass Tacks programme shown on BBC2 on 12 July 1978.



in the summer of 1980, being blamed by some on a one hundred year old gypsy curse, uttered when the gypsies were turned off their camp site so the Palace could be built.<sup>8</sup> The similarities between the arguments and stereotypes used, and the hostility and persecution shown in the 1880s and 1980s are striking in their closeness and consistency. Antipathy to the travelling population thus remains virulent and virtually unanimous, and there is no more a workable solution now than then concerning the question of how to accommodate this marginal group.

The three themes mentioned earlier form the organising strands that run throughout the various parts of the thesis. The first section comprises the empirical base. It discusses the gypsy population in England and Wales, locating it geographically, socially and economically, and illustrating by examples the texture of its everyday life. This is then followed by an assessment of the fundamental issue of ascriptions, perceptions, images and stereotyping. Essentially there were three main definitions of a gypsy, which though different were not necessarily mutually exclusive. These covered a romantic race, a degenerate race, and a group of outcast travellers. Responses were conditioned and informed by stereotypes emanating from each of these. The term 'gypsy' could thus be applied to a racial elite, to be found at the top of the pyramidal ordering said to exist among travellers. It could also apply, in a generic sense, to a much larger group of travellers sharing a way of life and

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8 J. James, 'The Future for the Gypsies', The Listener (6 November 1980), p.607,

occupations in common, though identifiable from the artisan or vagrant traveller by a tendency to live and camp in groups, pursuing mainly a variety of self-employments. This therefore includes regional and temporal variations in the ascriptions given to the travellers, as well as combining under one heading the various terms used to differentiate between the group according to such criteria as occupation, appearance, name, language and race. By this definition, which is the one adopted throughout the thesis, all gypsies, Egyptians, pretended Egipcions, fortune-tellers, tent-dwellers, van-dwellers, tinkers, didakais, potters and muggers were grouped together.

The remainder of the thesis is concerned with responses to this varied travelling community from sections of the host, sedentary society. Religious and philanthropic individuals and agencies led the way in the nineteenth century in an organised endeavour to reform and settle the travelling population, and were assisted in that direction by the generally persecutory activities of the police and magistrates, themselves responsible for the control and surveillance of the marginal and deviant sections of society. Following this came the attempts by philanthropists and local authorities to secure effective legislation to curb the 'gypsy menace'. Formal and informal agents of the dominant culture thus worked together, though not always harmoniously, in an attempt to find an effective solution to the travelling 'problem'. Their successes were mixed.

By looking in this way at responses to travellers and travelling, it is hoped that the structural position of travellers in society, and the relationship between travellers and the settled population, will be explained. Clearly this could not be done by looking at the nature of travelling life alone, for to identify the position of the travellers it was necessary to show how they were defined and perceived by various organisations and agencies, from evangelist missions and the legislature to local authorities and literature.

Any attempt at a reconstruction of the nomadic way of life, and how it was seen and understood by the travellers themselves, must necessarily be flawed and incomplete owing to the fact that they left behind very little written by themselves.<sup>9</sup>

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9 The most notable exception is F. W. Carew (pseudonym of A. E. C. Way), No.747 (Bristol, 1891). Subtitled 'The Autobiography of a Gypsy', this book is an account of the life of Samuel Loveridge, written by him but put into an 'acceptable literary and publishable form' by 'Dr. F. W. Carew'. See also for this period, J. D. Burn, The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy (1844; edited with an introduction by D. Vincent, 1978); G. Smith, Incidents in a Gypsy's Life (Liverpool, 1886); R. Smith, From Gypsy Tent to Pulpit: the Story of my Life (1900), and, by the same author, Gypsy Smith, His Life and Work (1905); Lovell, 'My Life: by a Gypsy', Home Chat, 18 April 1908, pp.267-8. For a later period see S. G. Boswell, The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy (1970); D. Reeve, Smoke in the Lanes (1958), and, by the same author, No Place Like Home (1960), Whichever Way We Turn (1964); M. F. Wood (edited by J. A. Brune), In the Life of a Romany Gypsy (1974).

Given this scarcity one can only express regret that a volume edited by W. Pinkerton, entitled A Collection Taken Down from the Mouths of Gypsies in Somersetshire, does not seem to have been published. On the death of the original publisher, Hotten, the business transferred to Chatto and Windus, and the fate of the manuscript must remain a mystery (Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.1, 17 April 1880, p.324).

Accounts from the travellers were written either from the evangelist standpoint intending to show the possibilities for reform or else were interpreted and re-presented by other writers of sedentary origins and from different class and cultural backgrounds. In short, the travellers left behind them no lasting documentation, and if sources for working class history 'from below' are said to be scarce through a lack of literacy and of institutions, and through reliance on oral tradition, then how much more elusive must be the sources from gypsies and travellers.<sup>10</sup>

On the whole, then, writings on the travellers came from outside observers, some of whom had a great deal of contact with the people, while others had little or none and wrote more from hearsay and speculation than fact. Detail about the travellers thus has to be taken from sources not of their own making, but which are nonetheless informative if analysed critically.

The quantity of writing from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerning gypsies and travelling is extremely plentiful, as can be seen by looking through George Black's A Gypsy Bibliography,<sup>11</sup> The quality, however, was highly uneven.

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10 Much progress has been made in recent years to locate and make accessible sources deriving from the working-class, and it is becoming evident that such material, rather than being absent, has traditionally been neglected by historians. See, in particular, J. Burnett (ed.), Useful Toil. Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (1974); R. Samuel (ed.), People's History and Socialist Theory (1981); D. Vincent, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography (1981).

11 The provisional issue was published in Liverpool in 1909, and the final edition in Edinburgh in 1914.

To impose a rather simplified model on the various works, they can be said to favour one of the definitions outlined earlier. Although the mixing of stereotypes by some writers and the ambiguous and contradictory nature of some works could make the classification awkward, it was nevertheless generally the case that one tendency dominated their works, thus enabling us to identify whether the writer was describing a separate race of people, whether romantic or degenerate, or the large group of travellers generally.

The writers who claimed to have identified a separate race of Romany gypsies were to be found mainly in the Romantic school of fictional writers or else associated with the Gypsy Lore Society, though their influence clearly would have extended further than these narrow confines suggest. Writings of people such as George Borrow and the mainstays of the Gypsy Lore movement, notably Henry Crofton, Charles Leland and Francis Hindes Groome, were very much a part of a general trend in Victorian thought that emphasised race and origins.<sup>12</sup> Having found variation among travellers and then discovered their foreign origins, theories of genetics were then used, often crudely and deterministically, to explain the characteristics of that group, and thus came to form some framework within which responses were conditioned. Also in accordance with contemporary concerns, more was written about the language of the people than about the people themselves.<sup>13</sup> More recently this

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12 See bibliography for details.

13 Rev. S. B. James, 'English Gypsies', Church of England Magazine (1875), p.289.

particular approach was adopted by Elwood Trigg, who took these sources and accepted their findings with scarcely a thought about criticism.<sup>14</sup>

Standing alongside these essentially racial works were those by authors who, though they may have subscribed to the belief in the existence of the Romany gypsy, were not concerned with locating a separate race but instead sought to advertise the conditions of existence of a large travelling group, urgently demanding the attention of reformers. John Hoyland and James Crabb were among the first to publish works with this kind of emphasis, and their importance was not missed by later writers who frequently drew from these sources for evidence.<sup>15</sup> The 1880s were perhaps the heyday of the gypsy as a subject, with frequent articles to be found in a wide variety of newspapers and journals. Much of the responsibility for the attention given to the gypsy 'problem' must belong to the philanthropist George Smith of Coalville. When he turned his attention to reforming the children of travellers, he published widely and profusely on the subject. Many criticisms can be levelled at his first book on the question, Gypsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their Children, with suggestions for their improvement, published in 1880. The book is badly written and poorly argued, relying

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14 See E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion Among the Gypsies of Britain', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1967). Trigg and this method of approach are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

15 J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate (1832); J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies (York, 1816).

on exaggeration to draw lurid pictures and on anecdote combining freely with hearsay and factual information. Although the more serious of these problems were rectified, up to a point, in later books, his exaggerated arguments remained convincing to an audience wanting to be convinced.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the presentation of wild speculation and unsupported assertions in the form of factual arguments was to be seen in works as varied as W. and J. Simson's A History of the Gypsies (1869), and various official, governmental publications.

Interestingly, work on travellers among academics has again 'taken off' in recent years, and studies are completed or in progress in relation to police responses to travellers, the contemporary position of travellers in society, the question of foreign gypsies, and gypsies and the women's issues.<sup>17</sup> At no time since the late nineteenth century has the question of a travelling population received such attention. Let it be hoped that the flaws and weaknesses of the earlier works are not repeated, here and elsewhere.

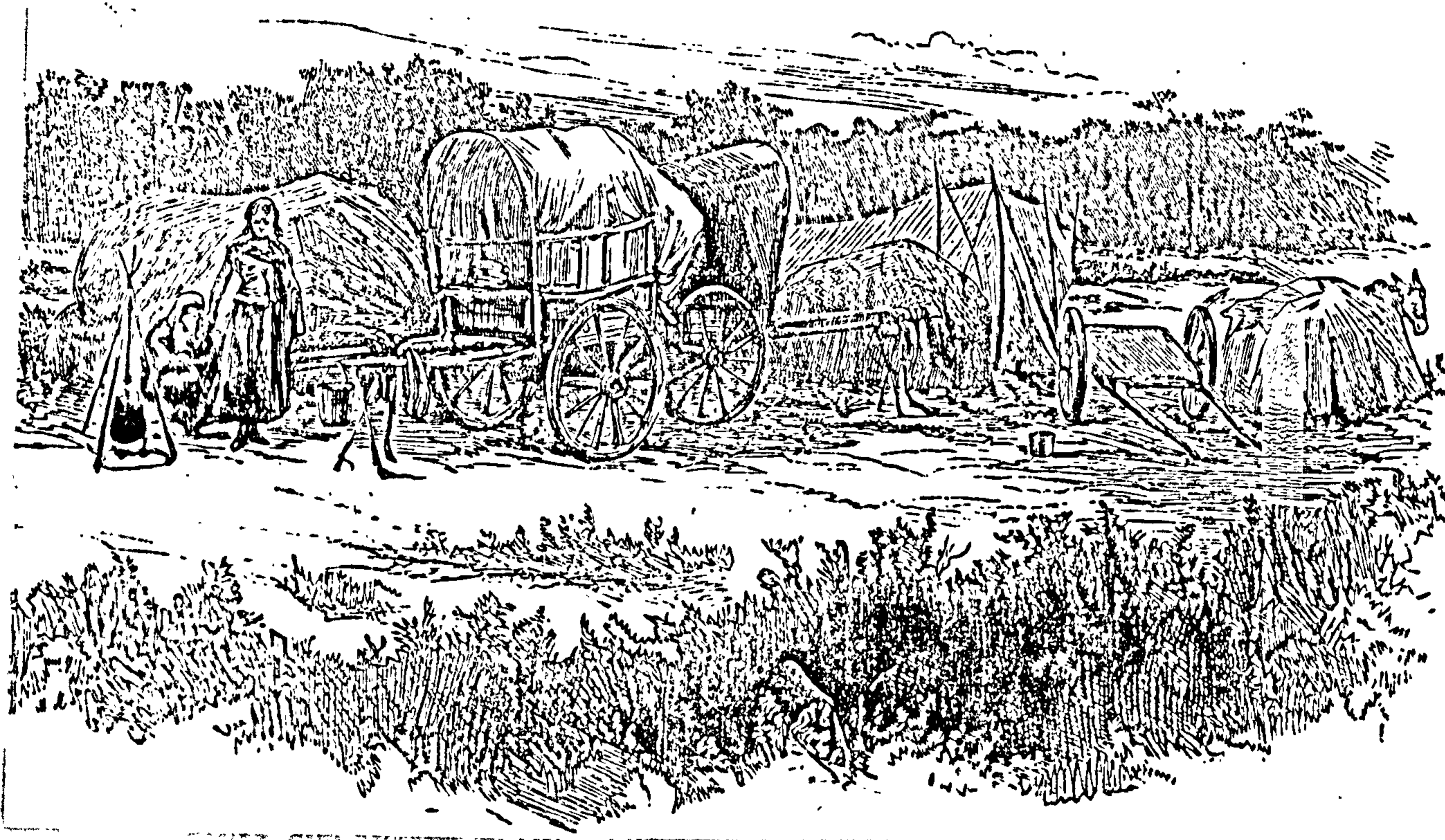
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16 See also his I've been a Gipsying; or, rambles among our Gypsies and their Children (1885); Gypsy Children; or, a stroll in Gipsydom (1889).

17 See, for example, C. Holmes, 'The German Gypsy Question in Britain, 1904-6', in K. Lunn (ed.), Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society 1870-1914 (1980), pp.134-59; J. Okely, 'Gypsy Women: Models in Conflict', in S. Ardener (ed.), Perceiving Women (1975); current research is being carried out by Hughie Mackay at the University of Cardiff and by Jo Hignett at the University of Edinburgh.

## CHAPTER 1

ITINERANCY AS A WAY OF LIFE:  
 THE NATURE OF TRAVELLING AND THE  
 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF TRAVELLERS



The nature and extent of itinerancy in nineteenth century Britain is an area that has received only little historical attention. Yet travelling was an essential part of economic and social life, with the various itinerant groups performing important functions before the development and growth of an efficient communications and trade network, and even afterwards, though in a modified form. John Swinstead identified seven classes of traveller which covered the uncommercial tramps, unemployed artisans, showmen, gypsies, horse-dealers, hawkers

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The illustration is of gypsies on Mitcham Common, London (from the Illustrated London News, 3 January 1880, p.13),



and cheap-jacks.<sup>1</sup> However, this categorisation touched only the surface of the issue. Navvies, canal boatmen, building-trade workers and wandering agricultural labourers, to add but a few, were also a part of this vast mobile labour force.

The variety of travellers was illustrated well by John Sampson, writing in the colourful and romantic slang of the period:

"Up and down the devious dusky streaks between city and village, and village and city, go the tattered tribes of dromengeros, wild birds of passage, differing widely among themselves in note and plumage, but united in their common enmity to the plump city-bred pigeon - the Swaddlers with their picturesque rhyming cant, the Hawker and Driz Fencer with their back slang, the Mush Faker with his nedhers kena thari; the Potter or Mugger with his mask cant, the Crocus Pitcher with his peculiar lingo, the Shalla-bloke, Tramp or Mumper with their ephemeral flying cant, and the Irish tinkers ... chief among these are the Gypsies, the aristocrats of the road ...".<sup>2</sup>

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1 J. H. Swinstead, A Parish on Wheels (1897), pp.4-6.

2 J. Sampson, 'The Gypsies', paper read to the Warrington Literary and Philosophical Society, 15 March 1897 (Warrington, 1897), pp.3-4. E. Partridge (The Routledge Dictionary of Historical Slang, abridged by J. Simpson, 1973) gives the following definitions:

'Swaddler': a pedlar. In the eighteenth century it was a term used to mean pedlars given to robbery with violence.

'Driz Fencer': a seller of lace; a receiver of stolen lace, hence of other material.

'Mush Faker': a mender of umbrellas.

'Mumper': 1670-1720: a beggar  
1720-1830: a sponger  
1870-1900: a half-bred gypsy.

'Crocus Pitcher': an itinerant quack doctor.

It is interesting to note the corruption of the term 'mumper' from a beggar to a half-bred gypsy.

Rather than differentiating the travellers by the allegedly distinctive cant associated with various occupations, Henry Mayhew attempted a categorisation simply by means of occupation and on a rural/urban dichotomy. He constructed a travelling spectrum of rural nomads, analagous to Swinstead's classes of travellers, which placed the respectable tramping artisan at one end, and the unrespectable tramps and beggars at the other:

"The nomadic races of England are of many distinct kinds - from the habitual vagrant - half-beggar, half-thief - sleeping in barns, tents, and casual wards - to the mechanic on tramp, obtaining his bed and supper from the trade societies in the different towns, on his way to seek work. Between these two extremes there are several mediate varieties - consisting of pedlars, showmen, harvest-men, and all that large class who live by either selling, showing, or doing something through the country".<sup>3</sup>

He then went on to identify the urban and suburban nomads who followed outdoor occupations in and around the large towns. Beggars, prostitutes, street-sellers, street-performers, watermen and cabmen were just a few examples of these. This attempt to distinguish between rural and urban nomadism, and between distinct kinds of rural nomads is somewhat misleading. The differences between the rural nomads, as identified by Mayhew, were not always apparent, and may simply have represented different stages of life of the individual, or even different seasons of the year.<sup>4</sup>

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3. H. Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, Vol.1 (1861; New York, 1968), p.2.

4. See R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers', in H. J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), The Victorian City, Vol.1 (1976), pp.152-3. This article provides an excellent introduction to nineteenth-century wayfaring life.

There was a similar fluidity between the rural and urban nomads. Many of the former took to itinerant and marginal employments in the urban areas during the winter months, in the same way that many of the urban nomads travelled the countryside at certain times of the year, notably during the hop- and fruit-picking seasons. A more important criticism, though, concerns his use of the term 'nomad', commonly associated with ideas of tribalism and communalism. Mayhew's main criterion for identifying the various types of nomads, rural and urban, was that of occupation. Essentially, he placed on the same nomadic spectrum all whose employment necessitated an outdoor existence for some period of time. Such a classification is clearly too sweeping. Similarly, Swinstead's categorisation is made too broad by the adoption of travelling generally as his criterion. As a result he failed to consider the specific aspects of an itinerant life-style and the nature of the relationship between itinerancy and employments.

In order to make some sense of the complexity and breadth of the itinerant population, it is necessary to narrow the scope and make an important preliminary distinction that separates a sub-group of travellers from this larger group of mobile labour. This can be done by differentiating between those who travelled in order to obtain employment but otherwise adopted, and conformed to, a sedentary way of life, and those who, with their families, took to travelling as a way of life in itself, at least for a sizeable part of the year. In the first group can be placed the tramping artisans, navvies and agricultural labourers. In the latter can be grouped the showmen,

hawkers, horse-dealers, gypsies, travelling potters and the like.<sup>5</sup> Once again, though, this distinction has no clear boundaries owing to a measure of fluidity that existed between the groups, but it nevertheless assists in making possible the identification of a sub-group of travellers as distinct from simply persons on the road.

The crucial preliminary distinction, then, is between those who adopted itinerancy as a way of life and those for whom it was merely a temporary expedient undertaken for purely economic ends. The differences between the two groups included minor points of style as well as more fundamental distinctions. The former travelled as a family group, camped on waste or common land, by the roadside and in barns, whereas the latter more usually wandered alone and resorted to staying in common lodging-houses and inns. Also, they differed fundamentally in the nature of their employment. The one was self-employed and independent, following a wide variety of itinerant callings and trades, while the other was a wage-slave, dependent on selling his limited labour skills to others.

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5 Canal dwellers could also be placed in this latter group. From around the middle of the nineteenth century they followed an itinerant life style, and travelled as families along the canals, with each member contributing to the family income by sharing the work burden. However, they constitute a distinct research topic in their own right, and for this reason will be excluded from this study. See C. Hadfield, British Canals (1950); H. Hanson, The Canal Boatmen, 1760-1914 (Manchester, 1979); L. T. C. Rolt, Narrow Boats (1944), Navigable Waterways (1969).

Clearly, the lines of demarcation between the two types were often blurred. The artisan, though, was dependent primarily on hiring out his specialised labour, and for him tramping was the customary response to regional trade depressions.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the self-employed itinerants were reliant primarily for their subsistence on their varied skills and an earning power based on their own wits. The only time when they did not conform to this pattern of independency was during the season when agricultural labour was much in demand, when the opportunities for temporary employment and relatively high levels of remuneration persuaded them to enter the harvest fields, fruit-growing farms and hop fields. Even during the winter period, when travelling was usually curtailed, this self-styled and self-imposed economic independency distinguished them from their neighbours in the towns. On the whole, they continued their trades as hawkers, pedlars, and the various costermongering and street-selling occupations.

This sub-group of travellers comprises the subject of the thesis. The question of ascription and perceptions will be dealt with later; suffice it to say here that the group can loosely be termed travellers, itinerants or gypsies.<sup>7</sup> They possessed a certain unity owing to their itinerant life style and their

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<sup>6</sup> See E. Hobsbawm, 'The Tramping Artisan', in his Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (1976), pp.34-63; R. A. Leeson, Travelling Brothers (1979); E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1977); together with extensive primary material to be found in the reports and journals of the nineteenth-century trade societies, many of which the author studied while employed at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

<sup>7</sup> These terms will be used interchangeably throughout.

independent, self-disciplined means of earning a livelihood, though this is not to imply uniformity and homogeneity. The members of the group differed in terms of occupation, race, wealth, the extent of their migrancy and the types of dwellings they used, and even the reasons for adopting such a life style.<sup>8</sup>

The diversity of the migrant population, of that part of the labour force described by Raphael Samuel as comprising a vast "reserve army of labour", would suggest that the reasons for its existence were many and various.<sup>9</sup> In relation to the non-nomadic mobile labour force isolated earlier, itinerancy was a direct result of the individual's need to sell his labour. There is no such clear correlation in respect of the nomadic sub-group, and there is no clear answer to the question whether the type of occupation pursued was a product of an itinerant life style, or vice versa. The historical antecedents would be largely untraceable and the evolved interrelationships and traditions would render meaningless any hard and fast answer. Even so, four factors have been offered, at various times and with different degrees of emphasis, in order to explain the existence of a nomadic population.

The first of these, which was commonly held in the latter part of the nineteenth century, suggested that travellers,

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8 The question of occupations is discussed in Chapter 2, and the issue of race in relation to definitions of gypsies and other travellers is contained in Chapter 3.

9 R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers', loc.cit., pp.123-60.

especially gypsies, were afflicted with an uncontrollable wanderlust instinct. It was in their blood, a part of their nature, and it was as natural to them to move about as it was for the majority of the population to remain in one place. Itinerancy was thus a product of genetic determinants, and, by extension, was present in some races and not others.<sup>10</sup> The fact that very many gypsies adopted a sedentary way of life provides sufficient evidence to ridicule such a monocausal explanation. More reasonably, itinerancy was said to be the product of socialisation to a travelling way of life. Clearly, being raised as a nomad and being socialised into a travelling life style would undoubtedly have increased the likelihood of inter-generational itinerancy. Itinerant occupations followed on from this. Thirdly, employment criteria were said to be uppermost, and it was argued that nomadism and mobility were economically essential in order to secure a regular income. Finally, it was suggested that itinerancy was the means of escape adopted by the 'refuse' or 'outcasts' of sedentary society, whether they were escaping from industrial employments and the constraints of civilised society, or from the hand of the law.

In sum, then, itinerancy was variously seen to have been a product of heredity, cultural continuity, economic practicality and ideological rejection. To give precedence to any of these factors would be an impossible task. With the exception of heredity, they must all have had some bearing on the decision to adopt, or retain, a travelling life style. There was, then, a mixture of habit, choice and obligation.

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<sup>10</sup> See footnote 8.

So far we have talked generally about a sub-group of travellers and have only hinted at the diversity of its members. Samuel's classification of the travelling population into four categories provides a convenient starting point for identifying the main diverse features of this group. Distinct from the habitual wanderers who travelled from place to place, with no regular settlement at all, were those who kept regular winter quarters in the town. Apart from these two categories were those who travelled only during the summer season and who otherwise remained in one place, and, finally, the group of travellers who made frequent visits to the country but never moved far from their home base.<sup>11</sup> John Hoyland found evidence of this range among the London gypsies in the opening decades of the nineteenth century:

"A few of the Gypsies continue all the year in London, excepting their attendance of fairs in the vicinity. Others, when work is scarce, go out twenty or thirty miles round the metropolis, carrying their implements with them on asses; and support themselves by the employment they obtain in the towns and villages through which they pass; and assist sometimes in hay-making, and plucking hops, in the counties of Kent, Surry (sic.), and Sussex.

Among those who have winter-quarters in London, there are a few that take circuits of great extent. Some of them mentioned going through Herts into Suffolk, then crossing Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire to Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Bristol, &c. Others spoke of being at Yarmouth, Portsmouth, South Wales, Wiltshire, &c.

There is reason to think, the greatest part of the Island is traversed in different directions, by hordes of Gypsies".<sup>12</sup>

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11 R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers', loc.cit., p.124.

12 J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies (York, 1816), p.187. See also 'Gypsies', The Literary and Scientific Repository, Vol.3 (1821), p.404.



This identification between the different types of migrancy is an important one to make, and the decision of when and how far to travel must have been subject to a number of considerations, not the least important of which was a personal assessment of employment prospects and hawking capacity. The adoption and reliance upon a variety of itinerant callings and trades meant that the means of earning a living demanded the ability to pursue different trades when the occasion necessitated it, and also the freedom and ability to travel in response to demand. That is, the extent of itinerancy was guided by the degree of success, in money or kind, achieved in the various towns and districts. The extent and direction of their wanderings were neither carefully planned nor chaotically irregular. Circuits were followed, and certain districts were regularly visited,<sup>13</sup> but the length of stay depended on the spontaneous basis of quickly analysing the local situation, and moving on as and when it became necessary. The exact route and amount of time spent in one location would have depended on the success of the hawking ventures; persecution by police, local authority officials and residents; the condition of the camping ground; and the desire for change.<sup>14</sup> Personal considerations and assessments thus mixed with external pressures.

Samuel's model, however, can be applied to the whole group of travellers, each type of which can be found in each of the

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13 See pages 142-57.

14 See J. Okely, 'Gypsies travelling in Southern England', in F. Rehfisch (ed.), Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers (1979), p.70.

migration ranges, and not simply to the nomadic sub-group. In order to focus attention more sharply on this latter section, it is necessary to suggest a relationship between the extent of migrancy, the type of abode and the nature and location of the site of the dwelling-place. The categories used by Samuel correctly cut across factors such as occupation, race or age, yet these variables of abode and site need to be added to his emphasis on the spread and range of migrancy. If migrancy was long in the amount of time spent on the road and wide in terms of the area travelled, then each stop was relatively short and the sites for their camps were temporary. Any area of waste ground, forest or common land, private land (often without the owner's consent), or a suitable roadside verge served as a short-stay site for these travellers. The types of abodes varied from vans and tents to barns, sheds and the open air. Although it was not entirely the case, the single traveller, with few possessions, tended to dominate the latter categories while the nomadic families tended to favour vans and tents.

When migrancy was short and narrow, if not for all seasons then at least usually for the winter months, more permanent sites, or settlements, were set up in locations where the travellers would be relatively free from harassment and pressures to move. Secluded sites in forests or on land leased for long periods were the most preferred alternatives that gave some measure of security of tenure. The sites varied in size and in the number of occupants from one family to scores of

families, and also in the degree of permanency, from two or three months to half a century or more. Such settlements, the larger of which came to be described as 'van towns', were to be found, at various times in the period under review, in and around London in Epping Forest, near Woodford, at Battersea, Wandsworth, Hackney Marshes, the Notting Hill Potteries and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Similar settlements could be found, for example, at Blackpool, Birmingham and Altrincham, in the New Forest, on the Malvern Hills, on the outskirts of Manchester and Dublin, and by the Welsh lakes where the gypsies pursued the half-sedentary employments of fishing and rowing visitors.<sup>16</sup>

To argue for the existence of permanent sites is not to imply that all the inhabitants of them were necessarily a permanent feature also. Simply, it should be taken to mean that given the large numbers of gypsies who used the sites, and given the diversity of the extent and duration of their travelling, these locations were the central base of the comings and goings of a large and varied group. This would have been most noticeable in the summer, but

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15 Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, First Report (1884-5), p.56, (hereafter referred to as R.C. on Housing); The Select Committee on the Temporary Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Sir H. Owen (1887), p.1, paras. 6-10, (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Temp. Dw.); J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate (1832), p.137; G. Smith, I've been a Gipsying (1885), pp.281-2; A. Melton, 'The true-born Gypsy Folk; will the ancient Romany people disappear?', Sunday Chronicle, 11 August 1907, p.2.

16 K. Bercovici, The Story of the Gypsies (1930), p.243; E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (hereafter, J.G.L.S.), New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.331; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1908', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1910), p.278; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.8, No.3 (1929), p.110.

even during these months many of the sites were in continual use, containing a nucleus of a fixed population. Indeed, some of the vans at the "head-quarters" of the van population near Wormwood Scrubs, Battersea, were no longer moveable, having lost their wheels.<sup>17</sup>

These large and regular sites provoked the most concern and interest precisely because of the large number of travellers who congregated there, and the regularity and semi-permanency of their dwelling. These factors stimulated interest and comment from philanthropists, journalists, philologists, lorists, sanitary officers, missionaries, police and local government officials, whether by sympathisers or critics, the gypsies were hounded from all sides the moment they ceased their wanderings and set up camp. Regular sites and semi-permanent settlements proved to be the main sources of attraction, whether as the ideal collecting ground of gypsy lore and language, for purposes of missionary evangelism and education with a relatively captive audience, or as proof of the depravity, immorality and insanitary conditions in which the travellers lived. For these reasons certain areas have been documented more fully than others, with the result that itinerancy on a national scale was not evenly logged. However, this should not be taken to reflect the absence of gypsies from particular regions and counties, but should be understood rather as a function of the bias of contemporary commentators. For example, the South Western region of the country provoked only minimal comment from nineteenth century writers, yet the sparing references to this area

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<sup>17</sup> R.C. on Housing, First Report, p.56,

suggest that gypsies had long been a feature there,<sup>18</sup> It can be speculated that the major reason for the paucity of sources was that the gypsies travelled in smaller groups and over a wider area than elsewhere, thus inhibiting the setting up of regular and permanent sites to which the missionaries and officials flocked.

However, not all those who curtailed their travelling during the winter, or who otherwise fell into the short and narrow migrancy range, lived in these settlements or even on sites in vans and tents. The tendency in the winter months was for the travellers to migrate inwards towards the centres of large populations, and there find accommodation according to wealth and preference:

"... those who have houses empty the furniture out of their vans into the houses, and live the regular ordinary life of the working-man, but with more general experience.

Some remain in their vans by preference, and take up a place at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, the Drill Hall, Portsmouth, and similar places, for which they pay larger rent than is supposed.

But others can neither do this nor even purchase the privilege of staying in an inn yard sheltered by the adjoining houses, and these ... have to keep moving on ... with their squalid vans or smoky tents".<sup>19</sup>

But winter lodging in houses and apartments was not simply the preserve of the wealthy. Vernon Morwood, writing in the mid-1880s, noted the tendency of gypsies to rent apartments

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18 See W. G. Willis Watson, 'Pestiferous Carbuncles in Somerset', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.12, No.2 (1933), pp.82-93.

19 J. H. Swinstead, op.cit., p.194.

"... in the most wretched houses in the low localities of our large towns ...".<sup>20</sup> Most large towns would have experienced this seasonal influx of travellers, and many authors noted the winter residencies of the gypsies with whom they had contact.<sup>21</sup> But it was to London that a great many gypsies travelled. Both John Hoyland and James Crabb noted the tendency of the gypsies who travelled the midland counties to migrate to London for the winter months.<sup>22</sup> The general impression formed by Morwood for the latter decades of the century was no less applicable to London a quarter of a century earlier:

"... some of the gypsies during the winter months take up their tents and live in houses. But when they do so, they make the place of their abode in the lowest parts of the metropolis. They leave the country and suburban districts of London ... and make their dwelling in some low court in Kent-street, Shoreditch, and Golden-lane, St. Luke's; where two and three families of them will huddle together in one small room, with no chairs, tables, or beds ...".<sup>23</sup>

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20 V. S. Morwood, Our Gipsies in City, Tent and Van (1885), p.89.

21 See, for example, J. Crabb, op.cit., p.111; W. Howitt, The Rural Life of England (1840), pp.175-6; Lady A. Grosvenor, 'A Pilgrim's Progress', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), p.207; T. W. Thompson, 'The Social Polity of the English Gypsies', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1923), p.125; Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.1 (29 May 1880), p.446. It is interesting to note that the gypsy lorists, in general, scarcely mentioned this significant aspect of gypsy life. Perhaps this was because it stood contrary to their notion of the Romany traveller, living the natural life of the noble savage. Perhaps, also, the type of accommodation rented by most gypsies was of the worst description, and not of the sort the lorists would wish to advertise as being associated with the romantic subjects of their researches.

22 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.183; J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.168, 187. Hoyland even produced a list, compiled by James Corder, of some of the lodgers in Westminster and Borough, and this is reproduced as Appendix 1.

23 Annual Report of City Missionary, 1859, in London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), p.30.

This picture of travellers living in non-moveable dwellings for the winter months could also be seen, though in more pleasing circumstances than those described above, at Kirk Yetholm in Scotland,<sup>24</sup> For much of the century, the gypsy occupants of Tinklers Row, Kirk Yetholm, retained the travelling traditions of summer migrancy and winter settlement. However, the balance swung increasingly in favour of reduced travelling and more permanent settlement. This tendency could be seen to date from about the latter third of the century, in Scotland as elsewhere in Britain. At first it seemed that only a few individuals were taking up permanent houses for the whole year, though still relying on traditional itinerant callings, but from the late nineteenth century on the existence of large numbers of house-dwelling gypsies came to be noticed by a variety of writers.<sup>25</sup> By this time the slow drift had turned into a more expansive slide into sedentarisation, and, eventually, colonies of settled gypsies were identified:

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24 See pages 293-308. See the bibliography for titles relating to Yetholm, and the Scottish and Border gypsies.

25 J. Flanagan, Scenes from my Life (1907), p.105; F. H. Groome, In Gipsy Tents (Edinburgh, 1880; Wakefield, 1973), p.13; Rev. G. Hall, The Gypsy's Parson (1915), pp.2-3, 157, 173; R. Jefferies, Field and Hedgerow (1889), p.163; C. G. Leland, The Gypsies (1882), p.141; T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1909', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.2 (1911), pp.121, 128; T. W. Thompson, 'The Uncleaness of Women among English Gypsies', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.1, No.1 (1922), p.17; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.1, No.3 (1922), p.144; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), p.118; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox and the Derbyshire Boswells', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.4, No.1 (1925), p.25; Rev. G. Hall, 'Notes on the Boss Pedigree', Romanitshels, Didakais and Folk-Lore Gazette (from 1913: The Gypsy and Folk-Lore Gazette; hereafter, Folk-Lore Gazette), Vol.1, No.4 (October 1912), p.120; Rev. G. Hall, 'The Gypsies of England', Sunday at Home (April 1912), p.415.

"The gipsy element is found in many if not most villages in the south of England. I know one large scattered village where it appears predominant - as dirty and disorderly-looking a place as can be imagined, the ground round every cottage resembling a gipsy camp, but worse owing to its great litter of old rags and rubbish strewn about. But the people, like all gipsies, are not so poor as they look, and most of the cottagers keep a trap and pony with which they scour the country for many miles around in quest of bones, rags and bottles, and anything else they can buy for a few pence, also anything they can 'pick up' for nothing".<sup>26</sup>

A similar colony existed at Thorny Hill, near the New Forest, but this settlement was usually described with less animosity.<sup>27</sup>

This tendency towards sedentarisation, in the nature of dwellings if not always in employment, should not be overstated. Although affecting an indeterminate though not insignificant proportion of the travelling community, there were still great numbers who modified their way of life rather than accept this important step towards permanent settlement. These changes in the duration and range of migrancy, and of the type of dwelling used by the travellers and its location, should not, though, obscure important elements of continuity. The range of migrancy, discussed earlier, in terms of its duration and area covered, was apparent at the beginning of the period under review just as it was at the end. Some travellers had always

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26 W. H. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life: impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs (1910), pp.265-6.

27 When the inhabitants of these, and other, non-moveable dwellings adopted full-time sedentary employments, and so became completely 'gaujified' in the eyes of the gypsy lorists, is the time they fall from the scope of this study. See, for example, 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.6, No.1 (1912), pp.64-5; ibid, No.4 (1913), p.332. See also pages 64-5.



travelled long distances and for long periods, while others followed a more restricted itinerant life style. Following on from this, there were regular and permanent sites throughout the century. As early as the eighteenth century there were settlements of gypsies close to the new urban communities in East and West Midlands, notably the Tinkerborough settlement outside Stafford.<sup>28</sup>

To argue, though, that the wide migrancy spectrum was always present should not be taken to mean that the emphasis did not alter. Indeed, certain trends are apparent. By the latter decades of the nineteenth century the majority of travellers were grouped at the end of the scale that travelled shorter distances for fewer months, with the inevitable result that larger and more permanent sites grew up on the edge of towns and cities. With the increased geographical concentration of the population there was no longer the same economic need to travel in small groups over wide areas. The general tendency among travellers was, therefore, towards greater concentration.

This voluntary adaptation to change coexisted with other external factors which threatened and encroached upon the way

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28 I am grateful to David Smith, Honorary Editor of the J.G.L.S., for this reference, which he discovered during his researches, still in progress, into the question of settled travellers. I am similarly informed by Mr. V. Tyrrell, Principal Area Librarian, Stoke, that Tinkersclough was a place name for a part of Hanley, near Stoke, at least by the 1660s.

of life of the nomadic population. The most notable of these were the attempts by missionaries and philanthropic humanitarians to force sedentarisation on the travellers; persecution and harassment by law officers and state officials; the challenge posed by technological developments and industrial advance to their traditional crafts and employments; and, finally, the enclosure movement and the building and development schemes which took away many of the regular and traditional camping grounds of the gypsies. The first three of these factors will be discussed fully in later chapters.

The enclosure movement gathered momentum throughout the century, taking away increasingly large areas of common land. The impact of this movement on the nomadic population was felt very early on. The gypsies were complaining of the difficulties occasioned by enclosure from the opening decades of the century.<sup>29</sup> Much land was enclosed under Private Acts between 1834 and 1849, and under the Commons Act of 1876. In 1851 an Act was passed for the disafforesting and enclosure of Hainault Forest.<sup>30</sup> Epping Forest, the other great resort of the gypsies, suffered a series of enclosures throughout the first part of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, a considerable quantity of land had been partitioned by agreement

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29 A. Esquiros, The English at Home, translated by L. Wraxall, Vol.1 (1861), pp.205-6; J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.244; Christian Guardian, Vol.4 (1812), pp.98-101; Vol.5 (1813), pp.412-4; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox ...', loc.cit., p.21.

30 14 & 15 Vict., c.43, 1851.

and also under the sanction of the Statute of Merton,<sup>31</sup> In the two years from 1871 to 1873 the area of commons had been reduced from 8,000,000 to 2,633,000 acres.<sup>32</sup>

Annie Beale described in plaintive manner the effect of this on the gypsies:

"Their old haunts are no longer their homes. The wide-stretching table-land around their present temporary retreat, once their own, as if by right of purchase, is now cultivated and enclosed; ploughed fields are interspersed among the smooth, turfy, breezy downs, and utility has replaced the picturesque. The gypsy tent rises no more from the green sward ... so it is in the woodlands. Trees are felled, and houses built, and the wanderers ... seek their leafy abodes in vain ..".<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, the roadside verge was no longer a convenient practical alternative. The wide 'slang' by the roadside of mid-century England, where the horses could pasture free of charge, were guarded and reduced, and the pressure to move on from the rural police and local authority officials was consistent and wearing in its effect. A gypsy named Lovell stated unhesitatingly that these developments had "... finished the old style gypsy".<sup>34</sup>

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31 Lord Eversley, Commons, Forests and Footpaths (1894; 1910), p.4.

32 Inclosure Commissioners, Reports, 1871, 1873, quoted in ibid, p.4.

33 A. Beale, 'Gipsying', Argosy, Vol.16 (1873), p.271. For similar laments see A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.177; C. G. Leland, The English Gypsies and their Language (1874), p.2; W. R. S. Ralston, 'A Gypsies' Christmas Gathering', Good Words (1 February 1868), p.100.

34 Lovell, 'My Life: by a Gypsy', Home Chat (18 April 1908), p.267. The role of the rural police and of local authority officials in enforcing a range of laws against the travellers will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The situation was scarcely better in the towns. For example, in London,

"The Crystal Palace ... covers the spot where, thirty years ago, the King of the Gipsies held his court; the 'Potteries' of Latimer Road are gone, and there is a station of the District Railway in their place. I believe that the Shaftesbury Estate covers the fields where the Gipsies loved ten years ago to pitch their winter tents ...".<sup>35</sup>

By the 1880s, Notting Dale, Willesden, Wormwood Scrubs and Kensal Green were also closed to the travellers.<sup>36</sup> Reclamation of waste land, building projects and railway extensions were the town equivalents of rural enclosures.<sup>37</sup>

The effects of these combined developments were various. Firstly, enclosure and the rural police tended to force the gypsies off the country roads and into the towns. Here they congregated in large encampments, located generally on land and fields rented from either sedentary landlords though also occasionally from the more wealthy gypsies, or rented

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35 W.B., 'Gipsies and their Friends', Temple Bar Magazine, Vol.47 (May 1876), pp.70-1. Similarly, railway extensions and building operations had obliterated effectively the encampment that used to be sited on the rushy wastes on the northern verge of Croydon Common, and a patch of ground near Addison Road Station was covered with tents and wagons in 1875 and by houses and other buildings by 1880 (see T. Frost, Recollections of a Country Journalist, 1886, p.8; F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.102).

36 I. Montagu, 'Rambles with the Romany', Good Words, Vol.23 (1882), p.720.

37 J. Hollingshead, Ragged London in 1861 (1861), p.31; C. G. Leland, 'The Tinkers', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.1 (1907), pp.81-2.

accommodation in the low tenements of the slum areas.<sup>38</sup> The drift towards more permanent settlement was apparent in both town and country. Many gypsies left their tents, "... to find a home in the miserable garrets, damp cellars, dirty lanes, and wretched alleys of our villages, towns and cities".<sup>39</sup> Gypsies in West Dorset, prevented from camping on the Downs, bought houses and farms in the area of Rampisham and at Chrickerel, Weymouth, and settled down.<sup>40</sup> It was not long before the gypsies had vanished altogether from the Downs. The movement towards permanent settlement was, thus, widespread, and affected the gypsies of Yetholm, London, Kent, Dorset and all the counties between.<sup>41</sup> A further response was to emigrate to the colonies or to the wide open spaces of America, described as "... their true Canaan".<sup>42</sup>

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38 A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.191; Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. E. Farr, Medical Officer of Health of the Andover Rural District Council (1909), p.74, paras. 1468-9 (hereafter, Sel.Cttee. on Mov. Dw.).

39 H. Woodcock, The Gypsies (1865), pp.162-3.

40 From an unpublished diary of William Mabey, 1848-1931, pp.27-8. I am grateful to Miss Margaret Holmes, archivist, for this reference, and for all subsequent references to items contained in Dorset Record Office.

41 H. Woodcock, op.cit., pp.162-3.

42 C. G. Leland, The English Gypsies and their Language (1874), p.2. See also Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.157ff; T. W. Thompson, 'The Social Polity ...', loc.cit., p.134; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox ...', loc.cit., p.23, for an account of the emigration of from sixty to seventy Bosses, Boswells, Herons, Grays, Smiths and Williams, between 1855 and 1870.

The selection of which of the alternative paths to take depended to a great extent on individual preference, which in turn must have rested on the perceived and real threat experienced by the travellers from the various assaults on their camping-grounds and employments from both impersonal forces and the particular whims of the different local authorities and policing agencies.

### Numbers and Distribution of the Travelling Population

Having identified the subject of this study, its unity and diversity, and the long-term trends bearing on the travelling community, it remains now, before detailing the geographical location of the travellers, to consider the size of this group. Contemporary assessments were frequently based on impressions and distortions, and were intended to have shock value rather than numerical accuracy. At one extreme, James Simson estimated the number of gypsies in the British Isles to be 250,000, "... and possibly double that number".<sup>43</sup> This wild and ridiculous assertion was not the product of any enquiry but rather stemmed from his belief that a child born of a couple with any gypsy ancestry, however remote, was still a gypsy. Numbers of gypsies could thus increase only in a startling ratio. By way of contrast, there were other commentators, notably the gypsy lorists, who believed that the 'true' gypsy, or Romany, had almost entirely died out by the late nineteenth century. The numbers of gypsies

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43 J. Simson, Preface, in W. Simson, A History of the Gypsies (1865).

had diminished almost to nothing, and the lorists were hurriedly collecting data on the culture and superstitions of the few who remained of this people before they were extinguished entirely beneath the heavy feet of a rapidly advancing civilisation. However, the lorists conceded that numbers of other travellers were probably increasing. These were not the Romanies, who by the late nineteenth century had lost many of their distinguishing characteristics, but were instead the half-breeds, the allegedly dirty and disreputable offshoots of pure Romany stock. In between these two extremes came that of George Smith of Coalville, who estimated the gypsy population to be from 15-20,000, and taken with other travellers of whatever description, the size of the travelling population was calculated to be around 30,000.<sup>44</sup> Smith's method, though, was far from scientific. He relied on generalising about nomads elsewhere from his limited experience of them around London and the Midlands, and assumed that each family consisted of six members and that the ratio of 1,000 gypsies for every 1,750,000 of the inhabitants of London would be true for the rest of the country also. Other estimates varied from between 1,500 and 36,000.<sup>45</sup>

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44 G. Smith, *Gipsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their Children, with suggestions for their improvement* (1880), pp.45-7.

45 See J. Crabb, op.cit., p.144; A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.219; E. Hodder, George Smith of Coalville: the Story of an Enthusiast (1896), pp.143-4; J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.169, 254; V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.6; J. Simson, 'Disquisition on the Past, Present and Future of Gipsydom', in W. Simson, op.cit., p.449; W. Simson, op.cit., p.92; B. Skot (pseud. of R. A. Scott Macfie), A Brief Account of Gypsy History (Liverpool, 1909), p.36; Rev. J. West, To the Nobility, Clergy and Magistrates of the County of Dorset: a Plea for the Education of the Children of the Gypsies (1844), p.29.

Closely bound in with these various assessments were the issues of definition and, following on from this, of responses. The lorists attempted to establish fundamental differences, rooted in race, between the various types of travellers and so tried to preserve a romantic image of the 'true' gypsy, who was in a decline. The perceived growth in numbers of other travellers was of the half-breeds with diluted blood. A crude use of eugenic theory enabled the lorists to distance themselves from these travellers and to side with those who called for the persecution or reform of this group. Smith, on the other hand, did not trouble himself with such distinctions, and acted as an effective spokesman for local authority officials and other concerned parties in advertising the existence of a large group of nomads living in depravity on the fringes of civilisation, yet parasitical upon it. The claims that the size of this group was increasing can be attributed to a number of causes. It is possible that the writers were simply adopting scare-mongering tactics, and that by claiming that the number of travellers had increased they hoped to provoke some immediate action. The tendency to exaggerate the impression that the number of idle, unclean, uneducated, parasitical itinerants was on the increase gave some justification to the persecution carried out by local authorities in their attempts to rid their county, and country, of what they considered an unwanted menace. The existence of these travellers proved to be an open and visible sore. They were said to contribute nothing to the economy of the nation, while at the same time living in open defiance of educational and sanitary laws. They could not be left to die a natural death. Their numbers had grown so large, it was alleged, that their demise had to be assisted.



Such claims may not have been deliberately misleading, It is probable that the number of van- and tent-dwellers appeared to have increased rather than decreased by the end of the century. It has been noted already that as the century progressed the extent and duration of the circuits travelled by the nomads gradually diminished in scope and shortened in time. The general tendency was to remain close to, or within, major towns in semi-permanent encampments. The number of such sites grew, and more gypsies used them more often. The obvious result of this was that larger numbers of travellers were seen more frequently. Gypsies, and the sites of their encampments, therefore came to be less scattered and increasingly centralised. Alongside this development it was also the case that more people went out looking for the gypsies. Whether their motives were philanthropic, official, charitable or hostile, the result was that more gypsies were found and new sites were discovered. Essentially, those sympathetic to the gypsies, or at least the notion of the 'pure' gypsy, found numbers to be declining, while those less inclined to a sympathetic response and more likely to view the nomadic question as a problem that needed a remedy, found the numbers to be increasing. It should be added that these views were not necessarily contradictory, and that the one could reinforce the other by the isolation of a group, described as not 'true' gypsies, for persecution.

Although it is now possible to view critically the bias of contemporary commentators, it remains a matter of considerable difficulty, if not impossibility, to give accurate figures for the size of the nomadic population. The number of travellers on the

road would have varied with such factors as the season of the year, the inclemency of the weather, and the vagaries of the different trades. Even though any attempt at enumeration has to be qualified by such considerations as these, the census reports provide the best, if faulty, indicator. The findings of the census enumerators are tabulated and illustrated below:

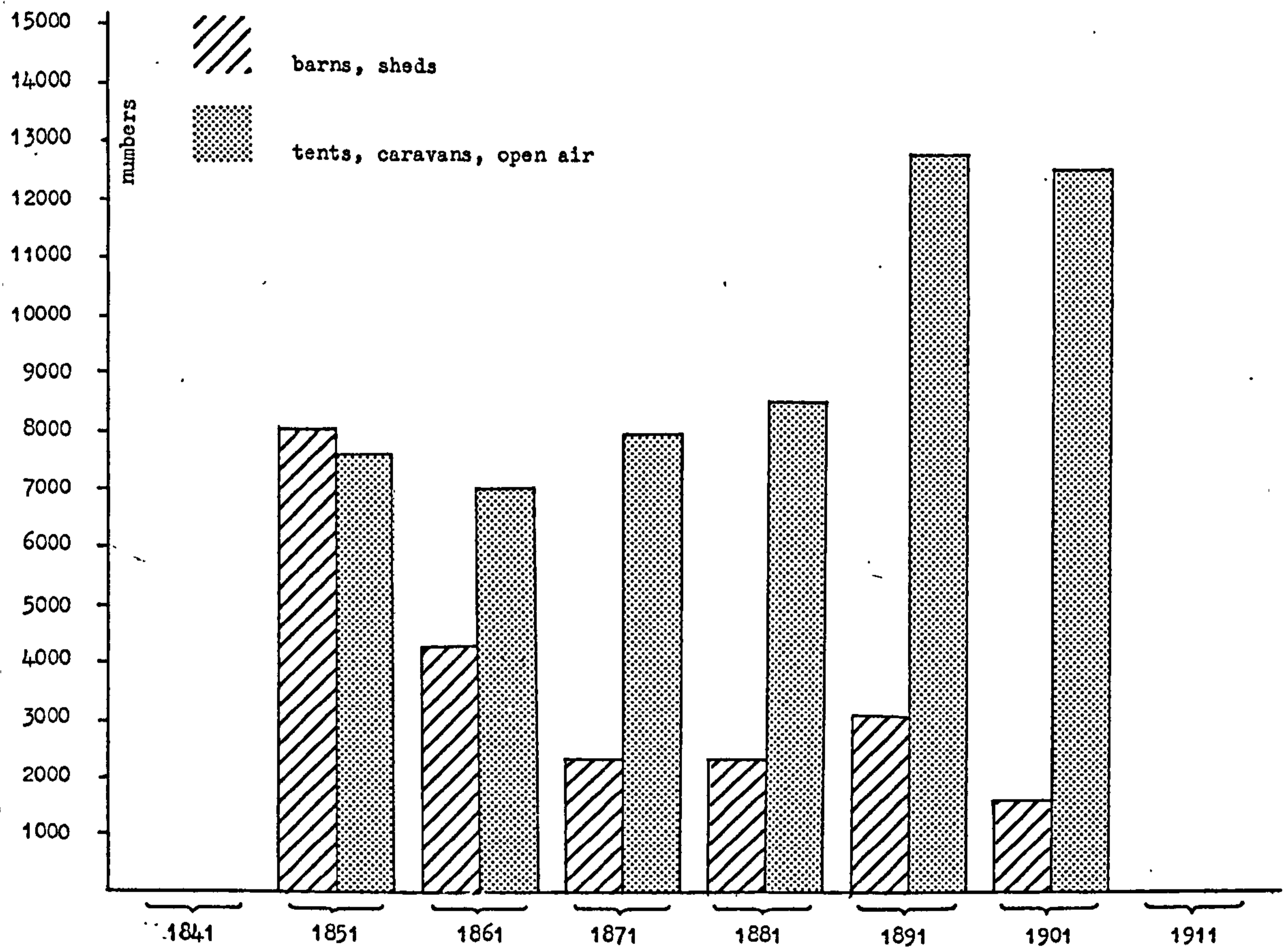
TABLE 1

Persons found dwelling in bars, sheds, tents, caravans and the open air (England and Wales), 1841-1911

Year	Barns, Sheds, Tents, Caravans and the Open Air			Barns and Sheds			Tents, Caravans and the Open Air		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1841	20348								
1851	15764			8105			7659		
1861	11444	7410	4034	4314	3372	942	7130	4038	3092
1871	10383	6246	4137	2358	1921	437	8025	4325	3700
1881	10924	6615	4309	2355	1947	408	8569	4668	3901
1891	15983	9469	6514	3149	2548	601	12834	6921	5913
1901	14219	8175	6044	1645	1317	328	12574	6858	5716
1911	30642	19948	10694						

DIAGRAM 1

Number of persons found dwelling in barns and sheds, and in tents, caravans and the open air (England and Wales), 1851-1901



N.B. The returns for 1841 and 1911 did not distinguish between the two types.

DIAGRAM 2

Total number of persons found dwelling in barns, sheds, tents, caravans and the open air (England and Wales), 1841-1911



Sources for Table 1 and Diagrams 1 and 2; Census of England and Wales, Reports and Appendices, 1861-1911.

The 1841 census was taken on the 7th of June and that of 1851 on the 31st of March, but from then on the data on travellers were collected sometime during the first week of April. Though, perhaps, a little early for some, this was about the time that summer migrancy began. This seasonal fluctuation was not unnoticed by the enumerators:

"... in winter they shrink into dwellings, and in summer they swarm again in the fields, which have irresistible charms for the vagabond race, as well as for their near relatives the hop-pickers and haymakers. Mixed among them are found some of the victims as well as some of the outcasts of society".<sup>46</sup>

The nature of the directive issued to the enumerators, to quantify the number of persons not sleeping in dwelling houses but in barns, sheds, caravans, tents and the open air, illustrates the intention to separate productive workers (such as canal boatmen and tramping artisans) from groups considered non-productive and with no specified occupation.<sup>47</sup> Having identified the group to be enumerated, a further distinction was then made between those dwelling in barns and sheds, and those dwelling in tents, caravans and the open air. The census reports for 1891 and 1901 further subdivided these groups according to sex, which illustrated most clearly the disproportion between the sexes in the group of barn- and shed-dwellers. In 1891 there were 2,548 males and 601 females, and 1,317 males and only 328 females in 1901. This imbalance was by no means so apparent in the case of dwellers in tents, caravans and the open air, where the corresponding figures are 6,921 and 5,913 for 1891, and 6,858 and 5,716 for 1901.<sup>48</sup>

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46 Census of England and Wales, General Report, 1861 (1863), p.7.

47 Ibid., p.2.

48 Census of England and Wales, General Report, 1891, Vol.4 (1893), pp.24-5; Area, Houses and Population, 1891, Vol.2, Table 8 (1893), p.xxxv; General Report, 1901 (1904), pp.164-5; Summary Tables and Index, 1901, Table 23 (1903), p.137. See Appendix 2.

The implication of this was that the barn and shed-dwellers were predominantly male, probably travelling alone. In contrast, the tent, caravan and open air population were more likely to be families, travelling as a group and not individually. The lone tramp and itinerant agricultural labourer were thus more likely to appear in the former category, with the nomadic groups that form the subject of this study in the latter. But the distinction is by no means so clear-cut. At least until around mid-century, when caravans first appeared in significant numbers, nomadic families frequently took to lodging in barns and the out-houses of farms, some only erecting a tent when a stay in a barn was not possible.<sup>49</sup> This practice seems to have diminished by the second half of the century, though, as shown by the census taken in Surrey in 1913, this was not entirely the case.<sup>50</sup> However, in broad terms, the distinction can usually be made.

Perhaps a more important obstacle in the way of accurate enumeration than the selection of categories was the practical problem of ensuring that all travellers were included. Some would have accidentally avoided the enumerators by being on the move when the count was being taken or else by being hidden

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49 F. H. Groome, *op.cit.*, p.58; J. Hoyland, *op.cit.*, pp.155-6; E. O. Winstedt, 'The Norwood Gypsies and their Vocabulary', *J.G.L.S.*, New Ser., Vol.9, Nos. 3-4 (1916), pp.148-9.

50 Guildford Muniment Room and Surrey Record Office have copies of the County Council census returns, taken on the nights of 22 June and 31 August 1913. The census was a part of the Surrey County Council's campaign against the gypsies, and is discussed in Chapter 6, pages 426-30.

in some secluded location. Others regarded the census officials, as they did other figures of authority, with a mixture of suspicion, fear and contempt. Such persons were to be avoided at all costs, for contact with them invariably meant that trouble and inconvenience followed close at hand. The result was that avoidance was often deliberate:

"At the time that the census officers were taking the census, gipsies and van-dwellers were either hiding in some out-of-the-way corner or back yard, or were on the road moving out of one district into another ... purposely, to evade the census officers, because they imagined that the census officers were on their track for breaking the laws of the land ...".<sup>51</sup>

Even when they had been given the census papers they had either removed to another part of the country before they could be collected, or else returned inaccurate forms,

"... for, without education, without that general knowledge which will enable them to understand the work in hand, and probably, in many instances, not certain of their age and other particulars, they have, very likely, aided by prejudices, thrown obstacles in the way, and given no very clear account".<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, the timing of the census would have excluded travellers still in their winter lodgings; gypsy horse-dealers, basket-makers, tinkers and the like were likely to have been listed separately under their several headings; and it would have included tramps and showpeople,<sup>53</sup>

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51 Sel. Cttee. on Temp. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of George Smith of Coalville, p.21, para. 364,

52 Illustrated Times, 13 April 1861, p,241. See also Illustrated London News, 29 November 1879, p,503.

53 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.45; F. H. Groome, 'Gipsies', Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.10 (Edinburgh, 1879), p.611, footnote 1; Illustrated London News, 4 October 1879, p.310.

The census officials were well aware of these inadequacies and shortcomings, and this problem did not pass unmentioned. The report for 1871 noted that the figures for vagrants, gypsies, criminals, prostitutes, and the like, were so imperfectly returned that no benefit could accrue from the publication of their statements.<sup>54</sup> It was thought that only the police could provide accurate statistical information. Both the 1881 and 1891 reports admitted that the numbers given must necessarily be an underestimate, for "... the detection and enumeration of this nomad population is manifestly one in which chance must have a great share".<sup>55</sup> Despite these problems, the census returns provide the best numerical guide available.

It can be seen from Table 1 and Diagram 2 that the travelling population as a whole experienced a steady decline down to 1871, and then began an upward climb climaxing in a massive growth between 1901 and 1911. No explanation is given for this 115% increase. The answer is not to be found in a later dating for enumeration, for the count was taken on the 3rd of April, thus following the usual pattern. Natural population growth could account for some of the increase, though perhaps it was due simply to improved methods of enumeration rather than to various and diverse factors which at best could only account for a small proportion of the increase. The graph showing the composite elements of this total picture, Diagram 1, reveals that though starting from a position of approximate equality in 1851, the

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54 Census of England and Wales, General Report, 1871, Vol.4 (1873), p.liii.

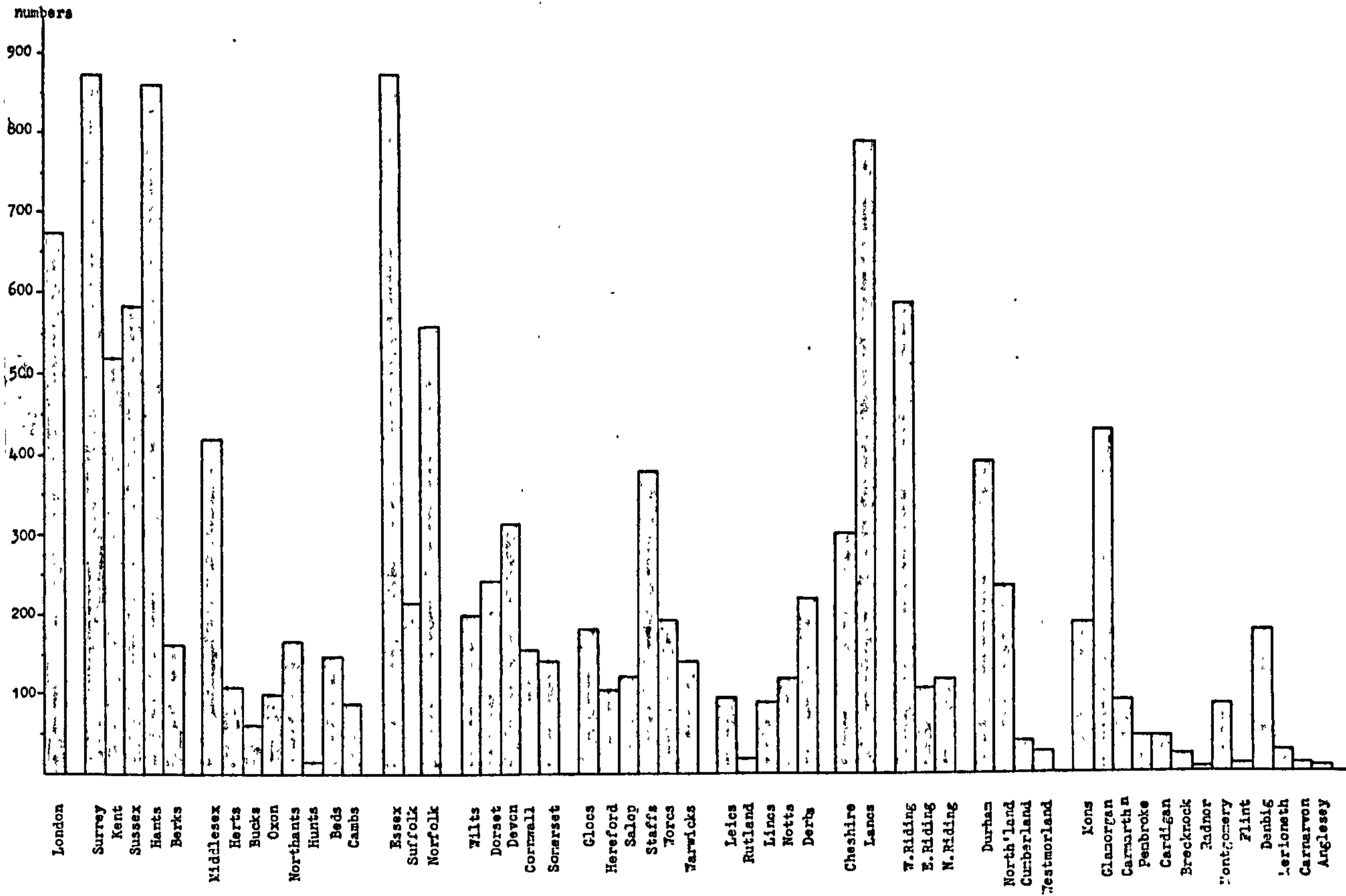
55 Census of England and Wales, General Report, 1881, Vol.4 (1883), p.14; General Report, 1891, Vol.4 (1893), pp.24-5.



disproportion between those dwelling in barns and sheds, and those in tents, caravans and the open air, widened steadily during the period until, by 1901, the latter group outnumbered the former by a ratio of 7,6:1. The disproportion between the sexes in these two groups has been discussed already. Finally, the reports from the latter part of the century are useful in illustrating the geographical distribution of the travellers. For the reasons given earlier, the following diagrams have been constructed to show the regional and county distribution of dwellers in tents, caravans and open air only, though Appendices 2 and 3 detail the distribution for barn- and shed-dwellers also.

DIAGRAM 3

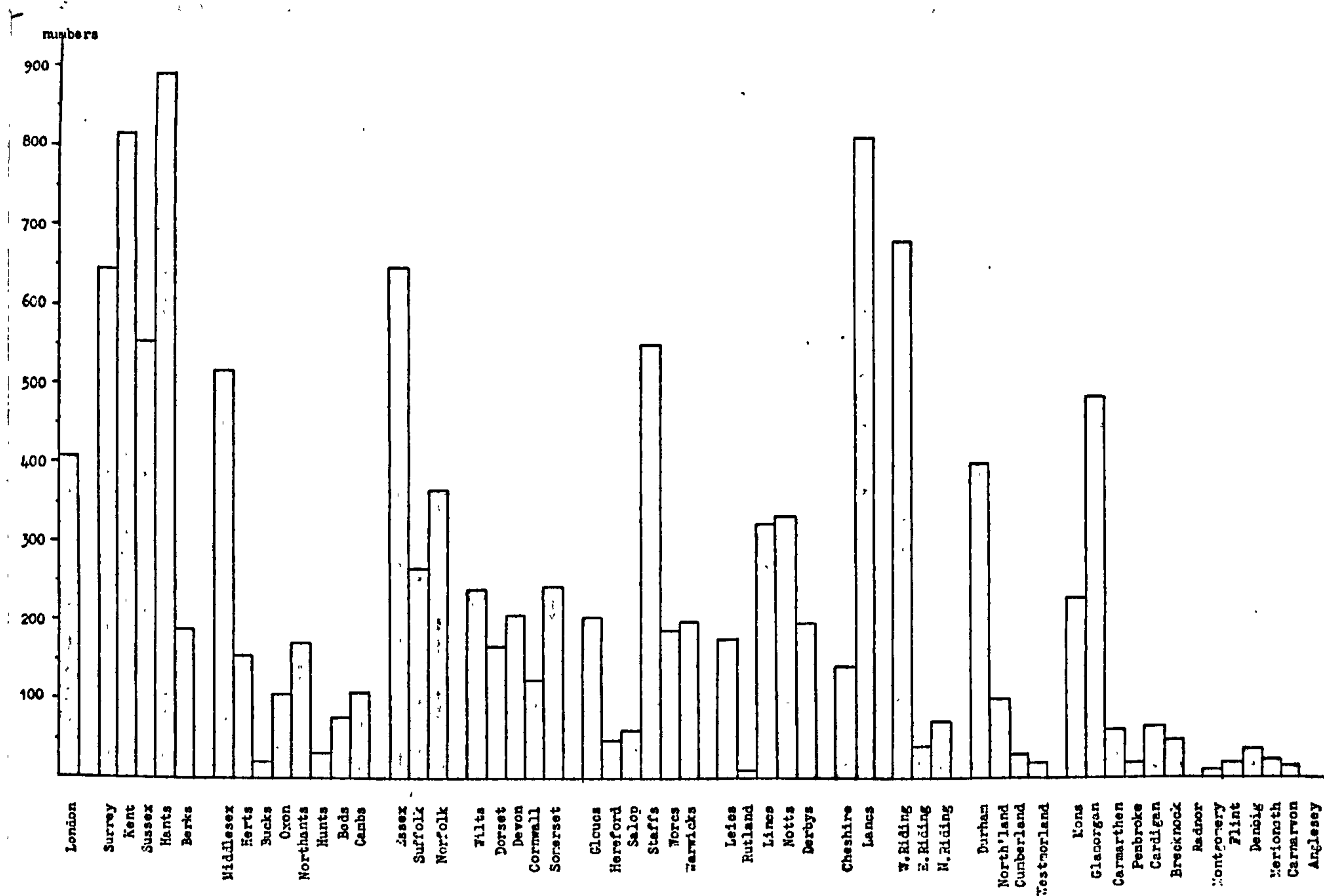
Regional and county populations of dwellers in tents, caravans and the open air (England and Wales), 1891



Source; Census of England and Wales, Area, Houses and Population, 1891, Vol. 2, Table 8 (1893), p. xxxv,

DIAGRAM 4

Regional and county populations of dwellers in tents, caravans and the open air (England and Wales), 1901



Source: Census of England and Wales, Summary Tables and Index, 1901, Table 23 (1903), p.137.

Both diagrams illustrate the concentration of travellers in the six counties around London, and in the neighbourhood of other industrial centres in the Midlands and the North West. Yet it is also clear that almost every county in England and Wales had some travellers within their boundaries, to a greater or lesser extent. Not surprisingly, their numbers are highest in the larger counties with the most dense populations. The pattern for 1891 and 1901

remains broadly similar, showing similar peaks and troughs, which tend to reaffirm the impression given by various sources for the whole period. It should be remembered that though the absolute numbers, in some cases, were quite high, their proportion of the population of the county, and country, remained very small.

### From North to South, East to West

A more detailed consideration of the various locations of gypsy encampments, whether irregular or permanent, will assist in the unearthing of the minutiae of travelling life, by describing in detail the extent of itinerancy, the conditions of existence, and the issues raised by the presence of an itinerant population.

Owing to the vastness of the area under study, this is best achieved by considering the encampments by region and county. This will give a clear indication of the geographical and numerical distribution of the travellers, and will also facilitate regional comparisons. London will be treated separately because of the range and complexity of gypsy life and travelling in the metropolis.

In the South Western region of the country, Somerset had long been a regular camping ground for the gypsies. Camps used to be pitched in the districts round East Huntspill and close to Uphill Station, on the Blackdown Hills by Buckland St. Mary and Ash Common,

and around Taunton,<sup>56</sup> The gypsies who travelled Somerset from the 1850s on were chiefly connected with the families of Boswell, Stanley, Smith, Lee, Burton, Hughes, Orchard, Sparks, Small, Saunders, Bowers, Penfold and Jowells (or Joules).<sup>57</sup> They lived principally in vans, and earned their living by hawking various wares about the countryside. Brooms and brushes made by themselves, pots and pans, tinware and small goods were the main items which the women took from door to door. Often this hawking provided the opportunity for telling the fortunes of gullible servant girls and others. The men occupied themselves by manufacturing the articles and by horse-dealing.<sup>58</sup>

Devon was said to be the travelling area of the Buckland family, and Dorset of the Smiths and Coopers,<sup>59</sup> In the early part of the twentieth century, gypsy encampments were to be found in Devon at Hook's Cross, near Ashburton, at Totnes and on Church and Green Common, Loddiswell. In June 1909, these sites were the subject of many complaints by local residents.<sup>60</sup> Dorset parish registers record christenings of gypsy children at Coombe

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56 J. Rudall, A Memoir of the Rev. James Crabb, late of Southampton (1854), p.154, quoting a speech of Crabb given at the laying of the foundation stone of Farnham Gipsy Asylum, 1845. The gypsies at Taunton were said to have been attentive and orderly church-goers; W. G. Willis Watson, 'Pestiferous Carbuncles ...', loc.cit., p.87.

57 W. G. Willis Watson, 'Pestiferous Carbuncles ...', loc.cit., p.83.

58 Ibid., p.92.

59 F. W. Carew (pseud. of A. E. C. Way), No. 747 (Bristol, 1891), p.44ff.; A. E. Gillington, Gypsies of the Heath (1916), p.17.

60 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs ... 1909', loc.cit., p.123.

Keynes and Wool in 1803 and Yetminster in 1799, and for later in the century at Bere Regis and Iwerne Courtney. On the latter occasions, it was suggested that the gypsies, or travellers or hawkers as they were described, were attending the Woodbury Hill and Shroton Fairs respectively for the ceremonies were performed at or near these festivals by itinerant missionaries.<sup>61</sup> By mid-century encampments were to be found on the Rampisham Downs, and later round Bournemouth, in the region of Heavenly Bottom, Branksome, on the Eype Downs, at Monkton Wyld, Wootton Fitzpaine and in the parish of West Parley,<sup>62</sup> In Cornwall land was rented to gypsies at Redruth, where "... men, women and children were huddled up in tents, without sanitary accommodation except an open field ...",<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, the South Eastern counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and Berkshire were much travelled by the gypsies, especially during the summer months.<sup>64</sup> A typical camp was to be found at Shoreham, Sussex, in August 1821. The gypsies were encamped on a bit of waste bog land, at the side of the turnpike. There were five groups of them, all with "... good, clean, open-railed carts, nicely painted ...", stocked with an enormous variety of articles which they

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61 The parish registers of Coombe Keynes and Wool, Yetminster, Bere Regis and Iwerne Courtney are to be found in Dorset County Record Office.

62 Unpublished diary of William Mabey, 1848-1931, pp.24-8; West Parley Parish Council, Minutes, 1896-1914; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1908', loc.cit., p.276; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.1, No.1 (1922), p.46; 'Affairs of Egypt', Folk-Lore Gazette, Vol.1, No.3 (1912), p.91.

63 H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1907', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.2 (1908), p.128.

64 W. Howitt, op.cit., pp.175-6.

were hawking about the countryside. The items for sale included wooden spoons, trenchers, bowls of various sizes, shoe-horns, drinking cups of horn, tin pots and pans, crockery, brooms, brushes, squabs, dusters, all kinds of hardware, old china cups, saucers, basins, jugs, brooches and watch keys. Every cart had a bed underneath, with a screen for shelter at night. The many children slept in the covered carts with blankets over them. In the day-time the camp appeared a hive of industry. The women were engaged in washing, with the assistance of the young girls, and the men were employed in making and repairing various articles, from brooms to tin pots. The remainder of the children busied themselves by collecting the firewood for cooking purposes.<sup>65</sup> This picture stands in marked contrast to that usually painted of a gypsy camp, in which dirt, squalor, idleness and immorality provided the key elements.

It can be seen from Diagrams 3 and 4 that, half a century later, Sussex and the other counties of the South East, except Berkshire, remained very popular with the travellers, and encampments could be found at such places as Manston, Nutley, in the midst of the Ashdown Forest district, Crowborough, Udimore and Winchelsea, at Ash, Whitehill, Gerrard's Cross, and Bucklebury Common.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the numbers of gypsies who frequented

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65 Account of visit given to W. Brockie, in W. Brockie, The Gypsies of Yetholm (Kelso, 1884), pp.92-3.

66 H. Wolff, Sussex Industries (Lewes, 1883), pp.151-3; T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs ... 1909', loc.cit., pp.127-8; Reading Mercury, 28 March 1908, p.6; South Bucks Standard, 29 May 1908, p.8; Sussex Daily News, 14 March 1912, p.2; Yorkshire Evening Post, 29 July 1908, p.4; Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. H. M. Chester (1909), p.43, para,908.

Surrey were to act as a constant source of embarrassment and worry to the residents, lords of the manors and local authorities, and constant attempts were made to find a way of removing these travellers.<sup>67</sup> But it is from the settlement of gypsies in the New Forest that we are able to obtain considerable information about the way of life and habits of these travellers in the southern part of the country.

The New Forest had been a regular haunt of the gypsies throughout the nineteenth century. The number of gypsies, or travellers as they were called locally, who camped within the Forest varied a great deal. They came from every travelling range, from those who migrated only short distances from the Forest boundary to those who travelled far wider afield, returning to the Forest only with the arrival of winter, when many camped in their vans in a field purchased by themselves situated near to Fordingbridge.<sup>68</sup> To take a high average, the numbers camped there at any one time would have been approximately sixty families, amounting to around four hundred persons. In August and September, when the travelling season was at its peak during the harvesting and hopping periods, this number would have been greatly reduced, with perhaps only half a dozen families remaining.<sup>69</sup>

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67 A full account of the Surrey gypsies, and the responses to them, is given in Chapter 6, pages 402-12, 426-30.

68 R. C. De Crespigny and H. Hutchinson, The New Forest. Its Traditions, Inhabitants and Customs (1899; Wakefield, 1975), p.85.

69 R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gypsies of the New Forest', Hampshire Field Club, Proceedings, paper read at Field meeting, 22 July 1893 (Southampton, 1894), p.277.



Even though considerable numbers of gypsies lived at different places in the forest, there were still areas where it would have been impossible to find a gypsy tent. Shelter, dryness, running water and proximity to a suitable market for their wares, were the main considerations. The following areas conformed to these requirements: in the north at Godshill Wood, Whinyates, Crock Hill and Copythorne; in the east at Ipley, Pennerley, Lady Cross and Norley Wood; at Poulner Pits, Picket Post, Burley and Thorny Hill in the west; at Bransgore, Shirley Holmes, Pennington and Setley in the south; and centrally at Rufus's Stone, Bartley, Buskett's Lawn and New Park.<sup>70</sup> Earlier in the century, the Stanley family encamped at Marl-pit Oak and at Gally Hill.<sup>71</sup> Just outside the forest boundary, camps were located around Bournemouth and at Blackhill, near Wellow.

The problem of definition arises again when attempting to identify the inhabitants of the Forest, with various authors stressing the need to distinguish between the gypsies, cheap-jacks, strolling outcasts, itinerant beggars, charcoal-burners and van- and tent-dwellers. The charcoal-burners were distinct by their abodes, huts made of mud and grass, and by the permanency of their employment.<sup>72</sup> The remainder of the inhabitants were thought to be distinguishable according to their surnames, the ability to speak the Romany language, and whether they lived in tents or vans.

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70 R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gypsies ...', loc.cit., pp.227-8.

71 'Account of the gypsies of the New Forest by Miss Bowles', later Mrs. Southey, in W. Howitt, op.cit., p.186.

72 R. C. De Crespigny and H. Hutchinson, op.cit., p.199ff.

Some commentators used these factors to argue in favour of ethnic variation among the travellers.

Those travellers who bore the surnames of Stanley, Lee, Eyre, Cooper and Burton were thought of by some to be the 'real' gypsies of pure descent. They were calculated to have formed only perhaps one quarter of the population of the Forest by the late nineteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Yet even this distinction hid a number of differences. Although the Stanleys and Lees were the most frequent visitors to the neighbourhood in the early decades of the century, the Stanleys, at least, did not consider they were from the same stock. They regarded themselves high above the Lees and thought that they were the "... better sort of travellers".<sup>74</sup> The remainder of the Forest dwellers were thought of as half-breeds, a mixture of tramp and gypsy, and whose numbers were kept up by the arrival of others who took to the wandering life. Their surnames were Lakey, Sherred, Doe, Sherrard, Sherwin, Sherwood, Wells, Blake, Green, Wareham, Barnes, Peters, Pateman, White, Rose, Stone and others.<sup>75</sup>

The gradual disappearance of the Romany language provided further evidence of this dilution of the 'true' gypsy blood. In the last decade of the nineteenth century it was reported that the New Forest gypsies still understood and used, 'more or less',

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73 R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.278.

74: 'Account of Miss Bowles', in W. Howitt, op.cit., p.186.

75 H. E. J. Gibbins, Gypsies of the New Forest and Other Tales (Bournemouth, 1909), p.19. See also F. Cuttriss, Romany Life (1915), and review of same in J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.1, No.1 (1922), pp.43-6.

Romany, although in a very incomplete form. In general, Romany words were interspersed with ordinary English, and in this differed from the old gypsy families who were said to speak exclusively in the Romany tongue.<sup>76</sup>

The final distinction used was between the tent-dwellers of the Forest, who were descendants of the old tribes, and their van-dwelling brethren, or "Romany of the towns".<sup>77</sup> The van-dwellers were, to Henry Gibbins, emphatically not residents of the Forest, and only passed through it on periodic visits. They were mostly 'cheap-jacks', or hawkers of various wares, at which they drove a profitable trade, with the result that many of them were relatively wealthy. They were said to have paid as much as seventy to one hundred and twenty pounds for their vans, and around thirty-five pounds for their horses.<sup>78</sup> Although wishing to draw a contrast between the respectable 'true' gypsies living in tents and the "unruly" van-dwellers, Gibbins was forced to concede that at least some of the latter kept their abodes clean and tidy, and possessed well-groomed horses and cared-for children.<sup>79</sup> R. Griffith agreed that the 'true' gypsy was rapidly disappearing from the Forest, and that three-quarters of the inhabitants were "mumpers" or half-castes, but differed from

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76 The attempt to draw a direct correlation between purity of language and purity of blood is discussed in Chapter 3.

77 H. E. J. Gibbins, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-9. See also Appendix 9, illustrations 1 and 2.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

Gibbins in that distinctions could not be made according to the type of abode. He distinguished between the van-dwellers and those who had, at best, a pony and cart, and at worst, no more than a canvas sheet for cover, but ascribed the difference not to town and country, or gypsy and "mumper", but instead to wealth.

The employment spectrum of the tent- and van-dwellers was considerable in its scope and variety, and the cycle of occupations pursued was adaptable to changing market demands, partly allied to seasonal fluctuations. In general terms they made baskets from withies, mats of heather, brooms, beehives, clothes-pegs and meat skewers; they repaired pots, kettles, and umbrellas, sharpened knives, mended and bottomed chairs, collected rags and bones and swept chimneys. The women sold fortunes, flowers, love-charms, 'medicines' for diseases, rabbit skins and an assortment of other wares. In the summer many families travelled to Surrey and Kent to participate in haymaking, fruit-picking, harvesting and hopping.<sup>80</sup> The list of occupations given to Alice Gillington in 1911 by a forest-dweller illustrated both the range and continuity of employment.<sup>81</sup>

The adaptability to the changing seasons was not only a response to the changes in demand, but also to the availability of the raw materials for the manufacture of the goods. For example, in the summer, the men concentrated on making beehives

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80 See R. C. De Crespigny and H. Hutchinson, op.cit., p.82; A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.182; R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gipsies ...', loc.cit., pp.289-9; J. R. Wise, The New Forest: its history and scenery (1880), p.160.

81 See Appendix 3.

of grass and straw and basket work, while the women gathered seasonal flowers such as daffodils and primroses for sale in the towns. In the winter the men switched to making clothes-pegs and meat skewers and the women made up artificial flowers from the pith of rushes and moss.<sup>82</sup> It was the common practice for the men to remain at home and manufacture the articles, while the women and children toured the towns and villages hawking the items. This usually involved walking many miles laden with heavy baskets and often a small child. Not surprisingly, if the householder could not be persuaded to buy any of the wares, then the gypsy would resort to other means in an attempt to extract money. Fortune-telling, an offence at law and punishable by a fine, was practised on rare occasions. The more usual method, it was claimed, was that of telling lies and playing on the sympathies of the listener by retelling stories of sick husbands and dead children.<sup>83</sup> In effect, this amounted to little more than disguised begging.

In consequence of this dependence on the female, the movements of the family were conditional largely on the success, or failure, of these hawking and begging ventures. Griffith was surprised that they managed to live at all under such hand-to-mouth conditions, and concluded that it could only be done by "... very hard and ill paid work".<sup>84</sup> Gibbins, on the other hand, had no such sympathy with a life he saw based on decadence,

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82 R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gipsies ...', loc.cit., p.278.

83 Ibid., p.281.

84 Ibid., p.278.

filth and idleness, the only cure for which was compulsory house-dwelling:

'At the present day the Gipsies of the Forest do not aspire to anything but idleness, or the art of taking it easy. The men content themselves with making a few clothes pegs which the women take round, with a basket full of cottons, needles, etc., for sale, and to evade the law against tramps and beggars, they take out a five-shilling pedlar's licence yearly, which the police frequently inspect. When the folks at the houses where they call say they do not want anything from the basket, there comes a pitiful tale of woe, a sick husband, or a child, or some similar misfortune, with a pious appeal for help. This, carried on for the day to perhaps twenty houses or more, yields a good harvest, and at evening they find their way back to their camps in the Forest, loaded with food and many old garments, much of which, in their hurry to depart to the next camping ground, most likely four or five miles distant, they throw away into the bushes, and the spot where they have rested for the last two days is thickly strewn with debris".<sup>85</sup>

The summer months, however, provided the opportunity for some relief from the hardships and shortages of winter, and many of the Forest-dwellers travelled to the harvest fields, hopping grounds and strawberry fields of Surrey and Kent. Employment was plentiful, regular and temporary, and wages could be earned by pea-picking, haymaking, harvesting and hop-picking. The hop gardens of Alton provided nearby and convenient employment. The money that was so quickly earned was spent with equal speed. New clothes were bought to last another twelve months and items were purchased to restock their hawking baskets. Any that was left after this was spent at the fair held at Downton, near Salisbury, early in October; an event which provided a social meeting place for the gypsies on

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85 H. E. J. Gibbins, op.cit., pp.11-13.

their return from hopping,<sup>86</sup> For some it was neither necessary nor desirable to travel so far afield. Some of the resident gypsies had their own strawberry fields, and employed gypsy children as pickers.<sup>87</sup> Gibbins again had his own personal assessment of this picking employment cycle:

"Gipsies, like convicts, are noted for their love of picking, and sometimes, unfortunately (for them), make five seasons in the year instead of four; ... first in spring he did a bit of pocket-picking at the race meetings, secondly in summer he did a bit of flower and fruit picking, thirdly in autumn he did a bit of hop-picking, fourthly in winter he did a bit of wood-picking, and fifthly (the rest of the year) he did a bit of oakum-picking".<sup>88</sup>

Although a similar cynicism and guarded reserve remained as part of the response to the gypsies, there were, nevertheless, other testimonies which praised rather than condemned this group. They were thought to be civil, polite, amenable to kindness, and only occasionally given to drunkenness, and then only at a successful fair. There were many who never touched alcohol at all.<sup>89</sup> In general, it seems that they were not ill thought of by the local farmers and villagers:

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86 H. E. J. Gibbins, op.cit., p.19.

87 Note from A. E. Gillington, in J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.4, No.2 (1925), p.95.

88 H. E. J. Gibbins, op.cit., p.54. Oakum-picking was the daily task set prisoners,

89 R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gipsies ...', loc.cit., p.281.

"Their conduct is well worthy of admiration ... Not one single article of his (the farmer's) property is found missing whilst these vagrant supplicants remain on the outskirts of the premises. The farmers consider themselves, as to their homesteads and property, always safe when Gypsies are encamped near them ... A farmer considers a Gypsy a good watchdog against poachers, sheep-stealers and neighbours ..".<sup>90</sup>

Relations with locals even led to amorous alliances being made with the village girls and domestic servants. Finally, they were not known to have committed crimes of robbery or violence, and an old local magistrate, who had sat on the Bench for fifty years, told Gibbins that for that period of time the most serious crimes of the gypsies had been stealing small trifles such as a fowl or a rabbit, or some park railings for firewood.<sup>91</sup>

By the first decade of the twentieth century the number of tent- and van-dwellers in the Forest had greatly decreased. The Stanleys and the Lees, formerly so prominent, had totally disappeared from the area. Some of the success for drawing the Forest inhabitants away from such a harsh and mean existence was claimed by the various missionaries and reformers attracted to the settlement primarily in an attempt to prevent the children from following on the traditions of their parents.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps, though, more potent factors which drove them away from the

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<sup>90</sup> The Times, 12 October 1842, p.3. See also 'Account of Miss Bowles', in W. Howitt, op.cit., pp.184-6; J. Myers, 'Drab', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), pp.199-207.

<sup>91</sup> H. E. J. Gibbins, op.cit., p.5.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter 4 for an assessment of the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity, pages 316-9.



Forest, or into houses nearby, were the effects of enclosure and economic pressures. The neighbouring towns and villages no longer served as an adequate market for gypsy wares, and it became increasingly difficult to earn enough money to provide a daily sustenance. Moreover, about half of the original Forest had been taken over as private property, and during the summer months holiday-makers disturbed the former calm of the Forest and its encampments. Finally, Forest laws only permitted the travellers to remain for forty-eight hours in one place, for fear that they should claim squatter rights.<sup>93</sup> The net result was that the gypsies either moved away altogether, settled in the Forest cabins, or formed small, sedentary colonies in the nearby towns and villages.<sup>94</sup>

Thorny Hill became one such settlement. Eric Winstedt gave the number of gypsies who settled there as seven hundred though contemporary newspaper accounts placed the figure nearer to one hundred.<sup>95</sup> They lived in thatched cottages rather than tents and vans, and marriages with the villagers were not uncommon. Family associations remained strong, though, and it was not considered unusual for three generations to live together in one house. Despite becoming house-dwellers they retained certain of their former habits. Summer travelling remained, for some, an essential custom. Even when not travelling, the women, at

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93 H. E. J. Gibbins, op.cit., pp.9-10.

94 J. de Bairacli-Levy, Wanderers in the New Forest (1958), p.53.

95 E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., p.331; Christchurch Times, 15 June 1907, p.5; Morning Leader, 3 June 1907, p.7.

least, were still dependent on hawking for providing sustenance for the family. On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, the men drove them in pony-carts to Christchurch, from where they caught a train to Bournemouth in order to sell flowers. The chief occupations of the menfolk were strawberry-growing, brickmaking and farming.<sup>96</sup> Although one correspondent to the local newspaper bemoaned the fact that the village was often attributed with possessing a distinctly gypsy character, relations with the long-settled villagers were said to be good, and the gypsies were not treated as outsiders or aliens. Impersonal forces had thus constrained the gypsies into adopting a way of life that would eventually result in total sedentarisation.

In the Eastern counties of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, the Shaws, Dymocks and Greys were regular visitors in mid-nineteenth century, and were described as the "... only legitimate gypsies of the eastern counties...".<sup>97</sup> The Bosses, Lovells, Hearnés, Browns, Youngs and Smiths were also noted for travelling the area earlier in the century.<sup>98</sup> The Lovells travelled chiefly in Essex, and camped in the same places each year, unless

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96 Morning Leader, 12 June 1907, p.7.

97 J. E. Cussans, 'Gypsies of East Anglia', Notes and Queries, 4th Ser., Vol.3 (15 May 1869), p.461; see also F. S. Atkinson, 'Gypsies in East Anglia', The Kendalian, Vol.11 (1911), pp.9-14.

98 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), p.279; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox ...', loc.cit., p.20;

101 D. Copsey, 'The Dialect and Manners of the Gypsies', Monthly Magazine, Vol.46 (1818), pp.393-4.

opposed by the farmers, while the Bosses remained usually in Norfolk and Suffolk. In winter, both groups of families left their tents for lodgings, the Bosses in Norwich or Yarmouth and the Lovells in London.<sup>99</sup> In 1822 one of their number, William Bos, was asked a series of questions designed to illustrate his origin and racial separateness from English people, and his lack of religion, together with more detailed inquiry into his way of life. His replies, which are reproduced in Appendix 4, in fact point to opposite conclusions, and instead showed a lack of distinctiveness from the settled, indigenous population on either racial or religious grounds.

The East Anglian travellers were not immune from the effects of enclosure and building developments, which deprived them of certain of their camp-sites. (One such was at Oulton, near Lowestoft, near to where the novelist George Borrow once lived<sup>100</sup>). This was probably an important factor that resulted in the establishment of permanent or semi-permanent colonies at Norwich, Yarmouth, Gorleston, Lowestoft, Southend, Buxton Heath and on the Bohemian Estate at Eastwood, near Southend.<sup>101</sup> The Bohemian Estate was partly owned and partly rented by some twenty-five to thirty families of gypsies, who had made it their permanent home.

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99 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), p.279; Rev. G. Hall, 'Notes on the Boss Pedigree', loc.cit., p.121.

100 W. A. Dutt, 'In Lavengro's Country', Macmillan's Magazine, Vol.84 (1901), p.145.

101 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.8, No.3 (1929), pp.105-20; F. S. Atkinson, 'Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.13.

The gypsies were divided into two hostile factions. On the one side were the Buckleys and Smiths, who had been converted to Christianity by the ministrations of Cornelius Smith and his brothers. Their place of worship was Pender Buckley's mission van, which was in reality a derelict London County Council tramcar. Opposed to this group was an "unregenerate mob", belonging to the families of Smith, Draper, Stone, Scarrett, Webb, Laws, Livermore, Bibby and Harris. The Christian gypsies accused them of being half-bloods, or "mumpers". Following a series of conflicts members of both these warring factions appeared at the Rochford Petty Sessions in 1909, under various charges of assault. From a report of the proceedings it would appear that most of the defendants were living in vans on the Estate.<sup>102</sup>

The only reference to their employments was that Bartholomew Smith was said to steal, and that Pender Buckley had given up tinkering and grinding to become a greengrocer. The division between the factions could, perhaps, be more accurately described as not being between 'pure' gypsies and half-castes, but between gypsies who had taken to Christianity and a settled, orthodox way of life, and those that had not.

The Midland counties were much frequented by gypsies throughout the period. Encampments were to be seen in most of the Midland lanes during the travelling season, and a typical camp is here

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<sup>102</sup> T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs . . . 1909', loc.cit., p.114.

described by Mabel Ashby;

"... with a fire and iron pots on it smelling of rabbit or hare, and an old woman beside it smoking a pipe (rather a shocking sight to a Victorian, to whom refinement in a woman was such a high virtue). There would be a pile of green willow sticks for making clothes-pegs, sheets of soldering iron and partly made tin bottles, and balls of string for netting game-bags and cooking-bags for cottagers' boiling-pots. Their horses were old and jaded; bread they had begged lay about in the mud ...".<sup>103</sup>

The Headington Quarries, near Oxford, were known to be a favourite haunt of the gypsies as early as 1844. By 1859-61 they had established themselves as regular settlers there, using the Quarry as their permanent winter base. Saccy's Pit was where the showmen used to encamp and Mason's Pit was frequented by the "... real old-fashioned gypsies".<sup>104</sup> Although the inhabitants of the Quarry were viewed with a degree of suspicion and fear, this does not seem to have prevented the gypsies from becoming almost permanent settlers there. This process was assisted by intermarriage with the local villagers, and by the contribution they made to the social life of the area. The Buckland family provided shows at Whitsun and in November, and the local Morris-dancing team had a gypsy named Sampson Smith as a member, who was also the leading fiddler. Their chief occupations were making and hawking skewers, clothes-pegs and baskets, horse-dealing, putting on shows and assisting with harvesting and fruit-picking.<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere in the South Midlands

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103 M. K. Ashby, Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, 1859-1919, (1974), pp.149-50,

104 R. Samuel, 'Quarry Roughs', in R. Samuel (ed.), Village Life and Labour (1975), p.147.

105 Ibid., pp.148, 161-2, 235.

gypsies were to be found at various times at Banbury, Helmdon, Long Buckby, Boughton Green, Rushden, Ely and Cambridge.<sup>106</sup>

Boughton Green, in Northamptonshire, was a major annual camping ground, and was described by George Smith as the "... fluctuating capital of gipsydom in the Midlands".<sup>107</sup> The gypsies formerly encamped in large numbers down Spectacle Lane, which, according to Smith, was once the scene of a smallpox epidemic that devastated the camp.<sup>108</sup> Smith, in his usual way, wasted little or none of his time recording the occupations and life style of these people beyond saying that of 100 adults and 150 children not more than three could read or write, and that the Green was a meeting place for the gypsies so that they could "... fight, quarrel, brawl, pray, sing, rob, steal, cheat, and, in past times, murder".<sup>109</sup> Near to this place was Rushden, where in 1815 Hoyland visited a camp of gypsies, bearing the names Smith and Loversedge. This

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106 See J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.151; G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.92-121; 197-225; 252-77; Gypsy Children; or a stroll in Gipsydom, Part 1 (1889), p.33; D. Townsend, The Gipsies of Northamptonshire: their manner of life ... fifty years ago (Kettering, 1877); G. C. Renouard, 'Gypsy', Encyclopaedia Metropolitana, Vol.20 (1845), pp.54-9; T. Taylor, 'Gypsey Experiences', Illustrated London News, 29 November 1851, pp.655-6; 13 December 1851, pp.715-6; 27 December 1851, pp.777-9; T. W. Thompson, 'Christmas Eve and After', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.1 (1909), p.21; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.4, No.4 (1911), p.307; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.8, No.3 (1929), pp.105-20; Bedfordshire Times and Independent, 30 August 1907, p.9.

107 G. Smith, I've been ..., p.95.

108 Ibid., p.102.

109 Ibid., p.95.

camp presented a different picture from that portrayed by Smith, reflecting not simply the differing styles and biases of the authors but also the changed conditions of existence of the travellers. The able-bodied men and women were in attendance at the local feasts and fairs, plying their trades as horse-dealers and musical performers. The ill and elderly remained in the camp weaving cabbage-nets. The head of the Smith family was reputed to be of some property, achieved through his success in selling asses and horses, yet during the winter months they remained in the open, and, despite the hearsay concerning their wealth, they had no shelter but their tents.<sup>110</sup>

The counties of the West Midlands were also much frequented by the gypsies, and camps were located at Bedminster Downs, Stroud, Stourbridge, Ruiton, Kidderminster, Hartlebury Common and at Moseley Holes, on the eastern outskirts of Wolverhampton, perhaps the best known of the Midland camping grounds.<sup>111</sup>

Travellers in Staffordshire, and surrounding districts, were commonly referred to as "potters".<sup>112</sup> T. Taylor talked of the

110 J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.151-3.

111 B. Adams, et al., Gypsies and Government Policy in England (1975), pp.192-3; J. Crabb, op.cit., p.110; P. H. Fisher, Notes and Recollections of Stroud, Gloucestershire (1871), pp.26-8; S. B. James, 'Gipsies', The Graphic, 19 September 1874, p.289; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox ...', loc.cit., p.174; Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.1 (17 January 1880), p.49; Birmingham Daily Post, 7 June 1869, p.6; Bristol Echo, 3 November 1908, p.3; Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. G. Haynes Fosbroke, County Medical Officer for Worcestershire (1909), p.25, para.471; p.25, para.484.

112 H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life in Lancashire and Cheshire', Manchester Literary Club, Papers, Vol.3 (Manchester, 1877), p.32.

Staffordshire pot-hawker in his article in the Illustrated London News, and when he later referred to the "potters" and "muggers" of his native county it is likely that he was talking of here. This group of travellers earned a living by making and repairing small iron and tin wares and by the manufacture and sale of coarse earthenware and birch brooms.<sup>113</sup> The alternative to manufacturing the earthenware items was to buy up, at low cost, the cast and faulty articles from the various earthenware manufactories at Tunstall, Burslem, Longport, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, Longton and other places, to repair and resell at profit.

The camp of Midland 'Potters', at Lye Waste, near Stourbridge, highlights the problem of distinguishing between the different classes of travellers. Hungary Hill was the name given to that area of waste land where a group of wanderers, headed by Henzoil Henzey, said to be refugees from the kingdom of Hungary and the province of Lorraine in the year 1555 or 1556, took up their abode. There they discovered the existence of valuable fire-clay, out of which, in their own country, they had formed glass and melting pots.<sup>114</sup> From the nature of the evidence offered by Francis Hindes Groome, intended to prove that this group of wanderers were gypsies and not Huguenot refugees, it would appear that they took up the profession of travelling potters. His reasons numbered four. Firstly, glass-making was probably, at certain times, the

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113 T, Taylor, 'Gypsy Experiences', Illustrated London News, 29 November 1851, p.655.

114 Note from F. H. Groome, Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.1 (17 January 1880), p.49.



occupation of a number of gypsies. Next, that the family name of Hennezel was, according to a French pedigree, of gypsy origin. Thirdly, the 'potters' and 'muggers' of the northern counties were almost certainly of gypsy origin, following a gypsy mode of life and retaining in their slang several gypsy words.<sup>115</sup> The similarities with the Derbyshire potters, who themselves moulded a large quantity of pots and pans, baked them in their ovens, loaded eight or nine donkeys with their wares, and then travelled the countryside hawking them from village to village and house to house, are clear.<sup>116</sup> A further group of gypsy potters were encamped in a by-road near Melton Mowbray around the middle of the century, consisting of three to four dozen men, women and children, and several donkeys. When questioned by a passing gentleman on horseback whether they were potmen, a conclusion derived from the large load of pots about the camp, the gypsies replied that they were.<sup>117</sup> The final piece of evidence used by Groome was that 'half-gypsies' were employed in Birmingham to bore and affix the pattern plugs to mugs, presumably illustrating some continuity of trade. The following report from the Local Government Chronicle testified to this:

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115 F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.49.

116 Ibid., pp.283-7.

117 G. Elson, The Last of the Climbing Boys (1900), pp.148-50.

"At the Birmingham Police Court, Daniel Moulton was summoned for selling earthenware measures, beer mugs, which were false. The mugs were made in the Potteries, and were received by defendant as plain cups. They were then distributed among his workmen to be tested, and to have the pattern mark placed on them. They were told not to drill any which differed from the standard. Instead of testing, they bored and affixed the pattern plugs to any, and put false marks on the cups to get increased wages, as they were paid according to the number that passed the Inspectors. They were 'half-gipsies'. He could not get others to do the work".<sup>118</sup>

The evidence remains inconclusive, though, and Groome's attempts to discover origins must be deemed a failure. However, he did succeed in highlighting the inability to draw precise lines of distinction between the various travellers, and how the terms 'potter', 'mugger' and 'gypsy' could be used interchangeably according to region.

There is evidence for at least two gypsy settlements in the Midlands. Barbara Adams drew on oral sources to locate a settlement at Ruiton, Dudley. The inhabitants of the houses there were said to have recently travelled in the spring and summer, and lodged only during the winter. Their living was obtained by supplying salt for the pit-ponies, and by retailing agricultural hand-tools, pots and pans, probably obtained from a local manufacturer.<sup>119</sup> A more troublesome colony was situated at Black Patch, Handsworth, near Birmingham. The settlement was founded by Esau Smith, horse-dealer, and expanded with the arrival of the Clayton family. By 1904

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in F. H. Groome, op.cit., pp.283-7.

<sup>119</sup> B. Adams, et al., op.cit., pp.192-3.

twenty-three families lived on the Patch, including fifty-nine individuals who were born there.<sup>120</sup> The colony maintained itself by the sale of pegs, baskets and tin goods. It suffered a temporary setback in July 1899 when a flood drove the gypsies away, but they were then enticed back by the offer of timber from a local manufacturer, with which they built a chapel. Even before their eviction from the Patch in 1905, the colony was gradually breaking up, with many of the women marrying local artisans and labourers.<sup>121</sup>

### East

Even the small county of Rutland, in the North Midlands, was not without its travelling population, and the open fields and heaths at South Luffenham were much used by the gypsies, until the Enclosure Acts closed this land to them, early in the nineteenth century.<sup>122</sup> In the 1830s and 1840s there were large gangs of gypsies travelling about Lincolnshire, and encampments were numerous in the rural lanes. The people were described as "... lazy, dirty, miserable-looking creatures ...", who caused serious problems for the farmers.<sup>123</sup> Many were of the family

120 The date of Esau Smith's death is uncertain, but was sometime between 1897 and 1901. His widow, Henty, born about 1808, died in her caravan in 1907 (see H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1892-1906', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4, 1908, p.369; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1907', loc.cit., p.121; Daily Graphic, 13 October 1904, p.4).

121 Daily Graphic, 13 October 1904, p.4. The issue of the eviction is discussed in Chapter 6, pages 438-40.

122 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.6, No.1 (1927), p.46.

123 Note from W. E. Howlett, of Kirton in Lindsey, Notes and Queries, 4th Ser., Vol.3 (12 June 1869), p.557.

Boswell, and the name Boswell, Bosel or Bosvile came to be used as a synonym for all the gypsies who travelled this area,<sup>124</sup>

Leicestershire was also popular among the gypsies, and in the early part of the century they frequented the fairs, village wakes and alehouses, primarily to entertain with their musical abilities.<sup>125</sup>

Smith's contacts with Leicester gypsies in the 1880s dispelled this romantic illusion by pointing to their lack of education and religion, and their poverty, demanding that these "roamers",

"ramblers", or "ditch bank travellers" needed to be "... taken in hand".<sup>126</sup> Further encampments could be found at Bulwell Forest

and at various places in Derbyshire.<sup>127</sup> Bramley Moor, near

Chesterfield, was the winter camping ground for about fifty to

sixty gypsies in 1813, and annual camps could be seen at Socombe

Lane, near Shirebrook, and at Duckmanton, also near Chesterfield.

The visit to the latter site took place usually at feast-time,

and the gypsies seemed to have been well received owing to the

good reputation they gained through their honest transactions.<sup>128</sup>

124 W. E. Howlett, op.cit., p.557; Note from E. Peacock, of Bottesford Manor, Brigg, Notes and Queries, 4th Ser., Vol.3 (12 June 1869), pp.557-8; Notes and Queries, 5th Ser., Vol.1 (2 May 1874), p.358.

125 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.6, No.1 (1927), pp.47-8. See also W. A. Cragg, 'A Gypsy Marriage', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.1 (1908), pp.93-4.

126 G. Smith, 'Gipsy and other Travelling Children', Hand and Heart, Vol.5 (11 June 1880), p.584.

127 G. Smith, I've been ..., p.234; T. W. Thompson, 'The Uncleaness of Women ...', loc.cit., pp.15-18; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox ...', loc.cit., p.161.

128 J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.181-2.

Moving north across the county border, numerous encampments were to be found in Yorkshire. In the summer of 1815 great numbers of gypsies were wandering throughout the county, encamping at such places as Boroughbridge, Knaresborough, Pocklington, Tadcaster, where a gang of about twenty gypsies were said to have told fortunes to most of the people in the town, and at Rotherham, from where "... a numerous horde had been driven".<sup>129</sup> Other camps were situated in Sheffield, Leeds, and in Brigg Lane, between Camblesforth and Drax, where a gang of Boswells regularly stayed, to the "terror" of the village constables.<sup>130</sup>

In 1822 a tract was published in York, by a local clergyman, who chronicled his visits to the camps of this wandering people. The account was concerned primarily with advertising the receptivity of these nomads to sound scriptural advice and religious instruction, yet there emerged from his talks with the tent-dwellers an interesting variation on the theme of winter lodging. He was told that in the depth of winter only the men travelled, while the women and children of the family and party stayed in the towns with relatives already living there. This appears to have been an isolated incident, though, and was probably due to the nearness of settled relatives. For the

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129 J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.181, 243; 'Gypsies', Literary and Scientific Repository, Vol.3 (1821), p.404.

130 Lady A. Grosvenor, 'A Pilgrim's Progress', loc.cit., pp.204-5.

males to remain travelling can be explained only by the likelihood that they took the responsibility for door to door hawking onto their own shoulders.<sup>131</sup>

A few years later Samuel Roberts described a visit to an encampment near Sheffield. A family of Boswells was living in one tent in a nearby lane. The two ends of the tent served as separate sleeping rooms, and the open space in the middle served as a kitchen. The people seemed clean and tidy, and there was "... an appearance of respectability, comfort, order, and cleanliness throughout the whole of the little dwelling".<sup>132</sup> The family obtained a livelihood by selling tin goods, cutlery, and different kinds of hardware. They had camped the last winter in a small rented room in Birmingham as the weather had been too severe for them to stay in the open. It is possible that this family was related to Riley Boswell, who was said to have kept up his connections with Birmingham. Similarly, the Heron family paid frequent visits to Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.<sup>133</sup>

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131 A. Clergyman of the Church of England, The Gypsies: or a narrative, in three parts, of several communications with that wandering and scattered people: with some thoughts on the duty of Christians to attempt their instruction and conversion (York, 1822); J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.165-75.

132 S. Roberts, The Gypsies (1836), pp.59-60. For an account of Samuel Roberts and his position relating to gypsies see C. Holmes, 'Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies', in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (eds.), Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire (Barnsley, 1976), pp.233-46.

133 T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsies who hunted with the Badsworth Hounds', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.7, Nos. 3-4 (1928), pp.152-3.

In fact, the Heron and Boswell families frequently travelled Yorkshire together, and were considered to be the two largest gypsy tribes in the county. The name of Boswell even became synonymous with any group of beggars, "... or other idle itinerants ...", who camped in the lanes and ditches around Doncaster and Conisborough.<sup>134</sup> Yet, they also had a respectable side, as illustrated by their regular appearances during the 1830s and 1840s in the neighbourhood of Barnsdale and Brockodale during the hunting season, when both men and women alike, perhaps numbering twenty persons, used to ride with the Badsworth hounds. Some time after this they deserted the area, apparently following the transportation of one of their number for the theft of a horse. His friends, allegedly, approached the magistrates and offered a bribe said to have amounted to the remarkable sum of five thousand sovereigns, if they would refrain from committing the gypsy to the York Assizes. The offer was turned down. Apart from their undoubted ability as horse-riders, this group were at one time much in demand as violinists at the country feasts and merry-makings.<sup>135</sup>

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134 T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsies who ...', loc.cit., pp.152-3. It is interesting to note that although the name Boswell became interchangeable with gypsy or itinerant in Yorkshire and elsewhere, and that Boswell's gang was applied generally to a collection of beggars or other idle itinerants, the name of Bosvile belonged to an ancient Yorkshire family. It is likely that the original gypsy settlers in this country adopted English names soon after 1554 when it was made a felony to remain in England as an Egyptian, or gypsy. They may have taken the names of prominent families on whose land they encamped, or else may have obtained English names through intermarriage (see J. Wainwright, Yorkshire: an historical and topographical introduction to a knowledge of the ancient state of the wapentake of Strafford and Tickhill, with ample account of Doncaster and Conisborough, Sheffield, 1829, pp.137-8; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.1, 1909, p.71).

135 J. S. Fletcher, Memorials of a Yorkshire Parish: an historical account of the Parish of Darrington (1917), pp.144-5.

By the turn of the century the gypsy camps had a different aspect. In order to find the gypsies encamped in Milton's Yard, Sweet Street, Leeds,

"... you go down a particularly mean street to it. You make your way with smoke overhead, and underfoot, and smells enveloping you. It is at the heart of a locality peculiarly unsavoury and ill-favoured".<sup>136</sup>

In the yard, during the winter of 1909 to 1910, were a dozen caravans and six tents, closely packed together, belonging to the Boswells, Hernes and Youngs. In this yard Herbert Malleon saw the personification of the plight of the modern gypsy. The squalor of the surroundings provided by the worst aspects of the industrial landscape of Leeds gave a displeasing contrast with the former sites of the gypsies on the commons and heaths:

"They have wandered into odd places, but they have wandered into still odder times. Civilisation has, by degrees, chased the Gypsy out of the wastes into the lanes, out of the lanes into the suburban brickfields, out of the suburban brickfields into the yards of the city. The Gypsy has been truly run to earth".<sup>137</sup>

Although Malleon possessed a rather romanticised image of the past days of gypsy life, and was seemingly ignorant of the fact that winter lodging in city slums long predated the twentieth century, he was correct in his observation of trends brought about by the spread of industry and civilisation. Even though the travellers were able to evade, to an extent, and postpone the immediate impact of such forces, pressures were continually felt.

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136 H. Malleon, 'A Sweet Street Sanctuary', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.4, No.1 (1910), p.55.

137 Ibid., p.56.



The Boswells were also said to be the most numerous gypsy family in Lancashire and Cheshire, but they were followed closely by the Harnes, Lees, Lovells, Smiths, Greys and Coopers.<sup>138</sup> By the late nineteenth century Henry Crofton thought that emigration had led to a massive drop in the numbers of gypsies travelling these two counties, and estimated that only around three hundred remained.<sup>139</sup>

Although his observations on emigration were important, his estimate of numbers was less than half that discovered by the census enumerators of dwellers in tents, vans and the open air for 1891 and 1901, the latter even showing a small increase.<sup>140</sup>

In the winter months the Lancashire and Cheshire gypsies mostly congregated about Gorton, where ideal camping ground was to be found among the brick fields and uncovered building land. Also, there was a street near the town's yard which had houses on one side only, and the gypsies used to encamp on the facing open land. Lilly Street was another of their haunts, where they lived in almost derelict houses that were apparently unowned. The houses were marked by a complete absence of any furniture except perhaps a rickety chair. The bedding was usually rolled up in a corner, and the family

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<sup>138</sup> H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.33.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>140</sup> See diagrams 3 and 4, pages 49 and 50.

squatted on the bare floor around the fire, thus striking a close resemblance to their tent arrangements. The number of itinerants who used Gorton as their winter rendezvous numbered, on average, from sixty to seventy. Other gypsies spent the winter months in the Clayton, Bradford, Harpurhey and Cheetham outskirts of Manchester.<sup>141</sup> In October 1879 there was a camp of Boswells located in the meadows at Cheetham Hill, for which they paid three pounds a week in rent.<sup>142</sup> Other families entered the city of Manchester itself. One winter a family of Smiths lived near the Salford gasworks, and a group of Lovells camped in a yard by the dog pound, in Great Bridgewater Street, Deansgate.<sup>143</sup> The steady influx of gypsies to Oldham had reached such a pitch by November/December 1907 that residents frequently complained to the press about the site, located near to the centre of the town and to the rear of the County Court.<sup>144</sup> No such antipathy was shown to George Smith and his family who regularly resided for

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141 H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life ...', loc.cit., pp.38-9.

142 F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.240.

143 H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.39.

144 See, for example, Oldham Chronicle, 30 November 1907, p.8; 7 December 1907, p.9; 11 January 1908, p.9.

the winter on the waste ground near Walton Breck, Everton,<sup>145</sup>

The women and children were well known in the district through their business of selling baskets and telling fortunes,<sup>146</sup>

Liverpool was also alleged to be the home of large numbers of Scottish gypsies who migrated to England, and took to various mechanical occupations in the city.<sup>147</sup>

Bolton and its environs was also subjected to regular visits from the gypsies. Encampments were situated between

145 This is emphatically not the same person as George Smith of Coalville. George 'Lazy' Smith, gypsy (otherwise known as Lazarus Buckley) was perhaps one of the most noted of British gypsies. He was born on 3rd May, 1830, on Mousehold Heath, Norwich, the son of Elijah Buckley and Elizabeth Smith. (This retention of the maternal surname does not appear to have been common). A full account of his life and early travels can be found in his small book, 'Incidents in a Gipsy's Life', published in June 1886 on the occasion of the International Exhibition at Liverpool. Along with his involvement with the group of Epping Forest gypsy entertainers and his visit to the House of Commons to fight the Moveable Dwellings Bill, his contribution to the Liverpool Exhibition of a 'typical' gypsy encampment ranked among the highpoints of his life. See also T. W. Thompson, 'Borrow's Gypsies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), pp.162-74; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.8, No.3 (1929), pp.105-6; H. J. Francis, 'Borrow's Gypsies in a Journal of 1867-8', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.14, No.1 (1935), pp.1-21; J. Myers, 'Lazy Smith in Egglestone's Note Book', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.16, Nos. 1-2, 4 (1937), pp.1-6, 174-86.

146 Liverpool Review, 19 June 1886, p.6.

147 J. Simson, 'Disquisition ...', in W. Simson, op.cit., p.419. Given Simson's predilection for exaggeration, and his extremely loose definition of the term 'gypsy', this claim has to be treated with scepticism. It is possible that in some time past Scottish travellers did indeed migrate southwards, and may even have remained in Liverpool. However, after generations of intermarriage with the native, sedentary population and the adoption of permanent, settled occupations and way of life, these people had become indigenous Liverpudlians rather than remaining, as Simson's racial explanation would have us believe, gypsies.

Bolton and Radcliffe, and each New Year these "Gypsy interlopers" caused a "... veritable pandemonium of Bolton's principal square".<sup>148</sup> Neighbouring Farnworth was also the regular circuit of

"...showmen, itinerant vendors, basket-makers, chair-sellers, and the like, many of whom, while partaking of gypsy habits, were not Romany folk at all".<sup>149</sup>

Thus, the issue of definition is again raised. To this writer the 'true' gypsy was identifiable not so much by overt racial characteristics but by, firstly, his nomadism and then by the hordes of horses, dogs and goats that accompanied the tribe. Without these attributes they were mere half-breeds, similar to those who lived in a small tent-like erection on a slag-heap, near Bradley fold, Bolton:

"They were not proper gipsies: they stopped too long in one place for that [my emphasis]; but they used to leave their ramshackle dwelling from time to time, always returning in spite of the authorities' veto ...".<sup>150</sup>

Other gypsies who stopped even longer in one place were to be seen at Hale Moss, Altrincham, at Birkenhead and at Blackpool.

Green Lane, Birkenhead, had been for many years the camp site for several of the Smith family, who also had settled relatives at Liverpool and Formby.<sup>151</sup> The camp at Hale Moss was more note

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<sup>148</sup> C. Fox-Smith, 'Gypsies in Lancashire', Manchester City News, 13 June 1908, p.6.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.I.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.8, No.3 (1929), p.106.

worthy if only for the fact that from about 1861 onwards a family of Bosses lived on the edge of the common in five old, wheel-less railway carriages.<sup>152</sup> The carriages were sited in an enclosure about fifty yards long. They were often supplemented by a couple of vans and some tents as Hale Moss had acquired a reputation among the gypsies of Lancashire and Cheshire for being a convenient and sociable camping ground. By the late 1870s a member of the Smith family was making a similar home on the other side of the Moss, which consisted of three vans and a shed, in the course of erection, of 'wood and sods'.<sup>153</sup>

Although settled, these people nevertheless retained some of the fundamental characteristics of that people that distinguished them from the sedentary population. Their abodes were clearly different, but, more than this, they still held on to the habit of summer travelling. The surrounding fairs were visited, where dealing in horses was the main pre-occupation, and they attended the annual village wakes as fiddlers. Travelling was not necessarily restricted to the immediate vicinity. One of the families, in 1877, travelled by Preston to Blackpool, and back by Southport and Warrington.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, they had retained their economic independency and self-sufficiency. The encampment possessed a willow plantation which supplied them with 'withies' for baskets and wood

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152 Rev. G. Hall, 'Notes on the Boss Pedigree', loc.cit., p.120; F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.58.

153 H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.38.

154 Ibid.

for clothes pegs. They also travelled the neighbouring villages with their knife-grinding barrows.<sup>155</sup>

The South Shore colony of gypsies, at Blackpool, began around 1836 with the arrival there of Ned and Sarah Boswell, yet it was not until the 1860s that it grew to any numerical strength.<sup>156</sup>

This was achieved with the addition of members of the families of Lee, Boswell, Young, Townsend, Smith and an East Anglian clan.<sup>157</sup>

By 1908 there were twenty-one sets of families living on the South Shore. Alma Boswell had lived there since her birth in 1855, followed closely by others who had been there for over forty years. Ten of the families paid from twenty to twenty-five pounds for their pitches, and 12s. 6d. for their water supply.

The lowest rents were those farthest south, for which the cost for a pitch varied from £2. 12s. to £4.<sup>158</sup> The gypsies lived in

both tub-like tents and in vans. The Reverend George Hall has provided a romantic picture of the settlement:

155 H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.37.

156 B. Turner and S. Palmer, The Blackpool Story (Blackpool, 1976), p.97.

157 T. W. Thompson, 'The Social Polity ...', loc.cit., p.126.

158 Blackpool Gazette, 25 December 1908, p.3.

"Living-vans of green and gold with their flapping canvas covers; domed tents whose blankets of red and grey had faded at the touch of sun and wind; boarded porches and outgrowths of a fantastic character, the work of Romany carpenters; unabashed advertisements announcing Gypsy queens patronised by duchesses and lords; bevvies of black-eyed, wheedling witches eager to pounce upon the stroller into Gypsydom; and troops of fine children, shock-headed and jolly ...".<sup>159</sup>

Each summer the encampment was added to by visiting gypsies, who travelled from Altrincham, Liverpool, Middlesex and elsewhere.<sup>160</sup>

Their main occupations during these months were to cater for the expanding holiday trade that was to result in Blackpool becoming a popular and fashionable resort. The gypsies told fortunes, and were itinerant entertainers, quack-doctors, phrenologists and operators of a variety of show-ground diversions. Holiday-makers wandered freely among the tents, and despite being stared at continuously the gypsies, it is said, remained civil and polite, and as such the attraction of these people and their contribution to the development of leisure facilities and a 'holiday atmosphere' at Blackpool should not be underestimated:

"... this gay Lancashire watering-place is one of the few towns where Gypsies are regarded as an asset. And so from Pentecost to Michaelmas you will find scores of tents pitched on the sands of the South Shore, where young and old Gypsy witches 'duker' [tell fortunes] without let or hindrance, while their men folk take charge of shooting-galleries, merry-go-rounds, switch-back railways, water-chutes, bowling-greens, and other recreative delights".<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.71; see also Clarion, 19 August 1910, p.1,

<sup>160</sup> H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.38.

<sup>161</sup> J. Sampson, 'The German Gypsies at Blackpool', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.2 (1907), p.111. See also B. Turner and S. Palmer, op.cit., p.97.

During the winter months they occupied themselves by weaving baskets, hawking, scissor-grinding and the like,<sup>162</sup> The picture of permanency was added to by the existence in the camp of a Gospel waggon, run by a missionary from Manchester from 1892, to take control over the education of the children and the "spiritual concerns" of the adults.<sup>163</sup> However, the gypsies as asset soon became a liability, and with the growth of the town as a holiday centre the existence of a colony of gypsies on the South Shore was considered to work against, and not for, the interests of the town. An account of their eviction appears in Chapter 6.

In central Northumberland the itinerant population were variously referred to by the names "trav'lers", "muggers", and "cadgers". In the spring and summer they travelled the countryside in their covered carts, visiting the small hamlets and farmhouses in an attempt to sell the wares which they had manufactured during the winter months. The items were of many kinds, according to the skills of the gypsy and the needs of the buyers. They varied from heather besoms, brooms, and willow-plaited baskets, or 'swills', which were peculiar to the north country, to cheap jewellery, cutlery, cloth and tin utensils. They bought rabbit skins, old iron and anything else which was unwanted and so could be picked up cheaply or for nothing. Some dealt in horses, were

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162 Blackpool Gazette, 25 December 1908, p.3; Clarion, 19 August 1910, p.1.

163 Blackpool Gazette and News, 8 September 1896, p.3. I can find no further mention of this Gospel waggon, though it is likely to have lasted after the date of this report.



tinkers, and some were even reputed to have been very good tinsmiths. However, the majority of them were dealers in earthenware, so much so that the name "mugger" became a synonym for a northern gypsy. The hill at Bellingham, used for their camp site during the period of the Cuddy's (Donkeys) Fair, was known as Mugger's Hill. A more illegal pastime of theirs was participation in the smuggling of illicit whiskey across the border, at a time when the difference between the English and Scottish duties on spirits made it profitable to do so.<sup>164</sup>

In winter they frequented the towns of Northumberland. In the early part of the century Alwick, Amble, Morpeth, Rothbury, Hexham, Bellingham, Wooler and Longhorsley were the main winter locations. Another main centre, across the border, was at Kirk Yetholm. Each family had their own rendezvous: for example, the Allens, Anguses and Currys to Amble, the Allens, Anguses, Andersons and Youngs and others to Alwick. Longhorsley ceased to be a gypsy haunt when the right of using the common became restricted to householders. This denial of grazing land to the "muggers' " donkeys, together with the difficulty in finding accommodation owing to the destruction of many old houses and cottages, meant that the gypsies moved on, with the aid of the velvet glove, to other more suitable areas.<sup>165</sup>

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164 See Rev. J. H. Barker, 'The Gipsy-life of Northumberland', in W. Andrews (ed.), Bygone Northumberland (1899), pp.224-39; M. A. Richardson, The Local Historian's Table Book, Vol.4 (1844), p.198; J. Wear, 'A Short Account of the travellers of Central Northumberland', Folk-Lore Gazette, Vol.1, No.3 (1912), pp.99-100; Illustrated Times, 13 April 1861, p.241.

165 J. Wear, 'A Short Account...', loc.cit., pp.99-100.

Natland, near Kendal, was yet another centre for a group of travelling potters. They were called the "Fa' gang" by the old inhabitants of the township, alluding to the relationship between the old Scottish gypsy family of Faw and the occupations of tinkering and hawking pots.<sup>166</sup> Every year about Easter time the whole family packed their belongings onto carts, and with the aid of a couple of horses and asses, they left the village to start their wanderings. They went first to Burslem to obtain their supply of pottery ware, which they then hawked round the counties "remote from Staffordshire".<sup>167</sup> While travelling they also acted as conveyors of news from village to village alongside their function of supplying the isolated villagers with cheap wares. They returned to Natland sometime in September, often still loaded with pots. The men, "a completely useless set", were then said to idle their time away:

"The best of them break down the hedges for fuel, and poach game and fish out of season. During the day they lounge round their carts. The only exertion they use is that of forming an otter, badger, or martin hunt of their own, with dogs which they keep for that purpose".<sup>168</sup>

Even the aged were thought to work harder for they at least went around collecting rags, horse hair, cow hair, hare and rabbit skins. Meanwhile, the women and girls travelled large circuits carrying

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166 See 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), p.283; F. S. Atkinson, 'Gypsies in Westmorland', The Kendalian, Vol.9 (1909), pp.14-15; Lonsdale Magazine, Vol.2 (1821), pp.343-7; D. MacRitchie, Scottish Gypsies under the Stewarts (Edinburgh, 1894), p.13.

167 Lonsdale Magazine, Vol.2 (1821), p.343.

168 Ibid., p.345.

baskets on their heads and in their arms, heavy with the weight of the pots. The other main item they offered for sale was not so burdensome. This was a sleeping powder, or love-philtre. If they wanted hats, coats or other items, the gypsies would lower the price of their pots and powders and exchange them for goods rather than money. They also obtained money as fortune-tellers and quack-doctors.<sup>169</sup>

Little mention is made of the Natland gypsies later in the century. It had been suggested that the Northern and Border regions would become the last home of the gypsies, forced there by the pressures exerted on them elsewhere.<sup>170</sup> Not only did the area not experience any increase in the size of its travelling population, but also the gypsies there were clearly not immune to pressures on their traditional sites and employments. Camping in lanes and on wastes was forbidden, a measure enforced effectively by the police. Travelling was thus made more difficult and so was less widely practised.<sup>171</sup> The Chief Constable of Northumberland confirmed this impression in his evidence to the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, 1906, when he declared that further controls over these people were unnecessary as the 1899 Inclosure Act was steadily abolishing them.<sup>172</sup> However, even in the first decade of the twentieth

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169 Lonsdale Magazine, Vol,3 (1822), pp.64-6.

170 Rev. J. H. Barker, 'The Gipsy-life ...', loc.cit., pp.222-3.

171 J. Wear, 'A Short Account ...', loc.cit., p.100.

172 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Minutes of Evidence, of Captain Fullarton James (1906), p.262, paras, 7725-7 (hereafter, Deptal. Cttee. on Vag.).

century, the Northern counties still acted as the centre for groups of "muggers", or gypsies, though presumably in diminished numbers, travelling a more restricted range.<sup>173</sup>

### "Metropolitan Gypsyries"

London and the surrounding districts remained the undisputed heart of the travelling population throughout the period under review. Even when pushed from the central areas the gypsies continued to base their varied comings and goings from the fringes of the city in the surrounding counties. Thus it was in and around the metropolis that sizeable numbers of itinerants travelled, and their camps were to be found everywhere. When the season arrived for the commencement of travelling large numbers could be seen radiating from this centre, only for the direction to be reversed with the end of hop-picking and the onset of wintry weather. London proved to be a convenient and sizeable market for hawking and street-trading, and a place where relative anonymity took precedence over conspicuousness.

Vagrants, beggars and tramps were a common sight, and camps of people living in tents, in the open, or under the arches of the London bridges were a regular feature of the landscape and environment. In London, then, was to be found the largest number of gypsies and travellers situated in a geographically

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173 See T. W. Thompson, 'Christmas Eve ...', loc.cit., pp.19-33; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), pp.232-3; T. W. Thompson, 'Storms and Interludes', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.4, No.4 (1911), p.262ff.; F. S. Atkinson, 'Gypsies in Westmorland', loc.cit., p.14.

limited area. As has been seen before, the numbers would fluctuate with the seasons, and the types of travellers who camped here varied considerably in the nature and extent of their itinerancy and the permanency of their dwellings.

In the main, the gypsies camped, during the summer, on the edges of the metropolis in the forests, on the waste ground and on the commons. The winter months saw many of them migrate further inwards to seek alternative sites and lodgings in the mean streets of the city. Camp sites varied from the idyllic surroundings of the woodland and forest to the slum regions of the Notting Hill Potteries. They settled on waste land of every description, from yards belonging to public houses to pieces of common land over which no authority claimed any rights, with the result that they were to be found in almost all areas of London. A London City Missionary, writing in 1858, supported this picture of the widespread dispersion of the gypsy encampments:

"...the circuit of my district has necessarily been large, taking in Woodford, Loughton, Barkingside, Wanstead, Barking, Forest-gate, Stratford, Barking-road, Bow-common, Hackney-Wick, Holloway, Blackheath, Greenwich, Plumstead-common, Streatham, Norwood, Wandsworth, Wimbledon, Putney and Barnes-common, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kensington, Potteries, Paddington, Battersea, Shoreditch, and Borough. All these are regular stations, where I generally meet with gypsies. In addition to these places I visit the hop-gardens in Kent and Surrey during the hop-picking season; also the fairs in the neighbourhood of London, with Epsom races, in quest of gypsies".<sup>174</sup>

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174 Annual Report of a London City Missionary to the Gypsies, 1858, in London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), pp.17-18.

Before the widespread advance of the enclosure movement in the nineteenth century, Norwood was perhaps the principal rendezvous of the London gypsies.<sup>175</sup> This afforested area was, at the start of the century, wildly rural, largely uncultivated and thinly populated. Although the 1808 enclosures deprived them of certain of their traditional sites, they did not remove entirely from the district but instead moved into neighbouring Dulwich, adding to the colony already there.<sup>176</sup> Their former site in Norwood came to be known, after their departure, as Gipsy Hill.<sup>177</sup> In 1876, one of the gypsies purchased a field in Lordship Lane, Dulwich, specifically for the purpose of accommodating his travelling brothers. Much to the annoyance of the inhabitants in the nearby mansions and "residences of a high character", their numbers soon reached between 100 and 200.<sup>178</sup> Other suitable locations were found about the woods and lanes at Anerley and Penge, and in the Epping and Hainault forests to the north-east of the city.<sup>179</sup>

The romanticism of such a picture of the wild gypsy, living al fresco in tents and shelters amidst the most beautiful aspects of Nature applied, in general, to the first part of the century,

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175 A. M. Galer, Norwood and Dulwich: Past and Present (1890), p.11; J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.180.

176 N. N. Solly, Memoir of the Life of David Cox (1873), p.21. See also Chapter 6, pages 390-2.

177 A. M. Galer, op.cit., p.11.

178 'A Gipsy Colony at Dulwich', The Builder, 11 November 1876, p.1094.

179 T. Frost, op.cit., p.4.

and later only to a small section of the gypsies. As the century progressed this image rapidly became a part of the romantic myth that surrounded a Romany people. The reality of the situation, which was becoming increasingly apparent, was less appetising. The gypsies pitched their tents and halted their vans in areas of transition, on brickfields and on waste ground, on sites of intended buildings and where buildings had been pulled down.<sup>180</sup> They encamped in the midst of ruins, chaos and filth. Many of their camps were in such depressed areas that they were said to be satisfied to put up their tents "... where a Londoner would only accommodate his pig or his dog ...".<sup>181</sup>

The degeneration of the commons from pleasant green lands to industrial waste sites was a marked and clear phase that accompanied the development of the metropolis as a major industrial centre. In 1871, for instance, Wandsworth Common, a popular resort among the gypsies from the beginning of the century, was more of a nuisance than a place of recreation and enjoyment:

"Its surface was bare, muddy and sloppy after a little rain, undrained, and almost devoid of trees or seats. It was covered with huge gravel-pits, many of them full of stagnant water, which, in addition to being very offensive, constituted a positive source of danger owing to their great depth and want of protection",<sup>182</sup>

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180 'Metropolitan Gipsyries', All the Year Round, New Ser., Vol.21 (1878), p.393.

181 Weekly Times, 26 October 1876, p.5.

182 J. J. Sexby, The Municipal Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces of London (1898), pp,237-8.

Twenty years later their vans were camped on the waste land near the railway arches in Wandsworth and Battersea. The conditions had not improved, with thick mud and garbage predominating. For the privilege of remaining there the gypsies had to pay between 2s. and 2s. 6d. a week in rent. By 1896 there were said to be five such colonies in these two parishes.<sup>183</sup>

T. Wilkinson drew a vivid picture of a typical encampment, which he came across in Donovan's Yard, Battersea, near to the South-Western railway line. He graphically described the rows of "living waggons", surrounded by palings, walls and arches, outside of which sat the women and children engaged in needlework, gossiping or the family wash. The inside of a van was said to be "... a pocket edition of home as known to many thousands of house dwellers - the vast public of the one-roomed tenement ...".<sup>184</sup> A fireplace, table and bed was all that could be accommodated within the confined space. Some owners had sold their horses on arrival to save the cost of keeping them over the winter, and would buy others when it was time to travel again. But Wilkinson also found "moveable" dwellings that had been made more permanent fixtures by having had their shafts, wheels and axles removed.<sup>185</sup> The gypsy inhabitants of Lamb Lane lived in equally appalling conditions. They had drawn up their caravans

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183 Charles Booth Manuscripts, B,366, pp.185, 190 (hereafter, C. Booth, MSS); E. Brewer, 'Gypsy Encampments in the Heart of London', Sunday at Home (1896), p.113; Building Trade News (December 1894), p.11.

184 T. W. Wilkinson, 'Van Dwelling London', in G. R. Sims (ed.), Living London, Vol.3 (1903), p.322.

185 Ibid., pp.321-3.



and pitched their tents in the spaces between the rows of houses tenanted by labourers in foundries and gas and water works. The yards were no more than areas for the deposit of garbage and yet each yard provided an unsavoury camping place for a number of the travellers.<sup>186</sup>

However, these conditions were almost pleasant compared with those that existed in Kensington, around the Notting Hill Potteries. Even their sites on the Thames mud-flats and Plumstead Marshes were described as "salubrious" compared with those at Notting Hill.<sup>187</sup> Whether from historical or geographical causes, tramps and travellers who entered London from the North and West had long used the district as a temporary halting place. Some stayed a night, some a week, maybe even months and years, but in general the travellers moved on, often to St. Giles's or Whitechapel, only to return again on their later travels.<sup>188</sup> Each time, though, some would have remained and Booth commented that gypsy blood was in evidence among the children in the schools, and was even "noticeable in the streets".<sup>189</sup>

The area only became known as the 'Potteries' from the 1830s onward, about which time it also attracted a large colony

186 Weekly Times, 8 February 1880, p.2.

187 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), p.116.

188 C. Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London, 3rd Ser., Vol.3 (1902), pp.151-2.

189 Ibid.

of pig-breeders. By 1849 the residents were living at a density of 130 to the acre, and the number of pigs was upwards of 3,000.<sup>190</sup> Many of the residents lived in converted railway carriages and vans. During the years 1846-8 the living conditions had deteriorated rapidly, largely owing to the vast quantities of semi-liquid pig manure and other organic matter which lingered in the cavities dug up by the potters and brickmakers. These conditions contributed to the astonishing fact that the average age at the time of death among the 1056 inhabitants was only eleven years and three months compared with an average age of thirty-seven years for London as a whole.<sup>191</sup> Following the cholera epidemic of 1848-9

"... the conditions of filth, disease and insanitation in which its inhabitants were found to be living and dying gave the area a notoriety perhaps unsurpassed by any other district in London".<sup>192</sup>

It was not until the 1870s that conditions began to improve with the introduction of better systems of drainage, prosecution of pig-owners and the cessation of pig-breeding as a regular business in 1878.

Yet, despite these conditions, the gypsies lived in the area in large numbers, and those living in or near Latimer Road were estimated to comprise from forty to fifty families by 1862.<sup>193</sup>

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190 F. H. W. Sheppard, Survey of London: Northern Kensington, Vol.37 (1973), p.342.

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid., p.340.

193 F. M. Gladstone, Notting Hill in Bygone Days (1924), p.143. See Appendix 9, Illustrations 3-7, for various representations of the gypsies and their camps about Notting Hill.

It was about this time that missionary work in the area was said to have effected some transformation among the gypsies. Many were said to have given up the traditional gypsy 'vices' of drinking, swearing and fortune-telling. Others were said to have abandoned the Romany language and had gone through the Christian marriage service. A mission tent was erected in 1869, though the endeavours of the missionary worker were to be cut short by an outbreak of scarlet fever, and the insistence of the local authorities that the camp be broken up. As a result many took to living in "melancholy looking cottages",<sup>194</sup> in sheds and outhouses, or in tenements "... so closely packed together that little sun or air can penetrate".<sup>195</sup> Some, however, managed to evade the authorities and continued to live in dilapidated vans at the back of rows of houses and in "... narrow courts and dingy lanes".<sup>196</sup> Once settled in more permanent dwellings it was inevitable that travelling declined.

Other colonies of gypsies, or 'van towns', similar to that described above, could be seen at Smethwick, between the railway arches at Clapham Junction, at Woodford, Wandsworth, Plaistow Marshes, Plumstead Marshes, Hackney-Wick and Hackney Marshes, Wanstead Flats, Cherry Island, Canning Town, Charlton,

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194 Suburban Press, 28 February 1880, p.2.

195 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), p.116.

196 Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.198. See also, G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.122ff.; Illustrated London News, 13 December 1879, p.545.

Turnham Green, Mitcham Common, Finsbury Park and doubtless elsewhere also.<sup>197</sup> Of these, the gypsy camp on the borders of Wanstead Flats, in Cobbold Road, near to Leytonstone Road, was a "... picture of order, cleanliness and industry".<sup>198</sup> It was no surprise that the occupants of this site were not ordinary gypsies living in unhospitable surroundings and unpalatable conditions but were instead a colony of gypsy evangelists. Although at present living in five vans they were building two 'neat little houses'. These gypsies were held as a shining example to other gypsies to emulate, as well as proving conclusively that such a people could be civilised, educated and converted, thereby providing encouragement to missionaries and philanthropists.<sup>199</sup>

This type of encampment remained exceptional, though, and the majority were of the Notting Hill variety. They flourished mainly during the winter months, experiencing a steady outflow

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197 See Reminiscences of J. Munday, in R. Blunt, Red Anchor Pieces (1928), p.110; E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.196-7; C. Smith, The Life-story of Gipsy Cornelius Smith (1890), p.52; G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.267-77; G. Smith, I've been ..., pp. 26, 35-6, 280; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), p.117; 'The Present State of the Gypsies', Sunday at Home (1884), p.119; R.C. on Housing, First Report, p.56; Minutes of Evidence, of George Smith, p.526, para. 14031; C. Booth, MSS, B.346, pp. 165, 233; B.348, p.97; B.371, pp. 55-7, 241.

198 Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.2 (4 December 1880), p.444.

199 George Smith of Coalville also contrasted the Christian gypsy with the majority, in order to show what could be achieved. Contrast, for example, Illustrations 4, 6 and 7 with 8 and 9, Appendix 9.

with the arrival of spring, but it was increasingly the case that a core stayed on the sites throughout the summer months. The main sites, at Notting Hill, Wandsworth and Battersea, all retained a small nucleus.<sup>200</sup> With the return of winter the nucleus was added to:

"As soon as the cold weather sets in the members of the various gipsy tribes whose headquarters are London and its suburbs, may be seen with their brown babies and their houses on wheels, the gay green and yellow paint with which their panels are bedecked, dulled and blistered by the sun of a long summer, leisurely making their way to the winter settlements. These are not far. There are two or three at Camberwell, and one at a place called Pollard's Gardens, near the Waterloo Road. Peckham boasts of several; they may be found at Homerton in the back slums of Lambeth, and among the potteries between Notting Hill and Shepherd's Bush. Lock's Fields, Walworth, is a favourite spot with the fraternity ...".<sup>201</sup>

The return of the gypsies to these places was regular and expected, and the areas of waste ground were often reserved and kept vacant for their winter hiring. Other major sites, in the 1850s and 1860s, were at Kensal Green and Wimbledon Common, with around seventy gypsies encamped on the latter at Christmas, 1871.<sup>202</sup> Others left their tents and vans for lodgings in houses. In general, these were at Bull's Court, Kingsland Road, Coopers' Gardens, Tottenham Court Road, Banbridge Street, Bolton Street,

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200 C. Booth, op.cit., 3rd Ser., Vol.5 (1902), pp.197, 206; V. Morwood, op.cit., pp.339-40; H. Woodcock, op.cit., pp.144-7; Building Trade News (December 1894), p.11; C. Booth, MSS., B.298, pp.91-7; B.366, pp.183-5, 190.

201 J. Greenwood, Low-life Deeps (1881), p.213.

202 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.37; F. H. W. Sheppard, op.cit., p.333.

Church Street, Church Lane, Battle bridge, Tunbridge Street, Tothill Fields and White Street.<sup>203</sup> Occasionally a gypsy family would enter one of the houses in Deptford which was managed under the Octavia Hill scheme. They brought with them next to no furniture, and

"... the walls would remain as bare as they found them, while old and young sat upon upturned boxes about the small grate, as contentedly as if it were a camp fire".<sup>204</sup>

Clearly, then, just as the nature of the camp sites differed from place to place, over time, and between individuals, so too did the type of their abodes. At the beginning of the century the Norwood gypsies lived, if possible, in the barns and outhouses of local farmers. A more usual abode for most travellers at this time was the tent or covered cart. These tents took many shapes and sizes, varying from simple canvas or blanket tents, otherwise called 'kraals', to large, dome-shaped constructions. The 'kraals' on Mitcham Common in November 1879 were uncharitably, though correctly, described as "... some kind of stitched-together rags thrown over sticks".<sup>205</sup> A fuller description of a typical gypsy tent in the same region at the same time is given overleaf:

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203 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.137; J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.186; W. Howitt, op.cit., pp.175-6.

204 E. Chase, Tenant Friends in Deptford (1929), p.96.

205 Quoted in G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.117-9. See also Appendix 9, Illustrations 10-14 for representations of the interior and exterior of tents on Mitcham Common and at Hackney.

"The tents are oblong and simple, Rods are stuck in the ground, and bent over to form a sort of waggon-shaped roof, tied together by strings, and covered with coarse brown cloths pinned or skewered together, and pegged to the ground. A narrow trench is cut around to prevent rain-water from flowing into the tent ... Sitting cross-legged is the order of the day, there being neither chairs nor stools; and as tables are as scarce as chairs, the meals are spread on the ground, perhaps with a cloth for a little approach to tidiness. Pots, pans, platters, and trenchers are pretty abundant; knives and horn spoons are used, but seldom a fork. A kind of brazier forms the fireplace, with a crook and a kettle for cooking. A pail and a water-cask, a box or two for cloths, and blankets to serve as bedding and bed-clothes, nearly fill up the list of goods and chattels".<sup>206</sup>

The gypsies on Finchley Common about 1818 constructed more solid dwellings. Tent-shaped wattle huts were made from boughs of trees and shrubs, covered with turf, and erected over a shallow hole in the earth.<sup>207</sup> However, despite the ease with which they could be constructed and their undoubted resilience to the climate, these huts do not appear to have been a common feature.

It was not until around mid-century that gypsies took to living in vans, which again varied from the small, crowded and squalid vans to the larger and more fancifully decorated type normally associated with the Romany. Other outdoor abodes

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206 'Metropolitan Gipsyries', loc.cit., p.391. See also, Christian World, 19 December 1879, p.809.

207 E. O. Winstedt, 'The Norwood Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.132.

included various huts and wooden dwellings, and under the numerous railway arches.<sup>208</sup>

Finally, many gypsies also lived in houses, and not only during the winter. Often the abodes were small and dirty, with an external appearance marred by the presence of sewage and other refuse. John Hollingshead described one such dwelling in Fryingpan Alley, Clerkenwell:

"... a rampant court, Its entrance is two feet wide - a long narrow slit in the wall - half paved, with a gutter which constantly trickles with sewage. Its tenants are chiefly gypsies and the lowest class of vegetable vendors. It is worse than anything in Whitechapel or Bethnal Green. The rooms are dust-bins - everything but dwelling-places. The women are masculine in appearance; they stand with coarse, folded arms and knotted hair, and are ready to fight for their castle of filth... Children make faces at you; repulsive men smoke down upon you from the holes that serve for windows; old women howl at you from the gloomy cellars; and a spreading heap of wet, muddy vegetable refuse ... was regarded like part of old William Sanderson's freehold ..".<sup>209</sup>

Later on, Booth found two colonies of gypsies, costers, flower-sellers, doorstep-cleaners, and the like, living three families to a house in the meanest streets of Wandsworth and Putney.

Many of the houses in the area belonged to a gypsy capitalist

208 Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., pp.200-1; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1907', loc.cit., p.129. Under the arches of London Bridge D. Kirwan came across what he described as a "perfect gypsy encampment", though it is unclear from his text whether the shelterers there were vagrants or travellers. He later described a common lodging house in Westminster as "gypsy-looking", by which he meant that it was crowded, dirty and verminous, so it is perhaps in this adjectival sense that he was describing the inhabitants of the bridge arches (see D. Kirwan, Palace and Hovel, 1870; 1963, pp.64-5, 199).

209 J. Hollingshead, Ragged London in 1861 (1861), pp.29-30, 73-4.



called Penfold, who also owned properties in Battersea and Streatham, and yet despite the poverty of their surroundings the gypsies regarded their home as their castle.<sup>210</sup>

Most colonies, though, broke up with the onset of spring, and the months of April and May witnessed the beginning of the exodus of gypsies from their winter camps. Some travelled far into Norfolk and the Midlands, others contented themselves by working in the market gardens of the London suburbs until July, when they crossed to Woolwich for fruiting, and then on to Sussex and Kent for the harvesting and hopping seasons.<sup>211</sup> Seasonal employment of this kind was an essential ingredient of summer migration. The nearby fairs, seaside resorts and race meetings were also a major source of attraction, and Epsom, during Derby week, was overrun by gypsies who either told fortunes, traded horses or set up coconut establishments. At the fairs they were the proprietors of 'Puff and Darts', 'Spin 'em Rounds' and other games.<sup>212</sup> Sometimes they even created their own fairs and built their own primitive swings and roundabouts on plots of waste ground, with the motive power being

210 C. Booth, MSS, B.298, pp.93-7.

211 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.136-7; R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers', loc.cit., pp.132-3; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1892-1906', loc.cit., pp.367-8. Woolwich can be compared with the Notting Hill district in its function as a resting place for travellers on their journeyings to and from London in the South East (see C. Booth, op.cit., 3rd Ser., Vol.5, 1902, pp.90-1).

212 J. Thompson and A. Smith, Street Life in London (1877-8; Wakefield, 1973), pp.1-2.

provided by "... ragged boys running round and pushing bars radiating from the centre pole".<sup>213</sup>

The summer season was also a particularly profitable time of the year for the gypsy fortune-tellers. The parks of Richmond, Greenwich, Windsor, and the other resorts of summer visitants from the towns, were thus much frequented by colourful gypsy women with bright headscarves and droopy ear-rings. For the same reason many gypsies encamped about Blackheath, Woolwich-heath, Lordship Lane, near Deptford, and Plum Street, near Woolwich.<sup>214</sup> But perhaps the most popular of all for the fortune-tellers was the once famous summer resort of Beulah Spa Gardens, Norwood. Indeed, the reputation of the Norwood palmists was such that a small book entitled The Norwood Gypsy Fortune Teller was said to have been in great demand among young women of all classes.<sup>215</sup>

Apart from these primarily seasonal incursions into the self-employment cycle of the gypsies, the usual occupations of travellers were also practised. The following was said of the gypsies who camped for the summer in the woods about Anerley and Penge:

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213 A. R. Bennett, London and Londoners in the Eighteen Fifties and Sixties (1924), pp.49-50.

214 W. Howitt, op.cit., p.176.

215 T. Frost, op.cit., pp.4, 8.

"The men made clothes-pegs and butchers' wooden skewers, which were hawked through the neighbouring villages and hamlets by brown-faced boys and girls; or perambulated the vicinity with the treadle-wheel and fire-basket of the itinerant tinker and knife-grinder. Some who had acquired or inherited a little money, made the round of the country fairs as horse-dealers, not without incurring the suspicion that they sometimes sold horses which they had not bought or bred. The women practised palmistry ..."216

Hawking and tinkering thus remained as the mainstay of employments for gypsies. Yet their occupations were even more diverse than this picture allows. The list of gypsy lodgers in London at the beginning of the century, reproduced in Appendix 1, shows that many trades were followed, notably those of chair-bottoming, basket-making, rat-catching, wire-working, grinding, fiddling, selling fruit, fish, and earthenware, and mending bellows. Although three were found to be employed on a regular basis, as a canal worker, lamplighter and journeyman saddler, the majority still relied on their own ability to maintain an existence and were dependent on selling their wares or skills directly rather than being employed as hired wage-labourers. This variety of occupations and the dependence on self-employment was a feature retained throughout the century.

Thomas Herne, living in 'Gipsy Square', in the Notting Hill Potteries, had a sign board on his cabin advertising his trade as a brush and cane chair-bottomer in the 1860s. Although aged about ninety years he still walked the streets touting for business.<sup>217</sup> Similarly the Christian gypsies on Wanstead Flats

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216 T. Frost, op.cit., p.8

217 H. Woodcock, op.cit., p.144.

in the 1880s were employed primarily in chair-mending.<sup>218</sup>

These street menders were a common sight about London;

" 'Chairs to mend!' was a very familiar cry. Cane- and rush-bottomed seats were much more common than at present. Bent-wood furniture was not yet, and there was little intermediate between the light and convenient cane-thatched chair and the heavy and massive mahogany and horse-hair, or the solid wood. Poor people, men and women, often of gypsy descent, brought round bundles of canes and rushes, and, settling on your doorstep or in your front garden, deftly and cheaply repaired the ravages of time or wear and tear".<sup>219</sup>

The street mender did not have the regular wages of those who worked for the dealers; but their profits were generally much higher. He charged from 8d. to 1s. per chair, according to the quality of the cane, the size of the seat, and the wealth of the customer. The amount of the profit is indicated by the cost of the materials needed for the repair. The street mender usually bought his cane already split and dressed, and this cost, according to the quality, from 2s. 6d. to 4s. per pound weight. This covered from six to eight chairs.<sup>220</sup>

218 Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.2 (4 December 1880), p.444.

219 A. R. Bennett, op.cit., p.52.

220 J. Thompson and A. Smith, op.cit., pp.28-9. The authors also give a valuable insight into the reasons for the growth of this trade: "At High Wickam (sic., i.e. Wycombe), the centre of cheap chair manufacture, common beech chairs are made which are actually retailed in the East of London at less than £1 per dozen ... (But) the wood of these cheap chairs has not been properly dried; they crack, and shrink, part at the joints, and fall to pieces ... Having thus introduced into London a constant supply of cane-bottomed chairs, another industry, namely that of mending the chairs when the cane had worn out, sprung up simultaneously. This was probably first originated by the gypsies ...". (Ibid.).

The work was precarious, though, and the profits were rarely sufficient to maintain an existence, and it was usually the case that more than one trade and other work was also followed.

Another similar type of trade often adopted was that of umbrella-mending. The "mush fakers", as they were commonly known, called from house to house for umbrellas to mend. When they obtained one they sat in view of the other inhabitants of the street so as to attract further possible custom. Having repaired the umbrella the "mush faker" would inquire if the householder had any others that had passed beyond the repairing stage. If this proved to be the case he would slightly reduce his charge. A "tolerably stout and serviceable gingham" could be made from two or so broken and torn umbrellas.<sup>221</sup> If he was unable to obtain old umbrellas in this way he would buy a quantity of broken ones from Petticoat Lane.

It was likely, therefore, that the husband would be, at various times, a basket-maker, chair- and sieve-mender, tinker, horse-dealer, peg- and skewer-maker. At times he would stay at home manufacturing small items for sale, and at other he would leave the camp to go tinkering old kettles and saucepans, grinding knives and scissors or selling oranges.<sup>222</sup> The women

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221 J. Thompson and A. Smith, op.cit., pp.75-6.

222 H. Mayhew, op.cit., Vol.1, pp.87-9. It is interesting to note that some gypsies were said to be employed in the street selling of oranges, a trade generally regarded as the monopoly of the Irishmen of London. Large quantities of the fruit were sold at fairs and race meetings.

usually left the camp to go out hawking. In South London they were said to hawk indiscriminately to the rich and poor alike living in the neighbourhood.<sup>223</sup> The major change that took place during the century was that the items hawked were no longer primarily of their own manufacture. Even so clothes-peggs were still being made by the gypsies well into the twentieth century. The process was so simple that the operations were sometimes performed by the children:

"The sticks are chopped into the necessary lengths and put into a pan of hot water. This I suppose swells the wood and loosens the bark. A child on the other side takes out the sticks as they are done and bites off the bark with its (sic.) teeth. Then there is a boy who puts tin round them, and so the work goes on".<sup>224</sup>

In 1907 these were sold at a shilling a dozen.<sup>225</sup> The other major home trade was that of "chinning the cost<sup>h</sup>", that is, the making of butchers' skewers.<sup>226</sup> These were sold directly to the butchers at 10d. or 1s. a stone.<sup>227</sup>

However, these were dying trades, and by the end of the century the items which the women hawked were of a greater variety and were generally bought from a wholesaler rather than being manufactured by the family. These wares included small wool mats, vases, cheap ornaments, brooms, brushes, clothes

223 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.190-1.

224 Quoted in G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.117-9.

225 H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1907', loc.cit., p.129.

226 'Metropolitan Gipsyries', loc.cit., pp.390-3.

227 Weekly Times, 8 February 1880, p.2.

props and pegs, fern roots, cottons, laces, hairpins and other odds and ends. A supplier of these wares gave his impression of these people to John Thompson:

"... some travelling hawkers make heaps of money, but they never look much above the gutter. I once knew one, Old Mo, they called him; I used to serve him with his wares, brushes, baskets, mats and tin things; for these are the sort of goods I send all over the country to that class of people. Cash first, you know, with them. I would not trust the best of them, not even Mo, though he used to carry £9000 about with him tied up in a sack in his van. He is now settled at Hastings; he has bought property ...".<sup>228</sup>

This informant believed that most of these hawkers made considerable sums of money as their trade expenses were only nominal and their profits usually large. He offered 'proof' of this by citing the example of a man who owned houses yet lived in his van and pursued his itinerant trade in the suburbs. However, for most the likelihood of property-owning was remote, for, in his opinion, the money earnt was too often squandered on drink and gambling.

It should now be apparent that all adults, young and old, male and female, played crucial roles in the domestic economy. This was no less the case with the children, and their contributions should not be underestimated. While the young girls travelled round with their mothers, the boys either assisted their fathers in the manufacture of various items at home, or else went out hawking on their own. The grown-up lads of Lamb Lane used to buy flowers in Covent Garden and then went

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<sup>228</sup> Quoted in J. Thompson and A. Smith, op.cit., p.3.

round the suburbs hawking them to house-dwellers, particularly on Saturdays. They arrived at Covent Garden at 4 a.m., spent four to six shillings on the flowers, and then sold them the same day, bringing in a profit of around three shillings.<sup>229</sup>

Types of occupations were used by some writers in an attempt to confirm distinctions between travellers based on race. From such foundations differences were found in the types of occupations pursued, physical characteristics, the extent of cleanliness of persons and dwellings and variations in cultural factors. The gypsies were at the top of the scale, representing cleanliness, honesty and respectability in the fashion of the 'true' Romany. This group then identified other groups below them, and in descending order of filth and degradation these were the 'chorodies', 'kora-mengre', and 'Hindity-mengre'. The dark gypsies lived in clean and tidy tents and vans, spoke the Romany language, and followed honest and respectable trades in woodworking and various traditional, rural crafts. The "chorodies", a term meaning low, mean and contemptible, were said to have coarse, vulgar but fair (Saxon) complexions. Their racial descent was from English rogues and outcasts, and in the main they spoke English, though with some cant expressions and bastard Romany intruding into conversations at times. They lived in the "vilest" tents and broken and filthy caravans, with the men chiefly engaged in tinkering, basket-making and stealing, while the women hawked and told fortunes. Although they were described as "ferocious,

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229 Weekly Times, 8 February 1880, p.2.



depraved and repulsive", they stood above the "kora-mengre", or "fellows who cry out". In every respect this group was one further step removed in the direction of filth and depravity than the "chorodies", even though said to be derived from the same origins. Their distinguishing feature was their occupation as itinerant sellers, who travelled around with a van loaded with an array of rush-chairs, mats, rugs, mops, brooms, brushes, pots, pans and other household utensils. At the bottom of the scale came the "hindity-mengre", or "filthy people". These were of vagrant Irish descent, and were tinkers by trade, though they were also experts at making, out of old brass buttons, the showy rings passed off by their womenfolk as gold.<sup>230</sup>

This interpretation attempted to isolate distinct racial categories and then argue backwards that from this could be identified differences in regard to employment, features, wealth, abodes, and by extension to such other variables as the extent of travelling and the affixing of various stereotypes. While it should not be denied that the travellers would have indeed shown variations in the categories mentioned it would be wrong and misleading to suggest that these stemmed from any racial foundation. If the Romany gypsy existed and could be identified, both highly dubious assertions which are challenged in Chapter 3,

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230 From a description of Wandsworth gypsies given in 1864 by an anonymous author, quoted in C. J. Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy (1887), pp.503-5. See also 'Metropolitan Gipsyries', loc.cit., pp.390-3.

it would not necessarily follow, as has been suggested, that he would be dark, clean, able to speak the Romany language, and pursuing woodwork or rural trades. Moreover, while accepting that important differences did exist between travellers, they were also bound by certain unifying elements, and were seen by others to be so bound. They were united by a common lifestyle that revolved around nomadism and self-employment, and by a shared day-to-day existence and the experience of marginality vis-à-vis settled society.

## CHAPTER 2

ITINERANT EMPLOYMENTS:  
FROM FORTUNE-TELLING TO FIDDLING

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The illustration depicts in grand fashion the aged, haggard gypsy reading the palm of the young, innocent, country girl in charming rural surroundings (from J. M. Weylland, Round the Tower, 1875, facing p.224).

It is no surprise that the conditions under which the travellers lived varied from camp to camp and family to family:

"Society on wheels, like every other sphere, has its patricians, and plebeians, its upright and religious, its idle and undeserving".<sup>1</sup>

Yet, for the most part, the nature of their existence remained similar, especially in relation to the types and range of occupations which they pursued. It was this factor that gave the travellers a measure of unity. Some writers considered this a negative feature, for travellers did not do 'real' work, but rather occupied themselves with as little toil as was compatible with survival. They were thought to be idle, parasitical and beggarly, with no belief in the value of work.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, such a view was, and is, based on perceptions of the relationship between a settled, or host, society and a marginal social group, or travellers, who were thought to be parasites. But the relations between host and parasite are not entirely one-sided, and can even take on necessary and mutually beneficial aspects to such an extent that the emotive and value-laden descriptions of host and parasite demand a more considered appraisal.

Although the gypsies did not depend on selling their labour for

1 D. L. Woolmer, 'Gypsies in their Winter Quarters', The Quiver (1903), p.530.

2 Even E. J. Hobsbawm pointed to the gypsies for illustration of the anti-work and anti-social aspects of pre-industrial society ('Work and Leisure in Industrial Society', Past and Present, No.30, 1965, p.100). See also J. Crabb, The Gypsies' Advocate (1832), p.38; A. Symons, 'In Praise of Gypsies', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (hereafter, J.G.L.S.), New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.298.

a wage, like the majority of the sedentary population and also many travellers, they did rely on the settled members of society to purchase the variety of goods and services which they presented for sale. For this reason the goods they offered, and the areas they travelled, were very closely linked to the developments and changes taking place in the wider society. The general move from the country to the town was a feature of both the sedentary and the travelling populations. The gypsies had to move with their market. This tendency was most apparent towards the end of the century, yet it had always been of seasonal occurrence. Summer travelling in rural districts was replaced during the winter months by the need to reside in or near to the centres of a large and concentrated population.

On the one side, then, was dependence, but what of the other? Summarily, the family-based economic unit, a distinguishing feature of these travellers, undertook employments which the sedentary work force were unable or unwilling to adopt. They filled the gap created by uneven market forces, in time and place, by providing for the occasional needs of a population not served by a regular or permanent supply of cheap, non-durable goods, services and temporary, seasonal labour. This was equally true for the early decades of the century, when the gypsies toured the largely inaccessible rural areas offering their goods and services, as it was towards the end, when they became adapted to the changed industrial environment by taking up new crafts, altering the old ones, and offering a wider variety of goods for sale in the more densely populated areas.

For purposes of analysis, Barbara Adams placed the spectrum of gypsy employments under four headings.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, there was the sale of goods not made by the travellers. These ranged from horses, fruit and vegetables, pots and pans to needles, pins and jewellery. The next group included the various services which the gypsies provided, such as tinkering, knife- and scissor-grinding, smithing, repairing umbrellas, bottoming chairs and entertaining. The third heading incorporated the seasonal labour undertaken by the gypsies. Agricultural work and fruit- and hop-picking were examples of these. Finally, there were those goods and services which were largely the monopoly of the gypsies, including peg- and basket-making, beehive-making, fortune-telling and the like. That is, goods or services manufactured or created by the travellers themselves.

Such a classification provides a convenient model by which to assess the various occupations whilst perhaps also suffering from a too rigid distinction between the groups. It was not always apparent how to categorise an employment. For example, fairground entertaining could have been described as a seasonal employment, as it was dependent primarily on the summer season. Similarly, some of the pegs and baskets were made by the gypsies while some were bought from a wholesaler; and, finally, the link between hawking and fortune-telling was so close that the offer of goods and the offer of this particular service went firmly hand-in-hand. A further distinction that can be added to this model was that the work was also subject to some degree of a sexual division of labour. Whereas the men were engaged at various times in

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3 See B. Adams, et al., Gypsies and Government Policy in England (1975), p.114ff.

occupations that fell under each of these headings, it was not usual for females to be employed in the service trades, except entertaining, or the craft trades, excepting the making of artificial flowers and perhaps some basket work. While the men remained in the camp making the items, the women went around hawking these domestically-manufactured and other wares, combining selling with fortune-telling.<sup>4</sup> Although the women rarely stayed at home during the day to assist in the manufacture of goods or the repair of articles, they would have contributed to these ends in the evenings. Clearly, the fundamental importance of women in the travellers' economy should not be underrated.

#### Peddling Goods and Fortunes

The sale of goods was the thread that ran through the whole of the gypsy employment spectrum. The only time when hawking was not carried on full-time was during the summer season of agricultural work, and even then it would have been practised in between moving from job to job. On the whole, hawking was undertaken by the women and young girls of the family unit, though this was not exclusively the case. This meant that the family was highly dependent on the ability of the women to sell their miscellaneous stock of useful and fancy items, including baskets, wooden spoons, pegs, nets, skewers, sieves, nail and tooth brushes, combs, pins, needles, chains, laces, buttons, knitted gloves and pottery.<sup>5</sup> An old gypsy recognised the important role played by the female in providing for the family when he told a City missionary in 1859,

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4 See Appendix 9, illustration 15.

5 V. S. Morwood, Our Gipsies in City, Tent and Van (1885), pp.131-2.

"I should not like my daughter to marry a gypsy man, but I know if my sons marry gypsy women, there is sure to be a living for them, for they will scrat (sic.) a bread from somewhere, though it would puzzle a lawyer to tell how they got it at times".<sup>6</sup>

Flora Thompson provided a clue:

"When a door was opened to them, if the housewife appeared to be under forty, they would ask in a wheedling voice, 'Is your mother at home, my dear?'. Then, when the position was explained, they would exclaim in astonished tones, 'You don't mean to tell me you be / original emphasis / the mother? Look at that, now, I shouldn't have taken you to be a day over twenty'.

No matter how often repeated, this compliment was swallowed whole, and made a favourable opening for a long conversation, in the course of which the wily 'Egyptian' not only learned the full history of the woman's own family, but also a good deal about those of her neighbours, which was duly noted for future use. Then would come a request for a 'handful of little 'taters, or an onion or two for the pot', and, if these were given, as they usually were, 'My pretty lady' would be asked for an old shift of her own or an old shirt of her husband's, or anything that the children might have left off, and, poverty-stricken though the hamlet was, a few worn-out garments would be secured to swell the size of the bundle which, afterwards, would be sold to the rag merchant.

Sometimes the gipsies would offer to tell fortunes ...

... The gipsies paid in entertainment for what they received. Their calls made a welcome break in the day".<sup>7</sup>

Many writers condemned this as thinly disguised begging, and claimed that people preferred to give the gypsies goods or money

6 Annual Report of a London City Missionary, 1859, in London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), p.31.

7 F. Thompson, Lark Rise to Candleford (1968), pp.122-3.



simply to get them to move on.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, though, such pressure-salesmanship was a necessary and inevitable part of door-to-door selling.

The items offered for sale changed with the seasons, depending on the availability of raw materials for the manufacture of craft goods and the vagaries of seasonal demand for different wares. For example, artificial flowers were made and sold throughout the winter and real flowers when in season. In the winter of 1898, about Christmas time, an old gypsy man was seen close to Primrose Hill, London, selling bits of holly, mistletoe and a few herbs from a basket he carried over his arm.<sup>9</sup> They also sold cart grease, which they claimed was pure fat, but which was in reality made up principally of potatoes, yellow turnips and grease, and in London they formed a part of the street army of sellers of fruit, vegetables and flowers.<sup>10</sup> In Uxbridge, the Hearne family earned a living by conveying gravel, wood and coal for the gentry and others in the neighbourhood.<sup>11</sup> In fact, they sold anything that did not involve a large capital outlay, that was transportable easily, and which people were prepared to buy. Hence they could

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8 M. K. Ashby, Joseph Ashby of Tysoe, 1859-1919 (1974), pp.201-2; W. H. Davies, The Autobiography of a Super-tramp (1908; 1955), p.154; G. Smith, Gipsy Life; being an account of our Gipsies and their children, with suggestions for their improvement (1880), p.249.

9 R. E. Chatfield, 'The English Gipsies', Theosophical Review (April 1899), p.108.

10 G. Smith, I've been a Gipsying (1885), p.108.

11 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.131-2.

also be seen selling oranges, birds of prey and large wicker chairs.<sup>12</sup>  
 In general, the items offered were either domestically-manufactured  
 or else, especially later in the century, were bought from the  
 wholesale warehouses of the large cities.<sup>13</sup> Although they could  
 buy a gross of laces, for example, at eighteen pence and could  
 sell them for around eight or nine shillings, the profit margin  
 can appear high while in absolute terms the amount of cash involved  
 was still very small.<sup>14</sup>

The place and importance of these hawkers, pedlars and street-  
 sellers in the rural and urban economic environment should not be  
 underestimated. They filled a gap created by an irregular demand  
 and supply situation, whether caused by temporal or financial  
 factors. Consider, by way of illustration, Alexander Somerville's  
 account of the gypsies' role in the Border regions:

"We lived inconveniently distant from shops and towns;  
 and they supplied us with many things, such as spoons,  
 crockery, tin-ware, and sieves, and repaired so many  
 things at prices exceedingly moderate, that my  
 impression of their usefulness was, that we should  
 have had to do without some articles of use, or pay  
 very dear for them elsewhere, if the tinklers had  
 not come round periodically to supply us".<sup>15</sup>

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- 12 See, for example, A. Somerville, The Autobiography of a Working Man (1848), p.57; S. L. Bensusan, 'How the Other Half Lives', English Illustrated Magazine (1897), p.645.
- 13 Rev. A. McMillan, Gipsy Hawkins, shoebblack-cobbler-'boy preacher'-evangelist and soul winner (1946), p.12.
- 14 W. H. Davies, op.cit., p.221.
- 15 A. Somerville, op. cit., p.55. In the Border regions the terms 'tinker', 'tinkler', 'tinkler-gypsy' and 'gypsy' were synonymous.

Later in the century a speaker in the House of Commons claimed that the "tyrannical monopoly" of the single village shop was held in check by the competition provided by the itinerant hawkers.<sup>16</sup> In the towns, the provision of cheap goods was centred chiefly in the poorer districts, and the itinerant hawker was distinguished from the stationary tradesman by the character and means of his customer:

"... the pedlar or hawker is the purveyor in general to the poor ... the class of travelling tradesmen are important, not only as forming a large portion of the poor themselves, but as being the persons through whom the working people obtain a considerable part of their provisions and raimant ...".<sup>17</sup>

Even so, the wealthier classes were not free of the gypsy hawker. It was at the houses of the rich that the gypsy was able to resort to telling the fortunes of the servant girls if they could not be persuaded to buy items from the baskets. It was said that the servant maids of London willingly paid their sixpences and shillings to the gypsy women in order to hear about their matrimonial prospects before the household had risen for the morning.<sup>18</sup> This was claimed to be the usual gypsy practice, though the truth of this and its extent has to remain a mystery.

The balance between fact and myth is impossible to resolve, though it should be pointed out that the belief that the gypsy

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16 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons (31 July 1889), col. 1840.

17 H. Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, Vol.1 (1861; New York, 1968), p.9.

18 Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No. 139 (1847), p.11.

women possessed magical powers which enabled them to see into the future was common among the superstitious of all classes of society. This belief was enhanced further if the gypsy women dressed for the part by wearing colourful headscarves and droopy earrings, and were old, ugly, and with the appearance of a "... wild-eyed hag".<sup>19</sup> To be told your fortune by a ragged hawker would by no means have sounded so convincing. The game had to be played with equal conviction by both parties. Superstitious beliefs among the general population were thus a product of the gypsies' marginality to conventional society, which could be exploited by recourse to the mystery and myths surrounding their present existence, and the romantic image of their origins and past lives. Such explanations could even be applied to the present-day. Indeed the fortune-telling practices of the nineteenth-century gypsies are still carried on by the numerous 'Gypsy Lee's' at fairs and holiday resorts. Perhaps a better contemporary analogy concerning this irrational belief in the power of predictions is provided by the profusion of horoscopes in the newspapers and journals and the irresistible impulse and enthusiasm with which they are read.

Just as the media now exploit this particular susceptibility, so did the gypsies in times past. Whether the gypsies themselves believed in their ability to foretell events is immaterial. Some claimed to, though perhaps out of desire to perpetuate the image and convince the interviewer, though others recognised that it was a supreme opportunity to obtain financial reward by pandering to the weaknesses of the superstitious. Naturally, only good was

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19 Ibid.

foretold their clients, with the customary promises of tall, dark strangers, wealth and travel.

The hey-day of gypsy fortune-telling was in the 1820s and 1830s, when superstitions among country folk were widespread. Their importance was illustrated by George Sturt when he told of William Smith's attitude to this practice:

"He hated fortune-telling, which may have struck him as sinful. Yet a man so much in harmony with his neighbours could not but share their countrified beliefs ... Rumours, prognostics, forecasts, had their effect on him, it may be supposed, even as on others".<sup>20</sup>

There were lucky and unlucky days, persons, places, actions and dreams. Fortune-telling was, therefore, just one aspect of the plethora of beliefs and superstitions of an illiterate and uneducated population. The spread of knowledge and science through the availability of cheaper books and the abolition of the paper and stamp taxes, together with more efficient and fixed street and home lighting, helped to weaken the hold of superstitious beliefs and fears of ghosts, 'boggards', and 'padfoots'.<sup>21</sup> Yet the fortune-teller still remained a much sought-after diversion at fairs and other resorts, whether for amusing, comforting or encouraging reasons. The promise of better things to come in the material world, in the form of a tall stranger or pots of gold, was the secular reply to the religious promise of an improved unworldly state.

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20 G. Sturt, William Smith, Potter and Farmer, 1790-1858 (1919; Firle, 1978), p.199.

21 J. Lawson, Progress in Pudsey (1887; Firle, 1978), p.71. For a further account of the hold of superstitions over country people see Home Missionary Magazine (February 1844), p.34.

Although fortunes were told throughout the year as an adjunct to hawking, it was a trade also subject to some seasonal variation. Come the summer, with its fairs, race meetings, and the parks, gardens and holiday resorts filled with holiday-makers, the gypsies were in the middle of a gold field. Their presence in the Beulah Spa Gardens has been noted already. Also, several notorious fortune-tellers had long frequented the Rosherville and Springhead Gardens in the neighbourhood of Gravesend, Kent, and one, Avis Lee, had been there for twenty-six years. At first she paid no rent and took five or six shillings a day, but by the middle of the 1860s she considered herself fortunate to take that in a week, for though she may have taken up to £4 in that time she now had to pay £30 for the season's rent.<sup>22</sup>

Although fortune-telling was declared illegal in 1864 the attitude of the magistrates remained ambiguous.<sup>23</sup> While some took this opportunity for stepping up the persecution of the gypsies, as witnessed by the number of times prosecutions of gypsy fortune-tellers appeared in local newspapers, there were others who did not. Mr. Harrison, a magistrate at Ashton-under-Lyne, dismissed all fortune-telling cases with the remark that "... it served silly people right if they lost their money ...".<sup>24</sup>

The occupation most commonly associated with the gypsies was

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22 E. J. Brabazon, A Month at Gravesend (1863), p.90;  
H. Woodcock, The Gypsies (1865), p.53.

23 J. Sandford, Gypsies (1975), p.44.

24 Quoted in F. H. Groome, In Gipsy Tents (Edinburgh, 1880;  
Wakefield, 1973), p.380.

that of horse-dealing. This was carried on both casually and sporadically at fairs, when the opportunity arose, and also on a more permanent basis. The many fairs throughout the country were the locations of much commerce in the horse-dealing trade, and among the best known of these were Turton Fair, near Bolton, and Boughton Green Fair.<sup>25</sup> For some outsiders this trade was deserving of criticism, suspicion and mistrust, and the gypsies were accused frequently of either having stolen the animals or of sprucing up old and worn horses and then selling them at a high cost, only to buy them back cheaply when the new purchaser had discovered the horse was not as agile and able as he had believed. At Cobham Fair, for example, "five-pound screws" were allegedly transformed into elegant horses by clipping, singeing and beautifying.<sup>26</sup> It may not have been until the rain had washed the dye from the horses' skin that the purchaser discovered his mistake, cursing either his own poor judgement about both animals and people or the gypsies themselves.

George Smith of Coalville made the most of this alleged practice as further evidence of gypsy deceit and cunning. He reported a conversation overheard at Boughton Green Fair:

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25 H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1907', J.G.L.S., Vol.2, No.2 (1908), p.125.

26 C. G. Leland, The Gypsies (1882), pp.136-7. Leland associated this practice less with the 'true' gypsies and more with the didakais or half-bloods. See also A. Esquiros, The English at Home, translated by L. Wraxall (1861), p.192.

"... I heard some gipsies chuckling over the 'gingered' and 'screwed' horses and ponies they had sold during the fair, and arranging which of their party should hunt the customer out the next day, to buy back for a five-pound note their palmed-off 'broken-winded' and 'roaring old screws' which they had sold for seventeen pound or twenty pound during the fair ... Many of the horse-dealing gypsies are dressed nowadays as farmers, and by these means they more readily palm off their 'screws' ...".<sup>27</sup>

One can express only surprise that Smith found himself in the right position at the right time to hear such a concise and condemnatory exposition of such a deceitful practice. That the gypsies sometimes bought back a pony they had recently sold is evidenced in the following extract from a notebook kept by Sylvester Boswell, but the practice was sound business acumen rather than deliberate fraud:

	£. s.
"Bought of (f) g (G) arned a poney ( <u>sic.</u> ) Cost	7.10.
and sold to Mr. Smith of Felexsolm for	9. 0.
sold the black mare that Cost to Ealey for	3.15. 5.10.
bought the same poney again at and sold again to Mr. Simons at Barnett Fare ( <u>sic.</u> ) for	5.10. 9. 0." <sup>28</sup>

Moreover, for some it was a regular business which depended on a joint reputation of expert knowledge and of trustworthy traders who had the confidence of the farmers and other buyers, and for whom fraud would have spelt disaster.<sup>29</sup> Such faith was essential to,

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27 G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.117-8.

28 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1892), p.245.

29 A. Melton, 'The True-Born Gipsy Folk: Will the ancient Romany people disappear?', Sunday Chronicle (11 August 1907), p.2.



for example, John Chilcott and Ambrose Smith who worked together in the trade and rented stables at North Woolwich, East Ham and Barking, and to a family of Boss's who owned livery stables in a suburb of Nottingham.<sup>30</sup> It seems probable that accusations of cheating, though perhaps based in some degree of truth, were chiefly yet another product of the desire to paint the gypsies in the blackest possible colours. To have admitted that their horse-dealing was honest, profitable and useful to both the seller and the purchaser would have been to chip away at the myth of the parasite that generally engulfed these travellers.

#### The Sale of Services

Apart from the sale of goods the gypsies secured an income by offering their services for sale in a variety of trades. The trades of chair-bottoming and umbrella-mending were noted earlier, and appear to have been especially popular with the travellers living in or near cities. To these can be added tinkering, knife- and scissor-grinding, rat-catching, repairing tin-ware, copper kettles and agricultural implements and entertaining. Some even became famous for their particular skills, for example, the Lockes and Smiths of Oxfordshire were considered to be extremely able iron-workers.<sup>31</sup>

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30 Rev. G. Hall, The Gypsy's Parson (1915), pp.152-3; T. W. Thompson, 'The Social Polity of the English Gypsies', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1923), p.123.

31 From an interview with Mrs. Cooper, in the Rev. T. W. Norwood's notebook, 1860, quoted in Lady A. Grosvenor, 'A Pilgrim's Progress', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), p.214.

To obtain work involved much walking, and even then the profits were not high. Chairs were bottomed at prices ranging from one shilling and upwards, and the charge for grinding and setting a pair of scissors varied from twopence to 2s. 6d., depending on circumstances and ownership.<sup>32</sup> Only rarely could sufficient money be made to insure against illness and old age, and contemporary sources often pointed to men in their eighties and nineties who continued to tramp the streets shouting, 'Chairs to mend, chairs to mend!'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, a gypsy tinker of Clerkenwell parish was said to have tramped the streets until his death in January 1843, aged ninety years, although he was reputed to have left a store of one thousand guineas hoarded in an old flower pot.<sup>34</sup> Generally, though, conditions of existence were hard, and the image provided by R. Vanderkiste of a knife-grinder trudging through the muddy streets, wearing only rags and remnants of shoes, was perhaps a truer characterisation of their financial status.<sup>35</sup> Their social standing was no better, allegedly being the most thoroughly detested of all the itinerant traders because of their drunkenness and quarrelsome nature.<sup>36</sup>

32 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.248; I've been ..., p.209.

33 See, for example, 'Meeting of Gipsies; another of Mrs. Bayly's Thoughtful Plans', The Weekly Record of the National Temperance League, No.253 (2 February 1861), p.40.

34 This unlikely wealth was suggested in a newspaper report in the Derby Mercury, 11 January 1843, p.1.

35 R. M. Vanderkiste, Notes and Narratives of a Six Years' Mission (1851), p.130. See also Appendix 9, illustrations 16-17.

36 W. H. Davies, op.cit., p.176.

The service trade most frequently mentioned in association with the gypsies was that of tinkering. Many travellers described themselves as tinkers and stressed the long tradition of this occupation among past generations of their families.<sup>37</sup>

Flora Thompson again provided a charming picture of the rural tinker:

"Travelling tinkers with their barrows, braziers, and twirling grindstones turned aside from the main road and came singing:

Any razors or scissors to grind?  
Or anything else in the tinkers' line?  
Any old pots or kettles to mend?

After squinting into any leaking vessel against the light, or trying the edges of razors or scissors upon the hard skin of their palms, they would squat by the side of the road to work, or start their emery wheel whizzing, to the delight of the hamlet children, who always formed a ring around any such operations".<sup>38</sup>

'Lazy' Smith's experiences of village children was not so pleasing:

"As soon as the children saw me they ran in and told their mothers that the tinker's boy that had mended the kettles was coming down the road. My word, they pelted me with kettles and stones, and I don't know what. I never had such a to-do in my life".<sup>39</sup>

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37 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.215; T. W. Thompson, 'Borrow's Gypsies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), p.166; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox and the Derbyshire Boswells', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1924), p.178. For an etymological discussion of the words 'tinker' and 'tinkler', and their relationship with certain stereotypes see T. Acton, 'The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics in Gypsy-Gaujo Relations in England and Wales from Victorian Reformism to Romani Nationalism', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1973). Note also that in the North Country tinkers, ballad-singers and itinerant beggars were also called 'randies' or 'randy-beggars' (see F. W. Hackwood, The Good Old Times, 1910, p.228; D. MacRitchie, Scottish Gypsies under the Stewarts, Edinburgh, 1894, p.12).

38 F. Thompson, op.cit., p.122.

39 J. Myers, 'Lazy Smith in Egglestone's Note-book', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.16, No.4 (1937), p.186.

This response can be explained by the fact that some weeks previously Smith, and his uncle, had toured the villages in search of tinkering jobs with only a broken file and an old soldering-iron for tools. The kettles and pots were repaired in makeshift fashion by bluestoning the holes first and then adding soap to make them watertight.<sup>40</sup> Again, then, this contrast of experiences makes apparent the difficulty in generalising about a group pursuing ostensibly similar ways of life and employments, yet such a surface uniformity hiding a considerable variety of individuals and responses.

In the early part of the nineteenth century village feasts, fairs, wakes and weddings formed a central feature of rural social life, and a key element of each of them was the presence of gypsy entertainers:

"At every village feast and fair  
The Gipsies' music would be there ...".<sup>41</sup>

And not just their music. They were also in attendance as bear-leaders, acrobats, dancers, harpers and even carol-singers, alongside their more customary activities of selling lucky charms, horses, baskets, clothes-pegs, skewers, corks and fortunes.<sup>42</sup>

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40 J. Myers, 'Lazy Smith ...', loc.cit. Bluestoning was the process whereby the kettles were rubbed round the holes with wet copper sulphate. The copper was deposited on the iron and so simulated the process of brazing.

41 D. Townsend, The Gipsies of Northamptonshire: their manners of life ... fifty years ago (Kettering, 1877), p.11. This is an interesting account of the gypsies in verse. See also R. A. Scott Macfie, 'Gypsy Lore', University Review, Vol.7 (1908), p.105.

42 B. Skot (pseud. of R. A. Scott Macfie), A Brief Account of Gypsy History (Liverpool, 1909), p.55; Bedfordshire Times and Independent, 30 August 1907, p.9.

Moreover, they entertained not only at fairs and the like but at private parties, in ale-houses, in order to play dance music for the "... young people of the working class ...", or from door to door.<sup>43</sup> The usual payment was ale, plum pudding and perhaps a little money.

Yet, such leisure forms were not without their critics. James Crabb grieved over the mixing of gypsy musicians with the most degraded outcasts of society in the various pubs and drinking parlours. Moreover, with their violins and tambourines they excited the "unholy dance", otherwise known as the two-penny hop. Crabb believed that the children of these entertainers were introduced to these houses of immorality, vice and drunkenness the moment they were able to perform on any instrument.<sup>44</sup> At these places:

"... their musical talents are called into requisition to lead on the giddy dance and bold song, and to entertain at raffles and suppers. On such occasions their pay is generally 2s. a night, with as much beer and spirits as they like to drink, which sometimes reaches an astonishing quantity. A man, who says he drinks moderately, told me that when playing at a raffle he drank a pint of rum, besides a great quantity of beer, and at another time the same man said he drank twenty-two half quarters of rum in about one hour and a half. It is very often the case that they get drunk on such occasions, return home with black eyes and scarred faces, and sometimes to beat their wives ...".<sup>45</sup>

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43 D. Townsend, op.cit., p.iv.

44 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.37. Interestingly, Crabb had said earlier (pp.33-4) that gypsy parents were extremely anxious to preserve the purity of morals of their children, thus contradicting this assertion that they were introduced to the vices of dancing and drink at the earliest possible age.

45 Annual Report of a London City Missionary, 1859, loc.cit., p.31.

The reformers of the temperance movement could hardly have wished for a more damning indictment.

Although this form of entertainment declined with the gradual demise of such traditional and rural leisure patterns, gypsies were still being engaged as fiddlers at village feasts, wakes and rustic weddings well into the 1880s.<sup>46</sup> Also, it was claimed that even in the twentieth century the gypsy fiddler was able to drive a thriving trade. For example, Tommy Boswell earned a living by playing his music in the villages on the Berkshire Downs, and some of the Welsh gypsies also relied on their violins for a livelihood.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the local, regional and in one instance national, repute of one or a group of entertainers was a feature throughout the period.

At the beginning of the century James Allan was a famous piper around Northumberland, and perhaps partly due to this association the bagpipes were recognised as a gypsy instrument in the Scottish Lowlands, on the Border and in the North of England.<sup>48</sup> Sammy Draper was well known around the inns of Hertfordshire in the 1860s and 1870s where he fiddled for coppers collected by his daughter, and the families of Gray and Shaw were famous for their tours of East Anglia with their dancing booths and for providing the fiddler at village merry-makings. Another such booth was taken around

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46 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.119.

47 E. O. Winstedt and T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsy Dances', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.6, No.1 (1912), p.20.

48 E. R. Pennell, 'A Gypsy Piper', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.2, No.5 (1891), pp.266-77.

Oxfordshire and neighbouring counties by another family of Shaws.<sup>49</sup>  
 But probably the most noted of all the gypsy entertainers was a band calling themselves the 'Epping Forest Gypsies'.

This group began touring the country, giving balls and opening their camp to visitors, sometime in the early 1860s. They began to break up in 1874 and fell to pieces altogether in 1878, with the various members dispersing to Ireland, America, Norfolk, Blackpool, Birkenhead and Liverpool. George 'Lazy' Smith claimed to have originated the idea of charging admission to see inside their tents, and so presumably to attend the dances as well. He had noticed the interest caused by their presence everywhere to the extent that onlookers would not keep out of their tents even at meal-times, and so he decided to profit from this curiosity.<sup>50</sup> This judgement was not misplaced; when in the Midlands in 1864 the curiosity in the gypsies was such that

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49 E. Grey, Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village (St. Albans, 1935), pp.207-8; T. W. Thompson, 'Borrow's Gypsies', loc.cit., p.167; Notes and Queries, 4th Ser., Vol.3 (15 May 1869), p.461. Another Draper, named Frederick, was well known for his fiddling at inns, wedding feasts and harvest suppers about Hitchin. However, the Hitchin Quakers considered his music "... almost as dangerous as gun-powder", and which threatened to disrupt the quiet disposition of the town. Pressure was brought to bear on farmers and landowners to prevent him from encamping on their lands, and he was continually moved on. His response to this was to fiddle "diabolically and excruciatingly" in front of his persecutors' houses. He then disappeared from the region, and was to die, aged 104 years, after a period in Reading Workhouse (R. L. Hine, 'Gypsy Draper, 1797-1902', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.11, Nos. 3-4, 1932, pp.120-4).

50 G. Smith, Incidents in a Gipsy's Life (Liverpool, 1886), pp.6-7.

"... The American War, Dano-German embroilment, Derbyshire murder, the last Tory election triumph, all became uninteresting; the only thing worth anybody's doing were to smoke cigars with male, and to drink tea with female gipsies".<sup>51</sup>

This interest, though, was not without criticism and suspicion. Their tents were said to be "wretched-looking" and "utterly bare of comforts", and the presence of a light-skinned child in the camp prompted newspaper reporters to revive mythical images of moonlight, magical incantations and unholy rites.<sup>52</sup> Despite these rumours the balls held by the gypsies remained crowded for weeks.

In 1866 they were camped on the moor at Newcastle, on their way to Edinburgh, where they spent some time in the summer and winter of 1867 and the spring of 1868. From there they went down through Manchester and on to Kidderminster by the summer of 1869. By this time the local press had altered their approach, and now praised this clean and tidy group of travellers who presented a startling contrast with the gypsies and their camps usually found in the Midland counties. The tents had become roomy and clean, and amply decorated with fabrics and furnishings which gave an Eastern air. The gypsies themselves were no longer separate and disdainful, but were well-dressed, communicative and easy-going, apparently content to continue unassumedly with their trades as horse-dealers and fortune-tellers. On the Saturday evening after their arrival in Kidderminster a gala was held in the camp, and a

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51 W.C., 'Transformation of the Gipsies', Once a Week (22 October 1864), p.498.

52 Ibid., p.501.



circle was fenced off for dancing. The evening was such a success that it was to be repeated.<sup>53</sup> Although the young were clearly attracted, and the local press had abandoned criticism, the elderly of the town scorned this form of recreation and accusations of theft and prostitution were said to have been repeated at numerous town meetings by officials and clergymen.<sup>54</sup>

During the next few years the band visited Swansea, Newport, Bath, Bristol and Taunton. At Bristol they hired the Public Gardens and charged one shilling admission, compared with the one guinea fee at the Assembly Rooms, Bath. £126 was taken at Bristol within an hour and a half and the crowds had to be locked out.<sup>55</sup> Gypsy 'Kings and Queens', the great journalistic myth, were presented as a special attraction. By March 1871 they were camped in Binsey Lane, Oxford, and two notices were immediately put up. The first announced in bold print that this group had caused 'great excitement' throughout Britain, and that the gypsy 'King and Queen' would be present at the evening's Ball.<sup>56</sup> The second notice was perhaps more blunt. Advertising admission to the camp for three pence, it then added, "Open till time to close for people with more money than sense".<sup>57</sup> The camp of five wagons and eight tents certainly caused much excitement among the people of Oxford and was visited by the

53 Birmingham Daily Post, 7 June 1869, p.6.

54 K. Bercovici, The Story of the Gypsies (1930), pp.247-8.

55 E. O. Winstedt and T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsy Dances', loc.cit., pp.25-6.

56 Ibid., p.26.

57 Ibid.

rich and poor alike. A rather exaggerated claim was that nearly everyone in Oxford who could spare the time had been to see the encampment.<sup>58</sup> The gypsies left for Banbury at the beginning of April, and then moved on to Leamington and Cheltenham. Subsequent reports were given of their visits to Wales, Holywell, Liverpool, Hull and Manchester.<sup>59</sup>

These itinerant entertainers, with their well-ordered camps and widespread popularity, were atypical of the general lot of the nineteenth-century gypsy. This band were primarily entertainers, or showmen entrepreneurs, and to maintain public interest, friendship and curiosity, of the young people at least, they had to exploit to the full the romantic myth of the mystical, Eastern gypsy. Even after the disbandment of this group 'Lazzy' Smith did not entirely disappear from the public eye.. At the Liverpool Exhibition of 1891 he reappeared with a reconstruction of a spacious, oriental-looking gypsy tent which again fed the public's desire for romanticism and mysticism among these people.

#### Craft Skills

It was not usual for the money obtained from entertaining to be sufficient to sustain a family, and an existence was maintained only by combining this with other occupations. Diversification of skills and interests, together with rapid adaptability, were the

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58 Jackson's Oxford Journal, 25 March 1871, p.5.

59 See, for example, E. O. Winstedt and T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsy Dances', loc.cit., p.27ff.; 'A Gypsy Ball', Every Saturday, Vol.2 (1872), pp.691-3; Daily News, 19 October 1872, p.5.

necessary keys to survival. Nowhere were these qualities shown better than in their craft ability to transform natural and plentiful raw materials into novel, attractive or useful, saleable items, thus keeping production costs to an absolute minimum.

The gypsies were renowned for their skill in manufacturing a wide variety of small items, such as rings, nails, knives, seals, needles, horn spoons and sometimes articles made from tin, brass and copper. The materials, tools and apparatus for their work in manufacturing metal goods were, on the whole, inferior and crude. Apart from a stone anvil, all that was used was a pair of hand-bellows, a hammer, pincers, a vice and a file. Despite the disadvantages of bad tools the gypsy was said to be quick and dexterous in his work.<sup>60</sup> They also worked extensively with the raw materials they found about them, notably wood and grass. Brooms were made of heather, whips of plaited rushes and doormats of dry grass stems tightly bound and woven together with strips of fresh bark of bramble.<sup>61</sup> The latter sold for about three-pence each.<sup>62</sup> Gorse was cut to make walking sticks and umbrella handles, and beehives were made from straw.<sup>63</sup> Others worked in wood in bottles and made artificial flowers from turnips.<sup>64</sup>

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60 Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), p.10; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.8, No.3 (1929), pp.111, 118-9.

61 F. Cuttriss, Romany Life (1915), pp.262-3.

62 Ibid., pp.263-4.

63 R. Jefferies, Field and Hedgerow (1889), pp.10-11; Daily Chronicle, 18 January 1908, p.6.

64 F. Cuttriss, op.cit., p.104.

Basket-making was also common and was a popular occupation among the gypsies of Bethnal Green, who used materials gathered from the Essex Marshes and neighbouring farmland.<sup>65</sup> By the 1880s cheap, ready-made baskets, imported from Bulureaux, France, were available for the gypsies to purchase at Houndsditch, thereby removing the necessity for home-manufacture. However, although some gypsies took their stock from here, others preferred to continue with their craft. Mrs. Brown, a gypsy, explained that the 'osiers' cost nothing so that all that was made from the sale of the baskets was profit. Sometimes she was able to make a pound a day in this way.<sup>66</sup> The demand for baskets of all descriptions remained fairly constant. There were fruit baskets, errand boy baskets, coal and wood baskets, wicker pots, publican's pots and lobster pots, and many others, and the gypsies were able to turn their hand to each kind.<sup>67</sup>

Heather and birch brooms were the staple manufacture of the gypsies in Ashdown Forest, Sussex. One aged gypsy there related how this craft had an ancestral tradition going back some two hundred years. He calculated that he made around 600 a year which he sold from his pony cart. The manufacture was described in the following manner:

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65 K. Chesney, The Victorian Underworld (1970), p.60.

66 C. G. Leland, op.cit., p.117.

67 F. Cuttriss, op.cit., p.266; B. Vesey Fitzgerald, Gypsies of Britain (1951), p.189; E. Brewer, 'Gypsy Encampments in the Heart of London', Sunday at Home (1896), p.113.

"As a rule the heather is cut in winter, and kept until it is seasoned. Then it is tied together and trimmed, according to its destination. An admixture of birch is valued as giving it 'a better head'. The binding is done on a 'binding horse', which presses the heather or birch together. In this position it is tied with withes or 'splints', peeled off hazel rods. Some brooms are made with 'bats' or handles, others without. They vary in size and to some extent in quality".<sup>68</sup>

House-brooms sold at between two shillings and half-a-crown a dozen, while stable brooms fetched twice that price, and brewers' brooms even more. They combined this occupation with selling bracken, underwood, peat and turf to farmers until prevented from doing this by a lawsuit which restricted the obtaining of these articles for their own use only.<sup>69</sup> Even so, they were able to continue making brooms, clothes-pegs and straw beehives.

Perhaps the two most traditional of all gypsy crafts were those of skewer-making and clothes-peg making.<sup>70</sup> About 1905, W. Raymond visited a family of gypsy peg-makers in Somerset, in the neighbourhood of the Quantock Hills. In order to make the pegs the gypsy needed a ready supply of willow, which was taken from the roadside, and a supply of tin, which was obtained from shops and rubbish tips. The tools required were a pair of pincers, a hammer, a stake, a knife and nails. The gypsy would sit in front of the stake, about two inches in diameter and a foot high, the stages that followed being

68 H. Wolff, Sussex Industries (Lewes, 1883), pp.151-3.

69 Ibid.; see also S. J. Marsh, Ashdown Forest (privately printed, 1935), pp.12-23.

70 See C. G. Leland, The English Gipsies and their Language (1874), p.210; G. Smith, 'Our Gipsies and their Children', London Society, Vol.47 (1885), p.38.

described by Raymond:

" 'That's to cut off the clothes-pegs on', said he. He sat down on a bag ... drew a sheath knife, took a willow wand already peeled, and measured the length by means of a piece of hazel cut half through at the right distance and split down to the cut. Then he hammered the knife through the willow, using the stake as a block. He chucked the little five inch piece upon a heap of hundreds of others which he had cut off during the day".<sup>71</sup>

The wood was then dried before being finished by nailing around it a ring of biscuit tin, which was to prevent the split from going too far down under the pressure of the clothes-line. Occasionally, the manufacture of the pegs was carried out by all the family, with each member specialising in one operation. A good day's work was about three gross, which were sold at a shilling a gross to shops, rather than houses, in the towns. It was said that village folk did not buy them as they dried their clothes on hedgerows, and town people preferred to buy them from shops.<sup>72</sup>

Skewer-cutting was a common employment among the poorer gypsies and, like peg-making, a great amount of labour brought in only modest returns. Although perhaps 2,000 skewers could be cut in one day, this was likely to take from seven in the morning until

71 W. Raymond, English Country Life (1910), p.319.

72 Ibid., p.317. Elsewhere it was stated that the price was a shilling a dozen (H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1907', loc.cit., p.129).

late at night, for which they would receive about one shilling for every fourteen pounds' weight,<sup>73</sup> One gypsy analysed the work involved in the following terms,

"It takes a deal o' work to earn a penny at skewer-making. A dozen cuts to a skewer, and a dozen skewers for a penny, that's a hundred and forty-four cuts a penny".<sup>174</sup>

Although such labour was regarded as non-productive and an excuse to avoid 'real' or 'honest' toil, this should be treated as a further symptom of the antipathy with which the gypsies were viewed. Their work was based in traditional rural craftsmanship and involved imagination, skill and long hours of labour. While not wishing to go to the opposite extreme of romanticising this craft aspect, the nature of this labour should go some way to countering the more customary cries concerning their alleged propensity to idleness.

### Seasonal Employments

It now remains to consider the seasonal employments of the gypsies. The months from March to November formed the height of the travelling season, and the numerous fairs and race meetings were a major feature of the itinerant's calendar. Also, it was during these months that the demand for temporary farm labour was at its peak.

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73 G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.281-2; I. Montagu, 'Rambles with the Romany', Good Words, Vol.23 (1882), p.818; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1908', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1910), p.284; G. Smith, 'Our Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.38.

74 A. Beale, 'Among the Gypsies', Sunday Magazine (1875), p.49.

The fairs and race meetings served a multitude of functions. They gave some structure to the timing and route of itinerancy, vesting it with some direction and purpose. They also served the valuable economic role of providing a convenient location for large numbers of people, thereby facilitating horse-dealing transactions, assisting the fortune-tellers who found an easy prey in the people who were enjoying a day of fun and leisure, together with a number of other means of taking money from a gullible public eager to spend their money at coconut stalls, on the "... steam flying dooby-horses", and on the donkeys hired out for rides and the like.<sup>75</sup> At Epsom Races it was stated that the young gypsies were able to make from one to three pounds a day from the coconut shies.<sup>76</sup>

Apart from this economic aspect the fairs and races also served a very significant social function. They drew travellers from all round, and the camp sites became the meeting place of old acquaintances, friends and family members, resulting in scenes of partying and love-feasts.<sup>77</sup> Conversely, this coming together could also result in scenes of conflict, with the revival of past rivalries and family disputes. But, if we are to believe 'Lord' George Sanger, the greatest source of conflict, latent if not overt, was to be seen in the distance kept between the showmen proper and the gypsies. For the showmen the distinction was an important one to

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75 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.266-7; G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.26, 71.

76 F. H. Groome, op.cit., pp.265-6. This practice was later prohibited at Epsom.

77 H. H. Malleon, Napoleon Boswell, tales of the tents (1913), p.113.



maintain, and for which they had long fought in the struggle to receive exemption from the proposed provisions of a Moveable Dwellings Bill, to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Having achieved this objective it was of fundamental importance to stress continually the differences:

"Now, I want to correct here a very popular error - namely, the belief that in those early days the gipsies were showmen, and most of the showmen gipsies. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The gipsies, it is true, went from fair to fair, but it was as horse-dealers, hawkers of baskets and tinware, workers of the lucky-bag swindle, fortune-tellers, and owners of knife and snuff-box shies. The showmen proper always kept themselves apart from the gipsies ... I do not think I ever saw genuine / my emphasis\_ / gipsies acting as showmen ... as a matter of fact, the show business was mainly in the hands of the Jews ...

... We kept apart from them (the gypsies) and, indeed, rather looked down upon them ...".<sup>78</sup>

Sanger has resorted to racial categories to explain differences that may best be sought in the long-term nature of their employments and way of life, in which the variety and temporary nature of the travellers' employment cycle contrasted with the single trade pursued by the showmen. His urgently-felt need to deny any connection between gypsies and showmen ultimately fails, collapsing under the

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78 'Lord' George Sanger, Seventy Years a Showman (1910; 1969), pp.104-5. (When first published this book provoked much criticism from the showmen themselves for Sanger's exposure of the various frauds involved in the showbusiness industry). Other writers in fact pointed to the opposite conclusion: "... among all these show-men and show-women, acrobats, exhibitors of giants, purse-droppers, ginger-bread-wheel gamblers, shilling knife-throwers, pitch-in-his-mouths, punches, Cheap-Jacks, thimble-rigs, and patterers of every kind there is always a leaven and a suspicion of gypsiness. If there be not descent, there is affinity by marriage, familiarity, knowledge of words and ways, sweethearting and trafficking, so that they know the children of the Rom as the houseworld does not know them, and they in some sort belong together". (C. G. Leland, The Gypsies, 1882, p.140). Also the dark-haired, olive-complexioned members of the Boswell and Lovell tribes attended a reception for the children of a fair held in Glasgow in 1907 ('The Showmen's Treat', The Coatbridge Leader, 20 July 1907, p.7).

weight of his own antipathy to the 'inferior' gypsy.

The following evidence given before the 1839 Committee on the Constabulary Force described how the travelling calendar could be largely, or even wholly, determined by attendance at fairs and race meetings:

"... Boughton Green Fair, near Northampton, in June every year, thousands of people assemble there; the police from London come to it. Then there is Lincoln, April fair; Boston, May fair; Newmarket in May; then to Birmingham or Sheffield fairs; then to Coventry, to Newport Pagnall (Bucks.), then back to Boughton, and there is a place called 'Stow Green Fair'. Then Peterboro' summer fair, then Fairlop Forest, 10 miles from London, there I have seen the most gypsies, hundreds at a time. Then to Liverpool spring meetings, and then follow the races in all the midland and northern counties, ending up with Doncaster. Then come on the winter fairs - Nottingham goose fair, Leicester cheese fair, Ottley Statties, Knaresbrough, York; then come down to Sheffield fair, 28th November, then end up until Wrexham fair begins the year on the 6th of March".<sup>79</sup>

While not suggesting that the route plotted above was carried out by many, it nevertheless indicates the extent to which fairs and meets were a central feature of the travellers' life. Moreover, this route touched only the surface of the number of fairs that were held each year. Horse fairs were held at Ashrigg Hill, Topcliffe, Appleby, Brigg, Boroughbridge, Thwaite, Brampton Hill, Kirby Leeke Fair, Brough Hill, Middleham Moor, Lee Gap, Hinckley, Horncastle, Barnet, Skipton, Craven Arms, and many others. These fairs were attended in great numbers by gypsies, horse-dealers

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79 First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire as to the best means of establishing an efficient Constabulary Force in England and Wales (1839), p.18 (hereafter, Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force). Statties were fairs held by statute where servants were hired.

and itinerant potters,<sup>80</sup> Brough Hill Fair was considered to be the largest horse fair in the midland and northern counties. It was held during the last week in September and attracted gypsies from Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man, and from all over the north of England.<sup>81</sup> Other fairs attended in large numbers by the gypsies were at Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, and at Turton in Lancashire.<sup>82</sup> Around London the best known fairs were at Wandsworth, Greenwich, Deptford, Blackheath and Clapham, and Wanstead Flats was known as the 'Gypsy Fair' owing to the great number of gypsies who made it their first gathering of the travelling season.<sup>83</sup> Further out of London, in the Epping Forest, Fairlop Fair was held on the first Friday of July. This was a great annual resort of the gypsies and was described by George Smith (gypsy) as "... a little gold mine to the members of our tribe".<sup>84</sup>

Such occasions were not always greeted favourably by the authorities. Although a good deal of legitimate business was undertaken at such events, there was also much that was not. Fairs and race meetings attracted well-meaning trippers whose intention was to enjoy a day out. It was said of the northern meetings that they were attended by workmen whose hard-earned wages lay loose in their pockets.

80 Letter from R. Hargreaves to Dorothy McGrigor Phillips, 29 January 1940, but dated 1939 (Romany Collection); D. Harvey, The Gypsies - Wagon Time and After (1979), p.116.

81 Rev. G. Hall, 'To Brough Hill Fair and Back', Romanitshels', Didakais' and Folk-Lore Gazette (hereafter, Folk-Lore Gazette), Vol.1, No.4 (1912), pp.134-7; Daily Mail, 30 September 1908, p.3.

82 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.263; Manchester City News, 13 June 1908, p.6.

83 G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.39-59.

84 G. Smith, Incidents ..., p.5; see also J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.175-8.

Not surprisingly, then, such places also attracted robbers and thieves.<sup>85</sup>

Added to this was the menace caused by the many encampments situated by the roadside, on waste ground and even on the race course itself.<sup>86</sup>

The Rev. J. Wilson of Folkingham registered his discontent with the Constabulary Force Commissioners:

"Unfortunately, we have five fairs here in the year; and this brings all the refuse and scum of society into the place. Against the insolence and injury these despicable characters may commit on the more quiet, and peaceable, and respectable inhabitants, we have no guardian officer to whom we may apply with any prospect of obtaining protection, support, or assistance".<sup>87</sup>

Similarly in Surrey, where two streets of a town were annually taken over for a "gypsy fair". The main business, conducted in the middle of the street, was horse-dealing, although many side shows and amusements contributed to the festivities. Yet those in authority decided that the fair was a physical and moral nuisance, and as such needed to be modified or repressed.<sup>88</sup> In this statement can be seen the seeds of concern that were growing among the middle classes and town notables with unregulated and unsupervised street and leisure activities. Rational recreation and supervised clubs, associations and games were proposed as alternatives.

Moreover not only was the activity of street fairs the subject of criticism and disapproval, but the gypsies themselves were also

85 Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force, p.18.

86 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.137-8.

87 Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force, p.105, para. 127.

88 F. Anstey, 'A Gypsy Fair in Surrey', Harper's New Monthly Magazine (1888), pp.625-33.

occasionally singled out for especial victimisation. In 1838 the Mayor of Oxford issued an order for the exclusion of gypsies from St. Giles's Fair.<sup>89</sup> This brought a poetic reply from the gypsies, entitled 'The Gipsies' Humble Petition and Remonstrance Addressed to the Worshipful Mayor of Oxford':

"O Mr. Mayor, O Mr. Mayor!  
 What have we gypsies done or said  
 That you should drive us from the Fair  
 And rob us of our 'custom'd bread?

O had you seen, good Mr. Mayor,  
 Our wond'ring, weeping, wailing band,  
 And marked our looks of deep despair  
 When first we heard your stern command;

Could you have witness'd, Mr. Mayor,  
 How, young and old, and weak and strong,  
 Excluded, branded, cold and bare,  
 We sat astounded all day long;

Your heart had ach'd good Mr. Mayor,  
 And felt that gypsies too were men;  
 Then deign our losses to repair,  
 Nor drive us thus to try the pen.

Alas! 'tis true, good Mr. Mayor,  
 Our friend Sir Walter Scott, is dead;  
 But heav'n that hears the Gipsies' pray'r,  
 May raise another in his stead.

Dread not the name, good Mr. Mayor,  
 No more the witch's pow'r we claim;  
 But still we are the Muse's care,  
 And Oxford Poets guard our fame.

What place then so unfit, good Mayor  
 A war against our tribe to raise,  
 As that which lately fill'd the air  
 With Gipsy-lore and Gipsies' praise?

You welcome Lions to the Fair,  
 Tigers and monkeys, Punch and Fool:  
 Then suffer us, another year  
 To hold there our Gymnastic School.

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89 R. W. Muncey, Our Old English Fairs (1939), pp.100-2.

Meanwhile farewell, good Mr. Mayor,  
 Your frowns, dismiss, resume your smiles;  
 We'll leave off cheating, take to prayer,  
 And claim thy patronage, St. Giles!".<sup>90</sup>

It was a popular belief among nineteenth-century commentators that agriculture was an industry to which the gypsy had the greatest antipathy.<sup>91</sup> This was an impression fed by the belief that the gypsy had a natural and instinctive aversion to anything that approached hard labour and physical toil, and as such was the product of an ill-informed hostility to these travellers. If anything, the aversion was not of gypsies to agriculture but of farmers to employing gypsies. Crabb noticed that the hostility to the gypsies was so great that they were not employed by some farmers if others could be hired instead. In 1830, at one hop plantation gypsies were not allowed to pick in some grounds while common beggars and well-known thieves were engaged in preference.<sup>92</sup> This was not, then, a parochial arrangement to benefit the local poor but was rather a positive act of discrimination against the gypsies. Nor apparently, if he found employment, should he expect fair treatment. An old shepherd pointed out that the unstable and restless gypsy who took to farm work,

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90 Quoted in G. V. Cox, Recollections of Oxford (1868), pp.287-8. The order did not seem to have had any lasting effect as George Smith of Coalville was able to report the existence of dirty, drunken, swearing gypsies, with undressed and unwashed children, who were present at the fair sometime during the 1880s (G. Smith, Gypsy Children; or, a stroll in Gipsydom, Part 1, 1889, pp.27-8).

91 B. Skot, op.cit., p.53; E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.322; Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.2 (18 December 1880), p.494.

92 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.60; H. Woodcock, op.cit., pp.161-2.

"... must not look for the same treatment as the big-framed, white-skinned / [my emphasis] / man who is as strong, enduring, and unchangeable as a draught horse or ox, and constant as the sun itself".<sup>93</sup>

In some places they were paid less wages than other workers, perhaps amounting to from two to four shillings a week less per man, were called upon to do things that the other workers would not do, and were "... generally imposed upon".<sup>94</sup>

Once again, though, the antipathy of some was balanced by the friendliness of others. A lady in Hampshire always employed gypsies to watch her hopgrounds, finding them to be trusty watchmen and good servants, and Mr. Vinson, of Hurst Farm, Bexley, was similarly inclined to employ gypsies.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, in 1907, a farm of 500 acres in Kingsworthy, Hampshire, was bought by a man who had married the daughter of a traveller, and farmed his land with an entire staff of gypsies.<sup>96</sup> Although such extreme cases as this were not often to be found, it should be apparent that seasonal work was available for the travellers.

Agricultural employments were to be found chiefly in the Southern and Eastern counties, where it was possible to follow the

93 W. H. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life: impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs (1910), p.265.

94 Ibid., pp.263-4.

95 Extract from J. Crabb's speech at the laying of the foundation of the Farnham Gipsy Asylum, 1845, quoted in J. Rudall, A Memoir of the Rev. James Crabb, late of Southampton (1854), p.154; T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1909', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.2 (1911), p.123.

96 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.2 (1907), p.187.

stages of the agricultural cycle through the months by crossing from farm to farm and county to county in pursuit of the ripening crops.

A Hampshire gypsy described his summer journeyings thus:

"We have what we call our 'runs', you know - at one time we do a bit of potato planting and cleaning, afterwards we travel to the strawberry country, then we go on hay-making and field pea-picking".<sup>97</sup>

Even this 'run' touched only the surface of the cycle of employments which attracted temporary labour. From April to June work could be found in the market gardens of the London suburbs and in haymaking, from where they moved into the neighbouring counties to assist in turnip-hoeing, pea-picking (or 'peas-hacking'), wheat-fagging or tying, strawberry-picking and assisting with the corn harvest. In September the round of employments was completed by fruit- and vegetable-picking and hopping principally in the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.<sup>98</sup>

97 Quoted in F. Cuttriss, op.cit., p.68.

98 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.136-7; J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, and Present State of the Gypsies (York, 1816), p.187; W. M. Adams, 'The Wandering Tribes of Great Britain', Cassell's Family Magazine (1883), p.730; 'The Present State of the Gypsies', Sunday at Home (1884), p.119; V. S. Morwood, 'Plans suggested for the Reclamation of Gipsies', Victoria Magazine, Vol.14 (1870), p.76; Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. R. Farrar, Medical Officer of the Local Government Board (1909), p.20, paras. 341-5 (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw.). Note that hop farming was practically restricted to the six counties mentioned in the text. The official returns for 1907 gave the following acreages for these counties: Kent, 28,169 acres; Hereford, 6,143; Sussex, 4,243; Worcester, 3,622; Hampshire, 1,842; Surrey, 744. This left less than 200 acres under hop not in these counties (Select Committee on the Hop Industry, Report, 1908, p.xxx, para.29, hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Hops).



Pea-picking was carried on chiefly in the market gardens of Essex, Lincoln, Suffolk and Kent, and in a lesser degree in Norfolk, Worcester and Yorkshire.<sup>99</sup> Dr. Farrar estimated that between one-quarter and one-third of the persons employed in pea-picking were gypsy van-dwellers.<sup>100</sup> They were especially favoured as they provided their own accommodation, either vans or tents, and were thought to have a standard of living and level of health above that of the agricultural labourer.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the women and girls among the van-dwellers were employed in preference to males, their nimble fingers being considered a particular advantage.<sup>102</sup> The pay was a flat rate of eight pence a day. Although the season may last for around eight weeks, the duration of the harvest on any one farm was very short, perhaps a few days. On at least one occasion the pickers stayed in a single village throughout the summer, but this was made possible only by turning to other work, such as the cycle of vegetable harvests, from beans and scarlet-runners to potatoes.<sup>103</sup> It was more common for the gypsies to move on.

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99 Reports of Medical Inspectors of the Local Government Board (L.G.B.), No.252: Dr. Reginald Farrar's Report to the L.G.B. on the Lodging and Accommodation of Hop-Pickers and Pickers of Fruit and Vegetables (1907), p.28 (hereafter, Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B.).

100 Ibid., p.29.

101 Ibid., p.30; Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. R. Farrar (1909), p.20, para. 346.

102 R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers', in H. J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds.), The Victorian City, Vol.1 (1976), p.135.

103 Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B., p.28; Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. J. Beck (1909), p.37, para. 787.

Following the harvesting months of July and August, the gypsies arrived at the fruit and hop farms in early September. Fruit-picking was again largely reserved for females, who worked extremely long hours from 4 a.m. to around 8 p.m. The sexual division of labour of some of the fruit-picking employments was not apparent in the hop fields, a seasonal employment for men, women and children of the poor classes from near and far. In Sussex, for example,

"Hands are wanted - gathering in the harvest with 'home-dwellers' is simply out of the question. Additional help is therefore requisitioned. The forest sends its swarthy, half-civilised 'gypsies'; towns and villages on the coast contribute their quota of fishermen, the smaller towns turn out every available man, woman, and child, whatever their occupation - whoever in the district can go hopping does so. But that is not enough. So the larger towns come to their rescue with their auxiliary armies, London leading the way, Brighton following".<sup>104</sup>

The problem of the importation of 'foreign' labour from great distances was even more acute in the counties with a higher acreage under crop. In mid- and East Kent it was estimated that 80% of those employed were strangers.<sup>105</sup> On the whole, the hoppers were drawn from the Irish poor, the families from the slum areas of London, unemployed workmen, and "... nearly all the gypsies in England".<sup>106</sup> Dr. Farrar obtained information on the numbers of

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104 H. W. Wolff, op.cit., pp.97-8.

105 Ibid., p.100.

106 Rev. J. Y. Stratton, Hops and Hop-Pickers (1883), p.133; M. J. Winstanley, Memories of Life in Kent at the Turn of the Century (Folkestone, 1978), p.81ff.; Labour News and Employment Advertiser, 28 February 1874, pp. 2-3. The claim that nearly all the English gypsies migrated to the hop fields in September is clearly an exaggeration, though it does indicate the high number of nomadic families among the hoppers.

'foreign' and gypsy pickers in 1906, and the information is tabulated below:

TABLE 2  
NUMBERS OF 'FOREIGN' AND GYPSY HOP-PICKERS  
IN THE 7 MAIN HOPPING REGIONS, 1906

<u>Region</u>	<u>'Foreign' Pickers</u>	<u>Gypsy Pickers</u>	<u>Total</u>
Kent	74,748	5,614	80,362
Sussex	2,550	276	2,826
Southampton (Hants.)	1,599	810	2,409
Surrey	200	10(?)*	210(?)
Herefordshire	12,900	0	12,900
Worcestershire	13,359	555	13,914
Shropshire	<u>118</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>118</u>
Total	<u>105,474</u>	<u>7,265(?)</u>	<u>112,739(?)</u>

\* 2 or 3 families

Source: Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B., pp.8-10.

The information was obtained from the clerks of the respective Rural District Councils, so the isolation of the 'gypsy' would depend on whether all travellers and van-dwellers were so termed, or simply those considered to be 'pure' Romanies. Whatever the definition such large numbers of temporary, migrant labourers, congregated in relatively confined geographical areas, could not fail to cause problems and be the subject of much criticism. Adopting a rather simple delineation, traders welcomed the trade of the hoppers but feared the influx of such dangerous and disorderly elements; evangelists feared for the collective mortal soul of so many heathens gathered in one place; and the authorities were concerned about the

spread of disease, sanitation and suitable accommodation.<sup>107</sup> Even the attitude of the employers was that 'foreign' labour was a necessary evil that had to be tolerated:

"... the less ('foreigners') the better ... we are always so very glad to get rid of them ... they are not the most desirable class of visitors; they are not the pick of society ...".<sup>108</sup>

The problems of accommodating so many temporary labourers in reasonable conditions were clearly immense. A report published in 1864 stated that only 25% of accommodation on hop farms was tolerable while the rest was indifferent or thoroughly bad.<sup>109</sup> In this respect the van-dwellers were considered superior to the mass of 'foreign' labour. They were accustomed to an outdoor existence, living in weather-proof accommodation provided by themselves, and were said to be generally healthy and free from disease.<sup>110</sup> Dr. Farrar was most impressed by the vans and skilfully-constructed tents of the gypsies and concluded that their accommodation was not overcrowded, was generally sanitary and that they kept good order, excepting the occasional instances of pilfering and scavenging.<sup>111</sup>

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107 See M. J. Winstanley, op.cit., p.81; H. W. Wolff, op.cit., p.97; Sel. Cttee. on Hops, Report, p.viii, para.13. The first of these responses is self-evident, and the second is considered in Chapter 4.

108 Sel. Cttee. on Hops, Minutes of Evidence, of W. Mannington, a hop-grower from Robertsbridge, Sussex, p.376, paras. 9218-31.

109 Quoted in Rev. J. Y. Stratton, op.cit., p.59.

110 Ibid., p.89; Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. Farrar (1909), p.20, paras. 341-6. See also Mrs. Reynold's account of hopping in M. Lewis (ed.), Old Days in the Kent Hop Gardens (Tonbridge, 1962), p.32.

111 Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B., pp.10-11.

General conditions, though, were deplorable, with no facilities for running water, cooking, or refuse collection. The pickers on a farm near Bromyard, Staffordshire, were "... packed together like sardines in a box ...", and altogether the conditions on the farm were described as "extremely bad".<sup>112</sup> Such conditions were by no means unique to that farm or county. Dr. Farrar stressed the importance of regulation by means of bye-laws, and in many instances these were adopted by local councils. Some progress was achieved and special huts were constructed for the pickers, accompanying the tendency of farmers to hire labourers in the large towns beforehand, and then bring them in by train when the crop was ready.<sup>113</sup> But changed conditions of accommodation and in the system of hiring were slow to take effect, and even the impact of recourse to bye-laws was lessened by the fact that both farmers and pickers remained oblivious of, or turned a blind eye to, their provisions.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, despite these conditions, the pickers welcomed the season for hopping and regarded it as something of a social occasion, or "... grand rural jubilee".<sup>115</sup> The atmosphere was almost holiday-like, and the same people returned year after year. Families were

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112 Report of the Superintendent of School Attendance Officers regarding his inquiries into the conditions under which the hop-pickers live, presented to a meeting of the Staffordshire Education Committee, held at Stafford, 23 November 1907.

113 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Report (1906), p.110 (hereafter, Dptal. Cttee. on Vag.). See also H. W. Wolff, op.cit., pp.98-100.

114 Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B., pp.25-6, 31.

115 A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.226.

together, old friends and acquaintances were seen again and the communality of an al fresco life added to the enjoyment. Although the memories of the various contributors to Mary Lewis's book on hopping in Kent could be said to be clouded with a distant romanticism, 'the good old days', the emphasis was placed not on appalling conditions but on the fun and comradeship experienced in the sunny fields.<sup>116</sup> Even the poor wages did not usually dampen their enthusiasm. On average a person earned from picking around 2s. to 2s. 6d. a day, and after three weeks labour may have managed to save about £1.<sup>117</sup> Occasionally, bitterness over pay could break out in the open, and it was noted that a gypsy might attempt to organise a strike if the general feeling was that the pay was insufficient. Unfortunately no explanation is given why the gypsy was elevated in status to the position of potential strike-leader, nor whether this role was ever fulfilled. The farmer could not afford to delay in bringing in his crop and any demands were usually met half way.<sup>118</sup>

#### Pressures Challenging Itinerant Employments

Gypsy occupations were thus of a general and varied kind, that mixed the legal with the illegal, and the skilled with the

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116 M. Lewis (ed.), op.cit., p.41ff.

117 Sel. Cttee. on Hops, Minutes of Evidence, of Rev. R. W. Wilson, p.438, para.10600.

118 Ibid., p.440, para.10636.

unskilled.<sup>119</sup> They remained, for the most part, independent of the system of wage labour and their reliance on self-help and ability to turn their hand to almost anything was a fine example of Victorian attitudes to private enterprise. Earnings were usually small, and the work was temporary, insecure and subject to regular seasonal fluctuations. They travelled during the summer, finding employment as casual agricultural labourers, entertainers and the like, and remained in one place for most of the winter months. During this time they turned their hands to a number of trades in order to survive, whether as gas-stokers, tinkers, street-sellers or hawkers.<sup>120</sup> The mainstay of their occupational calendar, the hawking of different items by the female gypsies, was also subject to seasonal, and geographic, variation. Items were sold in conformity with what was available in a particular region. Pots were sold in and around the Midlands and the North, flowers in the South about the New Forest and baskets about London. Beehives were sold in the summer and cutlery, nuts and oranges in the winter.

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119 Even this account has not given a complete picture of the range of occupations pursued by travellers. They can also be found to have worked as shrimpers, coalminers, bell-hangers, domestic servants, models, slipper-makers, menders of glass and china, rifle-range attendants, bathing-machine attendants, cab proprietors, prize-fighters and inn-keepers. See F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.48; S. Roberts, The Gypsies (1836), pp.211-4; G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.237, 291; G. Smith, I've been ..., p.351; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1892), pp.191-2; E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., p.340; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), p.115; T. W. Thompson, 'Borrow's Gypsies', loc.cit., p.165; T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsies who hunted with the Badsworth Hounds', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.7, Nos.3-4 (1928), p.152; T. W. Thompson, 'English Gypsies as Bell-Hangers', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.10, No.4 (1931), pp.187-94; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.14, No.3 (1935), p.165; F. S. Atkinson, 'Gypsies in East Anglia', The Kendalian, Vol.11 (1911), p.14; Notes and Queries, 4th Ser., Vol.3 (12 June 1869), p.558; Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.1 (17 January 1880), p.49; 'The Gipsy of To-day', The Sketch, 4 September 1895, p.329.

120 Gas-stoking, itself a job subject to seasonal fluctuations, was taken up by some of the Battersea gypsies. See D. L. Woolmer, 'Gypsies in their Winter Quarters', loc.cit., pp.534-5.

The trade in umbrella-mending would, similarly, have been more profitable in the wet months.

Their occupational structure remained dominated by the family as the essential work unit. Each member of the family, from the youngest to the oldest, contributed in some way to the family income, while still remaining, for the most part, independent of the hired-labour system. Although different families sometimes worked together it was more usual for each family to be economically independent. Kinship ties were strong but the travelling unit was of the nuclear rather than the extended variety. Work was a continuous activity for the family. There was no time for the rigid division between work and leisure, which, by late nineteenth century, was an increasingly apparent feature of the industrial economy. The working day began early and finished late, and affected the old and young indiscriminately. An aged gypsy lady, said to have been 115 years old, was working in a harvest field only a few weeks before her death.<sup>121</sup>

Thus, a major factor in the ability of travellers to maintain an existence was precisely the diversity and multiplicity of their employments, with the variety of work in which they engaged altering with the passage of time. The change in the nature and emphasis of employments, and of the goods and services offered for sale, were forced on them by the developing nature of the environment in which they lived and the altering market conditions for those goods and

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121 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.167. See also B. Adams, et al., op.cit., pp.129-53; J. Okely, 'Trading Stereotypes: the case of English Gypsies', in S. Wallman (ed.), Ethnicity at Work (1979), p.17ff.



services. It has already been noted that the contribution made by travellers in filling the gap in the rural supply and demand for goods and services was far from insignificant. Yet with the growth of the railways, and the improved systems of transport and communications in general, and with the diffusion of the conveniences of the city into the countryside, this gap was being adequately filled without the assistance of the travellers. Permanent retailers were distributing similar items to those hawked by the travellers, and possibly at lower cost.

The nature of the items hawked also suffered from the pressure of competition from industrially-manufactured goods. The process, which had begun by the time Hoyland was writing about the gypsies, had advanced immeasurably by the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>122</sup> Increasingly, the articles hawked were not of their own manufacture but were machine-made. Industrially-produced tin-ware and other goods were said to have yielded greater profits.<sup>123</sup> Baskets were bought and resold rather than home-made and, as Charles Godfrey Leland noticed, within days of the end of the hopping season the gypsies went, "almost en masse", to buy baskets in Houndsditch.<sup>124</sup> It was suggested that hawking became increasingly an excuse for begging and fortune-telling with the realisation that the items sold were available elsewhere at a lower price.<sup>125</sup>

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122 J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.248.

123 F. Cuttriss, op.cit., p.105.

124 Letter from C. G. Leland to the Standard, 19 August 1879, p.6.

125 R. A. Scott Macfie, 'The Gypsies: an outline sketch', Folk-Lore Gazette, Vol.1, No.3 (1912), pp.81-2.

Gypsy Lovell summarised the development thus:

"... we make an honest living out of selling clothes-  
pegs ... Business? No, it's not what it was.  
Machine-made pegs are undercutting us. They turn  
them out by boxes holding sixty dozen apiece ...  
( But) they're no good compared with those cut by  
hand! They split after they've been used a time  
or two. Ours last for months ...".<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, the traditional gypsy-produced items, pegs and skewers, inasmuch as they were still manufactured, were being sold directly to shops and retailers rather than from house to house.

Their service trades of tinkering, repairing and entertaining were also becoming less important. Cheap, new, manufactured items were readily available, and the days of the itinerant entertainer became numbered with the development of a formal time discipline that clearly segregated work from leisure and signalled the march forward of rational recreational activities.<sup>127</sup> The wakes, feasts and large wedding festivities of the rural villages were rapidly becoming a feature of the past, and again the trend had begun early:

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126 Lovell, 'My Life: by a Gipsy', Home Chat (18 April 1908), p.267.

127 See P. Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England: rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885 (1978); H. Meller, Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914 (1976); Society for the Study of Labour History, Conference Papers, 'The Working Class and Leisure: Class Expression and/or Social Control', held at University of Sussex (29 November 1975); D. Mayall, 'Leisure and the Working-Class, with special reference to the Cinema in Birmingham, 1908-18', unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Warwick (1977).

"England is no longer 'Merry England', our merry games, our merry meetings, our wakes, fairs and festivals have given way to Bible societies, mechanics' institutes, and saving banks ...".<sup>128</sup>

The progress of civilisation and the march of education and culture reduced superstition and weakened the belief in the powers of the fortune-teller.<sup>129</sup>

Seasonal employment in the harvest fields and hop farms was also threatened. The use of agricultural machinery on farms, the mechanisation of harvest work, and the employment of farm labourers on a more regular basis, all worked together to reduce the demand for temporary, seasonal labour.<sup>130</sup> The demand for temporary labour in the hop fields was also reduced. The acreage under hop was 71,789 in 1878, the highest figure on record, but by 1907 it had shrunk to 44,938 acres. Improved cultivation had increased the yield, hops were by then able to be kept in cold storage, and less hops were being used in the manufacture of beer.<sup>131</sup>

Clearly, these changes, noted by Hoyland at the beginning of the century, took place at different times, at a different pace and with varying strengths in the various regions of the country.

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128 'The Norwood Gypsies', The Literary Lounger (1826), p.88.

129 A Wanderer, 'The Gypsies', The Quiver, Vol.6 (1871), p.670.

130 R. Samuel, 'Village Labour', in R. Samuel (ed.), Village Life and Labour (1975), p.21; R. Samuel, 'Comers and Goers', loc.cit., pp.152-3.

131 C. Whitehead, Retrospections (Maidstone, 1913), p.7.

Notably, the southern part of the country was considerably more advanced than the remote northern regions where the travelling way of life was able to retain some of its traditional characteristics for longer. The effect on the travellers was therefore uneven, but, though regional variations should be noted, the combined effects of these pressures on employments and of the effects of enclosure would have left scarcely a county untouched to greater or lesser extent.

Essentially, these combined developments necessitated a shift for the travellers from village to town, but although their nomadism and self-employments needed some modifications and changed emphases these features remained as the two chief characteristics that distinguished them from the sedentary population.

## CHAPTER 3

DEFINITIONS, IMPRESSIONS AND STEREOTYPES  
OF GYPSIES: ROMANIES OR TRAVELLERS?

The impressions and stereotypes formed about nineteenth-century British gypsies revolved around two poles which represented, firstly, perceptions of them as an itinerant group, and secondly as a Romany race. By considering how the gypsies were defined, by the legislature, philanthropists and others, it will be possible to see how the often contradictory stereotypes emanated from this problem, and how responses were conditioned by mistakes and misguided assumptions. Some commentators viewed gypsies as just one, indistinct and unremarkable part of a large and ill-defined vagrant

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A gypsy portrait (from G. Smith, Gipsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their children, with suggestions for their improvement, 1880, p.1).

population, discussed briefly in the opening chapter. Others viewed them as a distinct and separate race whose culture and heritage should be preserved and respected, whether in the imagination or through practical efforts in the collection of folk-lore material. Another group borrowed the same arguments to identify the gypsies as a race apart, but then proceeded to attack them on precisely the grounds that their race possessed hereditary characteristics not romantic and desirable but rather harmful and destructive to the individual and to society. These latter two approaches form the substance of the present chapter. Essentially, my concern is over the application and use of theories of race, blood purity and genetic determinism to define the features and characteristics of a minority group. It needs to be asked whether recourse to concepts of ethnic distinction was valid in regard to gypsies in the nineteenth-century context, and what were the intentions and consequences of such racial interpretations. The first part of the chapter is thus concerned with the presentation of the gypsies as a romantic race, while the remainder of the chapter deals generally with the stereotypes formed around the travellers, as a race and as part of a travelling community.

#### Gypsies as a Separate Race: Fiction and the Gypsy Lorists

The use of romantic notions of a separate, mysterious race of gypsies was a device frequently adopted in poetry and fiction of all descriptions, from the 'highbrow' works of Sir Walter Scott,

George Borrow, Charles Dickens and D. H. Lawrence to the anonymous 'penny dreadfuls' and railway literature.<sup>1</sup> Whether the gypsy was an incidental acquaintance or the main character, the foreign origin of his or her race was the basis around which images were drawn of a dark and romantic people, living an idle, hazy, natural, al fresco life, camped in woods and similar locations. The beauty and grace of the bewitching gypsy maiden attracted many admirers in a variety of stories. The use of the male stereotype of the dark and handsome gypsy to attract non-gypsy women was adopted less frequently, though nowhere better-known than in D. H. Lawrence's The Virgin and the Gypsy. Whatever the nature of the book, and largely irrespective of the centrality of the gypsy to the plot, the image presented was mostly the same, indicating foreign birth or ancestry and physical characteristics that emphasised the dark, supple, agile and handsome features and hinted at a temperament that was wild, fierce and defiant. Even though other aspects of their physical and psychological make-up may have been included, these were undoubtedly the characteristics given the greatest emphasis.

Perhaps the best known of all writers, whose books contained gypsy characters and their way of life as the central theme, was George Borrow. The gypsies of Borrow's semi-autobiographical

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1 See, for example, W. H. Ainsworth, Rookwood: a romance (1850); G. Borrow, Lavengro (1851), The Romany Rye (1857); C. Dickens, The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870); D. H. Lawrence, The Virgin and the Gypsy (1930); Sir Walter Scott, Guy Mannering (1817); 'The Gipsy Queen's Revenge', The Aldine Half Holiday Library, No.419 (n.d.); 'The Gipsy Queen's Legacy', The Aldine Cheerful Library, No.139 (n.d.); 'A Gipsy Bride', Aunt Kate's Penny Stories, No.5 (Dundee, 1901); 'Gipsy Jack', The Boys' First-Rate Pocket Library, No.55 (c.1891),

novels certainly fit the picture described above of a foreign people with their own language and laws, determined to maintain their separateness from non-gypsies. Yet, although Borrow had had some contact with the gypsies, one critic expressed surprise that the reader was in fact told very little about the people. Borrow's tendency to generalise, to appropriate gypsy words from another author (including mistakes) without acknowledgement and to romanticise and exaggerate the mysterious and picturesque meant that the resultant picture was far removed from a factual study of gypsy life.<sup>2</sup> Even so, Borrow's novels can be seen to have contributed greatly to the appearance of gypsies in romantic literature, and perhaps even provided an important stimulus to the growth of gypsology which appeared at the time. Indeed, many writers, whether novelists or journalists, referred frequently to Borrow for some kind of inspiration, and whose romanticism filtered through to the pictures they were to present. Witness, for example, the strong element of romanticism with which some writers presented the gypsy way of life:

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2 See G. Borrow, Romano Lavo-Lil (1888), together with the works cited above; A. Compton-Rickett, The Vagabond in Literature (1906), p.6; J. Simson, 'Disquisition on the Past, Present and Future of Gipsydom', in W. Simson, A History of the Gipsies (1865), pp.523-4; Rev. S. B. James, 'English Gipsies', Church of England Magazine (6 October 1875), p.226; T. Taylor, 'Gypsey Experiences', Illustrated London News, 29 November 1851, p.655; C. M. Bowen, 'George Borrow', Westminster Review, Vol.173 (1910), pp.286-304.



"Formal, hedge-clipped, much-inclosed, well-farmed, law-respecting, vagrant-hunting England has few sights left so racy in their savour of wood smoke and open air, so delightful in their grouping of form and blending of colour, so helpful to the green landscape, so suggestive of escape from the mill-horse round of daily life and labour as the wayside camp of the gipsy horde",<sup>3</sup>

Such romanticism pre-dated Borrow, co-existed with him and would long outlive memories of his works, yet his particular influence at the time should not be forgotten.<sup>4</sup> In relation to the gypsies, he stood as the figurehead for the romantic elevation of their existence to the status of chief protagonist with the forces of progress and advance. This theme was adopted by many writers:

3 'The Roumany-Chai or Gipsies', Illustrated London News, Vol.29, (1856), p.304.

4 See W. Howitt, The Rural Life of England (1840), pp.165-72; C. G. Leland, The Gypsies (1882), pp.9-17; G. White, The Natural History of Selborne (1788), p.201; A. Bates, 'Gipsy George', Atlantic Monthly, Vol.100 (1907), p.479; 'Who are the Gypsies?', Church of England Magazine (1842), p.293; 'The Yetholm Gypsies', Hogg's Instructor (1893), p.75; Clarion, 19 August 1910, p.1; First Report of the Committee for the Reformation of the Gypsies in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1839), p.6 (hereafter, Rpt. of Cttee. for Reform of Scottish Gypsies).

"These people . . . are not the outcasts of society; they voluntarily hold aloof from its crushing organisation, and refuse to wear the bonds it imposes. The sameness and restraints of civil life; the routine of business and labour; 'the dull mechanic paces to and fro'; the dim skies, confined air, and circumscribed space of towns; the want of freshness and natural beauty; - these conditions of existence are for them intolerable, and they escape from them whenever they can".<sup>5</sup>

They stood for freedom against the tyranny of law and progress, for nature before civilisation, and for simplicity before complexity. This instinct for liberty was held as the symbol for the aspirations of all who challenged the repressive forces of modernisation.<sup>6</sup>

These writers did not go unchallenged though, and their emphasis on imagination rather than fact or experience was often pointed to. George Smith said they looked at gypsy life through "tinted or prismatic spectacles", and dismissed them all as "... daisy-bank sentimental backwood gipsy writers".<sup>7</sup> Many other

5 B. Smart and H. Crofton, The Dialect of the English Gypsies (1875), p.xvi. In fact, one of the first writers to set up the comparison between the gypsies and those who dwelled in the expanding cities was Samuel Roberts. He was undoubtedly a fervent gypsy romanticist who admired the simplicity of their pastoral way of life, seeing them as one of the few groups standing opposed to industrial progress. He asked his readers to compare the simplicity of the gypsies' way of life with the bitterness and degradation of that of the lower classes in the manufacturing districts (see S. Roberts, 'A Word for the Gypsies', in his The Blind Man and His Son, 1816, p.116). By 1836 he even claimed that "... the Gypsies are by far more intelligent and civilised than the depraved part of the lower ranks in large towns ...". (See his The Gypsies, 1836, p.57. Also, C. Holmes, 'Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies', in S. Pollard and C. Holmes, eds., Essays on the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire, Barnsley, 1976, pp.233-46; S. Roberts, 'Samuel Roberts of Park Grange, Sheffield, 1763-1848', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, hereafter, J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.3, 1912, pp.161-6).

6 See A. Symons, 'In Praise of Gypsies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.296-7.

7 G. Smith, I've been a Gipsying (1885), Prefatory note, p.34.

commentators warned against being misled by the representations of the stage or books,<sup>8</sup> But just as these criticisms were mounting the romantic movement resurged and gained in strength with the emergence of the numerous gypsy lorists. They took this romantic picture, mixed it with the developing sciences of anthropology, genealogy, ethnology and philology, and emerged with a fully-blown racial theory that had the notion of blood purity for the unifying theme.

Perhaps the most noted writers who adopted this vision of a small gypsy elite of 'pure' blood were Francis Hindes Groome and the contributors to the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society. They sought to identify the 'true' gypsy and to show him to stand above the common traveller, morally, socially and educationally. In fact, he was presented as the real aristocrat of the road. Their task was made more urgent by the belief that this purity was being eroded, and with it was disappearing the lore and culture of these distinct people. Scientific enquiries of the type outlined above, which will be examined shortly, permitted the lorists to isolate a Romany race of pure pedigree, and then to make assertions about the high moral character and cultural distinctiveness of this people. The notion of blood purity assisted the isolation of the Romany gypsy from other half-blood travellers, variously called posrats, didakais, and mumpers,

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8 See, for example, A. Esquiros, The English at Home, translated by L. Wraxall (1861), pp.145-6; A. H. Japp, 'The Gypsies as seen by Friendly Eyes', Gentlemen's Magazine, Vol.255 (1883, Vol.2), p.584; S. B. James, 'Gipsies', The Graphic, 19 September 1874, p.289; Hampshire Advertiser, 1 January 1842, p.2.

and from non-gypsies, otherwise termed gaujos or gorgios,

The lorists attempted to construct a picture of the past and present respectability of the Romany gypsy to set in contrast to the usual picture of travellers' camps, situated on waste ground, with a loosely constructed canvas tent for shelter, skeletonised horses feeding nearby, utensils and rubbish scattered about, a woman cooking, a man lazing, and swarms of ragged and unwashed children competing with each other to be the first to beg from the stranger or passer-by.<sup>9</sup> Such a situation had nothing to commend it, to the old gypsies who could remember better days, nor to the gypsy lorists who found such a state of things contrary to reasonable conceptions of social order. To link the Romany gypsy with a class of travellers living on the verge of society in poverty was opposed to the romanticised image the lorists wished to paint of a persecuted race that had remained noble and culturally distinct amidst great adversity. Some of the 'pure' race still lived in the late nineteenth century, though in rapidly decreasing numbers, and the modern travellers were not 'real' gypsies at all:

"Gypsies! Why, there aren't no gypsies now... All the old families are broken up - over in 'Merica, or gone in houses, or stopping round the nasty poverty towns. My father wouldn't ha' stopped by Wolverhampton, not if you'd gone on your bended knees to him and offered him a pound a day to do it. He'd have runn'd miles if you'd just have shown him the places where some of these new-fashioned travellers has their tents".<sup>10</sup>

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9 'In Gipsy Tents', Chambers's Journal, No.882 (20 November 1880), p.738.

10 An old gypsy quoted in F. H. Groome, In Gipsy Tents (Edinburgh, 1880; Wakefield, 1973), pp.101-2.

In short, the lorists had separated from the large group of travellers a sub-group of Romany gypsies, of 'pure' blood, who had a culture and characteristics that identified them from all others. The accusations of poverty, filth, depravity, immorality and a multitude of other vices, then being levelled at the travelling population, were denied by the lorists only in relation to the Romany. The mass of travellers, of diluted or no Romany blood, were undoubtedly the type described by, for example, George Smith of Coalville, local authority officials, and other critics.<sup>11</sup> To the lorists this group were simply a low breed of itinerants, only loosely connected, if at all, to the Romany. Just as purity of blood was used

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11 While the works of the gypsy lorists were in some measure intended to counter-balance Smith's uncompromising attacks on the gypsies, their views were in reality not so far distant. Smith, too, possessed a vision of the 'true' Romany. He talked of one settled gypsy as being "... as pure a gypsy as it is possible to find at this late day" (I've been ..., p.236). Another encounter took him into the vans of the gypsy owner of a coconut establishment. The vans were so clean and impressive that Smith concluded the owner must have had at least three parts of Romany blood in his veins (ibid., p.272). It would seem, then, that Smith and the lorists shared the same racial interpretation, and were describing in their studies different groups of people. Yet Smith was not consistent and at times diverged radically from the lorists by denying ethnic variation and simply equating gypsyism with travelling, hence the title of his book. In I've been a Gipsying he added an appendix in which he stated that two-thirds of the children then travelling the country were of parents who once followed town and settled employments. His interpretation was thus confused and contradictory, at one moment upholding the idea of the Romany and the next stating that an acquaintance of his had been a gypsy "... nearly all his life" (letter from G. Smith in the Standard, 14 August 1879, p.6). That is, Smith believed the old race of Romanies had largely been replaced by a new race of persons who recently took to wandering. His use of the term 'gypsy' is thus ambiguous.

to explain positive, worthy features and distinctive culture of the Romany, so its dilution could be used as the explanation for the weakening of these features and the appearance of negative characteristics, such as vice and immorality.

The essential paradox of the lorists' approach was that their enquiries began only with the realisation that the gypsy was no longer of 'pure' blood with a distinct culture, these aspects having long been in the stages of a steady and progressive decay. The isolation and purity of the race were disappearing with the abandonment of traditional habits and customs, and the degeneration of the Romany language.<sup>12</sup> The work of the gypsy lorists became a desperate attempt to salvage some vestige of separateness for a group that had become virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the travelling population. Their arguments about the present, however, were firmly embedded in a vision of a mythical and romantic past which they intended to confirm rather than question. The very need to publish books and articles which argued emphatically and unswervingly for a distinct and separate people was in itself a recognition that these elements were of the past. Moreover, their researches provided much evidence that indicated the opposite to their conclusions, and so illustrated the invalidity of their approach and interpretation in the contemporary context.

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12 See W. A. Dutt, 'English Gypsies', Cassell's Magazine, Vol.53 (1911), p.60; J. Sampson, 'English Gypsy Songs and Rhymes', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.2, No.2 (1890), p.80; A. Beale, 'Among the Gypsies', Sunday Magazine (1879), p.49.

This is illustrated best by considering their argument, and its weaknesses, in more detail.

There emerged from the writings of the romanticists, lorists and their disciples, several key factors, interrelated and united by concepts of racial descent and the maintenance of purity of blood, that marked the 'true' gypsy as distinct and separate from both other travellers and from the settled population: marriage partners were chosen from within the tribe; 'pure' gypsies had certain, limited surnames; the wandering instinct was a product of 'pure' blood; their physical characteristics were distinctive, as was their language and dress; and, finally, they had their own rites, taboos, ceremonies and customs. Thus, genealogical enquiry mixed with hereditary and cultural determinants to permit the identification of a distinct race among the travellers. This was presented as a statement of fact, of how things were, having resulted from scientific enquiry and empiricist objectivity, the implications of which are dealt with later in the chapter.

A frequent claim was that gypsies married only members of their own tribe, thereby maintaining ancestral purity and preventing the dilution of any of their fundamental characteristics. If the tradition was broken the offender was cast out of his tribe and denied any further contact with his family. Occasionally the gypsy

would realise his mistake and return in search of re-acceptance,<sup>13</sup>  
 Even more unacceptable than marriage with gorgios was marriage with  
 gypsies who ignored certain taboos and with 'inferior' travellers  
 of diluted blood, who were considered depraved and unrespectable.<sup>14</sup>

Such rigorous application of internal laws is inconceivable  
 among travellers in the nineteenth century, and even before.  
 From the time of the first appearance of gypsies in this country,  
 in the early fifteenth century, they would have been mixing  
 "... culturally, linguistically and genetically with the local  
 populations ...".<sup>15</sup> Such mixing with indigenous travellers and  
 other social groups continued throughout all subsequent centuries,  
 thus casting serious doubts on the ability of the gypsies to

13 See, for example, H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life in Lancashire and Cheshire', Manchester Literary Club, Papers, Vol.3 (Manchester, 1877), p.40. More recently this myth has continued to be expounded about the nineteenth-century gypsy in D. Harvey, The Gypsies - Wagon Time and After (1979), p.9, a book that contains many fine illustrations but is let down by a very weak text.

14 J. Crabb, The Gypsies' Advocate (1832), p.48; T. W. Thompson, 'The Uncleaness of Women among English Gypsies', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.1, No.1 (1922), p.42.

15 T. Acton, 'Academic Success and Political Failure: a review of modern social science writing in English on Gypsies', Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol.2, No.2 (April 1979), p.231.



maintain their purity of race.<sup>16</sup> By the eighteenth century records of marriages with gorgios have been preserved, and it would appear that such relationships were by no means rare during the century.<sup>17</sup> Evidence of intermarriage is even more plentiful for the succeeding century. Walter and James Simson, in their determination to prove that nomadic gypsies constituted but a small part of the race, argued for a very high degree of mixing with the native blood of the country.<sup>18</sup> The reasons given for such a level of intermarriage were the desire and need to disguise the race in order to avoid persecution. Although much of the Simsons' work and ideas was based on speculation and impression rather than fact, there are many other sources which offer sufficient evidence to the same effect.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most convincing of all was provided by the lorists themselves. Groome, for example, provided three Romany pedigrees

16 See pages 235-6; 245-7.

17 F. H. Groome attempted to extract something favourable from this by illustrating they mixed with 'worthy' partners. He argued that they "... have wedded with the sons and daughters of the land - with peasants, miners, shopkeepers, farmers often, with native tramps and jail-birds hardly ever". (See his In Gipsy Tents, p.250).

18 W. Simson, op.cit.

19 It would be too lengthy to provide references to every source where intermarriage between gypsies and gorgios is mentioned. The following are just a small cross-section. See R. C. de Crespigny and H. Hutchinson, The New Forest (1899: Wakefield, 1975), p.83; Lady A. Grosvenor, 'Preface' to H. H. Malleon, Napoleon Boswell (1913), p.viii; 'Edinburghshire', in the New Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol.1 (Edinburgh, 1845), pp.184-5; W. A. Dutt, 'With the East Anglian Gypsies', Good Words, Vol.37 (1896), pp.120-6; E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp. 331-2, footnote 5; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1907', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.2 (1908), p.127.

that showed varying degrees of mixed marriages with gorgios. In one of these, of Abraham Wood, with two hundred and thirty-five descendants, marriages with gorgios outnumbered those with gypsies. Groome himself then recognised that, despite his desire to prove the opposite, not only was the trend towards intermarriage more pronounced by the latter decades of the century, but also that it was extremely difficult to draw a hard and clear line between gypsies and non-gypsies. He concluded that the only satisfactory test was language, with every gypsy being able to speak Romany, even though not every speaker of Romany was a gypsy.<sup>20</sup>

Other writers acknowledged casually that non-gypsy blood could be found in ancestral chains, while others took these genealogical enquiries one stage further.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Thompson's researches showed that the majority of Lawrence Boswell's descendants had, by the fourth generation, married with gorgios.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the Reverend George Hall's notes on the pedigree of the Heron family showed a similar movement, illustrated in the following table:

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20 F. H. Groome, op.cit., pp.250-3.

21 See, for example, J. Sampson, 'Introduction' to M. E. Lyster, The Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood (1926), pp.xi-xii, and pp. 2,7; 'Pedigree of Matthew Wood', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), pp.370-1; Rev. G. Hall, 'The Heron Pedigree', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.7, No.2 (1913), pp.81-7; W. H. Rivers 'Notes on the Heron Pedigree collected by the Rev. G. Hall', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.7, No.2 (1913), pp.88-104; 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), p.113; T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox and the Derbyshire Boswells', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1924), p.158ff.; Rev. G. Hall, 'Notes on the Boss Pedigree', Romanitshels, Didakais and Folk-Lore Gazette (hereafter, Folk-Lore Gazette), Vol.1, No.4 (1912), p.120ff.

22 T. W. Thompson, 'The Uncleaness ...', loc.cit., p.42,

TABLE 3

MARRIAGES OF THE HERON FAMILY  
WITH NON-GYPSIES AND THOSE OF MIXED STOCK

	Generation				
	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>F</u>
Numbers of families	2	7	23	28	29
Numbers of marriages	10	37	71	64	34
Marriages with:					
(a) non-gypsies	1	0	7	14	5
(b) mixed stock	0	4	5	18	12

Source: W. H. Rivers, 'Notes on the Heron Pedigree collected by the Rev. G. Hall', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.7, No.2 (1913), p.91.

The trend would appear to be clear, and confirming the findings of other genealogists. Yet Rivers himself said of the above table:

"... (the) method is far from accurate, for the pedigree shows that many people bearing true Gypsy names are nevertheless of mixed blood ... The figures must ... be taken as only rough approximations ...".<sup>23</sup>

What Rivers has hinted at here in fact, on closer examination, reveals serious and fundamental flaws in the methodology and assumptions made by the genealogists of Romany pedigrees. The chief way that information on pedigrees was collected was from the oral accounts of the gypsies themselves. Even disregarding lapses of memory and incorrect recollections, there was also the problem

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23 W. H. Rivers, 'Notes on the Heron Pedigree ...', loc.cit., p.91.

of the gypsies being reluctant to admit marriages with non-gypsies or with those whom they considered the degenerate half-bloods.<sup>24</sup>

A more serious criticism concerns the assumptions made by the genealogists about the extent of purity of blood. Essentially, they adopted the lorists' maxim that surnames were a convenient and accurate guide to purity of race.

The idea that gypsies could be identified by their surnames probably dates back to the time of their appearance in this country, and was referred to by Hoyland and Crabb in the early part of the nineteenth century. The gypsy lorists took this and transformed it into a means of identifying purity of race, and much of the responsibility for this must rest with Charles Godfrey Leland, who produced a list of names of pure-blooded and half-blooded gypsies, which ascribed to each family group particular physical characteristics and directions where they were to be found.<sup>25</sup> This method, and the guidelines provided by Leland, were adopted by many subsequent writers.<sup>26</sup> Recent writers have even suggested that the high incidence of persons on the canal

24 The matter of gypsy self-ascription, and their desire to abide by the myth of a separate race, is discussed later in the chapter.

25 C. G. Leland, The Gypsies (1884), pp.304-9.

26 See, for example, F. Cuttriss, Romany Life (1915), pp.76-7; A. E. Gillington, Gypsies of the Heath (1916), p.17; Rev. G. Hall, The Gypsy's Parson (1915), p.55; B. Vesey-Fitzgerald, Gypsies of Britain (1951), p.77; C. Stein, 'Our Gypsy Visitors', Baily's Magazine of Sports and Pastimes, Vol.70 (1898), pp.17-23; T.A.T., 'The Gipsy of Today', The Sketch, 4 September 1895, p.329.

boats with the names of Stanley, Taylor, Lee and Boswell indicated that the first canal boatmen were Romanies.<sup>27</sup> Rarely has this methodological position been challenged despite obvious discrepancies and flaws, as shown by the following examples,

The surnames Buckland, Stanley, Clayton and Holland were commonly associated with pure Romany ancestry, yet a more detailed look at the family histories of some who travelled the roads in the nineteenth century bearing these names suggests that all was not what it appeared. For example, Edwin Buckland had been born a peasant at Charlbury in Oxfordshire. He lived in a house until he was twenty-seven years of age, when he married a gypsy and took to a wandering way of life. He was even noted for speaking Romany with great fluency.<sup>28</sup> One of the Stanleys claimed respectable ancestry, with his great grandfather being a principal officer in the army. When the family fell on hard times his father took to an itinerant life, and Stanley was born into this and has remained with the travellers, making butchers' skewers in order to maintain

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27 L. T. C. Rolt, Narrow Boat (1944; 1965), p.24. C. Hadfield challenged this theory, and argued that the boatmen were recruited in similar ways to those used to draw men to industrial areas (British Canals, 1950; 1966, p.73). More recently H. Hanson has critically examined Rolt's position. He looked at the Registers of Boats and Barges for several counties and found that only 11-12% of the names contained thereon were also listed by Leland as gypsy names. Moreover, it could not be assumed that all people with those names were in fact gypsies, so the real number amounted to less than 11%. Hanson thus found Rolt's conclusions unacceptable, though nowhere does he question this methodological position of associating surname with Romany gypsy beyond stating that Leland's list may not have been comprehensive (H. Hanson, The Canal Boatmen, 1760-1914, Manchester, 1975, pp.1-4).

28 Lady A. Grosvenor, 'A Pilgrim's Progress', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), p.204.

himself.<sup>29</sup> The families of Clayton and Holland were also of sedentary origins. From the original families of the Hollands of Barlestone, and the Claytons of Barwell, there were said to be, by the 1880s, seven families of Hollands travelling the country and fifteen families of Claytons. This represented a total of around 150 adults and children who had taken to gypsying in the last fifteen years since George Smith was writing in the mid-1880s. The ancestors of both these families were stockiners, or makers of stockings, who had gradually taken to hawking from a basket round the villages, and then from a cart round the county to a van.<sup>30</sup>

These examples of individual families show clearly the impossibility of assuming any clear correlation between surname and racial origin, indicating the ease with which confusion was made with travellers of short tradition. The other side of the coin reveals the inadequacy of the genealogists' attempts to isolate racial origins from among travellers of long-standing. Consider the following instructions issued by the Gypsy Lore

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29 H. Woodcock, The Gipsies (1865), pp.148-51.

30 G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.86-7.

Society:

"... all members are warmly urged to look through such Parish Registers as they can obtain access to. Every entry in which the descriptions 'Egyptian', 'Gypsy', 'vagrant', 'vagabond', 'wanderer', 'stranger', or their Latin equivalents, occur, should be noted down ... Entries containing obviously Gypsy names should also be copied, even when there is no description".<sup>31</sup>

Such vague and all-encompassing instructions were bound to lead to conflicting interpretations. The debate over whether or not the name Kemp indicated a true gypsy highlighted the problems.<sup>32</sup> Eric Winstedt, keen to uphold the existence of a 'pure' Romany, disputed that Kemp was of pure blood and he cited from parish registers the entry of the burial of a Kemp, "a travelling man", at Carlton, Suffolk, in 1726.<sup>33</sup> To Winstedt this showed conclusively that this man was not a gypsy. But Lady Arthur Grosvenor, equally in favour of the Romany myth, used precisely the same type of evidence to prove that the Buckland family were gypsies.<sup>34</sup>

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31 Gypsy Lore Society, printed report, undated (Gypsy Lore Society Archive). Any reliance on parish registers to establish racial identity must be treated with reserve. Whether to enter the traveller under the heading 'traveller', 'Egyptian', etc. would have varied from vicar to vicar, parish to parish and also over time. Furthermore, the different spellings would have added to the confusion with Boswell becoming anything from Boss, to Bosel to Bosvile and Heron from Earne to Hurn to Horam (see Rev. S. B. James, 'English Gipsies', loc.cit., 18 September 1875, p.161).

32 The Kemp gang was said to travel the Midland counties, along with the Lovells and Boswells (W. Howitt, op.cit., p.182).

33 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.4, No.1 (1910), p.80.

34 Lady A. Grosvenor, 'A Pilgrim's ...', loc.cit., p.216, footnote 1.

Evidently, therefore, the use of surnames to identify a separate race of Romany gypsies is highly flawed. Essentially, it fails to distinguish between the different groups of travellers with any degree of certainty, grouping together as 'pure' gypsies indigenous travelling families with 'pure' surnames and the 'vagabonds' and 'hawkers' of the parish registers. Such a methodology denies rather than assists the likelihood of identifying racial origins. Yet despite the inconsistencies and inadequacies of their methods and arguments, the lorists continued to press their claim for a distinct race, possessing characteristics determined by blood purity. The two main hereditary features referred to were the travelling instinct and physical characteristics.

Blood purity was said to have an important determining influence on the unavoidable desire of the gypsy to wander. Kālo-ratt was the term used to describe the black, or unmixed, blood of the pure Romany, in which was contained the wandering instinct.<sup>35</sup> The wild nomadic spirit was transmitted to the gypsy by birth, and so could not be controlled or denied:

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35 C. G. Leland, 'Visiting the Gypsies', Century Magazine, Vol. 25 (April 1883), p. 908.



"There is in the gypsy a power stronger than all others, a power that severs old ties, and that is their unsubjected wandering instinct. We come across it in the gypsy in a more intensified and at the same time possibly more primitive form than in any other wandering people".<sup>36</sup>

The belief in, and acceptance of, an inborn craving, a 'wanderlust', was thus persistent. The barriers this presented to evangelists and others who wished to reform the gypsy by settling him were considered by some to be insurmountable,

"... for pure Gypsies, the aristocrats of their race, abhor settled life, preferring to die on the road rather than wither inside four walls".<sup>37</sup>

The same sentiments were emphasised time and again by the gypsies themselves. Even though there are numerous examples of settled gypsies who lived to an old age, provided by the gypsiologists themselves, and despite the evidence they supplied about the large numbers of gypsies leaving their roads and tents in the cold, winter months in favour of rented accommodation in houses, this equation of being settled with non-gypsy behaviour and habits was common. Temporary lodging could be excused either by accepting it as temporary or by claiming that only those of mixed blood chose this alternative:

"In winter ... the mumpers sneak off into the bricks and mortar ..while the true dark Roman blood warms itself by the camp fire ...".<sup>38</sup>

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36 R. Numelin, The Wandering Spirit: a study of human migration (1937), p.279.

37 Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., pp.3-4. See also H. Woodcock, op.cit., p.40.

38 Rev. S. B. James, 'English Gypsies', loc.cit. (18 September 1875), p.161. See also W. H. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life: impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs (1910), p.266.

That is, diluted blood permitted and explained this aberration from 'true' gypsy customs.

It fitted the romantic, stereotyped image of the gypsy as 'noble savage', living under nature's roof, to sustain the belief that the gypsies were purely nomads, unable and unwilling to control their 'wanderlust', an instinct characteristic of their race.<sup>39</sup> Evidence of such an instinct was said to be provided by the many instances experienced of gypsies who, having been found sedentary employments by benevolent missionaries keen to

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39 It is interesting to compare this reasoning with that current in Nazi Germany. Both accepted the belief in the existence of a nomadic gene, but while the gypsiologists used this to excuse, or justify, the gypsies' nomadic existence, the Nazis used the same argument as an apology for, or rather justification of, their policy of extermination or compulsory sterilisation of this minority group. Consider, for example, the following statement of a Nazi in A. Koestler's novel, Arrival and Departure (1966), p.145: "Personally I am fond of gypsy music ... but we had to get rid of the nomadic gene, with its asocial and anarchic components, in the human chromosome". Although post-war German courts, convened to hear restitution claims, ruled that gypsies had been persecuted not for any racial reason but because of their asocial and criminal record, it was nevertheless apparent that Nazi racial law and theory saw gypsies as a race apart and a threat to German racial purity. A special bureau was even set up to construct genealogical tables and by 1842 1942 there were 30,000 gypsies on file. By Nazi definition, a person was classified a gypsy if two of his sixteen great-great-grandparents had been gypsies (G. Puxon, 'Forgotten Victims. Plight of the Gypsies', Patterns of Prejudice, Vol.11, No.2, March-April 1977, pp.23-28). Doubt must, however, be expressed whether the rigid enforcement of this classificatory principle was able to be carried out in practice owing to the inadequacies of genealogical records. After the war many of the officials employed in the Federal Gypsy Affairs Bureau had previously implemented the anti-gypsy policies of the Nazis. The influence of these ex-Nazis on government thinking and actions remained at least up until 1974 when this situation was exposed by the West German gypsy organisation, Verband Deutscher Sinti (Sunday Times, 12 April 1981, p.15). For a full account of the Nazi treatment of the gypsies see D. Kenrick and G. Puxon, The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies (1972) .

see the people settled and respectable, found they were unable to come to terms with remaining in one place for any length of time, and so soon returned to the nomadic way of life. This applied to both adults and children. Employment was often found for gypsy children as domestic servants, yet they remained, usually, only a short time before returning to the tents of their fathers. Occasionally factors other than genetic were offered, when it was suggested that freedom from restraint, together with the habit of vagrancy indulged in early life, had created a passion for it not compatible with regular industrial pursuits.<sup>40</sup> Such an explanation moved from factors of genetic determinism towards socialisation as the motor behind the perpetuation of travelling, yet these reasons were not mutually exclusive and were often said to reinforce each other.

The second usage of the hereditary argument was that physical characteristics unique to the 'pure' gypsies were genetically determined. There can be no dispute with the scientific rationale of this, but the basis of the claim, purity of blood, has been shown already to stand on faulty foundations. It is useful to consider the argument in favour of racial features in association with the outward appearance of the gypsy as a whole, thus including genetic alongside cultural factors.

The idea that the gypsies could be identified by their physical appearances alone can be attributed primarily to the

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40 'Gossip about the Gypsies', Leisure Hour, Vol.10 (1861), p.446. See also A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.173.

fictional and artistic stereotypes created by the Romanticists of the period. Allegedly, the 'pure' gypsy was readily identifiable:

"... by certain physical peculiarities which that race everywhere presents. The swarthy complexion, the raven-black hair, the dark eye with its pearly lustre, and the peculiar conformation of their features and marked profiles, render them as distinct a people as the Jews themselves ...".<sup>41</sup>

Their dark skin was attributed to many reasons, some overtly racial but others not. It was variously put down to their Indian origin; the tendency to first coat the bodies of their young in a concoction made from boiling the roots of wild plants with the leaves or fruit of the walnut, and then leave them to 'bake' in the sun; their rugged, outdoor life and constant exposure to the sun; the stains produced by living and breathing the smoke of camp fires; and, finally, because of the lowness of their habits as evidenced by the general dirt of their camps and clothes, and their fear and hatred of washing.<sup>42</sup> Even the less obviously racial explanations did not deny a belief in the gypsies as a separate race for they simply enhanced the already darkened skins of the people. When people actually began to work among the gypsies it was discovered, with some surprise,

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41 Letter from J. R. T. Mayer, quoting from a manuscript in his possession by V. S. Morwood, to Notes and Queries, 3rd Ser., Vol.9 (13 January 1866), p.49. See also E. Deutsch, 'Gypsies', Chambers' Encyclopaedia, Vol.5 (1863), p.172.

42 See George Smith quoted at the Manchester Social Science Congress in the Illustrated London News, 29 November 1879, p.503; 'Gipsies', The Literary and Scientific Repository, Vol.3 (1821), p.405; extracts from a volume of press-cuttings (Romany Collection, Brotherton Library).

that these Romantic images did not easily correlate with actual experience:

"To speak of a fair-haired, blue-eyed gypsy seems almost a contradiction in terms, and yet it is quite a correct description of a large section of gypsydom in England and elsewhere, and well known to those who closely study the subject / my emphasis\_7"<sup>43</sup>

This impression was confirmed by a wide variety of commentators, pertaining to the gypsies of all regions for the whole of the period under review.<sup>44</sup>

The second part of the argument of those who favoured the Romantic, racial image of the gypsies' physical features also concerned their mode and style of dress, which was said to be showy and colourful, with headscarves, trinkets, droopy earrings and the like in abundance.<sup>45</sup> There are two main objections to this attempt to equate a particular style of dress with the Romany gypsy. Firstly, travellers of all descriptions adopted this style for economic reasons, and, secondly, it did not in any case apply to the majority.

There is no doubt that many people deliberately impersonated

43 A. H. Japp, 'The Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.579.

44 Again, references to this could be extremely lengthy, for they can be seen in many works relating to the gypsies barring those eager to uphold the Romantic image at all costs. See, for example, M. R. Mitford, Our Village: sketches of rural character and scenery, Vol.2 (1827), p.267; E. Brewer, 'Gipsy Encampments in the Heart of London', Sunday at Home (1896), p.113; J. G. Kohl, England and Wales (1844; 1968), p.190; Rpt. of Cttee. for Reform of Scottish Gypsies, Appendix IV, p.30.

45 See J. Crabb, op.cit., p.24; E. Deutsch, 'Gypsies', loc.cit., p.172.

the gypsy of the Romantics in the manner and style of dress in order to secure specific ends. At times it would have been beneficial to adopt the gaujified image of the gypsy to facilitate economic transactions. For example, London prostitutes were said to have dressed up as gypsy women to attract clients at Epsom during Derby week.<sup>46</sup> This served to confirm the popular impression of the gypsy as immoral and lacking in any sexual scruples. The apparent overtness of their actions at race meetings was simply thought to be a more open display of what was suspected about a people who cohabited in tents and vans which housed large numbers of adults and children of both sexes.

Other travellers were said to do the same. Rogues and vagabonds, "... of the worst description ...", were reported to impersonate gypsies and often pass for them,<sup>47</sup> and a witness to the 1839 Constabulary Force Commission gave the following evidence:

"The women who travel about with the trampers seldom go out begging; they sometimes disguise themselves as Gipsies, and go fortune-telling. It is very profitable; they watch for the master and mistress to leave the house, and then try to get hold of the servants. They beg money, food, clothes, or anything; and if a silver spoon is in their way they will not 'tumble over it'; they will steal it".<sup>48</sup>

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46 D. Kenrick and G. Puxon, The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies (1972), p.38.

47 S. Roberts, The Gypsies (1836), pp.75-82.

48 Report of the Commission appointed to inquire as to the best means of establishing an efficient Constabulary Force in England and Wales (1839), p.61, para.32 (hereafter, Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force).

A gypsy, named Lementina Lovell, confirmed this practice during a conversation with Francis Hindes Groome in the 1870s, and lamented the fact that "... even the lowest Irish tell fortunes now - for sixpence!"<sup>49</sup> Even in the 1880s men and women were still said to disguise themselves as gypsies in order to approach kitchen entrances of houses to sell old, worthless and overpriced fruit, vegetables and poultry.<sup>50</sup> At fairs, race-meetings and feasts, when the travellers were present partly to entertain, then the adoption of Romany-style dress was all a part of the stage-show. Bright and eccentric clothes and jewellery were a part of the device for persuading the gorgio to part with his money, whether in the fortune-telling booths or at the specially staged gypsy balls and 'coronations'.

Thus, while the Romany-style costumes may not have entirely disappeared by the nineteenth century it was not possible to identify their wearers as 'pure' gypsies. Moreover, it should be noted that the appearance of such costumes was exceptional rather than customary. The majority of the New Forest gypsies, for instance, were clothed in items picked up or bought cheaply, and the children were dressed in "... the unlovely and ragged garments of the common tramp".<sup>51</sup> T. Taylor, writing in the Illustrated London News, ridiculed the theatricality of the common perceptions about the brightness and gaudiness of gypsy

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49 Quoted in F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.377.

50 C. J. R. Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy (1887), p.312.

51 R. C. De Crespigny and H. Hutchinson, op.cit., p.82; see also A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.175.

dress, and concluded that their appearance was rather a cross between a debauched game-keeper and a Staffordshire pot-hawker,<sup>52</sup> Although he sympathised with the notion of the 'pure' Romany, Taylor at least recognised that their appearance was no different from the rest of the population, and that, in the main, their dress was ragged rather than colourful, and their appearance generally was of hardship and poverty.<sup>53</sup> It was suggested that a main reason for the gypsies abandoning the Oriental-looking costumes in favour of native dress was to evade persecution and prosecution.<sup>54</sup>

- 52 T. Taylor, 'Gypsy Experiences', Illustrated London News, 29 November 1851, pp.655-6. Taylor stated further that painters, dramatists and novelists almost invariably misrepresented the gypsies and refused to paint them as they really were: "In the pictures and drawings of them there is an entire lack of truth, which can be detected at a glance by the 'aficionado', the true lover and student of Roumany (sic.) life. I cannot remember a single genuine Gypsy in a novel ...". Taylor implied that most painters continued to portray the gypsy as an Oriental. In contrast, J. H. Yoxall also used paintings to assess when gypsies began to dress in the style of the native population. He concluded, "... it would seem that by 1806 English gypsy women must have adopted the English style of dress ..." (J. H. Yoxall, 'A Word on Gypsy Costume', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.1, 1907, pp.23-4). Yoxall thus argued that gypsy costume was unexceptional and that this was reflected in paintings. While Taylor would have agreed with the conclusion, he claimed that artists continued to dress them in Oriental-looking clothes. We can only assume they were looking at different paintings.
- 53 Once again, the sources to support this assertion are numerous. See, for example, J. Crabb, A Condensed History of the Gypsies (Southampton, 1843), p.26; M. R. Mitford, op.cit., p.300; S. Roberts, The Gypsies (1836), pp.17-18; 'Gypsies and Fortune-Telling', Bow Bells, Vol.16 (1873), p.502; 'My Friend's Gypsy Journal', Good Words (1 November 1868), p.704; E. Brewer, 'Gypsy Encampments ...', loc.cit., p.113; A. Beale, 'Among the Gypsies', loc.cit., p.50.
- 54 W. Brockie, The Gypsies of Yetholm (Kelso, 1884), p.9. See also B. Skot, A Brief Account of Gypsy History (Liverpool, 1909), p.48; W. Simson, op.cit., p.154; Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), p.9.



However, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the Romanticists persisted in presenting the gypsies as a visibly distinct race. It served their, and the Tories', purposes to describe a bright, colourful, cheerful group of people travelling the countryside in marked contrast to the dirt, squalor and drabness of the expanding cities and growing slums. They were a pleasing distraction that diverted attention from the realities of progress. Yet, in truth, the gypsies were not far removed from the greyness of that expansion:

"Their silver buttons are all gone to pot. Their silk velvet coats, plush waistcoats, and diamond rings have vanished, never more to return with their present course of life; patched breeches, torn coats, slouched hats and washed gold rings have taken their place, and ragged garments in place of silk dresses for the poor Gipsy women".<sup>55</sup>

Yet while this vision of the gypsy as the literally colourful wanderer at home with Nature lacked any serious evidence, it remained an important stereotyped impression of the 'true' gypsy.

The construction of the myth that the gypsies were a separate race rested also on the belief that they possessed their own distinct culture. This was evidenced, it was suggested, by the existence of their own language, Romany, and by the persistent belief in a complex series of taboos and superstitions which demanded strict adherence to certain rites, ceremonies and conventions.

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55 G. Smith, *Gipsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their Children, with suggestions for their improvement* (1880), pp.247-8.

The argument that language provided the key to the difference between gypsies and non-gypsies does not stand up to much critical examination. The commonly-held assumption was that all gypsies were able to speak Romany to some extent, with the greatest fluency coinciding with the purest blood, but not all speakers of Romany were necessarily gypsies.<sup>56</sup> All that such a hypothesis could prove was that those who could not speak Romany could not be gypsies. The definition is thus exclusive rather than inclusive. Even so, this is not without its problems. To what extent did the language have to be known and to what degree of competence did it have to be spoken to be included amongst those who pass the 'Romany test'?

It is beyond doubt that a Romany language did once exist, and that it was spoken widely by travellers of every description. An itinerant whom Leland met near Bath, in 1876, was aware of Romany and asked rhetorically, "... was there ever an old 'traveller' who did not?".<sup>57</sup> However, by the latter stages of the nineteenth century, the language had become increasingly corrupted. According to Robert Scott Macfie, the Romany language was used "... according to the vernacular grammar of the country ...", adding that the gypsy noun had lost its nine cases, and the verb its moods, tenses and persons.<sup>58</sup> The 'vulgar tongue' used by gypsies in the

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56 Broken Romany was said to be spoken by a variety of people in villages in Kent, Surrey and Sussex, including shopkeepers, publicans and stable-boys (Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.153).

57 C. G. Leland, 'The Tinkers' Talk', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.2 (1907), p.169.

58 B. Skot, op.cit., p.45.

nineteenth century was mixed to a greater or lesser extent with English, and conformed to the English method in the arrangement of sentences. The deep or old dialect, which contained a minimum of English words, was said to be known only to a very few aged gypsies.<sup>59</sup> The picture that emerges, then, is that the Romany language was falling rapidly into disuse as the century progressed. Gypsies were becoming increasingly unable to speak the language beyond mixing in some Romany words in normal English sentences. Towards the end of the century it had become almost impossible to find travellers of any description who were still able to speak the language with any degree of fluency. The best that could be hoped for would be for individuals to be able to remember words. George Smith provided evidence of the worst to be expected. He visited a camp of twenty-five men and women and forty children, and he could not discover more than three who could speak Romany, and not one who could spell a word of it.<sup>60</sup>

A major reason for the language falling so rapidly into disuse was due to the greater degree of intermixing taking place with the indigenous population at every level, both as travellers and as settled folk. Despite this, or rather because of it, language became a central concern among the gypsy lorists.

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59 B. Smart and H. Crofton, op.cit., p.xi; Rev. S. B. James, 'English Gypsies', loc.cit., p.225.

60 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.195-6. In his evidence to the Select Committee on Temporary Dwellings, Smith said that the Romany language was very mixed up with slang and was seldom used. He denied categorically that Romany represented the language of the gypsies at that time (Select Committee on the Temporary Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, 1887, p.22, paras. 371-3, hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Temp. Dw.).

It became of extreme and urgent importance to preserve it before it disappeared altogether from living memory. A by-product of this was that it emerged as a central feature in identifying the 'true' Romany from the half-blood, and those who did not know it, or knew it only barely, were excluded from this elite.

To other writers the importance of language assumed a more sinister dimension. To them, notably Simson, it strengthened the impression they wished to create of a distinct and separate gypsy race able to communicate in a strange language that was unknown to the outsider. The implication was that there existed a freemasonry, and almost a conspiracy, on the part of those that could talk it. Simson was not alone in his views:

"The Romany is emphatically a language of secrecy, and the more mixed its phrases the more bewildering it becomes to the uninitiated and valuable to a race of people which socially has the hand of respectability against it and its hand against respectability",<sup>61</sup>

For this reason the gypsies were often quoted as reluctant to disclose this method of secret communication to strangers. Yet if the volume of works published in the nineteenth century on this topic alone is any guide, then vows of silence were certainly not followed by many among them. While it is possible that the purer form of the language was used in centuries long past for this purpose, principally because the harshness of the laws against the gypsies ensured that a sense of common suffering and persecution bound them in a relatively tight group, this certainly could

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61 Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.9 (28 June 1884), p.504.

no longer be said to be the case by the end part of the nineteenth century.

The final element that added to the argument that gypsies were a separate people is to be found in the widely-held opinions concerning their rites, customs, ceremonies, taboos and superstitions. All cultural factors were taken into consideration and covered, inter alia, death and marriage ceremonies, taboos concerning women, and superstitious portents that determined when they could travel. Such impressions were presented time and again throughout the nineteenth century. More recently, Elwood Trigg has taken up this aspect in his doctoral thesis and has attempted to argue, unconvincingly in my opinion, for the persistence of many of these forms in gypsy cultural life for the British gypsies throughout the period under review.<sup>62</sup>

Closely associated with the notion that gypsy life was guided by omens, superstitions and taboos was the romantic relationship gypsies were said to have with nature. The gypsies were seen in this light as a primitive people, and by living closer to nature than even gorgio country people they were thought to be able to preserve their magical beliefs and practices intact. Trigg has, regrettably, given a measure of academic respectability to this picture of a wild, roving, close-knit community of people, isolated from civilised society, who

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62 See E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion amongst the Gypsies of Great Britain', D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1967); and also his book, Gypsy Demons and Divinities: the magical and supernatural practices of the Gypsies (1973).

had managed to preserve their cultural integrity. He seems to have accepted uncritically the 'findings' of contemporary gypsologists, and their adherence to the blood purity myth, without seriously questioning the motives of the writers or the reliability of his sources. Such claims for the cultural identity of a gypsy race, centred upon distinctive rites and taboos, need closer attention.

The type of marriage ceremony most commonly ascribed to the gypsies was that of the 'broomstick' marriage, which involved the crossing of a broomstick by the marriage partners.<sup>63</sup> Other marriage rites were said to involve the use of urine and the assumption of the role of priest by an elder of the family.<sup>64</sup> Although many nineteenth-century writers put forward this idea of strange, irreligious ceremonies, there were also many others who recognised that such rites were no longer still practised. Winstedt accurately noted that the broomstick ceremony was more often mentioned than seen, and concluded that "... it is mere gammon for gorgios".<sup>65</sup> In fact, the gypsies either married in church in conventional fashion, or else simply lived together, bound by a promise made to each other.

Not surprisingly, similar impressions were formed about divorce procedures. Those who maintained that marriages were made only after a series of rites had been followed, also argued

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63 E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion ...', pp.85-7; V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.137-43; T. W. Thompson, 'Gypsy Marriage in England', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.5, No.1 (1926).

64 E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion ...', p.184; W. Simson, op.cit., pp.260-3.

65 E. O. Winstedt, 'Forms and Ceremonies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.4 (1909), p.343.

that various procedures, said to include the sacrifice of a horse, had to be gone through to secure a divorce,<sup>66</sup> If, however, marriage meant nothing more than living together, then 'divorce' or separation was obtained with equal ease and informality.

Ceremonies and superstitions concerning death were also much commented on. The two main traditions associated with gypsy death were said to be the burning of the property of the deceased and the relinquishing of some habit associated with the dead person by the remaining members of his family. Other customs allegedly included the pouring of ale over the grave and the burying of some keepsake with the corpse.<sup>67</sup>

There are numerous reported instances of the custom of burning the property of the dead, which variously included every item associated with the dead person, from his horse and van to his fiddle, to just a few selected items.<sup>68</sup> The custom was still carried out even if it meant that the living members of the deceased's family were reduced to poverty.<sup>69</sup> The motive for this practice was said to be due to a variety of causes, some super-

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66 W.B., 'The Gipsies of the Border', Monthly Chronicle of North Country Lore and Legend (1891), pp.205-8.

67 C. G. Leland, The English Gipsies and their Language (1874), p.58; Note from C. H. J. Anderson, in Notes and Queries, 4th Ser., Vol.3 (29 May 1869), p.518.

68 See, for example, W. Crooke, 'The Burning of the Property of the Gypsy at Death', Folk-Lore, Vol.20 (1909), p.353; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1892-1906', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.366-7; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1908', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1910), p.283; Notes and Queries, 2nd Ser., Vol.3 (6 June 1857), pp.442-3; 9th Ser., Vol.12 (19 December 1903), p.496.

69 B. Skot, op.cit., p.52.

stitious and others practical. Those who wished to emphasise the mystical side of the gypsies' beliefs put the causes as a desire to avoid the taboo of the corpse, and, associated with this, the ghost of the dead man was to be placated by providing, in an ethereal form, the goods needed by him in the spirit world.<sup>70</sup> More practical considerations were also suggested, and related to fear of infection, prevention of quarrelling over inheritance, ensuring that the widow was not wooed for her possessions, and, finally, the impracticality for a nomadic group of accumulating belongings.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, while valuable items were occasionally burnt, it seems to have been more usual for them to have been preserved and inherited, and indeed it was considered right by the lorists that it should be so.<sup>72</sup>

Although it was claimed that more attention was given to the "sacred rites of burial" towards the latter part of the century, rather than the grave being simply the roadside or "lonely lane",<sup>73</sup> Trigg accorded little significance to this sign

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70 W. Crooke, 'The Burning ...', loc.cit., p.353.

71 J. Crabb, The Gypsies' Advocate, pp.28-9; V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.174; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1892-1906', loc.cit., p.358; Notes and Queries, 8th Ser., Vol.6 (13 October 1894), p.286; 9th Ser., Vol.12 (28 November 1903), p.428.

72 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1892), p.245; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1892-1906', loc.cit., p.368; T. W. Thompson, 'The Social Polity of English Gypsies', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1923), pp.116-20; Yorkshire Post, 24 August 1907, p.11.

73 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.163.



of apparent conformity with the burial practices of settled society. Instead, he pointed to the persistence of certain beliefs and superstitions associated with death. Thus, while he was able to recognise that gypsies did not generally indulge in colourful and rich ceremonies, he nevertheless could claim that a series of taboos were rigorously adhered to. For example, the use of the name of the dead person was taboo, as was the use of camp sites once favoured by the deceased, and also the enjoyment of food, drink and entertainment indulged in by the departed person. Yet this argument that the spiritual occurrences and taboos associated with death formed the very core of the beliefs of a distinct and separate ethnic group of gypsies lacks evidence and appears, at best, unconvincing.

Also central to many nineteenth-century gypsiologists, and to Trigg, was the belief in the existence and practice of mokadi regulations among the gypsies.<sup>74</sup> In short, these regulations fell into two categories. The first covered those taboos associated with female sexuality, and were based on the idea of contamination by females. The second category was concerned with the 'uncleanness' regulations which governed the food diet, the use of eating utensils and the washing of clothes.

Anything associated with femininity, be it food preparation, clothing, long hair, or menstruation, were all included in these regulations, which determined what they could touch, where they

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74 T. W. Thompson, 'The Uncleanness...', loc.cit., pp.19-43.

could sit and what they may do. Childbirth was singled out for exceptional treatment, with, allegedly, the woman being treated as some kind of social leper. Similarly, the 'uncleanness' taboos governed who could use which dishes, and anything contaminated by touch from a mokadi person had to be destroyed. This was said to have included, among many others, food touched by a menstruating female or a food dish touched by an animal, or even food dishes which had been washed in a bowl usually reserved for washing clothes. The separation of men's and women's clothes for washing is just one example of how far this taboo claim was taken.

Once again, though, evidence of such prohibitions actually determining gypsy actions is scant, and seems to have existed more in the minds of the gypsy lorists than in the camps of these travellers. Nelson Boswell was reported to have said that the Midland Smiths "... were either ignorant or contemptuous of the majority of prohibitions in force among the Boswells".<sup>75</sup> But even within his own extended family such taboos were either not respected or had simply died out. It was reported that contact with the descendants of Vaino Boswell were minimal for precisely this reason. Among the Nelson Boswell family fear of defilement from mokadi gypsies was so great that rather than be defiled by interacting with them, they would prefer to marry gorgios, who did not adhere to the taboos because they did not know of them, not because they had rejected them.

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75 T. W. Thompson, 'The Uncleanness...', loc.cit., pp.19-43.

Perhaps Nelson Boswell was relating the truth, and perhaps he was pandering to what he believed were the wishes of his interviewer, and maybe it was in his interests to argue for the existence of a hierarchy among his (separate) people. Whichever of these was the more accurate it is clear that rather than exaggerate the importance of various taboos, and the extent to which they were followed by gypsies, as does Trigg, it would seem that the opposite should be the case. While some gypsies may have adhered to what were claimed to be traditional, ethnic practices, it would appear that by the nineteenth century these were followed, if at all, by only a very small section of gypsies, and may even have been restricted to isolated examples still persisting among a few nuclear families.

#### A Separate Race: the Basis of Hierarchy

Taken together, then, in an interrelated whole, the genealogical, heredity and cultural components formed the basis of the belief that gypsies formed a separate and distinct ethnic group, a notion central and fundamental to many nineteenth-century writers on the subject:

"... we have dwelling amongst us a race of human beings who differ widely from ourselves, not only in their origin, but in their life and habits, and who are altogether distinct from the professional tramp, or roaming casual; in fact that THE GIPSIES ARE A SEPARATE PEOPLE: [original emphasis]".<sup>76</sup>

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76 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.3.

In fact, the gypsies were often compared with the Jews, joined in their separateness from the indigenous population in terms outlined above, and also by a 'sense' of being a distinct people, thus reducing it to a mental phenomenon also.<sup>77</sup> Essentially, this interpretation isolated the gypsies not only from the indigenous population, but also, and more importantly, from other travellers. A clear hierarchy was constructed with the respectable Romany at the top of the scale, as the aristocrat of the road, and working downwards, through declining morals and heightened degeneracy, to the tramps and vagrants at the bottom. The half-bloods came somewhere in the middle. To confuse the 'true' gypsy with these posrats of diluted blood was scorned as a grave error, and one that led to much injustice being directed, in words and action, towards the 'true' Romanies. The latter, declining in numbers as the century progressed, were superior in manner, morals and occupations to their degenerate and impoverished mumply-brothers.<sup>78</sup> These half-breeds were said to have inherited all the vices of the Romany and of the gaujo, but none of their virtues.<sup>79</sup>

Elements of each of the factors used to identify the Romany were, perhaps, to be found in the half-blood, though in a degree related directly to the extent to which the 'pure' blood was intermixed

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77 See, for example, W. Simson, op.cit., pp.62-4; J. Simson, 'Disquisition ...', in W. Simson, op.cit., pp.389, 505-6; A. H. Japp, 'The Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.579. This indeterminate 'understanding' that existed between gypsies was reinforced by blood purity, and was retained long after the gypsy had become a settled and respectable member of sedentary society (see C. G. Leland, The English Gypsies ..., pp.174-5).

78 C. G. Leland, The English Gypsies ..., p.173.

79 'Who are the Gypsies?', County Gentleman and Land and Water Illustrated, Vol.3 (1906), p.1076.

with that of gaujos, Although other factors could intrude into this hierarchy, including conditions of existence, van- or tent-dwelling, and employments, these followed rather than preceded the essential and primary determinant, which was race.

It will be recalled from earlier references that a variety of terms identified the scale of this hierarchy. The 'true' gypsies were the Romanies or Romanichels, while the half-bloods were the poshrats, pushcats, didakais, mumplies, mumpers, posh and posh, posh-kalo and many others. Tramps were variously called hedge-crawlers, hedger-mumpers, can-men, dossers.<sup>80</sup> Some occupational categories remained closely linked to ethnic variation, such as chorodie, kora-mengre and hindity-mengre, while the terms tinker, tinkler, mugger and potter could cut across racial divisions.<sup>81</sup>

Although the arguments permitting the creation of a travellers' hierarchy based on race, with the isolation of the

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80 The word didakai, ditakei, or diddecoy, was said to have derived from the mispronunciation of the common gypsy words 'Dik akei' (look here!). The earliest record of the use of the word, spelt 'didykois', is thought to be found in Rev. J. Clay, 28th Report of the Preston House of Correction (Preston, 1852), p.53. See also Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.77; H. T. Crofton, 'Gipsy Life in Lancashire and Cheshire', Manchester Literary Club, Papers, Vol.3 (Manchester, 1877), p.32; For a full and interesting discussion of these terms see T. Acton, 'The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics in Gypsy-Gaujo Relations in England and Wales from Victorian Reformism to Romani Nationalism', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1973), pp.131-59.

81 See A. Melton, 'The True-born Gypsy Folk; will the ancient Romany people disappear?', Sunday Chronicle, 11 August 1907, p.2.

'pure-blood' Romany as the central feature, have been tested and found to be lacking in both methodology and evidence; this interpretation was adopted overtly and tacitly by people of every description in the nineteenth century, and is also still popular today. This model was applied to empirical facts to argue for regional differences between travellers, with the persistence of language and customs evidencing 'pure' blood, and it was also used to romanticise and elevate the Romanies to a position of unassailable virtue.<sup>82</sup> Others borrowed the notion of a separate race to verify the existence of less favourable racial characteristics.

Both the gypsies themselves and the local authority officers borrowed this notion of a distinct race with distinguishable characteristics, the one to deflect criticism and the other to justify persecution of the mass of travellers, who, by their habits, were evidently of mixed stock. Part of the gypsy defence against accusations of dishonesty, immorality, and the like, was that they, the 'true' Romanies, were not to blame, and that the responsibility for these impressions must rest with the half-blooded degenerates who also followed a nomadic way of life. In the late 1890s a writer on gypsies visited an encampment of van-dwellers and became engaged in conversation with a gypsy named Gray, who commented thus on his fellow neighbours of "... English tinkers and cadgers":

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82 M. Howitt (ed.), Mary Howitt: an Autobiography (1891), p.50; Rev. G. Hall, 'The Gipsies of England', Sunday at Home (April 1912), pp.414-6; T. Taylor, 'Gypsy Experiences', loc.cit., 29 November 1891, pp.655-6; 13 December 1891, pp.715-6; 27 December 1891, pp.777-9.

"They are undoubtedly scourges to all game preservers in our district, snare hares and rabbits and pick up pheasants' and partridges' eggs wherever they have an opportunity ... Unlike the English van people also, the gypsies do no wilful damage and are scrupulously correct in paying for the grazing of their horses...".<sup>83</sup>

Likewise, Sylvester Boswell drew a marked line between the disappearing race of 'pure' and worthy gypsies, and had only contempt for the "... modern half-gorgified gypsies", who were dirty, low-class and typified all that was bad among travellers.<sup>84</sup> Criticisms against travellers stemmed not from the actions of gypsies, but from those of the nailers, potters, tramps and wandering cadgers.<sup>85</sup>

Even George Smith of Coalville believed that the objects of his concern were not travellers who possessed gypsy blood but rather those who followed gypsy habits. The old-fashioned gypsies were dead, forced off the roads by the Enclosure Acts and persecution, to be replaced on the roads by a 'new race' of gypsies who had taken to travelling primarily to escape rates and taxes.<sup>86</sup> While there was a general consensus that the old-style gypsy had disappeared, few agreed with Smith that the 'new race' were persons recently arrived from sedentary society, but argued instead that they were a

83 C. Stein, 'Our Gypsy Visitors', loc.cit., pp.21-3.

84 J. Sampson, 'The Gypsies', paper read to the Warrington Literary and Philosophical Society, 15 March 1897 (Warrington, 1897), pp.16-17; see also Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.181; F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.30; B. Vesey-Fitzgerald, Gypsies of Britain (1951), p.42.

85 Lovell, 'My Life: by a Gipsy', Home Chat (18 April 1908), p.267.

86 G. Smith, I've been ..., p.163; see also Sel. Cttee. on Temp. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of George Smith (1887), p.24, paras. 404-7.

mongrel people, descended from the gypsies but with the blood much diluted:

"Already the old black blood has been crossed and re-crossed; the pure gypsy is as scarce as a black swan; the old customs have been perverted; the old language has been nearly lost; the traditions are forgotten ...".<sup>87</sup>

New theories of racial purity were thus used to locate a minority of 'true' gypsies, and to afford them some honour and praise for their racial integrity. The weaknesses of the arguments purporting to locate and isolate such a group have been indicated, but this is to criticise from a position of informed retrospective analysis. At the time such a myth was used as the foundation of the isolation of a group of racial 'impures' in preparation for persecution.

#### A Separate Race: Racial Stereotyping

Alongside the image of the gypsy as the noble savage of foreign origin, given literary weight through novels and articles and added to by the lorists, went that of the gypsy painted by hearsay and legal traditions as being disrespectful of property and morality. Popular impressions of gypsies would draw on both these opposing sources, and also from those which stressed the conflict between a travelling way of life and the mores of settled

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87 W.B., 'Gipsies and their Friends', Temple Bar Magazine, Vol.47. (May 1876), p.71; see also S. L. Bensusan, 'How the Other Half Lives', English Illustrated Magazine, Vol.17 (1897), p.646.



society. The problematical issue of definition and perception thus appears in its most confused form in relation to the question of stereotyping. It is the purpose of this section to attempt to find some path through this confusing maze.

The identification of a racial group permitted the development not only of romantic stereotypes but also of others marked by their antipathy and hostility to the people. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, stereotypes about travellers originated from perceptions that at one moment stressed their nomadism and the next their racial origins, the two often being in marked contradiction to each other. Yet their nomadism was also thought to enhance their genetic attributes, just as their racial characteristics gave strength and prominence to those habits engendered by travelling. The stereotypes that derived from these two sources will be treated separately, when possible, though the interaction between them and the differing interpretations given to the same stereotype were recurrent features in contemporary writings.

Few commentators were able to write about the gypsies without stressing the marginality of this separate and secretive race to the dominant political and social institutions. Essentially, the gypsies were said to be uninvolved in the politics of the wider society of which they were a part, and had instead their own organisations that depended on dark and mysterious meetings, which

called to mind freemasonry practices. The link between the gypsies' polity and fraternal meetings held on Masonic lines was made frequently.<sup>88</sup> The meetings, or councils, were a kind of judicial court which demanded the attendance of all the tribes and their elders in the locality, and were said to deal with serious offences which may have resulted in the expulsion of the offender from the gypsy brotherhood. The decision-making on less serious matters was left to the patriarch of a particular tribe, the elderly statesman, most commonly referred to, with his wife, as the King and Queen. However, evidence of the existence and operation of councils, and even of patriarchal organisation among tribes with their own Kings and Queens, is minimal and suspect.

Although many authors claimed knowledge of gypsy councils, the only written description of this ceremony that has emerged appeared in The Times, 5 October 1842.<sup>89</sup> At Bolton's Bench, near Lyndhurst, New Forest, between 300 and 400 gypsies assembled to witness the expulsion of a gypsy named Lee from the fraternity. Circles of men and women were formed around the offender, who was addressed at length by the King of the gypsies in the Romany tongue, thus preventing the non-gypsies present from identifying the crime for which the offender was expelled. The observer of

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88 J. Simson used this idea to argue for a secret society of gypsies, linked in a world-wide brotherhood by the Romany language. See his preface to W. Simson, op.cit., p.12.

89 Quoted in 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.2 (1908), pp.184-5.

this believed in the authenticity of the ceremony as the gypsies had apparently kept news of the meeting secret and so could not be accused of staging the meeting for gorgios in the hope of pecuniary gain, though his own presence was not explained. Such councils were also said to have been held on a much smaller scale among camps and by tribes. However, an old gypsy said, in 1910, that such councils as these had long since disappeared, and that he himself had never seen one.<sup>90</sup>

The other aspect of their polity given much publicity was that of the existence of Kings and Queens. It would be an impossible task to count how many times that ascription was used in the nineteenth century. It appeared most frequently in romantic novels and love stories where the image of the wild but royal gypsy appealed to the fertile imagination, yet it was far from absent in more worthy journals and newspapers. Considerable publicity was given to the gypsy colony at Kirk Yetholm, where the controversy over succession provided good print for journalists. It was even claimed, on the death of old Will Faa, that the crown was assumed by a "bold gypsy" who had no right to it, and it was only restored to the true successor after a "sort of civil war".<sup>91</sup> Accounts of the coronation of Queen Esther Faa Blythe received equal publicity.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, pictures of the coronation at

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90 W. Raymond, English Country Life (1910), p.320.

91 Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), pp.22-3.

92 See, for example, J. Lucas, The Yetholm History of the Gypsies (Kelso, 1882), pp.5-7; R. Murray, The Gypsies of the Border (Galashiels, 1875), p.15ff.

Yetholm in 1898 were reproduced by Andrew M'Cormick in his The Tinkler-Gypsies. David MacRitchie had this to say of the pictures:

"... (they) ought to be omitted from a future edition as being utterly misleading. I speak as one who witnessed the ceremony, which was engineered by gaujoes, Gypsies being conspicuous by their absence".<sup>93</sup>

Even so, newspapers assisted in perpetuating this lie, and a glance at their columns will show that almost every gypsy who died was described either as the king or queen of a tribe.<sup>94</sup>

The travellers themselves were not slow to exploit this to its fullest advantage, and George Smith of Coalville in fact described all talk of gypsy royalty as part of the game of lying, deceit and trickery, and dismissed the notion of kings and queens as

"... mythological, jack-o'-the-lantern, phantom of the brain, illusion, the creation of lying tongues practising the art of deception".<sup>95</sup>

One gypsy queen in London dressed in gaudy silks and sat in a "chair of state" in her van, and the Londoners paid threepence to come and see her.<sup>96</sup> The Epping Forest gypsy entertainers adopted the same practice, and advertised the presence of kings and queens in their travelling show-camps in order to excite popular interest and persuade the local populations to part with

93 D. MacRitchie, 'Review of A. M'Cormick's The Tinkler-Gypsies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.3 (1908), p.282.

94 B. Vesey-Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.86.

95 Letter from George Smith in Daily News, 6 September 1879, p.7.

96 G. Smith, I've been ..., p.328.

their money in return for the privilege of glimpsing royalty,<sup>97</sup> Also, by circulating that a gypsy king or queen had died, the gypsies fostered interest among local people, who came to the burial in the hope of witnessing lavish and esoteric rites. This provided the gypsies with a very convenient opportunity for taking a collection for the relatives of the deceased person.<sup>98</sup> Thus, while gypsies may once have had their own polity in some distant past, by the nineteenth century there remained merely vestiges, that could be used as excuses for pecuniary gain by the gypsies, and by writers to conjure up images of a dark, mysterious and marginal race.<sup>99</sup>

Related to the belief that the gypsies possessed their own political structure went the claim that they remained aloof from the politics of the host society, and in this respect were entirely apolitical.<sup>100</sup> Yet, there are instances when gypsies became involved in movements of a direct political nature, entered into under their own initiative and also at the behest

97 Despite exploiting this aspect of the polity of a 'separate race', this group were described elsewhere to be totally unlike the 'pure' race of gypsies in their features, and were, in fact, a "... mongrel lot ...", (Gipsy Glimpses, All the Year Round, New Ser., Vol.1, 8 May 1869, p.539), much intermixed with gorgios, who toured the country presenting sham weddings and fictitious coronations for the benefit of the gullible who believed they were obtaining an insight into 'true' gypsy culture, traditions and social organisation (T. W. Thompson, 'Samuel Fox ...', loc.cit., Vol.4, No.1, 1929, p.30). See also pages 134-7.

98 A. and F. Rehfisch, 'Scottish Travellers or Tinkers', in F. Rehfisch (ed.), Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers (1979), p.278.

99 See J. Crabb, The Gypsies' Advocate, p.11.

100 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.231-2.

of certain interested parties in the host society. For example, in the 1720s they led the Levellers against enclosures in Gallo-way, and one of their number, Billy Marshall,

"... kept knocking over each night a bit of the dyke which the men had built on the previous day. Such may have been the real inception of the great rebellion by farmers, crofters, Gypsies, and labourers against the proprietors, for fencing and annexing fields, moorlands, and commonies, and demolishing old houses, and which innovations 'the Levellers' considered to be a blow calculated to prevent many from earning a livelihood".<sup>101</sup>

Later in the century they were involved in the Gordon Riots, in defence of the protestant faith, for which part two of them were condemned to death.<sup>102</sup> In the early years of the nineteenth century, a number of gypsies rallied behind John Nichols Tom (otherwise known as 'Mad Tom', or Sir William Courtenay), who, on release from a lunatic asylum in 1837, preached communistic doctrines and claimed he was the Messiah.<sup>103</sup>

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101 A. M'Cormick, The Tinkler-Gypsies (Dumfries, 1907), pp.50-1.

102 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.9, No.1 (1930), pp.47-8.

103 See Anon, An Essay on the Character of Sir William Courtenay (Canterbury, 1833); Anon, An Account of the Desperate Affray in Blean Wood (Faversham, 1838); J. P. Barrett, A History of the Ville of Birchington, Thanet, Kent (Margate, 1893), pp.172-3; G. L. Boase and W. P. Courtney (eds.), Bibliotheca Cornubiensis, Vol.2 (1878), pp.724-7; P. G. Rogers, Battle in Bossenden Wood (1961); E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1968), p.880; Dictionary of National Biography (edited by S. Lee), Vol.57 (1899), pp.1-2; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.9, No.1 (1930), p.48.

However, perhaps the most notorious participation of gypsies in political affairs of national significance was during the 1832 election campaign at Hertford. It is common knowledge that mid-nineteenth-century elections were marked by financial corruption, violence and intimidation, yet the extent and nature of the corruption and pitched battles between the gypsies and bargees, acting on behalf of two of the candidates, prompted an enquiry by a Select Committee.<sup>104</sup> In the week preceding the election the gypsies went around attacking any person who did not have the colours of Lord Ingestre, the Tory candidate, in their hat. Many of the gypsies had come in from Welwyn at the request of the Lords Mahon and Ingestre, and were camped in a field belonging to the Mayor of Hertford, and in the stables and sheds of Mr. Dack, a staunch supporter of the Tory candidate. Many skirmishes took place during this week and the gypsies were said to parade about in ranks, like soldiers, outnumbering those whom they attacked by four to one. Duncombe, the reforming candidate, replied to this intimidation by bringing in 150 men from Ware, most of them bargees. On nomination day the two rival gangs fought, and the gypsies were defeated, only for the battle to be resumed the following day, this time with the victory reversed.<sup>105</sup> This appears, though, to have been an isolated incident in respect of

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104 See A. Briggs, The Age of Improvement (1959), p.266; Select Committee on the Hertford Election Petition; Report, Minutes of proceedings and evidence taken before them (1833), (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Hertford Election).

105 Sel. Cttee. on Hertford Election, pp.50-3, 102.

gypsy involvement, and arose not out of political considerations but from desire for financial gain. Such opportunism again showed itself during the Chartist demonstrations at Tunbridge Wells in 1848, when the gypsies used such a distraction as an opportunity for looting, and in the early years of the twentieth century when they were brought in as black-leg labour to break a strike of manual workers employed by Portsmouth City Council.<sup>106</sup> Admittedly, then, gypsy involvement in politics was marginal, but the reasons for this are to be found in their nomadism rather than in explanations which include racial separation.

Other racial attributes apportioned to the gypsies were more virulent in their antipathy, likening the race to animals rather than aristocrats:

"The Gypsies are nearer to the animals than any race known to us in Europe".<sup>107</sup>

The gypsy was thus placed on the lowest possible level of human existence.<sup>108</sup> Even the canal boatmen, hardly of elevated social status themselves, were said to look upon the gypsies as "... the lowest of the low".<sup>109</sup> They ate more like beasts than men, subsisting on animals that had died of disease and on the

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106 See Hampshire Chronicle, 3 March 1848, p.4; T. Mooney, J. M. MacTavish, General Secretary of the W.E.A., 1916-27 (Liverpool, 1979), p.19. I am very grateful to Dr. John Field, of Northern College, Barnsley, for both these interesting references.

107 A. Symons, 'In Praise ...', loc.cit., p.295.

108 See 'The Gipsy's Grave', Church of England Magazine, Vol.14 (1843), p.75.

109 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.234.



refuse of ordinary food, and were described as drinking more like swine than human beings, and, to continue the metaphor, they possessed the animal traits of cunning, deceit and aggression.<sup>110</sup>

If this was insufficiently damning, the writers then said this deplorable state of affairs was exacerbated further by the gypsies' temperament, character and proneness to a considerable number of vices. They were revengeful, cowardly, treacherous, idle, parasitical, quarrelsome, brutish and much given to drinking and smoking. Their simplicity of emotions derived from their ignorance and child-like nature.<sup>111</sup> Scarcely any aspect of their character, way of life or emotions was left uncriticised.

110 Note that although they, as a race, were reported to prefer to eat animals that had died by the hand of God rather than by the hand of man, this assertion conflicted with the accusations that they poisoned and killed, by 'drabbing', animals for their own consumption, and that they were an innately irreligious people. It was also said that they ate their parents! See F. Grose, A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1796; edited by E. Partridge, 1931), pp.175-8; E. Deutsch, 'Gypsies', loc.cit., p.172; 'Gipsies', Literary and Scientific Repository, Vol.3 (1821), p.405.

111 See A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.143; F. Grose, op.cit., pp.175-8; J. G. Kohl, op.cit., p.190; Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), pp.8-9; 'Gypsies', Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, Vol.10 (Edinburgh, 1830), p.597; F. H. Groome, 'Gypsies', Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.10 (Edinburgh, 1879), p.617; G. C. Renouard, 'Gypsy', Encyclopaedia Metropolitana, Vol.20 (1845), pp.54-9; Annual Report of City Missionary, 1858, in London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), pp.16-22; 'Gipsies', New Monthly Magazine, Vol.35 (1832), pp.375-7; 'The Passing of the Gipsy', Outlook (1 June 1907), pp.721-2; A. Wanderer, 'The Gipsies', The Quiver, Vol.6 (1871), pp.668-70; 'Gipsies' Penny Cyclopaedia, Vol.11 (1836), pp.225-6; T. W. Thompson, 'Gipsies', Tramp Magazine, Vol.2 (1910), pp.46-53; Whitby Gazette, 22 March 1912, p.4; Extract from William Mabey's Diary, c.1860s, pp.24-5. The references contained in this footnote could be multiplied many times, but those included are intended to show the appearance of racial stereotypes in a wide variety of works.

Gypsy sympathisers replied by pointing to virtues not recorded by the critics, arguing that they were a race showing especial devotion to family ties, guarding children from corruption, rejecting divorce, and not permitting aged relatives to enter work-houses. Moreover, debts were repaid with promptness and any kindness shown them was never forgotten.<sup>112</sup> Freedom to camp in farmers' fields was treated with extreme gratitude and with practical assistance in protecting the farm and contents from thieves. Their childishness was not to be scorned but was a product of their naturalness and communion with Nature, and was thus a charming not derogatory attribute.<sup>113</sup> However, these counter-claims were more of an addition to the above, suggesting the gypsy had also a good side to his personality, rather than as a challenge or corrective to them.

All the above stereotypes, whether favourable or antipathetic to the gypsies, were thought to be determined by the separateness of their race, and to this extent were independent of, though reinforced by, their way of life. In some cases stereotypes dependent on racial character and on a travelling life-style could interact in such a way to prevent their separation, and this was especially true in relation to criminality. The issue of definition is here presented at its most complex, with the fusing together of stereotypes formed from the alleged racial

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112 J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate, pp.105-6; J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.155-6.

113 See J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate, pp.23-4; A. Esquiros, op.cit., pp.204-5; Daily Mirror, 2 August 1907, p.15; Evening News, 23 November 1906, p.4.

separateness of the gypsies, their occupations and their nomadism. The gypsy lorists would have recoiled in horror at the attempt to explain gypsy life purely in terms of deceit, trickery and criminality, yet their rejoinder that responsibility for the charges must lay at the feet of the half-bloods appears evasive. In any case, the accusations were made by many who, like the lorists, identified the gypsies in racial terms, but who then refused to romanticise this group and justify their separate existence. In fact, the opposite was true.

Before considering some of these accusations in more detail, the relationship between criminality and itinerancy in general needs to be mentioned briefly. It was a natural and common reaction for the settled population to look on travellers with suspicion. The moment they appeared in the district was the time the crime rate was usually reported to have risen. If anything went missing, whether livestock, bracken or children, the travellers were the obvious suspects. They were the ideal scapegoat: everyone suspected them and no-one supported them. Whether the crime rate did increase, and if the travellers were primarily responsible in any case, is impossible to prove. They would not have been entirely free from blame, but it was also the case that local criminals took this opportunity provided by the appearance of a scapegoat to increase their activities, especially poaching. What is important to note, however, is that the association between itinerancy and criminality was generally assumed. The findings of the 1839 Commission on the Constabulary Force gave official sanction to this, reporting that the most

prominent body of delinquents in the rural districts were vagrants, and that,

"... vagrant classes pervade every part of the country, rendering property insecure, propagating pernicious habits, and afflicting the minds of the sensitive with false pictures of suffering ...".<sup>114</sup>

The Rev. J. Clay, chaplain of the Preston House of Correction, called for the repression of travelling, believing travellers to be

"... one of the most daring and profligate divisions of the dangerous class ... (who) perambulate every part of the country in parties more or less numerous, and maintain themselves by begging and imposture, or by robbery of every kind ... These 'travellers' ... form connexions ... with people who belong more or less [ my emphasis ] to the gipsy race ...".<sup>115</sup>

For a man, placed in circumstances of suspicion, to call himself a traveller was thought an admission that he was deserving suspicion; to be called a gypsy was to act as confirmation.<sup>116</sup>

The appearance of a family, or families, of gypsies made clear the apportioning of blame for any misdemeanour:

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114 Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force, p.56, para.30; also p.21.

115 Rev. J. Clay, op.cit., Appendix 12, p.44.

116 Ibid., p.59. See also D. J. V. Jones, ' "A Dead Loss to the Community": the Criminal Vagrant in mid-nineteenth century Wales', Welsh History Review, Vol.8, No.3 (1977), pp.312-44.

"If a hedge was broken down - if a sheep was missing - if an inroad was made on the henroost, who but 'the gypsies' were the perpetrators of these outrages. The speckle-backed hen, the best breeder in the yard, layed no eggs, a gypsy-woman had been seen on the premises. The red cow gave but two pints of milk - no wonder - 'the gypsies' were encamped just below the meadow gate. Calumny did not stop here; John, the plough-man came late to his work (the idle rascal had been spending his wages at the ale-house), the fault was laid at the door of the black-eyed AEgyptian, the daughter of Tom, the tinker".<sup>117</sup>

To be called a gypsy was to be attributed with the ability to do untold damage. Perhaps the most common accusation was that the gypsy 'race' possessed a particular propensity towards thieving. This was sometimes attributed to hereditary factors, and at others was thought to result from their way of life and occupations, in that thieving was necessary in order to support their existence.<sup>118</sup> Whatever the causes, the almost casual assumption that gypsy life was simply another name for a nomadic, thieving way of life can be frequently found:

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117 'The Norwood Gypsies', The Literary Lounger (1826), p.91.

118 See W. Simson, op.cit., p.72; Letter from 'Scoto-Montanus' in Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 3rd Ser., Vol.7 (1828), pp.242-4.

"I saw a great many Gipsies and their tents, likewise, some very good horses, which no doubt they had stolen, for I believe there are not many, of that sort, that are not guilty of thieving or poaching or some bad crime ...".<sup>119</sup>

They were accused of stealing everything from sheep, horses and children to grass for their horses and bracken to make fires, and in the much-quoted example of prosecution for horse-stealing, provided by James Crabb, the gypsy was singled out for especially harsh treatment and was given no hope of mercy by the judge.<sup>120</sup>

This combination of gypsy with thief was also taken one step further with the claim that everything to which the gypsies turned their hands was associated in some way with dishonest practice and criminality.

119 Philip Hine's Journal, 9 November 1825, p.63. See also Mr. Ellis, 'The Nuisance and Prejudice of the Gypsy Vagrant to the Farmer', in V. Bell, To Meet Mr. Ellis (1956), pp.74-8; H. M. G. Grellmann, Dissertation on the Gipsies, translated by M. Raper (1787), p.92; F. Thompson, Lark Rise to Candleford (Oxford, 1968), pp.472-3; A. Symons, 'In Praise ...', loc.cit., p.294; Birmingham Daily Mail, 8 October 1879, p.2. Note also that contemporary slang placed the gypsies alongside thieves and beggars. Consider, for example, the following:

'Arch Rogue' or 'Dimber Damber Upright Man': chief of a gang of thieves or gypsies.

'King of the Gypsies': chief of a gang of misrule; in cant language also called the upright man.

'Stop Hole Abbey': rendezvous of the canting crew of beggars, gypsies, cheats, thieves, etc.

See F. Grose, A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue (1796; edited by E. Partridge, 1931), pp.19, 68-9, 76-7, 141, 162, 175-8, 212, 236, 271, 328, 362-3.

120 This took place at the Winchester Lent Assizes, in 1827. Such blatant discrimination was witnessed by the Rev. J. Crabb, and it proved to be a major stimulus to his setting up a Committee to improve and assist these people. This is dealt with in the following chapter. See J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate, pp.64-5; Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force, p.214, para. 146; H. Woodcock, op.cit., pp.44-5; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.6, No.2 (1912), pp.158-60; W.B., 'Gipsies of the Border', loc.cit., p.163.

Their traditional skill with horses and their prominence in trading at horse-sales meant that they could be accused of both stealing the horses and of 'doctoring' them, in order to deceive their buyers.<sup>121</sup> Attendance at fairs permitted other criminal activities also, and in Hampshire the gypsies were said to organise young chaps into leagues, encourage them to steal what they could and return with their prizes to the leader.<sup>122</sup> Their other occupations, "... sometimes real - more frequently pretended", were said to be cloaks for less honest pursuits, and mere sham for a variety of impostures.<sup>123</sup> They carried rushes and pretended to be chair-menders, "... though they have never mended a chair in all their lives", and the hawking of small articles from door to door was simply a pretence for carefully noting what could be pilfered later in the evening.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, they even encouraged the domestic servants of the houses they visited to assist them and perhaps to go off with them.<sup>125</sup> Hawking was also said to be used as a pretext for begging, playing on the susceptibilities of the gullible, fortune-telling (itself the practice of deceit and trickery), and of 'ringing the changes'. By this latter practice the unsuspecting person was persuaded to wrap up a quantity of

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121 See pages 126-7. Also F. W. Carew, No.747 (Bristol, 1891), pp.20, 35; Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), p.22; H. T. Crofton, 'Gipsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.40; R. D. Paine, 'The Gypsy of England', Outing, Vol.45 (New York, 1904), p.334.

122 Quote from Hillyer, a member of the itinerant Frimley gang of criminals, in Rev. J. Clay, op.cit., Appendix 12, p.50.

123 Ibid., pp. 45, 49.

124 Ibid., p.50.

125 Ibid.

money in a plain wrapper, which the gypsy then handled and discreetly swapped for an identically packaged but worthless parcel. This was then returned to the owner, who was told that if it was left under a pillow for two weeks the gypsy magic would work and the contents would double. In the meantime the gypsy would make good his getaway.<sup>126</sup> Again, the frequency and accuracy of the reports of this alleged occurrence have to remain mysteries, yet it is possible that a greedy and superstitious person could well have fallen under the spell of the Romany woman and her magic powers.

Similarly, those engaged in rat-catching had other motives, in that this occupation was a means of gaining admission to farms, thereby easing the carrying out of 'drabbing' techniques. By this process sheep, and other livestock, were killed either by suffocating the animal on its own wool, or by feeding the animals poisoned foodstuffs. The gypsies would then beg the farmer for the carcase of the afflicted animal. Clearly, it is impossible to distinguish circumstantial and factual evidence from myth, yet there is an air of implausibility about this accusation. Even if the farmer believed that his animal had died of natural causes, then it seems unlikely that he would hand over the carcase to a begging gypsy. Furthermore, if foul play was suspected, then it

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126 The volumes of press cuttings contained in the Romany Collection, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, contain numerous instances of such alleged frauds. See, from the Collection, Gypsy Pictures and Play-Bills; Gypsy News Cuttings, 1693-1914; Gypsy Cuttings, 1-3; also H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1892-1906', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.369; Police Gazette, No.37 (24 June 1839), p.146. I am grateful to Dr. Tony Mason for this latter reference.



would have been even more improbable that the farmer would donate the dead animal to those who must have headed his list of likely culprits.<sup>127</sup> This accusation was levelled against the New Forest gypsies in the early 1840s, much to the surprise of the gentleman who lived in the hamlet where the offences were said to take place. This gentleman informed Crabb that to the best of his knowledge no such crime had been committed, and dismissed it as a base and groundless charge.<sup>128</sup>

In the early decades of the century the crime of counterfeiting base coin was rife and profitable, and it was thought that nomadism provided the best means, and cover, for passing, or uttering, such coinage. To have remained too long in one area would have increased markedly the risk of detection, but by travelling the deed was often long since done before it was discovered.<sup>129</sup> Naturally, gypsies were thought to be involved in this crime to a not inconsiderable degree:

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127 See A. Esquiros, op.cit., pp.158-9; J. Myers, 'Drab', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), pp.199-207; The Times, 14 November 1842, p.5.

128 Quoted in J. Crabb, A Condensed History ..., p.45.

129 For an interesting account of the method of making and passing base coins see Rev. J. Clay, op.cit., pp.55-8.

"Utterers of counterfeit coin live well; they never beg, Tinkers utter a great deal; but the greatest utterers are Gipsies; they make it in their tents at night; carry the moulds with them. They can be more secret than any other class of persons; they never sell it, only make it for themselves; stow it in a stocking, keep it warm, and pass it through a raw potato before uttering it".<sup>130</sup>

Clay noted that assistance was given to the gypsies by the landlords, "... as deep as any of the Gipseys", of beer shops in Brighton and Guildford.<sup>131</sup>

A crime that was believed to be the exclusive reserve of the gypsy race was that of child-stealing:

"When they saw the gypsies they drew back behind their mother and the baby carriage, for there was a tradition that once, years before, a child from a neighbouring village had been stolen by them. Even the cold ashes where a gipsy's fire had been sent little squiggles of fear down Laura's spine, for how could she know that they were not still lurking near with designs upon her own person? ... She never really enjoyed the game the hamlet children played going home from school, when one of them went on before to hide, and the others followed slowly, hand in hand, singing:

'I hope we shan't meet any gypsies tonight!  
I hope we shan't meet any gypsies tonight!'

And when the hiding-place was reached and the supposed gipsy sprung out and grabbed the nearest, she always shrieked, although she knew it was only a game".<sup>132</sup>

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130 Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force, pp.62-3. The vagrant who provided this detail gave no explanation of how this knowledge about so secret a people was acquired. He stated further that all gypsy women and children slept in the nude, that all gypsies called each other brother and sister, and poisoned livestock. It is impossible to assess whether his statements derived from actual knowledge and experience or from common hearsay.

131 Rev. J. Clay, op.cit., p.51.

132 F. Thompson, op.cit., p.36.

Also, an old Scottish rhyme sung to fretful children:

"Hush ye, hush ye, dinna fret ye,  
The Black Tinkler winna get ye".<sup>133</sup>

Having taken the child from its true parents, it was claimed that the gypsies then blackened their captive with a dye made from green walnut husks, galls and logwood, in order to make them appear their own.<sup>134</sup> It was said that the stolen children, when old enough, were married into the gypsy fraternity in order to ensure that the resulting mixed blood gave stamina to the race.<sup>135</sup> Elsewhere, the practice was linked to the tribal and historic superstitions of the race.<sup>136</sup> As with all such claims, examples were provided.

Adam Smith, the economist, was allegedly carried off by gypsies when only three years of age, to be rescued from obscurity by his uncle.<sup>137</sup> George Smith also looked for evidence of this crime and, not surprisingly, found it. He related the story of a gypsy woman stealing a young girl from the streets of Macclesfield. Although rewards were offered the girl was not found until five years later when a girl dressed in rags and dirt went to a shop in the town to sell clothes-pegs. By coincidence it was the house

133 Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1918), p.5 (hereafter, Dptal. Cttee. on Tinkers).

134 Mr. Ellis, 'The Nuisance ...', in V. Bell, op.cit., p.76.

135 'Gipsydom', Bow Bells, Vol.5 (1867), p.275.

136 'The Tent Folk', The Nation (12 October 1907), p.44.

137 Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), p.11; W.B., 'Gipsies of the Border', loc.cit., p.163.

of her mother, who immediately recognised her daughter. A policeman was sent for, and the gypsy woman was eventually sentenced to eighteen months' hard labour.<sup>138</sup> Whether true or false, Smith's story added weight to the stereotype.

The charge of petty pilfering appears far more substantial than these other claims. In the days before the establishment of an efficient rural police force, farmers had to suffer frequent depredations to their property, the blame for which fell on the heads of "... daring night marauders", or gypsies.<sup>139</sup> Potatoes were taken from fields, along with the occasional rabbit, horses were put into fields to graze at night, and hedgerows and fences were plundered for fuel and raw materials:

"Materials for baskets, clothes-pegs, and broom handles, are taken in large quantities; and it is believed that these articles are solely manufactured from stolen property".<sup>140</sup>

Although crimes in the strictly legal sense, these offences were of a petty and trifling nature, and were seen by the travellers not as criminal acts of theft and trespass, but as a natural, ordinary and commonplace event in their lives.<sup>141</sup> Both the Select Committees on Moveable Dwellings, in 1909 and 1910, recognised that stick-cutting, poaching and petty pilfering were common enough crimes among the gypsies, but attributed this

138 G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.236-7.

139 Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force, p.58, para.31.

140 Evidence from the magistrates of Worthing division, Sussex, in ibid., pp.59-60. See also evidence of magistrates of Coquetdale, Northumberland, p.59.

141 R. Smith, Gypsy Smith, his Life and Work (1905), pp.40-1.

to their primitive views on the rights of property, "... especially in respect of what grows or moves upon the earth in a more or less wild state".<sup>142</sup>

Any attempt to quantify this, and other crimes attributed to gypsies in the nineteenth century, is doomed to disappointment and ultimate failure. It would require painstaking research to unearth all newspaper reports of crimes attributed to gypsies throughout the period under review, and even then there would be major problems. Perhaps the most serious obstacle in the way of quantification is that of definition. Even if the term 'gypsy' had been used in the newspaper reports, itself a vain hope, it is impossible to know what the writer meant by this term. Also, often no reference to the nomadism of the offender would have been made, simply being described as a Labourer.<sup>143</sup> The reverse may also have been the case, with all travellers being grouped together indiscriminately under the term 'gypsy'.<sup>144</sup> Clearly, the gypsy lorists were most concerned by the lack of differentiation made between gypsies, posrats and their gorgio companions:

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142 Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Report (1910), p.iv (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Mov.Dw.); see also Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Capt. Sant (1909), p.66, para. 1284 (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Mov.Dw.).

143 "They are not specified very often as gypsies". (Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Capt. Sant, 1909, p.67, para.1303).

144 See 'Gypsies as Highwaymen and Footpads', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.6, No.2 (1927), p.76.

"Magistrates, policemen and newspaper reporters - even the enlightened British public - cannot, or do not, distinguish between nomad Gypsies and other vagrant classes, but group all offenders under the more picturesque title".<sup>145</sup>

Bearing these difficulties in mind, it is nevertheless apparent from a variety of sources that gypsies did commit highway robberies, steal horses, participate in brawls and violent assaults, and were guilty of most of the other charges levelled at them, excepting child-stealing. The crimes were of both a petty and a serious nature, the latter evidenced by the inclusion of gypsies in the transportation registers.<sup>146</sup> However, there is no evidence to suggest that they were disproportionately represented in any of these crimes relative to the settled population. What does emerge, though, was that gypsies were often prosecuted on charges dependent on circumstantial evidence or on the word of a gorgio against that of the gypsy. At the beginning of the century rewards used to be given to those who assisted in securing the conviction of horse-stealers, and this practice was inevitably abused because,

"... the gipsies were thought to be universally depraved ... (and) no-one thought it his duty to investigate their innocence".<sup>147</sup>

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145 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.391-2.

146 Transportation, which ceased to be the most important way of dealing with criminal offenders only in the 1850s, was also used in the most trivial of cases. Thefts of harnesses led to transportation alongside crimes of murder, assault and horse-stealing. See HOLL: Transportation Registers, Public Record Office; Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.247; G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.239; I've been ..., p.257; T. W. Thompson, 'Borrow's Gypsies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1910), p.164; 'Notes and Queries' J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.6, No.2 (1912), p.159; Leicester Journal, 9 January 1807, p.3; 27 March 1807, p.3; 9 August 1816, p.3; Jackson's Oxford Journal, 18 April 1846, p.3; 18 July 1846, p.1; The Times, 7 April 1812, p.3.

147 J. Crabb, The Gypsies' Advocate, pp.54-5. Crabb provided many examples of false prosecutions (see pp.49-57).

The above impressions about the nature of gypsy criminality in the nineteenth century is confirmed by the statistics available for the period 1907-11.<sup>148</sup> For these years a press-cutting agency was commissioned by the Gypsy Lore Society to collect all notices of gypsy crimes. This was supplemented by correspondents sending in extracts from local newspapers overlooked by the agency. The findings have been put in tabular form, and consist of charges not convictions. Sections 1 and 2 are composed of minor violations of the law which could have been committed, almost innocently, by anyone who happened to be living as a nomad. Section 3 was said to consist of charges that reflected the differences between the Romany and gaujo codes of morality, or between the travelling and sedentary mentality, although it is not clear how the discharging of catapults and guns came to be included in this section. The J.G.L.S. explained these crimes thus:

"Such misdeeds leave on the tenderest Gypsy conscience a scar no larger than that produced on the conscience of a justice of the peace when his chauffeur is fined for exceeding the legal speed limit".<sup>149</sup>

Sections 4 to 7 include crimes common to all sectors of society, and whose causes ranged from poverty, drunkenness and dishonesty to the avowedly criminal.

Although these statistics cannot be taken as entirely accurate, they are useful as an indicator of the nature and extent of nomadic criminality. While it is the case that many charges would

148 See Appendix 5.

149 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.392-3.

have passed unreported and unnoticed by the agency, it was also true that the figures could suffer from exaggeration. Some were accused, only to be acquitted later, and the numbers also have been swelled by the appearance in court of a whole family or gang to answer for what was virtually one crime. Moreover, the tent-dweller lived in public, and his actions were closely watched by unfriendly eyes. Family quarrels, for example, private in the case of the sedentary population, could become, in the open air, grounds for charges of disorderly conduct, breaches of the peace, or even assault. The final qualification is best illustrated by a quote from Colonel Williamson of Lawes, Crieff, in explanation of the statement of Mr. John MacPherson, Chief Constable of Perthshire, that apprehensions for drunkenness among the gypsies were fifteen times more frequent than among the civil population:

"I believe that is a very unfair estimate of the drunkenness between the two classes. Probably every case among the gypsies is reported, and thousands of cases of the ordinary population are not reported".<sup>150</sup>

Comments on these figures thus have to be made with guarded reserve. However, certain tentative suggestions can be made. Firstly, the number of persons charged would appear to have comprised only a small percentage of the travelling population, and, secondly, around 50% of the charges were a result of the conflict between nomadism and sedentarisation. The remainder were, in the main, of a petty nature, and are perhaps most notable for the relative absence of serious crimes among them, which undoubtedly

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<sup>150</sup> Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, Vagrants, Beggars, Inebriates and Juvenile Delinquents, Scotland, Minutes of Evidence (Edinburgh, 1895), p.218, para. 6690 (hereafter, Dptal. Cttee. on Hab. Offenders, etc.).



would not have gone unreported or unrecognised by the agency. This picture of the predominance of trivial offences, mostly small thefts and the like, was confirmed by the return of crimes and minor offences committed by gypsies and van-dwellers in the jurisdiction of the Surrey Constabulary for the twelve months ending 30 September 1909. This area was frequented by great numbers of gypsies and yet no serious crimes were committed by this class and only 227 minor offences.<sup>151</sup> Clearly, then, the facts, though inadequate, are sufficient to suggest that the criminal stereotype of the gypsy was grossly exaggerated.

#### The Gypsy: Romany or Traveller?

It has been shown, then, that both the romantic and antipathetic stereotypes formed about the gypsies rested on the notion of them as a separate and distinct race, an interpretation showing many weaknesses. Although the romantic elevation of the Romany to a position of superior status over other travellers was somewhat qualified by the antipathetic assertions made respecting their character and temperament, they rested on the same foundation, and the often contradictory stereotypes could be drawn on at will and used for various purposes. Lorists and local authority officials, for instance, readily subscribed to the same interpretation, the one always meeting the Romany and the other never. In the latter case the Romany was revered, perhaps because he was never met with, while the ordinary gypsy suffered the antipathies and persecutions reserved for all

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<sup>151</sup> Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Report and Appendices, Appendix 4 (1909), p.88,

travellers, vagrants and vagabonds. That is, responses and stereotypes evolved also from a travelling life-style, which from earliest times had been associated with roguishness and vagabondage. A racial element could be present in this, but it was more usually subsumed beneath the general association of all travellers with vagrant habits, thus, to a greater or lesser extent, destroying the hierarchical distinctions between travellers. Although sometimes accepting ethnic variation, this interpretation challenged the notion of separateness and distinctiveness in the manner put forward by the romanticists andlorists, and stressed instead the commonality of a travelling way of life and the impossibility of identifying ethnic differences in the face of other factors that cut across racial divides.

The association between a nomadic way of life, self-employment and being a gypsy was commonly made, and is perhaps best illustrated in the book by J. H. Steggall, A Real History of a Suffolk Man who has been a Gypsy &c. (1857), in which is described the life of a 'gypsy' family in the opening decades of the century. When he was aged eight or nine years the author ran away from school and home, and having stumbled across a gypsy he was taken to an encampment where he willingly remained for an unspecified period. He travelled with the gypsy family, adopted a gypsy way of life, and was treated as such by the people with whom he came into contact. It was not until his adopted father was on his death bed that the true story was learnt. This dying 'gypsy' was in fact a Cambridge graduate, and once a great landowner in Surrey, who himself ran away to avoid an arranged marriage in favour of his gypsy sweetheart of the Hearne family. In this instance intermarriage led to the

adoption of an itinerant mode of life for the non-gypsy, and the label of gypsy being given to him. If the reverse had been the case, and the wife had settled in a house, then not only would the husband not have been called a gypsy, but the wife would also lose that ascription, and be described as "gaujified".<sup>152</sup>

This indicates, therefore, that a common way of life and employments made impossible identification between travellers, and that in popular opinion a nomad was a gypsy just as a gypsy was a nomad:

"Yer name's Gipsy Jack?"

"Yes"

"And ye are a Gipsy?"

"Not at all. The handle originated, probably, from my wild roving disposition".<sup>153</sup>

152 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.6, No.4 (1913), p.335. Likewise, Isaac Jowles, married a gypsy, adopted a travelling way of life, and in Somersetshire came to be known as the 'King of the Gypsies' (V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.77). Even the lorists themselves were fooled in this way. Morwood chanced upon meeting a woman carrying a child, and selling combs and other articles, and assumed immediately that she was a gypsy. He discovered later that she was simply the daughter of a Norfolk traveller, who roamed the country with a van hawking brooms, brushes, mats and the like. Paradoxically, she then married a gypsy chair-mender, and settled down to a sedentary way of life (ibid., p.148).

153 ' "Gypsy Jack" of Jimtown', The Boys' First-Rate Pocket Library, No.55 (c.1891), p.3. See also D. MacRitchie, Scottish Gypsies under the Stewarts (Edinburgh, 1894), p.1.

"... A Gypsy is a Gypsy only so long as he continues - in the exercise of his most distinctive characteristic - to roam about the country and live in tents or vans".<sup>154</sup>

Moreover, even if it was possible to accept the arguments of the lorists that the gypsies constituted a separate race, it has to be asked whether this had any bearing on popular responses to travellers. Clearly, the most crucial factor was that of identification. Would it have been possible to identify a separate race of gypsies from the travelling community as a whole?

Travellers of every description traversed the same roads, shared the same camping grounds by the roadside and on waste areas, and mixed socially and economically at fairs, race meetings and village feasts. Such mixing was irrespective of origin or purity of blood. Nor was this a recent phenomenon. A book published in 1612, to detect and expose the art of juggling and legerdemain, noted that many of "our English 'loyterers' " had joined with the "Egyptians", thereby raising important doubts about the purity of gypsy blood two centuries on.<sup>155</sup> It would seem, then, that almost from the moment these alien wanderers arrived on these shores they were joined by English wanderers, thus mixing the indigenous travellers with the original gypsy immigrant.

This was said to take place especially between the gypsies and the native outcasts and criminals. This class took up the habits and occupations of the gypsies and were known to associate

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154 A. M'Cormick, op.cit., p.393. M'Cormick was here stating the popular notion and not his own.

155 R. D. Samuel, The Art of Juggling or Legerdemaine (1612), pp.6-8; see also H. Woodcock, op.cit., p.10.

with them, External appearances would have shown them to be the same,<sup>156</sup> In 1769 the inhabitants of Guildford and Naphill forcibly dislodged and captured some of a "... formidable gang of Gypsies, highwaymen and smugglers ...", who were encamped in Naphill Wood,<sup>157</sup> A similar mixing with the criminal underclasses was also suspected to take place in Scotland. Alexander Moor, the Sheriff Depute of Aberdeenshire, observed that the bands of vagrants who appeared in his county in order to deceive the unwary at fairs, were alleged to be connected with the gypsies.<sup>158</sup> Final testimony to the mixing of gypsies with indigenous wanderers and outcasts can be taken from the reports of a Committee associated at Southampton to bring about the social and religious reform of the gypsies. The second report of the Committee stated categorically that the gypsies were no longer identifiable as a distinct and peculiar race of people owing to the admission to their ranks of vagabonds, tinkers, umbrella-menders and vagrants, many of whom were said to have left their parishes to escape from the constable. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the camp or its inhabitants from being regarded as anything other than gypsy.<sup>159</sup>

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156 Chambers's Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Tracts, Vol.16, No.139 (1847), p.1.

157 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.3, No.2 (1891), p.123.

158 Quoted in J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.92-3.

159 2nd Report of Sub-Committee, November 1828, in Southampton Committee: a summary account of the proceedings of a provisional committee associated at Southampton with a view to the consideration and improvement of the condition of the Gipseys (Southampton, c.1830), p.9. The Committee and its work will be dealt with more fully in Chapter 4.

However, to continue with the assumption that travellers were of different ethnic origins, evidence of mixing was not the only, or even the main, reason that led to difficulty in distinguishing between travellers. Shared circumstances, mode of life, means and habits of existence and occupations were sufficient for the popular equation to be made between nomadism and gypsyism. Morwood identified the problem when he described the great number of families, most of them natives of the Black Country, who constantly travelled about, living in vans

"... the outside of which are usually laden with brooms, brushes, baskets, and other articles for domestic use, and who are on this account looked upon as gipsies / my emphasis / but with whom they can claim no physical relationship whatever. The only things in which they are at all identical are the occupations they follow, and their wandering life".<sup>160</sup>

Yet these were precisely the criteria by which they were judged, and which formed the basis of the reasoning that equated such a life-style with gypsyism.

All travellers who wandered with their families and pursued itinerant self-employments, were classed as gypsies, and even those who regarded gypsies as a race could not fail to note the mixing, the difficulty of identifying racial separateness among nomads pursuing similar occupations, and, finally, the failure of the public to do so in any case. This can be shown by the example of the 'potters' of Staffordshire.<sup>161</sup>

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160 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.4; see also F. W. Hackwood, The Good Old Times (1910), p.215.

161 See J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.169-70. See also pages 70-3.

Some authors preferred the term 'potters' to describe this group, even though it was acknowledged that the gypsies had intermingled with them, in an attempt to distinguish native pot-hawkers from gypsy potters. Yet others claimed that the hawking of pottery around the midland, northern and border counties was a recognised gypsy occupation.<sup>162</sup> In fact, the terms 'potter' and 'gypsy' were used interchangeably to describe the travelling hawkers who camped in Craven, about Chipping, near Preston and in Derbyshire. This synonymous usage of racial, occupational and nomadic terms, listed earlier, and the grouping together of tinkers, muggers, hawkers and the like under the 'generic' term 'gypsy' seems to have been a common and regular occurrence.<sup>163</sup>

This is perhaps most noticeable in the association of gypsy occupations with tinkering and of gypsy with tinker. Originally, a tinker was simply a wandering smith, though by the nineteenth century the work of smithing had to combine with various other employments, and eventually the term came to be associated with travelling and nomadism in general. This is best illustrated by taking the Scottish tinkers, or tinklers, as an example. Tinkers were well known in the Border regions, were often referred to as

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162 See G. Smith, I've been ..., p.264; J. Simson, 'Disquisition ...', in W. Simson, op.cit., pp.534-40; B. Vesey-Fitzgerald, op.cit., p.79. Although Vesey-Fitzgerald accepted the racial definition of a gypsy, and isolated the Romany as the 'pure' gypsy, he nevertheless was forced to acknowledge the existence of a "Gypsy strain" in the Northern potters.

163 C. G. Leland, 'Shelta', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.2, No.6 (1891), footnote 3, p.349. See also Rev. G. Hall, op.cit., p.181; J. Timbs, Popular Errors Explained and Illustrated (1869), p.232; 'The Children of Mystery', All the Year Round, New Ser., Vol.39 (1886), p.88.

gypsies, and travelled through the Border counties in small bands. They poached and thieved on a small scale, but their legitimate business was as tinkers, sellers of crockery, dealers in old rags, in eggs, salt and tobacco, and as manufacturers of horn into spoons. They were divided into clans, the principal names being Faa, Baillie, Young, Ruthven and Gordon. They were said to be much intermingled with the native outlaws and vagabonds. Most of those who travelled through Selkirkshire resided in the winter months in the villages of Sterncliff and Spittal in Northumberland, and in Kirk Yetholm in Roxburghshire.<sup>164</sup> In the county of Lanark the gypsies were generally called tinklers, and in Perthshire the term gypsy frequently indicated tinker.<sup>165</sup> The editor of a Scottish newspaper even went so far as to argue that gypsies had died out in Scotland, there being, instead, families of itinerant tinklers who made their living from manufacturing and selling horn spoons and saucepans, which they bartered with the rural peasantry for potatoes and other eatables. They were thought to derive

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164 Walter Scott, Sheriff of Selkirkshire, quoted in J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.94-6.

165 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.2, No.4 (1890), p.254; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.3, No.1 (1891), p.63.



mainly from Ireland, and were seen to be a wild and lawless bunch,<sup>166</sup>  
 The question of Irish tinkers was raised in 1816 by the Sheriff  
 Substitute for Bute, who desired to know if these were the people  
 about whom Hoyland requested information, and in Wales in mid-  
 century, following the influx of tinkers forced out of Ireland by  
 the famines of 1845-7. Both these groups lived in the manner of  
 the gypsies and took up similar occupations to the indigenous  
 travellers.<sup>167</sup>

Although, then, it was impossible to distinguish ethnically  
 or occupationally between the various groups of travellers, thereby  
 suggesting some degree of uniformity or homogeneity, it was not  
 entirely true that differences of some kind were not noted.  
 Travellers were distinguishable from the tramp or vagrant by their  
 banding together in groups, encamping in some form, and by

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166 Quoted in J. Simson, 'Disquisition ...', in W. Simson,  
op.cit., pp.539-40. This newspaper editor scoffed at the  
 idea of gypsies, or tinklers, "... existing as a distinct and  
 separate people, possessing a native, independent language,  
 and peculiar habits, rites, and ceremonies, and bearing, in  
 many features of their barbarous customs, and outcast destiny,  
 a resemblance to the vagabond Jews, such an idea, we say, has  
 as little foundation in fact as has Swift's story of the  
 Lilliputian, or the romance of Guy Mannering itself ..."  
 (ibid., p.540).

This editor was attempting to argue against Simson's view of  
 the widespread existence of gypsies throughout Britain, to be  
 found in all spheres of life. The difference between the two  
 lay in their definition. The editor believed that inter-  
 marriage, settling and the general interaction between gypsies  
 and non-gypsies had destroyed the essence of being a gypsy.  
 In contrast, Simson believed that the essence would have been  
 spread among a greater number of people.

167 J.-P. Clébert, The Gypsies (1963), p.82; J. Hoyland,  
op.cit., p.93.

exercising some handicraft or industry.<sup>168</sup> This distinction between the lone tramp and the family group of travellers was usually, though not always, made. Both Select Committees on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, in 1909 and 1910, reported that the public were not careful enough in distinguishing between the gypsy van-dwellers and the tramps who did not live in moveable dwellings at all.<sup>169</sup>

Any attempt at imposing a hierarchy on the travellers was based on differences of wealth and their specific style and manner of life, and not in terms of racial origins or socio-economic and cultural formations:

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168 Dptal. Cttee. on Hab. Offenders, etc., Minutes of Evidence, of J. MacPherson and Chief Constable Fraser, p.210, paras. 6330-3; pp.366-7, paras. 11,561-11,623; Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Report (1906), p.109 (hereafter, Dptal. Cttee. on Vag.); 'The Surrey Gipsies', Spectator, 18 December 1897, p.895.

169 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Report (1909), p.64, para. 1254; Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Report (1910), p.iv; Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol. 7 (1911), col. 103; Dptal. Cttee. on Vag., Report, p.24.

"To begin with you have the very respectable class of gipsy who goes about with vans, and you generally see them with wicker-work baskets and chairs and various wicker-work articles for sale ... Then you have another class, just below those people who generally go about with one or two vans and two or three horses. Below them you have another class which has only a donkey cart and a few rags and sticks in it to make tents; and even below that you get a class who wheel the things about in old barrows or perambulators. Again, below that, you have the ordinary tramp ...".<sup>170</sup>

This hierarchy added a refinement to the usual practice of grouping all travellers together, the latter habit being a source of much annoyance and displeasure to the lorists and some of the gypsies themselves:

"... (Gorgios) fancy all gypsies are the same - Lovells and Taylors, Stanleys and Turners, Boswells and Norths. Nay, worse than that, they take for Gypsies the Nailers, Potters, Besom-makers, all the tagrag and bobtail travelling the roads".<sup>171</sup>

Whether it was right or wrong, fair or unjust, the notion that all tent- and van-dwellers were gypsies was widespread and popular.<sup>172</sup> Essentially, then, we are left with a definition which saw differences between travellers as coming secondary to

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170 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Capt. Sant (1909), p.66, para. 1284. Similarly, Scott Macfie noted how some wealthy gypsies were able to spend up to several hundred pounds on their vans, which they furnished with goods of exceedingly high quality, while others possessed nothing "... save a donkey or a perambulator, a few sticks and a ragged blanket for a shelter, and an irreducible minimum of pots, pans, crockery and bedding" (B. Skot, op.cit., pp.46-7). See also Dptal. Cttee. on Tinkers, Report, p.10; E. Brewer, 'Gipsy Encampments ...', loc.cit., p.113-4.

171 Silvanus Boswell quoted in F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.102.

172 H. T. Crofton, 'Gipsy Life ...', loc.cit., p.32.

fundamental similarities that marked them off not from each other along racial lines but from settled society in terms of their way of life.

### Nomadic Stereotypes and the Clash with Settled Society

Travellers in general were, therefore, considered to be separate from settled society and in some way different from the sedentary inhabitants. Mayhew identified nomads as a separate race distinguished by their high cheek-bones and protruding jaws, among whom was a greater development of the animal than of the moral or intellectual nature of man, and who possessed certain characteristics:

"The nomad ... is distinguished from the civilised man by his repugnance to regular and continuous labour - by his want of providence in laying up a store for the future - by his inability to perceive consequences ever so slightly removed from immediate apprehension - by his passion for stupefying herbs and roots, and, when possible, for intoxicating fermented liquors - by his extraordinary powers of enduring privation - by his comparative insensibility to pain - by an immoderate love of gaming, frequently risking his own personal liberty upon a single cast - by his love of libidinous dances - by the pleasure he experiences in witnessing the suffering of sentient creatures - by his delight in warfare and all perilous sports - by his desire for vengeance - by the looseness of his notions as to property - by the absence of chastity among his women, and his disregard of female honour - and lastly, by his vague sense of religion ...".<sup>173</sup>

By implication, settled members of society possessed characteristics opposite to the above, such as thrift, materialism,

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173 H. Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, Vol.1 (1861; New York, 1968), p.2.

industriousness and high morality. The travellers' inability to save money, respect property, work industriously and live morally clearly offended concepts of social order and progress.

Luke Pike illustrated well the long-held connection between sedentarisation and respectable behaviour, or servility, and between itinerancy and antisocial behaviour and attitudes:

"Before the Norman Conquest a man who had no lord was to be accounted a thief; in the reign of Elizabeth a man who had no lord and no master was to be accounted a vagabond ... the houses of correction were filled with 'idle labourers that would not work for the wages taxed, rated and assessed by the justices of the peace', and 'strong tall persons, having no land, money or lawful occupation' ".<sup>174</sup>

By the nineteenth century these attitudes were being repeated more and more frequently, and by persons of varying backgrounds and objectives. Criticisms made by trade union leaders about the demoralising effect on character engendered by travelling, thus making the traveller unfit for the settled, industrial occupations, could have been made by any number of critics from any class.<sup>175</sup>

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174 L. O. Pike, A History of Crime in England (1876), pp.75-6.

175 See, for example, London Society of Compositors, Trade Reports: L.S.C. Sub-Committee Report on the Tramping System, August 1862; Printing and Machine Managers' Trade Society, Minute Book, 9 August 1876. (To be found at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick).

Simply, travellers of whatever description were considered rogues and vagabonds of the worst type, whose way of life, habits and characteristics were not acceptable to members of a society structured primarily around permanency and sedentarisation. Yet the very same society that criticised itinerancy in such strong terms also demanded its existence by its reliance upon a measure of itinerancy to compensate for seasonal and regional fluctuations in trades and employments. Toleration of a necessary evil rather than acceptance was, though, the justification for the perpetuation of this marginal group that was to become increasingly anachronistic as time passed.

Into this context of general antipathy wandered the gypsies. From the moment they appeared in great numbers, in the reign of Henry VIII, they were deemed vagabonds. They were viewed with such disfavour not so much because they practised palmistry, or even because they were suspected of various felonies, but rather because they "... went from shire to shire".<sup>176</sup> By the laws enacted in the reign of Philip and Mary they were able to avoid the penalties of the Acts by leaving their

"... naughty, idle and ungodly life and company, and be placed in the service of some honest and able inhabitant of the realm ...".<sup>177</sup>

Subsequent legislation condemned to death or transportation 'pretended Egyptians', 'persons pretending to be Gypsies', and persons 'wandering in the habit and form of Egyptians'. All

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176 L. O. Pike, op.cit., pp.75-6,

177 Ibid., pp.76-7.

these classes of persons were to be deemed rogues and vagabonds and dealt with accordingly.<sup>178</sup> It would seem, then, that racial categories were here included.

However, as David MacRitchie pointed out, it was not clear that prosecutions and sentences singled out a peculiar and distinctive race for persecution.<sup>179</sup> By the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century this confusion was somewhat removed by the repeal of the excessively severe legislation of the earlier period, and by prosecution no longer resulting from the simple fact of being a gypsy but instead by being a travelling rogue. Unless able to 'give a good account of themselves' all who slept in tents, carts, wagons or the open air were liable to prosecution.<sup>180</sup> Essentially these provisions, contained in the Vagrancy Act of 1824, simplified the earlier legislation, removed the ambiguities and adapted them to the present state of society.<sup>181</sup>

The definition had thus become more flexible yet was nevertheless still closely associated with vagabondage and vagrancy. The absence of the racial element was also evident in the reports

178 L. O. Pike, op.cit., pp.76-7; see also F. W. Hackwood, op.cit., pp.207-8.

179 See D. Hume, Commentaries on the Law of Scotland, Vol.1 (Edinburgh, 1844), pp.471-9; D. MacRitchie, op.cit., pp.1-2.

180 Vagrant Act, 23 Geo.III, c.51, 1783; Vagrancy Act, 3 Geo.IV, c.40, 1822; Vagrancy Act, 5 Geo.IV, c.83, 1824.

181 See A Barrister, The Vagrant Act, in relation to the liberty of the subject (1824).

on vagrancy made to the Poor Law Board by its Inspectors. The Relieving Officer for Birkenhead classified vagrants thus:

"Thieves on the look-out, low prostitutes, beggars of both sexes and all ages, hawkers of petty articles ... begging-letter writers, smashers, ballad singers, travelling tinkers, china menders, umbrella-menders [my emphases] ...".<sup>182</sup>

Similarly, an anonymous report on vagrancy in Norfolk, dated 1869, also shared the opinion that the hawking of laces, matches and miscellaneous small wares was simply a pretence under which vagrancy was successfully carried on.<sup>183</sup>

When it came to hurling abuse and affixing stereotypes the differences between the vagrants and travellers were soon forgotten. They had a freedom resented by the householder, evidenced by their nomadism, marginality to the normal forces of law and order, and evasion of taxes and other charges suffered by the householder. To make matters worse, they were a burden on local resources by demanding relief payments and of being idle beggars. In short, they were seen as unwelcome and unsavoury parasites. Those travellers who did not work, or were not seen to work, were said to be idle mendicants, and those who did were said to pursue 'sham and vagabond' employments, such as tinkering and hawking.

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182 Quoted in C, J, R, Turner, op.cit., p.295, 'Smashers' were persons who passed counterfeit coins.

183 HO45/9340; Norfolk: printed report on Vagrancy (1869),



Cadging from door to door and manufacturing craft items by the roadside were not thought to involve real, hard toil, and so could not be considered work.

The nomadic way of life thus stood in defiance to that experienced and suffered by the sedentary population. It rejected materialism, conformity and subjugation to industrial discipline, and although this was resented there was nevertheless a suggestion of envy.<sup>184</sup> Anything that hinted at eccentricity and unconventionality would have been treated with an interest qualified by reserve and suspicion.<sup>185</sup>

By the latter decades of the nineteenth century these rather amorphous and ill-defined antipathetic sentiments were fuelled by mounting evidence concerning their illiteracy, low levels of sanitation and morality and the tendency of infectious diseases to be transmitted by travellers. The earlier, more moralistic emphasis on the need to extinguish itinerancy to prevent licentious and parasitic behaviour had been largely superseded by the appeal to common sense. The expressed concern over the moral and physical dangers posed by the itinerants was apparent

184 See A. Compton-Rickett, op.cit., p.3.

185 It should be remembered that, at least for the early part of the century, villages were an introspective community and hostility could exist between up-towners and down-towners, villages, and counties, with an extraordinary network of what were believed to be racial differences. In a context where myths could develop about a people dwelling a few miles across a county border, any stranger would have been viewed with suspicion. See J. Lawson, Progress in Pudsey (1887; Firle, 1978), p.30. To an extent regular visitors, like gypsies, would have avoided this response.

throughout the century, but the difference was that the emphasis had been modified. George Smith of Coalville was a prime influence in effecting this change. His numerous publications in newspapers, articles and books portrayed travellers not only as idle, beggarly and parasitic, but also as unclean, uneducated, unhealthy, conveyors of infectious diseases and especially prone to criminality.

Smith conformed with tradition in his isolation of itinerancy as the great evil to be cured; failure to do so would have disastrous consequences:

"By travelling in vans, carts, and tents they escape the school boards, sanitary officers, rent and rate collectors; and today they are - unthinkingly, no doubt - undermining all our social privileges, civil rights, and religious advantages, and will, if encouraged by us, bring decay to the roots".<sup>186</sup>

Smith did not condemn the gypsies as a race, only the itinerant, gypsy way of life. To support his argument that settlement was the only solution he presented examples of sedentary gypsies who were industrious, clean and religious. They complained to him about their lack of education, and related stories on the road of depredations, crimes, fights and child-stealing. They all, without exception, commented how pleased they were to have given up wandering,

In contrast, with a distinction too convenient and tidy to be treated without some measure of scepticism, travellers were presented as the polar opposites of the respectable, settled

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<sup>186</sup> G. Smith, I've been ..., p.263.

families. Occasionally a Christian van-dweller may be found, living in clean and tidy vans in hospitable and pleasant surroundings, but they were a rarity. The remainder came in for unreserved criticism. Smith claimed to have discovered just one instance of them paying rates for their vans, and that was at Blackpool.<sup>187</sup> Everywhere he met with them confirmed his belief that few among them could read and write, and that their standards of morality were so low as to shock even the most wretched of the settled population. Smith listed examples of gypsy men sharing their vans with one or more women and any number of children from seven upwards.<sup>188</sup>

Of particular concern was the insanitary condition in which the van-dwellers lived, causing a health risk to both themselves and to the settled neighbours next to their encampments. Smith again discovered evidence to support his claim that itinerancy coupled with insanitary living arrangements to form one of the chief means by which infectious diseases were spread. In one case it was stated that travelling gypsies conveyed smallpox to a large town and caused more than 2000 deaths.<sup>189</sup> The information was presented in a manner calculated to convey both fear and pity, and the importance of his views derives from the widespread publicity and acceptance accorded to them. Consider, for example, this extract from a letter he wrote to the Morning Post about the carrying of infectious diseases:

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<sup>187</sup> G. Smith, Gipsy Life..., p.285,

<sup>188</sup> G. Smith, I've been ..., p.280,

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.347,

"Two days ago I came upon a family of gipsy 'muggers', father, mother and four children, travelling in a cart. The poor little children, whose ages ranged from four to twelve years, were stived (sic.) up in a box on the cart, which box was 5ft. long by 2 ft. 9in. wide by 3ft. high, or about eleven cubic feet of space for each poor child. The children were all down with a highly infectious disease, carrying it from a village where it had been raging, to Daventry and Northampton".<sup>190</sup>

Clearly, such a claim would have provoked much concern and interest, and the link between travellers and the conveying of infectious diseases was a logical one to make. However, it was a claim ungrounded in fact. The Select Committees of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, for 1909 and 1910, spent some time considering this issue. Dr. H. F. Parsons, assistant medical officer to the Local Government Board, gave evidence that he had been given notice of only six cases of infectious diseases being brought into a district by van-dwellers in the ten years 1900-1909.<sup>191</sup> Although it is possible that not every instance was brought to his attention it was still thought that the cases were not very numerous.

This analysis was backed up by reports from the Medical Officer of Health for the combined Rural Districts of Carshalton, Dorking, Epsom and Leatherhead, who had the following to say about the large number of gypsies who congregated on Epsom Downs for the two annual race meetings:

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190 11 October 1882, p.2.

191 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence (1909), p.14, para.242.

"... I have never received a notification of infectious disease among them at those times, and I have no reason to think that they have introduced any disease into the district".<sup>192</sup>

Similar reassurances were forthcoming from officials of the Guildford and Reigate districts.<sup>193</sup> In fact, their enquiries led them to adopt quite different conclusions. Rather than being unhealthy and diseased, the various medical officers and inspectors commented on the absence of infectious diseases among travellers, the low rate of infant mortality and a generally high standard of health.<sup>194</sup> In this case the failure to distinguish between travellers and vagrants had led to wrong assumptions. Infectious diseases were more likely to be spread by tramps in the common lodging-houses and workhouses rather than in travellers' camps. Yet despite the inaccuracy of the accusation, the association of ill-health and disease with all travellers was frequently made,

Although, then, some of the stereotypes formed about the gypsies contained more than a measure of truth, notably in regard to their conditions of existence, there were many others for which

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192 Letter from Dr. Williamson to Dr. Farrar, Medical Officer of the Local Government Board, quoted in Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence (1909), p.21, para. 367.

193 Ibid., p.21, paras. 368-9,

194 See Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Report (1910), pp. iv-v; J. Crabb, The Gypsies' Advocate, pp.31-2,

there was more hearsay and speculation than evidence. The accuracy of the various allegations was, though, of less importance in terms of responses than the fact of their constant repetition and cultural transmission from one generation to the next:

"... I have heard so much about their being a predatory and dishonest race, that I am compelled to think that what anybody says must have some truth in it ...".<sup>195</sup>

This writer was forced to submit to popular consensus despite having had personal contact with the gypsies, an experience that showed them to be an honest and "... serviceable class of persons".<sup>196</sup>

The strength of the stereotyped themes and images lay in their emphasis on generalisations borrowed and learnt from others, which were constantly repeated in the press, literature, folk-lore, common hearsay and nursery rhymes. Each time, the separateness of the gypsy from settled (civilised) society was stressed, either as a distinct racial group, biologically and culturally, or in terms of the debased and debasing nomadic outcast. Responses were therefore based on persistent but mixed stereotypes, the one founded in romanticism of a distinct people, but which could be adapted in terms showing a marked antipathy to an 'alien' race and culture, and the other based in a long-standing hostility and mistrust directed at the whole nomadic population. This latter position was occasionally taken to such extremes that travellers were said to be a separate race themselves, or that they were joined, Masonic-

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195 A. Somerville, The Autobiography of a Working Man (1848), p.54.

196 Ibid.

style, into a mysterious, thieving, travelling fraternity.<sup>197</sup>

The overt racism contained in the association of malicious stereotypes with a separate alien race was perhaps the least common of these various nineteenth-century perspectives. However, this position came to the front most clearly when the country experienced periodic visits from foreign gypsies, for example, with the arrival of the Greek gypsies in 1886, and later followed by Hungarians, Servians, Germans and the Calderari gypsy copper-smiths from Hungary in 1911.<sup>198</sup> As obviously of foreign origin as they were of nomadic disposition, these gypsies offered the localists an opportunity to romanticise again about past origins, and strange beliefs and customs, but for almost every other section of the community to respond with horrifying xenophobic crudity. Local authorities would not tolerate their existence, violent

197 See F. Grose, op.cit., pp.176-7; A. J. Gordon, 'About Gipsies', Gentleman's Magazine, Vol.287 (1899), pp.409-12.

198 For an account of the Greek gypsies see D. MacRitchie, 'The Greek Gypsies at Liverpool', Chambers's Journal, 5th Ser., Vol.3 (1886), pp.577-80; F. H. Groome, Gypsy Folk Tales (1899), pp. xlii-xliii; A. M'Cormick, The Tinkler Gypsies (Dumfries, 1907), p.x; for the German gypsies see C. Holmes, 'The German Gypsy Question in Britain, 1904-6' in K. Lunn (ed.), Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society 1870-1914 (1980), pp.134-59; R. Hargreaves, 'A Brief History of the German Gypsies, Brough Hill, 1908', in his letters to Mrs. McGrigor Phillips, 13 November 1939 - 29 January 1940 (Romany Collection, Brotherton Library); J. Simpson, 'The German Gypsies at Blackpool', J.G.L.S., Vol.1, No.2 (1907), pp.111-21; for the Calderari copper-smiths see Andreas (Mui Shuko), pseud. of R. A. Scott Macfie, Gypsy Copper-smiths in Liverpool and Birkenhead (Liverpool, 1913); E. O. Winstedt, 'The Gypsy Copper-smiths Invasion of 1911-13', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.6, No.4 (1913), pp.244-303; E. O. Winstedt, 'Coppersmith Gypsy Notes', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.8, No.4 (1915), pp.246-266; W. T. Searle, 'The Calderari Gypsy Copper-smiths', Folk-Lore Gazette, Vol.3, No.1 (1914), pp.6-32.

conflicts occurred frequently with the police, indigenous travellers gloated over their harassment, and the local townspeople stoned them and spat at them. Here antipathy to the gypsy, the nomad and the foreigner was seen in the most extreme forms.

The most commonly-held views, in relation to indigenous travellers, subscribed to the Romantic elevation of the Romany and the actual denigration of all other non-Romany travellers. These positions did not, as might appear, stand in contradiction to each other, but rather interacted in a complementary and self-reinforcing manner. Lorists could borrow from both sides to argue that the subjects of their studies were always the 'true' Romany, while the dirty and degenerate criminals of other writings were necessarily the half-breeds or non-gypsy travellers. Conversely, the travellers encountered by philanthropists of the George Smith ilk, and the local authority officials, many of whom were directly influenced by his 'discoveries', were regarded only as half-breeds and never the 'true' gypsies whom the officials exalted along with the lorists. Both groups thus held identical positions, and claimed to be studying different sections of the hierarchically-organised travelling community. One can only comment on the remarkable fact that their paths never crossed. Pro-gypsy sentiments were, then, reserved for a small portion of travellers, found and visited by the lorists, though seemingly not by anyone else, for whom the Romany remained an elusive figure, bathed in a fictional, romantic light. Antipathy to travellers was thus double-edged, composed of racial flights of fancy and alleged empiricist objectivity concerning their manner and conditions of life.



Conclusion: Marginal, Mobile, Minority.

The whole question of perceptions of gypsies, and of responses to them, thus has to be viewed from within the much larger framework of attitudes and responses to itinerancy in general and to a separate, 'alien' race and culture. The motivation behind the concern over an itinerant population, no matter how varied, is not hard to understand. In short, travellers offended every sense of good order and morality. They existed on the fringes of society, and of the economic and political spheres, and this marginality to, or rejection of, a conventional, settled mode of life made them suspect and unwelcome. They were to be feared for the implicit threat their existence posed to a method of thinking that was increasingly to stress immobility and regularity, to be resented for remaining apart from the pressures towards conformity, whether legal, institutional, cultural or the many, subtle pressures towards socialisation, and yet, also, were to be envied for managing to retain some independence and individuality. On the whole, though, the balance of opinion was very heavily weighted against them.

Itinerancy, vagrancy, vagabondage and mendicity were terms used almost interchangeably. The problem was compounded by the belief that the numbers of the class were forever increasing, boosted at various times by, for example, the reduction of the militia following the Napoleonic Wars, and the potato crop failure in Ireland in mid-century, which led to an influx of pauperism into England on such a scale that it was said it was impossible to enforce the 1824 Vagrancy Act,<sup>199</sup> Reports of Chief Constables, to be found in: the Public

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199 C. J. R. Turner, op.cit., pp.216, 259-60.

Record Office, testify to the expressed concern over vagrancy and its perceived increase and the felt need to control the problem.<sup>200</sup> The depth of concern over this problem is illustrated well by the large numbers of bills put forward, and Acts passed, covering this issue throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Added to this was the antipathy that developed towards a group allegedly of foreign origin, who had managed to retain distinctive characteristics over the centuries. Myths thus emerged concerning Freemasonry practices, strange rites and customs inimical to the British way of life. Peculiarly gypsy traits compounded the impressions which formed around nomadism into an all-embracing hostility, shared by all members of settled society, irrespective of class. The settled labourer had no more sympathy for the traveller than the lord of the manor. Essential to this hostile response was the belief that travellers were different from, and apart from, settled society, whether this was identifiable in terms of low moral, physical, religious and educational standing, or in peculiar dress, manners and customs. On the whole, they were not regarded as a threat, either economically, politically or in any sense other than to property or health, for to accord them this would be to give them a measure of importance and respect they were not thought to deserve.

The twin bases of the racial definition, of blood purity and ethnic distinction, have been found to suffer from serious methodo-

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200 See HO45/9340.

logical flaws, and which ultimately crumble in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence. Both the assumptions, that the gypsies were a separate race and that they were identifiable as such, have thus been challenged. Though culturally distinct from the settled population it cannot be argued that this factor, allied to race, separated them from each other. We are left, then, with a large body of travellers, tied by a common life-style and employments. This, though, is not to suggest that they formed a heterogeneous group. Although not able to be slotted into a hierarchical scale according to criteria suggested by the lorists and others, they were differentiated according to, for example, the extent of their nomadism, the types of their dwellings, differences in wealth, and favoured occupations.

Summarily, there were three different, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, definitions about who constituted the gypsies of the nineteenth century, and these covered a romantic race, a degenerate race and a group of outcast travellers. Responses were conditioned and informed by stereotypes emanating from each of these. The term 'gypsy' was thus variously used to apply specifically to a racial elite found at the top of the pyramidal ordering said to exist among travellers, and also to apply, in a generic sense, to the whole travelling pyramid itself. Given the weaknesses and general invalidity of the former position, it is in this latter sense that the term should be interpreted in this work.