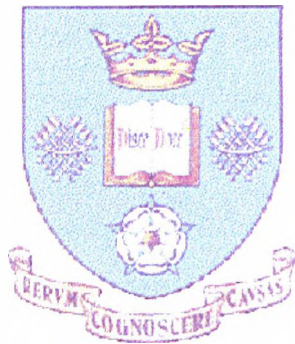


**"Fun without Vulgarity":  
Community, Women and Language in  
Showland Society, from 1890 to the Present Day.**



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To the memory of James O'Connor, Arthur William Albert Francis  
and Peter William Carnell.



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## ABSTRACT.

Much of the literature relating to the history of fairs and travelling communities is written from the perspective of an outsider and deals mainly with the material culture of the societies concerned. The aim of this study is to shift the balance back to the community itself and investigate the notions of belonging, group identity and the customary lifestyle of travelling showpeople. Although there are approximately 250 fairs which take place from April through to November every year, little is known about the lifestyle, history and culture of the showpeople that present these attractions. Fairs have long held a fascination for an assortment of writers and chroniclers, but the history and traditions of the society behind the fair remain virtually unknown. Through the use of tape-recorded interviews and archival sources a comprehensive body of oral, photographic and documentary evidence has been brought together to form the corpus of material necessary for this study. The resulting data selected for presentation has been analysed in detail and, by applying the methodologies practised by social anthropologists, linguists and cultural historians, has been broken down into three principal focal topics: the relationship between showpeople and other Travellers; the role of women in the community; and the use of language. These topics were chosen as central to the analysis of changes that occurred in the traditional society in the late 1880s and which have shaped the development of the fairground community in the twentieth century.

The study reveals the fluidity and development of the traditional culture of travelling showpeople, analyses the status and role of women within the community, and demonstrates the importance of linguistic usage in maintaining a strong sense of separate identity within the contemporary travelling communities. The advantage of the insider's perspective has provided significant new insights into the society and culture of travelling showpeople.



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## Chapter 1.

### Introduction and Review of the Sources.

*A showman's life, my friends, is not all glory. Beneath the glitter and the tinsel is many a heartache. The open road is often strewn with thorns ... Tell us the showmen's tale, you say. And why not? The very thought of it brings back to my ears the jingle of bells. The dim figures before me turn into a thousand shapes and fancies. Tell you the showman's tale? Ay, that I will. Once more I hear the blare of music and the sound of drums. I catch the laughter of merry children. Walk up! Walk up! Walk up! This way for the most singular stories ever told by living man!*<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1. Hives Family, London, c. 1900s.

## Chapter 1.

### Introduction and Review of the Sources.

#### 1. Aims and Overall Themes of the Study.

From April to November, approximately 250 fairs take place every week throughout the United Kingdom. The majority of these fairs can be traced back to the granting of Charters or the Statute of Labour Act of 1351.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the public face of the fairground and the very active role it plays in the lives of the general populace, very little is known about the lifestyle, history and culture of the showpeople that present these attractions. The aim of this study is to provide an insight into the way of life of this little known group and to analyse any change that might have occurred in the traditional culture over the past century. Although fairs have long held a fascination for an assortment of writers and chroniclers, the history and traditions of the society behind the fair remains virtually unknown. Over the past hundred years, a variety of publications have appeared that have attempted to open a window into this society, but with the exception of the few autobiographies published by the showpeople themselves, the results have been based on secondary or limited source material.

The opening quotation is taken from the autobiography of 'Lord' George Sanger, perhaps the most prominent of all the Victorian showmen. The most important aspect of Sanger's account is that it draws directly on his career as a showman. This study aims to build on the foundations laid by Sanger's work, by drawing on the life stories and experiences of the showpeople themselves, in order to present an in-depth account of how the community has developed over the century. However, the themes of this study were chosen not because the material had been under-researched, but because of my own family connections within the community. For the past three and half years I have been involved in collecting and researching the history, language, and cultural

traditions of travelling showpeople. The reasons for undertaking this research were twofold. Firstly, my family members are travelling showpeople and as such I had immediate access to a community which has always been perceived as closed and unco-operative. Secondly, no in-depth analytical account of the development of showland culture, and of the issues of identity and ethnicity within the fairground fraternity, has previously been published or researched at a higher level by an insider within the community. The aim, therefore, was to utilise my insider knowledge, combined with my academic training as a historian, in order to present a comprehensive account of the development of fairground society and any changes that might have occurred in the customary society.

Faced with such a task, the immediate problem was how to limit the scope of the study within manageable proportions. The most important factor which concerns those operating fairground equipment is membership of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, and ninety five percent of the families who run travelling funfairs in this country are members of this organisation. According to records held at the headquarters of the Guild, there are approximately 5,000 members presently operating funfair equipment in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> These figures, however, do not take into account the five percent of showpeople who organise events outside the sanctions of the organisation and are members of other societies. My own extended family includes Guild and non-Guild members and a study of either group could have been undertaken. However, as the Showmen's Guild is the trade association for the funfair industry, and the one with over a hundred years of history in the business, I decided to base the research around the members of this organisation. The reasons for this choice are as follows. Firstly, as previously stated, ninety five percent of travelling showpeople are members of the Guild and in order to provide an overall account of the lifestyle of fairpeople, the dominant group must be considered. Secondly, from an historical perspective, the rival organisations that currently exist have either sprung up in

opposition to the Guild, or are operating vintage fairground equipment and therefore, not usually involved in the business as fulltime operators. Thirdly, when the research began, the Guild was the one group that imposed a policy of restricted membership, and only the sons, daughters, wives or husbands of present or past members could join the association.<sup>4</sup> The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain was founded in 1889, in order to combat legislation that would restrict the movements of travelling people. Over the century it has developed into a trade society which not only controls the movements of fairs, but also imposes a strict code of conduct within the community. Therefore, after considering all these factors it was decided that the main thrust of this study would be to investigate and analyse the lifestyles, traditions and language of travelling showpeople who are members of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. Although a small percentage of the people interviewed in the course of the research are not members of the Guild, their selection is either on the grounds of family connections, or because their occupation and lifestyle are in keeping with the overall background of the other informants.

## **2. Geographical Background.**

The present day Showmen's Guild is organised at both a national and regional level, and comprises ten sectional offices and a head office in Staines. The regions embrace the following areas:

No. 1 Section - Northern (Northumberland, Durham, Tyne and Wear and that part of North Yorkshire defined by a line drawn from Hawes to Staithes and which shall include Leyburn, Richmond and Northallerton); No. 2 Section - Lancashire (Lancashire, Cheshire, Montgomeryshire, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Merionethshire, Caernarvonshire, Anglesey); No. 3 Section - Yorkshire (except that part of North Yorkshire included in No. 1 Section) and that part of Lincolnshire north of a line drawn so as to include Gainsborough, Corrington, Caenby Corner, Glentham, West



Rasen, Market Rasen, North Willingham, Ludford, Magna Elkington, Louth, Legbourn, Withern, Maltby-le-Marsh and Mablethorpe); No. 4 Section - Midlands (The historical counties of Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire); No. 5 Section - Eastern Counties (Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Rutland, Huntingdonshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire); No. 6 Section - London and the Home Counties (London, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Essex, Middlesex, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire); No. 7 Section - West of England (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorsetshire, Hampshire, Devonshire, Cornwall, Avon and the Isle of Wight); No. 8 Section - Derby, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire (except that part included in No. 3 Section); No. 9 Section - South Wales (Dyfed, Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan, West Glamorgan, Gwent, Powys, and the area of the County of Worcester and Hereford within the former boundary of the County of Hereford, and the six counties of Northern Ireland); No. 10 Section - Scotland (Scotland, Cumberland and Westmorland).<sup>5</sup>

In order to narrow down the geographical areas, I decided to focus my research on Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the study will therefore encompass the No. 2 and No. 3 Sections of the Guild. Due to the geographical proximity, and the prominence of Nottingham Goose Fair in the showland calendar, interviews were also conducted with members from the No. 8 Section, which incorporates Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and parts of Lincolnshire. The remaining sections are not central to the study, except in order to provide regional comparisons and to set the material in a national context. The reasons for selecting the Lancashire and Yorkshire Sections as the area of study are as follows. Firstly, the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain was originally founded in Salford and many of the founding fathers of the association were based either in Lancashire or Yorkshire. Secondly, although showpeople see themselves as a community, the regional background of the informant is always emphasised and in order to present a more detailed analysis of the community, it was decided to narrow

the geographical area of the research topic. Thirdly, family association with showpeople in Lancashire resulted in important personal contact with many of the people interviewed. Because my family predominantly travel in Lancashire and my present location is Sheffield, there is a partiality in the material recorded, which inevitably leans towards these regions. This is due to the fact that many of showpeople in the areas are connected by ties of kin or friendship and initial interviews were easier to obtain. A final consideration was also historical continuity and according to the evidence presented by Cunningham, Poole *et al.* in their studies of nineteenth century fairs, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, the survival rate of such events was far higher in the North of England.

The full details of these publications will be discussed, and their importance to this research will be analysed throughout the study.

### **3. Review of the Source Materials.**

As noted above, the aim of this research project is to examine the history and development of showland society and to analyse changes in the traditional culture. Because of the breadth of this topic, various aspects of the society had to be selected for closer attention, and the following were chosen as case studies: the relationship between showpeople and other Travellers; the roles of women in the community; and the use of language. The methodology affecting such a selection is outlined in the following chapter. The array of data collected to support the research is divided into two principal categories: the primary and the secondary source materials.

Any form of research pertaining to fairs and the travelling people who operate them is very scarce, especially if one considers the wealth of material available on other travelling communities.<sup>6</sup> Travelling showpeople have received little of the attention that Gypsy and circus families have attracted. It was not until the publication of Henry Morley's *Memoirs of St Bartholomew Fair* in 1859, that there was an attempt to write

an account of one of the thousands of travelling fairs that operate on an annual basis in Great Britain and have done since the Middle Ages. Since that time a range of material has become available and will be examined in relation to the primary data collected in the course of this fieldwork. First of all a number of secondary sources was consulted in the form of a variety of published books and articles which relate directly to the history of travelling fairs. This material will be reviewed in the following section and includes a sample of the bibliographic sources relevant to travelling communities as a whole and those which relate directly to travelling showpeople.

### 3.1. Review of the Published Secondary Sources.

*That little has been written on the subject of fairs, possibly the only true form of public entertainment, is a curious phenomena. Many have been moved by the sheer impact of the event, but their writings are perfunctory, contributing little to a chronological record.*<sup>7</sup>

Within the term "travelling people" there exists a myriad different groups with diverse occupations, language, and social and economic structures to their life. From the nineteenth century onwards these groups have become distinct economic, cultural and, in the case of Gypsies, ethnic groups.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis of this particular study is on travelling showpeople, whose customary way of life is living and working on the travelling fairs in Great Britain. In order to assess what aspects of the community have been analysed, a review of the literature was conducted. The exclusion of a more comprehensive listing of material on travelling culture as a whole is on the basis of its secondary importance, in that the primary material under consideration in this study is concerned solely with the traditions and culture of travelling showpeople. To quote Gillian Bennett:

*Where there is such a mass of data on a variety of interrelated topics, it is often simplest and most revealing to find one's way through the maze holding onto a single thread.*<sup>9</sup>

The literature reviewed in the following section covers the variety of material that has

been published on travelling showpeople. If one was investigating the changes in the traditional lifestyle of Gypsy communities, the array of publications available for review would number in the thousands. However, this is not the case when one examines the printed matter on travelling showpeople, and the review includes a summary of a selection of the hundred or so publications which have been included for the following reasons:

1. Providing information on the historical background of the showland community.
2. Revealing dissimilarities in the material culture and linguistic variation among travelling communities.

The material selected not only provides the chronological framework for the study, but also incorporates any evidence that can reveal an insight into the cultural and linguistic differences prevalent amongst the groups travelling in the United Kingdom at this present time.

### **3.2. Historical Background.**

Although the last hundred years have resulted in an ever increasing number of publications on the history of fairs and the showland community, the following points must be taken into account. Firstly, the amount of material published which deals with showpeople and fairgrounds is minute and numbers perhaps a hundred or so books. Secondly, at least ten percent of these accounts have either been published privately by the family or the author. Thirdly, these books are often written by amateurs and although they provide us with a pictorial description of the equipment, the writers make no attempt to examine the social fabric of showland society and the internal mechanism of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. The publications available on showpeople are scarce and often cater for fairground enthusiasts and their particular interest in the external face of the community, which is manifested on the fairs through the machinery

and the equipment. Another point which must be considered is that at least fifty percent of the material presented in these accounts deals with either individual fairs or families.

Among the first publications which tried to provide an insight into the way of life were Thomas Frost's books on circus and fairground showmen.<sup>10</sup> Their importance is that they provide us with an insight into the perceptions of fairs and showpeople in a crucial time in the history of the society, as they were published only a few years after the Fairs Act 1871, which introduced legislation to enable the abolition of fairs. Perhaps the only book which examines the whole fabric of the fairground community and how it has evolved in the past hundred years is *The Travelling People*, by Duncan Dallas.<sup>11</sup> This centres on the history of showpeople as a community and an organisation. Published in 1971, it takes into consideration the changes that showpeople faced and are still facing. Its importance as a source of information for beginners or researchers is considerable, and despite the information inevitably being slightly out of date, it is perhaps the most significant of all the publications written by an outsider.

The whole context of fairs as manifestations of popular culture is explored by Hugh Cunningham in his important study on the nineteenth century Metropolitan fairs, published in *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, edited by A. P. Donajgrodzki.<sup>12</sup> However, even the academic studies of fairs such as Walton and Poole's account of the Lancashire Wakes,<sup>13</sup> and Douglas Reid's discussion of the festivities in Birmingham,<sup>14</sup> tend to ignore the role of the travelling showpeople in affecting changes in the physical landscape of the fair and the reversal in legislative and public perceptions. As such their overall contribution to the present study is limited.

One of the few academic studies of travelling showpeople can be found in the doctoral thesis presented by Robert D. Sexton in 1989. However, this focused on travelling people as a whole and, although the methodology of using oral narrative as a means of collecting primary data is similar to my own, the geographical scope of his material

centred on the South of England. Sexton's conclusions will be considered later, but, in summary, he examined three different travelling communities: showpeople, Traveller-Gypsies and barge people. The overall assumption was that there are strong historical and cultural links within the first two of these communities but that barge people have always been distinct and autonomous.<sup>15</sup> Two factors must be considered when examining Sexton's evidence: firstly, the material was compiled by an outsider and not from within the community, and secondly, the region chosen by Sexton has always been perceived as different by showpeople from the rest of the fairground community. Showpeople in the South East region are generally known as *hop-pickers*, *Hampshire Hogs* or *pikeyfed*, all expressions which allude to the closeness of the relationship between the showpeople and the Traveller-Gypsies in that area. Sexton claimed that his evidence demonstrated that the showpeople and Gypsies are closer in customs and traditions than previously accepted by the fairground community, and that a large percentage of his informants were originally from Gypsy families. He also stated that the small selection of interviews undertaken in Lancashire proves that this hypothesis can be extended to the country as a whole.<sup>16</sup> However, although Sexton can perhaps claim these conclusions on a regional basis, the evidence he presented is not in keeping with that of the informants who took part in the present research, and therefore cannot be assumed to be applicable on a national level. These elements will be considered throughout the present study, in particular in Chapter 4. However, the importance of the evidence presented by Sexton is relevant only within its geographical context, and as such it will be considered as of secondary importance and one that does not warrant more detailed examination.

Despite the hundred or so texts which the researcher can draw upon, the vast majority of the publications are not only written by outsiders to the culture but emphasise the material culture as opposed to the traditional culture of fairground people. The evolution of fairground equipment is one aspect of fairground history which has been

comprehensively covered and still dominates present day publications. Frederick Fried,<sup>17</sup> in 1964, wrote an extensive account of the most recognisable of fairground rides, the carousel, which has been followed up by a range of publications since then.<sup>18</sup> However, these accounts tend to approach the material culture from the point of view of the manufacturer and do not deal with the impact it made on fairground society. Every aspect of fairground transport, the traction engines,<sup>19</sup> Scammell tractor units,<sup>20</sup> and the modern eight wheel vehicles,<sup>21</sup> have at least one publication dedicated to them. Writers such as David Braithwaite,<sup>22</sup> and Geoff Weedon and Richard Ward<sup>23</sup> have provided us with an expansive record of the fairground rides and their decoration in Great Britain, but, again they tend to ignore the role of the showmen. The majority of the photographic publications also reflect this inclination to examine the fairground equipment or the history of a particular family.<sup>24</sup> If family life is covered it is usually that of a lessee or machine owner, rather than a stallholder. These publications will be examined along with the material deposited in the National Fairground Archive, and will provide the means of analysing how changes in material culture have affected the organisation of the community. Showpeople regard themselves as being educated in experience, self-taught jacks-of-all-trades. One of their particular talents is the utilisation of all aspects of their equipment. They adapt, convert and utilise all their equipment on a regular basis for their own specific purposes. The actual fairground show or ride will often bear no relation to the state in which it came from the factory or manufacturer. This tendency on the part of the showmen reflects a desire in the society to keep one step ahead of their competitors and is rarely mentioned in publications relating to the equipment.

### **3.3. Dissimilarities in the material culture, and linguistic variations.**

A selection of books on travelling communities which mention the differences in the everyday lifestyle between showpeople and other Travellers is represented in this

section. Both Thomas Acton,<sup>25</sup> and David Mayall,<sup>26</sup> in their studies of Gypsy communities from the nineteenth century onwards, stress the particular relationship that exists between members of the Gypsy and showland fraternity. Therefore the sections in the reading material which deal with Traveller communities as a whole, emphasise the distinct cultural niche that showpeople have within the travelling fraternity, and this leads into an examination of showpeople as a separate reference group. This diversity in both the culture and lifestyle is represented in the languages that travelling people use. Within all travelling groups there exist secret languages. In Chapter 6 on Traveller languages in the present study, various articles are referred to which illustrate the range of languages spoken by Travellers and by association, the type of Traveller language that showpeople use. The jargon used by showpeople will be examined as a means of demonstrating that the use of language is a mark of cultural identity and regional diversity. Further information relating to the historical definitions of some of the terminology used and its role in the maintenance of a cultural identity will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

The review of the printed material relating to the research topic has shown that with the exception of Robert Sexton's doctoral study, there is no major historical account of the everyday life and traditions of travelling showpeople. For many years the emphasis has always been placed on the fairs they attend and the fairground equipment they present at these events. This is due in part to the regional interest reflected by the publishers and writers of the material. From the history of St Bartholomew Fair in 1859 to the more recent account of Hull Fair in 1992, interest in the fairs has always been greater than in the people who present them. Another reason for the bias in favour of the material culture is accessibility. Travelling showpeople are in the words of Kenneth Graham a clannish people, living a life apart, rarely accepting outsiders into their community:



*Some people seem to have a vague idea of travelling show-folk as living in Rembrandt interiors on a Salvator Rosa background, in a scene of perpetual high lights and fuliginous shadows full of flashing eyes, tangled gipsy locks, dirt, confusion, clamour and picturesqueness. They are instead a quiet and reserved people, subdued in manner, clannish, living a life apart; scrupulously clean and tidy, as indeed anyone must be who lives in a caravan; self reliant, asking little from anyone except some tolerance from officials and freedom to come and go and offer their simple wares; and you rarely find a gipsy among them.<sup>27</sup>*

The review of the secondary material has demonstrated that in order to fully investigate changes in the traditional society of travelling showpeople over the last hundred years, further evidence must be examined in order to present a comprehensive and detailed account of showland community. The following section will concentrate on reviewing the range of primary sources available to researchers working in this field.

#### **3.4. Review of the Primary Sources.**

The material to be examined includes the following:

1. Archive data, which includes unpublished autobiographies, letters and photographic material. The main repository for such material is the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield, and the Arthur Fenwick Collection in the Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle upon Tyne. A microfilm copy of elements of the Fenwick collection can be consulted in the National Fairground Archive.
2. Published autobiographies of travelling showpeople.
3. Newspaper sources such as the *World's Fair*, *The Era* and the range of newspaper cuttings found in the scrapbooks held in the National Fairground Archive.
4. *The Showmen's Year Books* held in the Central Office of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.
5. Oral accounts which consist of interviews conducted with travelling showpeople, radio broadcasts, tapes deposited in the Leicester Sound Archive and material supplied by other researchers involved in the history of fairs. Full details of the tapes and transcripts consulted, and biographical information pertaining to the informants interviewed in the course of the fieldwork can be found in Appendix 1b.

6. Personal research conducted in the field, comprising firstly, approximately sixty seven hours and fifteen minutes of recorded interviews with travelling showpeople, full details of which can be found in Chapter 2 and in Appendix 1. Secondly, material gathered from conversations and personal observations which were immediately entered and dated in the Fieldwork Notebook.

### **National Fairground Archive.**

When examining the published histories of travelling fairs, it was found that this material does not illustrate the domestic and social life of travelling people and is biased towards fairground equipment. In order to investigate the changes in the material culture, both the domestic and working environment must be included in any assessment of the transitions in the customary lifestyle of travelling showpeople.

One aspect of the fieldwork has included the collecting of primary source material reflecting all levels of fairground society.<sup>28</sup> The material reviewed in this section is on a whole taken from showland families' personal albums and forms part of the National Fairground Archive. These photographs not only record the prominent fairs in their areas but also illustrate the external and internal changes in the living accommodation, the domestic and social life outside the fairground and the everyday life on and around the fairgrounds. The unpublished accounts of their life histories by showpeople are often verbatim records which if not for the action of the writers would be lost. As such they will be examined in relation to the oral histories collected during my own fieldwork. The accounts are not biased by editorial factors outside the narrators' control and are not affected structurally by an outside influence such as that of an interviewer. Another important source of information available in the National Fairground Archive is the personal correspondence of travelling showpeople. These letters contain details which may have been lost in the accounts collected on tape. One example of this is a letter from Herbert Green from Tommy Green's family collection

which reveals the exact time, place and supplier of his cinematograph equipment.<sup>29</sup> They also record personal details not covered by the *World's Fair*, and in particular, intimate experience of the prejudice faced by travelling people. The remaining bulk of the archival material is the photographic record, which ranges from the 1880s to the present day. All of the early material is taken from family collections from all over the country and on the whole can be found in the National Fairground Archive. Other important items utilised from the National Fairground Archive include records of daily earnings, personal diaries and ephemera, and details of these can be found in the listing of primary material in the bibliography.

### **Autobiographies.**

The most important form of printed documentation relating to the culture of travelling showpeople is of course the autobiography. It is from these accounts that the first hand information relating to a particular historical period can be found. From the 1800s onwards the elaborate exhibition shows dominated the fairground landscape, well before the advent of mechanisation. Even with the introduction of mechanisation in the form of steam powered roundabouts, the shows continued as theatrical booths or peep-shows. One of the most successful was the fairground bioscope, which contributed to the financial growth of many of the showmen, some of whom diverged into running permanent cinemas and left the fairground altogether.<sup>30</sup> It was not until the First World War that cinematograph shows gradually disappeared from the fairground. The menageries and theatrical booths continued into the 1930s. The autobiographies of W. F. Walleth<sup>31</sup> and G. Van Hare,<sup>32</sup> published before the arrival of mechanisation, recall the days of the large travelling shows on the fairground. A later example of such a showman can be found in Vic Taylor's account of his life as a Punch and Judy man from the 1920s onwards.<sup>33</sup> However, this record is more evocative of the life of a showman in the nineteenth century than in the twentieth, dealing as it does with fire

eaters, music hall venues and seaside resorts, rather than the travelling fairground. These Victorian showmen with their large exhibition shows were the ruling aristocracy on the fairground, a position which was threatened and then lost with the emergence of a new social class, the riding master and lessee. This prominence is reflected in the accounts that appeared after the publication of 'Lord' George Sanger's autobiography in 1908.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the biographies of Matt Moran,<sup>35</sup> and Charlie Hickman,<sup>36</sup> which both deal with boxing booths,<sup>37</sup> the remaining materials are often chronological accounts of a particular family's history such as those of the Tubys in Yorkshire,<sup>38</sup> Pat Collins in the Midlands,<sup>39</sup> the Mannings in Hertfordshire,<sup>40</sup> and the Thurstons in Oxford.<sup>41</sup> With the exception of Jimmy Chipperfield's<sup>42</sup> and Edwin Corrigan's<sup>43</sup> autobiographies, this later material is often written by a local fairground enthusiast connected with the relevant families and rarely includes verbatim accounts from the showpeople. The problems of using this material as the basis for an historical account are twofold. Firstly, no real attempt has been made by the narrators to place the account in any historical or contemporary setting, relying as they do on the personal narrative theme. Secondly, this material is usually written by or about the most prosperous groups on the fairground, the ruling elite. Consequently it not only reflects the position of the family in the time it was written but also presents a viewpoint which is predisposed in favour of the social and economic ruling class. However, although the material has a propensity to reflect the attitude of a particular hierarchy, these problems do not detract from the rich vein of evidence regarding the aspects of fairground society that these accounts portray.

#### **Newspaper sources.**

Both the *World's Fair* and to a lesser extent *The Era* provide a contemporary account of the rapidly changing world of travelling showpeople. For the period from 1890 onwards, *The Era* provides an account of the changes in fairground society and the

growth of the Van Dwellers' Association. *The Era* was not wholly concerned with travelling showpeople, but from the 1890s onwards, Thomas Horne, the Showmen's Guild chaplain, became the editor of a column in *The Era* entitled "The Showmen's World", dedicated to travelling showpeople. The other main newspaper source is the *World's Fair*, which since its original publication in 1904 has become:

*The means by which many showmen recruit labour and by which machines, stalls or caravans are bought and sold. Almost every aspect of the showman's business and personal life is catered for.*<sup>44</sup>

The *World's Fair* contains information from the reporting of fairs and equipment, to news of recent deaths and weddings. All aspects of fairground society are represented in the *World's Fair*, ranging from accounts of fairs in different regions, grounds to let, the buying and selling of equipment and the hiring of labour. 'Lord' George Sanger's life story appeared in the *World's Fair* before it was published as a book in 1908.<sup>45</sup> In the case of other less known showmen, the *World's Fair* is the only surviving record of their autobiographies.<sup>46</sup> The columns of advertising in the newspaper reflects for example the current popularity of particular rides or the current trends in prizes for the fairground stalls. The advertising space in the early issues is dominated by film companies,<sup>47</sup> fairground suppliers,<sup>48</sup> and makers of living vans and rides and is an important source of reference for identifying these early manufacturers. This continues in the present day publication with a minimum of four pages in each issue being dedicated to advertisements. This information reflects the current trends in popularity of a particular ride or living van and illustrates the changes in the material culture of travelling people, not only in the workplace but also in the domestic environment. In terms of the documentary evidence relevant to this research, the *World's Fair* is the most crucial of all the sources reviewed. It provides the main historical context for the oral narrative and together with the archival material demonstrates how changes in the material culture affected the fabric of the traditional society.

### ***The Showmen's Year Books.***

*The Showmen's Year Books* are the main source of reference for the history of the Guild and the part played by the organisation within the community. Published yearly since 1900, they contain a wealth of information, including details of membership, internal disputes, correspondence regarding local and national legislation, the annual report, and most importantly the listing of the rules of conduct for members. They are issued for the use of members only and a showperson can be penalised for allowing the *Year Book* to be made available to non-members. However, for the purpose of this research, I was granted full access to the *Year Books* by the officials of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and the full details can be found in the bibliography.

#### **4. Oral Tradition.**

Henry Morley calls Bartholomew Fair, "*the unwritten portion of the story of the people*,"<sup>49</sup> bound to the life of a nation by the ties of religion, trade and pleasure. These ties have diminished over the years, and in this century it is as a vehicle for amusement and pleasure that the modern day travelling fairs flourish. Close examination of the reading material reveals that travelling fairs have received more coverage by writers over the past century than ever before and books on all aspects of the fairground, its history, art, transport and machinery have been published. Even so, the "*unwritten portion of the story of the people*" still remains untold. Documentation relating to fairgrounds is far more accessible than it was in Henry Morley's day, but the material relating to the showpeople is still obtainable mainly by word-of-mouth:

*Documentation on the travellers is, however, sketchy, incomplete and often contradictory. Because for centuries they have been regarded as vagabonds, there is understandably a reluctance on the part of the showmen to recount their family histories.*<sup>50</sup>

A primary aim of this research is to remedy that situation, the most important source of information pertaining to travelling showpeople being the people themselves. The oral

data is taken from a variety of recorded sources. Firstly there are the sound recordings and transcripts produced by the Leicester Oral History Archive and other oral history projects. Secondly, there are tapes and transcripts supplied by individual researchers such as Ned Williams and Neil Calladine, who granted access to their primary data for this study. Thirdly, there are recordings of radio and television broadcasts in which showpeople have been interviewed. Details of all of these transcripts and recordings can be found in Appendix 1b. The issues surrounding the use<sup>cf</sup> of this material are discussed in the following chapter, but at this point it should be noted that the criticism levied at the documentary evidence can also be applied to this primary data. The tapes and transcripts listed above, further details of which can be found in Appendix 1b, were all compiled by outsiders.

Consequently the main body of recordings used in this study is a result of one to one interviews which I conducted with travelling showpeople. In the course of my fieldwork I have interviewed showpeople from the North of England and visited every Section of the Showmen's Guild. Although the interviews were largely recorded in the Lancashire and Yorkshire Sections of the Guild, I visited each regional office of the Guild in the course of the fieldwork in order to understand and interpret the material within a wider national context, and details of this part of the research can be found in the Fieldwork Notebook. A complete listing of the interviews and the biographical details of the informants are found in Appendix 1. Although they form a major part of the primary source material reviewed in this chapter, the methodology and organisation of this oral material will be discussed in the following sections. In brief, the informants are taken from a wide section of fairground society. As mentioned previously, the main emphasis of this research is focused on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Sections of the Guild, and a representative sample of showpeople from these regions has been interviewed. However, all the factors affecting the sample material will be discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore by utilising my own background and

placing it in the context of showland life in these Sections in general, it is hoped that a more detailed account of the changes in the traditional society can be presented.

This review of the source material has illustrated that the everyday society of the travelling showpeople has not been examined in any detail hitherto. Although the published sources outlined in this chapter are a valuable contribution to the study of travelling fairs, they are of secondary importance for this research topic. The most important source of data relevant to examining the effects of change in the traditional society of showpeople is the tape-recorded field interviews, providing as they do a first hand account of the everyday lives of showpeople in this country. In the following chapter the processes of access, selection and interpretation relevant to these oral histories will be discussed in order to illustrate whether changes in the material culture have effected a transition in the established fabric of showland society.



Notes.

1. 'Lord' George Sanger, *Seventy Years A Showman* (London: Arthur Pearson, 1908; new edn. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1952), p. 29
2. See Chapter 3 for full historical introduction.
3. Information supplied by Keith Miller, General Secretary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.
4. This policy was recently changed in keeping with the rules issued by the Office of Fair Trading, see Chapter 4 for further details.
5. See Rule 13 - Section Working, *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1996-97*, ed. by Keith Miller (Staines: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1997), pp. 69-70. In the case of the renaming of county names and the changing of boundaries, the *Year Book* refer to the former historic counties before the changes that occurred in 1974.
6. A perusal of the bibliography would appear to contradict this statement. However, if one compares the number of books on circuses and Gypsies, which number in the thousands and include Toole Stott's five volumes of world bibliography of circus and allied arts (see bibliography for further details), and the range of bibliographies on Gypsies, the reading material on fairs is in the minority.
7. David Braithwaite, 'An Introduction to Henry Morley's Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair' in Henry Morley, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859; new. rev. edn. London: Hugh Evelyn, 1973), p. iii.
8. David Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth century society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
9. Gillian Bennett, 'Aspects of Supernatural Belief, Memorata and Legend in a Contemporary Urban Environment' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 1985), p. 3.
10. Thomas Frost, *The Old Showmen, and The Old London Fairs* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1874) and Thomas Frost, *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875; new edn, 1881).
11. Duncan Dallas, *The Travelling People* (London: Macmillan, 1971).
12. Hugh Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs: A Case Study In The Social Control of Leisure', in *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. by A. P. Donajgradzki (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 163-184.
13. J. K. Walton, and R. Poole, 'The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century', in *Popular Culture*

- and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. by Robert D. Storch (London, Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 100-124.
14. Douglas A. Reid, 'Interpreting the Festival Calendar: Wakes and Fairs as Carnivals', in Robert D. Storch, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-153.
  15. Robert D. Sexton, 'The Travelling People, 1900-1950' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southampton, 1989).
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
  17. Frederick Fried, *Pictorial History of the Carousel* (New York: Barnes, 1964).
  18. See W. Manns, P. Shank, and M. Stevens, *Painted Ponies: American Carousel Art* (New York: Zon International, 1988). Charlotte Dinger, *Art of the Carousel* (New Jersey: Carousel Art, 1983).
  19. See Michael Lane, *Burrell Showmen's Road Locomotives* (Hemel Hempstead: Model and Allied Publications, 1971); William Pickles, *Showmen's Engines* (Lingfield: n. p., 1964) and J. H. Russell, *Painted Engines* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965).
  20. Malcolm Slater, *Fairground Transport* (Huntington: Slaters Publishing, 1988).
  21. Malcolm Slater, *Fairground Eight Wheels* (Skipton: Wyvern Publications, 1987).
  22. David Braithwaite, *Fairground Architecture* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1968).
  23. Geoff Weedon, and Richard Ward, *Fairground Art* (London: White Mouse Editions, 1981).
  24. John Girvan, *Showmen of Wiltshire* (Chippenham: Picton Publishing, 1991).
  25. Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: The development of ethnic ideology and pressure politics among British Gypsies from Victorian reformism to Romany nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1974).
  26. See Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, and David Mayall, *English Gypsies and State Policies* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1996).
  27. Kenneth Graham, 'Sanger and his Times', a new introduction, in Sanger, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
  28. Johnny Culine, *We are not Kings and Queens, we are the Marvellous Culines*, unpublished autobiography; Keith Nichols, *My Life Story*, unpublished MSS.
  29. Letter from Herbert Green to Henry Simpson, 8th January 1945, National Fairground Archive. A copy of this letter is also in the Scottish Film Archive.
  30. Vanessa Toulmin, 'Telling the Tale: The Story of The Fairground Bioscope and the Showmen who operated them', *Film History*, 6, no. 2 (1994), 219-237.
  31. W. F. Wallett, *The Public Life of W.F. Wallett*

- (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1870).
32. G. Van Hare, *Fifty Years a Showman* (London: W. H. Allen, 1888).
  33. Vic Taylor, *Reminiscences of a Showman* (London: Penguin, 1971).
  34. Sanger, op. cit.
  35. Nelly Watson, *Matt Moran's Shamrock Gardens: From Boxing Booth Fighter to Travelling Showman* (Swinton: N. Richardson, 1988).
  36. Charlie Hickman, *The Biography of Charlie Hickman As A Travelling Showman* (Privately Published by the family, 1975).
  37. Apart from circus and parading shows, the most longlived of the Victorian shows were the boxing booths. Both Charlie Hickman and Matt Moran have published accounts of their lives as boxing booth showmen. The more recent addition of a biography of Len Johnston adds to a comprehensive picture of these shows on the fairground. See bibliography for details of all these books including the two publications by Harry Legge, an ex boxer on Mrs Mckewon's show which provide an account from the viewpoint of one of the boxers.
  38. Peter Wilkes, *Whilst I Live I'll Crow: An Illustrated History of the Tuby family, Doncaster's Showmen Supreme* (Burton upon Trent: Trent Valley Publications, 1990).
  39. Freda Allen and Ned Williams, *Pat Collins, King of Showmen* (Wolverhampton: Uralia Press, 1991).
  40. Herbert J. Haines, *Manning's Amusements: Chronicle of a Hertfordshire Family* (Halstead: Halstead Press, 1989).
  41. G. W. Essex, *The Famous Thurstons* (Kettering: The Fairground Society, 1968).
  42. Jimmy Chipperfield, *My Wild Life* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
  43. See E. Corrigan, *Ups and Downs and Roundabouts* (Driffield: Ridings Publishing, 1971).
  44. Dallas, p. 50.
  45. *World's Fair*, October 1908 onwards.
  46. G. E. Steffersons, 'Travels in Ireland', *World's Fair*. November 30th 1935 to May 5th 1936.
  47. See *World's Fair*, January 18th 1908, for an example of this.
  48. See *World's Fair*, August 3rd 1907, for descriptions of items in the 'for sale' columns.
  49. Henry Morley, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859; new. rev. edn. London: Hugh Evelyn, 1973), p. 5.
  50. Braithwaite, 'An Introduction to Henry Morley's Memoirs', p. iv.

## Chapter 2.

### Methodology.

*Doctor Sengespiel, a historian who obtained an administrative job in the Circo Sarrasani, suddenly realised that stars and star turns had roots that went deep into the mysterious past. He began to make research into the hidden origins of stardom and applying to his work the most severe rules of criticism ... lost his way in the details and gave up the job as hopeless.<sup>1</sup>*



Figure 2. Vanessa Toulmin, Warrington Walking Day, July, 1995

## Chapter 2.

### Methodology.

#### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter it was concluded that the most important source of information relating to travelling fairs and showpeople was of course the people themselves. Belinda Leach, writing in *Oral History*, reminds us of the positive nature of this form of source material:

*The benefit of the oral history approach - is that it provides a way for the 'poor to tell their own story, to make their history a part of recorded history'. When combined with the contemporary report it becomes a particularly powerful way of reconstructing the past, giving life to distant accounts, through a personal link with the present.*<sup>2</sup>

Until recently, previous research on the history of fairs has neglected to utilise these sources and instead emphasised the physical landscape of the fairground and its material culture. However, recent research has attempted to incorporate oral narratives and Robert D. Sexton's thesis on travelling people in the South of England drew on a large body of interviews which he conducted with travelling people throughout the region including showpeople.<sup>3</sup> Frances Brown's account in particular, was based on personal narratives relating to her family's involvement on the fair:

*Determined to salvage what I could of their story, I visited travellers of the older generation and questioned them about the family. They loved talking about the past, I loved listening to them. Although some of their tales strained credibility, subsequent research in county archives, libraries and newspaper offices confirmed and expanded the truth of what I heard.*<sup>4</sup>

Although the resulting publication was titled *Fairfield Folk: A History of the English Fairground and its People*, the primary aim and eventual result was a history of the Harris family over the last hundred years. The problems of using such material are twofold: firstly, the author had no personal experience of the lifestyle to draw on; secondly, due to the limitations of the approach adopted, the resulting publication was essentially a family history, with no overall regional or national perspective. John Ling's autobiography of his life as a travelling showman

was published in 1991 by the Fairground Association of Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> This was transcribed from personal recordings made between 1988 and 1991, and Stephen Smith, who edited the material, utilised autobiographical reminiscences and one to one interviews with the showman:

*John began to record recollections on tape and from this beginning was built a record of fairground history. For three years John turned on the tape recorder as memories came to him, resulting in an unique insight into the fairground business during the first half of the twentieth century.*<sup>6</sup>

This material was then transcribed, edited and organised for the sake of chronology and continuity. The methodology applied by both Smith and Brown was similar in ideology, in that the resulting publications arose out of a belief that the oral sources were dying and the material was being lost:

*The realisation that no one else was going to leave a record of the old times.*<sup>7</sup>

However, their approaches were very different and this leads on to the question of the factors affecting such fieldwork. Frances Brown had the benefit that her family were still loosely connected to the travelling community and this enabled access to relatives still involved with the fair. Stephen Smith's role was that of a fairground enthusiast who had struck up a friendship with John Ling over the years and utilised this to provide a personal insight into his life as a travelling showmen. However, the criticism levied at *Fairfield Folk* and the published autobiographies of showmen can also be applied to John Ling's autobiography, in that no attempt has been made to analyse the data in the wider context of showland society. Neither of the authors had been involved in the intimate lives of the showpeople, nor participated in the variety of situations that face showpeople in their working and domestic environment and as such the overview and the conclusions drawn were outside the community. The role of the insider within the community is central to the present study, not only in the original fieldwork but also for analysing the data collected for the research. Oral history is a result of the relationship between the fieldworker and the informants and the material should always be viewed in such a context. Researchers working in the fields of social anthropology, folklore and oral history,

all use the informant as the basis for their studies and Mary Stuart writes that:

*Interactive experience is a dimension which needs to be incorporated into any research project if we are to make proper sense of the 'outcomes' are.*<sup>8</sup>

However, the role of the insider, participating, recording and working within one's own community, affects the research data somewhat differently than is the case with the outsider. The understanding of the overall context in which the resulting material is set, is primarily a result of the fieldworker's personal experience within the community, and it is difficult to draw the line between personal knowledge and evidence accumulated in the field. Nevertheless, Charles Briggs and others have demonstrated that ultimately all fieldwork is a result of participant observation.

Briggs writes:

*It is harder to delude ourselves into thinking that the meaning of the interaction is independent of the context in which it was articulated.*<sup>9</sup>

The key issues of the nature of the relationship between the interviewer and the informant will be examined in the context of how the insider within the community relates these problems to the chosen methodology. Therefore, in order for there to be an evaluation of the differences in methodological approaches to fieldwork between the researcher from inside the community and the interviewer coming into the community, a brief outline of my own family background is necessary at this point.

### **1.1. Personal Involvement.**

I was born on the Winter Gardens Fairground in Morecambe into an established Lancashire showfamily, who owned a chain of amusement and arcade concessions in the Morecambe Bay area. Although I was seven when my parents' direct involvement in the fair ended, these early experience never left me and one could say that I have been subconsciously involved in gathering material for this research from that point onwards. Family links within the fairground community were still maintained and these relationships were extremely important for the purpose of this study. Because of this insider experience, every facet of fairground life is known



to me from *building up* and *pulling down* the equipment, working behind stalls, serving in the *candy*, living in a waggon and understanding the language. This insider knowledge has enabled initial contact to be made with what has been perceived as a closed community. As David Braithwaite observed in 1973:

*There is a reluctance on the part of the showmen to recount their family histories.*<sup>10</sup>

This reluctance was never a problem for me because I was perceived as a member of the community, and as the research extended into the wider showland fraternity this factor was not just an advantage, it became a central issue in the fieldwork. Researchers in the fields of oral history and folklore have demonstrated the importance of building up a relationship of trust within the community concerned.<sup>11</sup>

Alessandro Portelli writes that:

*Oral sources are always the result of a relationship, a common project in which both the informant and researcher are involved, together ... The content of the oral source depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, stimuli, dialogue, personal relationship of mutual trust or detachment. It is the researcher who decides there will be an interview. Researchers often introduce specific distortions: informants tell them what they believe they want to be told.*<sup>12</sup>

However, because of the nature of my relationship within the community, a situation of trust and respect was already inherent in the interview situation. Showpeople perceive themselves as being one extended family; the ties of kinship are a means of affording status and tradition within the community. Therefore, within a matter of minutes of my meeting or conducting an interview, the family or individual concerned would try to find a link, a bridge between myself as the interviewer and their family or experiences. Only when I or my family were placed within the context of personal knowledge on the part of the informant was the interview successful. On some occasions this was not necessary as I was known personally by the informant. However, when conducting fieldwork in Yorkshire, I found that the family links had to be extended; the informants would always try to find a link with my family, whether through personal knowledge, family relationship, marriage or just association with a particular fair. So knowledge or association with a specific fair or event or the sharing of personal gossip were just



as important as establishing a family relationship. One example of this was demonstrated in the case of Arthur Holland from the Nottinghamshire region. During the interview I mentioned to Mr and Mrs Holland that my family were related to the Warren family from Lincoln. Mr Holland replied that although he did not personally know my uncle, he was certain that my grandfather and my uncle's grandfather would have opened at Lincoln fair together many years ago, thereby making an association between the two families, as both Nottingham and Lincoln are part of the No. 8 Section of the Showmen's Guild which incorporates, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and parts of Lincolnshire. As a result of this, I soon realised that the emphasis placed by oral historians on gaining the trust of the informant was less crucial to the present study. Personal association or family background supplied the credentials for the feeling of trust to be inherent in the interview situation. Although this approach was not central to the methodology used here, the experiences of other insiders working within their community had to be taken on board. Valerie Raleigh Yow, in *Recording Oral History*, warns of the different sets of the problems faced by the insider researching his or her own society, and stresses:

*There is still work for the insider to do in explaining purpose and in becoming sensitive to nuances in personal relationships in the subculture, he or she might have forgotten.*<sup>13</sup>

Ken Plummer relates an incident in which Antonia T. Diaz-Roys, a Puerto Rican immigrant who when compiling ethnobiographies from his own community, found that he had to go back to the community in order to regain the full trust of friends and family members.<sup>14</sup> Although the approach taken by Diaz-Roys was similar to that adopted for my own fieldwork, in that I rejoined the fairground in order to participate on a day-to-day level in the community, the problems which I encountered were quite different. I went back to the fair as a professional researcher, and it was only by stating my objectives and in some ways standing out from the community, that the interviews and the fieldwork could be perceived by the showpeople on a professional level.<sup>15</sup> The issues touched on briefly here are

discussed in more detail in *Documents of Life*,<sup>16</sup> and *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney.<sup>17</sup> However, the insider and outsider in the community both bring their weaknesses and strengths to the chosen research area:

*Neither is especially better, both have attributes that can both serve the purpose of the inquiry and work against it... The point is to be aware of one's relationship to the culture being investigated and 'use' whatever strengths of the situation or relationship that there are.*<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2. Participant Observation.

On examining Stephen Smith's and Frances Brown's treatment of oral narrative, it was soon realised that neither of their methodologies could be applied to my own particular situation. The approaches adopted by oral historians and the dialogue they have with the interview as text and the informant as performer again were not particularly relevant to the approach taken in the fieldwork.<sup>19</sup> Some of the key issues examined by oral historians were relevant however, and Ken Plummer and others remind us that insiders still have to gain the confidence of the informants.<sup>20</sup> Therefore the methodology in the present research had to utilise these approaches, but also take into account the issues inherent in the fieldwork. One line of enquiry followed by oral historians and social anthropologists is that of participant observation. Attempts have been made by James Spradley<sup>21</sup> and others<sup>22</sup> to bring forward a methodological framework in which the interviewer is somehow presenting the material from inside the community in which the fieldwork takes place:

*The participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation.*<sup>23</sup>

This theme was continued by Kim Howells and Merfyn Jones in their overview of the uses of oral and documentary sources, where they write:

*Without the direct involvement, with the historian himself becoming participant, then our experience suggests that the work will only be accomplished with great difficulty if at all. The extent to which the historian's role is compromised can only be judged in the history which is produced.*<sup>24</sup>

In *Participant Observation* (1980), Spradley provides a set of guidelines to follow when involved in an interview: the descriptive observation where the interviewer attempts to cover all aspects of the community; the focused observation, where the selection process is narrowed to certain aspects of the community; and finally selective observation, in which the interviewer collects the data through specific contrast questions.<sup>25</sup>

By applying the methodology of participant observation, in particular the idea of selective observation, to the fieldwork and interview process, I could utilise both my insider knowledge and my academic training. However, this approach was only adopted after encountering the various problems during the fieldwork, where a variety of approaches was initially used as a means of accumulating the data necessary for the research.

## **2. Fieldwork**

When the fieldwork began, the initial interviews were conducted with members of my family, and in particular my oldest relation on my mother's side. The fundamental reason for conducting these interviews was very similar to that given by John Ling, in that the older generation was dying out and no attempt had been made to document their memories. A series of different techniques were utilised in order to arrange these interviews, and some proved to be more successful than others. These factors and the interviews themselves will be discussed later in the study. Briefly, because there was no precedent for such fieldwork within the fairground community, the methodologies employed by oral historians and social anthropologists were applied, with varying degrees of success.

### **2.1. Fieldwork Methodology.**

Perhaps the most unsuccessful technique and the one most commonly employed by would-be researchers of travelling life is the appeal through the *World's Fair* letter

page. In 1992 a letter was sent to the *World's Fair* asking for any information relating to travelling showpeople and for any informants willing to participate in the study. By adopting this approach I was following the examples that BBC research teams who produced such programmes as 'The Secret World of Sex' and many others had utilised. This I believed would result in gaining the addresses of people I could then contact and arrange to interview. Although, some important documentary material was made available as a consequence of the appeal, no contact was made from within the fairground community itself.

2.2. A second approach was attempted by contacting the headquarters of the Showmen's Guild in London and sending them a letter outlining my family background and asking for contacts within the regional sections of the Guild itself. The original response was encouraging in that the Showmen's Guild sent a letter of support and the request was brought to the attention of the ten regional headquarters. Within a month I had received letters of support from the regional offices and I believed I had found the most appropriate method with which to arrange interviews. However, flaws soon appeared in this approach. The majority of the letters included addresses of showpeople to contact, but when I then followed up any of the addresses and tried to arrange an interview or even asked for replies to the series of questions in the letters I sent out, I received no response. My reservations about this approach were further compounded by the response I had received from the Lancashire Section. When I sent off the original letter, to my surprise the one regional office I did not receive a reply from was the Lancashire Section. I contacted my family in Lancashire and asked them to find out why I had had no response. The reply was blunt and forthcoming: '*they thought you were a josser*'. What I had perceived to be a passport onto the fairground was in reality a polite formal letter which the Guild and its officials send to any interested parties. By sending out such a letter I was regarded in the same light as all the many other writers of letters and appeals which the Guild received on a regular basis. In other

words I was acting like a *joskin*, the implication being that if I was a show girl why had I not come onto the grounds and introduced myself? Although the notion of participant observation had entered the fieldwork, I had assumed that by being born into the community I had immediate access to the society, but it was only through returning to live on the fair that the trust was rebuilt. This proved to be a far more direct way of obtaining information and would elicit more genuine interest in the work. Instead of utilising my family background I had acted like an outsider; if I was to find informants for my fieldwork I had to go and actively seek them on the fairgrounds and winter sites.

It was only when working in the National Fairground Archive that I fully appreciated the irony of these original responses. As Assistant Director of the National Fairground Archive I receive approximately fifty enquires a month from individuals asking for further information on the way of life of travelling showpeople and many of these are forwarded from the Guild's headquarters in Staines!

2.3. By widening the context of the research, I had to extend the interviews to the larger fairground community. In the initial family interview I was content to allow informants to narrate their life histories and allowed them to dictate what would be discussed. However, this approach ran into problems and the informal narrative technique which had been adopted for interviewing friends and family members became problematic when the fieldwork was extended to the wider community. I had believed that by recording personal narratives and autobiographical information and allowing the informants to reminisce, the material would not be contaminated by outside influences.<sup>26</sup> However, showpeople became confused about the overall aims of the research, and preferred a more formal interview arrangement rather than an informal conversation. For example, Mr and Mrs Simons were unhappy with the general nature of the questioning and commented on the fact that they would prefer a more formal interview situation. Therefore an overall balance had to be

achieved between maintaining the trust inherent in the interview situation because of my role as insider and incorporating a professional formal element in the interview. This was achieved through introducing the notion that although I was from the community, I was also a trained researcher. The professional standing was established by informing the showpeople that I had received funding to research travelling showpeople and travelling fairs. Although I was not exploiting the material for commercial reasons, the fact that I had received financial assistance to research the community enabled the showpeople to address my work in their working environment. Only by setting the fieldwork on a more professional and commercial footing was I able to convince the showpeople that this was a serious and academic research project. I was applauded by the community for my ability to *fake the flatties*<sup>27</sup>, by obtaining money from outside the fairground, to achieve something that would essentially be of benefit to the wider showland society. The interview technique used was based on the three stages of participation observation; the descriptive, the focused and finally the selective form of interview. Because of my role as an insider within the community, I realised that I could ignore the primary stages and found that the final and more selective form of interview, was more applicable for the particular fieldwork I was undertaking.

From April 1992 I began to concentrate on the Lancashire Section of the Guild. Throughout that summer I worked at a variety of fairs all over the North West region, from Kendall to Wilmslow, and became known to the showpeople on that circuit. Although no interviews were conducted whilst operating the fairground equipment, the informal conversations created an opportunity for introducing people to the purpose of the fieldwork. By the summer of 1993 I was well known to people in the region and started to plan the interview itinerary for the winter months.

#### **2.4. Evaluation of Data Collected.**

Between 1991 and 1995, a series of interviews was carried out with members of the

fairground community. For the reasons already stated, the area of the research was limited to particular Sections of the Guild which incorporated Yorkshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire in the catchment area. The informants were found through personal knowledge and family links within the society and consisted of sixteen men interviewed in a one to one situation, four married couples, and ten women either solo or in the company of other women. In the case of Rae Armstrong-Wilson, the interview was conducted by Neil Calladine, a reporter for the *World's Fair*, and based on a questionnaire which I had compiled. The individual details of all the informants and the context in which they were interviewed can be found in Appendix 1 and the following list is a summary of the number of field recordings collected:

1. Men only - Twenty two hours and forty five minutes of taped recordings
2. Female only or in the company of other women - Thirty five hours and thirty minutes.
3. Married Couples - Eight hours and fifty five minutes.

Therefore the overall interviews resulted in over sixty seven hours and fifteen minutes of recorded data relating to travelling showpeople, and travelling fairs.

### **2.5. Presentation of Data.**

This material was either transcribed in full or an overall summary of the particular recording was provided. Each tape-recorded interview was given an individual referencing system and the particular transcript which related directly to that recording was filed within the code allocated. For example, the initial interview with Mrs. E. Francis is referred to as Tape: VT/BF1 and reveals that Vanessa Toulmin interviewed Mrs 'Betty' Francis, and all future recordings followed this numerical system. The subsequent transcriptions were filed under Transcript: TR/VT/BF1 or in the case of Mrs. Francis TR/VT/BF11, as eleven interviews were conducted during fieldwork. Appendix 1 contains full details of the system used,

complete with information relating to the time of the interview, the location, and any other factors which may have affected either the recording or transcription.

### 3. Fieldwork - Analysis:

The data produced as a result of the fieldwork has been broken down into samples which reflect the age group, and the social and economic background of the informant. However, in order to illustrate how the final areas of study were chosen from the data collected, the themes of the transcripts will now be examined. A detailed summary of the topics discussed in the interviews can be found in Appendix 1 within the index of interviewees.

The prevalent issues found in the interviews are as follows, and although no overall interview technique was applied, the material from each informant was similar in emphasis and importance.

1. The issues of ethnic and cultural identity within the differing travelling communities.
2. The importance of family ties.
3. The differences between showpeople and non-Travellers, and the belief that showpeople were more "old fashioned and moralistic".
4. Narrative accounts of personal family involvement with a particular fair or ride.
5. The differences between shows and rides.
6. The contribution made by fairground women to the overall success of the industry and the society.
7. Fairground cinema and how the contribution made by the showmen to early cinema has been ignored and others have taken the credit.

The showpeople became pro-active in the selection of the research areas under



investigation and the material to be examined in the following chapters began to be selected by people from the community, who started to recommend what should be the dominant themes of the study. This partly arose out of the methodology; by involving showpeople in the process of research through participant observation, the resulting material was affected by their concerns, experiences and interests. For example, during the interviews all participants would explain the relationship between showpeople and other Travellers, and indeed one showman suggested that the title of the thesis, should be "*We are not Gypsies*". Therefore, one of the fundamental concerns of the material was the reasons behind this ideology, and this issue was chosen as a case study primarily because of its importance within the community.

Although, I had always intended to devote a section of the study to the role of women, the material on this topic began to dominate the fieldwork and I had to restrain myself initially from overemphasising this aspect of the research. However, the prominence of women within the fairground community is again an issue that was dominant in the tape recordings, and again, due to the scope and breadth of the information, it was necessary to narrow the areas of examination and I decided to follow up the general material by conducting further in-depth interviews with three of the original interviewees.

The final case study concentrates on the continuity and usage of jargon and slang within the society. This was not originally considered a subject for study, but the importance of the language as a means not only of communicating but also of emphasising group identity emerged as an important issue. This linguistic data was initially organised into a glossary of words and was collected purely in order for the reader to understand the terminology used in the transcripts. Consequently the importance of this material was not really originally explored during interviews. However, although the usage of a secret terminology within the Traveller communities was one area where my position as an insider was important, I did not realise the full potential of this in the interviews and shied away from discussing the

use of secret language within the community. This did not necessarily inhibit the collection of data; because I already knew the jargon it was easy to generate a glossary from the transcripts of phrases used on the fairground and then examine the differences in their meaning within the community and the interpretation found in standard dictionaries of slang, jargon, and the like. Because slang was spoken in everyday conversation with the informants this material was in some way the easiest to compile in the field. On the other hand, it is one aspect that would have been almost impossible for a non-Traveller to examine as the context of the usage is just as important as the word itself. By contrast, I could distinguish regional variations in the usage as I was au fait with the meanings of words and expressions found in Lancashire as opposed to the other sections of the Guild. Therefore, for this aspect of the research, inside knowledge was essential to the overall data and the information was collected almost unconsciously through conversation and usage during interviews. In summary, the respective topics were dictated and suggested by the showpeople themselves and three important aspects emerged from the fieldwork data: the relationship between showpeople and other Travellers, the role of women and the use of language within the fairground community.

Due to the differences in the areas under examination a variety of methodologies were applied to each case study.

### **3.1. Methodology for analysing the data**

The fieldwork material in the first case deals with the relationship between showpeople and the larger travelling community and the general public. The methodology utilised was drawn from the work undertaken by academics working in the field of anthropology, in particular, the study of ethnic and cultural minorities. A more detailed account of the methodological approach can be found in Chapter 4. In summary, the methodologies employed by Judith Okely,<sup>28</sup> Thomas Acton,<sup>29</sup> and David Mayall,<sup>30</sup> amongst others,<sup>31</sup> are examined in the context of how they relate to travelling showpeople. The main point of reference for these publications is the

procedure the writers have used when examining the structure of travelling society, and the way in which particular reference groups develop and interact. Judith Okely wrote in 1994 that:

*Studying the wider context of the dominant or majority society is crucial when focusing on a minority group, for the latter's experience and beliefs are always in part formed by the need to respond to the dominant society.*<sup>32</sup>

3.2. In order to present an evaluation of the social and working conditions of women on travelling fairs throughout the twentieth century, and bearing in mind the lack of published material, the methodology outlined in Chapter 4 was also employed in the collection and analysis of data for this section of the study. The interviews conducted for this research reflect the different economic groups that are found operating on the fairground: out of the thirty four people selected for the study as a whole, fourteen of the interviewees were women. A detailed account of the methodology employed for this case study can be found in Chapter 5. To summarise: the sample of showwomen selected from the travelling community were predominantly based in the Lancashire and Yorkshire Sections of the Showmen's Guild, and of the fourteen interviewed, thirteen were either married or widowed. The age ratio of this group is as follows: seven percent between thirty and forty years of age; fourteen percent between forty and sixty years of age; twenty eight percent between sixty and seventy years of age; fifty one percent between seventy and eighty years of age. Fifty percent of the female interviewees belonged to the roundabout fraternity, thirty percent were predominantly stallholders and the remaining twenty percent had had experience of fairground shows. As noted above, these interviews resulted in thirty five hours and thirty minutes of taped recordings, fuller details of which can be found in Appendix 1. In order to evaluate the importance of showwomen in the overall fabric of the community, the majority of the interviewees were asked questions regarding their upbringing and how they perceived the contribution showwomen made, not only on the domestic front, but also in the economic and physical environment of the fairground. Of the fourteen

showwomen interviewed, thirteen were either married or widowed. The age ratio and economic background of the informants are set out in detail in Chapter 5. Four life histories were chosen to provide a chronological framework for evaluating the contribution made by travelling showwomen to the economic and social fabric of the community.

3.3. The final area of study comprised an examination of the continuity of language on the fairground, utilising the methodologies of Eric Partridge and other lexicologists. The primary material for this section of the study has been compiled from two sets of data: firstly, from interviews conducted with travelling showpeople and listed in Appendix 1, and secondly from personal knowledge of the language, as a result of my role as an insider in the community. As a consequence of this fieldwork, a glossary has been compiled of approximately 200 terms that are either in common use on the fairground or are peculiar to certain showland families or individual family members. The material presented in Chapter 6 endeavours to record and examine a representative selection of these terms, to analyse the importance of *Parlyaree* within the community, and to demonstrate its historical continuity within the society.

3.4. A full breakdown of the problems encountered using each of these differing methodologies will be found within the respective chapters. The remaining family material and information relating to other aspects of the history of travelling fairs and showpeople were used for a series of publication from 1994 onwards, and full details of these can be found in the bibliography. Although this research was not central to the overall themes of this particular study, the depth of material on cinema history for example, was taken out of the research data and explored in detail through a series of exhibitions, lectures and articles, and more information can be found in the bibliography and by consulting the National Fairground Archive on the World Wide Web.<sup>33</sup>

One of the important results to emerge from the fieldwork was the need to give appropriate degrees of emphasis to the feeling of community, the place of women in the society and the use of language. Consequently, it was decided that the historical data relating to the material culture of the fair or the history of specific events should be also omitted from the study and reserved for separate examination elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> The data selected for use in the study was then analysed in detail from a social anthropological perspective, and the relevant issues are outlined below.

#### **4. Presentation of Material**

As a result of the fieldwork, the issues analysed in this study are presented in the following order: an historical introduction to travelling fairs from the medieval period to the late nineteenth century; an introduction to showland society and how it is perceived by Travellers and non-Travellers; the role of women in the society; and finally the use of Traveller language within the fairground community. These chapters have been broken down into the following sections.

Chapter 3 provides a chronological account of the history of fairs up to and including the 1890s, and covers the medieval period; pre-industrial fairgrounds; the introduction and impact of mechanisation from the 1870s onwards; the formation of the United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association (U.K.S.V.D.P.A); and the reorganisation of the Van Dwellers' Association as the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

The first of the three case studies is presented in Chapter 4 which deals with the relationship between showpeople, the settled community and other travelling groups. It then concentrates on the differences in the language and the use of material culture which exist between all travelling communities, and ends with an in-depth account of the organisation of fairground society, through examining the role and development of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

The second case study is presented in Chapter 5 and concentrates on the role of

showwomen in fairground society. The areas under examination are: the public and economic domain of the fairground; the domestic and social spheres; and the impact showwomen have had on the development of the Showmen's Guild.

Chapter 6 covers the final case study and presents a discussion on the role of language within travelling communities. The methodological approach to the collecting of the data and the glossary of the terms used throughout the study are examined in detail throughout by evaluating the continuity of the secret language used by showpeople from the nineteenth century onwards.

The various issues discussed during the study as a whole are drawn together in the conclusion in Chapter 7. This indicates how the aims of the investigation have been achieved, offers a critique of the approaches used, and concludes with suggestions for future research that may evolve from the present study.

Following the Bibliography, which includes a comprehensive guide to the sources utilised, the study ends with an introduction to the interviews, a summary of the subjects covered, along with biographical details of the interviewees, which can be found in Appendix 1. Finally, the listing of the Acts of Parliament cited in the preceding chapters and the legislative issues pertinent to travelling showpeople are set out in Appendix 2, and Appendix 3 contains details of the photographs used in the study.

Notes

1. A. H. Kober, *Star Turns*, trans. by G. J. Renier (London: Douglas, 1928), translator's preface, p. viii.
2. Belinda Leach, 'Grandma Page's Workshop: Outwork in Birmingham 1911-1914', *Oral History*, 22, no. 1 (1994), 35-43, (p. 35).
3. Sexton, 'The Travelling People'.
4. Frances Brown, *Fairfield Folk: A History of The English Fair and its People* (Worcester: Malvern Publishing, 1988), p. 6.
5. John Ling, *Memories of a Travelling Life*, ed. by Stephen Smith (Newcastle Under Lyne: Fairground Association of Great Britain, 1992).
6. *Ibid.*, p. i.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Mary Stuart, '"And How Was It For You Mary?" Self Identity and Meaning For Oral Historians', *Oral History*, 21, no. 2 (1993), 80-84 (p. 82).
9. Charles Briggs, *Learning how to ask: a sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 117.
10. Braithwaite, 'An introduction to Henry Morley's Memoirs', p. 2.
11. See William M. Clements 'Personal Narrative, the Interview Context, and the Question of Tradition', *Western Folklore*, 39, no. 2 (1980), 106-112.
12. Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop*, 12, no. 3 (1981), 97-107, (p. 103).
13. Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 153.
14. Ken Plummer, *Documents of Life*, no. 7 of the Contemporary Social Research Series, ed. by M. Bulmer (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 93. See also Antonio T. Diaz-Royz, 'Maneuvers and Transformations in Ethnobiographies of Puerto Rican Migrants', *International Journal of Oral History*, 4, no. 1 (1983), 21-31.
15. See Michael Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (New York: New York Academic Press, 1980).
16. Plummer, *op. cit.*
17. *Autobiography: Essays, Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
18. Letter from Linda Shopes to Valerie Raleigh Yow, cited, in Yow, p. 153.
19. See J. Jeffrey Patton, 'Writing Ourselves Into Our Texts: Dialogics In Folklore and Ethnography' (unpublished M. Phil. dissertation, University of Sheffield, 1991); and J. Jeffrey Patton, 'Dialogic textmaking in folkloristics', *Lore and Language*, 13, no. 2 (1995), 125-162.

20. Plummer, p. 93.
21. James Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980).
22. *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*, ed. by James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1972).
23. Spradley, *Participant Observation*, p. 54.
24. Kim Howells and Merfyn Jones, 'Oral History and Contemporary History', *Oral History*, 11, no. 2 (1983), 14-20, (p. 20).
25. Spradley, *Participant Observation*, pp. 122-129, see also James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979).
26. See Simon Dentith and Philip Dodd, 'The Uses of autobiography', *Literature and History*, 14, no. 1 (1988), 4-22; and Stephen Yeo, 'Difference, Autobiography and History', *Literature and History*, op. cit., 37-47, for an evaluation of the uses of autobiography in historical research.
27. *Fake the flatties* = to mislead the general public, see glossary in Chapter 6 for full explanation
28. Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*.
29. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*.
30. Mayall, *English Gypsies*.
31. Although there are numerous scholars working in the field of Traveller identity and ethnicity, the material relevant to this study can be found primarily in the work of the aforementioned scholars.
32. Judith Okely, 'An Anthropological Perspective of Irish Travellers' in *Irish Travellers, Culture and Ethnicity*, ed. by May McCann, Seamus Siochain, and Joseph Ruane, (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), pp. 1-20 (p. 2).
33. National Fairground Archive:  
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/nfa/>
34. See Vanessa Toulmin, 'Hull Fair: 700 Years of Fun', *Yorkshire Journal*, 11 (1995), 58-63; and Vanessa Toulmin, 'Temperance and Pleasure at the Hoppings: A History of Newcastle Town Moor Fair', *North East Labour History Bulletin*, 29 (1995), 50-64.



### Chapter 3.

#### All for Fun, Fun for All: All The Fun of the Fair.

*If a council threatens to deny permission to use an established site, the first line of defence is tradition. It is a popular word amongst showpeople. It justifies, supports and legitimises them. "The fair has been coming here for hundreds of years..." they'll begin. They talk among themselves about the Black Death as if it were last year's flu epidemic, and call upon charters sealed a thousand years ago to defend their right to plant a set of dodgems outside Southam Carpet and Curtains.<sup>1</sup>*

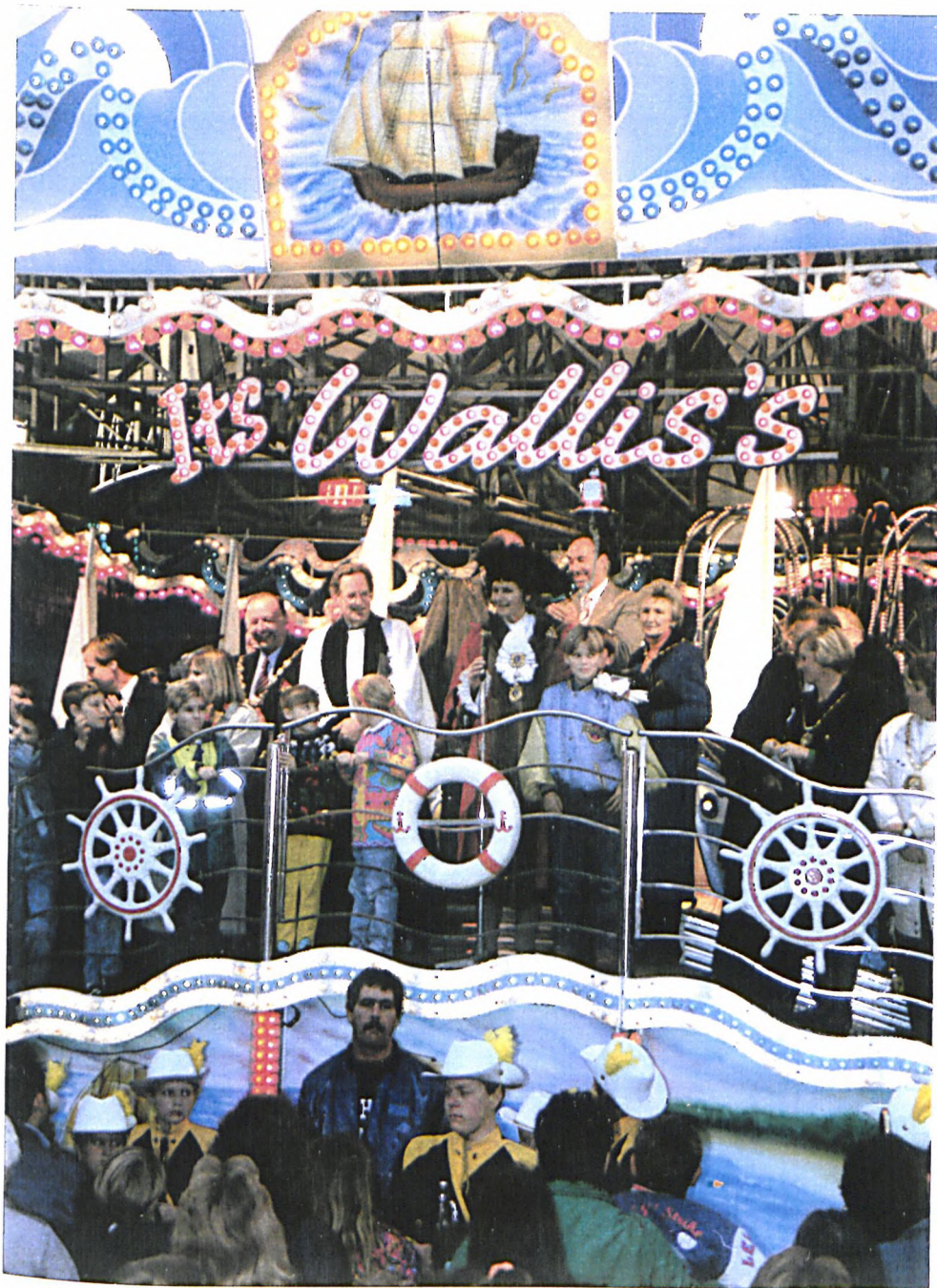


Figure 3. Opening of Hull Fair, October, 1995.

### Chapter 3.

#### All for Fun, Fun for All: All The Fun of the Fair.

In order to offer an in-depth analysis of fairground society, the historical context within which the showpeople and the fairs they attend is set must be examined. The majority of fairs held in this country trace their origins back to charters and privileges granted in the medieval period. Showpeople use these charters to justify their continued right to present fairs in localities throughout the United Kingdom. This historical introduction will briefly examine the history of such events and their importance within the fairground community.

In the thirteenth century, the creation of fairs by royal charter was widespread, and the Crown made every effort to create new fairs and to bring existing ones under its jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> During the eighteenth century these great fairs flourished, and events such as Bartholomew Fair, Sturbridge, St Ives, Weyhill and many others became renowned throughout the country as centres of trade, commerce and entertainment. However, by the mid-nineteenth century their fortunes had declined when the passing of The Fairs Act 1871, which stated that:

*Fairs are unnecessary, are the cause of grievous immorality and are very injurious to the inhabitants of the towns where the fairs are held.*<sup>3</sup>

This view is further corroborated by Thomas Frost in 1874 who, when writing on the history of fairs in this country, prophesied that:

*Fairs are becoming extinct because, with the progress of the nations, they have ceased to possess any value in its social economy, either as marts of trade or as means of popular entertainment.*<sup>4</sup>

The introductory discussion of the history of fairs leading up to Thomas Frost's pronouncement in 1874, is presented in chronological order. The chronological sequence has been chosen for the following reasons: firstly, to show how the medieval Charter fairs flourished and declined with the passing of The Fairs Act 1871; secondly, to depict how these once great centres of commerce and trade evolved into marts of

pleasure and entertainment; and thirdly, by means of a historical overview, to indicate how the great travelling shows of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries laid down the foundations for the change in the structure of fairground society that occurred in the 1870s. The final section of the introduction provides the necessary background structure and documentary history of the fairground and covers the beginnings of mechanisation and the formation of the Showmen's Guild. The overall sequence is as follows:

1. Medieval fairs.
2. Pre-industrial fairgrounds (1700s to the 1870s).
3. The 1870s and the introduction of mechanisation.
4. 1889 and the formation of the United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association.
5. 1889-1914: the impact of mechanisation and the transition from the Van Dwellers' to the Showmen's Guild.

## 1. Medieval Fairs.

*The Kemps have been working Stratford Mop Fair for as long as anyone can remember. "This guy came out of McDonald's and he said - cos I had my lorry there - and he said, 'Whose vehicle's this?' says George Kemp, aged 44, working on his test-your-strength striker, swinging the giant wooden mallet. "I said, 'It's mine.' He said, 'Who gave permission for you to put it there?' I said, 'King John.' He said, 'Who?' I said, 'You know, Richard the Lionheart's brother.'"*<sup>5</sup>

1.1. In his introduction to the *History of the Showmen's Guild* Thomas Murphy makes a strong link between the pagan and Christian origins of the fair and the modern amusement fair held in this century.<sup>6</sup> The dating of fairs was originally related to the working season of the year as well as to religious or pagan festivals. T. F Dexter in *The Pagan Origin of Fairs* claims a link between the great pagan festivals and the trading fairs of the medieval period.<sup>7</sup> Other writers such as John Griffith attempt to show that the majority of fairs are governed by the May or Gorsedd year as opposed to the solstitial year.<sup>8</sup> It was however in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that the history of fairs in this country began:

*However fascinating the prehistory of fairs may be, much must remain speculative until we come to the granting of charters. It is with these that their authentic history begins.*<sup>9</sup>

1.2. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the majority of the English fairs had been granted charters and were reorganised to fall into line with their European counterparts. The granting of charters did not necessarily initiate the right to hold a fair; it was in effect a means of controlling the revenues for the Crown. The control and organisation of the fair were then granted to the particular town, abbey or village where it occurred.<sup>10</sup> Between 1199 and 1350 over fifteen hundred charters were issued which granted the rights to hold markets or fairs.<sup>11</sup> In Yorkshire alone, more than 160 charters were granted between 1227 until 1514.<sup>12</sup> However, it is clear that these charters were granted to fairs that already existed. One such Royal Charter was granted to Wells in 1201 by King John, who further recognised the already existing fairs in the locality by adding a fifth event to take place on the Feast of St Andrew.<sup>13</sup> The Rev. N. F. Hulbert's study of Somerset fairs examines the importance of Wells in

a regional context.<sup>14</sup> Nottingham's fair was already in existence when it was granted a charter by Edward I in 1284 for a fair to be held in November. The charter refers to the existence of an Anglo-Saxon festival lasting for eight days.<sup>15</sup> Peter Sawyer argues that many fairs are ancient indeed and that the lack of sources available to us concerning their early history is due to the fact that they were not under royal protection.<sup>16</sup> Also Cornelius Walford, the first historian to attempt a chronological account of fairs past and present, argues for the existence of fairs in the Anglo-Saxon period,<sup>17</sup> and Mrs O. Watkins' account of the fairs in Wales reports how the granting of fairs and markets was used by the English Crown as a means of exerting financial pressure in areas still largely controlled by a Welsh prince.<sup>18</sup> Like Nottingham, Wolverhampton was granted a charter for an already existing fair, as was Stockport in Cheshire. The perquisite to hold a fair in a particular area could also be claimed by prescriptive right. Although certain towns or villages were never granted a charter, fairs were allowed to take place by the King or his representative in the borough, due to their longterm establishment.

The period in which many of these fairs flourished as international marts of trade and commerce extended from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> St Ives fair was dominated by the trading and selling of cloth, wool and hides, and was frequented by a considerable number of foreign merchants from Europe. This prosperity continued throughout the thirteenth century during which St Ives was ranked amongst the greatest of English fairs. An in-depth study of the international importance of this fair as a centre of commerce for the cloth industry can be found in Ellen Wedemeyer Moore's *The Fairs of Medieval Europe*.<sup>20</sup> The great fair at Lenton Priory, which was situated just outside Nottingham, competed with its rival the Goose Fair for many centuries, and fourteenth century merchants preferred to attend the Lenton fair as opposed to the Michaelmas fair.<sup>21</sup> By the fourteenth century a network of chartered and prescriptive fairs had been established throughout England. The greatest of these were St

Bartholomew's in London and Sturbridge in Cambridge:

*That St Bartholomew's was the greatest of all the London Fairs and Sturbridge the greatest of all English fairs is beyond dispute.*<sup>22</sup>

Sturbridge Fair flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; much of its trade was gathered not only from East Anglia but also from throughout the country.<sup>23</sup> The representatives from church dioceses in the Midlands, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire all bought their supplies there. Its original charter was granted during the reign of Elizabeth I, but it continued to grow as a centre of trade well into the eighteenth century when Daniel Defoe visited it and described booths and tents as big as warehouses selling a hundred thousand pounds worth of merchandise.<sup>24</sup>

1.3. The trading aspect of the medieval fairs continued well into the eighteenth century. Although their international significance was on the wane, their local and national popularity was still evident:

*The decline of the international fair in England is only one aspect of commercial history. Internal fairs may be less spectacular, but none the less economically important.*<sup>25</sup>

However, those that had been granted charters to commemorate a festivity or Saint's day had long since lost their trading element. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, there appeared two types of fairs. Firstly, there were the provincial market-fairs, which distributed goods and livestock and were also concerned with the hiring of men. Secondly, there were the great festivals or fairs such as the ones held in London.

## **2. Pre-industrial Fairgrounds (1700s to 1870s).**

*The eighteenth century brought about changes in the nature of fairs. The distribution of goods from manufacturers to shops was becoming more efficient and as the century progressed there was less trading and more emphasis on amusements.*<sup>26</sup>

From the late seventeenth century onwards until the mid-Victorian period, amusements and festivities rather than the buying and selling of goods were the principal attractions of the fairs. Duncan Dallas in *The Travelling People* believes that the rate at which

pleasure rather than commerce began to dominate the fair was due to the nature of the original Charter:

*Fairs that were connected with the great festivals of the medieval church and were traditionally associated with the performance of miracle and mystery plays were the first to be dominated by the pursuit of pleasure.<sup>27</sup>*

Therefore the fairs that were associated with the sale of a particular kind of produce held on to their trading nature far longer than those purely associated with festivals and feasts.

The growth in popularity of the festivities held at the fairground as opposed to their original purpose as venues for trading became more apparent as the seventeenth century drew to a close. There appeared to be a difference in functions between the great London fairs such as Bartholomew and Mayfair and their provincial counterparts in Weyhill, Nottingham and Sturbridge. These changes in the functions of the fair may explain why the local ones such as Nottingham, Hull, Cambridge and Bridgewater flourish today and why their eighteenth century counterparts and rivals in London died out in the mid-nineteenth century.

### **2.1. Bacchanalia of the Metropolitan Fairs.**

The great London fairs such as Greenwich, Mayfair and St Bartholomew seemed to decline in importance as centres of trade well before their provincial counterparts.

Henry Morley in his history of St Bartholomew Fair in 1855 includes the account from 1685 when a visitor to the fair wrote:

*The main importance of the fair is not so much for merchandize and the supplying what people really want; but as a sort of Bacchanalia, to gratify the multitudes in their wandering and irregular thoughts.<sup>28</sup>*

Theatrical booths were the most prominent of all the showland attractions which could be found on the fairgrounds in the seventeenth century. Cornelius Walford when writing about theatrical booths at Bartholomew fair states: -

*Indeed, it has never been considered derogatory for persons of the first rank and*



*fashion to partake in the broad humour and theatrical amusements of the place.*<sup>29</sup>

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, puppet or marionette shows, freaks and boxing booths had all been eclipsed by the rise in popularity of the theatre on the fair.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the most documented and infamous fair in England during this time was St Bartholomew. Founded in 1133 when Henry I granted a charter to his jester Rahere, the fair flourished for seven hundred years until its abolition in 1855. During the middle ages its fame was as a cloth fair. However, by the time Ben Jonson was describing it in his play *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614, this trading background was scarcely mentioned.<sup>31</sup> In the seventeenth century the predominant amusements to be found there were the puppet theatres, with the showmen renting frontage space from Smithfield Council for their booths of up to sixty feet in length. In the music and theatre booths, the shows were attached to taverns and run by the publicans in the area. By the eighteenth century the theatrical booths came to dominate the fairs of Bartholomew, and even a production of *The Beggars Opera* was on show in 1729.<sup>32</sup> Ballad operas and plays were specially written for Bartholomew and Southwark fairs, and Fielding, Richardson and other London showmen all erected booths there. The growth in popularity of the theatrical booths continued, despite the reduction of the festivities in 1735 from a two week event to one that lasted for only three days.<sup>33</sup> With the closure of the London theatres for the summer vacation in the early part of the century, the theatrical booths continued to appear at St Bartholomew Fair until they were prohibited in 1750. However, the presence of six booths in the previous year illustrates how dominant they had become in the amusement side of the fair. Throughout its long history, the association between Bartholomew Fair and to a lesser extent Greenwich, Southwark and Mayfair, with immorality and fakery was prevalent. The forbidding of theatrical performances at fairs in 1744 resulted in the fair at Smithfield drawing to a close in civilised fashion:

*The fair terminated in a more peaceable manner than it had done in the memory of man.*<sup>34</sup>



William Addison comments on Bartholomew Fair in his *History of English Fairs and Markets* that:

*Every component of the fair was there from the beginning, every manifestation and expression of its piety, its fasting, its greed, its folly, and it seems in melodramatic proportions.*<sup>35</sup>

He then goes on to list the 'rabble of sick and diseased', the selling of slaves, and the martyr fires, the most lurid and terrible spectacle of all, which continued until 1611.

He ends his review of the fair by concluding 'Bartholomew's is not a pretty story'.<sup>36</sup>

A proportion of the bawdiness and immorality attached to this fair is attributed to the granting of eleven additional days to it by Charles II during the Restoration. However, it appears that the reputation that led to St Barts being described in the following terms in 1641 was always a hallmark of this infamous event. The fairgoers are described as:

*Knives and fooles, cuckolds and cuckoldmakers, Bauds, Whores, Pimpes and Panders, Rogues and Rascalls, the little Loud-one and the witty wanton.*<sup>37</sup>

The review of the fair continues with the writer appraising the wares and amusements on offer:

*And now being arrived through the long walke to Saint Bartholomew Hospital; that place (me thinkes) appeares to me a fucking Exchange and may be so termed not unfitly; for many a handsome wench exchanges her maidenhead for a small favour .. for she comes not hither with her sweetheart to serve her owne turne only but also to satisfie his desire; according to the old saying, one good turn deserves another.*<sup>38</sup>

This association between loose women and fairgrounds was not unique to Bartholomew Fair. One of the main causes of dispute between the Mayor of Cambridge and the Vice-Chancellor of the University was the question of who was to hold the privilege that gave them the right to search the fair at Sturbridge for lewd women in order to improve or banish them. However, the trading element at the so-called provincial fairs was stronger than it was in their London counterparts. The great fairs of Weyhill, Sturbridge, and Nottingham continued as centres of economy and trade well into the nineteenth century.

## 2.2. Trade Fairs in the Provinces.

*The country fairs had a social and economic function totally different from those of the London Bacchanalia. The finding of master and man continued, at the many hiring fairs, to take precedence over amusement and the market fair persisted in the provinces long after the machinery of retail trade had made it redundant in London.*<sup>39</sup>

The beginnings of these hiring fairs can be traced to the fourteenth century with the passing of the Statute of Labourers in 1351 by Edward III which:

*ordered workmen to bring to the merchant town their instruments and they shall be hired in a common place and not privy.*<sup>40</sup>

These Statute fairs, or Mops as they are known in the Midlands, still continued in their original purpose until the end of the nineteenth century. The description of wife selling in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Thomas Hardy has as its origin an incident of wife selling at the nearby village of Andover in 1817.<sup>41</sup> However, even with these hiring fairs the original purpose of the event was soon superseded by the amusement side, and sadly over threequarters of the East Riding Hiring fairs in Yorkshire failed to survive into the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> A complete listing of the fairs that survived until the end of the eighteenth century can be found in K. L. McCutcheon's in-depth study of Yorkshire fairs.<sup>43</sup> However, Statute fairs were just one type of event held in Yorkshire, and the prescriptive and charter fairs appear to have a greater continuity. Despite the failure of a proportion of these events to continue in strength in the twentieth century, the Mop Fairs held in Studley, Stratford, Warwick, Burton, Ilkeston and Loughborough, for example, all owe their existence and continuation to the original hiring fairs of many years ago.

The trading aspect of these fairs still flourished in the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Cambridge fair began to be called the Pot fair from this period onwards due to the large amount of pottery on sale there.<sup>44</sup> People attending Nottingham Goose Fair in the eighteenth century would see upwards of 20,000 geese arriving from East Anglia to be sold for the Michaelmas feast.<sup>45</sup> Like Nottingham, Weyhill Fair was a Michaelmas fair, and the sale of livestock was an important feature in its history. It

was already renowned for the sale of sheep, hops, cheese and livestock by 1720 when the *Magna Britannia* described it as the greatest fair in the kingdom. Throughout its history, the site on which it was held has included a horse fair, a hiring fair, a cheese fair, a leather fair and latterly a pleasure fair. The sale of sheep and hops was its most important aspect and its fame as an event spread as far as Scotland:

*For Sheep and Hops probably it has not its equal in England and the price is usually a criterion for all the West parts of the Kingdom. In leather, cheese and other articles of general consumption also, it mostly regulates the Markets and fairs for several months after.*<sup>46</sup>

Another great medieval fair which flourished in the eighteenth century was that held at Sturbridge, which dated back to a Charter granted by King John in 1211, and took place from the 24th August until the 14th September. During the eighteenth century, Sturbridge served as a wholesale mart in hops and woollens for a large part of the country. Daniel Defoe described the goods and wares on sale in 1720. The main commodities for sale, according to Defoe, were wool and hops, and packhorses travelled from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Essex and Surrey in order to provide the produce for sale. The industrial cities also contributed to the sale of goods; brass and iron were supplied from Birmingham, glassware was sent from Nottingham, and knives and tools manufactured in Sheffield could all to be found on sale. The great provincial fairs such as Nottingham, Weyhill and Sturbridge, for example, may have had entertainments on offer to the public in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but the business of buying and selling was still of primary importance. Indeed the pleasure fair at Nottingham was only allowed to start when the trading side of the event was finished:

*It remained the pattern for business to be finished first and pleasure to be taken afterwards.*<sup>47</sup>

### 2.3. The Nineteenth Century Fair.

*Until an improved technology had effected the dominance of the roundabout at the end of the nineteenth century, shows as the name "showman" implies, were the major component of the fair.*<sup>48</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, attractions such as theatrical booths, waxworks, and freak shows began to dominate the fairground landscape. The middle of the century saw the emergence of the wild beast shows known as menageries, which began to assume a primacy over their rival shows on the fair. This was soon reflected in their appearance on fairgrounds throughout the country. Thomas Frost's account of the fair held at Smithfield includes a description of Bartholomew Fair which depicts the large number and array of these attractions.<sup>49</sup> It lists five circus booths, four menageries, a number of theatres, peep shows, freak shows, glass blowing acts and a number of exhibition shows, which brought the tally of establishments exhibited in 1822 to twenty two. Henry Morley commented in 1859 that the price of admission to the larger shows such as Wombell's menagerie, Richardson's theatre and Atkins' menagerie, in 1830, was sometimes six times as much as the penny shows exhibiting at the fair.<sup>50</sup> Thomas Frost, writing in the 1870s, recalls that by 1833 there was thirty two of these exhibitions displayed at Bartholomew Fair.<sup>51</sup>

The fairground shows of the early to mid-nineteenth century are perhaps the best documented of all the amusements that appeared on the fairground until the introduction of steam powered roundabouts.<sup>52</sup> Their heyday was in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century with the menageries, circuses, ghost shows, exhibitions and waxworks all dominating the showground landscape during this period. The people who exhibited such shows became well known personalities and adopted extravagant titles. George Sanger became known as "Lord" George Sanger and Tom Norman was referred to as the "Silver Dollar King". Thomas Horne, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, produced various accounts of the lives of the nineteenth century showmen including *The Humorous and Tragic Stories of Showman Life* and *Famous Shows and Showmen: The Story of One Hundred Years of British Show Life*.<sup>53</sup> The

stories recounted in these books all reflect the dominance of the shows on the fairgrounds until the 1870s. Frontage space was allocated at these fairs on the basis of who arrived first. A famous incident which occurred at Bartholomew in the 1800s reflects the competition between the showmen to exhibit the greatest attractions in the best possible position. George Wombwell, the famous menagerie proprietor had decided not to exhibit at Bartholomew Fair. However, when finding that his greatest rival, Atkins, was advertising that his menagerie would be the only wild beast show in the fair he decided to attend.

The incident is recounted by Edward Henry Bostock, in his autobiography published in 1927:

*On the arrival of the menagerie in London, it was found that both horses and men were absolutely spent, while the elephant fell ill the same night and was dead on the morning the fair commenced. Atkins heard of the loss, and immediately placarded the neighbourhood with the announcement that his menagerie contained "the only living elephant in the fair." Mr Wombwell was not "caught napping." In a few hours he had posted up an immense cloth, on which were painted the words, "Come and see the only dead elephant in the fair!"<sup>54</sup>*

Wombwell's Menagerie which exhibited the only dead elephant was crowded for the duration of the fair, whilst his rival Atkins' audience was severely reduced.

This theme of competitiveness is also referred to by Lord George Sanger:

*I shall show you what cunning tricks and artifice were resorted to in the early days to draw the pennies ... you will witness the fierce rivalries of the showmen of those times and the fights and riots that arose in consequence.<sup>55</sup>*

Fights between the showmen of the day were commonplace. One of the most notorious incidents occurred at Oxford Road between Wombwell's and Hilton's menageries in 1833. The fight between the two rival showmen en route from Reading to Henley resulted in windows and doors of waggons and vans being smashed, showmen being injured and Wombwell's great elephant van destroyed.<sup>56</sup>

The showmen of this period developed ingenuity and style, and the gullible public flocked to see not just the great waxworks and menagerie shows, but also the peep shows, illusion booths and exhibitions of freaks. The life was hard but the rewards

could also be high. Of the showmen who exhibited in this period, some became rich and left the fairground altogether. Among those who became rich and stayed in the fairground communities were the families who laid the foundations of the great showland successes of the late nineteenth century. These halcyon days of exhibitions and shows were never to be repeated, and even with the rise in popularity of the bioscope shows of the late nineteenth century, only ten of these attractions were featured at fairs such as Nottingham and Hull.

This emphasis on entertainment rather than trading was reflected in the great provincial fairs such as Sturbridge, which by the beginning of the nineteenth century was in decline. Only freak shows kept alive a Charter fair which had existed there since 1211. However, the decline in trading and the spread in popularity of entertainment occurred at a far slower rate at the fairs in the provinces. Entertainments came later to the rural fairs and may have contributed to their continued existence. With the demise of commerce occurring at an earlier period at a proportion of the London events, eighteenth century trading fairs rapidly declined and enabled the authority to abolish the festivities. This occurred well before the industrial revolution revitalised the amusement side of the fair and the support of the populace for such amusements.

#### 2.4. The Demise of the Trading Fair.

In contrast to the array of entertainments on display at the London fairs, rural fairs such as Weyhill, Nottingham and Norwich continued as trading marts well into the mid-nineteenth century. William Cobbett wrote in 1826:

*I went to Weyhill yesterday to see the close of the hop and of the cheese fair, for, after the sheep these are the principal articles.* <sup>57</sup>

Even though Cobbett goes on to argue that the growth of shops in the area was killing the trade of the country fair, it seems apparent that the annual event was still important as a trading fair in 1848 when a report in *The Standard* describes the congestion caused

by the wagon loads of hops at fair time.<sup>58</sup> However, by the mid-1850s even Weyhill was in decline. The coming of the railway to Andover in 1854 negated the need for the farmers to bring livestock and produce to the fair, as they could now sell direct to merchants in London or in the Midlands.<sup>59</sup>

As already noted, this decline occurred at a slower rate in the provincial and country fairs, but, by the mid-1850s it was reflected in the ever increasing emphasis placed on amusements rather than trade at fairs such as Nottingham and Hull. The following description of Nottingham Goose fair by the Superintendent of Markets for Nottingham in 1857 reflects what had already occurred over a century ago at the great London fairs:

*The principal fair in October, while losing to a great extent its trading qualities, has been acquiring more and more those of a pleasure fair and is now considered to be the principal holiday of the year.*<sup>60</sup>

By the 1850s the trading element in fairs throughout the country seemed to have been replaced by entertainment:

*Almost without exception, the market fairs have degenerated into purely pleasure fairs and would not have survived without the support of the travelling showmen.*<sup>61</sup>

Even the array of shows found at these festivities seemed no longer to attract the attention of an evermore sophisticated audience. David Millar, a showman who presented theatrical and Punch and Judy shows, had achieved great success in the early decades of the century. By 1849, however, his credit was extended, his shows and theatres were unsuccessful and his decline was such that his only exhibition was a pitiful show on ground opposite his old theatre in London.<sup>62</sup>

Thomas Frost's previously quoted remarks in 1874 on the decline of fairs would seem justified when one looks at the state of some of the traditional Charter fairs during that period. The notorious Bartholomew Fair had its charter proclaimed for the last time in 1855, and this was quickly followed by the demise of the events in Camberwell in 1855, Greenwich by 1857, and Stepney in 1860.<sup>63</sup>

During that period many of the famous names of the first part of the nineteenth century also seemed to desert the travelling fairs. Lord George Sanger bought the permanent site of Astleys in 1871 as a circus exhibition and stopped travelling.<sup>64</sup> Although the firm of Bostock and Wombwell would continue to be connected with the fairground industry for another fifty years, the death of the founder in 1850 and the disposal of his show in 1872<sup>65</sup> would seem to indicate that the nation had indeed outgrown its need for such entertainment:

*The old style of showmen were unmistakably on the decline. Their way of life was linked to the entertainment they offered and was dependent on individual skill, whether the entrepreneur or the performer, and these entertainments were becoming an unfashionable anachronism in the new industrial society.*<sup>66</sup>

Fairs throughout the country seemed in danger in the 1860s and 1870s, not only as a result of The Fairs Act of 1868, 1871, and 1873, but also because of the loss of traditional sites in town centres. Luton Fair was abolished in 1880, under the authorisation of the Fairs Act 1871, and although, William Austin writing in 1914, records local regret, the overall feeling was one of rejoicing 'in the removal of what they regarded as an unseemly nuisance'.<sup>67</sup> The Metropolitan Fairs Act 1868, had granted the licensing of unofficial events to be placed in the hands of the Metropolitan Police.<sup>68</sup> The Fairs Act 1871, had allowed local authorities or "owners" of fairs the right to petition for their abolition, and the further amendments introduced in The Fairs Act 1873, created the possibility of changing the days when the event could be held.<sup>69</sup> Historians of the time warned against the loss of such events, Fabian Amery in his paper on 'Country Fair and Revels', published in 1878, predicted:

*The relics are fast dissolving; soon the generation of fair and revel-goers will disappear also, and with it a rich mine of folk-lore, traditions, and customs will also be lost.*<sup>70</sup>

In Hull the traditional fair was moved yet again, when the local authorities considered that since its economic importance had declined, the festivities associated with it were simply a nuisance.<sup>71</sup> The changes brought about by the industrial revolution had not yet made an impact on the types of entertainment offered on the fairground, which



faced competition from music halls, theatres and travelling exhibitions such as panoramas and lantern shows that presented their attractions in venues in the town centres. Thomas Frost believed that the fairs had become oldfashioned and their decline in fortune was linked to the public's need for other forms of entertainment:

*All the larger towns now possess music-halls, and many of them have a theatre, the most populous have two or three ... The railways connect all the smaller towns, and most of the villages, with the larger ones, in which amusements may be found superior to any ever presented by the old showmen.*<sup>72</sup>

2.5. However, recent studies of the impact of fairs during the mid-to late nineteenth century reveal a different interpretation and emphasise the regional nature of such festivities. For example, Hugh Cunningham's article on the metropolitan fairs in *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* refutes Frost's claims and cites the following reasons for the inaccuracy of his statements:

*Frost was wrong and for a number of reasons. First, he failed to anticipate the ability of the fairs themselves to adapt to new conditions, and to make a positive virtue of the mechanical skills of the industrial revolution. The fair itself became mechanised, and as such had the power to excite and give pleasure to the people. Secondly, Frost overemphasised the "mass" quality of entertainment in the nineteenth century ... Thirdly, he failed to recognise that those fairs which no longer existed had not so much died as been killed. None had simply faded away.*<sup>73</sup>

Robert Poole's doctoral thesis on the Lancashire Wakes also demonstrates the continuity of fairs in the region.<sup>74</sup> Although the audience had changed and events had become increasingly unpopular with the bourgeoisie, the appeal of such fairs was on the increase among the working class members of the populace:

*The fairs themselves, however, obstinately refused to wither away ... The number of fairs which died out was tiny and these were easily outnumbered by new ones such as pub-inspired fairs, new local wakes fairs, and pleasure fairs associated with agricultural shows. Far from tending to extinguish fairs the cotton district provided a healthy, if somewhat unsettled, environment, for them to flourish in, both from trade and pleasure.*<sup>75</sup>

A similar pattern can also be found in Douglas Reid's study of wakes and fairs in eighteenth and nineteenth century Birmingham.<sup>76</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century the festivities had been tamed by the local authorities who eventually passed a ruling in

1875 to abolish the holding of fairs on Corporation land.<sup>77</sup> However, they continued to be supported by the working classes, and the abolitionists had only succeeded in banishing the fair to the outskirts of the city, where it flourished:

*By 1880, both at Whit and Michaelmas, fairs were held on 'as large a scale as ever', complete with new fangled steam roundabouts.*<sup>78</sup>

However, although Cunningham, Poole and Reid all reflect on the changes in public perception of fairs and showmen, they make no attempt to explain why the increase in popularity occurred. Cunningham writes that:

*Abolition always required a positive and often resisted act by authority. A change therefore in the attitude of authority towards fairs offered them considerable hope of survival.*<sup>79</sup>

Fairs could only face abolition if no public pressure was applied to prevent such an order being carried out. If the notice of abolition was greeted with public outrage and pressure, then the Secretary of State had the power to rescind the request from the local authorities. This was a lesson that the showpeople would learn in the last decade of the nineteenth century and one they would continue to use throughout the following century. However, in order to prevent such notices taking effect the showpeople and their fairs had again to become necessary to the recreational needs of the populace. They needed a new attraction, a marvel that would reflect the technical innovations that were prevalent in Victorian society; they needed an industrial revolution. The role of the showpeople and the part they played in revolutionising the Victorian fairground has been overlooked by scholars in the field. Fairs have been examined as recreational and popular entertainment, a means of asserting control over the masses, and as affirmations of community identity.<sup>80</sup> Cunningham comments on the improved relationship which the showpeople had with authority and the patronage by Royalty, but not on why these events took place.<sup>81</sup> Douglas Reid includes no information on any of the fairground families who operated such events, which is surprising, considering that Birmingham was home to perhaps the most successful and prosperous

of the late Victorian fairground entrepreneurs, the infamous Pat Collins, who later became the Member of Parliament for Walsall.<sup>82</sup> However, the very organisation of these events, the role of the showpeople in the presentation of fairs, and the improvement in the attractions on show have never been examined in detail.

The following section will seek to demonstrate how these improved relations developed between the showpeople, the public and local and national government, and why the introduction of mechanisation created such an impact on the fairground and resulted in the rise of a new kind of structure within showland society, which would ultimately provide the positive resistance necessary to counter moves to abolish the holding of fairs.

### 3. The 1870s and the Introduction of Mechanisation.

*Perhaps in no other section of the fair is the march of improvement shown more fully than in the roundabouts.*<sup>83</sup>

By 1874, when Thomas Frost was writing his history of the London fairs, an event had already occurred that revolutionised the Victorian fair and laid the foundations for the modern travelling amusement business: the introduction of steam powered roundabouts.

The initial appearance of these rides did not apparently warrant his attention or prevent him from proclaiming the demise of the English fairs and their showpeople. Merry-go-rounds were not a unique phenomenon on the fairground or in the history of popular entertainment. The earliest visual record of a roundabout or carousel appears on a Byzantine bas relief in the sixth century. Frederick Fried, in *The Pictorial History of the Carousel*, provides a detailed account of the development of the wooden roundabouts from the early medieval period onwards.<sup>84</sup> By the eighteenth century these forerunners of the great Victorian steam roundabouts could be found at fairs such as Bartholomew Fair held in London, when a poem published in 1727 mentions the merry-go-rounds on display there.<sup>85</sup>

The appearance of the steam powered roundabouts on the fairground is first mentioned in 1863 at the Midsummer Fair at Halifax.<sup>86</sup> Subsequent research by Stephen Smith has shown that the 1863 date is inaccurate and he claims that the first steam powered fairground ride appeared at Bolton New Year Fair in 1861.<sup>87</sup> However, no contemporary documentation is currently available to test the validity of this theory and the information is taken from the writings of Thomas Hurst, a prominent roundabout proprietor of the time and General Secretary to the Roundabout Proprietors, in the *World's Fair*. The Halifax fair initiative was followed at Aylsham Fair in Norwich when Sydney George Soame presented his Steam Circus.<sup>88</sup> The introduction of the steam powered roundabout at Aylsham Fair had a monumental effect on the history of travelling fairs, not only because it was the first of its kind but also in the way the technological advancements of the machine had an impact on Frederick Savage, an engineer from Kings Lynn. Savage was inspired not only to follow this example but to improve the design by placing the steam engine, which became known as the centre truck, in the middle of the fairground ride. The innovation of the centre truck occurred not only at a significant time in the history of fairs but also in the history of the mechanised ride.

*The centre truck represented a complete statement of the harnessing of steam; to joy riding it was as significant as was Watt's rotative patent to industry. Larger roundabouts could now be built, a faster ride achieved and later complex mechanisms, compounding vertical and horizontal movements could be introduced.*<sup>89</sup>

The earliest ride Savage built for the showmen was probably a *Velocipede* and he constructed three of these machines in 1870. Other rides produced at this time included the *Sea-on-Land* roundabout in 1880, the *Tunnel Railway* in 1885 and the steam powered *dobbies*, but at this time the horses were non-moving.<sup>90</sup> By the 1880s, rivals emerged to challenge Savage's prominence, and firms such as Tidman and Sons, Thomas Walker and Sons, and Reynolds and King all emerged and also sold their rides to the showmen.<sup>91</sup> In 1885 Savage perfected the *Platform Gallopers*, where the action

of the wooden horses with their up and down movement imitated the activity of a galloping horse. This ride came of age in 1891 when a combination of patents from Reynold and Kings, with their crank action, a stepped platform introduced by Robert Tidman, and Savage's innovation of the platform slide in 1891 produced the classic style for the English *Gallopers*, a design which a hundred years later is as popular as ever. The increased demand for all of these rides and their growth in popularity on the fairground can be seen from this period onwards when Frederick Savage alone from the 1880s onwards built over forty *Switchbacks* in the course of fifteen years.<sup>92</sup>

The impact which these machines had on the fairground can be seen in a description of Kings Lynn Mart in 1869 and 1889. Frederick Savage used the Valentine's Day Fair as a means of displaying his latest machine, not only to the showmen but also to the fare paying public. In 1869 the local newspaper, *The Lynn News*, reported the display of roundabouts, booths, shooting galleries and shows to be found at the fair. The coverage of the 1889 event centres on the great steam powered roundabouts which dominated the landscape of the fair.<sup>93</sup> Records from King's Lynn museum, which holds the Frederick Savage archives, show that in the period between 1880 and 1885 twenty sets of the *Sea-on-Land* ride were built. Other successful rides followed in the 1800s, none more so than the invention of the *Switchback* which was patented in 1888.<sup>94</sup>

3.3 The emergence of these new and wondrous machines on the fairground heralded a new age for showland society as a whole. Despite the fact that the shows still outnumbered the rides and were holding their own, the steam powered roundabouts were beginning to expand in range and number:

*By the late nineteenth century, fairs had been reconstituted. - The chief attraction was mechanised swings and roundabouts, in place of the theatrical shows and dancing booths of the first half of the century.*<sup>95</sup>

The major difference the rides began to make at this time was the change in emphasis away from the shows, which were rooted in the past, towards the rides which gave the showmen complete freedom to keep in step with the technological advancements of an ever revolutionary age. The golden age of the fairground roundabouts was yet to come but the seeds planted had grown strongly. By the end of the Victorian era the landscape of the fairground was populated by rides of all kinds: steam yachts, switchbacks and of course the galloping horses.

*The application of steam did more than free the fairground from the limitations of space and movement. In one stroke it made modern, even futuristic an industry which was looking tired and outmoded and was in danger of becoming merely the resort of the Lumpenproletariat in the towns and the bumpkins in the more isolated countryside.*<sup>96</sup>

The innovation of mechanisation on the fairground came at a most opportune time in its history; it revitalised the once glorious fairs and created a hierarchy of businessmen on the fairgrounds.

*The mood was optimistic, the present was good and the future looked better ... Their living vans echoed the splendour of their riding machines and proclaimed their success as unmistakably as their show fronts.*<sup>97</sup>

As an economic group, travelling showpeople had discovered greater prosperity, and by the 1880s travelling showpeople were perhaps the most affluent of all the itinerant groups travelling in Great Britain at this time.

This increase in prosperity was one of the reasons why the Government became increasingly tolerant towards the holding of fairs, and showed little interest in enforcing the legislation introduced in the previous decade. Cunningham believes that the change in public attitudes enabled the continuation of such events despite the passing of restrictive legislation:

*Equally important was a change in the values and norms of showmen, who from the middle of the century became respectable and wealthy entrepreneurs of leisure, patronised by Royalty. As a result the police, instead of acting instinctively to suppress fairs, began to cooperate with showmen in organising them.*<sup>98</sup>

However, the business was still disorganised, the fights over ground and positions were still prevalent and the showmen still faced prejudice from the settled community. They

needed to organise themselves to protect their interests and livelihood. In 1888 the greatest threat to their existence after The Fairs Act 1871, occurred when George Smith used his political prominence which had come to the fore during the passing of the Canal Boat Act 1884 and lobbied Private Members for the introduction of the Moveable Dwellings Bill. The newfound sense of security and prestige felt by the showmen was threatened by the proposed legislation, which if passed would ultimately restrict the movements of all travelling people.

#### **4. 1889 and the Formation of the United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association (U.K.S.V.D.P.A.).**

The formation of the United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association in 1889 is the most decisive and important event in the history of travelling showpeople as a community. For the first time the showpeople joined together to fight what they perceived as unfair legislation. The passing of the three fairs Acts in 1868, 1871 and 1873 may not have restricted the holding of such events,<sup>99</sup> but the legislation put forward by George Smith would affect every aspect of showpeople's lives. For the first time in three hundred years of legislation interfering with fairs and showpeople, a concerted attempt from the community itself would result in a campaign to prevent the Bill from becoming law.

##### **4.1 George Smith and the Moveable Dwellings Bill.**

The factors behind George Smith's proposed Bill have been set out in detail by Thomas Acton, and David Mayall, who both examine the climate in which the legislation arose.<sup>100</sup> Briefly however, since the work of George Borrow and the emergence of the Gypsy Lore Society in 1888, writers began to make a distinction between who they perceived to be the real Romanies or pure Gypsies and the tinkers, tramps and other Travellers:

*They sought to identify the true Gypsy and show him to stand above the common traveller, morally, socially and educationally. He was to be presented as the real aristocrat of the road.*<sup>101</sup>

This attitude is still popular today and can be found in the writings of Gypsy historians and writers such as Norman Dodds,<sup>102</sup> and more recently Alan E. Jones.<sup>103</sup> A romantic view of the traditional gentleman Gypsy prevailed as the researchers, described by David Mayall as the Lorists, sought to identify the true Gypsies and locate them as a race apart in terms of language, history and ethnology. George Smith made no such distinction and refused to see them as creatures of romance. He believed that his mission was to reform and educate all members of the itinerant community in the United Kingdom, whom he referred to as:

*Dregs of society, that will one day put a stop to the work of civilisation, and bring to an end the advance in arts, science, law and commerce that have been making such rapid strides in the country.*<sup>104</sup>

This prejudice or even hatred led him to lead a determined campaign to reform and in due course educate Gypsy Travellers so that they would eventually stop travelling. In short Smith saw them as living in:

*defiance of social, moral, civil and natural law. Viewed from every angle, whether moral, educational, religious, sanitary, economic or political, their reform seemed essential.*<sup>105</sup>

Between 1884 to 1891 he attempted to bring in legislation to govern the movements of all travelling people. His battle with the Gypsy Travellers in the nineteenth century arose out of the Canal Boats Acts 1877 and 1884, which had become law primarily as a result of his emotional publications on the living conditions of barge people.<sup>106</sup> When this had proved successful in controlling the movements of barge dwellers he turned his attention to the travelling community as a whole.

4.2. The basic tenets of the Bill included the registration of all moveable dwellings, which incorporated waggons, carts and tents, and the compulsory school attendance of all Gypsy and van dwellers' children.<sup>107</sup> One of the main proposals was a series of regulations concerning the number of people permitted in a given living space, and the



need for separating living quarters for males and females. However, the main recommendation was the power to grant the local council the authority for an officer of the law to enter a van with a warrant, in order to inspect the dwelling for sanit<sup>ation</sup>, health and moral irregularities. Finally George Smith recommended a series of fines to be imposed by the local authorities if the law was not adhered to.<sup>108</sup>

These proposals caused widespread anger throughout the travelling fraternity, and complaints from Travellers were not long in appearing in the newspapers, with vocal protest being made wherever George Smith was lecturing, both by van dwellers and Gypsies alike. Indeed at Birmingham Onion Fair he was chased through the streets of the city. When he ventured onto the fairgrounds in Leicester and Northampton he was given police protection from the threat of attacks, and at Ascot Races a Gypsy woman threatened to pour paraffin over him and set him alight.<sup>109</sup> However, despite the extensive hostility felt by the travelling community and the individual threats of violence, the first determined campaign to resist this legislation was organised by the Liberty and Property Defence League, (L.P.D.L).

4.3. The League believed that the clause was cruel and unworkable and that the intended registration of living vehicles would lead to suppression and the enforced movement of people from the country to the already overcrowded towns. Advertising in *The Era*, a newspaper with strong fairground affiliations, in particular in its *Showmen's World* column, the Liberty and Property Defence League drew the proposed Clauses to the immediate attention of the travelling showpeople. This contribution continued when Dr Croft of the League helped the van dwellers to organise their campaign through petitions and public meetings.

*Valuable advice on the conduct of these meetings and the method of obtaining petitions for the signatures, etc, was given to us by the Liberty and Property Defence League, who were our firm friends.*<sup>110</sup>

Within months of this initial contact, the showpeople organised themselves, and at a meeting in Salford a new association was formed, the U.K.S.V.D.P.A.

#### 4.4. The United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association.

The story of the unification of the travelling showpeople and their successful fight against George Smith is central in showpeople's history. The sequence of events leading up to the Moveable Dwelling Bill and the basic tenets of the proposed law are widely known amongst travelling showpeople today. When interviewed in Sheffield, Miss Celine Williams, a great granddaughter of one of the founders, recalled in detail the background which led to the formation of the U.K.S.V.D.P.A.

*It was called the Movable Dwellings Bill, and they had to get lawyers before the Van Dwellers was started, and what it was it started out with the barge people, because they said the children were not being cared for .... George Smith, that's right, in fact the records are in one of the newspapers in Manchester, and they got a group together, and he was the one who helped fight the Bill, paid the lawyers because how it was coming about, they was after, because people then lived on the barges, didn't they, and they worked as children, and they were getting no schooling and they were neglected and they were like Gypsies and vagabonds and they also included fairground children. And he said "no way am I going to stand for them taking my children offa me," he said "if we're poor it does not mean we don't love us children" and through that one led to another and that's how they got together and they fought the first one, and they fought again, and that's how they started with the Van Dwellers and then the Showmen's Guild.<sup>111</sup>*

The fight against George Smith was in their eyes an attack not only on their way of life but to add insult to injury he had associated them with the Gypsy Travellers.

The primary concerns of the Association are reflected in a letter from Thomas Horne:

*Mr Smith fails to make any distinction between say the living vans of George Sanger and the most miserable ramshackle carts ceiled over with hoops and canvas; between the true and legitimate showman and his family, well cared for, and the veriest wretch of a miserable Gypsy - one who is a pariah amongst pariahs of the road.<sup>112</sup>*

From 1889 onwards the travelling showpeople united themselves in their fight against this proposed legislation. The leading showmen of the day had been contacted by the League through the pages of *The Era*. The meeting at the Black Lion Hotel in Salford on the Flat Iron fairground arose out of the initial contacts made by the showmen through the pages of *The Era* and by word of mouth on the fairground. Although

Gypsy scholars such as Thomas Acton,<sup>113</sup> believe that this initial meeting did not actually occur and the date is more folklore than historical fact, Thomas Murphy in the *History of the Showmen's Guild* states that the meeting at Salford was the forerunner to the one called at the Agricultural Hall in Islington.<sup>114</sup> However, the importance of the gathering at the Black Lion in Salford cannot be underestimated as this is the event recalled in interviews conducted with showpeople, and not the later gathering held in London. By the following year the outrage felt by the fairground community had expressed itself in the sending of petitions to the Government and the distribution of pamphlets in cities and towns wherever a fair was held; it culminated in a series of public meetings held throughout the country. A membership fund was started and in the first year over five hundred showmen contributed to the cost of fighting George's Smith proposed legislation.<sup>115</sup> The showmen had already enlisted the help of Henry E. Stephens, the M.P for Hornsey in Middlesex, who presided over the first meeting, held at the Agricultural Hall in London, at the beginning of 1991.

*No stone was left unturned to arouse further enthusiasm in the rank and file. Placards announcing the meeting were headed "Showmen and Travellers, To Arms, To Arms! Defend Your Liberties and Your Homes" and ended up by asking all to attend.*<sup>116</sup>

Between 1888 until his death in 1895 George Smith saw his Bill meet with opposition each time it was presented to Parliament. Its final defeat in 1894 was seen as a victory by the U.K.S.V.D.P.A. and the L. D. P. L. who can be seen to have been the most important factor in rallying support to eventually block the Bill in Parliament.

4.5. At the Annual General Meeting of members of the U.K.S.V.D.P.A. in 1892 a set of rules was passed which provided the framework for all future regulations. Despite the later fame attached to the founder members of the Guild such as Pat Collins, George Green and others, the main individuals primarily responsible for its success in its formative years were the Reverend Thomas Horne, the showmen's chaplain, and Joe Caddeck, a travelling photographer who worked and lived on the fairgrounds. Both

had strong links with the fairground community. Thomas Horne in his own words was one:

*who spent the first twelve years of life in a van travelling from fair to fair.*<sup>117</sup>

Joe Caddeck described himself as both a van dweller and travelling photographer.

From the very start the U.K.S.V.D.P.A was concerned that a distinction should be made between the showmen and the Gypsy Travellers, and according to David Mayall in his history of *Gypsy-travellers in the 19th Century*:

*From the first it was more concerned that the public should not confuse the Gypsies with showmen, and that the showmen class of travellers alone should not be brought under the restrictions of the Bill.*<sup>118</sup>

Letters sent by the showpeople to *The Era* and other sympathetic newspapers during Mr Smith's campaign reflect the showpeople's belief that they were a separate autonomous group:

*Mr Smith seems to have no power of discriminating between the wretched drink-besotten Gypsy and the showman proper ... they may know a great deal about boatmen and their peculiar ways but about the showmen and his wife and children and the life they lead, they know nothing or have just that little knowledge that is so highly dangerous.*<sup>119</sup>

This disaffiliation on the part of the travelling showpeople from the other itinerant communities of the time was successful and led to the eventual exemption of showland society from a series of Acts of Parliament that directly affected travelling people over the next century.<sup>120</sup> It initiated a highly successful campaign by travelling showpeople and from this period onwards the society as a whole was united in its outrage at being mistaken for anything other than bona fide showpeople. As a community they began to separate themselves from other Travellers not only in the eyes of the law and society in general, but also in their dress, jewellery, living accommodation and language. The Moveable Dwellings Bill strengthened and formulated the traditional lifestyle of travelling showpeople by presenting a direct challenge to their customary existence, and also by providing an opportunity for them to be perceived as different from other Travellers by the Government and society as a whole. They borrowed from the Gypsy

Lore Society and other Gypsy Lorists the ideology of the "pure Gypsy" and "bona fide Traveller" and applied it successfully to their own community.

4.6. Prior to the formation of the U.K.S.V.D.P.A. travellers who worked on the fairgrounds would have described themselves on registration certificates such as those for birth and death as being travellers, hawkers, or exhibitors if they owned one of the large shows. After the formation of the Association they began to perceive themselves as a separate economic group. This was reflected in the use of the term "travelling showman" on birth and death certificates. One example of this is the case of Randall Williams; on the birth of his first child in 1853 he is registered as a traveller with exhibition. When he died in 1898, his occupation is stated as a travelling showman.<sup>121</sup> Within fifty years of its formation, only those who were bona fide showpeople were allowed membership of the Showmen's Guild, by which the U.K.S.V.D.P.A became known. By the start of the Second World War, their General Secretary, Thomas Murphy, claimed that their membership comprised over ninety five percent of the travelling showpeople in Great Britain.<sup>122</sup> It had in effect become a trade union where membership was allocated through ties of kinship. However, after the initial success of the protesters against the Moveable Dwelling Bill, the Van Dwellers' Association lost support and in the period leading up to the First World War it faced new rivals within the travelling fraternity.

## 5. 1889-1914: the Impact of Mechanisation, and the Transition from the Van Dwellers' Association to the Showmen's Guild.

In this period, the major events which shaped the structure of showland society were the dominance of mechanisation, the rise and decline of the bioscope shows and the growth of the Showmen's Guild.

### 5.1. The Dominance of Mechanisation.

*We thus see that the roundabout section is a most important factor in the business of British Fairs.*<sup>123</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century the fairground landscape began to be dominated by steam powered roundabouts. Those once insignificant rides which had been spartan in concept and design a hundred years previously had pushed their rivals, the shows, to the perimeter of the fairground. Although the period from 1897 to the start of the First World War would see the pinnacle of the great Victorian shows, their influence was on the decline. The Bioscope shows of the early twentieth century were the final expression of a once great spectacle that had dominated the fairground for over two hundred years. Fairground manufacturers such as Frederick Savage of King's Lynn, Orton and Spooner from Burton-upon-Trent, and Thomas Walker and Sons from Norwich were all making gallopers, switchbacks, steam yachts and other marvellous rides for the showmen to tempt the fairground public. The rides dominated the landscape of the Edwardian fairgrounds and more than twenty machines were open to the public at the great fairs of Hull and Nottingham in the early 1900s.<sup>124</sup> The popularity of these rides is reflected in the photographs of historic fairs such as Nottingham when hundreds of people gathered to see the opening proclamation. The showmen achieved prestige and prosperity through investing in the rides when they were displayed at King's Lynn Valentine's Day Fair. The golden age of the fairground had arrived and this did not merely refer to the gold leaf decorations on the ride. The account books of such a riding master, or proprietor, of one of these steam powered roundabouts from Yorkshire, reveals that during the early 1900s, Mrs Hannah Waddington's ride was taking on average one hundred pounds a week.<sup>125</sup>

*The shows ... had been relegated to the perimeter to form an enclosure for the principal attraction: Roundabouts. Huge, golden, swirling machines, replete with richly carved horses or velvet-plush upholstered gondolas, studded with cut glass mirrors and lavished with fine paintings, glittering in the glow of the new miracle of electric light. Each ride competed with the next for speed, noise and sheer brilliance of effect. The funfair had come of age.*<sup>126</sup>

In the period leading up to the First World War, a greater concentration of these rides

appeared on the fairground, and the once great shows seemed to be on the decline. However, the shows attempted to stage a revival, and for fifteen or more years they were apparently on the increase, but unfortunately they would never achieve the splendour and dominance that they had in the 1800s when one would see over twenty of them on display at the great London fairs. For a short period the introduction of the bioscope prevented the demise of the show and created a spectacle in terms of size, numbers and artistry that has yet to be equalled on the fairground.<sup>127</sup>

## 5.2. Rise and Decline of the Bioscope Shows.

The invention known as living pictures first made its appearance in February 1896, when displays by Robert Paul and the Lumiere brothers occurred within a few days of each other.<sup>128</sup> The exploitation of this new industry by travelling showmen also began in this year, and from 1897 onwards the fairground exhibitors played a significant part in this business, showing to largely provincial audiences whose chances of seeing this new display were limited. For fifteen or more years these enterprising showmen travelled around the country, adapting and building new portable booths in which to exhibit the films. One of the first was Randall Williams, who is acknowledged by most writers as the first showman to introduce moving pictures onto the English fairgrounds in 1897.<sup>129</sup> He first exhibited his ex-ghost show which had been converted to display moving pictures at the Royal Agriculture Hall in Islington in 1896.<sup>130</sup> In February of the following year his cinematograph show was an instant hit at King's Lynn for the Valentine's Day Fair, the traditional start to the travelling season. The shows were transported first by train and then by traction engine which Randall Williams had purchased from Fowlers of Leeds in 1896.<sup>131</sup> Randall Williams attended the Victorian Era Exhibition at Earls Court in London in 1898 and then the February fair at Kings Lynn, which by now had four cinematograph shows exhibiting the latest films, including Randall Williams' converted bioscope show.<sup>132</sup>

By 1898 the early cinematography shows dominated the fairground landscape, using names such as Biddall's Royal Bioscope, Ball's Living Pictures, William Taylor's Colliseum, Green's Cinematograph and Arnold Brothers Picturedrome. At the major fairs, such as Nottingham, Hull and Oxford St Giles fair, one would see a long line of these shows, side by side. The Green brothers, like Randall Williams, were prominent travelling showmen. Both Randall Williams and John Green were instrumental in the formation of the Van Dwellers' Association.

In order to maintain the interest of the early movie audience and to keep one step ahead of their competitors, the bioscope shows on the fairground improved dramatically from 1897 onwards. The earliest form of booth or show for the exhibiting of moving pictures was the ground booth show. By the end of the Victorian era, the ground booths were gradually improved and adapted to maintain their position in the competitive world of the travelling showmen. The shows became bigger and better, and stages become longer; the parades formed part of a vaudeville act and the music emanating from the new 104 key organs from Europe established the centrepiece of the new show. Theatre or music hall designs provided the main model for such portable shows and the interiors of the exhibitions matched the lavish theatrical theme of the exterior. From 1902 onwards these shows were transported by traction engine, allowing greater loads to be carried. This made it possible to transport a complete bioscope show with six or seven fully loaded vans at one time. These elaborate walk-up shows reached their zenith between 1906 and 1912 and became bigger, more intricate and having a greater audience capacity.<sup>133</sup> By the end of 1914, the fairground cinematograph shows gradually began to disappear. A combination of factors is apparent in the decline of these shows and a detailed account of their rise and descent can be found in the articles published in *Picture House* and *Film History*.<sup>134</sup>

Perhaps the main reason for the demise of the travelling film shows was the growth in popularity of the cinema. This eventually resulted in permanent locations being built



all over the country and the travelling exhibitions gradually vanished by 1915. The greater availability of films for the proprietors of cinemas enabled them to change their show on a regular basis, showing the latest up-to-date films from America and Europe. The showmen could not compete with this as their prospective audience would have previously seen a majority of the films at their local cinema.<sup>135</sup>

5.3. On the fairground when the large bioscope shows had gone, the new electric scenic railways that Savages and Orton and Spooner began producing became the latest fashion for the showmen to follow. Interestingly, the organs and some of the frontage from the cinematograph shows still had a home on the fairground, and many showmen incorporated them into the decor of the latest fairground attraction, the *Scenic*. In the case of the organs, these were cut down and placed them in the centre of the new electrically powered rides.

The importance of these shows cannot be underestimated; the exhibitors belonged to the elite of fairground society. If one considers the original founders of the Showmen's Guild, it is apparent that ancestors of the early Victorian Showmen exhibitors were some of the primary agents for the foundation of the Guild. Randall Williams, John McIndoe of ghost show fame, and many others, including the Wilmots and the Manders, were all members of families who had exhibited shows on the fairground since the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>136</sup> The prevalence of showmen exhibitors in the earliest membership list for 1889 reflects the positions of wealth which the original exhibitors had achieved. Towards the end of the century a proportion of these showpeople invested in machines, and those with a long history of exhibition quickly realised the attraction of the bioscope shows. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the fairground in a position of strength; the so-called golden age had arrived. The bioscope shows, together with the new mechanised rides, created a hierarchy of wealth and power on the fairground that began to be reflected in the

organisation of fairground society at every level.

#### 5.4. From the Van Dwellers' Association to the Showmen's Guild.

The *History of the Showmen's Guild* which appeared weekly in the *World's Fair* throughout 1938 and 1939, and was then published complete in 1940, commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the organisation which began as the U.K.S.V.D.P.A and later became known as the Showmen's Guild. If one were to believe Thomas Murphy, who compiled the history, once the organisation had been founded, the Association continued from strength to strength. However, this was not the case. The original purpose of the formation of the U.K.S.V.D.P.A was to protect the rights of showmen and van dwellers against George Smith's proposed legislation. Once the battle had been won, membership fell from over 1,000 in 1891 to 251 by 1897,<sup>137</sup> and when the Association set out to strengthen its organisation within the fraternity in 1910, many rival organisations sprang up. After the initial victory over George Smith, the old organisation went into decline, with membership falling every year. The eligibility for membership was vague and the first rule states simply that *a man and his wife are eligible for membership*. One of the early problems the Association faced was the fact that only a small percentage of the potential members were joining, but the majority were reaping the benefits of the success achieved by the minority. In 1903 the Van Dwellers' Association was in serious trouble, its finances were low and support from within the fairground community was at its lowest ebb. Thomas Horne, the secretary, threatened to resign if the funds to fight the battles with Parliament were not replenished. It needed to enlist new members, and from this period onwards it successfully recruited new followers from the prominent fairground families. The primary agent in this move to increase greater membership was the Reverend Thomas Horne, who was one of the founders of the Association and its first secretary. Prior to this appointment he had held the position of honorary chaplain. In 1907, Thomas

Horne reorganised the old association which later changed its name officially to the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain in 1911. Although they used the term Guild as a subtitle in the *Year Books* from as early as 1903 onwards, it was not until 1911 that the Van Dwellers' Association became formally known as the Guild.<sup>138</sup> Not only did Thomas Horne organise meetings and bring in new members, he also became the Guild's watchdog and historian. The early days of the Van Dwellers' Association were threatened by rival organisations and lack of solidarity. In a letter of 1903 Thomas Horne writes:

*I can only conclude that the more absorbing demands of rival trade associations have so occupied the time and attention of showmen that the old society is being allowed to die for lack of means.*<sup>139</sup>

Thomas Horne travelled throughout the country, preaching to the showmen and devoting time and attention to attracting new members from the travelling fraternity. In one year alone he travelled over 12,000 miles, visiting fairs as far apart as Penzance in Cornwall and Ayr in Scotland.<sup>140</sup>

*Whenever and wherever the showfolk or their calling was attacked, he stood for them and fought their battles.*<sup>141</sup>

Until his death in 1918, Thomas Horne was the main spokesman for the fairground community. With his education, training as a priest, and family association with the fairground he became the ideal representative for the travelling showmen. He did much to safeguard the future of the old Van Dwellers' Association, shaped its transition to the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and presented a respectable image of the fairground to its detractors. As a man of God, his testimony on behalf of the showmen would hardly have been called into question.

### 5.5. Rival Organisations.

The main opposition the Guild faced in those early days was that from the Roundabout Proprietors' Union. Other rival organisations, which included the Yorkshire Stall

Holdings' Society, The Lancashire and Cheshire Stall Holders' Association and the Yorkshire Lessees Society, also reflected the already prominently stratified society that was emerging on the fairground.

However, in the years leading up to and after the First World War the Roundabout Proprietors' Union and the Showmen's Guild became virtually one and the same. The Committee members of these two organisations had the same representatives from the fairground community. Finally, by 1915 the Guild and The Roundabout Proprietors' Union shared the same address in London, and Thomas Horne was the secretary to the Guild and honorary chaplain for both supposedly rival establishments.<sup>142</sup> The emergence and eventual dominance of the Showmen's Guild in these years is linked with its former rival organisation and reflects the ascendancy of the mechanised rides on the fairground. Steam powered roundabouts and the replacement of horse power by the traction engine heralded the arrival of a new class of showmen, the riding master and lessee. These machine men or riding proprietors had a considerable investment to protect. When the Van Dwellers' Association was in disarray in 1903 it was donations from the roundabout proprietors which contributed to the increase in its finances. Many of the members of the Roundabout Proprietors' Union gave the Association a day's takings to contribute to its parliamentary fund.<sup>143</sup>

One of the reasons for the Guild's eventual dominance over the rival organisations on the fairground was the presence of Thomas Horne as the secretary and the emphasis he placed from the start on the brotherhood of the travelling showmen. When the Van Dwellers' Association became known as the Showmen's Guild in 1911, it gave showpeople a common identity, regardless of the power and prestige they had within the society. To outsiders they were all showpeople, united, bound by the idea of belonging to the fairground fraternity. Despite allegiances amongst the showpeople being split between the different societies, they all perceived themselves to be representing the fairground community. Membership of the rival organisations such as

the stallholder and lessee societies was dependent on the social strata of fairground society from which a showperson came. Membership of the Guild was purely on the basis of birth, or in those early days conditional on one's occupation being that of a travelling showman.

Therefore the Guild's main distinction and the reason for its eventual success was that it was not concerned exclusively with the internal domestic issues that arose on the fairground. After an initial mistake in 1906 when the organisation failed to support Albert Holland in his court action against Bolton Corporation, the Guild extended its fight from the national to the local level.<sup>144</sup> The result of this was that its primary concern was to fight anything that adversely affected the travelling amusement business. It was this national outlook rather than the local position taken by the other organisations that led to its dominance over its rivals. Further details of the legislative battles fought by the Guild on both national and local levels are presented in full in the following chapter.

By 1908 the Showmen's Guild was fighting the resurrection of the Moveable Dwellings Bill and a petition to abolish Mitcham Fair. Regional branches of the organisation were formed in 1907 and the areas were divided into London, Manchester and Liverpool, Leeds and Bradford, Birmingham, Wales and finally Scotland.<sup>145</sup> Working hand in hand with the Guild, the dominant position of this new economic elite was reflected in the organisation of the Showmen's Guild. In less than two decades since the defeat of the original Moveable Dwellings Bill, the travelling showpeople had changed:

*They were no longer the fly-by-night vagrants of the first part of the century ... They began to consider that they were respectable members of society, businessmen with integrity, money in the bank, employees and a good name to protect.*<sup>146</sup>

### Conclusion.

In summary it can be seen that the period leading up to the formation of the Showmen's Guild and the introduction of mechanised rides witnessed the greatest changes in the traditional society of the travelling showpeople. Thomas Frost, writing in 1874, had overlooked the impact which mechanisation would have on the community when in *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs* he prophesied:

*What need then, of fairs, and shows? The nation has outgrown them, and fairs are as dead as the generations which they have delighted, and the last showman will soon be as great a curiosity as the dodo.*<sup>147</sup>

The inaccuracy of this prediction can be seen in that more than a hundred years later over 250 fairs take place every weekend, from Easter through to November, in the United Kingdom.<sup>148</sup> The showman whose fate seemed to be linked to that other great curiosity, the dodo, not only has a Guild which fights for his interests, but has also fought successfully throughout the century for showpeople to be recognised as a distinct social and economic group. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Acts of Parliament safeguarding and protecting the rights of showpeople to live in the way to which they were born have been passed by successive governments.<sup>149</sup> Fairs still open successfully on traditional sites all over the country, and events such as the Goose Fair at Nottingham and Hull Fair both continue to grow in size and popularity every year. From the 1880s onwards travelling showpeople diversified from the travelling communities of the time until they emerged as a separate and economic group within the travelling fraternities. As a community, their culture underwent changes not only in the working environment, but also on the social and domestic front. They perceived themselves as an autonomous cultural and economic group, with a traditional way of living which was different from those of other Travellers. The transition from Travellers or hawkers in the early part of the nineteenth century to respectable showpeople at the beginning of the twentieth century forms the necessary background to investigate how such changes resulted in the present day structure of fairground

society.

*It was the First World War which forced the industry to come to grips with its problems and to recognise the changes which had taken place.*<sup>150</sup>

As previously stated, three case studies have been chosen in order to analyse how the changes that occurred in the traditional society in the late 1880s have shaped the development of fairground community. Therefore, the relationship between showpeople and other Travellers, the role of women in the community, and the use of language will now be examined in detail in the following sections of the study.

Notes.

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5. Birkett, p. 13.
6. Thomas Murphy, *History of The Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939* (Oldham: *World's Fair*, 1940), p. 5.
7. T. F. Dexter *The Pagan Origin of Fairs* (Perranporth: New Knowledge Press, 1930).
8. John Griffith, 'The May or Gorsedd Year in English and Welsh Fairs', *Nature*, 5th September, 1907, cited in William Addison, *English Fairs and Markets* (London: Batsford, 1953), p. 8.
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14. Rev. N. F. Hulbert, 'A Survey of Somerset Fairs', *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 82 (1936), 83-159.
15. Peter Wilkes, *The Great Nottingham Goose Fair* (Burton-Upon-Trent: Trent Valley Publications, 1989), p. 9.
16. Sawyer, p. 153.
17. Cornelius Walford, *Fairs Past and Present: A Study in the History of Commerce* (London: Elliot Stock, 1883; repr. New York: Augustus. M. Kelley, 1968), p. 13.
18. Mrs. O. S. Watkins, 'The Mediaeval Market and Fair in England and Wales', *Y Cymmrodor*, 25 (1915), 21-



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  20. Ellen Wedemeyer Moore, *The Fairs of Medieval Europe: An Introductory Study* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1985).
  21. Wilkes, *Nottingham Goose Fair*, p. 9.
  22. Addison, p. 32
  23. See Walford, pp. 58-161, for a history of Sturbridge Fair from the twelfth to the eighteen centuries.
  24. Addison, pp. 47-48.
  25. Moore, p. 222.
  26. Brian Jewell, *Fairs and Revels* (Tunbridge Wells: Midas Books, 1976), p. 91.
  27. Dallas, p. 5.
  28. Morley, p. 289.
  29. Walford, p. 229.
  30. Sylvia Rosenfield, *The Theatre of The London Fairs in The 18th Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). For further information on Puppet theatres, see John McCormick, 'Puppets in the Streets and Fairgrounds of Nineteenth-Century France', *Maske Und Kothurn: Internationale Beitrage zur Theaterwissenschaft*, 33 (1987), 143-149, and John Phillips, 'D'Arc's In Dublin', *Theatre Notebook*, 43, 1 (1994), 19-35.
  31. See Morley, pp. 145-181, for a full account of the fair during the time of Ben Jonson.
  32. Morley, p. 402.
  33. Rosenfield, p.
  34. Ibid., p. 52.
  35. Addison, p. 51-52.
  36. Ibid.
  37. Richard Harper, *Bartholomew Faire! or Variety of fancies, where you may find a faire of wares and all to please your mind*. (Printed for Richard Harper, Bible and Harpe, Smithfield, 1641). See Morley, pp. 185-189, for an edited version but full details can be found in the National Fairground Archive.
  38. Ibid.
  39. Dallas, p. 8.
  40. Ibid.
  41. Anthony C. Raper, *Weyhill Fair, The Greatest Fair in the Kingdom* (Buckingham: Barracuda Books, 1988).
  42. John Catt, *Northern Hiring Fairs* (Chorley: Countryside Publications, 1986), p. 60.
  43. McCutcheon, pp. 179-183.
  44. Enid Porter, 'The History of the Midsummer Fair in Cambridge', *Cambridgeshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough Life*, (June, 1969), 24-26 (p. 25).
  45. Wilkes, *Nottingham Goose Fair*, p. 15.
  46. Raper, quoted from the *Edinburgh Gazette* for 1947, p.3.
  47. Dallas, p. 8
  48. Weedon, and Ward, p. 119

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50. Morley, p. 486.
51. Frost, *The Old Showmen*, p. 307.
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54. Edward Henry Bostock, *Menageries, Circuses and Theatres* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1927; new edn. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), p. 4
55. Sanger, p. 29.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.
57. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (London: 1826), cited in Raper, p. 63
58. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
60. Richard Iliffe and Wilfred Baguley, *Victorian Nottingham. A Story in Pictures* (Nottingham: The Nottingham Historical Film Unit, 1971).
61. Jewell, p. 10.
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64. Sanger, p. 210.
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68. The Metropolitan Fairs Act 1868,
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71. Steven Smith, and Kevin Scrivens, *Hull Fair: An Illustrated History* (Beverley: Hutton Press, 1991).
72. Frost, *The Old Showmen*, pp. 376-377.
73. Cunningham, p. 179.
74. Robert J. R. Poole, 'Wakes Holidays and Fairs in the Lancashire Cotton District. c1790-1890' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Lancaster, 1985).
75. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
76. Reid, pp. 125-153.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

78. Reid, p. 146.
79. Cunningham, p. 179.
80. Walton and Poole, pp. 100-124.
81. Cunningham, p. 163.
82. Freda Allen and N. Williams, *Pat Collins, King of Showmen* (Wolverhampton: Uralia Press, 1991).
83. *Halifax Guardian*, 27th June 1863.
84. See Fried, pp. 4-19.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
86. *Halifax Guardian*, 27th June, 1863.
87. Further information on the latest research into this subject can be found by consulting Stephen Smith, *History of the Fairground Ride*, on the National Fairground Archive, World Wide Web pages: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~nfa/history/rides>.
88. Braithwaite, *Fairground Architecture*, p. 37.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-43.
90. See glossary for definition of technical terms used by the showpeople.
91. Weedon and Ward, p. 10.
92. David Braithwaite, *Savage of King's Lynn: Inventor of machines and merry-go-rounds* (Cambridge: Patrick Stephens, 1975), p. 75.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
94. See glossary under *Switchback*. According to Braithwaite, *Savage of King's Lynn*, the switchback was a circular ride approximately forty feet in diameter, two hills and two valleys, with eight cars driven round the track.
95. Cunningham, p. 170.
96. Dallas, p. 22.
97. Dallas, p. 23.
98. Cunningham, p. 163.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
100. See Acton, *Gypsy Politics* and Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
102. Norman Dodds, *Gypsies, Didikois and other Travellers* (London: Johnson Publications, 1966).
103. Alan E. Jones, *Yorkshire Gypsy Fairs, Customs and Caravans* (Beverley: Hutton Press, 1986).
104. George Smith, *Gipsy Life: Being an Account of our Gipsies and their Children, with Suggestions for their Improvement* (London: Haughton and Co., 1880), p. 193.
105. Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, p. 136.
106. George Smith, *Our Canal Population: A Cry for the Boat Cabins, with Remedy*, new edn with supplement (London: Haughton and Co., 1878). See also Mayall *Gypsy-travellers*, for full bibliographical details of George Smith's publications.
107. See Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, pp. 12-18, for full details of this proposed legislation.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

109. Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, p. 142.
110. Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p.28.
111. Miss Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW1, p. 10.
112. Letter from Reverend Thomas Horne, (1891), Chaplain and General Secretary of the U.K.S.V.D.P.A., quoted in Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 24.
113. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 78.
114. Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 27.
115. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
117. *Ibid.*, loc. cit.
118. Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, p. 143.
119. Letter from Reverend Thomas Horne, (1891), loc. cit.
120. See Appendix 2 for lists of Acts that include special Clauses or exemptions for Showpeople, including the new Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.
121. Certificates of registration of birth and death certificate relating to the Williams family are in the possession of Miss Celine Williams.
122. *The Showmen's Year Book 1940*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1940).
123. Thomas Horne, 'British Shows and Showmen', in *The Showmen's Year Book 1906*, ed. by Thomas Horne (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1906), pp. 39-47.
124. The Showmen's World column in *The Era* from 1899 onwards contains a weekly account of some of the fairs held throughout the country and a list of the showpeople who attended such events. Later evidence can be found in the *World's Fair* from 1906 onwards.
125. Mrs Hannah Waddington's account books, 1898-1908. National Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield.
126. Weedon and Ward, p. 7.
127. Toulmin, 'Telling the Tale', 219-239.
128. See John Barnes, *The Beginnings of The Cinema in England* (London: David and Charles, 1976), for further details.
129. *The King's Lynn Advertiser*, February 15th 1897.
130. Toulmin, 'Telling the Tale', p. 219. See also Mervyn Heard, *Pepper's Ghost - An Introduction* (London: The Projection Box, 1996), p. i-iv, for a brief account of the Ghost show.
131. See Vanessa Toulmin, 'Moving Picture Pioneers', *The Fairground Mercury*, 19, no. 3 (1996), 9-15, for a brief history of the life of Randall Williams. Celine Williams, the great granddaughter of Randall Williams, has the original agreement between Randall Williams and Fowlers dated 1896 which shows that Randall Williams had electric lights on his show, instead of the naphtha lamps that the other showmen were using.
132. Stephen Peart, *The Picture House in East Anglia*

- (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1980), p. 10.
133. Toulmin, 'Telling the Tale', p. 226.
  134. Ibid., and see Vanessa Toulmin, 'Travelling Shows and the First Static Cinemas', *Picture House*, 21 (1996), 5-12.
  135. Vanessa Toulmin, 'The Fairground Bioscope', in *In the Kingdom of Shadows: A Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. by Colin Harding and Simon Popple (London: Cygnus Publications, 1996), pp. 191-194.
  136. See Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, pp. 25-27, for list of original committee members.
  137. Ibid., p. 46.
  138. See Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 67; and also Thomas Horne, *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain: The Story of its Rise and Progress* (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1911).
  139. *The Era*, 23rd May, 1903; see also, Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, pp. 54-55.
  140. Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 45.
  141. Ibid.
  142. The letters of condolence sent by both the Guild and the Roundabout Proprietors on the death of George Green in 1915 share the same address in London, are both signed by Thomas Horne and Pat Collins, who as well as being the Warden of the Guild, was also Vice-President of the Roundabout Proprietors' Union.
  143. Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 55.
  144. Dallas, p. 28; see also *World's Fair*, 20th June 1906, p. 1.
  145. Murphy, *Showmen's' Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 67.
  146. Dallas, p. 27.
  147. Frost, *The Old Showmen*, p. 377.
  148. Frederick C. Roope, "Come To The Fair!" *The Story of British Fairgrounds and the Showmen who attend them* (London: Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1961).
  149. For a full list of these see Appendix 2.
  150. Dallas, p. 31.

## Chapter 4.

### Showpeople, Travellers and Flatties.

*The truth is that we're people like everybody else but we're a different-speaking people with our own traditions and our own way of life, and this is the way we should be treated ... not like dirt or drop-outs from the settled community.<sup>1</sup>*



Figure 4. Members of the Hives Family, c. 1900s.

## Chapter 4.

### Showpeople, Travellers and Flatties.

#### 1. Introduction.

The extract on the previous page, is taken from Nan Joyce's autobiographical account of her life as a Traveller in Ireland, but it could be easily applied to travelling society as a whole. Many of the factors to be examined in this study can be found in the quotation from Nan Joyce's life history, in that Travellers are a 'different-speaking people,' with their own traditions, and their own way of life. In order to provide a more detailed commentary on the development of showland society and the way it is perceived, a representative sample of interviews have been conducted with showpeople from the North of England. The methodology and factors involving the selection of the data has been presented in chapter 2 and a full list of the interviewees, complete with biographical information can be found in Appendix 1.

1.1. No serious academic study of showpeople as a community has yet been conducted, and therefore the methodology used for this chapter is based on the work undertaken by academics working in the field of anthropology, and in particular, the study of ethnic and cultural minorities. The main source of material on travelling people in the United Kingdom and Ireland can be found in the work of Judith Okely,<sup>2</sup> Thomas Acton,<sup>3</sup> and David Mayall,<sup>4</sup> amongst others. For the purpose of this study each of their differing approaches will be examined. However, the methodology they employed will only be applied in the context of how their material relates to the issues pertinent to travelling showpeople. The main point of reference for these publications is the procedure the writers have used when examining the structure of travelling society, and the way in which particular reference groups develop and interact. With the exception of the work of Thomas Acton and David Mayall, on the whole showpeople are not examined in these studies. This could be for a variety of reasons, including the lack of original source material, the closed nature of the fairground community, and the perceived hostility

between showpeople and Traveller-Gypsies. However, the writers' emphasis on Travellers as an ethnic group and the showpeople's belief in their autonomy which they have pursued through exemption from legislation affecting Traveller-Gypsies, may be the main reason for the lack of academic research into showpeople as a community. Therefore, although the pertinent details will be presented below, the sources consulted are important only as a tool with which to evaluate the development of showland society.

1.2. Professor Judith Okely wrote in 1994 that:

*Studying the wider context of the dominant or majority society is crucial when focusing on a minority group, for the latter's experience and beliefs are always in part formed by the need to respond to the dominant society.<sup>6</sup>*

In order to evaluate travelling showpeople and how they respond to the wider travelling or non-travelling society in which they operate, the following methodology presented by Judith Okely in her paper on Irish Travellers will be utilised and adapted for this study:

*When presenting an anthropological perspective on Travellers, I should include: first, the inside views and experiences of the Travellers themselves; second, the views and experiences of non-Travellers - both powerful decision makers and the mass of housedwellers with particular emphasis on their attitudes to and relations with Travellers; third, the total context of Traveller - non-Traveller relations, whose aspects change according to economic circumstances, national or international political pressures and prevailing ideologies.<sup>7</sup>*

Continuing the approach set out by Okely in 1994, the material presented in this study draws on a variety of sources, including published or written accounts of Travellers, the works of academics in the fields of folklore, oral history, anthropology and history, and most importantly first hand empirical material drawn from my own research on travelling fairs. Nevertheless, one particular aspect of the methodology used in this study differs from Okely and Acton, for example, in that the main bulk of the material is culled as a result of insider knowledge gained from growing up and working on fairgrounds throughout the United Kingdom.

1.3. The following chapter is divided into three principal sections and seeks to place showpeople in the wider context of travelling and settled society. For the



purpose of this study the approach introduced by Okely has been adapted in the following ways:

- (i) Section 2 explores showpeople in the context of the travelling fraternity as a whole.
- (ii) Section 3 evaluates how they are perceived by the general public.
- (iii) Section 4 investigates how fairground society is organised by examining the role and development of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

## **2. Showpeople and other Travellers.**

*I sent my daughter when she was five to the local school at Mount Sorrel, she'd only been there a few days and she came back and she said "Daddy, the new girl that's started with me that I sit next to at school asked me if I was a Gypsy." So you explain to your children what a Gypsy is and what feelings people have got about them, and then my daughter sort of resented all the other children that was in the school that thought she was a Gypsy.<sup>8</sup>*

Among settled communities there is a tendency to associate anyone who uses a caravan as a home rather than a leisure pursuit as a Traveller or Gypsy. This tendency reflects a total disregard for the myriad of professional and ethnic groups travelling in the United Kingdom who all live in caravans, or waggons as travelling people call them. This section of the study hopes to set into context the variety of groups who are referred to as Travellers, and places showpeople in the context of the wider travelling fraternity.

2.1. The problems of identifying and labelling the minorities who travel in the United Kingdom are complex and these issues have preoccupied scholars working in this field since the founding of the Gypsy Lore Society in 1888.<sup>9</sup> The questions of ethnicity and identity posed by the Gypsy Lore Society in 1888 still continues in the work of Thomas Acton and others. A recent publication by the Department of the Environment, *Counting Gypsies*, (1991) provides a list of the types of Travellers which their inspectors found on all types of caravan sites. It includes *Irish Travellers, non-local Gypsies, New Age Travellers, non-Gypsy caravan dwellers,*

*Gypsies on authorised sites who do not travel and Gypsies on fairground sites.*

However, the editors of the report question whether Gypsies are found on fairgrounds and they write:

*One officer reported including Gypsies on fairground sites but the question may have been interpreted as referring to travelling showmen, who are not covered by the Act.<sup>10</sup>*

The Act in question is the recently repealed Caravan Sites Act of 1968. In this legislation, travelling showpeople were granted a continuation of the exemption attained in the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act of 1960, a clause which was seen as a victory by the officers of the Showmen's Guild at the time:

*A site licence shall not be required for the use of the land as a caravan site by a travelling showman, and who is travelling for the purpose of his business or who has taken up winter quarters on that land.<sup>11</sup>*

This legislative distinction was one of many in a long list of parliamentary and local government bills that the Showmen's Guild has fought since its formation in 1889.<sup>12</sup>

Although David Mayall argues over the effectiveness of the showmen's campaign against the Moveable Dwellings Bill in 1889, and believes other factors were responsible for its eventual defeat in the Houses of Parliament, he emphasises that the showmen's concern was for an exemption and not necessarily the defeating of the Bill:

*The Association was an organisation representing travelling showmen rather than van dwellers generally and great efforts were made to disassociate themselves from the broader Gypsy and van-dwelling population. Their concern was based primarily on self-interest, fearing that excessive regulations would seriously threaten their livelihood and profits. If they could be exempted from the Bill's provisions then they were prepared to abandon their objections.<sup>13</sup>*

The point made by Mayall is a pertinent one and is also raised in Thomas Acton's research.<sup>14</sup> This was the only time that showpeople fought against the passing of a Bill aimed at travelling people as a whole; from then onwards their main motive was exemption rather than prevention. This is demonstrated in the campaign mounted by the Guild in 1908, in which they successfully challenged the Middlesex County Council Bill.<sup>15</sup> Clause 31 of this bill inflicted a penalty on any van dweller, Gypsy etc, if they camped within a hundred yards of a permanent structure. The

showmen campaigned for and won an important exemption from this clause:

*This section shall not apply to any person dwelling in a tent or van or other similar structures who is a roundabout proprietor or showman or stallholder - not being a pedlar or hawker; nor to any owner or lessee or other persons' who suffers any land to be occupied by such persons as aforesaid.*<sup>16</sup>

The significance of the victory must not be underestimated; from 1908 the Showmen's Guild was perceived to be a separate legislative group, not only locally but also on a national level. The importance of this ruling is emphasised by David Mayall in *English Gypsies and State Policies*, when he writes:

*This Act is particularly significant in that it was the first time Parliament had given legislative recognition to the different types of traveller living in tents and vans by exempting from its provisions owners of vans attending fairs. The showmen's lobby had, with this exemption, achieved an important victory.*<sup>17</sup>

2.3. The history of showmen and Traveller relations in terms of academic writing is limited from this period onwards. Because the showpeople continued to receive a number of exemptions from legislation affecting travelling people, their experience as a community is scarcely mentioned by Mayall and others, as Acton points out:

*This policy of exemption rather than resisting outright meant that the showman militancy no longer extended a protective umbrella over the rest of the travelling community. All that delayed legislation now was that, the colour and passion having gone out of the question, reforming Gypsies had a low parliamentary authority.*<sup>18</sup>

The relations between showpeople and Gypsies became strained and writers such as Acton and Mayall have questioned the ambiguous attitudes showpeople have towards Traveller-Gypsies. Although Acton claims that in the 1970s there were more Romany members in the Guild than in other Gypsy organisations,<sup>19</sup> the Guild itself would be keen to emphasise its autonomy from Gypsies and other Travellers:

*For many years we have been trying to involve a clause that would effectively abate the nuisance and anger to the public health of the squatter and Gypsy settlement and yet be free from harm to the business of the travelling showman.*<sup>20</sup>

2.4. The historical connection between some of the original founders of the Guild and other Victorian Travellers is acknowledged through the language and material culture and especially in the phrase *dordy cousin* = Gypsies, and reflects the link between the two communities. Since 1889, however, showpeople and

Gypsies have become separate in terms of language, material culture and most importantly by 1908, through government legislation:

*As a result of the Moveable Dwellings Bill controversy, their interests and organisation was severed from those of other Travellers, and assumed somewhat ambiguous attitudes to Romani culture ... Moreover, the schism between the showmen and other Travellers in a sense decapitated the travelling community as a whole and separated from it Gypsies who might otherwise have led a more specific and openly pro-Gypsy movement.<sup>21</sup>*

2.5. A summary of the legislation affecting showpeople can be found in Appendix 2. The rest of this section of the study will now concentrate on how showpeople perceive and maintain group membership. Based on the work of Thomas Acton in *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, the following method of identifying Travellers will be applied to the groups currently travelling. The definitions applied to travelling people are based on information gleaned during fieldwork interviews, details of which can be found in Appendix 1. Any contradictions that occur between the material compiled from the fieldwork and the definitions provided by Acton and others will be examined in the individual sections. These categories are not in any way meant to be pejorative and are in some ways based on the classification found in the work of Thomas Acton in 1974,<sup>22</sup> May McCann et al. in *Irish Travellers* (1994),<sup>23</sup> and the titles published by the Department of the Environment in 1991 on Traveller-Gypsies and site policies.<sup>24</sup> The later part of this section introduces the notion of Traveller languages and demonstrates how the schism that occurred in 1889 between showpeople and the rest of the travelling fraternity gradually began to be reflected in the material culture of the separate communities.

## 2.6. Differing Terms for Travelling Groups Found Amongst Showpeople.

Hazel Green's 1991 report, *Counting Gypsies*, defines a variety of different words for Travellers, and Thomas Acton, writing in 1974, includes eighteen distinct terms such as *Poshrat*, *Mugger*, *Potter*, *Didecoy*, *Traveller* etc.<sup>25</sup> However, when these are compared with the terminology used by travelling showpeople interviewed for

the present study and in the *World's Fair*, only ten are found and of these the following seven are commonly used: *Gypsy*, *Didecoy*, *Pikey*, *Tinker*, *Romany*, *Traveller*, and *Showman*. The labels that are rarely applied include *Potter*, *Mumper* and *Needies*. However, in the Morecambe area the common name for a Traveller was *Potter* and their site was known locally as Potters Field, but I have never found this used within fairground society. Moreover, descriptions such as *Hawker* or *New Age Traveller* for example, which are widely found, are not listed by Acton.<sup>26</sup> Acton's failure to list New Age Travellers is due in part to the fact that as a body they were not accorded any kind of group identity until the late 1980s, but they are listed in the Department of the Environment reports published in 1991. Although Acton was concentrating on the issues of ethnic diversity perceived by both *Gorgios*<sup>27</sup> and Gypsies, these individual terms will be examined in relation to the perceptions presented by showpeople collected during fieldwork for the present study. The term *Hawker* is widely used by travelling showpeople to describe the economic activities of a particular group of Traveller-Gypsies and as such it has been included in the listing below. Therefore, if we take the categories found in the work of Thomas Acton and use only those terms found in the fieldwork transcripts or which are part of my own personal usage they can be divided into the following reference groups:

### ***Romany/Gypsy.***

The categories listed by Thomas Acton place *Gypsy* and *Romany* under separate headings, *Gypsy* being the word generally used by non-Travellers and *Romany* the preferred term employed by insiders within the community.<sup>28</sup> Within the fairground community the usage of *Romany* and *Gypsy* is interchangeable and, in keeping with other Travellers, showpeople still maintain the notion of a true *Romany*. Although Acton,<sup>29</sup> and Mayall,<sup>30</sup> for example, have shown that historically this was a concept used to maintain the idea of a scapegoat for other Travellers, and one that does not fit in with the current ethnographic evidence, the

idea of the true *Romany* is still a claim widely held amongst travelling showpeople. It is also employed, for example, by fortune tellers who emphasise the authenticity of their professional status by claiming in their advertisements that they are the son or daughter of a genuine *Romany*.<sup>31</sup> When interviewed, Mrs E. Francis supplied the following definition:

*Now the aristocratic Gypsy, the true Romany, are a very clean people ... a lot better class of person than the Pikeys that people associate them with ... we knew the Romanies you see ... Arthur could speak Romany you see he learnt it when he was travelling in Lincoln, with his father.*<sup>32</sup>

Although showpeople as a whole would use these labels to describe an English Gypsy as opposed to a European Gypsy, the issues raised by academics working in the field of Traveller history are pertinent. Acton believes that the term *Romany* is the most common form of self-identification used by Traveller-Gypsies and is often applied, as with the showpeople, as a means of demarcating group membership.<sup>33</sup> This is found in particular when referring to the Irish Travellers who are not classed as either real *Romanies* or *Gypsies* by many English Travellers and showpeople alike:

*We do not find Travellers linked to Ireland or Scotland calling themselves Gypsies unless they claim some connection with English Traveller/Gypsies ... It appears to be part of the ideology of both the minority group and the dominant sedentary society, whether in Ireland or Britain that Gypsies are not Irish.*<sup>34</sup>

Showpeople are also keen to emphasise this distinction and Frances Brown in *Fairfield Folk* writes of an incident when one of her ancestors was charged with aggravated assault and had to appear at the local magistrates court:

*Harelip was gratified to hear himself officially described as a "steam roundabout proprietor" in his court appearances. He paid a fine for two aggravated assaults in Dorking in 1898 without demur, but when he came before magistrates in Worthing the following year, his indignation knew no bounds. A "Gypsy"? Had he heard himself described as a Gypsy.*<sup>35</sup>

Amongst travelling showpeople, the labels *Gypsy* or *Romany* are rarely used in a negative sense and they are usually found in the fieldwork transcripts when the showperson interviewed is explaining the differences between the two communities. Whilst living and travelling in Wales with my family I often heard my relations emphasising this in the following way:

*If I was a Gypsy I would be proud to be called one, but I'm not, it says "travelling showman" on my licence and on my birth certificate and that's what I am, a travelling showman, born and bred.*<sup>36</sup>

### ***Didecoy.***

*This is the most difficult and interesting word considered here; the path to its history is much obscured with myth and special pleading.*<sup>37</sup>

Thomas Acton believes that of all the terms used and applied to travelling people, *Didecoy* is the most difficult to interpret. The connotations associated with its usage are variable and dependent on the locality where it is found, and the people who use it. For example, terms of reference for members of the travelling community in Doncaster and Thorne are *Giddekite*, *Gidicai*, *Gidies* or *Kayotes* and appear to be mixture of Gypsy and *Didecoy*.<sup>38</sup> Within the settled community, the meaning of *Didecoy* is interchangeable with *Gypsy* or *Gypo*, and is often a term of abuse. However, among travelling people its significance is varied and often contradictory. Norman Dodd, in *Gypsies, Didekois and Other Travellers*, states confidently that "*Didekois are half-castes - part gypsy*",<sup>39</sup> and this is a view that Judith Okely often encountered during her fieldwork:

*In an internal dispute or when wishing to ingratiate themselves with Gorgio visitors, one group of Gypsies might denigrate their rivals by calling them "Didekois", meaning half-breeds.*

However, when she questioned her informants about the meaning of this word the definitions she encountered were often contradictory, and she writes:

*One Traveller indicated to me: Didekois sometimes means the tent dwellers or horse or trap people, but it's often used for any Traveller. It means the same thing as a Traveller.*<sup>40</sup>

The interpretation given to Judith Okely that *Didekois* are horse dealers is similar to that found on the fairground. Moreover, the word *Didedoy* or *diddy* can be found amongst showpeople as a means of describing what they perceive as a traditional Romany horse dealer as opposed to an Irish Traveller:

*Well it's all mixed up our backslang was all mixed up, shooshi in diddy language is a rabbit.*<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, within fairground society, the term *Didecoy* was used as a general

description for Gypsies who were primarily traditional in their way of life, and attended the horse fairs such as Appleby, Lee Gap and Yarm, in Yorkshire, and was not seen to be any way derogatory.

### *Tinker/Irish Traveller.*

The term *Tinker* is generally found in relation to *Irish Travellers*, and not commonly used by showpeople. In my experience, the term *Tinker* is common amongst second generation Irish families and its usage is similar to that of "Gypo"<sup>42</sup> amongst English people. Although Thomas Acton designates it as an occupational term, like myself he stresses that *Tinker* has a particular odium associated with it, especially, with reference to the West Midlands an area with a large Irish immigrant population. Following the increase in immigration of itinerants from Ireland since the 1950s onwards, the *Tinker* or *Irish Traveller* has replaced the didecoy as the scapegoat for public perceptions of travelling people. Thomas Acton writes:

*The time at which the didicai stereotype was losing its credibility was precisely the unsettled period after the Irish immigration. One can see how local authorities cast about for a new scapegoat.*<sup>43</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Irish Travellers became perceived as an inferior group, blamed for the increase in public hostility towards Travellers by the English Travellers and used by local authorities to justify their policy of discrimination towards itinerant communities. Acton believes this was yet another example of the demarcating of travelling society into separate groups as a means of suppressing the community as a whole and he writes that the local authorities:

*have lifted from themselves the reproach of having sought to suppress an ethnic group by emphasising that they had nothing against the "true" Gypsy - while at the same time defining the true Gypsy so that he has none of the irritating Gypsy characteristics that they wish to eliminate.*<sup>44</sup>

In Ireland, to describe someone as a *Tinker* was not only a reflection on their occupation but was also the common term for an itinerant. The problems which confronted travelling people in Ireland have been covered in detail by writers such as Sharon Bohn Gmelch, and George Gmelch, in their doctoral studies,<sup>45</sup> and more recently with the publication in 1995 of Jim Mac Laughlin's *Travellers and Ireland:*



*Whose Country, Whose History?*, and are not central to this study.<sup>46</sup> However, the labels *Tinker* in Ireland, or *Irish Traveller* in England, have similar connotations to that of *Gypo*, and as such the Irish Travellers, like their counterparts living in the United Kingdom, commonly refer to themselves as Travellers.<sup>47</sup> Amongst showpeople and Traveller-Gypsies in the United Kingdom, Irish Travellers are designated as having a lower status in the community and although writers such as Acton and Mayall insist that the concept of racial purity amongst Travellers is historically inaccurate and does not reflect the current ethnographic evidence, the classification of Travellers by local authorities, for example, unfortunately reflects the underlying attitudes held by the Traveller community as a whole. This is demonstrated by the reaction of the English Travellers in Morecambe last year after a large number of Irish Travellers visited the town and, according to the local newspaper, *The Visitor*, left "a trail of damage, crime and fear in their wake." A letter from one of the local Travellers was published in *The Visitor* and included the following sentiments:

*"We are English travelling people, born and bred in the town. We have houses in Morecambe but still travel. I was born here and so were my husband and children. There are a lot of families in Morecambe who are travelling people who have been disgusted at what has happened." She claimed those responsible for the trouble were on their way back to Ireland.*<sup>48</sup>

However, Traveller-Gypsies and Showpeople do not use either *Tinker* or *Irish Traveller* to describe this group; instead they are referred to as *Pikeys*, implying that these people are of a lower status and not part of their society.

### ***Travellers.***

Thomas Acton writes that the term *Travellers*:

*Is the most widely used and inclusive word of self- and group identification amongst Gypsies in England and Wales.*<sup>49</sup>

When he made this statement in 1974 this would have been a fairly accurate assessment and remained so during the 1970s and 1980s. However, over the past decade there has been a change in emphasis throughout the travelling community in general and within showland society in particular. As a child on the fairground I

was aware that the term Traveller was the most common form of identification amongst the travelling showpeople, and indeed it is still widely used. An example of the inclusive use of this term as a means of identification occurred when I was initially collecting the data. Before arranging an interview I would disclose the fact that I was a Traveller, as this was a means of informing my contacts that I was an insider within the community. This approach was generally successful and I would usually be admitted into their living van to arrange an interview.<sup>50</sup> However, with the rise of the New Age Travellers and the introduction of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 there has been a change in the meaning and use of the term. Where once the different travelling communities would have described themselves on a general level as *Travellers*,<sup>51</sup> they have recently reverted to identifying themselves as Gypsies, Romanies or in the case of the fairground community; travelling showpeople. This is partly due to the connotations associated with the term *Traveller* by the media and general public at large. Celine Williams recalled an occasion during a committee meeting of the Yorkshire Section of the Showmen's Guild in 1993, at a time when the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill had been discussed in Parliament, that a member of the committee rebuked one of his fellow showmen for using the term *Traveller* as a form of identity, and insisted that in order to avoid association with the New Age Travellers, members of the Section should always refer to themselves as travelling showpeople.<sup>52</sup> The consequences of this new Act will be discussed later, but although it has ramifications for Gypsies and other Travellers, the legislation affecting showpeople is unchanged.

### *Hawkers.*

This term is not found in Thomas Acton's categories and writers such as Barbara Adams and David Smith generally use it to describe the economic activities of Traveller-Gypsies, in particular the women:

*The wives of the wealthy made a major contribution in hawking and fortune telling if not agricultural.*<sup>53</sup>

This is a nineteenth century term for Travellers and one found on birth certificates held in the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield. Further information regarding the use of this term on the fairground can be found in the glossary in Chapter 6. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *Hawker* as:

*a man who goes from place to place selling his goods, or who cries them in the street, in modern use technically distinguished from pedlar.*

On the birth certificate of Randall Williams, a prominent Victorian showman, the term *Hawker* appears under father's occupation.<sup>54</sup> This is quite often the case with the certificates of birth and death lodged within family collections in the National Fairground Archive. After 1889, the designation "travelling showman" appeared on these certificates and on the death certificate for Randall Williams in 1898, this was given as the occupation of the deceased.<sup>55</sup> It is used more commonly to denote a form of occupation and is generally applied when describing activities such as hawking carpets, gold or scrap metal. Amongst Travellers, it is rarely found as a form of abuse, but it was used by the contributors in the early journals of The Gypsy Lore Society as a means of distinguishing the *Hawker* from the "genuine" Romany Traveller. Mrs E. Francis when interviewed described a Traveller she knew in the following way:

*I got talking to this Romany mush ...one of the traders, he sold carpets you see, a carpet hawker.*<sup>56</sup>

### ***Pikey.***

Eric Partridge, in *A Dictionary of The Underworld*,<sup>57</sup> describes a *pikey* as a tramp or Gypsy. A fuller definition of this term, is given in the glossary of language on the fairground in Chapter 6. Amongst the wider travelling community, the meaning and significance varies from region to region, and is largely dependent on whether the user is a Traveller-Gypsy or a travelling showperson. It is generally used as a term of abuse amongst the travelling communities, and implies low status and unhygienic conduct. To refer to a Traveller from any of the cultural or ethnic groups as a *Pikey* is to tender a great insult. It is often applied to Irish Travellers,

who are generally blamed for the negative reaction that Travellers as a whole face in the United Kingdom. Thomas Acton believes that *Pikey* is seldom used, and is a term he himself has never heard in conversation.<sup>58</sup> However, without exception I have found this term to be in use amongst all the different Travellers within my extended family circle, and it is very common on the fairgrounds. When interviewed about the different groups travelling, Mrs. E. Francis remarked:

*Now the aristocratic Gypsy, the true Romany, are a very clean people ... a lot better class of person than the Pikeys that people associate them with.*<sup>59</sup>

When discussing this term with Sandra Wright, a showwoman from the Yorkshire Section of the Guild,<sup>60</sup> the observation was made that although this was a very old term, its usage is more widespread in England since the emergence of the Irish Travellers in the 1960s.<sup>61</sup> Before their arrival, the designated term for Traveller-Gypsies amongst showpeople was generally a variation on the word *Didecoi* and was shortened to either *Diddy* or *Did*. However, many of the younger Travellers now use *Pikey* as a generic term for all Traveller-Gypsies.

It is clear that there are presently a variety of groups all travelling in the United Kingdom since at least the nineteenth century who are referred to as Travellers. I will now address the latest group to be identified in this way, the New Age Travellers. They have not been included in the introductory discussion about travelling people, because in historical terms they have no tradition of itinerant living and are a very recent phenomenon.

### ***New Age Travellers.***

*The latest group of travelling people, new age travellers, is one of the hardest to define. New age travellers differ from Romany Gypsies or Irish Travellers in a number of ways: they have a much shorter history; they are not defined as a distinct ethnic group under the Race Relations Act (although some new age travellers have attempted to gain recognition as an ethnic group as defined in this Act); they do not necessarily follow traditional routes of travel, adult travellers have rarely been born into travelling, though there are increasing numbers of children of new age travellers growing up as travellers.*<sup>62</sup>

This extract taken from a report by the Children's Society published in 1994

succinctly outlines the problems of including New Age Travellers in an introductory study of travelling communities as a whole. However, the issues raised by the emergence of the New Age Travellers and the problems of categorising travelling communities are pertinent to the themes discussed here. The term *New Age Traveller* is commonly used to refer to people who travel in buses, vans and other vehicles, and follow an alternative nomadic lifestyle. In the 1980s they were described as the "Peace Convoy", when the main area of settlement was around or associated with American Army bases at Greenham Common and Haddenham. By the late 1980s they tended to follow the festival season in the United Kingdom and congregated in rural areas to have raves, parties etc. They became widely known as "crusties", an expression which is partly reflective of their code of dress and personal hygiene.<sup>63</sup> However, by 1990, they had begun to realise that there were rules and regulations affecting not only where people could park their vehicle and stay in a area, but more importantly who was allowed to do this. These matters came under the auspices of the Caravan Site Act 1968, and applied to all travelling people with the exception of the travelling showpeople. In order to give greater legal weight to the eviction orders which this new kind of Traveller constantly had to fight, and are still fighting, they began to refer to themselves as *New Age Travellers*, a designation which was largely picked up by the media and the general public. The decision to name themselves Travellers was not purely descriptive of their way of life. They were utilising the fact that according to the recently repealed Caravan Sites Act 1968, a local council had to provide at least a temporary site or transit site for travelling people. Their use of the term "Traveller" caused widespread condemnation, not from the settled communities, but from the travelling society as a whole. The Caravan Site Act 1968 classifies Gypsies in the following way:

*"gipsies" (sic) means persons of nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, but does not include members of an organised group of travelling showmen or of persons engaged in travelling circuses, travelling together as such.*<sup>64</sup>

The emergence of a new nomadic group which became identified as the New Age

Travellers, caused considerable problems as the classification in the original 1968 Act would appear to cover this group. However, many of the Gypsy Site officers employed by local councils throughout the United Kingdom were unhappy with the notion of including New Age Travellers in the recommended count of Gypsies by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in 1991. Hazel Green, the author of *Counting Gypsies*, a report undertaken on behalf of the Department of the Environment, summarises the issues involved in distinguishing or identifying various nomadic groups, and identifies nine different groups to be specified in the census. New Age Travellers were afforded a different identity in the report, partly due to the hostility of the officers and councils towards including them in a count of Gypsies living in their respective areas. It was finally decided to incorporate them on the grounds that they were accorded a different status:

*In order to achieve a consistent count it is essential that the groups to be covered are specified. Therefore a decision about the inclusion of the New Age Travellers must be made. Although they follow a nomadic way of life and would appear to be covered by the definition of a "Gypsy" in the Act, it is clear that their inclusion, without distinction from other groups, will be unacceptable to many districts. We would recommend, therefore, that they are not included in the Gypsy count.<sup>65</sup>*

In this study, Hazel Green acknowledges the problems of unauthorised encampments of New Age Travellers and believes that the coining of the term "Traveller" was in part deliberate in that the New Age Travellers would then receive recognition of their way of life under the 1968 Act:

*It may also be that New Age Travellers "learn" to describe themselves as "Travellers" if they become aware that they are being excluded from site provision.<sup>66</sup>*

Green continues by stating:

*The exclusion of New Age Travellers from the Gypsy count does, however, introduce the concept of an "ethnic" Gypsy into the definition of who is to be covered.<sup>67</sup>*

Although the criteria used for recognising the different groups identified by the report are not listed in it, the author accepts the claims of the officers carrying out the census who:

*believed that in practice there was no difficulty in distinguishing New Age Travellers from Gypsies.<sup>68</sup>*

Although a definition is not included in this report it does incorporate a guide to the type of accommodation New Age Travellers generally use, such as converted lorries, buses or tents. An introduction to how this new group perceive themselves can be found in *Voices of the New Age Nomads: Travellers*, by Richard Lowe and William Shaw, which uses published transcripts of interviews from a variety of informants. These authors state that *New Age Travellers* is the term used to describe:

*the thousands of people who live a semi-nomadic life based loosely around the summer festivals ... Once they were known as the hippie convoy, now they've attracted a richer more pejorative vocabulary: they get called crusties, hedge monkeys, brew crew, soap dodgers.*<sup>69</sup>

The issues that have evolved because of the emergence of the New Age Travellers are complex and although pertinent to the issues of Traveller identity and belonging, they are not central to the primary focus of the present discussion, namely the historical relationship between showpeople and other Travellers. Partly as a result of the increased problems of illegal trespass associated with New Age Travellers the Government introduced the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Section 5 of this Act covers trespass on land and illegal and unauthorised camping, and repeals Part II, and Sections 77 and 78 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968 which covers the provisions of sites by local authorities.<sup>70</sup> The consequences of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 for travelling people as a whole are currently under review and the problems facing Traveller-Gypsies are outlined in Donald Kenrick and Sian Bakewell's *On the Verge: The Gypsies of England*,<sup>71</sup> and in Derek Hawes and Barbara Perez, *The Gypsy and the State*.<sup>72</sup> However, travelling showpeople were not covered either by the original 1968 Act or the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and as such their movements are unaffected.

### ***Showpeople.***

The final group to appear in Acton's listing are travelling showpeople. They are distinguished from other groups purely on occupational grounds, in that they present

travelling fairs, or they are members of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, the trade organisation of the travelling funfair industry. In the past ten years rival organisations have appeared that claim to represent travelling showpeople. These include the Amusement Caterers Equipment Society, (A.C.E.S.), and the Society of Independent Roundabout Proprietors, (S.I.R.P.). However, they account for only a few hundred individuals and cater for the showmen who:

*Specialise in restored or preserved traditional equipment, wooden, hand turned or steam driven swingboats, gallopers and flying chairs etc.*<sup>73</sup>

On the whole, these associations have arisen as a result of the Guild's restricted membership policy and only claim to represent a few hundred individuals largely concerned with the preservation of vintage fairground equipment. Although showpeople maintain their separateness from other Travellers, Acton believes that many of the original founders of the Guild in the 1890s were from Gypsy families:

*seventy years of relative separation and contact with other cultural elements, especially European Gypsies, Yiddish and Italian, have marked the culture of English Gypsies within the Showmen's Guild; and other Gypsies, not in the Showmen's Guild, have had to make their adjustment to this.*<sup>74</sup>

Robert Sexton, in his doctoral thesis on travelling people, also claims that the frequency of "Gypsy" names within the community and the similarity in the use of hygiene rules within the living van, suggest that a large percentage of travelling showpeople are descended from Gypsy families.<sup>75</sup> However, Sexton's work was based on interviews conducted mainly within the South of England and although he attempts to incorporate informants from the North of England, his material must be seen in its regional perspective and is not representative of the fairground community as a whole. When conducting fieldwork within closed communities it is difficult for the outsider to identify cultural traits and anomalies that are apparent to the insider. Sexton's work must therefore also be seen as based on the perceptions of an outsider who was examining the community in order to assess:

*to what extent families of travelling showmen and canal boatmen can be legitimately identified as gypsies, by reference to their history.*<sup>76</sup>

The issues raised by Acton and Sexton will be examined in detail later in the



present study. However, despite the conclusions drawn by academics, showpeople have always emphasised the differences between the two communities, never more so than during the time of the proposal to reintroduce the Moveable Dwellings Bill in 1909:

*We must do everything in our power to eradicate the inference that showpeople are gipsies (sic). I do not wish to say anything at all about gipsies here, accepting that it must be made broadly public that the two classes of travelling van-dwellers are distinct and separate classes.<sup>77</sup>*

Membership of the Showmen's Guild was until recently only available to persons born into a family that were already members of the organisation, and people could only apply if they were an individual over the age of eighteen who was the spouse, son or daughter of a full member of the organisation.<sup>78</sup> Rule six of the Rules of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain found in *The Showmen's Year Book* has recently been changed by the Office of Fair Trading to fit into the new regulations affecting trade unions implemented by the Council of Europe in 1993.<sup>79</sup> According to the new guidelines this previously restrictive practice has been lifted and membership is now open to:

*Nationals of any member state of the European Economic Community (E.E.C) over the age of eighteen who satisfy the Section Committee that they own and operate at Travelling Fairs or Travelling Circuses (or that they propose so to own and operate) any of the equipment listed in rule 8b subject to the definitions contained in Rule 38, are eligible for election to full membership.<sup>80</sup>*

Prospective candidates for membership have to be nominated by two members of the Guild, who act as referees. The proposal is listed in the meeting agenda of the relevant regional committee which then votes on the matter. The verdict is presented to the individual members of the Section to determine whether they agree with the decision.<sup>81</sup>

However, although the restrictive membership practice has been discontinued, applications for membership of the Guild are heavily vetted and full membership is still difficult to attain. This practice of controlled membership and self-government by the fairground community has led to the society being perceived by scholars working in the field of travelling communities as one that is closed and hostile to

other itinerant groups. Acton believes that the showmen were largely responsible for the distancing that appeared between the fairground and other travelling communities, in that they were keen to separate themselves from Gypsies and to appear as responsible businessmen, unlike their counterparts in the wider travelling fraternity.<sup>82</sup> This criticism has to be considered; the legislative distinction achieved by showpeople, and the subsequent policy of exemption implemented by the government with regard to legislation affecting Travellers, was part of a highly successful campaign of separation by the showpeople. Nevertheless, as the previous sections have demonstrated, the concepts of hierarchy and status are widely prevalent amongst all travelling communities and not unique to showpeople. The main difference between showpeople and other Travellers is that they originally emphasised these distinctions on a legislative scale and, having tasted this initial victory, the society as a whole became united in their outrage at being mistaken for anything other than bona fide showpeople. Over the past 100 years, this ideology has been reiterated constantly by the Guild, the individual showpeople and the writers in the *World's Fair*:

*The public seeing a travelling van pass through their village, town or city, cannot and do not adequately know the difference between a gypsy or a showman ... Once again for all time, for my whole lifetime, a showman is a showman, and a gypsy is a gypsy. Write about it. Think about it, and explain about it at every opportunity that presents itself to you.*<sup>83</sup>

As a result of this collective solidarity, the community as a whole began to separate itself from other travelling groups in two ways: through local and national legislation, but more importantly and within the context of the wider travelling fraternity, in their dress, jewellery, living accommodation and language.

## **2.7. Differences in Language and Material Culture.**

By the end of the nineteenth century there were at least two distinct groups recognised by Parliament amongst the travelling fraternity. A series of later pieces of legislation has led to the distinction being based on cultural, ethnic or economic

grounds. Within the communities themselves, however, the differences began to be expressed through language and material culture. Barbara Adams *et al.* writing in *Gypsy and Government Policy in England* emphasise the variety of conditions that govern membership of the travelling community:

*Descent is a necessary condition of Gypsy or Traveller identity but not sufficient in itself. There are subsidiary ways in which Travellers assert their identity and recognise each other. Included are: self-employment, knowledge of the group's languages; an ideology of travelling; habitat; speech; dress; rituals of cleanliness; and a general ideological separation between themselves and gorgios.*<sup>84</sup>

If we examine the factors mentioned by the authors, and apply these criteria to travelling showpeople, the evidence accumulated in the fieldwork will illustrate that these differences, whether functional, cultural or symbolic, are expressed through material culture and language.

### Traveller Languages.

The relationship between the language used on the fairground and that spoken by other members of the travelling community is examined in detail in Chapter 6, and an introduction to the different Traveller languages, e.g. *cant*, *Romany*, can be found in the glossary. Briefly, a variety of languages has been identified within the travelling communities in the United Kingdom and Ireland. In Scotland, the term *cant* is used to describe the patois spoken by Scottish Travellers,<sup>85</sup> in Ireland, *Shelta*<sup>86</sup> is the accepted term, and from the sixteenth century onwards, *Romany* is the given designation for the language used by English Travellers.<sup>87</sup> Within travelling communities there exists a secret language unique to each culture or ethnic group. The showpeople refer to theirs as *backslang*, the Romanies use *rocka*, the tinkers use *cant*. The expressions *plarey the backslang*, *kekka rocka*, and *mang the cant*,<sup>88</sup> are used by each of the groups respectively, and basically translate as "can you speak our language?" Each society has a term which implies an outsider or non-Traveller; this could be *flatty* or *joskin* among the showpeople, or *gauja/gorgio* among the Traveller-Gypsies.<sup>89</sup> Additionally, within the individual language they have terms for each different group. For example, Traveller-Gypsies

may call a showperson a *Shit in the bucket* whereas a showperson would call a Gypsy a *Shit up the hedge*. Other terms for Traveller-Gypsies found amongst the fairground community include *dordy-cousin*, *donkey whallopers* and *mumpers*. When interviewed about the relationship between showpeople and Traveller-Gypsies, Mrs E Francis narrated the following story:

*Now I told you that Showpeople and Gypsies have different names for each other, they call us shit in the buckets and we call them shit up the hedge ... now I found this out because I was in the market one day and I got talking to this Romany mush ... anyway I got into conversation with the mush and I dropped one or two Traveller words into the conversation and he picked up on them and asked me what I did, so I told him I belonged to the fairground and he replied straight out he did "You're one of those shit in the buckets" straight out he did.<sup>90</sup>*

These distinctions in the language reflect the difference in the functions of the living vans. Before the introduction of flush toilets in living vans, the showpeople would have a wooden structure or tent beside the waggon. If a Gypsy was passing by they would know that the vehicle belonged to a showland family, the reason being that because Gypsies believe it to be *mochardi* or dirty to have the toilet in the living area they would therefore use the hedge.<sup>91</sup> Mrs. E. Francis explains the differences between the two communities:

*well you know that showpeople always had one of those stainless steel buckets for when they went to the carsey, they always did ... but Romanies they thought that was disgusting, dirty like. They would go find the nearest hedge, go behind it and shit. But showpeople, fairpeople would have a bucket with a toilet seat on it, with a canvas cover, outside the waggon. You know what your Uncle Arthur used to say: "You're not a true Traveller until you've fallen down the waggon steps and had the ring of the bucket on your jeer" (laughs) You've had that this year haven't you.<sup>92</sup>*

This theme is continued by Tommy Russell, a showman from the Lancashire Section of the Guild:

*Oh aye they used to say that, they used to say that when a woman, when a woman has been found dead, how did they know that she was a Traveller woman and that's what they used to say that she had the ring around her backside.<sup>93</sup>*

The use of language as a means of demarcating group membership within travelling communities in general, and showpeople in particular, is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The terms of address used by showpeople and Gypsies alike reflect both the similarities and the historical links between the communities, and an affectionate

allusion can be inferred in terms such as *dordy-cousin* and *donkey whalloper*. However, although Okely emphasises that similar use of language is not a criterion for group identity, she stresses the importance of these shared terms in that they can emphasise:

*Some clues to past relationships - e.g. colonial conquest or trade.*<sup>94</sup>

The use of such terms implies that the showpeople accept the historical links between themselves and the wider travelling fraternity, but through their designated use of descriptions such as *dordy-cousin* they are emphasising their autonomy.

### **Material Culture.**

Donald Kenrick believes that academics have placed too much emphasis on the supposedly shared cultural taboos associated with Travellers throughout Europe. He suggests:

*that the extreme attention paid to food and clothing common to all is more likely due to the necessity for this when travelling, than to a common origin or common set of beliefs.*<sup>95</sup>

This argument for a functional origin for the similarities between itinerant communities can be applied to the overall constructions of the living vehicles used by the travelling communities in the nineteenth century. Despite the popular belief held by the settled community that everyone who lives in a caravan is a Gypsy, it was not the Traveller-Gypsies who first pioneered the use of the waggon as a living vehicle. That distinction goes to another group of Travellers prevalent in nineteenth century Britain, the travelling showpeople. The first reference to van-dwellers appears in Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*, published between 1840 to 1841, when he describes Mrs Jarley, a waxworks proprietress, as living in a house on wheels which came fully equipped with a stove, a chest of drawers and a bed.<sup>96</sup> The definitive account of the origin, technology and construction of these living vehicles is presented in detail in *The English Gypsy Caravan* by Denis Harvey and C. H. Ward-Jackson, who provide a full explanation of the differences found in the various types of traveller vans.

### Living Vans.

By the 1880s the more prosperous showpeople had begun to use the living waggon as a mode of transport and a domestic vehicle. As the different travelling groups became more autonomous these disparities came to be reflected in the living vehicles, which began to serve two purposes. The primary use was functional in that the living vehicle became the home and centre of the family unit and was a means of transporting the showpeople and their equipment from fair to fair. Early differences in the structures of these horse-drawn waggons, reflect the variety of occupations found amongst Victorian travelling society. Briefly the Ledge, the Reading, the Open Lot, the Bowtop and the Brush became the types of living van preferred by the Gypsies, and the differing occupations found amongst Travellers-Gypsies were reflected in the type of van constructed.<sup>97</sup> According to Ward-Jackson and Harvey in their account of the evolution of the Gypsy waggon, the showmen started living in van dwellings about thirty years before their contemporaries in the Traveller-Gypsy community. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, menagerie proprietors were advertising that their wild beast shows could be seen in safe and commodious caravans, built for the purpose. The rest of the community were quick to follow suit, and "Lord" George Sanger in his autobiography recalls his father building the family living van in the 1820s.<sup>98</sup> As the living waggon became a more desired mode of transport, a variety of manufacturers sprang up who catered for the individual demands and needs of their clients. The Burton van was adopted by the showpeople who, when not using horse-drawn waggons, were living in converted railway carriages which were transported by rail or traction engines.

Prior to the introduction of the living van, Traveller-Gypsies in particular lived in temporary shelters made from willow branches with a cloth tied over them, which were known as benders. Showpeople and circus performers used to take board and lodgings in the guest-houses in the town they were visiting with their

equipment.<sup>99</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century each travelling group began to use a recognisable and distinct make of living vehicle as their domestic residence which also reflected the variety of occupations found amongst the communities, and Nerissa Wilson notes that:

*Many of the different styles reflected the occupation of the owner or the particular skills of the builder.*<sup>100</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century there were recognisable differences between the varying makes of living vans available. The Burton van became the preferred vehicle of the travelling showpeople because it had wheels of the same size which enabled them to travel more easily on the road. Gypsy caravan wheels were bigger at the rear and the caravan body was constructed between them. This type of design was more efficient for pulling onto grass verges and crossing fields. However, as the communities grew more determined to emphasise their cultural autonomy, what may have once been a functional difference became an effective means not only of demonstrating membership of the particular branch of the travelling society, but also of depicting status within the society. Nerissa Wilson has demonstrated that the interiors of these living vans also became distinctive and that:

*different makers varied the interior details of the vans and catered for the clients with particular needs.*<sup>101</sup>

Living vans such as the the Ledge, the Reading, the Open Lot, the Bowtop and the Brush became commonly associated with the Gypsies and were built by Dunton and Sons of Reading. The showpeople had two distinct types of living vans: the horse-drawn waggons, usually designed like or similar to those known as the Burton van, and the large coachbuilt living carriages, which were primarily designed for rail travel and could be pulled by traction engines. These living carriages or saloons were similar in design to the Pullman coaches and structurally were very different to the horse-drawn waggons described in Ward-Jackson and Harvey's account of the Gypsy Caravan. Detailed descriptions of these living vans can be found through advertisements that appeared in the *World's Fair* in November, 1914, for example:

*For sale, side door Pullman Rail living carriage, 18ft long. Howcroft make, panelled all round, grained and gilded outside. 3 brilliant cut glass windows, 2 made to lower, fitted with spring blinds. Letter box and door handles; double panelled roof; separate bedrooms; both fitted with wardrobe, locker dressing tables with two small drawers and large cupboard underneath; cut glass over tables; Mellor's best lamps with reflectors, hand painted globes.*

The advertisement also includes particulars of the living room, complete with Hostess stove, cupboards, tables, and all three rooms carpeted throughout, and concludes by telling the reader that:

*This ideal Living Carriage is in splendid condition and a picture to look at. Cost to build £175. Will accept £75 (cash) complete.<sup>102</sup>*

The two types of van dwellings prevalent amongst the showpeople were the horse-drawn Burton type, and the Pullman living carriage. Although Orton and Spooners were the best known of the manufacturers, the firm of Howcroft's of Hartlepool was very popular amongst the travelling showpeople and they often constructed vans based on Orton and Spooner's designs. No definitive study of these types of living vans has appeared, but the overall history of their origin and design is presently being researched by John Pocket, wheelwright and restorer of living vans. Further information can be gleaned from the advertisements and photographs that appear in the *World's Fair*, which provide an insight into the overall technology, furnishings and accessories of these dwellings.

Originally the differences between the various living vans would appear to be functional; the longer heavier carriages could only be pulled by traction engine or transported by rail and the smaller lighter vans were primarily designed for the road. If moved by road, the Pullman carriages would have needed a minimum of two horses and such was their weight that Dennis Harvey and Ward-Jackson refer to them as horse killers.<sup>103</sup> The original Pullman type carriage was far more expensive than the road van and would have been used primarily by the fairground roundabout proprietors or the showpeople with exhibitions. The most expensive vans constructed were for prosperous members of the fairground community, which included bioscope proprietors such as William Taylor and Flora Collins, wife of Pat



Collins, (President of the Showmen's Guild), whose living van was known on the fairground as the "White Lady." Orton and Spooner reputedly only built these masterpieces for their best customers which generally included the bioscope proprietors in the period leading up to the First World War. The overall price of these living vans is not known, but advertisements placed in the *World's Fair* at that time suggest prices between £150 to £300. They were often designed to match the fairground show that the firm would also have been constructing or rebuilding. A famous example of this type of van was the matching living carriages built for William Taylor in 1907:

*Mr Orton, the well known specialist in this line, has just completed what is probably the finest living van in the country. Roomy, well lighted with polished mahogany fittings, silver plated mountings, and an electric light installation, no expense has been spared towards making the "house on wheels" a palace rather than a mansion.*<sup>104</sup>

The price of this living carriage was reputedly in the region of a thousand pounds, with a new feature included in the design, a lavatory. This kind of vehicle was the exception rather than the norm, but the layout and interior decorations would eventually become the standard to which the manufacturers of living waggons and their owners would aspire in the years to come.

The two factors which influenced their designs were firstly that living vans became a symbol of prestige and a means of affording status and rank on the fairground, and secondly that the traction engine was introduced on the fairground. The introduction of traction engines as a means of transport and power had vitalised the fairground rides and would have had a similar effect on the living accommodations. Although further research needs to be done on the impact of the traction engine on the fairground community as a whole, its history has been covered in detail by Micheal Lane's publications on the firms of Fowler and Burrell, and the journal *Steaming*, produced by the Road Locomotive Society of Great Britain.<sup>105</sup> The showpeople could travel greater distances, and pull heavier loads with traction engines, and although some of the richer showpeople had utilised the railways as a form of transport, that was only available for a privileged few.<sup>106</sup> The introduction

of traction engine power and the mass availability of this form of transport enabled the living van to develop rapidly. Where once these saloon type waggons were a feature of the more prosperous members of showland community, they became the basic design for the showmen's living carriage. Makers such as Southern, Colchester, Birkby, Pilot, Bibby and Brayshaw appeared, and by the 1920s the Pullman-like features of the original rail carriages had become the conventional in these coachbuilt waggons. Although no account of these manufacturers has been published, further information can be found in the *World's Fair* and in the National Fairground Archive which holds examples of some of the catalogues that survive from these firms.

The dissimilarities between the modern living vehicles used by the showpeople and those used by the Travellers can be traced from this period. The Gypsy waggon was primarily designed as a form of horse-drawn transport and as such its overall length and construction were restricted. From the turn of the century onwards, Gypsy waggons comprised the types referred to above. After 1910, the basic design of these waggons never altered. Even so, because of the personal requirements of the individual customers, no two waggons are alike.

The overall design of the showman and Gypsy waggons did not change significantly until the 1960s, and although the coachbuilt living carriages used by the showpeople may have incorporated modern interiors, the basic structure and length rarely deviated from the traditional form.

The differences between the living vans used by showpeople and Travellers-Gypsies have become more pronounced over the past thirty years. Where once the horse-drawn waggon was a familiar sight, in Yorkshire in particular, it has been replaced by the modern chrome trailer and has been largely consigned to the preservation movement or museums. The greatest concentration of such living waggons can be found at Appleby Horse Fair, held in the first week of June every year, but more often their ownership is likely to be in the hands of an enthusiastic *gorgio* rather

than a Gypsy or Traveller.<sup>107</sup>

Modern showmen's waggons are often thirty to forty feet long, are raised at least six feet off the ground and have an elaborate system of pullout fittings along the side which allows the accommodation area inside to double in size from ten to twenty feet square. When interviewed, Sandra Wright explained the differences in the modern living waggons:

*Oh they've changed now, I mean they are all pull out sides, pull out kitchens, pull out bathrooms, they've got everything now, gold plated taps, gold plated light fittings.*<sup>107</sup>

A modern living waggon costs approximately a £1000 per square foot, and interiors and extra fittings would eventually add to the final price. The average price of a living van would be between £40,000 to £60,000, and makers such as Simpsons and Nash Morgan of Lydney cater for the modern van dweller.<sup>108</sup> Older waggons are often adapted to utilise the developments such as pullouts, and Brian Wells of Banbury is a wellknown wheelwright and van restorer who often renovates older type waggons to incorporate modern trends.<sup>109</sup> A modern Traveller-Gypsy's waggon is commonly known as a *trailer* by the Travellers. It is elaborately decorated in chrome on the outside and could be pulled by a four wheel drive vehicle or a small lorry, as opposed to the showland waggon which would need an eight wheel lorry or a low loader to move it around. Showpeople and other Travellers can still distinguish group identity purely by the type of living van on show, and although the boundaries between the differing societies are more tightly drawn than a century ago, the need to express group identity and belonging is never stronger than in the use of interior decorations. Researchers such as Sexton and Thomas Acton to some extent have studied the fairground community as an adjunct of Traveller society as a whole. As stated previously, Barbara Adams *et al.* believe that only by examining the '*subsidiary ways in which Travellers assert their identity and recognise each other*' can the relationships between the groups be properly assessed.<sup>110</sup> The following information on the interiors of living vans is one of the areas in which showpeople assert their identity and it was gleaned as a result of

insider knowledge. This is the one area of the fieldwork where the material is based primarily on personal knowledge and although there are no transcripts of interviews available, information was gathered through conversations and then noted down in the Fieldwork Notebook. When questions of personal hygiene and use of the living space were posed in an interview situation, the showpeople refused to answer because they believed that because of my fairground background I was acting like a *joskin*, i.e. an outsider in asking such questions. This point was reiterated when I travelled to the West Country. A showman related an incident when a researcher from Plymouth University visited the fairground to enquire about their customs and traditions. When the question of toilet habits was raised, and the showmen were asked how did they go to the toilet or how was the toilet used in the living van, the response was "*just like anyone else I drop me trousers and have a piss.*"<sup>111</sup> This response reveals not only the distrust manifested by showpeople towards outsiders working on their community, but also the problems that result in trying to compile such information through the interview situation.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, whenever possible, information gleaned from conversation or by the telephone was immediately entered in the Fieldwork Notebook, using verbatim quotations whenever possible, each entry being dated and attributed to the individual(s) concerned.

Like other Travellers, showpeople have a marked preference for prestige goods, such as extravagant items of china, glass and gold. However, the emphasis placed on the use of material culture in the living vans and the distinctiveness of such items within a given community of Travellers is more difficult for an outsider to understand as all travelling people have a fondness for china and cut glass. The preferred kinds of china are Royal Worcester, Capo di Monte and Crown Derby, the Worcester designs being slightly more popular with the showpeople. Other differences in the material culture of the various itinerant groups are of a more detailed nature and are only used as a means of identification within the travelling

fraternity. A distinction may be found in the designs used on the china. Celine Williams emphasised that the showpeople's preference was for darker and more traditional designs, whereas Gypsies went for more elaborate designs which incorporated more gold and had less of a pattern.<sup>113</sup> Both groups share the superstitions regarding the decorations on the china, and any green coloured artefacts or ones decorated with peacocks are considered unlucky.<sup>114</sup> One distinction may be the amount of coloured cut glass on show. A showwoman at Hull Fair recently informed me that although she liked the red glass because it was the most expensive, she did not display it because the other Travellers told her it was *pikeyfried*,<sup>115</sup> because it was too similar to the ornaments found in the trailers belonging to English or Irish Travellers. Another example of this is found in the hanging of the curtains in living vans. During a conversation with Celine Williams, the point was made that you could often tell Gypsies because of the way the curtains were hung in the waggon. Showwomen generally prefer to drape their curtains with perhaps only one drop, and will only use very simple but classic patterns. Gypsies, she maintained, often have three or four bows on the curtains, the drape would drop three times and there would be two or three edges of lace around the curtains and cushions.<sup>116</sup>

This preference for bright colours and highly decorated items is reflected in the mode of dress and types of jewellery displayed. The term *pikeyfried* is often used amongst all Travellers to denote someone who is wearing too much gold or displaying too much jewellery. A whole industry has sprung up to reflect the fashions and tastes of the Travellers, with distinctions between the differing groups being found only in the amount of gold and diamante on the clothes or the ostentatious nature of the jewellery. A Gypsy will invest money in gold and china, thereby demonstrating wealth or prestige by the quantity of gold worn by the women, or the quality of the china on display in the living van. Showpeople would follow this idea to a certain extent but with a degree of restraint which, although it

would still seem ostentatious to a *flatty* or non-Traveller, pales into insignificance when compared with the other Travellers. *Pikeyfied* is again used in showland society to rebuke someone for their conspicuous display of wealth.

Although these descriptions are brief and do not fully demonstrate the range of differences reflected in the material culture of the disparate itinerant groups, they serve as an introduction to the varying cultures and traditions unique to all travelling societies in the United Kingdom. Cultural or ethnic identity can be reflected not only through history and language but also through the whole range of material culture in use in the domestic and economic spheres found amongst travelling people. The domain occupied by showpeople in the wider context of the travelling fraternity has been demonstrated; the following section concentrates on how the general populace perceives travelling fairs and showpeople.

### 3. Showpeople and the General Public.

*I find that very many people including teachers don't actually know who we are; they assume they know or they may have this romantic notion of the fairground. Then what happens is you get the Gypsy and other different cultures mixed together and I am proud of my culture, my history, as I know that the Romanies are of theirs. But they are actually two separate cultures, they are an ethnic minority, we are a cultural business group of people.<sup>117</sup>*

As previously demonstrated, the fairground community, through the offices of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, is very effective in combating legislation which poses a threat to their traditional society. This is an important aspect of this study and it will be examined in more detail later. The following discussion firstly demonstrates how the public's perception of travelling showpeople is partly bound up with their misconceptions of fairs, and secondly reveals how this belief is presented. Ultimately, I hope to establish how changes in the legislation covering travelling showpeople were in part due to the rise of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. However, in the context of this research, in order to understand the ideology of the Guild, the reasons for its existence must be examined, beginning by

focusing on the relationship between the travelling showpeople and the general public. This relationship can be divided into two distinct focal points: the public perceptions of fairs, and the prejudice that showpeople encounter daily.

### 3.1. Public Perceptions of the Fair.

The history of travelling fairs has been outlined in Chapter 2, but to summarise, the decline of the great trading marts in the middle of the nineteenth century prompted the authorities to prohibit such fairs. With the exception of Hugh Cunningham's study of the Metropolitan Fairs,<sup>118</sup> Walton and Poole's investigation of the Lancashire Wakes,<sup>119</sup> and Douglas Reid's account of the festivities in Birmingham,<sup>120</sup> no in-depth study has been undertaken of the history of this popular form of recreation, and the impact such a move to prohibit fairs had on the general public and the travelling showpeople. In the period leading up to the Fairs Acts of 1868, 1871 and 1873:

*The threats to the wakes from external forces probably reached a peak in the tense and conflict-ridden second quarter of the nineteenth century, when the new industrial magistrates and the new police forces were mounting a direct assault on popular recreations.<sup>121</sup>*

The events leading up to the implementing of these Acts have been discussed in the historical introduction in Chapter 2, and the implications of these Acts for travelling showpeople will be covered in detail at a later stage in this chapter. However, the relevant focus for discussion here is the reasons behind the introduction of such legislation, namely that:

*Whereas certain of the fairs held in England and Wales are unnecessary, are the cause of grievous immorality, and are very injurious to the inhabitants of the towns in which such fairs are held, and it is therefore expedient to make provisions to facilitate the abolition of such fairs.<sup>122</sup>*

This Act goes one step further than the Metropolitan Fairs Act 1868 which conferred authority on the Commissioner of Police to prevent the licensing or holding of fairs within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police.<sup>123</sup>

Walton and Poole have demonstrated how in the nineteenth century the attitudes of

the middle classes towards the fair, described as a "carnival of vice" and "a horrid nuisance", were part of the wider attempt to control the leisure and recreation of the working classes. They have demonstrated that, despite these criticisms, the change in character of the Lancashire wakes over the century was more in response to growing industrialisation than to the reforming zeal of the local authorities.<sup>124</sup> The issues raised by these reformers and the Acts of Parliament relating to fairs are the association of such events with high levels of misconduct, debauchery and crime. *The Era* and the *World's Fair* contain numerous examples of such accusations, and further research needs to be undertaken in order to evaluate the significance of these attacks in the context of the late Victorian and early Edwardian society. Douglas Reid provides us with an account of the debate that took place between Council members in Birmingham for the proposed abolition of fairs on Corporation land or public streets, in 1875.<sup>125</sup> The main argument for the restricting of such events are ones that would be used time and time again by abolitionists, namely reasons of immorality, loss of revenue, and the threat of sickness. The objections raised by the local authorities in Birmingham to the annual wakes and feasts are representative of the attacks that the showpeople faced.<sup>126</sup> For the purpose of this study, however, the following examples reflect the fundamental concerns which lay behind the criticisms levied against fairs: disease, immorality and economics.

### **The Fair and Disease.**

One of the tenets of the Moveable Dwellings Bill in 1888 was the need for improved sanitation in living vans. This was based on the assumption that the van dwellers were carriers of contagious diseases. This claim was reiterated in 1909, when during a meeting of Bedford Corporation and the representatives from the Guild, the local doctor called for the abolition of the fair, because of the risk of smallpox and scarlet fever. The response of the reporter in the *World's Fair* summarises the argument put forward by the local medical officer:



*He in one breath recommended on hygienic grounds the imperative abolition of the fairs and in another makes the statement that he had not been able to prove to his satisfaction that the rise and fall of epidemics of scarlet fever were directly due to the presence of the van population. Again after advancing the bogey of the possibility of smallpox, he devitalises the importance of his own note of alarm by the contradictive remark that he did not think it had happened, but it might happen!<sup>127</sup>*

Another example of this can be found in the case of the Medical Officer of Holsworthy, who in 1917 blamed the recent visit of the circus for an outbreak of German measles in the town. The reporters in the *World's Fair* were quick to counter this attack and when the accusation appeared unfounded and contradicted by the evidence, the following editorial was issued:

*In our issue of May 19th we drew attention to a statement made by the Medical Officer of Health in Holsworthy in which the officials stated that an epidemic of German Measles has broken out in the town and he stated that he believed their origin was due to the recent visit of a circus to the town.<sup>128</sup>*

When it was found that the outbreak was brought into the town by a soldier on leave, the reporter continues with a stinging rebuke:

*Not a word is said of the mis-statement at the previous meeting and not a word of apology is offered to the circus and showpeople who would suffer for such a false report. It is surely time that men in such a position should be more careful in their statements, as such words, given the publicity they naturally get, do a great deal of harm to all our readers.<sup>129</sup>*

Although these misconceptions were commonly held at the time, as sanitation improved throughout the country as a whole, by the end of the First World War this notion gradually fell away. However, elements of this belief were still found in the proposed Public Health Act 1936 which the showmen opposed and from which they finally received an exemption. These sentiments are even evident in modern society on an everyday level and are bound up with the view that all Travellers are dirty.<sup>130</sup> The following examples are taken from a series of interviews conducted by the Leicester Oral History Project between 1990 to 1992, details of which can be found in Appendix 1:

*They were Gypsy like people and the children had matted hair and women looked dirty - they looked like Gypsies or I believed they were Gypsies or of Gypsy stock you know.<sup>131</sup>*

This theme of uncleanliness is continued by Arthur Holland Jnr:

*Naturally there was good teachers and there was bad teachers but I still think that*

*they had a good look in your ears to see if you'd washed your ears in the morning, more so than what they did the other children.*<sup>132</sup>

Fortunately, this particular prejudice has been diluted, though it is still widely associated with Traveller-Gypsies. However, the following allegations that one finds in nineteenth century accounts of fairs are still widely believed.

### **Fairgrounds, Crime, Immorality and Misconduct.**

One of the most common assertions found in objections against fairs is the association of the fairground with immoral, illegal and improper conduct. This attitude was widely prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was one of the reasons for the introduction of the Fairs Act 1871. These issues have been discussed in Chapter 2, and further information can be found in *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, edited by Robert D. Storch.<sup>133</sup> Nicholas Fogg, in his history of Stratford Mop, relates the endeavours of a few members of the local community to abolish the Mop, due to the "exhibitions of obscenity, filth and vulgarity."<sup>134</sup> Fortunately for the modern inhabitants of Stratford and the showpeople who present the fair, this attempt was unsuccessful and was eventually defeated by the majority of the populace. A similar attack on the annual Charter fair held in Hull occurred in 1911. However the replies that appeared in the daily newspaper, the *Hull Mail*, quickly dismissed any notions of abolition:

*Hull's annual fair is undoubtedly the largest, most popular, and best conducted fair - I say that without reservation - and goes a long way to advertise the city. I have never had one case of immorality connected with the fair brought to my notice.*<sup>135</sup>

However, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, fairs that had maintained a strong economic function survived the 1871 Fairs Act and, with the introduction of mechanisation, had gone from strength to strength. Large metropolitan events like Nottingham Goose Fair, Hull Fair, and the Manchester Wakes fairs may have been attacked for the rowdy behaviour and general misconduct of their visitors, but they were never in danger of abolition because of public opinion. The greatest threat to the continuation of these fairs can be found in the early 1900s when various attempts were made by local councils to control and sanction the types of events

held in their locality. The consequences of such actions and the reaction of the showpeople are examined in full later in this study. Although these attacks did not necessarily result in the abolition of fairs, they ultimately affected public perception of such events. The showpeople in turn became associated with immorality and bad conduct. A modern manifestation of this belief was found in the column edited by Victor Lewis Smith, that appears in the *Mail on Sunday* in 1993:

*Disney remains fresh and bright, and infinitely preferable to our own sinister, superannuated funfairs, a curious misnomer since they are neither fun nor fair.*

He continues:

*The rides (machines that Torquemada might have designed when he was in one of his moods) are "supervised" by burly tattooed maniacs hell-bent on pursuing underage girls: Neanderthals whose demeanour suggests that these travelling folk are a closed society who have been inbreeding for centuries.<sup>136</sup>*

The fair has always attracted such criticisms, and even those who wish to support the idea of fairgrounds describe the attractions as burlesque, carnivalesque or grotesque.<sup>137</sup> The showpeople themselves are always keen to emphasise the good clean fun, and that they cater for "all classes of people." Indeed my own family motto is "Fun without Vulgarity." However, when interviewed Fred Warren admitted that the public perception of fairs is partly due to the type of customers it sometimes attracts:

*No the point is, people say we don't mind the fairground coming, it's what you attract. I mean we go to Leigh and you go to Leigh tonight, or any night of the week you'll never see a glue sniffer anywhere, the moment we get there we are surrounded by them. Don't ask me why?<sup>138</sup>*

There has always been a dichotomy in the feelings held by the general public towards fairs. Local people in any of the towns where a Charter, Mop or Prescriptive fair is held will present a positive view of the arrival of the annual fair and the travelling showpeople.<sup>139</sup> Even so, attempts by showpeople to introduce new private business fairs generally attract a level of prejudice of which the following is a typical example:

*It's like when you pull on a site isn't it, we go on Halifax, a little park at Halifax, its been designated a fairground site for years, but there has never been a fairground on it, and we've pulled on it and we didn't go back because it was no*

*good. But the recreation officer, they call her Mrs P...., oh she said "what a time I am having," "I said why" and she said, "oh you are going to rape the daughters (laughs) going to rob their houses and if you don't rob them while you're there, you are going to come back and rob them when you've gone." 137a*

Ironically, when the showpeople are granted permission to hold a new fair in the town centre they are faced with yet another set of prejudices: that they are ruining the local economy.

### **The Fair and the Local Economy.**

While there has been an increase in the number of fairs held in city centres over the past five years, on the whole the last hundred years have seen the gradual disappearance of the town centre fair. However, a modern trend has been the emergence of events such as Leeds Valentine Fair, Doncaster Fair, Sheffield City Centre Fair, all of which take place in the centre of the town or city. The Valentine's Day Fair held at Leeds has attracted huge publicity and, despite the various objections posed in the first year of the event, the fair continues to attract huge crowds. In 1996, BBC Radio Leeds presented a phone-in show on the subject of Leeds Valentine Fair. On this programme, officials from Leeds City Council explained why they invited the showmen into the town centre:

*It's part of a policy, part of inner city management, we have a whole series of events, we have the Christmas lights and summer events, a whole series of theatre in the streets, so it's all part of that. We want the city centre to be a place for people to enjoy.<sup>140</sup>*

Although the fair attracts people into the town centre, the local burghers, or shopkeepers, do not usually like the effects they believe it has on their business. In 1966, a grocer from Hull complained that there would be:

*One big slap up fair lasting for eight days, when the whole town appears to have gone mad. It is nothing unusual to hear of people spending £10 or more in one merry night. Grocers, particularly at the opposite side of town, like myself, dread the fair's arrival, as quite a number of bills go unpaid.*

And he continues:

*One of my customers gave his wife £5 for the week's groceries. She went to the nearest telephone box, rang for a taxi and drove off to the fair - with my money. Can you wonder that grocers on my side of the town pray for rain.<sup>141</sup>*

The recent city centre fair in Sheffield was seen as a success by the city council in

that during that period thousands more visitors came into the centre. Nevertheless, the shopkeepers maintain that this increase largely went into the pockets of the showpeople and not into the till receipts in the shop.<sup>142</sup> This echoes the idea prevalent in the early 1900s, when the council officials for Wigan debated the continuation of Wigan Fair:

*So what if they were to gain by bringing the fair back, increased revenue, they would lose the other way, because of the large amount of money that would be taken out of the town.*<sup>143</sup>

It would appear then, that the fears of a community, whether it be sex and debauchery in the 18th century, drink, immorality and disease in the 19th century, or the increase in crime and drug abuse in the late 20th century, are transposed onto the travelling fairs and the showpeople who present them.

### **3.2. Showpeople and the General Public.**

*There is criticism between showmen and the public, the public criticising the mode of life which, they assume, the showmen lives, and the showmen criticising the public because of their lack in not rushing into or on the various concerns of the fairgrounds.*<sup>144</sup>

The previous section has demonstrated the historical attitudes felt towards fairs and how these perceptions have become reflected onto the showland community as a whole. Moreover, the travelling showpeople also face the prejudice encountered by Traveller-Gypsies, partly due to the popular belief that anyone who lives in caravan must be a Gypsy.<sup>145</sup> Or perhaps because showpeople, like other Travellers, live on the margins of society, they are the focus for the fears and prejudices that all minority groups face within the larger context of the general populace.

The showpeople are the most visible of all the travelling communities in the United Kingdom today. The fair has been and still is a common and regular feature of most cities, towns and villages, but, despite this, or perhaps because of its familiarity, showpeople are the least understood of all the groups. Documentation about their community and history is scarce, and it is only with the recent

inauguration of the National Fairground Archive that attempts have been made to understand their unique culture and way of life. Traveller-Gypsies, European Gypsies and Irish Travellers have all been the subject of numerous studies and academic research, and details of these can be found in the bibliography. A recent example of how the public perceive travelling showpeople appeared in *The Guardian Weekend* of December 14th, 1996:

*Showpeople are Britain's last lost tribe. They don't reside in our road, they don't drink in our local, and their children don't go to our schools with our children. They don't even tap into our gas and electricity grids. They have their own language and their own culture. There are an estimated 21,000 of them, married almost exclusively to each other.*<sup>146</sup>

Although these observations are partly accurate, the very nature of the argument is that showpeople are different, they are separate, they have a different language and they are basically not part of modern society. However, showpeople deny that they are different, and when interviewed about the prejudice encountered by travelling showpeople, Roger Tuby, a prominent roundabout proprietor from Doncaster, replied:

*People get the wrong impression about us, we've been introduced as Roger Tuby, the fairground people and through the evening they will say, "you can't be fairground people, you're just like anybody I know, you're just normal." What do you expect us to be, we are just business people like anyone else, the only difference is we move our business from town to town.*<sup>147</sup>

All of the showpeople interviewed in the course of the fieldwork have faced varying degrees of prejudice from the general public. They believe these attitudes are based largely on ignorance and are due in part to public misunderstanding of the differences between showpeople and Gypsies. Showpeople are not recognised as having the same needs and interests as "normal people", because they are perceived as outsiders, they are therefore thought to live differently:

*This man that we know he comes in here, he fixes Sky up for us, he said that they say to him, "do they watch television, have they got Sky?" and I'm sure people think we've got four eyes or we are freaks. I don't know what basically a lot of people do think, because the friends I know out of the business, the friends that we've got out of the business, the people I meet, we are just accepted as the same as them. Which we are the same as them, but we just live in a different environment. But some people, I don't know what they honestly think we are, until you hear all silly things like that. Have they got Sky and do they watch television, it's like saying do they eat Mars Bars isn't it (laughs) do you know what I mean? So I don't know what*

*they think ... I don't know what ordinary people think.*<sup>148</sup>

As a result of this prejudice, showpeople generally tend to stay within their own community; they are *in a siege culture, continually forced to justify its very existence*, writes Dee Birkett.<sup>149</sup> Consequently the bonds within the community are more intimate and extend not just to one's own immediate family but also to the fairground community as a whole:

*I feel that showbusiness is a very close knit community, very very close and I think it partly stems from going to school, in my case anyway we were very much classed as the outsider, which tended to keep us closer together and made us a closer knit family.*<sup>150</sup>

Arthur Tuby, a showman from Doncaster, relates an incident pertaining to his grandmother and grandfather, Mr and Mrs George Thomas Tuby, the former Mayor and Mayoress of Doncaster, which is evocative of the prejudice faced by travelling showpeople:

*One evening when they were returning from the gaff, me grandmother got caught short, she needed to use the toilet and because they were miles away from their waggons, she knocked on the nearest house and asked this dornor like if they could use their toilets. Well the woman took one look at them, saw their van parked on the lane and refused like, saying "I am not having your sort in my house." Well me grandmother turned round and said "Madam if my bottom is good enough for the Queen of England, it should be good enough for you." When me grandfather was Mayor of Doncaster, they'd gone to a garden party at Buckingham Palace, and they were not seen as good enough by these people because they were from the fair like.*<sup>151</sup>

The original founders of the Showmen's Guild realised that not only did they as a community have to fight legislative prejudice, but they also had to change the perceptions held about their society by the inhabitants of the towns and villages they attended with their equipment. An attempt by Pat Collins to improve this public perception of the lack of standards on the fairground contained the following "rules of conduct":

*I beg to remind all my Tenants and the Families and Servants, that we are all Caterers for the Great British Public, and that the eyes of the Public are always upon us and our business. From year to year it becomes more difficult to get and to keep Fair Grounds in good and central positions; it therefore behoves us, one and all, to avoid giving cause for talk and objections.*<sup>152</sup>

He continues:

*Keep your Shows and Stalls and especially your Living Waggons scrupulously clean*

*and tidy; don't keep your doors and windows wide open, when you are performing domestic duties ... Our mothers can do a lot in this matter by setting a good example to the younger generation. In your dress, in your speech, and in your manners be a good example to the younger generation. Don't go in large numbers to storm the public houses directly they are open; and never talk business, family matters, or grievances over in them.*<sup>153</sup>

He concludes by imploring his colleagues to:

*Try and be a credit to our class, be proud of your calling and uphold its time honoured reputation. Our Fair Grounds must be Model Pleasure Grounds, where nothing unseemly is to be found or seen, and no foul language to be heard.*<sup>154</sup>

When the circular was published in the *World's Fair* in 1906, the editions that followed contained a variety of responses written by his fellow showmen.<sup>155</sup> The points raised by Pat Collins are just as relevant today, and the showpeople, with the aid of the Guild, face these issues in a variety of ways.

One of the common misconceptions concerns the education of showchildren, Dee Birkett, writing in the *Weekend Guardian*, made sweeping generalisations about the attitude of showpeople towards education:

*In showland, education is seen as a flattie indulgence. A child's education is on the fair - at the gaff handling money, mending machines, and on the road learning the directions and distances between towns. A six year old child can change a £20 note but may never be able to read or write*

and she continues by maintaining that:

*illiteracy is regarded as an attraction of the fairground, and showpeople turn mistakes to their advantage.*<sup>156</sup>

On the issues of illiteracy and education, travelling children attend local schools throughout the country and the Education Reform Act 1988 imposes a penalty for non-attendance. To cater for their special needs, local authorities have set up Traveller educational officers who visit the fairs that open in their area, and distance learning packs are being developed for the children of occupational Travellers.<sup>157</sup> The Showmen's Guild has regional officers who act as a means of liaison between the showpeople and the local education authority, and greater efforts are made to ensure that children of fairground families attend school and take their examinations.<sup>158</sup> On an individual level, certain showpeople are trying to educate the general public about the lifestyle of fairground people. Arthur Tuby is a



popular after dinner speaker and has given numerous lectures to local branches of the Women's Institute. Valerie Moody, the educational liaison officer for the North of England, is a regular visitor to the schools in her area and presents an illustrated talk on the history of fairs. However, the approach employed by Rae Wilson, a showwoman from Nottinghamshire, echoes the sentiments expressed by Pat Collins at the turn of the century in that each individual showperson should be an ambassador for the industry as a whole:

*I think that when you are speaking to somebody outside the business you should always act as an ambassador for the business. And if you enlighten just one person and they think well perhaps they're not so bad after all then it's good isn't it. So no matter how much I feel like actually smacking people at times, or walking away in disgust, I patiently answer any stupid thing they throw at me. Because at the end of the day somebody is going to think, oh they don't seem too bad after all, and if there is a fairground parked next to their house, they might let them have water, or not complain about them. So you've got to do your bit.<sup>159</sup>*

3.3. Over the past hundred years, showpeople have had to deal with prejudice, threats to their traditional livelihood and the changing perceptions held by the general public. Moreover, the growth of the early Van Dwellers' Association was a necessity due to the increased requirements formulated in local and national legislation, which could ultimately restrict their right to hold travelling fairs. The dominant concern of the present study is to present a comprehensive account of the group of people who work and present travelling amusements in the United Kingdom. The relationship between showpeople and other travelling groups and the context in which they operate with members of the settled community have been demonstrated earlier. The following section will now consider how the showpeople organised themselves to combat these pressures and will examine in detail how the original van dwellers' association developed into the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. The external and internal structure of fairground society will be revealed, and the discussion will include an introduction to the diversity of occupations found on the modern fairground.

#### 4. The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

*Well they are entitled to an equal share aren't they, everybody is a member. I was brought up by my father that a person with a roundabout or a person with a six foot bucket joint were equally entitled to a living and that's how it should be shouldn't it? I mean a fairground with all rides is no good and a fairground with just stalls really is no good, you've got to have a balance haven't you.<sup>160</sup>*

With the formation of the United Kingdom Van Dwellers' Association in 1889, showpeople began to distance themselves from the itinerant fraternity and formulated a strict set of rules governing their behaviour on travelling fairs and they have developed into a trade association which not only controls the movements of fairs but is also the main governing body for travelling showpeople. In order for these dual functions to be evaluated, a more detailed account of the overall structure of fairground society is necessary so that the reader can understand the role of the Guild and how it reflects the society as a whole.

##### 4.2. Fairground Society

The late nineteenth century fair was structured along the lines of exhibitions, rides and stalls, and incorporated the fairground shows which had dominated the fairground landscape until the introduction of steam powered roundabouts in 1863. By the beginning of the First World War the economic situation had changed; the roundabout proprietors, or riding masters as they became known, occupied a position of prominence, the exhibition proprietors were in decline, and the stallholders were placed at the lower end of the scale.

In the early history of the Showmen's Guild, the rival associations that sprang up within the community reflected the stratified nature of the society and were known as the Stallholder's Society and the British Union of Roundabout Proprietors. The U.K.S.V.D.P.A. became known as the Showmen's Guild in 1911.<sup>161</sup> The boundaries between the roundabout proprietors and the stallholders were maintained during the first half of the century, and although the hierarchy was based on economic factors, families were associated with owning rides, shows or stalls, and the physical landscape of the fairground reflected this organisation:

*What we term a side stall is the stalls that go on the outer perimeter of the fairground. The rides as a rule either go in the middle or in a line, then we have the stalls which are round shapes. Most people call them hoopla stalls but in our business we call them round stalls or round uns, as they say in Lancashire, and they go round the rides. Then the side stalls that stand to the back of the fair facing the fair, like the shows they used to do the same, they used to go on the outer perimeter of the fair, facing the fair.<sup>162</sup>*

Within this structure, the role of the lessee was always important and although a lessee was usually a riding master, this was not always the norm and the lessee was the most important person on the fairground by virtue of the fact that he/she had overall control of the fair. Duncan Dallas, writing in 1971 maintained that:

*The stalls are the poor relations on the fairground. They stand in forlorn avenues marking the boundary of the fair or cluster round the rides hoping for pickings. Their status is now so low that ride-owners with one or two rides will only use a few stalls as a sideline, in order to keep the less useful or active members of the family fully employed.<sup>163</sup>*

In his opinion, fairground society was stratified, with riding masters at the top of the hierarchy, shows occupying the middle ground and stalls having the lowest status. He contends that the:

*Ride owners are the barons of the fairgrounds, and their power is wielded in various ways. From their ranks come the riding masters who lease the sites of fairs on whom rests the ultimate responsibility for their quality and success.<sup>164</sup>*

Although this is an opinion that can be found within certain families or among individuals and one that outsiders are keen to emphasise, these distinctions are not necessary reflective of the overall society today.<sup>165</sup> Over the past twenty years the situation has changed. On the modern fairground these groups can still be distinguished but, if one examines the fairground community more closely, the boundaries are less defined. Today's society incorporates showpeople who own children's rides, amusement arcades, trailer mounted shows, and food kiosks selling hot dogs and candy floss. A riding master can operate a set of dodgems, old time galloping horses, or the latest imported ride from Europe, and a stallholder can be found operating a candy, hoopla, wheel-em-in or penny arcade.<sup>166</sup> A full history of the variety of rides found on the modern day fairground and their development and evolution can be found in David Braithwaite's *Fairground Architecture*, Duncan

Dallas's *The Travelling People* and Geoff Weedon and Richard's Ward's *Fairground Art*.<sup>167</sup> A brief but informative history of the various rides, stalls and shows found on the fairground can be found by consulting the National Fairground Archive's World Wide Web Site.<sup>168</sup>

Although individuals within the Showmen's Guild may maintain that a hierarchy exists, the economic factors involved in operating fairground equipment in the 1990s has broken down the barriers between riding masters and stallholders. When the ideas found in Duncan Dallas' work are voiced publicly by members of the fairground community, they receive widespread condemnation. During an interview with the BBC, a leading roundabout proprietor stated that riding masters' daughters only marry riding masters' sons.<sup>169</sup> However, he encountered much criticism for this statement, especially when it was pointed out that his father originally worked on shows and was not a riding master, whereas his wife was the daughter of a roundabout proprietor. So although certain families may like to create an illusion that the hierarchical structure of the past century is still maintained, the evidence does not support this and families that may have once been historically associated with roundabouts can be found operating funhouses, food kiosks or trailer mounted side stalls. The position of the lessee, however, is still as strong as it was a century ago; wealth and prestige are always in the hands of the organisers of the fairground as they can dictate who attends their events. Nevertheless, the rulings in the Showmen's Guild *Year Book* also take this into account, and since 1954 any member can claim what is known as the two year ruling.<sup>170</sup> Rule 23 covers the "Established Rights of Tenure at Fairs" and entitles the owner of the show, stall or ride to attend a fair if he or she has previously occupied land on that fair for two consecutive years:

*Subject to the provisions of these Rules and Bye-laws, a member who has held and occupied ground and/or a particular position at a Fair in the two immediately successive years, shall have a right (called "an established right of tenure") to hold and occupy ground or such particular position as the case may be, at the Fair in the immediately following year.*<sup>171</sup>

Therefore, the lessees and their tenants are bound by the rules and regulations of the

Guild, and failure to comply results in a series of fines and possible expulsion from the Guild itself. This rule not only applies to privately operated funfairs but also to events organised by local councils, in particular the Charter Fairs such as Nottingham Goose Fair, Stratford Mop and Oxford St Giles. However, within the regional bye-laws which cover the individual Sections, Rule 23 has different variations and in the Northern Section, for example, rule 23a applies in the "immediately preceding year", rather than "two immediately successive years."<sup>172</sup> Therefore, in practice when travelling showpeople arrive at a town, village or city to present fairground attractions the following procedures are already in force. Firstly, the Lessee who is organising the fair, which can either be the local council or an individual showperson, will have already advertised that the ground is to let, in the *World's Fair*. The showpeople who have "two year ruling" for that particular fair will confirm that they are attending the fair and any remaining plots will then be rented out to the remaining applicants, who are chosen either by a ballot system or by the range of the attractions they are offering to present. The "two year ruling" is therefore the backbone of the fair, in that it prevents the lessee tendering out ground to the highest bidders and prevents adverse competition. If the lessee ignores the "two year ruling" and lets out the position to a rival operator, the individual can be booked by the Guild, and in the case of a local authority ignoring this rule, the fair can then be declared "out of order" under the rules set out in *The Showmen's Year Book*, and the fair is then boycotted by members of the Guild.<sup>173</sup> Therefore the right to attend a fair is in the control of the "lessee" under the conditions and rules set out by the Showmen's Guild.

4.3. The recent recession and the lack of disposable income have affected the modern fairground, and the once rigid boundaries are less defined. Showpeople are constantly looking for the latest attraction or novelty that will increase their weekly takings. Five years ago the price of a ride on a large roundabout at Hull Fair would have been upwards of one to two pounds, whereas it would only have cost

fifty pence to try and win a prize on the side stalls. However, the fair held in 1996 saw a reversal of fortunes. The latest novelty at Hull Fair was a large-trailer mounted side stall and tickets to play the game cost £1.50, whereas the showmen operating the roundabout next to this attraction was charging less than a pound.<sup>174</sup> The latest innovation is the increase in showmen presenting amusements outside the United Kingdom. Showmen such as David Wallis and International Funfairs have travelled to Iceland, Hong Kong and more recently to South Africa, hiring cargo ships to transport their machines and spending the winter months in more exotic locations when their fellow showmen are usually hibernating in their winter quarters. The Wallis family travelled to South Africa in 1995 and came back to the United Kingdom for the start of the 1996 season. The following extract is taken from David Wallis's unpublished diary which provides an fascinating insight into the working pattern of the modern day showman:

*The ship we caught was a Nissan Car Transporter, eleven storeys of vehicles, cars, bulldozers, lorries, in fact anything on wheels. They lifted the deck in one corner to give us the height we needed for the loads. We used the tug of the dock to load everything but we had a problem with the dodgem plate truck because the ramps were so steep.*<sup>175</sup>

The cargo ship docked at the port in Durban and while awaiting the arrival of their equipment the showmen found out to their dismay that stowaways from West Africa had been living in the trailers for the duration of the voyage. In his notebook, David recalls the scene that greeted them as they unloaded their rides, lorries and trailers from the transporter:

*The crew had caught two stowaways from West Africa, they had been caught nearly naked in the trailers. When we found out what had gone, it seemed that the stowaways liked ladies' underwear, Christmas cake, Christmas crackers and booze. We pictured them sat in knickers and bras, pulling crackers, wearing paper hats, drinking Asti and eating Christmas cake!*<sup>176</sup>

After this inauspicious start the showmen travelled down to Umshlaga Rocks and opened their fair. For the next four months they operated fairs throughout South Africa and even crossed the border into Zimbabwe. When interviewed about his experiences for the BBC Radio 2 broadcast on fairs, David Wallis explained the reasons behind the journey:

*The fairground business is something I love, it's in my blood, I am fifth generation and it's passing on to my children and I wouldn't do anything else.*<sup>177</sup>

Over the past fifteen years the architecture of the fairground has radically changed and this has made an impact on the traditional society that operates the fairs. A recent trend has seen an increase in the popularity of trailer-mounted side shows, and the owners of such attractions can be members of a family that once operated a ride or a side stall. Children's rides have been increasingly more visible on the fairground. The introduction of trailer-mounted equipment, where the ride or show can be packed on one load and built up through hydraulics has cut down the need for additional staff or *gaff lads*. A children's ride which has been mounted on a trailer can be pulled by car and can be ready to open in less than a hour. The Francis family in Wales have been constructing such rides since the beginning of the 1990s, and the secret of their success was their foresight in predicting the need for greater portability on the fairground:

*I knew years ago that trailer-mounted things would be the in thing. The secret of show stuff now is portability, you've got to be in, down, take the money, pack it up and away. Two and three days in a gaff is no good, people are not enthusiastic any more for showstuff to that extent, they don't mind it for a couple of hours in an afternoon but that's it.*<sup>178</sup>

Portability and profitability then are the main criteria for operating equipment on the modern fair. The modern fairground is composed of people involved in a diversity of occupations, all trading under the banner of operating travelling funfairs. The most important factor in operating such equipment is membership of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. According to Frank Newsome, the incumbent President of the Guild, the members:

*Operate approximately 250 fairs every weekend from the start of the season starting from the Easter period. When I say we have 250 travelling fair every week of course we then, over the twelve month period, give the opportunity for over 300 million passenger rides to the public in general.*<sup>179</sup>

However, despite the public face of the fairground and the very active role it plays in the lives of the general populace, very little is known about the governing body that represents travelling fairpeople:

*Today the Showmen's Guild doesn't only represent the showmen, it rules them. It is the one authority they respect. Officers of the Guild are bestowed with all the regalia of high rank .... Guild rules are turned to in disputes between showmen, and the Appeals Committee is the arbiter in all matters. Cases which could - and should - be brought to court rarely are. It is the Guild's opinions that count. If you are not a member of the Guild you cannot work a pitch at a gaff.<sup>180</sup>*

The internal mechanism of the Guild is still a closely guarded secret and the main source of information can be found in *The Showmen's Year Books*. The organisation of travelling showpeople has always been open to misunderstanding, therefore consultation of this material will hopefully provide us with an insight into the external role of the Guild and the importance of its function within the community.

#### **4.4. The External role of the Guild.**

The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain was originally founded to combat the Moveable Dwelling Bill first introduced in 1888. The early success of the founders of the Guild in defeating this Bill has been covered in detail in the previous sections. However, this victory paved the foundations on which the modern day Guild is firmly based. In the first part of the *History of the Showmen's Guild*, published in 1940, Thomas Murphy writes:

*We are proud to report that during the past 40 years the Guild has succeeded in defeating 251 Private Parliamentary Bills; to these can be added well over 1,000 Bills of the same category that have contained our exemption clauses.*

He continues by reminding the members of the reasons why they should support the organisation and why the Guild was founded:

*It should always be remembered that the work of the Guild is in the nature of a defensive war. We must be constantly on the alert because there is no prospect of either peace or an armistice. As fast as we overcome one set of difficulties, others arise, and so it will go.<sup>180a</sup>*

A complete record of every Parliamentary Bill that the Guild has opposed over the last one hundred years can be found in *The Showmen's Year Book*, published by the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain since 1900. The information contained in these reports is remarkably detailed and the summary in the two volume *History of the Showmen's Guild*, which records the first fifty years of this battle, was also utilised



in compiling this section of the study. Although, as will be demonstrated, the summary presented in the *History of the Showmen's Guild* account contains mistakes, these are minor and its importance as a historical document must not be underestimated. Further research needs to be undertaken in order fully to assess the development and history of this organisation, but for the purpose of this study the following areas will now be examined briefly:

1. National Legislation.
2. The Guild and Local Government.

### **National Legislation.**

A common misconception held on the fairground concerns the legal standing of the particular Charter fair the showpeople may be attending. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the right to hold a fair can be traced to the Statute of Labours, an original Charter granted by the Crown, or that by prescriptive rights a fair has become entitled to be held on a particular day. Showpeople believe that only by an Act of Parliament will the right to hold a particular fair be withdrawn from the area to which it was granted. However, this is not the case and The Fairs Act 1871 contained the following Clause:

*In this Act the term "owner" means any person or persons, or body or commissioner, or body corporate, entitled to hold any fair, whether in respect of the ownership of any lands or tenements, or under any charter, letters patent, or Act of Parliament, otherwise howsoever.*

As a result of this Act the "owner" of the fair can appeal to the Secretary of State that:

*It would be for the convenience or advantage of the public that any such fair shall be abolished, it shall be lawful for the said Secretary of State of the Home Department, with the previous consent in writing of the owner for the time being of such a fair, or the tolls or dues payable in respect thereof to order that such fair shall be abolished accordingly.<sup>181</sup>*

The Fairs Act 1873 further extends the power of the Secretary of State to alter the date when the fair is held.<sup>182</sup> The significance of the Fairs Act 1871 was not lost on the early founders of the Guild, and after the initial success of the Van Dwellers'

Association, the following years were spent trying to prevent the Act being applied to any of the fairs attended by their members. An important case was the proposed abolition of Mitcham Fair in 1906. According to local folklore, Mitcham was granted a Charter to hold a fair by Elizabeth I, who so enjoyed watching the village festivities during her visit that she granted them the right to hold an event every year.<sup>183</sup> However, the evidence for such a Charter is not forthcoming and the prerogative to hold a fair at Mitcham is prescriptive, by right of custom. The franchise for the fair was part of the estates of James Bridger, Lord of the Manor of Tamworth, and in 1905 this was sold to a board of trustees, which included representatives from Mitcham Parish Council. This decision by the trustees to buy the franchise was partly due to the condition in the 1871 Act that only the owner of the fair could apply for its abolition. The history of Mitcham Fair had always been clouded by controversy and local disputes, but because the franchise was held by an individual the local council never had the legal standing to remove the event from their locality. The sale of the franchise altered this, and in 1906 the council applied to the Secretary of State for the abolition of the local fair.<sup>184</sup> The Showmen's Guild acted swiftly on this matter and arranged their objections on two fronts: firstly they immediately petitioned the Secretary of State for the right of representation, and secondly, they organised a public protest meeting to be held on the fairground. This campaign initiated by the showmen was successful and according to *Mitcham Fair*, an illustrated history published by Merton Library Services, when the local people attended the meeting to hear the speeches made by Thomas Horne on behalf of the showpeople:

*Many of the audience were convinced of the strength of the showmen's case and shared the view that the people's fair should be relocated from the centre of the village.*<sup>185</sup>

The Secretary of State refused to issue an order to abolish the fair and over the next seven years the Guild and the local council fought an intense battle. The matter was finally resolved in 1913 when a joint party of the local trustees and council

members abandoned their petition of abolition, and applied to the Secretary of State, under the Fairs Act of 1873, for the removal of the fair to a less inconvenient site within the locality.<sup>186</sup> This is just one example of the effectiveness of the Showmen's Guild in combating such threats. The original founders of the Van Dwellers' Association realised that the greatest threat to their continued livelihood was the implementation of national legislation. The Fairs Acts of 1871 and 1873 and the earlier Metropolitan Fairs Act 1868 had all included clauses which if applied would curtail the fairground industry. The fledgling organisation had to ensure that not only were the members aware of such rulings, but it also had to effectively prevent any further Acts being placed on the Statute Book. When Thomas Horne became the official secretary to the Van Dwellers' Association, one of his first tasks was to compile a list of laws and bye-laws that affected the travelling fair business. This was first published in 1899 and subsequently included in *The Showmen's Year Books*.<sup>187</sup> It was updated and expanded in 1921 by the English Insurance Company, the official insurance company for the Guild, and published as *The Showmen's Laws and Bye-Laws*.<sup>188</sup>

However, when the Guild became aware of the full legislation regarding fairs on both a national and local level they turned their attention to either actively preventing such legislation or gaining an exemption.<sup>189</sup> The Guild's position on the Middlesex County Council Act 1908 effectively demonstrates this policy of securing exemption and for the most part the main concern was the inserting of such clauses in national legislation. Once it had incorporated a provision that made a distinction between showpeople and other Travellers, the next concern of the Guild was to ensure that subsequent legislators were aware of this. Between 1908 and 1935 the Guild campaigned against any rulings that would affect the overall business of their members; the legislation included the Road Traffic Acts in 1930 and 1933, and the Town and Country Planning Act in 1932.<sup>190</sup> However, it was in 1936 that the previous half century of lobbying by the Guild came to fruition with the sponsoring of the Road Traffic Act and the implementation on a national level

of the exemption clause, first inserted in the Middlesex County Council Act 1908. The Road Traffic Act 1936 effectively repealed the provisions in the previous Road Traffic Acts governing the holding of driving licences for both the steersman and driver of a traction engine.<sup>191</sup> However, the legislation that was of greater significance and formed the basis for the exemption clause in subsequent Private and Public Bills was the Public Health Act. When the initial Public Health Bill came to the attention of the Guild's solicitors in 1935, there appeared no cause for objection, but when the Bill was reissued a new condition had been attached to Part Eleven, and the terms relating to tents, vans and sheds had been extended to control the use and movements of moveable dwellings. Although the showpeople were granted an exemption based on the conditions originally introduced by Middlesex County Council in 1908, the officials from the Guild did not feel that this covered the licensing of winter quarters.

After a period of negotiation between the officers of the Guild and the Government, the following proviso was inserted which freed the travelling showpeople from the need to license their vehicles or their sites whilst they were in the business of presenting travelling fairs:

*Nothing in this Section applies to a moveable dwelling which belongs to a person who is the proprietor of a travelling circus, roundabout, amusement fair stall or store (not being a pedlar, hawker or costermonger) and which is regularly used by him in the course of travelling for the purpose of his business.*<sup>192</sup>

This became known as the Showmen's Charter and was the basis for exemption clauses from hundreds of public and private Bills that would be presented in the future.

A record of these achievements can be found in *The Showmen's Year Book 1937* in which the editor writes:

*While using the word "momentous" in presenting this, our Forty-Eight Annual Report, we do so not by way of exaggeration but with a true sense of conviction when we say that the past year has been one of the most momentous in our history. For the first time since it was founded the Guild, entirely on its own merits, has been able to get a Private Bill carried out through Parliament to become a part of the Law of the country. Also, we have had provisions made for us in a major Government Measure, the Public Health Act, 1936, the original clauses of which constituted nothing but an up to-date revision of the old Moveable Dwellings Bill.*<sup>193</sup>

Over the following years, the Guild campaigned continuously on behalf of its members to ensure that no new legislation would affect the travelling fair industry. Between 1947 and 1948 it campaigned against the proviso in the Town and Country Planning Bill which allowed the parking of moveable dwellings for ten days only. Because of this crusade, the original ten day ruling was extended to twenty eight and provisions were made regarding land used for winter quarters.<sup>194</sup>

1960 can be seen as the landmark year in the Guild's fight for recognition for travelling showpeople, when three Acts of Parliament included special clauses concerning them. A full account of these can be found in the Annual Report published in *The Showmen's Year Book 1961*. The Acts in question were the Noise Abatement Act, the Betting and Gaming Act and the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act. The Caravan Site and Development Act has been covered in part in the introduction and further details of the provisions incorporated in these rulings can be found in Appendix 2. In brief, the Caravan Sites and Development Bill was proposed as a result of the increase in the recreational use of caravans and the need to legislate for the growth of unauthorised sites which had materialised. The clauses in the Public Health Act 1936 would be repealed and the original exemption granted to the showpeople did not extend to the use of winter sites. The Guild campaigned for special conditions for its members, including an agreement which would not only free them from licensing restrictions for twenty eight days in the summer, but would also be extended when living in winter quarters from October to March. The final wording of the Act included provisions which the Guild had never imagined would be included, in that it restricted the certificate of exemption:

*To be granted only to an organisation recognised by him as confining its membership to bona fide travelling showmen.*<sup>195</sup>

This certificate of exemption was granted to the Showmen's Guild and for the first time placed the emphasis on showpeople who were members of a recognised organisation. The importance of this Schedule is that it would one day be the

means by which the showpeople would be granted an exemption from the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.<sup>196</sup>

This is only a brief summary of the effectiveness of the Guild on a national level and as noted earlier further research needs to be undertaken in order to present a full and comprehensive account. The issues of winter sites for travelling showpeople are still being discussed by the Government and the Showmen's Guild. The problems of the compulsory purchasing of winter quarters by local councils have in some areas drastically reduced the number of sites available. The plight of showpeople in London was highlighted by *The Observer* in 1993, which contained the following statement issued by the valuer and estates surveyor for Bromley Council:

*I don't think Bromley has got any responsibility to provide sites for showmen. We don't recognise that the occupiers have a right to be here.*<sup>197</sup>

A Draft Planning Guide concerning the issues of planning regulations on sites used by travelling showpeople was distributed by the Department of the Environment in July 1991.<sup>198</sup> This recognised that showpeople require special facilities for their occupation and included the allocation of a separate work area on the site and the need to accommodate storage space for equipment. Discussions are still taking place between the Department of the Environment and officials from the Guild. However, the statement issued by Bromley Council is in some ways reflective of the problems that the Guild has faced both on a national and local level over the past century. The following section will now examine how the Guild's relationship with local and regional Government has developed and the consequences this has had for travelling showpeople today.

### **The Guild and Local Government.**

The external face of the Showmen's Guild concentrated on fighting misconceptions about travelling showpeople, whether they concerned the society as a whole or were condemnations of individual fairs. The Guild sought to gain greater public

understanding for the particular needs of the community. The victory over George Smith and the Moveable Dwellings Bill was only the first in a long line of local and national legislation that the Guild fought on behalf of its members. However, the greatest danger faced by showpeople was when their right to attend fairs controlled by the local authorities was challenged. This threat was often found in local Government Bills, where pressure from the indigenous community was often manifested by attempts to prohibit the holding of fairs and thereby preventing showpeople attending the event with their shows, stalls or roundabouts.

In 1911, Luton Corporation attempted through a local government Bill to obtain authority to prohibit the opening of fairs within a four mile radius of the market centre. The Clauses in the proposed Bill contravened the Fairs Act 1871, where the right of abolition was in the hands of the Home Secretary.<sup>199</sup> When the Guild petitioned the authorities in order to negotiate on behalf of the showmen, this request was denied and the Guild had to present evidence before the Court of Referees of Private Bills for the right of *locus standi*,<sup>200</sup> as an association.<sup>201</sup> Luton Corporation was not the first local authority to attempt to introduce this clause; Pontefract, Oldham and Halifax, for example, were but a few of the councils who had endeavoured to prevent the officials from the Guild negotiating on behalf of the showpeople.<sup>202</sup> In 1898, Thomas Horne and the Liberty and Property Defence League had enquired about the means to obtain *locus standi*, or right of hearing, as an organisation, but they were informed by their solicitors:

*That it was impossible for the Association as such (according to the procedure of both these Government departments) to enter a protest against, or even to inspect, any proposed by-law enactments.*<sup>203</sup>

In 1901, when the U.K.S.V.D.P.A. had tried to appeal against the introduction of a Bill by Eccles Corporation which would restrict the opening of fairs, the *locus standi* of the Van Dwellers' Association had also been refused, and the showmen concerned had to campaign against this restriction on an individual basis.<sup>204</sup> However, a similar clause put forward in the Mansfield Corporation Bill in 1901 was rejected by the Parliamentary Committee, and evidence was supplied on the

fairground industry by Thomas Hurst on behalf of the U.K.S.V.D.P.A.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, the *locus standi* of the Guild was not clear and in 1911 the organisation would be able to gain a definitive ruling on their right to be granted a *locus standi*.<sup>206</sup> The first consideration was for the Guild to be recognised by Parliament as the trade association of the travelling funfair industry thereby granting them the right to petition, not just against this Bill, but also any subsequent ones which would affect the travelling amusement business. Representatives from the Showmen's Guild and their Parliamentary Counsel, the Hon. Ewan Charteris, presented their case to the Court of Referees of Private Bills in 1911, and argued that:

*Under Standing Order 133A (1904) associations of traders or others combined for the protection of common objects were permitted to petition by their officials acting in the common interests of all their members. He told the Court that since 1904, the Association which he represented had invariably used its right to petition under the Standing Orders, and that no public body had disputed their right of so doing.*<sup>207</sup>

The Guild officials then produced evidence to support their claim that they had previously campaigned for the rights of the members against similar Bills, and they should therefore be allowed to do so in the case of Luton Corporation. This evidence was compiled by Thomas Horne and produced as a pamphlet chronicling the history of the organisation and its rise and progress.<sup>208</sup> In the light of such evidence the Committee ruled that the *locus standi* of the Association be granted and the Guild was now able to petition against the clauses in the Luton Corporation Bill. This decision was seen by Thomas Horne as a great success and one that:

*clears away for ever all doubts as to the position of the Showmen's Guild.*

He continues by stating that:

*The claim to represent the whole industry and to speak in its defence has been won over years of hard work. Upon hundreds of occasions in public meetings, before Parliament, at the Home Office, and the Local Government Board, the showman, through this society, has stated his claim for national recognition, citizenship, and equality of opportunity to ply his trade and business like all other workers and traders.*<sup>209</sup>

In *The History of the Showmen's Guild, Part 2 - 1939-1948*, Thomas Murphy estimated that the Guild had defeated over 268 Private Parliamentary Bills in the past sixty years.<sup>210</sup> A comprehensive list of these Bills can be found in the Annual



Reports which until 1972 were published in the *Year Books* and include the response of the Guild at the time. A summary of the legislation opposed by the Guild over the first sixty years can be found in Thomas Murphy's history of the Guild. The majority of these Bills originated from local authorities and, from 1911 onwards, the solicitors for the Guild employed a vigorous checking system to ensure that no proposed rulings would affect the standing of the organisation or its members. For example, in 1931, the Guild campaigned against five local Government Bills, including petitions by Surrey, Taunton and West Hartlepool.<sup>211</sup> This number increased rapidly in 1937 when of the seventy eight Bills presented in Parliament, nine were found to include provisions which would adversely affect the fairground community.<sup>212</sup> 1950 was perhaps the most difficult year for the Guild when they had to contest twelve Parliamentary Bills, including the Manchester Corporation Bill, which included a clause that

*no person shall hold a pleasure fair in the City except with the consent of the Corporation.*<sup>213</sup>

The Guild was effective in removing this and other offending legislation from the proposed Bill, and by 1958 it could proclaim in its Annual Report:

*It must be many years since no English Bill was lodged in November containing a clause that injuriously affected the business. There was of course, the usual crop of standard and exempted clauses, but there was nothing that warranted a Petition or even lengthy correspondence.*<sup>214</sup>

The Guild has also been called into action over the loss of sites for fairgrounds and the removal of fairs from the town centres, partly due to the increase in carparks and the redevelopment of city centres. But such is their effectiveness as an organisation that they are prepared to challenge on any level:

*The Showmen's Guild are engaged in a constant battle to preserve the fairgrounds or obtain reasonable alternatives where preservation proves impossible. Deputations to local authorities, representations on Development Plans, opposition to Compulsory Purchase Orders and public petitions organised on the fairgrounds are some of the legitimate means at our disposal.*<sup>215</sup>

Over the following years the Guild has continued to campaign effectively on a local scale for the rights of its members to hold fairs in the ten sections of the Guild. Each year the Sectional Offices of Guild hold an annual luncheon to which

representatives of the local authorities in which the fairs are held are invited. The Guild will use such an occasion to informally lobby for the rights of its members facing local issues. For example, at the Midland Section Luncheon in February 1997, Frank Newsome, the President of the Showmen's Guild, made a petition on behalf of the Section to the officials from Bromsgrove Council over the decision to apply for planning permission to build a leisure centre on the site where the annual fair is held. In an emotional speech Frank Newsome made the following appeal:

*Don't let us lose our fairs, our members fought in two world wars to continue the right to hold fairs and to carry on our way of living. Don't do what Hitler couldn't do, don't stop our way of life.*<sup>216</sup>

The Guild's effectiveness as an organisation, both locally and nationally has been demonstrated. Writing in 1961, F. C. Roope maintained that one of the most important tasks of the Guild was to:

*Maintain good relations with local authorities and to inquire into any legitimate complaints they may have.*<sup>217</sup>

To summarise, over the century the Showmen's Guild has become the recognised spokesbody for the travelling amusement industry, and the exemptions won by the founders of the Guild are the basis for exemptions up to and including the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. After the Second World War, the Guild, in parallel with the renewal of trade union power throughout the country, began to strengthen its organisational power within showland society. Although the history of the Guild over the first fifty years is dominated by its concern to challenge for members' rights on a national level, in the following fifty years the Guild began to concern itself with imposing rules of conduct within the fairground society as a whole:

*New forms of amusements and intensified competition within their own ranks compelled the showmen to strengthen their Guild, and submit to discipline and control by their own elected officials.*<sup>218</sup>

The following section will concentrate on the factors that governed this decision and the consequences and effectiveness of this internal legislation.

#### 4.5. The Internal Organisation of the Guild.

*Those football teams that are still at the top, Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, all the top notches that are still at the top, well you get an old World's Fair it will show Silcocks, Shaws, Collins, Mitchells, the only ones that have faded away are them that had no family to carry on like Mitchells, but they are still the same. And the Syndicate will not let like the P... 's and T... 's who are having a go now, the system won't let them survive. Because if they let one survive the next year there will be another two having a go, so the system keeps them in their place ... which I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing.<sup>219</sup>*

Although the Guild was founded in 1889, it was not until the late 1930s that in order to operate and present amusements it became necessary for travelling showpeople to join the organisation.<sup>220</sup> As demonstrated, the first fifty years of the Guild were spent fighting unjust legislation, local attempts to abolish fairs and presenting the society in a more positive and constructive way. With the increase in internal disputes within the fairground fraternity and the diversity of rival organisations that sprang up within the society, the Guild had to extend its authority and began to impose rules and regulations within the community as a whole. The earliest surviving *Year Book* dates from 1900 and comprises three pages of rules and a calendar of fairs and feasts held throughout the country.<sup>221</sup> The original rules were basically a list of suggestions, and no penalties were imposed for non-compliance, although the governing officials suggested that:

*To promote the interests of the Association, it is incumbent on all members who may be lessees of ground, or others who may have the letting thereof, to give preference in letting and sub-letting to Members of the Association.<sup>222</sup>*

However, the reality on the fairground was very different and if a showman had obtained a pitch or piece of ground it was by virtue of the fact that he/she had arrived at the site before his/her fellow showmen. In his autobiography 'Lord' George Sanger, recalls an incident when the showmen battled for pitches on the fair,<sup>223</sup> and E. R. Bostock relates how the fairground operators would race from fair to fair in order to obtain the best position available.<sup>224</sup> The early van dwellers' association was highly effective in presenting a strong picture of self-regulation and

organisation. However, the main concern of the original founders of the Guild was primarily one of changing public perceptions of fairs and overturning the 1871 Fairs Act. Although individuals within the society repeatedly called for the Guild to regulate the internal disputes between the lessees and the stallholders for example, the Guild refused to get involved. The Guild Notes published in the *World's Fair* in 1913 make this very clear:

*Let it be reminded that for twenty five years past the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain has been engaged in the most strenuous and expensive work of establishing a claim to be heard as the representative Society of the great industry and enterprise of the fairgrounds of Great Britain. A great deal of the unwise criticism and misapprehension of individual Showmen would be obviated if this supreme object of the Guild was more borne in mind. If we may put it bluntly, the Guild has grown too big, and its influence with public opinion, the sympathetic press and the Imperial Parliament itself, is too great, for its usefulness to be frittered away in dealing with some of the minor evils and difficulties that we know do exist to the injury and detriment of certain classes of fairground traders.*<sup>225</sup>

As a result of the Guild's unwillingness to become involve in internal disputes, rival factions sprang up within the society and by 1914 there were at least three other organisations claiming to represent the fairground fraternity. Indeed, as early as 1906 a reporter in the *World's Fair* claimed that the old Association had outlived its usefulness and it was suggested that the new ones were far more effective in regulating the fairground community.<sup>226</sup> As previously stated in Chapter 3, membership of these organisations was based on the type of equipment the showman or woman operated, and consisted of the Stallholders Association, and the British Roundabout Society and Showmen's Union. Documentation of these rival organisations is scarce, but further information can be found by consulting the letters published in *World's Fair* from 1906 onwards.<sup>227</sup>

4.6. The issues of internal regulation which dominated the meetings of these organisations would effectively be taken up by Guild as its position within the fairground community was consolidated. However, the Guild's original aim of fighting issues on a national stage was one of the decisive factors in its longevity and the previous section has demonstrated the Guild's effectiveness at this level.

The Guild then turned its attention to the government of the fairground community. Regulations were needed to prevent misconduct and infighting between its members that were attracting the attention of unsympathetic local authorities.

In order to impose restrictions and regulations on the community, membership of the Guild had to be encouraged, and in the years following the First World War the Guild lobbied within the society for self-regulation and restrictive admission. In 1920 there was a greater increase in the number of new associates being admitted to the Guild and the figures reported in the *Year Book* reflect this growth. Between 1919 and 1920 membership of the organisation rose from 1,612, to 1,954.<sup>228</sup> Even during the 1920s, when membership of the Showmen's Guild fluctuated slightly, the collective personnel was always in the region of 2,000. R. D. Sexton, writing in *Southern History* in 1988, believes that the 1920s were an important time in the history of the Guild:

*In retrospective, this was seen as the time when the Showmen's Guild 'got on its feet'. In an industry which was no longer expanding, many showmen saw the need to band together for protection.*<sup>229</sup>

Although Robert Sexton's study is one of the few academic articles on travelling showpeople, the reader should be wary of taking specific points from it at face value. Firstly, the information regarding membership of the Showmen's Guild contradicts that found in *The Showmen's Year Books* in my possession, and secondly Sexton fails to take into account the fact that the *Year Books* are the annual reports of the Guild and therefore all figures and letters quoted refer to meetings and subscriptions from the preceding year.

By the late 1920s, the decrease in the numbers of members joining the Guild, compelled the General Secretary, William Savage, to issue the following warning in the 1928 *Year Book*:

*The fact of the Guild having a restricted Membership and not an extended one, throws the responsibility of income, upon such membership, and because of the restriction, which means greater benefit, the Members should appreciate the fact and rise to the occasion of these privileges. May we further point out that Rule 17 particularly points out the relationship of Members, one towards the other, in the*

*matter of occupying and using the Fair Grounds; and embodies the rule "No Guild, No Ground." For this to become effective we count upon the loyalty of the Lessees of the Fair Grounds who are Members, as well as upon the tenant members.<sup>230</sup>*

The introduction of Rule 17 had been an attempt by the Showmen's Guild to impose membership of the organisation on the showpeople as a whole. Although at first this did result in a substantial increase in members, the introduction of a new constitution which strictly defined the rules and regulations of the Guild was a major factor in its eventual monopoly. Throughout 1923, the ten Sections of the Guild held a series of meetings, and various regulations were proposed, including the "No Guild, No Ground" policy which was later implemented as Rule 17:

*Members of the Guild who are Tenants of the Guild, Lessees of Grounds, shall not follow or occupy the ground of any Lessee who is not a member of the Guild and should any member do so, he will expose himself to the fines and penalties that may be imposed by the Committee of the Section of which he is a member, and be subject to expulsion under Rule 9.<sup>231</sup>*

The previous rules had suggested that Guild members be given preferential treatment. According to William Savage, this new constitution was needed because:

*It was found that the rules and regulations of the Membership were more of a tentative character than otherwise, and to place the work upon a more permanent basis it has been found necessary to reconstruct the whole of the rules and conditions of Membership.<sup>232</sup>*

Throughout the 1930s the Guild became stronger and more effective, not only on a national level, where it campaigned rigorously for the rights of the members, but also within the community itself.

4.7. The Second World War was effectively the means by which the Showmen's Guild extended its authority over the travelling showpeople as a whole. Mindful of the near collapse of the industry during the First World War, the Guild was better prepared and during the late 1930s it maintained close links with the Ministries of Supply, Agriculture and Fisheries and Transport.<sup>233</sup> The Stay-at-Home holidays initiative, implemented by the Government in 1941, enabled the showmen to build up power, support and economic strength on a national and regional level.<sup>234</sup> Showpeople received special "Traveller's Ration Cards" and "Showmen's Vehicle

Fuel Ration Cards" which they could use throughout the country. Not only were they encouraged to open fairs in the city centres and parkland, but some local authorities actually paid the showmen or waived the rent for the wartime period.<sup>235</sup>

4.8. From the Second World War onwards the Showmen's Guild went from strength to strength, updating its rules but keeping to the original principles of its founding fathers. It effectively became a trade association in which membership was granted only to the sons and daughters of the existing members. In 1957, a reporter for *The Times* wrote:

*As a professional body and Employers' Trade Union the Showmen of Britain must rank as one of the best governed and most co-operative in the Kingdom.*<sup>236</sup>

As previously stated in Chapter 1 the present day society is organised at both a national and regional level and comprises ten sectional offices and a head office in Staines. The regions are broken down into ten bureaucratic areas consisting of: Lancashire, Yorkshire, Scotland, South Wales, the Midlands, Norwich and Eastern Counties, London and the Home Counties, the West of England, Derby, Notts. Mid. and South Lincs., and the Northern Section. The thirty eight rules which today govern modern day fairground society have evolved over the past century and bear little resemblance to those found in the 1900 *Year Book*.<sup>237</sup> The main rules are those governing membership, conditions of membership, rights and privileges held on the fairground and the time and location of fairs.<sup>238</sup> This elaborate system of self-regulation has seldom been challenged, and when it has, the rules have been changed to effectively restrict such action being taken again. Any changes in the procedures have to <sup>be</sup> voted on by the ten sections and can only be passed when a two thirds majority is reached.<sup>239</sup> If complaints are made by their fellow showmen concerning non-compliance with the rules laid out in the *Year Book*, the accused have the right to prepare their case and present it to the regional committee, where a judgement is made. Offenders usually have to pay a fine which is applied on a sliding scale according to the nature of the offence.<sup>240</sup> A member has the right to appeal against the decision and the case is then presented to the Appeals Committee

which arbitrates on the matter and finally is heard by a tribunal.<sup>241</sup> Proposals for the introduction of new bye laws and rule changes are first sent to the Management Committee and then presented to the Central Council, which consists of the President, Vice President, Junior Vice President, General Secretary and elected officials from the ten regional committees. The reports of the Central Council and the Annual Report are published in the *Year Book* and a full record of these can be found in the Guild's Central Office in Staines.<sup>242</sup> Any rule change has to meet with the approval of the Office of Fair Trading, and after a complaint was lodged in 1993 over the restricted membership policy, the conditions of membership of the Showmen's Guild were altered. During 1993 a General Meeting was called and for the first time since 1924 a policy was introduced whereby membership was effectively open.<sup>243</sup> From 1994 onwards, the previously restricted membership policy of the Guild changed, and currently membership can be granted to any EEC national over the age of twenty who operates fairground equipment.<sup>244</sup>

This is only a brief introduction to the inner workings of the Showmen's Guild and further research needs to be undertaken in order to present a comprehensive account of its development over the past hundred years. Nevertheless, the continued support by the showpeople would seem to indicate the strength of this unique organisation. When interviewed about the continued effectiveness of the Guild, Sandra Wright responded:

*Well the thing is, I've done like everybody else, complained about committees, everybody does, oh the committee is useless and the committee's corrupted and the committee does this wrong and the committee is not strong enough and if somebody loses their case, it's the committee that's against them. But when you get on there and you see how it works it's not like that because everything's voted on. I mean everybody has their say. If there is two people having a case, they both have a say and you can ask them questions and then they both have a winding up speech and then it's voted on what way, or who you think has done wrong or hasn't done wrong, it's voted on. So really it's more democratic when you get on, than when you think it is when you're not on it.<sup>245</sup>*

4.9. The Guild is only as effective as its members and despite the growth of the rival organisations within the fairground community the Guild still effectively



represents the travelling showpeople of Great Britain:

*There is roughly five and half thousand members to date which represents 21,000 showmen because normally one member of the family would be the member of the Showmen's Guild. Normally the husband but in more recent times the wife has joined and the children have joined. On an average it works out about 21,000 travelling showmen with a membership of 5,500 members of the Guild. We are all in it to represent one another properly and everyone has an equal chance today whereas years ago it was more a tight knit family concern. If you run funfair equipment then you have the qualification to become a member of the Showmen's Guild.<sup>246</sup>*

In the past hundred years the travelling showpeople have had to face new challenges to their traditional patterns of employment and mobility within the fairground. By the start of the twentieth century they may have been financially solvent but their employment and living environment were constantly under threat from local authorities, zealous evangelists, as in the case of George Smith, and national legislation. In 1961, F.C. Roope wrote that:

*The responsibilities of the Guild seem to grow more complicated as the years pass. New legislation, new restrictions on grounds, new forms of competition, are all reflected in correspondence, interviews and deputations to local authorities, government departments and Members of Parliament. In addition the personal problems of the members and their relations with each other and the Guild, through the administration of the rules, are often even more complicated and certainly take some time.<sup>247</sup>*

However, he concluded that the Showmen's Guild:

*believe we have something worth carrying on, and we are determined to carry it on.<sup>248</sup>*

Over the century the Showmen's Guild has effectively been carrying on the mandate set by the founders in 1889: to separate showpeople from Traveller-Gypsies, and to defend the homes, liberties and way of life of the showpeople of Great Britain.<sup>249</sup> It has become the watchdog for the industry as a whole, the means by which the community is organised and the public face of the community. The following chapter will focus on the private and internal mechanism of showland society by analysing the part played by women in the economic, domestic and official domains.

## Notes.

1. Nan Joyce, *Traveller, an Autobiography*, ed. by Anna Farmer (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), p. 1.
2. Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*.
3. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*.
4. Mayall, *English Gypsies*.
5. Although there are numerous scholars working in the field of traveller identity and ethnicity, the material relevant to this study can be found in the work of the aforementioned scholars.
6. Okely, 'An Anthropological Perspective', p. 2.
7. Ibid.
8. A. Holland, Jnr: TR/VT/C44, p. 1
9. Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, p. 4.
10. Hazel Green, *Counting Gypsies* (London: HMSO, 1991), p. 32.
11. Caravan Sites Act 1968, cited in *The Showmen's Year Book*, ed. by F. C. Roope (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1969), p. 131.
12. See Appendix 2 for full details.
13. Mayall, *English Gypsies*, p. 39.
14. See Acton, *Gypsy Politics*.
15. Thomas Murphy states incorrectly that the Middlesex County Council Bill was passed in 1906. Although, the original exemption granted to the showpeople was in the first draft of the Bill in 1906, it was not passed until 1908.
16. Clause 31 of the Middlesex County Council Bill 1908, quoted in Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 64.
17. Mayall, *English Gypsies*, p. 69.
18. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 123.
19. Ibid., p. 125.
20. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 64.
21. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 125.
22. Ibid.
23. McCann, Siochain, and Ruane.
24. The three reports on the guidelines for Gypsy site provisions have been made effectively out of date by the recent Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, but include useful information on how the Government classifies travelling people; see David Todd and George Clark, *Gypsy Site Provision and Policy* (London, HMSO, 1991); David Todd and George Clark, *Good Practice Guidelines for Gypsy Site Provisions by Local Authorities* (London: HMSO, 1991); and Hazel Green, op. cit.
25. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, pp. 60-80.
26. Ibid.
27. Term used by Romanies and by Gypsy scholars when referring to the settled populace.
28. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, pp. 60-64.
29. Ibid., pp. 53-87.
30. See Chapter 4; Romany or Traveller - definitions or stereotypes in Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*.
31. The advertising boards outside the fortune tellers' caravans at Hull Fair often carry the wording "Genuine Gypsy" or "daughter of real Romanies".

- During my visit to the fair in October 1996 I found that the majority of the women I talked to claimed such a link. See Jones, p. 45.
32. Mrs. E. Francis: TR/VT/BF7, p. 1.
  33. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 63.
  34. Okely, 'An Anthropological Perspective', p. 6.
  35. Brown, p. 93.
  36. Recollections of conversations with Arthur Francis, proprietor of Francis's Fairground Amusements, 1990-1992.
  37. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 70.
  38. Personal communication, Pauline Cooper, 21st January, 1996; see Fieldwork Notebook for further details.
  39. Dodd, p. 144.
  40. Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*, p. 72.
  41. Tommy Russell: TR/VT/TGR/2. p. 2
  42. *Gypo* = a derogatory name for a Traveller-Gypsy, and one that is used as a form of racial abuse. See Clive Upton and J. D. A. Widdowson, *An Atlas of English Dialects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 80-81.
  43. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 207.
  44. Ibid.
  45. See Sharon Bohn Gmelch, 'The Emergence and Persistence of an Itinerant Ethnic Group: The Irish Travellers' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, 1974); and George Gmelch, 'Change and Adaptation Among Irish Travellers' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, 1974).
  46. Jim Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland: Whose Country, Whose History?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995).
  47. Sharon Gmelch, *Tinkers and Travellers: Ireland's Nomads*. (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1975).
  48. *The Visitor*, January 15th, 1997, p. 3.
  49. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 64.
  50. See Chapter 3 on methodology for a more detailed account of the factors involved in collecting the research data.
  51. See Donald Kenrick, and Sian Bakewell, *On the Verge: The Gypsies of England* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995), for a more detailed account of the impact of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, on Traveller-Gypsies in the United Kingdom.
  52. Telephone conversation with Celine Williams, 18th November, 1996; see Fieldwork Notebook for details.
  53. Barbara Adams, Judith Okely, David Morgan, and David Smith, *Gypsies and Government Policy in England* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 152.
  54. Birth certificate of Randall Kay Williams, 14th July, 1846, in the possession of Miss Celine Williams.
  55. Death certificate of Randall Kay Williams, 14th November 1896, in the possession of Miss Celine Williams.

56. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF7, p. 1.
57. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of the Underworld* (London: Routledge, 1950).
58. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, pp. 73-74.
59. Mrs. E. Francis: TR/VT/BF7, p. 1.
60. See appendix 1 for full biographical details of the persons interviewed for this research.
61. Conversation with Sandra Wright, 12th January 1997; see Fieldwork Notebook for further details.
62. J. Davis, R. Grant and A. Locke, *Out Of Site, Out Of Mind: New age travellers and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill* (London: Children's Society, 1994), p. 1.
63. For a more detailed summary of the perceptions of New Age Travellers and their relationship to the itinerant community in the United Kingdom see Vanessa Toulmin, *Crusties, Hawkers, Pikeys, Showmen or Travellers? A Definition of the word 'traveller' in relation to historical and contemporary itinerant communities in the United Kingdom*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Folklore Society, University of Sheffield, 22nd to 24th March 1996.
64. Caravan Sites Act 1968, quoted in Green, p. 67.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. Richard Lowe and William Shaw, *Voices of the New Age Nomads: Travellers* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993), p. 3.
70. *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, An Introductory Guide* (London: HMSO, 1994), p. 27.
71. Kenrick and Bakewell.
72. Derek Hawes, and Barbara Perez, *The Gypsy and the State: The Ethnic Cleansing of British Society* (Bristol: SAUS Publications, 1995).
73. Society of Independent Roundabout Proprietors, educational leaflet, uncatalogued item, National Fairground Archive, University of Sheffield.
74. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 80.
75. See Sexton 'The Travelling People', in this study, Sexton compares Gypsies, showpeople and canal barge dwellers and concludes that Gypsy Travellers and showpeople share similar cultural and ethnic attributes, but that canal people have no historic link to either community.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
77. *World's Fair*, 20th February, 1909, p. 7.
78. See Rule 6 of the *Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book*, Conditions of Membership, up to and including 1993.
79. Information supplied by Keith Miller, General Secretary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.
80. *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1996-97*, p. 52.
81. Rule 6, Qualification of Membership, and Rule 8, Conditions of Membership and Election to Membership

- by Section of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.
82. Acton, *Gypsy Politics*, p. 80.
  83. *World's Fair*, February 20th, 1909, p. 7.
  84. Adams, Okely, Morgan, and Smith, p. 42.
  85. See Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *Till doomsday in the afternoon: The Folklore of a Family of Scots Travellers, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).
  86. Alice Binchy, 'Travellers' Language: A Sociological Perspective', in McCann, Siochain, and Ruane, pp. 134 -154.
  87. Donald Kenrick, 'Romani Language', in *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus: The English Romani dialect and its contemporary social, educational and linguistic standing*, ed. by Thomas Acton and Donald Kenrick (London: Romanestan Publications, 1984), pp. 79-88.
  88. See Glossary in Chapter 6 for full definition, but basically *mang the cant, plarey the backslang and kecka rocka* = do you speak the language?
  89. See Glossary of words used on the fairground in Chapter 6 for further details of the traveller languages cited in this chapter.
  90. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF7, p. 1.
  91. See Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*, pp. 77-104, for a discussion of the concept of pollution and purity within the Gypsy community.
  92. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF7, p. 2.
  93. Tommy Russell: TR/VT/TGR/2, p. 26.
  94. Okely, 'An Anthropological Perspective', p. 7.
  95. Donald Kenrick, 'Irish Travellers - A Unique Phenomenon in Europe?' in McCann, Siochain, and Ruane, pp. 20-36 (p. 28).
  96. See Charles Dickens, 'The Old Curiosity Shop', in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, April 1840 to January 1841 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1841; new edn, 1910), p. 280, 288 for the description of the interior of Mrs Jarley's caravan.
  97. C. H. Ward-Jackson, and Denis E. Harvey, *The English Gypsy Caravan: Its Origins, Builders, Technology and Conservation* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972).
  98. Sanger, p. 38.
  99. Nerrisa Wilson, *Gypsies and Gentlemen: The Life and Times of the Leisure Caravan* (London: Columbus Books, 1992).
  100. Wilson, p. 35.
  101. Wilson, p. 34.
  102. *World's Fair*, November 14th, 1914, p. 18.
  103. Ward-Jackson and Harvey, p. 103.
  104. *World's Fair*, August 3rd, 1907, p. 7.
  105. See Lane, *Burrell Showmen's*; and also *Steaming*, The Journal of the National Traction Engine Club, National Fairground Archive, 178 A 12, Volumes 1 to 21.
  106. See National Railway Museum in York for photographs of road and rail waggons within their collection.

107. See Jones, for further information regarding the restoration of horse-drawn Gypsy caravans.
107. Mrs Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW, p. 20.
108. When Mrs Sandra Wright was interviewed her husband William participated in the conversation towards the end of the session and supplied the information that modern living vans can cost on average a £1000 per square foot and in some cases up to two £2000 per square foot. See TR/VT/SMW, p. 20.
109. Personal conversation, Graham Downie, January 20th, 1997.
110. Adams, Okely, Morgan, and Smith, p. 42.
111. See Fieldwork Notebook, January 1995; for further details.
112. For details of an outsider perceptions of the domestic situation within the living van see Sexton, 'The Travelling People', pp 309-317.
113. Celine Williams, personal communication, January 21st 1997; see Fieldwork Notebook for details.
114. Common superstition found on the fairground. Mrs E. Francis, for example, would never allow china with any kind of bird decoration in her living van and this belief is still widely held.
115. See Fieldwork Notebook, Hull Fair, October 11th, 1996.
116. Celine Williams, personal communication, January 21st 1997; see Fieldwork Notebook for details.
117. Mrs Valerie Moody: TR/VT/LJ/VM1, p. 3
118. Cunningham, pp. 163-185.
119. See Walton and Poole, pp. 100-124.
120. Reid, pp. 124-153.
121. Walton and Poole, p. 115.
122. The Fairs Act, 1871.
123. Metropolitan Fairs Act, 1868.
124. Walton and Poole, p. 119.
125. Reid, p. 142.
126. Ibid., p. 143.
127. *World's Fair*, February 27th, 1910, p. 5.
128. *World's Fair*, July 21st, 1917, p. 17.
129. Ibid.
130. See Sexton, 'The Travelling People', pp. 38-46, for a summary of non-Travellers' perceptions of the personal hygiene of Gypsies, showpeople and canal dwellers.
131. Leicester Oral History Project: TR/VT/C44, p. 1.
132. Ibid., p. 2.
133. See Walton and Poole, and Reid's articles in particular, in *Popular Culture and Custom*, op. cited.
134. Nigel Fogg, *A History of Stratford Mop and the Town's other Fairs* (Privately published to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Stratford-upon-Avon's first Charters by Bob Wilson and the Fairground Association of Great Britain, 1996), p. 5.
135. *Hull Mail*, quoted in *World's Fair*, October 14th, 1911, p. 6.

136. *Mail on Sunday*, December 12th, 1993.
137. Such images are found in Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man*, Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*, to name but a few examples.
138. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 21.
139. See Toulmin, 'Hull Fair' for a brief summary of the importance of the fair to the local people.
140. BBC Radio Leeds, February 22nd, 1996: TR/VT/LVF, p. 1.
141. Cited in the *Yorkshire Post*, October 14th, 1966, p. 16.
142. See letter page in the *Sheffield Star*, 10th - 17th August, 1996.
143. *World's Fair*, February 11th, 1911, p. 7.
144. *World's Fair*, May 8th, 1909, p. 12.
145. See Sexton, 'The Travelling People', for a discussion of the conceptions and attitudes towards travelling society as a whole.
146. Birkett, pp. 12-13.
147. Roger Tuby, interviewed by BBC Radio Leeds, TR/VT/LVF, p. 1.
148. Sandra Wright: Transcript. TR/VT/SMW1, p. 8.
149. Birkett, p. 19.
150. Leicester Oral History Project: TR/VT/C44, p. 2.
151. Arthur Tuby: TR/VT/ATL1, p. 4.
152. *World's Fair*, July 7th, 1906, p. 1.
153. Ibid.
154. Ibid.
155. See *World's Fair*, July 14th, p. 4, and August 4th, p. 4, 1906, for a selection of the responses to this circular.
156. Birkett, p. 16.
157. Further information on the Educational Liaison Officers can be found in the National Fairground Archive: NFA 178 O
158. See *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book, 1997-97*, p. 2 for full details of this system.
159. Mrs Rae Armstrong Wilson: TR/VT/RW1/1, p. 9.
160. Mrs Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 12.
161. Horne, *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain: The Story of its Rise and Progress*, p. 1.
162. BBC Radio 2, 21st January, 1996: TR/VT/BBC/NTM, p. 3.
163. Dallas, p. 163.
164. Ibid., p. 110.
165. See Sexton, 'The Travelling People', pp. 168-171, for an evaluation of fairground hierarchy from 1900-1950.
166. See Chapter 6 for glossary of terms used on the modern fairground.
167. See Bibliography for further details.
168. National Fairground Archive:  
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/nfa>.
169. I have been unable to trace the exact date of the broadcast but this incident is one that is constantly referred to by the informants; see

- Fieldwork Notebook, July 1996.
170. See Sexton, 'The Travelling People', pp. 132-134, for a brief history of the "Two Year Ruling", which was first introduced as a sectional bye law by the Lancashire Section of the Showmen's Guild in 1929, and Dallas, pp. 34-36. For the national appearance of this rule see *The Showmen's Year Book 1955*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1955), pp. 45-46.
171. *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1995-96*, p. 95.
172. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
173. Under Rule 21k "Fairground Out of Order", a fair can be boycotted by the members of the Guild for adverse rent increases, illegal practices and non-compliance with Guild rulings. See *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1995-96*, pp. 87-89, for a listing of the conditions under which this ruling can be implemented.
174. See Fieldwork Notebook, 31st January 1996 for details of a conversation with Sandra Wright regarding Hull Fair.
175. Unpublished diary of David Wallis, 1995-1996, p. 2.
176. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
177. BBC Radio 2, 21st January, 1996: TR/VT/BBC/NTM, p. 6.
178. Mrs. E. Francis: TR/VT/BF3, p. 6.
179. BBC Radio 2, 21st January 1996: TR/VT/BBC/NTM, p. 2.
180. Birkett, p. 19.
181. Fairs Act, 1871, schedule 3.
182. Fairs Act, 1873, schedule 6.
183. *Merton in Pictures: Mitcham Fair* (Merton: Merton Library Services, 1991), p. 1.
184. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
185. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
186. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 88.
187. Thomas Horne, *A Synopsis of Bye-Laws* (Manchester: The United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association, 1899).
188. William C. Tagg, and W. Carlyle Croasdell, *The Showmen's Laws and Bye-Laws* (London: English Insurance, 1921).
189. *The Showmen's Year Book 1902*, ed. by Thomas Horne (Manchester: United Kingdom Showman and Van Dwellers Protection Association, 1902), p. 25.
190. Roope, *Come To The Fair*, p. 107.
191. *The Showmen's Year Book 1937*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1937), pp. 69-70.
192. *Ibid.*, p. 74
193. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
194. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, Part 2 - 1939-48*, p. 98.
195. Caravan Sites and Development Act 1960, Chapter 62 schedule 1, section 10 part 1.
196. See appendix 2 for further details.
197. *The Observer*, 14th November, 1993.
198. *A Draft Planning Guide for the Provision of Sites*



- for *Travelling Showpeople*. June, 1991. Department of the Environment.
199. See Appendix 2.
200. *Locus standi* is the legal term for the right of an organisation to represent its members through official delegation.
201. *The Showmen's Year Book 1912*, ed. by Thomas Horne (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1912), pp. 17-19.
202. See Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 82, for details of other attempts by local authorities to impose this legislation.
203. *The Showmen's Year Book 1902*, p. 25.
204. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
205. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
206. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, pp. 80-81.
207. *The Showmen's Year Book, 1912*, p. 18.
208. See Horne, *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain: The Story of its Rise and Progress*.
209. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
210. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, Part 2 - 1939-48*, p. 104
211. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 174.
212. *The Showmen's Year Book 1938*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1938), p. 68.
213. *The Showmen's Year Book 1951*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1951), p. 93.
214. *The Showmen's Year Book 1958*, ed. by Frederick C. Roope (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1958), p. 101.
215. Roope, *Come to the Fair*, p. 102.
216. See Fieldwork Notebook, February 5th, 1997.
217. Roope, *Come to the Fair*, p. 108.
218. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
219. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 22.
220. Robert D. Sexton, 'Travelling Showmen in Two World Wars', *Southern History*, 10 (1988), 160-177.
221. *The Showmen's Year Book 1900*, ed. by Thomas Horne (Manchester: U.K. Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association, 1900), pp. 7-10.
222. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
223. See Sanger, p. 45-47, for the Battle of Oxford Road.
224. See Bostock, p. 4.
225. *World's Fair*, April 5th, 1913, p. 10.
226. *World's Fair*, September 15th, 1906, p. 1.
227. See also, National Fairground Archive: NFA 178 Z11 for details of the Yorkshire Stallholders Society membership cards donated by George Tucker.
228. *The Showmen's Year Book 1921*, ed. by William Savage (Bloxwich: Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1921), p. 6.
229. Sexton, 'Travelling Showmen', p. 167.
230. *The Showmen's Year Book 1928*, ed. by William Savage (Bloxwich: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain), p. 52.

231. *The Showmen's Year Book 1924*, ed. by William Savage (Bloxwich: Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1924), p. 18.
232. *The Showmen's Year Book 1923*, ed. by William Savage (Bloxwich: Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1923), p. 17.
233. Sexton, 'Travelling Showmen', p. 168.
234. See Sexton, 'The Travelling People', pp. 96-103, for further details of the stay at home initiative implemented by the Government during the Second World War.
235. See Roope, *Come to the Fair*, p. 8., and Sexton, 'Travelling Showmen', p. 170.
236. *The Times*, 5th August, 1957.
237. See *The Showmen's Year Book 1900*, pp. 7-10.
238. *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1995-96*, pp. 51-110.
239. Graham Downie, *All The Fun of the Fair* (Staines: Privately published by the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1987), p. 10.
240. See Rule 19, Fines and Penalties, in *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1996-97*, pp. 76-79.
241. *Ibid.*, see Rule 20, Appeals, pp. 79-83.
242. For the purpose of this research, I was granted full access to the *Year Books* and a duplicate set was deposited in the National Fairground Archive.
243. Personal communication, Keith Miller, General Secretary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 3rd February, 1996; see Fieldwork Notebook for details.
244. *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book, 1995-96*, pp. 52-53.
245. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 5.
246. Bert Ayres, Vice-President of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, interviewed BBC Radio 2, 21st January, 1996. See TR/VT/BBC/NTM, p. 2
247. Roope, *Come to the Fair*, p. 110.
248. *Ibid.*
249. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 29.

## Chapter 5.

### 'There's No Women Like Showwomen'.

*John Peters, he used to travel Yorkshire and Lancashire and he was on the Yorkshire Section Committee of the Guild and he used to say by all accounts, that he used to take his hat off to the women in this business and he used to say that the women in this business were the backbone of the business, because there would be no business if it wasn't for the women and you have to be bred to the life to be able to stick it, because today is not like it used to be. <sup>1</sup>*



Figure 5. Florence and Maisie Shufflebottom, Hull Fair, 1950s.

## Chapter 5.

### 'There's No Women Like Showwomen'.

#### 1. Introduction.

Previous chapters have presented various aspects of travelling fairs, the attitudes shared by the showpeople, the organisation of the Guild and the growth and development of fairground society. This chapter will present an in-depth guide to the role played by women on the domestic, economic and public fronts of the fairground.

In his preface to the *History of Bartholomew Fair* in 1853 Henry Morley called it "the unwritten history of the story of the people."<sup>2</sup> Since then a greater amount of literature has been published on travelling fairs, which also includes autobiographies of the showmen involved.<sup>3</sup> However, the material on travelling showwomen is scarce and undocumented. Although work has been undertaken on travelling women in other communities, as for example in Betsy Whyte's *Yellow on the Broom, the early days of a traveller woman*,<sup>4</sup> and Judith Okely's research on Traveller-Gypsies,<sup>5</sup> no comparable information has been gathered on travelling showwomen.<sup>6</sup> Duncan Dallas, writing in *The Travelling People*, presents a chapter on the role of women, but this evaluation is basically that of an outsider and does not come from within the community.<sup>7</sup> The problem of the quality of material in the published sources becomes more acute when it is realised that this information is pertinent to the inner workings of the community. In order to present an evaluation of the social and working conditions of women on travelling fairs throughout the twentieth century, and bearing in mind the lack of material evident in the published sources, the methodology utilised in the previous chapters was also employed in the collection and analysis of data for this section of the study, namely the evaluation of the *World's Fair*, *The Showmen's Year Books* and oral testimony.

### 1.1. Printed Sources.

The first line of investigation in this section of the research was the *World's Fair*. Close examination of the contents of this publication yielded a wealth of documentary evidence, including biographical accounts of showwomen from the early part of this century and information on the presence of women proprietors in the advertising pages. It also provided the documentary framework in which to place the oral testimonies of the fieldwork interviews. For example, when Celine Williams was interviewed, she related stories dating back to the time of her grandmother, who was born in the 1880s, and the *World's Fair* supplied the chronological framework for these reminiscences.

After the *World's Fair*, the main source of printed information was *The Showmen's Year Book*. Dating from 1900, these yearly membership accounts provide a list of the both the male and female personnel of the Showmen's Guild to the present day, and important financial details. These books are the property of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and the only complete set can be found at their headquarters at Staines. Through the good offices of the Guild, I was allowed unlimited access to these handbooks for the purpose of this research.

### 1.2. Oral Testimony.

The most obvious source of material is of course the travelling showwomen themselves, and interviews were set up with a selection of women throughout the Yorkshire and Lancashire Sections of the Guild. The use of autobiography as a means of reconstructing history is an approach used by both oral and documentary historians, and the methodological problems of such an approach have been discussed in Chapter 2. Travelling fairs have their own diverse and stratified culture. The term 'showpeople' covers occupations ranging from owner of an adult or children's ride, proprietor of a funhouse or novelty show, or being involved in the catering side by

selling food such as hotdogs and candy floss. On the modern fairground, women can be found operating the rides, advising on the planning of the fair, and also as lessees in their own right. The interviews conducted for this research reflect the different economic groups that are found operating on the fairground, and out of the thirty four people selected for the study as a whole, fourteen of the interviewees are women.

In order to evaluate the importance showwomen have in the overall fabric of the community, the majority of the interviewees were asked questions regarding their upbringing and how they perceived the contribution showwomen made, not only on the domestic front, but also in the economic and physical environment of the fairground.

1.3. The showwomen selected from the travelling community were predominantly based in the Lancashire and Yorkshire Sections of the Guild and of the fourteen interviewed, thirteen were either married or widowed. The age ratio of this group is as follows: seven percent between thirty and forty years of age; fourteen percent between forty and sixty years of age; twenty eight percent between sixty and seventy years of age; fifty one percent between seventy and eighty years of age. Fifty percent of the female interviewees belonged to the roundabout fraternity, thirty percent were predominantly stallholders and the remaining twenty percent had had experience of fairground shows. As noted in Chapter 2, these interviews resulted in thirty five hours and thirty minutes of tape-recordings, fuller details of which can be found in Appendix 1.

From the wealth of documentary and oral material gathered, four life histories were chosen to provide a chronological framework for this evaluation of the contribution made by travelling showwomen to the economic and social fabric of the community. The methodology and issues reflecting the selection process have been outlined in Chapter 2, and Appendix 1 includes biographical information on all the interviewees.

1.4. The following women were selected, in order to provide a chronological account of the social conditions facing women who have lived and worked on travelling fairs over the past one hundred years:

- (i) Renee Marshall, née Scott, aged eighty, born into family of circus proprietors and performers.
- (ii) Sandra Wright, née Marshall, eldest daughter of Renee Marshall, aged fifty six; runs W. Marshall Amusements and in 1996 became only the second women delegate to be elected to the central council of the Showmen's Guild.
- (iii) Celine Williams, aged fifty six, single, owner of stalls and catering equipment.
- (iv) Rae Armstrong-Wilson, née Armstrong, aged thirty two; runs Armstrong Amusements; married, with two children and in 1994 became the first women to be elected to the committee of the Derby, Notts., Mid and South Lincs. Section of the Showmen's Guild.

During the fieldwork, a wealth of information was collected by conducting one to one interviews with a selection of travelling showwomen. In order to present an evaluation of the social and working conditions of these women, the material has been considered under three headings:

- 1. The public and economic domains.
- 2. The domestic and social spheres.

In this section the role of the women as wives and mothers will be examined in relationship to the working environment and how this fits into the overall pattern of fairground life in the community.

- 3. Showwomen and the Guild.

The role of women in the Showmen's Guild will be discussed, either as members in their own right, or as elected officials.

## 2. Site of the Fair - The Public and Economic Domains.

*In showland, women have always worked and worked hard. We have seen our women at the head of circuses, menageries, roundabouts and many other amusement concerns, and in fully ninety per cent of our people, it is the women who look after the exchequer.<sup>8</sup>*

This observation appeared as part of an editorial in the *World's Fair* during 1916, when the shortage of men in the workforce was affecting both travelling and settled communities. The significance of this statement should not be underestimated; the writer stresses that showwomen have always played an equal role in the business and that the pioneering role models provided by generations of showwomen should not be forgotten:

*In remote days the women of showland were looked upon with wonder by those who saw what was being done, but nowadays, when others are doing similar work, their work does not cause any special comment.<sup>9</sup>*

During the First and Second World Wars, fairground women were compelled through necessity into providing the workforce and the operating skills on the fair because of the shortage of men. The sentiments reflected in 1916 can be found in the oral testimony of Celine Williams, who when questioned about the contribution made by fairground women replied:

*More so in the first world war because you see there was that many men lost in the first world war and there was that many called up for service, that's how the women came to be going into the factories and working. But the women had really been doing that for generations on the fairground business, we were in front, when they are on about women's libbing themselves if there is such a thing and which I have my doubts...I mean before the first world war the women worked as hard in a sense as the men and I think in some cases they must have worked harder.<sup>10</sup>*

The shortage of ablebodied men for farming and industrial work had been solved by women being placed in these areas of economic activity. However, in 1916, the editor of the *World's Fair* comments that the phenomenon of women working in such arenas



is not unusual on the fairground:

*Although like their sisters of the outside world, they are now being called upon to take an extra share of the work, it is no new experience for them.*<sup>11</sup>

The structure of fairground society allowed and encouraged women to perform whatever role in which they were accomplished. This could include all the traditional male jobs such as driving vehicles and doing manual work, and was not necessarily limited to the family home. The women involved in fairground society had to know the business as thoroughly as their husbands, brothers or fathers, and that could often involve overseeing the travelling of the machinery and equipment on the fairground route. The editorial leader in the same issue of the *World's Fair* is surely stating an obvious fact when it says that:

*The women of Showland have risen nobly to keep the business going, and all honour to them, but their work in the past has fitted them very well for the important part they are now playing.*<sup>12</sup>

Women were involved due to a range of factors: through necessity because of the loss of the husband, by their aptitude in showing a talent for a particular job, or purely through family involvement with a particular show or ride which allowed them to participate in the overall running of the business. In the words of Celine Williams:

*There wasn't a great deal of choice, you had it to do then, not only to keep bread on the table but to keep the business going, the women had to roll their sleeves up and get going ...*<sup>13</sup>

The 1916 editorial in the *World's Fair* also makes distinctions between the variety of occupations in which women found themselves engaged. The modern stratification of the showland society within the working area of the fairground itself is still apportioned between rides, shows and other amusement concerns, and women can be found participating at every level. Historically, the dividing lines were slightly different, and until the demise of the fairground parading and illusion shows, and the increase in the catering side of the business, the divisions would have been between roundabout proprietors, showpeople and stallholders. As well as being involved in the business

side of the fairground, the women had to maintain the domestic side of the life such as childrearing and maintaining the family home. As Lily May Richards writes in her unpublished biography of her father, William Haggar:

*In 1890, father and mother had nine surviving children and, to accommodate such a large family, they had to acquire a third wagon. Somehow, mother managed to feed and clothe all of them, play a different part each night and also take care of the costumes.<sup>14</sup>*

The lack of distinction between the domestic and the working arena is reiterated by Celine Williams in 1994:

*They had a home to look after, the children to bring up and care for and yet they would still be outside with the men with the rides and the stalls, helping to build the stalls up, setting them out, minding them...<sup>15</sup>*

The three main domains of work which have previously been identified in Chapter 4 will now be examined. However, these distinctions are purely functional and are not to be seen as a means of attributing greater or lesser prestige based purely on financial grounds. The factors which dictate placement within a given category are usually economic and dependent on the occupation of the particular showfamily. Moreover, in some cases the genealogical heritage of the person concerned can be a means of affording rank within the community. When interviewed a showperson will often state his or her family relationship to prominent members of the society before they talk about their occupation.<sup>16</sup> For the purpose of this section of the study, the stratified nature of the society will be examined under the following headings:

1. Roundabout Proprietors and Lessees.
  2. Fairground Shows.
  3. Stallholders.
- 2.1 Roundabout Proprietors and Lessees.

*My mother used to drive a centre engine with me granddad, because she used to do the centre engine as well as the Fowler traction engine that they had, there was a Robey centre engine with the yachts and if they was busy me granddad would take one side and me mother the other. What she used to do, she could pump that boat that engine, but she could also be up in two minutes up on the top and she'd be in, taking her half off the boats for the money off the customers.<sup>17</sup>*

The roundabouts first made their appearance on the fairground during the 1860s, and as previously stated the impact they had on fairground society was far-reaching. However, the Switchback roundabout which became one of the most popular rides of the late Victorian and early Edwardian fair, was not solely owned by the men; it was travelled extensively by fairground women, including Sally Beach, Mrs Waddington, Mrs Hoadley, and Sophie Shepherd, amongst others.<sup>18</sup> The following tribute to one of these proprietresses was published in the *World's Fair* in 1909:

*I do not think it will be out of place to refer to the galloping horses owned by Mrs Hoadley as one of the neatest and cleanest machines on the road.<sup>19</sup>*

This level of participation in and management of the fairground machinery by women has continued throughout the past hundred years. The modern day counterparts of Mrs Shepherd and Sally Beach can be found on any number of fairs operating throughout the country. Rae Armstrong-Wilson is both a lessee and proprietor<sup>20</sup> in her own right, and although her participation does not include the setting up of the machine, when interviewed she emphasised that she controls the more important financial side:

*I do mind and Joey takes the money because it is a awkward machine to take money on and if the men are not experienced its a bit awkward, but usually as a rule when there's any money to be took I do mind.<sup>21</sup>*

The control of the exchequer or the financial side of the business is maintained by Rae throughout the Armstrong-Wilson business:

*Joey does all the building up and I don't intend to I've got enough to do with the family. I do the business, I do ninety nine percent of the business, I write to the places I do the phonecalls, do the letters, pay the rent and do the banking, like I say ninety nine percent of the business.<sup>22</sup>*

Rae Armstrong-Wilson's father was a prominent roundabout proprietor and this inherited knowledge of the business that Rae brought to her marriage was as important

a factor as the roundabouts that formed part of her dowry:

*Where a ride, for instance, is passed down on the bride's side, it is not expected that she should lose control of its administration ... Because of her earning power and experience of the fairground, the woman enters marriage as a more equal partner than her flattie counterpart.*<sup>23</sup>

Rae distances herself from the actual construction part of the fairground rides, stating that:

*we've always had men and having the girls outside with the men lifting things and that it wasn't an ideal situation. And when you've got men to do things you don't do that.*<sup>24</sup>

However, when there was a shortage of men, especially during the First and Second World Wars, or it was financially impossible to pay for labour, women were called upon to supply the physical labour on the fairground. One example of this is the case of the Pullen family from Yorkshire. Aaron Pullen owned a set of Steam Yachts and it was his children who provided the labour necessary to travel the equipment around the country, build up the ride and operate it when the fair was open for business. Aaron Pullen's three daughters had been taught to operate the Steam Yachts, the ride which the family controlled, a situation which arose out of necessity, but proved to be very successful for the family:

*Me grandfather the day before he was due to go into the services in the First World War ... he collapsed ... they rushed him into Rotherham hospital and they had no men and me mother was ten years of age ... so my grandfather got an old fashioned ginger beer box, one of those old thick heavy wooden ones with what we call a block on top, which is a piece of good thick wood, so she could reach the valves and the knobs and pump the engine at the same time ... (laughter). Ten years of age (laughs), so they didn't close.*<sup>25</sup>

Aida Pullen continued to learn the business from her grandfather and eventually went from building the yachts to steering the traction engine on the road with three loads behind:

*me mother and her eldest sister I believe used to work very very hard ... and it was nothing for them to swing a pick-axe or a stake hammer to stake the yachts because they used to have to drive big stakes in the legs and they were big legs.*<sup>26</sup>

Aida Pullen was continuing a family tradition; her grandmother Annie Pullen was

famous throughout Yorkshire for operating the Pullen's famous Steam Swings.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, despite their ability and obvious skill with the machinery, Aaron Pullen demanded that ladylike decorum was maintained by his daughters at all times:

*In those days they weren't even allowed to wear trousers, that was definitely not allowed and they used to wear long skirts even though they were doing a man's job ... They used to have big aprons on and me grandfather used to see that they had a piece of string so if they was going up a ladder, they could tie down the bottom of the skirt to stop the skirt going up, believe it or not.*<sup>28</sup>

By the end of the first world war, the large mechanised roundabouts dominated the landscape of the twentieth century fairground. Showland families travelled Steam Yachts, Galloping Horses, Switchbacks and Scenics. As mentioned earlier, the transportation of such rides had been revolutionised by the use of the traction engine as a means of conveying the machinery from one fair to another, but despite the changes in the working environment of the fairground, the use of women in the workforce or as the employers continued. In the case of the Warren family from Lincolnshire, the oldest daughter, Lottie, became the main driver for the family traction engine:

*Me mother used to drive the traction engine for her father, called Mona II, after she had me three days later she drove a traction engine from Grimsby Market to Lincoln... Well me mother she was one of three sisters me mother did that, the driving. One sister she married away from the job but still travelled, the other sister stopped at home, and me mother did the outside driving and my aunty, the other sister did the waggons because I grew up more with me aunty than I did me mother.*<sup>29</sup>

Lottie Warren from Lincoln, Mrs Shepherd in the Midlands, and Mrs Hannah Waddington all had positions in the family firm which in non-showland society at that time would not have been so prominent:

*Williams girls used to build up and John's wife's mother she used to build up and paint the lorry. The last woman round here I've seen do it is Walter Shaw's wife, she was an Armstrong and them two girls used to get two machines about for their dad. She would drive the lorry ... and she drives the lorry now, and takes her own waggon and that on the road.*<sup>30</sup>

In the South Yorkshire region one of the most famous rides, the Switchback Gondola, was travelled by the Waddington family. After the death of her husband, Abraham Waddington Snr, Hannah continued to travel the machines with her son John William.

Her success as a machine proprietor can be gauged by examining her takings book for the period between 1898 and 1908, which covers the fairground run in South Yorkshire. Hannah Waddington's yearly takings from her Switchback Gondola ride were on average five thousand pounds a year, over the ten year period covered in her takings books.<sup>31</sup> After her death in 1909<sup>2</sup> the firm was temporarily closed and the fairground machinery, including the Switchback ride and the traction engines, was sold, and the family never again achieved that level of affluence or income.<sup>33</sup>

Knowledge of all the different facets of the business is something which is shared equally between men and women on the fairground. The importance of this is such that the wives, mothers or daughters are just as much the natural successors to the livelihood as their male counterparts. The majority of women interviewed stressed the factor of necessity in their involvement in the physical side of the business, which often came about because of invalid parents, no male successor or perhaps more importantly, as Fred Warren reiterated when interviewed, the lack of financial ability to pay for any additional workforce:

*Well you get girls who fancy doing it like Hemmingways one of their girls drives the lorry but I think it depends on your places, if you can afford to get the men to do it you don't expect your wife and daughter to do it? ... They should know how to put it together not necessarily carry it, but instruct people how to put it together.<sup>34</sup>*

It was the factor of necessity, the death of her husband, that led to Margaret Deakin's involvement in the family firm, and her achievements transformed it into one of the most successful businesses operating throughout the United Kingdom for more than forty years.

#### **Mrs Deakin-Studt.**

*"The story of A Deakin and Sons, is essentially that of one woman, the redoubtable Mrs Margaret Deakin"<sup>35</sup>*

Margaret Deakin, née Ford, was one of eleven children born to Mr and Mrs William Ford, who travelled the fairs of South Wales from the 1900s onwards. She met her

first husband, Alfred Deakin, on the fairground through his work as an organ builder for Wrights and Holmes of Manchester. They married during the First World War and until his death in 1927 the firm of Deakin and Sons travelled a variety of fairground amusements, including shooting galleries, children's rides and the latest modern rides.<sup>36</sup> Alfred Deakin joined the Showmen's Guild in 1917 when membership was still relatively open.<sup>37</sup> From 1917, the Deakin family made a modest living in the South Wales area and Alfred Deakin became actively involved in the affairs of the South Wales Committee of the Guild. During this time his subscription fee rose from ten shillings and sixpence in 1917 to £5.00 in 1927.<sup>38</sup> The subscription fee set by the Guild was already in place in 1917<sup>39</sup> and the rates set down by the Reverend Thomas Horne, General Secretary of the Showmen's Guild, in 1917 illustrate that the Deakin family's contribution for that year was the minimum payable.<sup>40</sup> However, by the mid-1920s the Deakin family had achieved greater prosperity and the rise in membership fee to £5 reflects the increase in the amount of equipment travelled by the family. After the death of her husband, Margaret Deakin was left with the task of continuing the thriving business and bringing up six children alone. She began by assuming control of the family firm, which from 1928 travelled under the name of Mrs Deakin and Sons.

*"The fact that she was able to maintain the firm's growth, speaks volumes for her courage and strength."*<sup>41</sup>

writes her grandson in *The Fairground Mercury* magazine in 1991. However, Margaret Deakin did more than maintain the family firm; she expanded the company until it became one of the largest travelling concerns in Wales throughout the 1940s and 1950s. In 1927, the year of Alfred Deakin's death, the firm of A. Deakin and Sons', subscription fee of £5.00 to the Showmen's Guild was substantially lower than that of the White Brothers, the Studt family and other leading roundabout proprietors who presented amusements in South Wales.<sup>42</sup> After the death of her husband, Margaret allowed the Guild membership to lapse for nearly two years, and details of the firm's

membership, which reflects the amount of equipment travelled by a showfamily, are therefore not available for that period.<sup>43</sup> However, by 1930 Mrs Deakin's subscription fee had doubled and the firm paid a total of £11.00 for the year, slightly lower than their leading rivals, the Studt's and the Danter's, who paid £12 10s.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the 1930s, the firm of Mrs Deakin and Sons went from strength to strength and her second marriage to Jacob Studt Jnr., one of the leading roundabout proprietors of the period, in 1933, did not result in Margaret losing control of the family firm. According to her grandson, by mutual agreement the two businesses continued with their separate interests and itineraries. An analysis of the subscription fees paid by the Deakin family and those of rival firms during this period demonstrates their level of prominence. The subscription fees paid to the Showmen's Guild were based on the amount of machinery operated by the family. During the 1930s, the average price paid for ownership of a ride, depending on its size, was between £3.00 and £5.00.<sup>45</sup> In 1936, the firm paid the annual subscription fee of £13 10s.<sup>46</sup> By 1951, the membership fee had doubled, but the total subscriptions and fees paid by the Deakins to the Guild had increased to £71 6s, making them on average the proprietors of seven roundabouts. In the same year the nearest competitor in the region, Miss Jessie Holmes, paid nearly twenty pounds less in subscription dues.<sup>47</sup>

These figures demonstrate the business acumen and initiative that Mrs Deakin possessed but, as previously shown, this position of economic dominance was not unique. Mrs Deakin was also a lessee, which in the hierarchy of the fairground involved not only the running of the firm and equipment, but also the leasing of grounds and the booking of tenants. She built on her success in the business and ultimately controlled her own run of grounds.

Sandra Wright, a showwoman from Yorkshire travelling in the 1990s, inherited a



similar position from her father and, as in the case of Mrs Deakin, the situation was a result of necessity. After her father suffered an accident, Sandra left school at the age of thirteen to help her family with the business:

*Then my dad had a very bad car accident and I would be thirteen and so I was brought back from school then ... So I got thrown in at the deep end and had to learn all this. My brother was only seven, he was too young to do it ... I started at thirteen, and I would go with me dad, and I've sat many an hour in the car while he's been in meetings and stuff like that and he'd tell me to do the rent books and the ground letters.<sup>48</sup>*

This kind of ability can be demonstrated by fairground women at every level of the community, and all of the women interviewed echoed the sentiments expressed by Sandra Wright:

*I was never treat any differently as how a girl to a boy, I don't think travelling girls are, they just, the boys and the girls are treat equally.<sup>49</sup>*

From the 1860s onwards travelling showwomen have always occupied positions of power in the family business that their counterparts in the settled community would not have possessed, never more so than in the longest surviving attraction on the fairground, the travelling shows.

## 2.2. Fairground Shows.

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, one of the principal attractions on the mid-Victorian fair was the fairground show. Although mechanised roundabouts first made their appearance in 1861, it was not until the end of the century that they achieved a position of dominance over the early shows. These fairground shows ranged from Theatrical booths, Wild Beasts or Menagerie shows, Waxworks and Puppet or Marionette booths.

The direct part that women played in this aspect of the business can be seen in the fairground exhibitions popular at that time. Women not only paraded on the front of these elaborate shows, but were also the proprietors and sometimes the main

performers. Before the appearance of the bioscope shows in 1896, the features dominating the fairground landscapes would have been the Waxworks booths, Ghost shows and the Marionette theatres. Madame Tussaud, Madame James,<sup>50</sup> Mrs Ruth Williams,<sup>51</sup> and Mrs Emma Fossett,<sup>52</sup> are amongst just a few of the women proprietors who managed these elaborate attractions. Mrs Cohen's Photo Studio was a common sight in the United Kingdom and Ireland from the 1860s onwards, and the reporter for the *World's Fair* in 1908 writes:

*Mrs Cohen is at present with her Photo Studio in Ireland, and though 74 years of age, travels alone in her living carriage and still builds up her own marquee alone.*<sup>53</sup>

Between 1897 to 1914, there were over 120 cinematograph shows being exhibited on the fairgrounds, and over ten percent of the proprietors were women.<sup>54</sup> Some of the most successful of these exhibition booths were often controlled, as in the case of Mrs Deakin, by a widow left to continue to family business until the children were old enough to gain control. One famous example of this was Mrs Annie Holland of Nottingham who was a prominent fairground exhibitor of the Victorian period. Her family's entry into the fairground business again arose out of necessity. Her mother, Mrs Payne, had been left to bring up three children when her father died at the age of forty. Mrs Payne's solution to the problem of no income was to exhibit one of her children, who according to family tradition weighed in excess of forty stone, to the public. Arthur Holland, her great grandson, recalls how the family first made its start on the British fairground:

*She had two sons this Mrs Payne and one daughter, my grandmother, the daughter, Annie Holland they called her but she wasn't Holland at all then, she was a Payne and she got this forty stone son and one of these here chorus girls or whatever it was said, you ought to take him around the shows, show him. That was the only thing she could do because her husband died ... and this is what she decided to do. What she did, she used to hire a town hall out for half a crown and she used to take him round all the town halls, wherever she could, you understand and show him. This went on until I think she eventually decided to have a little booth of her own, and she bought one, I don't know what it was like and then she used to go around the fairs, with this fat boy, her other son he had been introduced into the fairground business through the fat boy, through him you know him being forty stone, and he started up then and in the olden days he was called Captain Payne.<sup>55</sup>*

The fairground cinematograph shows flourished between 1896 and 1914 and fairground women played a major role in the organisation of these attractions. Mrs Annie Holland, the sister of Captain Payne and the *World's Fattest Schoolboy*, travelled one of the largest cinematograph shows on the road. The Holland cinematograph show could hold up to a thousand people and every comfort was provided for the people attending a performance in the booth:

*In the Palace of Light there was seating accommodation for six hundred people with standing room in the gallery for another four hundred. The seating was upholstered in Italian green fingered cloth with backs to match, while the side linings were of heavy blue figured plush trimmed and ornamented with gold tassels as also were the side door curtains. From the inside top lining which was of red and gold, were suspended sixteen Japanese lampshades (eight down either side of the ceiling) in pink and gold.<sup>56</sup>*

Other prominent fairground businesses which were run by women included that of the Hancock family from the West Country. Sophie Hancock ran the family firm with her brothers; it included fairground shows, rides and the cinematograph booth which was one of the most lavish of its time. She was not only famous in the West Country for her business skills but also for her ability to hold her own in a fight. Father Greville, the editor of the *Merry-Go-Round* wrote the following tribute in 1955:

*Miss Sophie, the female of the species - what a woman she was! She was the undisputed boss of the fairground, and to prove her right, would enter into a battle with anyone, man or woman, policeman or civilian. Her vocabulary of swear words was longer and better than any man's, and it was said, that if crossed, she could go on for half-an-hour without repeating herself.<sup>57</sup>*

In Wales, Mrs Crecraft travelled the family bioscope show and was still in overall control of it until her death in 1917 at the age of ninety eight.<sup>58</sup> The *World's Fair* in 1910 published the following tribute:

*Mrs Crecraft is rightly named the veteran of the van, as she is the oldest show proprietress in the world. This wonderful old lady is 92 years of age, and is still controlling one of the biggest bioscope shows on the road.<sup>59</sup>*

In the year before her death, her sons informed the *World's Fair* reporter that their mother was:

*still hale and hearty, she still counts the money every night and has not made a mistake for years.<sup>60</sup>*

In the case of the women, it was through inclination and interest in the family business that they were led to direct participation in the shows. Renee Marshall was a member of Scott's Royal Circus and her early life was spent travelling around the West Country and then Ireland. Her parents were both performers in the circus and eventually set up on their own with the family and travelled around Ireland in the 1930s. Renee was four years old when she first took part in the trapeze act:

*For a gimmick I used to sit in the seats and a clown used to come in and he'd say we can make anybody in the ring do this, I can mesmerize them and then he'd mesmerize me and I walked in and they lifted me up, with just little shoes, little pumps and ordinary little frock on and I did a couple of tricks and that was it.<sup>61</sup>*

The Scott family all participated in every aspect of the travelling life, building up the show, looking after the horses and being the artistes for the daily performance:

*I did about five different turns, riding, double act, but I felt myself getting tired and two days when you are tenting wasn't so hard but to do all those acts twice a day. When you are tenting wasn't so bad, but when you had six or seven shows to do, you were getting tired. But we'd do as many shows as you could to get the money and it was later hours.<sup>62</sup>*

Renee Marshall and her family would do whatever was possible to earn a living and to keep the show on the road. This spirit of endeavour is never to be found more than during the First World War, when the loss of the skilled performers in the shows left a deficit not easily filled. However, even in this arena the women learnt to persevere and improvise, in order to keep the business running. In 1916, Renee Marshall's aunt, Mrs Elizabeth Kayes, was faced with the responsibility of maintaining the family show after her three older sons enlisted in the army. Kayes' circus was centred primarily around the lion taming act which had been performed by the oldest sons. Finding herself with no one to carry on the show and facing financial ruin, Mrs Kayes determined:

*that she would do her utmost to keep the show on the road, and took the showpeople by surprise and astonishment by announcing her determination to assume the role of lion tamer.<sup>63</sup>*

The report of this feat was featured in the *Yorkshire Post* in 1916 and reprinted by the

*World's Fair* as part of morale boosting articles encouraging the showpeople to carry on the business:

*Mrs Kayes boldly entered the cages of two distinct groups of lions and successfully put them through their paces. "Thank God," she exclaimed as she made her exit from the huge lion with an awkward turn of temper, "I've done it, and the show will still carry on."*<sup>64</sup>

Mrs Kayes had been brought up in the circus tradition and this, in all probability, was perhaps not the first time she had entered the lions' den.<sup>65</sup> However, the main feature of the story is the sentiments uttered by Mrs Kayes as she finished her performance: *I've done it and the show will still carry on.* The need for the family firm to continue was and still is the most important idea to be instilled into a child on the fairground. Both Sandra Wright and her mother Renee Marshall reiterate that boys and girls were treated as equal members of the family concern. This attitude was also seen in the boxing booths on the fairground where the proprietors would allow their daughters to box in the shows.

Annie Hayes, née Hickman, was born into the famous Hickman boxing family in 1913. Her brother was Charlie Hickman, the Lonsdale Champion, and her great grandfather was Tom Hickman, a prominent prizefighter of the 1820s, who was known as the Gaslight Champion.<sup>66</sup> The family travelled with Pat Collins in the Black Country, and Annie was taught how to box by the fighters who toured with her family's boxing booths.<sup>67</sup> This is not a unique phenomenon; William Moore, who owned a boxing booth, had his licence temporarily revoked in 1912 for allowing his daughters to box in the family show. However, the account in the *World's Fair* indicates that it was the fact that he had allowed his daughter to box with a bear which resulted in the fine, not the boxing itself.<sup>68</sup> In Scotland the Stewart family also allowed their three daughters to perform on the show. Some of these performances may have been in the form of parading and exhibition boxing before the shows, but Annie Hickman and the Stewart girls claimed that their fights were often against male opponents. If they went on to

run the boxing booth or manage the fighters as Polly Stewart did in the 1950s,<sup>69</sup> they commanded the same respect from their workforce as their fellow showmen would. If this was not the case, the consequences for the offender could be damaging to the ego:

*Stewarts in Scotland they had a boxing show and they had three daughters and they used to fight anybody, allcomers, men, women or child. And I was in the yard at Kirkcaldy and they had one man working for them and he was leaving and he was stood and he thought all the girls were in the caravan and he was stood at the bottom of the steps and telling them what he thought of them and that they could stick the job up the arse and that. So one of them had been to the shop and she was coming in the gate with the shopping bags and they're all amazon women you know and she puts the shopping bags down, so there was one of them, and two of them in the caravan and they said we'll get you and he turned around and ran and she went smack and smack head back ... you don't leave and bring them back alive.<sup>70</sup>*

The fairground shows were physically more demanding than the rides, and the type of work in which women could be involved reflected the variety of roles they were called on to play. Despite the use of traction engines from the 1890s, horse power was still an integral part of the fairground until the 1930s. As a child Renee Marshall travelled throughout Ireland with the family circus and was brought up to cope in any situation:

*We all worked together, mother, father, we all worked with one another. We'd catch the horses, harness them up and then on the way and if it was a long way we'd stop on the road and have a bit of breakfast, cook a bit of breakfast in the waggon on the road. Then we'd go in the ground and then you'd start to measure out and then you'd start to build up and if there was a matinee you had to get washed, changed and dressed up for the matinee, you'd have a couple of hours rest and then the next thing you'd be ready for the night show. And after the night show, we'd pull down, pack up and off again, bloody hard work.<sup>71</sup>*

The need to utilise the children in all aspects of the show can also be found in the Shufflebottom family. Texas Bill and his wife Rosalie travelled with their Wild West show from 1888. Margaret Shufflebottom was one of the youngest of ten children and played the part of the Indian in the show, on account of having dark hair. The performance was based on the theme made popular by William Cody's Wild West Show, and involved sharpshooting, knife throwing and snake charming acts:

*I often wondered how all those years we risked death in the acts - it actually was - with the knives being thrown at us and that, we risked death and my father wouldn't have any duds.<sup>72</sup>*

Margaret Shufflebottom left the family show when she married John Willie Waddington Jnr, a showman from Yorkshire. However, her brothers and sisters continued the family tradition. In the 1950s, Florence Shufflebottom was the star attraction on Margaret's oldest brother's show, which was performed under the stage name *The Colorados*. Although the work was dangerous, in particular the sharpshooting tricks, Florence continued to work for her parents after her marriage and the birth of her son:

*You got the dancers on the showfront but they didn't specialise in any particular act they just, how can I put it, they were just dancers sort of thing, more or less anyone can do, it but to do sharpshooting and knife throwing it was a speciality you see.*<sup>73</sup>

By the 1970s the parading shows were in decline and the new trailer-mounted shows such as the ghost train, fun house and Frankenstein's castle replaced the once familiar circus and variety tents. There is no room for nostalgia on the fairground, and many of the showpeople benefited from the independence gained by relying on machinery instead of human endeavour:

*The fairground was all right if you did one show a day or two shows a day, but we were doing four and five and as I said we did thirty at Bolton New Year Fair and twenty the next day and when I tell you, my hands were peeling were red with the skin coming off, that's with holding on the bar doing the trapeze and I was getting tired and the more tired you are the more you hold on ... skin was offa all there. That's the worst part throwing a lot of shows on the fairground, you do all the shows and it nearly kills you.*<sup>74</sup>

However, Celine Williams, whose family have exhibited shows, travelled roundabouts and worked side-stalls, believes that the life led by the stallholders is perhaps the most labour-intensive of all the activities.

### 2.3. Stallholders.

In his account of the travelling showpeople, Duncan Dallas writes disparagingly about the stallholders on the fairground and claims that *the stalls are the poor relations on the fairground*.<sup>75</sup> However, this view is contradicted by the showpeople themselves. The stalls and refreshment stands have always been a prominent part of the fairground, and

in terms of historical importance the retail booth can claim the longest economic function and the words of Sandra Wright emphasise their importance:

*Well they are entitled to an equal share aren't they, everybody is a member. I was brought up by my father that a person with a roundabout or a person with a six foot bucket joint, were equally entitled to a living and that's how it should be, shouldn't it. I mean a fairground with all rides is no good and a fairground with just stalls really is no good, you've got to have a balance haven't it.*<sup>76</sup>

The main types of stalls on the fairground can be divided into three categories: the games of skill or chance, for example the coconut sheet or the throwing games; the amusement arcades; and the catering stands. Their history and traditions have already been discussed and for the purpose of this chapter the type of work carried out by women in this sector of the society will be concentrated on in some detail.

Duncan Dallas also states that:

*little work and energy are needed to run a stall in the summer and the chief requirement is patience. Building up and pulling down are relatively easy, and there is little that the stall-holder can do to attract the public.*<sup>77</sup>

When interviewed however, the majority of the showpeople expressed the opinion that it is the very patience involved in standing in a fairground stall and having the initiative to attract the public that results in the harder work. Sandra Wright has had experience of all of the various economic aspects of the fairground, including running and driving heavy machinery, being a lessee and running an arcade, but she stated categorically that:

*Candys are the hardest work of the lot. I've lifted drums of brandy snap when they used to be in drums and Wrestler's sausages used to be eight to a thing and nobody to help me and nobody to run the mains in ... I couldn't go out on the Friday at Hull because it was busy on Saturday.*<sup>78</sup>

Celine Williams has always been involved in the stalls and catering side of the business. Her father, Reuben Williams, came from a long line of showmen, but when the family cinematograph went into decline in 1916, his branch of the family concentrated on the side-stalls. Celine was educated by her father in all aspects of presenting an attractive and competitive concern. The competition between the



respective stallholders takes place on a weekly basis, as each family tries to compete in presenting a novel game or more attractive prizes, and encouraging the customers. There is no respite for the stallholders or their children. Lack of concentration can result in missing would-be customers who, unlike the other attractions on offer on the fairground, have to be cajoled to take a chance on winning a prize:

*I mean William Cowie his kids can't go and talk, when you are open you are open and that's it and if you go away talking someone who will come up and you miss the money and it's gone past you.<sup>79</sup>*

Another aspect is the time involved in managing side-stalls and amusements. With the exception of the travelling arcades where the showperson will simply pull down the trailer and the arcade is in place, the side-stalls have to be packed away every day:

*Build the stalls up, setting them out, minding them and in those days stalls had to be done every day and the games that they worked then the tools that they worked the swag they worked was a lot different today and a lot of the stalls had to be packed up at night and set out again in the morning and when they used to have the rows and rows of Pannams [food-stalls] and all like food. My family going back a long time, they used to sell brandy snap on the fairground when they had to make it themselves and that was women's work.<sup>80</sup>*

Although the modern candy or food kiosk has changed structurally over the last hundred years, the type of work involved has hardly altered. One of the main differences between the machines and the stalls on the fairground is the amount of energy used by the proprietors when the fair is open. For example, once a ride is built up, it takes only a few seconds for the operator to start the machinery and instruct the workers to take the money. However, the work involved in running a stall or serving in a food kiosk is more intensive. Firstly the work is usually carried out by one or two people at the most and secondly, there is always something to do when things are not as busy on the fairground. In the food kiosks, for example, there would always be more food to prepare, candy floss to spin or counters to keep clean:

*Before there was hamburgers before you could buy hamburgers, we'd make our own hamburgers, before Wrestlers or you got frozen ones, mince, fresh mince from the butcher, onions in, bind them up with an egg and you had to make these burgers and the Travellers used to order them and we'd have that many orders in, we couldn't keep up ... I used to spend all morning cutting this steak and then I used to spend all*

*morning putting it through this damned machine, fry it at night in time for the Travellers.*<sup>81</sup>

Even with the availability of specially prepared tins of hamburgers and hot-dogs, the cooking and serving time is constant: as soon as one batch of food is sold, another lot has to be cooked ready for the next customers. The machines must always be under surveillance and although this is true of all fairground machinery, the types and range of mechanical appliances in the kiosks are more diverse than on a ride. For example, the range of cooking appliances in a modern food kiosk will include two candy floss machines, a hotplate, a deep fat fryer, a fridge, a microwave oven and many more devices, depending on the type of food the owner is selling at that particular fair.<sup>82</sup> During the time I was employed by my family in the food kiosk, serving food, I could be selling hot-dogs, hamburgers, chips, candy floss, hot drinks and soup to name but a few, and all would have their own separate cooking utensils and preparation areas, in order to comply with the guidelines laid down by the Health and Safety Officers, who visit each fair. Finally, even if the fairground is not necessarily as busy for the rest of the showpeople, the catering staff still have to supply food for the showpeople and their workforce. My own experience of working on the fairground reflects the statement made by Sandra Wright that the *"Candy is the hardest work of the lot."*

Greater diversity in the sustenance required by the fairground customer has resulted in the modern day kiosks offering a more diverse range of products, but this was not the case in the first half of the century. The food stalls tended to be specialised, for example the Holland family from Lancashire always sold black eyed peas and mint sauce. In Yorkshire, a familiar sight on the fairground would have been the Pannam stalls, selling gingerbread, brandy snap and fairings<sup>83</sup> especially made for the local feasts. Before the advent of prepacked snacks and sweets, the women would have had to bake the food on offer. Celine Williams recalls her mother and grandmother preparing the food before they opened the Pannam:

*Me mother used to do it like a rolling pin, part bake it and when it was still soft they used to roll it.<sup>54</sup>*

The public domain of the fairground is shared equally by the showmen and showwomen. Although the catering side of the business may be more dominated by women, showmen such as Wyatt Vernon and Joey Silcock in Lancashire can be found operating a candy floss machine as skilfully as their wives. The women who participated in the fieldwork reiterated time and time again that the level of equality was shared by both men and women in every aspect of the business of running and presenting a travelling funfair. The main exception emphasised by all of the women interviewed was the running of the domestic side of the business, which appears to be an exclusively female domain:

*I've seen my mother in this weather at nine o'clock at night ironing and I've seen her in the summer, nine o'clock at night, Sunday night and they've been going away the next day, after they've pulled down and then she's come in and done her waggon work or whatever and nine o'clock at night she's cleaning the windows, ready for going on the road the next day.<sup>55</sup>*

### **3. Domestic and Social Sphere.**

In his account of the history of travelling showpeople, Duncan Dallas writes that:

*The wife is the pivot of the showman's family. Her role on the fairground goes far beyond that demanded of her counterpart in the rest of society .. She is expected to be housekeeper, mother, secretary, accountant, worker and business partner.<sup>56</sup>*

This position is reaffirmed over twenty years later by Celine Williams, a showwoman from Yorkshire. When interviewed in Sheffield, Celine explained the role of women as that of a partnership with their husbands or male relations:

*We was brought up to look at it this way, inside the home the woman has fifty one votes and the man forty nine, but outside the man has fifty one votes and the woman has forty nine, even if she might be working as hard as him outside it is still that he is master of the job.<sup>57</sup>*

Despite all the business activities, the showwomen have to produce a sizeable family and to maintain the family home. They are responsible for the handling and upbringing

of the children and laying the groundwork for their education on the fairground. If the woman has lost her partner and has to run the family business, the domestic and economic domains have to be finely balanced. In the case of Lottie Warren, it was her sister who became the surrogate mother figure to her son:

*Because me mother was outside she was always outside working, but me aunty was in the waggon when I knocked me head and all that, she was the one who put the sticky plasters on.<sup>88</sup>*

This additional contribution by the women is almost taken for granted by the fairground community, as Celine Williams has already stated, it *"is part of the way of life, it was what they were brought up to do."* In settled communities the distinctions between the living area and the work area are defined. For a fairground woman, the domestic area is both the living van and the fairground. For example childrearing can also extend onto the public arena of the fairground. There are no distinctions in the spheres of activity for the womenfolk, but the modes of operation are quite clear when it comes to the participation of showmen; the domestic aspect of the business is solely the woman's domain. In order to illustrate this, the following aspects will be examined; the role of childrearing and education, and the function of the living van.

### 3.1. Child Care and Education.

Childrearing on the fairground is a community responsibility. The use of the extended family as helpers and minders when the parents are busy is a widespread phenomenon. The close family network will in effect spread to the whole of the fairground and not just involve the immediate parents or grandparents. As a consequence of this, the fairground itself is one extended nursery, and there is no shortage of volunteers to help with the rearing of the children:

*I've seen them now if the weather's been bad and they have lifted the pram or whatever they've been in inside the hoop-la shutter, if it's fine they've been outside. I've seen them take a "wheel them in" table off to put a baby's pram inside and sometimes the waggons might be too far away to bring them in or they're in on there own so they're with their mothers and they know where they are and they know what's happening to*

them.<sup>89</sup>

This attitude reflects my own experience of the business. When interviewed by a local reporter from the *Morecambe Visitor* about her experiences on the fairground, my mother, Mrs Shirley Toulmin, recalled how she used to strap her children onto the children's ride when she was working. This would both aid the business by attracting customers to the ride, and also keep the children out of mischief and under her surveillance.<sup>90</sup>

Although the business of childrearing may be seen as exclusively the female prerogative, the child will be educated in the fairground business by both the mother and father, and quite often this will extend to any relations working on that particular fair. However, the technical knowledge and ability will in most cases be passed on by the father:

*when it come to say building up or pulling down and minding and that we'd have all had equal shares as regard as that, but like there's certain jobs if there is a son there then that means that he helps his father and works with his father and that, responsibility for engines and things like that.*<sup>91</sup>

If there is no son to hand down the technical knowledge of the mechanical side of the business to, or the daughter shows an inclination in that direction, the father will instruct the daughter:

*But when there is no son there ... if it's only say "will you pass me this and reach me that and hand me the other" it makes the job a lot easier and it also makes it a lot quicker and it makes it easier for one another because you're there to help one another and work together and it makes the job a lot better if you can work together and pull together.*<sup>92</sup>

The fairground environment can be compared to a school, and the teachers will often be the parents, instructing the children in the operational side of the business. The type of instruction depends on the equipment operated by the parents; for example all children will be taught to drive at an early age and many of them will also learn to manage the lorries and heavy vehicles irrespective of their sex. In most cases, the instructor will be the father:

*Well like all showmen's children we learned them to drive at a very early age, only on*

*the fairground of course but my children both of them could drive when they were very small, both of them could drive a car when they was nine or ten and they moved from there to a lorry so they could drive the lorries on the fairground.*<sup>93</sup>

The education covers all aspects of the business, and Arthur Holland Jnr., when interviewed for the Leicester Oral History Project in the early 1990s, emphasised the importance of early training:

*We certainly had to help with putting the rides up and taking them down and we had a go at the painting in the winter time, this is the training, the only training that we can get is passed down from father to son and that is how we have to operate, so the children are actually involved in the business.*<sup>94</sup>

The education received by travelling showchildren when they approach the age of school attendance is a more contentious issue. The majority of the people interviewed stressed the importance of literacy, but the problems of leading an itinerant life can have an obvious effect on the level of schooling received by the children. Some children would stay behind with a sympathetic family and visit their parents at the weekend. Other methods could involve hiring a private tutor or sending the children to school solely in the winter time:

*We went to school regularly during the winter months. I had three sisters who were left behind at school in Nottinghamshire. They were left with a very kind lady who offered to look after them and give them their schooling, but mum used to make the others, the rest of the girls, go to school every single place we went if it was only for two days, if we went to a place for a fortnight we had a fortnight's schooling if we went for two days we had two days' schooling.*<sup>95</sup>

The 1988 Education Reform Act included an exemption for the children of occupational Travellers, and school attendance in the nearest establishment to the fair must be as regular as the business permits.<sup>96</sup> In some cases this has led to children attending as many as twenty different schools in a season and the children face the disruption and the prejudice of fitting into a new environment on each separate occasion.<sup>97</sup> This problem has led to the recruitment of specialised teachers by Local Education Authorities, and the Showmen's Guild has an area Education Liaison Officer for each section. The wider issues of the education of children of occupational Travellers have been covered by organisations such as the European Federation for the Education of the

Children of Occupational Travellers (EFECOT), and a research project co-ordinated by Robert Pullin, a specialist in Traveller education, is currently underway. The prejudice and problems confronted by children from the fairs when they have attended Local Authority schools have been covered in Chapter 4. Recently, the effect of these difficulties has been to arouse interest in the prospect of distance learning schooling for travelling children, which will cater for their special needs.<sup>98</sup>

One solution to the problem which travelling causes with respect to children's education was to send them to a private boarding school, but this option was usually only available to the more financially solvent families such as the roundabout proprietors. Both male and female children were sent to boarding schools, and Anthony Harris, the ex-President of the Showmen's Guild, Tommy Green, the ex-Chairman of the Lancashire Section, and Sandra Wright of the Yorkshire Section are just a few of the showpeople who have had a boarding school education.<sup>99</sup> The showpeople always stress that the education received on the fairground is just as important for the children in that it gives them a complete understanding of the business:

*You've got to learn it from the early age. It's like the women, you are used to packing up or you're used to packing your ornaments on the bed, putting towels over your pots in the cupboards aren't you and you know what's got to be fastened up and what's to be packed away.*<sup>100</sup>

### **3.2. The Function of the Living Van.**

*The home was the living accommodation and it was part of the business as well.*<sup>101</sup>

The modern living van travelled by the showpeople bears little relation in construction and size to the older horse-drawn waggons used by the previous generations. However, there has always been an assortment of styles and shapes of living vehicles and the main aim of this chapter is to examine the variety of purposes and functions of the living van. The two main functions of the living vehicle are that it provides a home

and sleeping accommodation for the family and also in effect the office for the financial side of the business. They must be examined together because of the involvement of the showwomen at the centre of both the domestic and the financial domains. The women are largely responsible for the domestic running of the firm and the control of the paperwork involved in the running of the industry. As a result of this dual involvement both the personal and financial spheres are centred on the living space.

The wife is both the exchequer and the accountant, and is quite often responsible for all the major paperwork that accumulates when running a business. The financial side of the industry takes place largely in the living van, which quite often therefore changes its function according to the task undertaken by the wife.<sup>102</sup> Female children are brought up by their family to be equally skilled on both the economic and domestic fronts:

*The boys are still spoilt in this business with respect to doing household work because they don't do it, odd ones might do it but the majority of them you don't find them washing up or hoovering the carpets or taking the washing to the Bendix if there's no washing machine. But the girls do still, well I think they do more than the boys, the boys will go out and build up and pull down and they'll drive or they'll paint but they don't come in and do the inside work like a girl does.*<sup>103</sup>

The only investigation of the role of the trailer or waggon in travelling communities has been carried out by Judith Okely in her study of Traveller-Gypsies.<sup>104</sup> Although the showpeople resent the commonly held view that because they live in a caravan they are Gypsies, the closest similarity between the two cultures is the use of storage space in the waggon and the observance of customs attached to using cooking and cleaning utensils. Like Gypsies, showpeople are constantly moving, and the effect of this is that the home is in a permanent state of transition. When a travelling fair moves on to its next destination, the women not only have to help with the packing of the equipment on the fairground but they also have the overall responsibility for the waggons. This results in the following routine:

*So you'd feed the men and I've seen my mum feed four to six men and then you'd wash the pots off and I can remember the gas mantles, you used to put an old stocking round*



*them so they didn't fall down, we had old gas lights in the old van and so you'd put an old stocking round them and tie it up so they didn't fall off. And then the ornaments they used to be on the bed, under the eiderdown.*<sup>105</sup>

One of the most important jobs is to ensure that no water is left in the containers, and everything is tied down securely inside the vehicle. Sandra Wright illustrated the importance of securing objects in the living van when moving, with an incident that happened in her family on moving day:

*If anything moved, we once had a fire place come out, once when my father had this smash up, my cousin drove our van and he drove it too fast round a roundabout and the stuff came out.*<sup>106</sup>

The living van is also the aspect of domestic life which is most commonly misunderstood by non-travelling people. Due to the increase in popularity of caravans as recreational vehicles, non-Travellers associate the showmen's waggons with the holiday caravans commonly used for holidays. These popular misconceptions have already been covered in Chapter 4. However, showpeople are always keen to emphasise the range of facilities shared by both themselves and members of the settled community in their respective homes:

*Well it's because they still think, ... they don't think we've got heating, they don't think we've got baths, and they don't think we've got toilets do they. They think we live in a tent or a (laughs), they think the facilities are the same as in a tent, they don't think we've got washing machines or dishwashers, or baths.*<sup>107</sup>

Valerie Moody, for example, when interviewed by Radio 2, gave the reporter a guided tour of her home on wheels and repeatedly told the listeners that "*she had a washing machine, running water, cooker and a telephone like normal people do.*"<sup>108</sup>

Showwomen also believe that this is the one aspect of showpeople's life to which outsiders who marry into the business have the greatest difficulty adapting. Modern living vans are often very spacious in relation to their predecessors, and the use of pull-out attachments to the main body of the vehicle can result in the interior space being doubled. However, although the latest waggons may include a fitted kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a living room, the footage and storage space per room is of course far greater in a standard terraced house. The problem of learning to utilise what

space is available, and the continuous moving of the home, with the many tasks that involves, is one that non-showpeople would find daunting:

*I mean I've got friends out of the business and they say "I couldn't do this every week, I couldn't move about every week like this," they couldn't cope with it.<sup>109</sup>*

Within the living vehicle there are set areas of demarcation that are allocated by the women for certain functions. For example if, as in a modern waggon, there is a bathroom, it would always be used by the showpeople for washing, the kitchen being set aside completely for the preparation of food. Some living vans do not have this facility, and historically this is a more recent innovation, therefore the demarcation extends to the application of the bowls used in the waggon. Sandra Wright and her mother Renee both agreed over the number of bowls used and the different functions associated with them:

*You'd always have two bowls, you'd wash up and you'd wash in separate bowls you don't have the same bowl. You've got to have a separate bowl, one for washing up in, one for washing your hands and face in or having a top and tail washing, that's what we call it, we'd have no baths. And one for doing the vegetables in, three separate dishes or bowls, up the north they call them a dish, in Yorkshire we call them bowls. And so if you wash your hair you'd have two bowls and you had to have a jug so you could rinse your hair with the jug.<sup>110</sup>*

Even with the modern facilities available in the living vehicles this custom is still maintained:

*You'd always have separate bowls and even today you'll find that everybody does, I mean times have changed now but, I mean a few of them now have got little dishwashers, ... but you still keep separate bowls for your food, your hand washing and your washing up.<sup>111</sup>*

When questioned about the need for this accumulation of bowls, when storage space would obviously be at a premium, the reply is bound up in the heightened awareness that travelling communities have of pollution and cleanliness:

*I suppose you are brought up with it, it's force of habit. To wash your vegetables up in the sink that the pots had been in would be classed as dirty, it's thought of as not hygienic in other words, or to wash your hands and face in a sink what's had pots in, it's classed as not hygienic, so you just don't do that. Even now you don't do that, you wouldn't wash any clothes in a sink that you'd wash the pots up in either.<sup>112a</sup>*

In this respect there are great similarities culturally between showpeople and Gypsies,

but the showpeople would argue that the relationship is purely functional and based upon the common use of the living van. Judith Okely believes that it is the context of washing, not the washing itself, which is crucial for defining uncleanliness. She writes that:

*Ideally the Gypsy should have a whole collection of bowls, one for washing food, another for washing crockery and cooking utensils, one for the main laundry, one for washing the body, one for a woman's body, one for washing the floor and trailer and one for washing a newborn infant.*<sup>112</sup>

That both societies are similar in this way has been clearly demonstrated. However, the levels of taboo, or *mochardi*,<sup>113</sup> that are associated with the usage are more pronounced in Gypsy culture. In order to evaluate the importance of this in the fairground community, further research would have to be carried out as the available data is at present limited. Even so, this distinction is such that when one visits a travelling fair, one can often find behind the fairground a variety of goods offered for sale to the showpeople; this type of market is known as "swag row". On the "swag rows" at any of the major fairs such as Newcastle, Nottingham and Cambridge, a full set of cooking and cleaning bowls, specially designed for use in the living waggons, will almost certainly be on sale.

Although the waggons have always been designed for durability and comfort, the showpeople's living conditions have improved dramatically over the past fifty years. Innovations in the use of fitted extensions, as mentioned earlier, which pull out when the waggon is stationary have often doubled the width of the interior:

*Oh they've changed now, I mean there's all pull out sides, pull out kitchens, pull out bathrooms, they've got everything now, gold plated taps, gold plated light fittings.*<sup>114</sup>

Labour-saving domestic appliances have had the same effect on fairground society as they have had in the settled community, but despite the changes brought about by modern technology, the place of the living waggon in fairground society retains the same importance. Celine Williams believes that notwithstanding the changes in the

materials used, in the style of the fittings and the space available, the living waggon will always be at the centre of fairground life:

*The women worked hard outside so when they came in, their home was their pride and joy, that was their achievement in a sense, because that was their world, it's what they'd worked for and that's what they'd achieved and a lot of women and men was the same, that's what they was working for, it wasn't the waggon it was their home ... So there was always those who put that little bit of pride into it, that little bit extra effort, a little bit extra care.<sup>115</sup>*

#### 4. Showwomen and the Guild.

The previous sections have illustrated the diversity of roles performed by women in the travelling community. With the exception of their respective roles in the living vehicle, the level of participation between the sexes is equal. However, one aspect of fairground society is still very much a male domain, the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

The founder members of the Showmen's Guild, or the United Kingdom Van Dwellers Association, as it was known in 1889, were all men. Despite the position of power and influence showwomen held on the fairground in the late Victorian period, the public side of the business appeared very much to be in the hands of the showmen and roundabout proprietors. Although showwomen such as Sophie Hancock and Hannah Waddington were both lessees and proprietors in their own right, they do not appear in the list of members in *The Showmen's Year Book* for 1900. As membership increased up to the First World War, a small proportion of women gradually paid a subscription, but they would have probably been paying as part of a firm rather than as individuals.

Since the establishment of the Guild in 1889, fairground women have played an active part in the formation and organisation of showland society. Although there has never been a women president of the Guild, women can be members in their own right and

independent of family concerns. During the Second World War, due to the absence of the men, women also represented their husbands on the committee. In the past ten years, women have become committee members of the individual section of the Guild, and in September 1995, Sandra Wright became the first woman, after Mrs Deakin, to form part of a delegation to the Central Council of the Showmen's Guild in London.<sup>116</sup>

No woman has ever been elected as Chairman or Vice-Chairman of any of the ten governing sections of the Guild, and the role of President and members of the Central Council has always been filled by the men from the regional committees.<sup>117</sup> However, there are exceptions on a local committee level and in the past five years both Sandra Wright and Rae Armstrong-Wilson have been elected as committee members of their regional sections of the Guild.<sup>118</sup>

4.1. The first woman to breach the male monopoly of the inner temple of the Showmen's Guild was Mrs Margaret Deakin Studt. Her life and history have already been covered earlier in this chapter, but perhaps one of her most significant achievements was in becoming the first women to be elected as a member of any of the regional committees of the Guild.<sup>119</sup> The reasons behind her decision to break a then fifty year tradition are not on record, but perhaps the significant factor is that the three women who became committee members were all lessees of their own fairgrounds and therefore used to being in control of the business. However widespread your business concerns may be, the overall authority for the fairground business lies in the hands of the Showmen's Guild. It was this lack of control or voice in the business of the Guild which prompted Rae Armstrong-Wilson to stand as a committee member:

*I don't think you can criticise people for doing things if you are not prepared to do them yourself, and I had a lot of criticisms of the things the committee was or wasn't doing and there's a lot of armchair committee people who sit there and say you should have done this and you should have done that. ... Well you shouldn't say things like that if you are not prepared to do things yourself should you, so that's one of the*

*reasons why I put my name down.*<sup>120</sup>

This theme is repeated by Sandra Wright, who is presently a member of the Yorkshire Section committee, a position she has held for the second year in succession:

*Well the thing is, I've done like everybody else, complained about committees, everybody does, oh the committee is useless and the committee's corrupted and the committee does this wrong and the committee is not strong enough and if somebody loses their case, it's the committee that's against them. But when you get on there and you see how it works it's not like that because everything's voted on.*<sup>121</sup>

Mrs Deakin's reasons may have been similar or perhaps the motivation was more of an economic nature. By 1939, the Showmen's Guild could claim to represent over ninety five per cent of the travelling amusement fraternity.<sup>122</sup> The years leading up to the Second World War had seen the organisation becoming increasingly dominated by machine proprietors, eager to have their say, and ordinary showmen joining because they had to be in it:

*The organisation of the Guild rapidly became so effective and all embracing that it was almost impossible for showmen to operate outside it.*<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps it was to safeguard her rapidly expanding business or possibly, like her modern day equivalents, she found that the only way to have her criticism answered was to be on the board that effectively managed the society. Whatever her motivations, Mrs Deakin's achievements in the Guild have never been equalled by any other woman. Between 1938 to 1955 she served as a member of the committee and for eleven of these years she also took on the responsibility of Treasurer to the section.<sup>124</sup> This not only involved working on the committee at her own expense but also included subsidising the region when lack of subscriptions resulted in financial shortage for the South Wales Section. In 1942, Charles Yeates, the Secretary of the section, acknowledges the contribution she made to the community:

*My special thanks must go to Mrs Deakin Studt, the section Treasurer, who not only worked but financed the section for a while - to keep it going, and even though she did that, attended every meeting and was Steward at Hereford Fair - she did not receive ONE penny expenses for the year.*<sup>125</sup>

By 1946, the section's accounts which had been in danger of being overdrawn were

now in credit and her achievements were recognised by Thomas Murphy in 1946:

*During this time we have been blessed with the services of a very worthy Treasurer, a Mrs M. D. Studt, and it is largely due to her and the work of the committee that such a total has been reached, and I commend to you how cheerfully Mrs. M. D. Studt has carried out the work of the section.*<sup>126</sup>

Mrs Deakin Studt's achievements have been largely forgotten by the younger generation of showpeople,<sup>127</sup> but the greatest reward for her services was when she was elected as delegate to the Central Council of the Showmen's Guild. This distinction was duly acknowledged by Thomas Murphy in his annual report of the Central Council for 1945:

*The honour of being the first woman to attend the Central Council as a delegate falls to Mrs M. Deakin Studt.*<sup>128</sup>

and in *The History of the Showmen's Guild* he recalls that:

*The Members of the Central Council were impressed by her clarity and sincerity in the Council's deliberation.*<sup>129</sup>

However, it would be more than fifty years after Mrs Deakin Studt's appearance as delegate to Central Council that another woman would appear in the same capacity. In 1996, Sandra Wright, a committee member for the Yorkshire Section of the Showmen's Guild, was elected as the area representative.<sup>130</sup> In the intervening years, few women became members in their own right and it was not until the advent of Cathy Meakin and Rae Armstrong-Wilson in the Derby, Notts. Mid and South Lincs. Section, and Sandra Wright in the Yorkshire Section, that women were again represented on the regional committees.

4.2. When interviewed about the lack of women on the managerial side of the Guild, the women questioned gave a variety of reasons for not joining the organisation. Firstly, families tended to travel as a unit so the question was asked as to why they should pay for two members of the family, when paying as a firm was more economical. Secondly, although the women lead independent lives, they do so within

the constraints of family life and then marriage. Therefore, when membership for the Guild is taken up on the twenty first birthday, the majority of women are still either with the family business or their husband. It is very rare in the fairground community for a daughter or a son to leave the family unit and earn a living independently, unless they are getting married. As a result of these factors, although the role of the female can be seen as equal to that of the male within the family circle, it is her very importance within the domestic and economic sphere, and the element of time involved, that may have ultimately placed the restrictions on attaining success in the more public arena of the Showmen's Guild:

*Women didn't take an interest because they hadn't got any time, because if you're moving, even if they've got joints more so than rides haven't they, they've still got to go and build up and still do the cooking and the cleaning and take the washing. The women in this business haven't had time. Plus basically the majority of the women do all the paperwork because the men aren't interested in paperwork. There's very very few men that will do the paperwork in our business, bar for odd ones I would think, so they haven't got time to go on the Guild have they.<sup>131</sup>*

4.3. However, innovations in technology over the past decade have revolutionised fairground equipment, and with the manoeuvrability of the new trailer-mounted rides and the freedom this imparts, the economic necessity for the family operating as a unit is no longer pertinent to every situation. The new trailer-mounted rides, especially the children's juveniles and side stalls, can be operated by one person. This has resulted in greater flexibility for the individual male or female operator who are now working increasingly in isolation. Therefore, individual membership is often necessary, as other members of the firm could be appearing at another fair, hundreds of miles away. Sandra Wright believes that, as the younger generation become increasingly flexible and independent in their pattern of work, more of the women will join the Guild as members in their own right and not dependent on the family or spouse:

*But I think some of the younger girls that aren't married are more interested, because a lot of them are left now with equipment, split up now, they don't stick together as much, they send their daughter. Like a couple that travel with us, William Cowie, his daughter is eighteen and she's off with the juvenile on her own, so therefore, if there is*



*any problems and her father isn't there, they can't say well you're not in the Guild, you haven't got a say.*<sup>132</sup>

Both Sandra Wright and Rae Armstrong-Wilson belong to families where the father was a prominent member of the Guild, and as a result of this they were educated in the importance and relevance of the organisation. As an increasing number of women become aware of the possibilities for involvement in the management of the bureaucracy, eventually the ratio of women participating will reflect the responsibility they already share in the domestic, financial and working domains:

*So that's why the younger ones, the girls now that are out with equipment themselves and looking after the equipment on their own, they want to have a say, if there is any problems on the ground with the measuring out. They are not going to be shoved on the end or have anything done to them so, and I'll think they will take more of an interest.*<sup>133</sup>

### Conclusion.

*Sometimes I wonder how she does it all. She is still looking after the children, cleaning, cooking, polishing, and pushing me. Two hands on my back pushing me.*<sup>134</sup>

This chapter has demonstrated the variety of skills and occupations in which travelling showwomen have found themselves involved over the past hundred years. As the fairground changes and progresses, the work involved in running the business becomes more advanced. However, the sentiments expressed by Celine Williams at the beginning of this chapter, that *"it makes the job a lot better if you can work together and pull together,"*<sup>135</sup> are as true now as they were in the last century. It would appear that the level of equal opportunity afforded to women in the society is one of the main factors for achieving success as adults:

*She has been brought up the same as I. She can drive, she can build up, she can pull down, she can paint ... You mention it, and she can do it. She can jump into one of the lorries, drive it, drive the car, start the generator up, open, close it.*<sup>136</sup>

The society actively encouraged equal participation on every level from its women, because they have *"been brought up the same."* Moreover, although the Showmen's Guild has never had a women president, the advent of women such as Sandra Wright

and Rae Armstrong-Wilson reflects the inroads fairground women have made into what was traditionally a male monopoly. Considering the contribution made by the fair women to travelling society, the main question is not why has there not been a woman in charge of the Guild but when will there be! However, the Guild is just one aspect of the fairground community, and the part played by women in other levels demonstrates their strength in the community. Celine Williams describes the part performed by women in travelling society in the following way:

*It has always been in this business that in order to get on there has got to be a good partnership. A good man without a good woman at the side of him is nothing. You need the two to work together and they've got to be able to work together and pull together. If one wants to go on strike or wants a day off and the other one is trying to get on with the job, that's no good, you've got to work together whether it is inside or whether it is outside.*<sup>137</sup>

The upbringing of the children, the direct participation allowed in all aspects of the business, and the equal status afforded women from the Victorian period onwards all contribute to the position of shared authority. The sentiments uttered by Renee Marshall may be taking the point too far, but they reflect the pride and knowledge women on the fair have in their own achievements, achievements made well in advance of their counterparts in the settled community:

*They do all the work don't they, most of the work, course they do, they build up, they pull down, they drive, they set out, they do everything yet when it comes to doing some business or something, they don't like it. They must be frightened of them.* (laughs).<sup>138</sup>

The women are taught all the aspects of the business because not only is it expected but eventually it may be instrumental for the success of the firm that they have the requisite knowledge and experience. Celine Williams, when interviewed about the factors that have made women on the fairground so successful in the domestic, economic and public domains of the industry, concluded:

*It's part of life and if you've got a family you carry on with the tradition with what you've been brought up to, it's your bread and butter it's what you've been brought up to do.*<sup>139</sup>

The most important aspect of the fairground life is that the show must go on, the

business must continue. In an industry where family and genealogy are the key attributes for entrance into the Guild, the importance of the family must not be underestimated. The role of fairground women is therefore of greater central importance to the society, both on a domestic and economic basis. The women maintain the continuity of the tradition; they are responsible not only for the education of the children and the home-oriented concerns, but they also provide the necessary financial and business acumen that are needed for all contingencies. In the editorial column of the *World's Fair* in 1917, the writer makes the point that:

*It is the women folk who are left at home endeavouring to keep the flag flying.*<sup>140</sup>

The writer continues by urging the showpeople to stick together and help each other. The editor of the *World's Fair* encourages all the men who are unable to go to war to do everything in their power to help the women whose husbands or children are away fighting, to keep the business going. The article concludes in the following way, expressing sentiments that would also be commonly held throughout the modern fairground society:

*To our readers we would say, never lose sight of the fact that it is essential everything should be kept going and by giving a little assistance, they are thus doing a lot for the business in general.*<sup>141</sup>

## Notes

1. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p 22.
2. Morley, p. 5.
3. See bibliography for the range of material published on the history of fairs in the United Kingdom.
4. Betsy Whyte, *The Yellow on the Broom* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1979).
5. See Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*, pp. 201-305.
6. See Vanessa Toulmin, 'There are No Women Like Showwomen: The Pullen Women of Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Journal*, 9 (1995), 42-50, for a brief account of women working on travelling fairs during the 1930s.
7. Dallas, pp. 68-83.
8. *World's Fair*, October 21st 1916, p. 17.
9. *World's Fair*, October 21st 1916, p. 17.
10. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 6.
11. *World's Fair*, October 21st 1916, p. 17.
12. *World's Fair*, October 21st 1916, p. 17.
13. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 5.
14. Lily May Richards, *Unpublished biography of William Haggard; Actor, Showman and Pioneer of the Film Industry*, written by his daughter, Lily May Richards, Cardiff, (1969), p. 8.
15. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 6.
16. One instance of this occurred at the St Helens Fair held in Sherdley Park in August 1994. After talking to George Holland, a showman from Lancashire, he introduced me to one of the stallholders working opposite his pitch. However, he failed to mention her name or occupation, but instead described her as one of Pat Collins' granddaughters.
17. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 9
18. See Kevin Scrivens, and Steven Smith, *The Circular Steam Switchback* (Newcastle under Lyme: Fairground Association of Great Britain, 1995), for a full list of women proprietors.
19. *World's Fair*, February 27th, p. 7.
20. See Appendix 1 for biographical details.
21. Rae Armstrong-Wilson: TR/VT/RW1/1, p. 3.
22. Rae Armstrong-Wilson: TR/VT/RW1/1, p. 2.
23. Dallas, p. 76.
24. Rae Armstrong-Wilson: TR/VT/RW1/1, p. 2.
25. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW1, p. 4.
26. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW1, p. 4.
27. Toulmin, 'No Women like Show-women', 42-50.
28. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 8.
29. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 20
30. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 19.
31. Waddington's Switchback Takings Books, 1898-1908. National Fairground Archive, uncatalogued items.
32. *World's Fair*, April 24th 1909, p. 4.
33. Scrivens, and Smith, *The Circular Switchback*, p. 14.

34. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 19.
35. Robert Deakin, 'Glorious Days', *The Fairground Mercury*, 14, no. 2 (1991), 4-8.
36. Ibid.
37. *The Showmen's Year Book 1917*, ed. by Thomas Horne, (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1917), p. 32.
38. See *The Showmen's Year Books* between 1917 to 1927 for full details of the Deakin family's yearly membership fee.
39. Schedule 5. of the Showmen's Guild Constitution and Rules in *The Showmen's Year Book* refers to the Conditions of Membership, under which the annual subscription charge for membership of the Guild is laid out.
40. *The Showmen's Year Book 1917*, pp. 9 and 32.
41. Deakin, p. 4.
42. *The Showmen's Year Book 1926*, ed. by William Savage (Bloxwich: Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1926), pp. 132-135. The entries in *The Showmen's Year Book* for 1925 and 1926, show that the Deakin family's subscription fee fluctuated between £5 and £6.
43. The firm of Deakin and Sons is not listed under members' subscriptions in *The Showmen's Year Book* for 1928 and 1929.
44. *The Showmen's Year Book 1926*, pp. 127-132.
45. The Showmen's Guild operates a sliding scale of membership charges based on the size of the machine and the type of ride or novelty presented, This is still maintained and is set out in Rule 8b, schedule of charges, under "conditions of membership."
46. *The Showmen's Year Book 1937*, p. 166.
47. *The Showmen's Year Book 1952*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1952), p. 181.
48. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW, p. 6.
49. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW, p. 7
50. *World's Fair*, December 28th, 1912, p. 11.
51. See *The Showmen's Year Book 1919*, for the obituary of Thomas Horne, which recalls his early life as a doormen for Mrs Ruth Williams' Waxworks show.
52. See *World's Fair*, June 8th, 1912, front page, for obituary of Mrs Emma Fossett and an account of her life on the circus.
53. *World's Fair*, August 15th, 1908, front page.
54. Vanessa Toulmin, 'Women Bioscope Proprietors: The Queens of Showland,' in *Celebrating 1895; Film before 1920*, ed. by John Fullerton and Michael Harvey, (in press).
55. Arthur Holland: TR/VT/AH1, p. 1.
56. Arthur Fay, *Bioscope Shows and their Engines*, (Lingfield: Oakwood Press, 1966), p. 27.

57. Father P. Greville, 'Hancocks of the West', *The Merry-Go-Round*, 9, no. 1 (1955), 2-7.
58. *World's Fair*, May 4th, 1917, p. 3.
59. *World's Fair*, November 5th, 1910, front page.
60. *World's Fair*, August 28th, 1916, p. 12.
61. Mrs Renee Marshall: TR/VT/RM2, p. 3.
62. Mrs Renee Marshall: TR/VT/RM2, p. 8.
63. *World's Fair*, November 4th, 1916, p. 12.
64. *Yorkshire Post*, reprinted in *World's Fair*, November 4th, 1916, p. 12.
65. John Turner, *Victorian Arena: The Performers* (Formby: Lingdales Press, 1995), p. 20.
66. Derek Brailsford, *Bareknuckles: A Social History of Prize Fighting* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988), p. 27.
67. Mrs Annie Hayes: TR/NW/AH1, p. 1.
68. *World's Fair* March 2nd, 1912, p. 11.
69. *Daily Mirror*, October 1st 1951 contains an interview with Polly Stewart.
70. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 7
71. Mrs Renee Marshall: TR/VT/RM2, p. 5.
72. Interview with Mrs Margaret Bird, née Shufflebottom, National Fairground Archive: NFA-178-E11, p. 3.
73. Florence Campbell: TR/VT/FC1, p. 9.
74. Mrs Renee Marshall: TR/VT/RM1, p. 10.
75. Dallas, p. 163.
76. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 12
77. Dallas, p. 164.
78. Sandra Wright:TR/VT/SMW1, p. 21
79. Sandra Wright:TR/VT/SMW1, p. 22
80. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 6.
81. Sandra Wright:TR/VT/SMW1, p. 22.
82. My family travels food kiosks and children's rides and whenever possible I would prefer not to work in the kiosk because of the long hours and hard labour involved.
83. Fairings could be gifts associated with local feasts but some showpeople would also prepare special sweets and jellies and advertise them as feast jellies or fairings.
84. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 6.
85. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 23.
86. Dallas, p. 68.
87. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, pp. 4-5
88. Fred Warren: TR/VT/FG1, p. 20.
89. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 13.
90. *The Visitor*, May 3rd, 1995.
91. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 8.
92. Celine Williams: TR/Vt/CW5, p. 8.
93. Mr Arthur Holland, interviewed as part of the Leicester Oral History Project: All the Fun of the Fair, Tape C44, TR/VT/C44, p. 3.
94. Arthur Holland, Tape: C44, TR/VT/C44, p. 3.

95. Mrs Bates, interviewed as part of the Leicester Oral History Project: All the Fun of the Fair, Tape C44, TR/VT/C44, pp. 2-3.
96. See Appendix 2 for details of the Education Reform Act, 1988.
97. My cousin, Dorothy Doody, attended over fifty different schools during childhood and one of the reasons she settled in a chalet was to ensure educational stability for her children.
98. See National Fairground Archive, NFA-178-O for the range of teaching packs currently offered by Traveller Education Officers from different regional authorities.
99. Of the thirty four people interviewed for this study, only seven received a private education.
100. Sandra Wright TR/VT/SMW1, p. 11.
101. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 22.
102. See Duncan Dallas, for his opinions on the use of the living vehicle.
103. Sandra Wright TR/VT/SMW1, p. 16.
104. Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*.
105. Sandra Wright TR/VT/SMW1, p. 13.
106. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 13.
107. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 8.
108. Radio 2, June 21st 1996. See TR/VT/LJ/VM1, p. 1.
109. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 11.
110. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 13.
111. Sandra Wright, *ibid*.
112. Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*, p. 81.
113. See glossary; however, definition of *mochardi* given by Okely is "ritually polluted."
114. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 20.
115. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 22
116. Minutes of a Meeting of the Central Council of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, held in St Ermin's Hotel, London, on the 15th and 16th of January, 1996, p. 2.
117. See Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, for further details.
118. *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book, 1995-96*, pp. 149, 158.
119. *The Showmen's Year Book 1938*, p. 151.
120. Rae Armstrong-Wilson: TR/VT/RW1/1. p. 1.
121. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 5.
122. Sexton, 'Travelling Showmen', 160-175.
123. *Ibid.*, 167-168.
124. See Thomas Murphy, *The Showmen's Year Book*, from 1938 to 1955.
125. *The Showmen's Year Book 1944*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, 1944), p. 175.
126. *The Showmen's Year Book 1946*, ed. by Thomas Murphy (London: The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain,

- 1946), p. 152.
127. The minutes for the Central Council meeting for 1996 mistakenly credit Mrs Sandra Wright with the achievement of being the first lady delegate to the annual meeting.
  128. *The Showmen's Year Book 1946*, p. 104.
  129. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, Part 2 - 1939-48*, p. 64.
  130. Minutes of the Central Council of The Showmen's Guild, p. 2.
  131. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 4.
  132. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 4.
  133. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 4.
  134. Dallas, p. 83.
  135. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, p. 6.
  136. Dallas, p. 83.
  137. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, pp. 4-5.
  138. Mrs Renee Marshall: TR/VT/RM2, p. 11.
  139. Celine Williams: TR/VT/CW5, pp. 4-5.
  140. *World's Fair*, May 12th, 1917, p. 13.
  141. Ibid.



## Chapter 6.

### *Do You Plarey the Backslang?*

*Yes, I can mix with anybody, get chatting to them, they say I don't know how you can talk to them, I say quite easy, I say flatties, (and) Travellers are no different, we are only living in a waggon, four wheels on the road, it's no different is it, the language is different perhaps, I don't know.<sup>1</sup>*



*Lord Lonsdale shaking hands with Alderman Tuby,  
Vice-Chairman of Doncaster Race Committee.  
September, 1925.*

Figure 6. Lord Lonsdale and George Thomas Tuby, Doncaster, 1925.

## Chapter 6.

### *Do You Plarey the Backslang?*

Within all travelling groups there exists either a secret language, cant, or usage of words and jargon particular to that group or society. As Chapter 4 has demonstrated, showpeople perceive themselves, as do all travelling communities, as a separate autonomous group. To a non-Traveller the differences may appear marginal or even indistinguishable, but to Travellers their individual identity is often expressed through their use of material culture and language.<sup>2</sup> The different usage in the material culture has already been touched on,<sup>3</sup> and for the purpose of this study the role of language within the fairground community will be approached as follows:

1. Discussion of the role of language within travelling communities.
2. Collecting of data.
3. Introduction to the Glossary.
4. Glossary of terms used by travelling showpeople.
5. Conclusion.

This will hopefully demonstrate that the role of *backslang*, as used by showpeople, is not only a mark of cultural identity but has also been part of their continuous tradition for at least the past hundred years.

#### 1. Introduction to Traveller Languages.

*Can you rocker Romany?  
Can you chin the cosh?  
Dicki at Mandy?  
Can you fake the bosh?\**

The Irish Travellers refer to their secret language as *Shelta* or *Gammon*; Gypsies call it *Romany* or *Pavla*; travelling showpeople also have their own speech which is a mixture of slang and local dialect, and includes many words unique to their society. Although the various reference groups may speak a different language, there is a common acceptance of its nature and secrecy. According to James

Browne "it came about to avoid trouble."<sup>5</sup>

Travellers formed their own language to prevent the *flatties*, the non-Travellers, from finding out about their business. Recent studies of the language of market traders imply a connection between the jargon used by travelling showpeople, Travellers and that of market traders.<sup>6</sup> All of the groups claim the originality of these words for their own culture, but the widespread use of the terms within the distinct societies is not surprising considering the travelling and trading nature of each group. When asked if there was a difference between the language of Travellers from different regions of Great Britain, John Stevens, a Gypsy from Wales, replied that the Scottish and Irish Travellers in particular use totally different expressions and words.<sup>7</sup> The different terms used to designate the language are outlined below. These are only loose definitions, however, and are not to be regarded as definitive.

### 1.1. Romany.

*Romany* is the language spoken by people of Romany extraction or Romany race. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, 2nd Edition, describes it in the following way:

*The language of the Gypsies, probably of Indo-Aryan origin but with regional variations reflecting contact with other languages.*<sup>8</sup>

It is different from the other languages under discussion in that originally it did not build on the common tongue spoken by the settled community. It has reputedly been in decline since the 1870s and the relative strength of the survival of the original language is in dispute. Thomas Acton and Donald Kenrick, however, have argued that the evidence for the maintenance of the language is stronger than previously believed, and they and others have attempted to transfer what is essentially an oral tradition into a more literary form, details of which can be found in Acton and Kenrick's revised edition of *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus*.<sup>9</sup> Debate is currently raging between two of the foremost Gypsy scholars over the nature of

Romany spoken amongst modern Romanes. Professor Ian Hancock argues that the modern language is still essentially a dialect of Romanes, albeit one massively influenced by English, whereas Donald Kenrick believes that the modern language spoken by Romanes is basically Romani English, which is a dialect of English rather than a distinct language.<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this study, *Romany* is merely used to describe words which are attributed to the Romany language or have a Romany origin, whether it be a dialect of Romany or the Romany dialect of English.

## 1.2. Cant.

The *OED* gives the following definition for the term *cant*:

*The special phraseology of a class, sect, profession, etc.; jargon, slang.*

*Cant* is used in this study to distinguish between the names given to their language by Scottish travelling groups. Bella Stewart, a Traveller from Scotland, describes the cant in much the same way as James Browne, her Irish counterpart, namely as the:

*language used by travellers for private conversation when they don't want any strangers to understand what they are saying.*<sup>11</sup>

It also shares with the other Traveller languages and dialects a tendency to use English as the mother tongue on which to build, as it is in some ways dependent upon the usage and structure of English. Therefore, speakers of *Cant* would for example ask "do you mang the cant?" as a way of ascertaining if you understand their language. The only time I have heard showpeople use this particular expression was in conversation with Tommy and Gladys Russell, who travel around North Lancashire, Cumbria and the Scottish Borders. When interviewed, Gladys explained the importance of understanding some words of cant:

*Mang the cant? ... do you mang the Cant well that has got me out of a lot of scrapes that because we used to go to a few horse fairs and if they think they can get the upper hand with you, they will you know Vanessa. As from going as we were married I got to know these Gypsy boys ... and I could talk to them and give them a bit of Gypsy lingo and they used to say "don't mess her about she mangs the cant" ... that meant to say she knows the language (laughs).*<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. Shelta or Gammon.

The *OED* defines *Shelta* in the following way:

*An ancient cryptic language used by tinkers, gypsies, etc., composed partly of Irish or Gaelic words, mostly disguised by inversion or by arbitrary alteration of initial consonants.*

*Shelta* is a term used by the Irish Travellers or tinkers to describe their own secret language. The nineteenth century American scholar C G Leland describes it as *singular Celtic language which is peculiar to tinkers*.<sup>13</sup>

*Shelta*, like all the other languages mentioned here, stresses its individuality from the other types used by the different itinerant groups. David Birch uses the definition as supplied by an English Gypsy in that *Shelta* is used by the Irish Traveller, *Cant* by the English Traveller or Gypsy, and *Romany* as the language used by the European Gypsy.<sup>14</sup> These definitions are nowadays quite loose and the various languages are often known by the generic term "Traveller talk".

### 1.4. Language Spoken by Showpeople.

*The use of slang words has been in vogue ever since Showland was Showland, and will, we believe, last as long as Showland is Showland.*<sup>15</sup>

The final group of Travellers who have their own language are travelling showpeople. When describing their secret language, showpeople will often use the term *backslang*, and of the five interviewees specifically questioned about its function, all referred to it as *backslang*. Within the community, failure to understand the terminology used marks you as an outsider, a *flatty*. Although showpeople from different parts of the country may have a different meaning for a particular term, lack of understanding is accepted on the basis that you are from another section, a foreigner, not a *joskin*.<sup>16</sup> The showpeople use their unique variety of language, as other travelling groups do, as a form of communication that outsiders do not understand. There are considerable similarities between market traders' speech and *backslang* spoken on the fairground, which is not surprising

considering the historic link between markets and fairs. O'Shaughnessy's 1975 study provides a glossary which allows us to compare the two.<sup>17</sup> Many of the great fairs of today carry the original trading/marketing heritage in their names: Nottingham Goose Fair, Blackburn Pot Fair, Appleby Horse Fair etc, and the close trading links between the two communities would have resulted in a common knowledge of the terms specific to trading. When interviewed about the purpose of *backslang*, Tommy Green, a showman from Lancashire, replied:

*there used to be a lot more backslang amongst showmen and they could have a conversation with a view to the person who was an outsider not knowing what was going on.*<sup>18</sup>

Its concise nature enables the speaker to insert the words in normal conversation without the outsider being made aware of this. Two words may mean as much as a whole sentence of normal speech. However, the actual term used to designate the language of showpeople poses difficulties as the precise meaning of the term *backslang* as used on the fairground was not found in any of the dictionaries consulted. When the *OED* and various slang dictionaries were examined to establish the meaning and provenance of individual words with common fairground usage, the main term given to distinguish the language of circus and showpeople from that of other groups was *Parlary* or *Parlaree*.

### 1.5. *Parlyaree*.

The *OED* definitions of *Parlyaree* which are outlined below seem to imply that what the showpeople call *backslang* is really what linguists and historians refer to as *Parlyaree*. However, the identity of the group who use this canting form of speech is in question as the following definitions given to *Parlyaree* by the editors of the *OED* demonstrate:

*Parlyaree* (\_\_\_\_\_). Also *parlary*.  
[f. It. *parlare* to speak, talk] ~

*A form of slang used by actors and showmen, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries and characterized by Italianate vocabulary.*

*The word appears to be related to nanty parnarly recorded in Barrere, & Leland*

*Dict. Slang (1890) II. 81/2*

1933 Partridge *Slang Today & Yesterday* iii. 223 *Until about the end of the eighteenth century, actors were so despised that in self protection, they had certain words that properly should be described as cant and were actually known as Parlyaree.*

1933 *Times Lit. Suppl. 15 June 412/3* *Circus slang is a nineteenth-century offshoot from the Parlyaree of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.*

1950 Partridge *Here, There & Everywhere* 117 *It was among showmen and strolling players that parlyaree originated.*

*Ibid.* 122 *Most parlyaree-speakers prefer a carser or carsey, i.e. a house when they can get it.*

*Ibid.* 125. *Parlyaree is a glossary, a vocabulary, not a complete language.*

1952 Granville, *Dict. Theatr. Terms* 132 *Parlyaree (occasionally parlary). Little is known about this language which has neither accidence nor syntax of its own but is built on a base of Italian words and phrases, whereon cant term and illiteracies are piled.*

1960 J. Franklyn *Dict. Rhyming Slang* 106/1 *The term (sc. parlamaree) is obviously a mispronunciation of Parlyaree, the language of the Circus.*

1960 *Spectator* 11 Mar. 355 *The canting jargon of the Victorian fairground known as parlyaree.*

In *A Dictionary of Historical Slang*, Eric Partridge further adds to the confusion by distinguishing between *Parlyaree* and circus slang:

*Parlour: The "Lingua Franca" - but actually as to 90% of its words, Italianate vocabulary of C.18-mid-19 actors and mid-C.19-20 costermongers and showmen.<sup>19</sup>*

According to Partridge the word probably did not exist long before c.1850, when the vocabulary was enlarged and the principal users changed radically. Therefore the link is supplied by itinerant actors who worked on the fairgrounds and the showpeople who employed them. Circus language became separate from *Parlyaree* in the nineteenth century, and although they share many words they are treated as separate vocabularies by Partridge in *Slang, Today and Yesterday*, where he writes that:

*It is pleasant to think that circus slang, which in the 19th century detached itself from the moribund Parlyaree (the secret slang of actors, especially of strolling players) has survived to this extent.<sup>20</sup>*

This theme is also reflected in his collection of essays published in 1950:

*Partyaree is not co-extensive with circus slang, which however, notably includes much of the old partyaree vocabulary: it came to the circus from independent showmen.*<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, even Partridge finds contradictions in the term applied to the language of showpeople. He refers to it as the Cinderella among languages and states that there have been few academic attempts to analyse or even record this language.<sup>22</sup> Most of the definitions supplied in the *OED* seem to imply a link between the type of slang employed by both circus and fairground showmen. However, early writers on circuses and fairs make a distinction between the two. Thomas Frost, in *Circus Life* (1875), devotes a whole section to circus slang and observes that:

*Circus men are much addicted to the use of slang, and much of their slang is peculiar to themselves.*<sup>23</sup>

and he continues by maintaining that:

*A distinction must be made between slang words and phrases and the technical terms used in the profession, and also between the forms of expressions peculiar to circus men and those which they use in common with members of the theatrical and musical profession.*<sup>24</sup>

However, no such usage is attributed to the fairground showmen in his book *The Old Showmen and the Old London Fairs* (1874).<sup>25</sup> This distinction between the kind of slang spoken on the circus and fairground is maintained by Partridge.

Although he stresses the similarity between the two vocabularies, he believes that circus slang is different from *Partyaree*, the former being in decline:

*The smallness of the circus community would not entitle it to a place in this book were it not for the inherent interest of its slang, which has close association with Cockney, with cant and with Romany. But it is a slang gradually dying out ... now it has few terms peculiar to itself, now it is little more than such a mixture of Cockney, and Romany (with a few words from Lingua Franca and the underworld).*<sup>26</sup>

Partridge then defines *Partyaree* as being the secret slang of actors, in particular strolling players, with terms such as *letty*, *scarper*, *donah*, for example, sharing a common usage. However, although he continued to make a distinction between the two vocabularies, he maintained throughout his work that both were in decline.

Partridge relied heavily on printed sources for his material, and one such text consulted, Edward Seago's *Circus Company*,<sup>27</sup> contains a glossary of sixty-seven terms. Partridge divided the terms found there into different elements of jargon, of



which he maintains there are six. These include forty examples of genuine circus slang, eight uses of cant, and three Romany words, while the remaining few are a mixture of Cockney and Shelta.<sup>28</sup> Of the sixty-seven listed, only ten can be found in Frost's account of circus life in 1875. This led Partridge to the belief that:

*it is doubtful if the close of the present century will see more than twenty of Seago's terms still in use.*<sup>29</sup>

This assumption or conclusion is also applied to *Parlyaree*, and in his collection of essays published in 1950 he writes that:

*Parlyaree is a glossary, a vocabulary, not a complete language. Little remains. Even that little may disappear.*<sup>30</sup>

Partridge's compilation of *Parlyaree* and circus slang as spoken by travelling showpeople, was drawn solely from published accounts of circus life either written by enthusiastic outsiders such as Seago or autobiographical accounts of showmen such as Phillip Allingham's *Cheapjack*.<sup>31</sup> Newspaper accounts such as those in the *World's Fair* were either ignored or not known to Partridge. Although he may have been involved in the collecting of primary data, the main evidence Partridge supplies in his various essays on the vernacular as spoken by the fraternity of showpeople is taken from published secondary sources. Therefore, we have to presume that his premise was based on secondary data rather than on his own original material. This is a common problem facing outsiders who do not witness the language spoken in a day to day situation but perceive what is essentially an oral tradition through the written word. However, Partridge's belief that the language spoken by the fairground showmen and circus performers is different is shared by my interviewees. Indeed, circus performers such as Mrs Marshall, née Scott, who married a fairground showman, stressed repeatedly that the slang spoken in her childhood was completely separate from what she then later heard on the fairgrounds.<sup>32</sup> The majority of the references quoted in the *OED*, and indeed by Partridge, stress the association between *Parlyaree* and travelling performers and showmen. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, *Parlyaree* refers specifically to the language of travelling showpeople. If we take *Parlyaree* as the technical term

used by linguists to describe the jargon spoken by fairground people, we then have to assess whether Partridge was correct in his view that such a language is moribund and in decline. The remaining discussion is therefore concerned primarily with the use of *backslang* or *Parlyaree* amongst travelling showpeople in contemporary society. In order to assess its relevance and importance and to determine the origin or etymology of the terms and expressions common on the late 1990s fairground, a glossary of such terms used in everyday conversation has been compiled. The methodology for the collection of this data is outlined in the following section. Furthermore, in order to evaluate the meanings of the words currently in use, a search of the *OED* and major slang dictionaries was undertaken and the resulting commentary is presented alongside the glossary entries.

## 2. Collection of Data.

The primary material used in this chapter was compiled from two sets of data: firstly, from interviews conducted with travelling showpeople and listed in Appendix 1, and secondly from personal knowledge as a result of my role as an insider in the community and a speaker of the vocabulary. As a consequence of this fieldwork, a glossary has been compiled of approximately 200 terms that are either in common use on the fairground or are peculiar to certain families or individual family members. It must be emphasised that this is not an attempt to present a complete compendium of the jargon in use on the fairground. Rather, it endeavours to record and examine a representative selection of these terms, to analyse the importance of *Parlyaree* within the community, and to demonstrate its historical continuity within the society.

2.1 The role of insider within the society is obviously most advantageous when attempting to understand the secret language of the community, and this has greatly aided my research. This advantage was often a mixed blessing. It obviously enabled me to provide a definition of the term when used on the fairground today,

especially when no information was available from field interviews, and I could then draw on my own personal knowledge. However, when I attempted to record the usage of the secret language in a more formal situation, difficulties arose as a result of my insider status. Firstly, when I tried various modes of interviewing showpeople about the use of *Parlyaree* on the fairground, the results were mixed. This was due to a number of factors, the most important being that the whole purpose of a secret language is, as Tommy Green a showman from Lancashire, describes it as:

*"a means of talking to one another without the other person knowing."*<sup>33</sup>

As a speaker of *Parlyaree* I was seen as an insider and any attempts to introduce questions on the language as an objective topic for discussion resulted in suspicion. Secondly, because my parents left the fair when I was seven, it was only through subsequently living and travelling with my mother's family in the holidays, throughout my school years and then living on the fair for two years for the purpose of fieldwork, that I was in a position to learn the words as a non-speaker. Other factors that I had not considered until I began this level of investigation were the differences in the varieties of usage within the *backslang* spoken in various regions and the frequency with which it was used. For example, showpeople from Yorkshire informed me that slang was not really used in their section but it was more prevalent in the Lancashire and Eastern Counties Sections of the Guild. This finding was in keeping with studies of cant as spoken by Scottish Travellers. Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, for example, were informed by the Stewart family that the cant differed from region to region:

*The Stewarts were insistent in pointing out that the vocabulary and pronunciation of cant shows considerable variation from district to district, and even from family to family.*<sup>34</sup>

Another instance occurred when talking to Sandra Wright about the term *mochardi*, which she informed me was one she had never heard of. Later in the evening she rang me at home to tell me that her cousin Pamela who travelled around East Anglia was familiar with the term but they pronounced it *mocharti*.

Sandra's explanation for the fact that both Pamela and I know this term was that we mixed more with Traveller-Gypsies and as a result of this our speech was more *pikeyfied*. Consequently, the same problems discussed above in connection with the beginning of the fieldwork were again encountered when attempting to compile a database of recorded material on tape: firstly, my role as an insider within the community often prevented a full discussion because any detailed questioning aroused suspicion about the authenticity of my claim to be a speaker of the language. Secondly, I was ignorant about the regional uses of *backslang*. Thirdly, due to my family connection with Travellers-Gypsies, a percentage of my vocabulary was scattered with terms that the showpeople who did not recognise the words perceived as Gypsy in origin. As a result of this, I was occasionally seen as *pikeyfied* and not a true showperson.<sup>35</sup>

2.2. Because of these initial problems, and although it may appear unorthodox, the method of collecting data for this aspect of the study was very similar to that employed by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, in that it was basically as a result of everyday conversation:

*In compiling the following vocabulary, we did not conduct extensive research down all the avenues of Stewart memory. On occasion we would ask for a translation of a conversation if it was incomprehensible, and we kept lists of words on envelopes, chip-bags and scraps of paper.*<sup>36</sup>

The methodology decided on and finally used for the interviews was based on a type of quiz where the showpeople would respond to an idiom either by presenting another definition for the same word or saying the term themselves; I would then respond to them with a explanation of my own. In line with this approach, I would note down the unfamiliar words that I came across in everyday conversation and then attempt to introduce them into an interview through casual discussion. Obviously, as a speaker of *Parlyaree* I had an underlying knowledge of the language, and this has been of great benefit. This was particularly the case when actually compiling the glossary; if I recalled terms for various objects which were

not on tape, I could use my personal knowledge to supply additional information. However, a balance between apparent ignorance and understanding had to be maintained in order to obtain new data and to gain a greater understanding of the variety of ways in which a term may be employed. One example of this is the word *vardi*. I had only heard this applied to a living van, but my aunt told me that *vardi* was also used as a verb meaning "to look":

*B: That's right .....well mostly the word used there is vardi that means to look ...vardi the chavvy*

*V: In Lancashire they say kecker the chavvy*

*B: Do they?*

*V: Well I said vardi and she said oh we say kecker.*

*B: Mind you vardi as well you see in some places means a waggon.<sup>37</sup>*

An example of the question and answer approach used in my fieldwork and based on the notion of selective observation, in which the interviewer collects the data through specific contrast questions,<sup>38</sup> is found in the following extract from an interview with Betty Francis:

*V: Sooty arratte*

*B: Sooty arratte*

*V: That's go to bed, but muscra a policeman and gavver*

*B: Yes the muscras and gavver, yes the gavvers have come, yes the gavvers.*

*V: Bewie*

*B: Dorner*

*V: Bewie's a dorner.*

*B: That's a Nottingham word that, well he used to use it quite frequently did Jimmy Crow.*

*V: And pobs are apples*

*B: Pobs are apples, yes.<sup>39</sup>*

This form of selective question and response was then broadened until the interview became an informal discussion about the origin of *Parlyaree* and the variety of usages that could apply to one term:

*V: But this is what this old Traveller said that a lot of backslang, showman's talk is a mixture of all of them.*

*B: It is the backslang, and plus the fact that you picked up the bits of slang, as you were travelling in each county you travelled in as well.*

*V: How would you say stop; don't do that?*

*B: Pardon*

*V: How would you say stop don't do that?*

*B: Nanti*

*V: So nanti like don't talk don't do anything?*

*B: Nanti mush you'd go or kecker mush ...kecker.. stop it don't do it.*

V: *And rocka for speech is an abbreviation*

B: *Rocka means to speak ...kecka rocka means don't speak ....some words are used for yes and no ...you know what I mean ...yes and no.*<sup>40</sup>

This methodology was developed through interviewing members of my family who still travelled on the fair, and as I became more adept at introducing the subject of *backslang* into the conversation, it was then extended to people outside the family. Sometimes the level of secrecy attached to the understanding of *Parlyaree* prevented tape recordings of the interviews and in such instances notes were taken. Unfortunately, it was not until the final phase of the fieldwork that I attempted to enter these notes more formally in a notebook instead of relying on the MacColl and Seeger method of using scraps of paper.<sup>41</sup> Even so, a database of approximately two hundred terms was eventually compiled which I myself knew and which were commonly heard on the fairground. Also, overfamiliarity with the language originally resulted in various terms being omitted, due to my belief that such expressions were found amongst non-Travellers; and it was only through conversations with Dr Clive Upton in the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language that I realised their importance.<sup>42</sup> As noted above, the following glossary is not a comprehensive listing of the words employed amongst travelling showpeople and is not meant to be the definitive listing of *Parlyaree* as spoken on the fairgrounds. However, so far as I am aware it is the first attempt by either an insider or indeed any researcher to provide a listing and interpretation of its extended and contemporary usage within the society.

### 3. Introduction to Glossary.

As previously stated, when writing about the importance of *Parlyaree* in 1950, Eric Partridge commented:

*Parlyaree, then, is a glossary, a vocabulary, not a complete language. Little remains. Even that little may disappear.*<sup>43</sup>

Nearly fifty years after the publication of this essay, we have the means to prove or disprove the validity and use of *Parlyaree* on the fairground. The following glossary comprises terms taken from everyday conversation on the modern fairgrounds. Quotations from the transcripts and attributed to individual interviewees and further biographical information of the people interviewed can be found in Appendix 1.

Obviously when dealing with the secondary sources it would have been too time consuming to consult all of the known published works on slang. It was therefore decided to choose a representative sample of the standard specialist and non-specialist reference works, to provide information on definitions and for use in the analytical commentary incorporated in the glossary. Of the many and varied references works available twelve main texts were finally consulted and the principal secondary sources drawn upon in the commentaries are:

1. The *Oxford English Dictionary*.
2. Dictionaries of slang and unconventional English.
3. Specialised texts which include the vocabulary used on the fairgrounds.
4. Glossaries of words employed by market traders and Traveller-Gypsies.

Occasionally a specialist dialect, work for example Upton, Parry and Widdowson's recently published *Survey of English Dialects: The Dictionary and Grammar*,<sup>44</sup> provided greater insight into a particular term and where appropriate the relevant citations in these sources are included in the analytical commentary. The entries in the glossary include all the relevant details from the twelve texts consulted. However, if a given term in the glossary is not found in the secondary sources, or the definition

in the source consulted differs in some way, this is indicated by the statement "sense not in dictionaries consulted". The reasons governing the selection of secondary sources and an introduction to the relevant texts consulted are set out in the following sections.

The primary sources consulted for the glossary were the transcripts of interviews with travelling showpeople and material gleaned from the *World's Fair*. It must be emphasised that the material included is only that which is known to me personally or is in current usage on the fairground. Occasionally a word which is spoken by Traveller-Gypsies or is found on the circus is included in the glossary because of its use on the fairground, or it is found in the transcripts. Information from these interviews and other primary sources such as the *World's Fair* are presented in the final section of each commentary. This source material which is found at the end of a given entry is crucially important in that it incorporates the authentic usage of language on the fairground today.

1. The principal published source used in checking data for the glossary is *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, which was consulted on CD Rom. This is the most comprehensive dictionary in the English language, and an obvious starting point for providing definitions of words and expressions found on the fairground. If a given word is not found in the *OED*, no definition is included in the glossary. However, if the word employed by the showpeople is located in the *OED*, but the meaning on the fairground is different, this is indicated by the statement, "sense not in *OED*".

2. The second body of texts consulted comprises the specialised dictionaries dealing with the historical use of slang. These are presented in order of publication, beginning with Hotten's *The Slang Dictionary*, (Hotten).<sup>45</sup> Hotten's work was preferred to that of the many other compilers of slang glossaries in the nineteenth



century in that his methodology of actively seeking out informants to explain the meaning of new words was closest to the one employed in the present study. The main compiler of slang dictionaries in the twentieth century was Eric Partridge, and both *A Dictionary of Historical Slang*<sup>46</sup> (*DHS*) and *A Dictionary of the Underworld*<sup>47</sup> (*DU*) have been consulted. The reasons for choosing these works rather than the standard *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*,<sup>48</sup> is that *A Dictionary of Historical Slang* is an abridgement of the 1961 edition and contains only those words and expressions which were in use before the First World War. A large percentage of the interviewees were born during that era and their language reflects that of the period immediately following. By consulting a dictionary that specialises in the historical use of slang, the etymology of such terms on the fairground could be dated or traced to a certain time point. *A Dictionary of the Underworld* was consulted in order to assess the links that Partridge maintains between the jargon employed by costermongers, tramps, criminals and other groups such as Travellers who operate on the margins of society. If the word employed on the fairground is located in these sources but the given definition is different, as mentioned previously, this is indicated by the statement "sense not in dictionaries consulted".

3. The third group of texts consulted are specialised works that deal solely with fairground and circus history and often include a glossary of terms. For a technical definition of the jargon employed on the fairground, Braithwaite's *Fairground Architecture*<sup>49</sup> was employed and when appropriate, the definition given. Other publications which include circus and fairground slang glossaries were consulted and their explanations are presented in date order. When abbreviations for texts consulted are used in the glossary, they are identified by the author's name in italics: Edward Seago's *Circus Company*<sup>50</sup> (1933), is shortened to *Seago*, Phillip Allingham's biographical account of his life on the fair, *Cheapjack*<sup>51</sup> (1934), is referred to as

*Allingham*, Edwin Corrigan's autobiography, *Ups and Downs and Roundabouts*<sup>52</sup> (1970), is shortened to *Corrigan*, and Francis Brown's glossary in *Fairfield Folk*<sup>53</sup> (1985), is referred to as *Brown*.

4. The historical links between showpeople and other members of the trading communities have already been demonstrated, but in order to illustrate the common use of language between showpeople, Gypsies and market-traders, three further works have been consulted. Firstly, O'Shaughnessy's *Glossary of Market Traders Argot*<sup>54</sup> (1975), Birch's *Travellers' Cant, Shelta, Mumpers' Talk and Minklers' Thari*<sup>55</sup> (1983), and finally Acton and Kenrick's *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus*<sup>56</sup> (1984). The latter includes both a contemporary translation and a definition of terms used in existing Traveller culture, and also their nineteenth century usage.

The final source materials used in compiling this glossary are the most important and the ones that contain the additional primary information collected during the fieldwork. These are the *World's Fair*, and the transcripts of interviews with travelling showpeople and as previously stated, a number of interviewees were especially selected for their knowledge of *backslang* on the fairground and full biographical details can be found in Appendix 1. Therefore, the concluding section of a particular glossary entry includes either a quotation from the transcripts, or the *World's Fair*, or an analytical commentary based on the fieldwork data. As previously stated in Chapter 2, each tape recorded interview was given a individual referencing system and the particular transcript which related directly to that recording was filed within the code allocated. The transcriptions are cited as Transcript: TR/VT/BF1, 2, 3, etc. or TR/VT/CW1, 2, 3, etc. and further details can be found in Appendix 1.

Occasionally, as is inevitable in research of this kind, a word or expression collected during fieldwork is not found in the secondary sources or known to myself; the symbol

(\*) is used to denote that the word was unknown to me but used by a particular family. In the rare occurrence when a word or expression is unique to an individual the entry is double starred (\*\*). It is virtually impossible to establish the provenance of such terms; many of them tend to be found only in speech and variant forms and meanings may occur in different parts of the English speaking world. No doubt, as research continues, further information will come to light about such problematic words. The last section of a given entry is perhaps the most important part of the glossary in that it includes the contemporary employment of the word or term on the fairground and is not reliant on printed secondary sources. Finally, if the term has not been recorded in the sources consulted, my own definition is presented, together with any other relevant information.

#### 4. Glossary of Terms used by Travelling Showpeople.

**Abreast.** Used to describe a ROUNDABOUT with three horses or other animals, placed side by side on the platform.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Braithwaite:* 1-, 2-, 3- and 4 -abreast horses refer to the arrangement, side by side of HORSES, COCKERELS and BICYCLES, or other vehicles, in a ROUNDABOUT.

Mrs. E. Francis, VT/TR/BF8: *They used to say that, a three abreast and afour a breast and then some used to call them a set of Gallopers.*

**Ark.** Type of fairground RIDE.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Braithwaite:* primarily the collective name for modern switchbacks; specifically the term Noah's Ark referred to a circular RIDE having an undulating track of 4 hills and valleys, or 3 hills and 3 valleys and a variety of fixed animals carried on segmental platforms, all contained within a static enclosure. The terms **Ark**, **BEN HUR**, **SPEEDWAY**, **CORONATION SPEEDWAY**, and **CYCLE SPEEDWAY** are roughly synonymous, animals being replaced by chariots or other vehicles as appropriate.

**Backslang.** Vernacular: this term is used by showpeople to describe their secret form of communication.

*OED:* a kind of slang in which every word is pronounced backwards.

*Corrigan:* vernacular.

A term used widely by the older generation of showpeople. In particular both Billy Manders and his contemporary Tommy Russell used this expression to denote the vernacular. When interviewed, Tommy Green used the term **backslang** to refer to the language showpeople used. Tommy Green, TR/VT/TG1: *Our backslang is all mixed up.*

**Back end run.** Fairs that are held towards the end of the summer and which usually signal the run-up to the major back end fairs such as Nottingham Goose Fair and Hull.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted, but see Upton, Parry and Widdowson for their definition of **back end**.

*Brown*: End of season fairs.

This expression is widely used on the fairground and found throughout the country. Usually heard towards the end of August and the beginning of Autumn and therefore in connection with the major events held at Stratford, Nottingham, Hull and Loughborough which is generally the last fair of the **back end run**.

**Back of the Duke.** Counting change into one's own hand then turning the hand over and palming coins into the back pocket.

*OED*: **duke** n.7, the hand or fist.

*Hotten*: **dukes**, hands. *DU*: **duke** 2, hand.

*Corrigan*: moneytaker counting change into his own hand then turning hand over and palming coins.

Heard only occasionally on the fairground, and used on the fair to describe how the men who work on the large RIDES short change the public. The term TO BRICK is more commonly used.

**Barker.** Person who stands outside the show and encourages the customers to enter.

*OED*: a noisy assailant, an auction room or shop tout; one who barks at a cheap shop or show.

*Hotten*: a man employed to cry at the doors of gaffs, shows and puffing shops to entice people in. *DU*: **barker** 3, auctioneer, a bally-hoo man, spieler.

*Allingham*: one who stands outside a show at a fairground to address the crowd and persuade the people to enter.

Usually heard in reference to the old parading shows which have

since disappeared, not widely used on the modern fairground, but found in conversation with the older generation for whom shows were a common feature.

**Ben Hur.** See ARK

Sense not in dictionaries, see *Braithwaite's* definition under ARK.

**Bewie/Bewer.** Girl, or woman. See DORNER, MONNISHER, MORT OR MOZZIE.

*OED*: **bure, buor**, a woman, spec. one of loose character.

*DHS*: (ex shelt), a girl. *DU*: a woman.

*Birch*: **beor**, woman.

DONAH or RAKLI, may be used according to area and age of the woman, generally used in the Nottinghamshire area. See TR/VT/TG1 for locality where **bewer** is used. The showpeople tend to believe that this is a term peculiar to Nottingham and its extended use can possibly be traced back to the interaction between the showpeople and the locals at the famous Nottingham Goose Fair. When asked what the term for woman was in Yorkshire Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2, responded with the following: *All sorts, "dorner, " "mozzie, " "bewie, " "bewie" isn't used up here, Notts, and Derby "bewer. "*

**Bicycles.** Found on the VELOCIPEDA, one of the first types of fairground ROUNDABOUTS, see ABREAST and VELOCIPEDA.

**Bioscope.** Early fairground cinema show, popular between 1896 to 1914.

*OED*: **bioscope 2**, an early form of cinematograph.

*Braithwaite*: a generic term meaning travelling booth for the display of motion pictures.

Term widely used to describe the travelling cinematograph shows

found on the fairground before the First World War. A handbill from 1897, in the possession of Miss Celine Williams contains the following:

*Randall Williams visits his town Fair or Feast with his famous bioscope animated photographs, Electric light and Dynamo costing over a thousand pound.*

**Boats.** See STEAM YACHTS.

**\*Bora.** Hedge.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Acton and Kenrick*: bor, hedge.

Used by the Francis family usually in conjunction with bora canni, meaning a pheasant. No other example of this term found in either the taped interviews or in general conversation with other showpeople.

**\*Bora Canni.** Pheasant.

Sense not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

See BORA and CANNI for individual definitions, the phrase translates as "hedge bird" or "bird in the hedge". The only example of this in the fieldwork was spoken by the Francis family and was not found either in the taped interviews or in general conversation with other showpeople. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF10 when interviewed gave another term for pheasant: *A cock canny means a pheasant.*

**Brick.** To steal; usually describes the action of taking money from the cash box.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*O'Shaughnessy*: defraud.

Commonly used on the fairground to describe the act of stealing money from the proprietor of the RIDE and not usually from the general public. See BACK OF THE DUKE.

**Building up.** The setting up of equipment in readiness for the opening of the fair. Expression not found in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted. Very common expression used on the fairground to describe the business of constructing the RIDES and STALLs ready for when the fair is open. Fred Warren, TR/VT/FW1: *Williams girls used to build up and John's wife mother she used to build up and paint the lorry.*

**Bunce.** Profit.

*OED*: money; gains, extra profit or gain, bonus, something to the good.

*DU*: money, profit, a commission, a bonus.

*Seago*: bounce, bunce, profit.

*O'Shaughnessy*: profit.

See *World's Fair*, 7th April, 1945: *The more sprasers and holes he takes the bigger the bunce he gets.*

**Burster.** An exceptionally good day on the fair when the showpeople take a lot of money.

Precise sense not in *OED*.

*DHS*: **burster 7**, a very successful day or season.

*Corrigan*: an exceptionally good do.

A common expression to denote that business was profitable, *World's Fair*, April 7th 1945: *Before long we'll have new rides that will prove a burster at every gaff.*

**Cady/cadi.** Hat.



*OED*: a hat or cap.

*DHS*: (ex Rom), a hat. *DU*: a hat or cap.

*O'Shaughnessy*: hat, headgear. *Birch*: hat. *Acton and Kenrick*: **kadi**, hat.

Sandra Wright: TR/VT/RM2: *I've heard of "cadi," "cadi"'s a hat.*

See also Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1:

*T*: *Screw the monnisher's cadey*

*G*: *That's her hat*

*V*: *What's that?*

*T*: *Look at the women's hat.*

**Cakewalk.** Type of fairground RIDE, named after the dance called the Cake-walk.

*OED*: **cakewalk** n.2, a form of entertainment consisting of a promenade moved by machinery on which people walk to the accompaniment of music.

*Braithwaite*: an amusement device comprising oscillating bridges.

Once a popular attraction on the fairground, one or two examples of this machine are still travelled by showpeople; it is used as a term for that particular RIDE.

**Candy.** Food STALL, machine that produces CANDY FLOSS, an abbreviation of CANDY FLOSS.

Precise sense not in dictionaries consulted.

The word **candy** can be used when referring to the food STALL which also sells candy floss, the actual machine that makes **candy** or the sweet floss produced from the candy making machine. In Lancashire, **candy** is commonly used to describe a food STALL, in Yorkshire the term is KIOSK, whereas in the West of England they use CANTEEN. Sandra Wright, TR/VT/SMW1: *Well we always had candys, pre war they are, candys used to be run by Calor gas. They had them in*

*America before we had them over here.*

**Candy floss.** A popular sweet sold on the fairgrounds, made from sugar and pink colouring.

*OED*: a sweet confection, usually pink, of fluffy spun sugar.

Usually abbreviated to CANDY by showpeople or written down as "candy in a bag or on a stick", Sandra Wright, TR/VT/SMW: *Candy was on a stick, it was never heard of in a bag, we used to have queues miles down waiting for it.*

**Canteen.** A food stall on the fairground, see CANDY, KIOSK.

*OED*: a shop in a camp or barracks where provisions and liquors are sold to soldiers.

Sandra Wright, TR/VT/SMW1: *We don't call them Candy's we call them kiosks or hot dogs or canteens.*

**\*Canni.** Bird, or chicken

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Acton and Kenrick*: **kanni**, chicken.

Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF10: *Canny Oras, "ora" means eggs, "canny" means chickens or birds, I mean they say "there's a canny there" or "look at them cannies" or "look at them birds in there."*

**\*Canni Oras.** Eggs.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Acton and Kenrick*: **youra**, egg.

Mrs. E. Francis, TR/VT/BF10: *But these are cannies here and they're*

*canny oras, that's hen eggs. I don't think there's a word for duck eggs, "oras" was eggs the word "oras" always meant eggs.*

**Carousel.** See ROUNDABOUT.

*OED:* a merry-go-round, a roundabout.

*Braithwaite:* a Merry-go-round; this term is mostly confined to the United States and the Continent.

Never used by showpeople, unless they are speaking to outsiders, it is perceived as an American term.

**Caser.** Dollar.

*OED:* caser 2, a crown; five shillings; in the U.S.A., a dollar.

*Hotten:* Hebrew word for a crown. *DHS:* a crown piece; the sum of five shillings. *DU:* A five shilling piece; the value of five shillings; in C.20 U.S.A., one dollar.

The medial consonant is pronounced /z/. Individual terms for money are rarely said now, as the currency is no longer in use. However, when in conversation with Tommy Russell he explained that caser was a term which became popular after the Second World War and one he associates with American soldiers.

**Centre Engine.** Steam engine in the centre of the ROUNDABOUT.

*Braithwaite:* the heart of the portable roundabout, embodying cruciform hub, centre drum engine and mechanism.

A technical term found when talking about steam powered ROUNDABOUTS and traction engines. Fred Warren, TR/VT/FW1:  
*Well I was driving a centre engine when I was about eight year old.*

**Chat(t).** Any object or small thing, usually said when referring to an object.

*OED:* chat v., small talk, chat 3, the thing under discussion, chat 6, a small poor potato.

*Hotten:* any small things of the same kind. *DHS:* (parl), chatt 5., a

thing, an object, anything.  
*Seago*: any thing, or object.  
*O'Shaughnessy*: thing, object.

Extremely common usage on the fairground; see Fieldwork Notebook for description by an electrician working for Roger Tuby: *They'll say "pass me the chatt, hand me that chatt" and I'll shout "what the bloody hell is a chatt!"* Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF6: *The monkey got out of the cage, the chatt, the baboon got out of the cage.*

**Chavvy.** Child, sometimes used to denote a person, e.g. "chavvy's in the ken."

Word not in *OED*.  
*DHS*: (parl ex Rom), a child. *DU*: children, boys or girls.  
*Seago*: children. *Allingham*: child.  
*O'Shaughnessy*: child. *Birch*: child. *Acton and Kenrick*: boy, son.

Extensively used on the fairground to denote a child and sometimes a person. Mrs. E. Francis, TR/VT/BF1: *We'll get this chavvy to do this and as soon as it's done we'll joll"*

**Chiv.** Knife, e.g. "chiv him" = knife him. Pronunciation: initial consonant as in church.

*OED*: **chiv(e)**, n.<sup>3</sup>, a knife.  
*Hotten*: a knife, also used as a verb, to knife. *DHS*: (ex Rom), a knife, a file, a saw, also used as a verb, to stab. *DU*: to cut, to cut off, **chife**, knife.  
*Corrigan*: **chiv him**, knife him.  
*Birch*: knife. *Acton and Kenrick*: cut.

Still used on the fairground but not extensively found in everyday conversation. When questioned, showpeople would explain or use the term in the context of a fight in the area.

**Chore.** Steal.

Precise sense not in *OED*.

*DU*: **choring**, stealing, theft.

*Corrigan*: stolen.

*O'Shaughnessy*: to **chore**, steal, thieve. *Acton and Kenrick*: steal.

Very extensive usage on the fairground, **chored**, meaning stolen and

**choring** meaning robbing. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1:

*Well "chore," "chore" is to steal.*

**Cinematograph.** See BIOSCOPE.

*OED*: an exhibition or show of moving pictures.

Another word for a BIOSCOPE show which refers to a booth that is used for the presenting of moving pictures. Mrs Kate Smart

TR/VT/RS/KS: *one of the cleverest old men I knew in the business was old Jacob Studt and he said to me I was one of the first men in the business to have a travelling cinematograph show.*

**Clod.** Penny.

*OED*: **clod**, n. 3 f, a copper coin.

*DU*: coppers, coins.

*Allingham*: penny.

*O'Shaughnessy*: penny.

Heard infrequently on the fairground and only in conversation with

Mrs Renee Marshall and Freddy Warren. It would have once been

widely used as a term for money. Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM2:

*Money, clod, menzies, clods.*

**Cockerels.** A carved wooden figure in the shape of a cockerel found on fairground ROUNDABOUTS, see ABREAST and ROUNDABOUT.

**Cock Canni.** Pheasant, see CANNI and BORA CANNI.

**Coconut shy.** Fairground STALL where coconuts are won as prizes, see SHEET.

*OED*: a side-show at a fair in which the contestants throw balls at coconuts placed in rings or cups in an attempt to dislodge them.

*Hotten*: a game at fairs, consisting of throwing short sticks at trinkets or cocoanuts (sic) set upon other sticks.

*Corrigan*: coconut STALL.

Limited use on fairgrounds, the more common term for coconut STALL is SHEET, especially in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Ernest Percival,

*VT/TR/EP1*: *Yes we used to go to Hull Fair with Coconut Sheets and we stood in what you call "bottom row" and we stood there for years and years.*

**Coronation Speedway.** See ARK.

**Cushti.** Good, fine, that's nice, great; used to denote a positive action or object, e.g. "cushti chatt" = that's nice.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*Brown*: good,

*O'Shaughnessy*: good, good quality, enjoyable. *Birch CUSHTI MUNYER*, good/nice.

Propensity of usage varies according to region of the country; widely used in East Anglia and also used in Lancashire; perceived in Yorkshire as a Gypsy term and not used by the showpeople there.

Usually heard in relation to CHAT(T), e.g. "cushty chatt" = nice thing.

Tommy and Gladys Russell, TR/VT/TAG1:

*T*: *You see this word "Cushty"*

*G*: *That means good.*

**Cushti Munyer.** Good, see CUSHTI.

**\*Cushy down.** A term used when putting a child to sleep,  
eg. "cushy down chavvy."

*OED*: **couch** v.1, To cause to lie down, to lay down (a person, oneself, one's head, etc); to lay to sleep, put to bed. *DHS*: \*couch a hog's head, to lay down one's head, i.e. to lay down and sleep.

Used extensively by the Francis family but not heard in conversation with other showpeople.

**Dandy.** Water cart on the back of the traction engine.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Corrigan*: water cart.

Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *A dandy is a barrell on two wheels like a water boat that they used to fill the engines with.*

**Dibs.** Money, payment or takings.

*OED*: **dibs** n.3, a slang term for money.

*Hotten*: money. *DU*: a small part or share, **dibs**, money.

The usage not found to be very extensive, but common in the North of England and amongst older showpeople, usually in the context of work, e.g. "your dibs will be fifties". *World's Fair*, July 27th, 1912: *We are agreeably surprised to hear the old lady is 94, and still taking the "dibs" in the pay box.*

**Dick.** Look.

Sense not in *OED*.

*Hotten*: **dickering**, look. *DHS*: (ex Rom), to look or peer. *DU*:

**dick** v., to look sharply about one, to gaze intently.

*O'Shaughnessy*: look. *Birch*: look/see. *Acton and Kenrick*: see, look.

Generally used by showpeople over fifty and not widely known by the younger generation. Commonly used by showpeople in Lancashire and is an abbreviation of the following term DICK A KIE, meaning "look at that." Often used in the form "dick the chavvie," = "look at that person."

**Dick a Kie.** Look at that, often shortened to dick.

Expression not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Generally used by showpeople over fifty and not widely known by the younger generation. Commonly used by showpeople in Lancashire but Sandra Wright maintains that although she understands the meaning it is not an expression used in Yorkshire.

**Dicki at Mandy.** Look at the person or look at me, see

DICK and LEAN FOR MANDY

**Diddy.** Gypsy; can be used to describe one with Romany blood as opposed to being of Irish extraction.

*DHS:* a familiar diminutive of DIDIKAI, a half-breed gypsy among the folk of the road.

**Diddy** can also refer to an English Gypsy or just be used as a general expression for Gypsy Travellers. Tommy Russell,

*TR/VT/TAG: Well there are one or two the diddies use amongst this like. See also World's Fair, August 25th, 1916: Where the diddies vans have rested, signs you'll notice as you pass.*

**Didikai.** Half breed, but sometimes denotes a single or lone traveller, often shortened to DIDDY to refer to the English Gypsy as opposed to the Irish traveller.

*OED:* Gypsy.

*DU:* a Gypsy, in Romany, **didikai** is a half-breed Romany.

*Brown:* half-breed Gypsy.

*Acton and Kenrick:* rough traveller.

*Guardian, 3 Nov., 1966: Didicoys, the Irish tinkers and other nomads around London who far outnumber the true Romanies.*



For variants and extensive regional use of this word see Upton and Widdowson, 1996. When used by showpeople the meaning is quite different and not in a derogatory sense as for example the term PIKEY would be. *Didikai* is often shortened to DIDDY, but can mean an English Traveller as opposed to a Scottish or Irish one.

**Dinari.** Money.

*OED*: denary, Roman for money.  
*Hotten*: money. *DHS*: dinarli, money. *DU*: money.  
*Seago*: money.

Another term for money, usage similar to LOAVER and one still widely used on the fairground. See *World's Fair*, April 4th, 1908.

Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM1: *Dinari's the money and munjari's the food.*

**Dinari Struck.** No money, or short of money.

*DHS*: (parl), NANTEE DINARLI, no money. *DU*: NANTEE DINARLY, no money.

**Dinari struck** is the expression commonly found on the fairground.

However, the closest meaning listed in the texts consulted is NANTEE DINARLY, which has the same meaning, but is not an expression I have often heard or recorded in interviews during the course of the fieldwork. The *World's Fair*, April 4th, 1908, does contain the following: *A man could with "niente dinari" in his "kicksters" command a full house.*

**Dingilow.** Idiot.

*DU*: DINGALING, crazy, crazed, insane.  
*Brown*: dinilow, idiot.

This expression is used throughout the country and often in place of DIVVY. Gladys Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *Oh "dingilow", he's a dingilow.*

**Divvy.** Daft, idiotic.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*O'Shaughnessy*: daft. *Birch*: DIVI-RADGED, mentally insane. *Acton and Kenrick*: mad.

Gladys and Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1, when interviewed offered the following explanation: *T: "Divvy" ... that's used more in Cumberland than anywhere else.*

*G: "Divvy" means daft*

**Dobbies.** Wooden horses on a ROUNDABOUT; usually refers to a merry-go-round without the overhead crank movement introduced by Frederick Savage.

*OED*: DOBBY HORSE, a wooden figure of a horse.

*Braithwaite*: before the introduction of galloping motion, the horses were merely hung from the swifts, and only slightly restrained against swinging out.

Sometimes used to describe a hand driven premechanised ROUNDABOUT. Can also be found when describing a children's RIDE with miniature wooden horses.

**Dodgems.** Fairground RIDE introduced in the late 1920s, usually a sixty foot track with cars powered from a overhead electric grid.

*OED*: a fairground amusement consisting of a number of small electrically powered cars steered about in an enclosure.

*Braithwaite*: an amusement device comprising electrically charged ceiling and running floor with dirigible cars.

- Doings.** Takings on the fair.  
 Precise sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Brown*: money takings  
 Not found in general conversation and I have only come across this word occasionally, usually in East Anglia.
- Donah.** Woman, see BEWER, MONNISHER, MORT, MOZZIE, RAKLI.  
*OED*: *dona* 2, a woman, sweetheart.  
*DHS*: (parl), a woman. *DU*: a woman, best girl.  
*Seago*: woman. *Allingham*: a woman.  
 Most common expression for woman or girl on the fairground and found throughout the country, usually pronounced with an -er and therefore spelt *dorner*. See BEWER for transcript relating to *donah/dorner*. Gladys Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: "*Joll the little dorner*", that means "*get rid of the little dorner*." Mrs E. Francis: VT/TR/BF8: *Bewie's a donah*.
- Donkey Walloper.** Gypsy, found in the North East of England, see DORDY COUSIN, DONKEY WALLOPER, DORDY CHAVVIES and PIKELET.
- \*Dordy.** Oh dear.  
 Word not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Brown*: oh dear! *Birch* an expression of exclamation. *Acton and Kenrick*: dear me.  
 Perceived as a Gypsy expression by showpeople, used extensively by the Francis family, and families who have married Gypsy travellers.
- \*Dordy Cousin.** A term used by showpeople to denote a Gypsy-Traveller.  
 Expression not found in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

One of the variety of terms to denote a Gypsy Traveller: DORDY refers to the expression "oh dear", which is common amongst Gypsy-travellers, and "cousin" implies a link but not necessarily a close tie between the two communities. Found in Wales and the North of England; not generally used and then usually by the older generation of showpeople. See Fieldwork Notebook for details of conversation with William Wright concerning the variety of terms used in the North East, e.g. DONKEY WALLOPER, PIKELET, DORDY CHAVVIES.

**Dordy Chavvies.** See DONKEY WALLOPER, DORDY COUSINS and PIKELET.

**Dorriker.** Fortune Teller, see DUCKERING.

**Drag.** The road, used by showpeople to describe the main path through the fairground.

*OED*: drag 3 e, a street, a road.

*Hotten*: road or street. *DHS*: drag 4, a street or a road. *DU*: drag 7, a street or road.

*Corrigan*: road or street,

*O'Shaughnessy*: street.

Usually found in reference to the main drag, the main pathway through the fairground or the avenue where the riding machines are built up. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1/2: *Keep the dorner out of the drag you know.*

**Dropsy.** To take a bribe.

*OED*: dropsy n. 4, money, esp. paid as a tip or as bribery.

*Allingham*: bribery.

*O'Shaughnessy*: gratuity, bribe.

Generally heard on the fairground and usually in connection with

money.

**Duckering.** Fortune telling.

Precise sense not in *OED*, but see DUKE n. 7, hands.

*DU*: dookering, a hand, hand reading, i.e., palmistry; pitchmen's and fairground.

*Allingham*: dookering, to go round from door to door telling fortunes.

*O'Shaughnessy*: DORRIKER, fortune teller. *Birch*: fortune telling.

*Acton and Kenrick* ducker, tell fortunes.

A general expression for fortune telling and found in reference to

TICK OFF tents on the fair. Used widely throughout the country and

when when interviewed, Tommy and Gladys Russell and Sandra

Wright insisted that the word was widely known.

**Fake.** To deceive or cheat, to do somebody a wrong turn.

*OED*: fake n.<sup>2</sup>, to perform an operation on, to do, do for, to plunder, wound, kill, to do up, put into shape, to tamper with, for the purpose of deception.

*Hotten*: to fake or swindle, to do anything, to go on, or continue, to make or construct; to steal or rob. *DHS*: \*fake, to cheat, deceive, devise falsely, tamper with, forge. *DU*: to do, to make, fake 2, to rob a person, to steal from a place, fake 3, to hurt, cut, wound, fake 5, to give to something a desirable appearance by illicit means, fake 7, to cheat or swindle, also faking, theft, swindling, active dishonesty.

*Seago*: hit.

*O'Shaughnessy*: take a bribe. *Birch*: obtain. *Acton and Kenrick*: play an instrument.

A common expression on the fairground and used in the variety of

meanings. The appearance of an article for sale can be faked in

order to ensure a good sale. To fake a person can also mean to do

them a wrong turn or teach them a lesson. Never used as a word to

steal or rob but quite often used to imply that you have taken

advantage of someone, "I faked the chavvy", I ripped him off.

Therefore a general explanation would be to use false means or to

deceive someone knowingly. See *World's Fair*, June 15th, 1912: *Can*

*you fake the bosh? Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF1: That was a disgrace to them, half a waggon painted, but they used to try and pull it off on him, to try and fake him and leave without paying.*

**Flash.** An attraction, a gimmick or a trick, see *World's Fair*, April 7th, 1945: *A flash that will appeal to the flatties.*

**Flatty.** A person not a Traveller or showman.

Precise sense not in dictionaries. *OED*: **flatty** 2. 2, a flat bottomed boat, **flat** n.3, one who is ignorant of the methods of professional thieving.

*Hotten*: a rustic or uninitiated person. *DHS*: **flatty** 2, a rustic, an uninitiated person, **flatty** 3, an easy dupe, **flatty** 5, a small flat bottomed sailing boat, **flatty** 6, one who goes out in a van in the summer but lives in a house in the winter. *DU*: **flat** n. 2, a dupe, a gullible person, **flat** n. 3, any person ignorant of the wiles of the underworld, **flatty** GORY, a countryman, an ordinary decent citizen, **flatty** COVE, one who does not understand the cant, **flatty** CULLY, a simpleton, a susceptible person.

*Seago*: a member of the audience. *Corrigan*: a person not a traveller or a showman. *Brown*: non showman.

*O'Shaughnessy*: person who is not a market trader.

Widely used on the fairground and although JOSKIN is the preferred term in parts of the country, this is the most commonly used.

Numerous examples found in the specialized texts and *World's Fair*, April 7th, 1945: *A flash that will appeal to the flatties and*

*bring in the bunce.* Thomas Horne in his *Ballads of Showland*, 1909,

describes **flattie** as "men who do not know." The extended usage of this term on the fairground would seem to imply that showpeople,

unlike the **flatties**, were in the know. When interviewed, Celine

Williams used the term **flatty**, to describe people who lived on canal

barges in the nineteenth century. She believes that the origin of

this term dates back to the Canal Barge Act of 1884 and the later Moveable Dwellings' Bill of 1889, both introduced by George Smith of Coalsville. In order to prevent the Bill becoming law the showpeople organised themselves into a Guild to show George Smith that they were not like the **flatties**, i.e., not like the barge dwellers. This term then became extended to describe anyone who is not from the fair. *World's Fair, May 15th, 1915: The disdain in which many showmen hold those who have abandoned our game was shown in a letter we received the other day. This stated that \_\_\_ has left our business. He is a flatty now working for a flatty firm.* George Thomas Tuby, TR/FV/GT1: *She was what was known in fairground terms as a "flattie" which means an outsider having no connection with fairground folk.*

**Flattified.** Displaying non-Traveller tendencies or characteristics.  
Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Widely used on the fairgrounds. Can also refer to a Traveller who lives in a house and is no longer used to life on the road, or a term to denote someone is acting stupidly, they are acting **flattified**.

Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF6: *Yes, the young generation are doing it, they are becoming more modern, they are following the trend of the flatties, gone more flattified.*

**Gaff.** The fairground.

*OED:* gaff n<sup>4</sup>, a fair.

*Hotten:* a penny play house. *DHS:* \*gaff, a fair. *DU:* a fair.

*Allingham:* a fair or market. *Brown* fairground site.

*O'Shaughnessy:* market fair.

The main expression for the fair or the event where the showpeople

are doing business. Widely used and no alternative presented to me during fieldwork. **Gaff day** for example is used to describe the main day of the week when the fair opens for business. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF2: *They live on a Traveller's site, and visit the gaff ground at weekends.*

**Gaff day.** The main day when the fair is open for business, see GAFF.

**Gaff lads.** Fairground workers.

Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

A general term to denote a person who works on the fair and who is not a showperson or member of the Guild and usually a FLATTY.

**Gallopers.** Term used on the fairground to describe a ROUNDABOUT with wooden horses.

*OED*: a wooden horse on a merry-go-round; a roundabout with such horses on it.

*Braithwaite*: generically a roundabout with animals made to gallop by some mechanical means.

A term used by showpeople to describe the popular ROUNDABOUT with wooden horses on overhead cranks which make the animals gallop. Referred to as JUMPERS in Yorkshire, Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF8; *Then some used to call them a set of Gallopers, because they did gallop around didn't they.*

**Gavver.** Policeman.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Brown*: policeman. *Acton and Kenrick*: policeman.

Not as widely used as MINGRA or MUSCRA for



policeman. When interviewed Mrs E. Francis defined a **gavver** as a policeman on the beat as opposed to a **PLASTRAMINGRA** which was a detective. See also TR/VT/BF8: *Yes the muscras and gavver, yes the gavvers have come.*

**Gee.** Used widely by boxing show proprietors to denote a fight where the outcome has been already determined. Pronunciation: initial consonant as in give.

*OED*: **gee** n<sup>3</sup>, the accomplice of a cheapjack or showman.

*DU*: \***gee** n 6, the accomplice of a cheapjack who stimulates trade by pretending to buy something.

*Allingham*: a grafter's apprentice or assistant who mingles with the crowd.

A **gee** was a trick to get people to go in the show, but is most frequently used when referring to boxing booths. A **gee** in a boxing show was a situation when the boxer would pretend to be a local or someone with a grudge match against the proprietor. See Legge, H. (1981) for his use of the word. Harry Furness, TR/VT/HF1 explained that although **gee** fights were common they were often quite good: *But they were never imitation bouts they were actually good boxers, exhibition boxing but they did knock each other about, that was the job and they accepted it, if they got a broken nose in a gee fight or a split lip.*

**Ghost Train.** Fairground **RIDE** described as a show where the customers sit in cars and travel through tunnels and are confronted by ghost-like effects and bloodcurdling noises.

*OED*: a train of cars at a fun fair that travels through dark tunnels in which there are ghost like effects.

*Braithwaite*: a ride and show combined. At discreet intervals, dummy trains running on an energised rail, carrying no more than two

passengers, penetrate the darkened booth, where a labyrinth of hair-raising spectacles and optical tricks awaits them.

**Gillie.** Man, pronunciation of initial consonant as in give.

*OED*: a lad.

*DHS*: **gill**, a fellow, a chap. *DU*: a man, fellow, guy, **gill**, a man, chap, fellow.

*Seago*: member of the audience

*O'Shaughnessy*: man. *Acton and Kenrick*: **gillie**<sup>2</sup>, man.

A common term for a man in the Eastern Counties Section of the Guild would usually be **gillie**. However, the further north one gets the less frequently it appears and the usage is quite rare in other sections of the Guild. During a conversation with Sandra Wright, she mentioned that her cousin Pamela who travels in East Anglia quite often uses **gillie** or **gilpin** instead of OMEY.

**Gilpin.** Man, see OMEY and GILLIE.

**Grais.** Horse, **grais** is pronounced to rhyme with hah see POOVTER GRAIS.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Acton and Kenrick*: horse.

Pronounced **grah** and not commonly used but often referred to during interviews about life in the horse-drawn waggons. Tommy Russell,

TR/VT/TAG1: *A prad is the same as a grais.*

**Guildy.** Denotes a member of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.

Term not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Often used to differentiate between a showman who is a member of the Showmen's Guild and one who belongs to the Society of Independent Roundabout Proprietors. Can also be used to describe a member who sticks to the letter of the rule book.

**Hawker.** A pedlar; usually denotes a traveller who makes a living out of buying and selling possessions.

*OED*: **hawker** n<sup>2</sup>, a man who goes from place to place selling his goods, or who cries them in the street, in modern use technically distinguished from pedlar.

*DHS*: peddler. *DU*: **hawk**, a sharper.

Can be used to describe someone who sells carpets or china, but often denotes a traveller who makes a living out of buying and selling goods or things they have made themselves. Mrs Gladys Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *Me dad's stepbrother and he married or lived with this hawker woman and I know that she made pegs and they used to get the wood out of the woods and take the bark off it and he used to put a a bit of metal round it.*

**Hawking.** Selling wares from house to house or on the roadside.

*OED*: to practise the trade of a hawker,

*DHS*: peddling.

*Birch*: selling.

Used to describe the activities of Gypsy Travellers or Scottish Travellers. Mrs Gladys Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *it never seemed no hardship to them and they used to go out and do a bit of hawking.*

**Helter Skelter.** Type of SLIDE found on the fairground; see SLIP.

*OED*: **helter-skelter** n. b, a tower-like structure used in fun fairs and pleasure-grounds, with an external spiral passage for sliding down on a mat.

*Braithwaite*: also known as the Slip; basically a tower like structure contained within an unwinding spiral chute. The tower encloses a staircase by means of which the riders climb to the top of the chute, sitting on individual mats they descend by gravity.

Infrequently used on the fairground, the more common term being a

SLIP or a SLIDE. When referring to O'Connor's helter skelter, Fred Warren TR/VT/FW1 said: *I used to go and build his Slip up for him and go and pull it down.*

**Holes.** Money, usually coins, see BUNCE and SPRAZER.

**Homey.** See OMEY, a man.  
*Allingham*: a man.

Generally pronounced and written as omeY, but the *World's Fair* from 1904 onwards uses both forms. **Homey** and MUSH are the most common terms for man. *World's Fair*, August 25th, 1917: *Showmen suffers for these duffers, who have piked the homey's grass*

**Hoop-La.** Type of game which takes place usually in a round STALL and consists of throwing hoops over the objects on display in order to win a prize.

*OED*: a game in which persons throw rings on to a surface containing a number of articles, the object being to gain any of these as a prize by throwing a ring so as to encircle it completely.

*Braithwaite*: generically any round STALL, but specifically a game with hoops in which the player has to ring his prize.

Also a general term for a round STALL on the fairground and very common. Celine Williams, TR/VT/CW5: *I've seen them now if the weather's been bad and they have lifted the pram or whatever they've been in, inside the hoop-la shutter.*

**Hot Dogs.** Type of food found on the fairground but used by the showpeople to describe a catering STALL, see CANDY, CANTEEN, KIOSK. -

**Hump.** A trick or method to make the customer win or lose.

Sense not in *OED*.

*Hotten*: **hump** 2, to botch or spoil. *DHS*: **hump** 2, to spoil, botch.

*Corrigan*: a trick or method to make the customer win or lose.

An expression known to me but not one widely used. Tommy Russell explained that one trick or **hump** used on the fairground was to push the final coconut on the STALL down into its holder to prevent it from being knocked over.

**Jeer.** Bottom, bum, backside, e.g. "dick at the donah's jeer" = look at the woman's bum.

Sense not in *OED*.

*DHS*: **jere**<sup>2</sup>, one's posterior; esp showmen's C.19-20. *DU*: the posterior.

*O'Shaughnessy*: buttocks.

A widely used term for the backside or bottom, has been written as "jeerbox" or "jeercase" but in my experience most frequently referred to as jeer. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF7: *You're not a true traveller until you've fallen down the waggon steps and had the ring of the bucket on your jeer.*

**Jeerbox.** Bottom or bum, see JEER.

**Jeercase.** Bottom or bum, see JEER or JEERBOX.

**Jig.** See JIGGER.

**Jigger.** Door.

*OED*: **jigger** n<sup>1</sup>. 6 a, a door.

*Hotten*: a door. *DHS*: \***jigger**, a door. *DU*: jiger = **jigger**, a door, see **jigger**, a gate or a door.

*O'Shaughnessy*: stairs. *Acton and Kenrick*: door.

Widely used as the word for door. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *Shut the jigger (laughs), yes we use that one.*

**Joll.** Leave; used to describe leaving or going somewhere, e.g. "I'll joll off now."

*DU:* **jol**, to depart, make off.

*Birch:* **gell**, go. *Acton and Kenrick:* **jel**, go.

This word is very popular on the fairground, with extensive usage throughout the business. It is quite often used in everyday conversation and denotes the action of leaving or going somewhere. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF5: *We'll get this chavvy to do this and as soon as it's done we'll joll"*

**Joll the Jig.** Close the door.

Expression not found in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

A well known expression on the fairground. There are slight variations, e.g. "**joll the jigger**," but generally the same term used throughout the fairground fraternity.

**Jonah.** Bringer of bad luck, or rain.

*OED:* **jonah** v., to bring ill luck to.

*Seago:* one who brings back luck to a show.

Usually said with reference to bad weather, to describe someone who has brought the rain onto the fairground, e.g. who is the **jonah**?

**Joskin.** Non-Traveller; used more widely now as the term FLATTY has become known amongst non-Travellers.

*OED:* a country bumpkin.

*Hotten:* countryman. *DHS:* a country bumpkin. *DU:* a countryman.

*O'Shaughnessy:* country lad, yokel.

The usage of this term is largely dependent on the region of the country. It is widely used in the Notts. and Derby section of the Guild and in East Anglia, FLATTY and **joskin** are both used in

Lancashire. Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2, maintains that JOSSER is the preferred term in Yorkshire and joskin is rarely used: *I know Pamela knows words, what they used down the Eastern Counties that I've never heard of, they say "joskin" and "gilpin."*

**Josser.** See JOSKIN

*OED*: josser 2 a, a simpleton, a soft or silly fellow.

*DHS*: a simpleton. *DU*: a simpleton.

*Seago*: outsider.

Only found in Yorkshire and obviously a variant of JOSKIN.

Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2, maintains that josser is the preferred term of the Yorkshire travellers:

*R*: *I don't know, "josser's" a "flatty."*

*S*: *We know that but we are on about monkeys.*

*V*: *We don't say "josser" we say "joskin."*

*S*: *We say "josser."*

**Juke.** Dog.

Sense not in *OED*.

*DHS*: (ex rom) jugelow, a dog. *DU*: jugal, a dog.

*Brown*: jukel, dog,

*O'Shaughnessy*: dog. *Birch*: juckal, dog. *Acton and Kenrick*: dog.

The standard word for a dog on the fairground, but regarded by showpeople as a Gypsy word and generic to all Travellers. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *That's another word for a dog, a "jukel."*

**Jumpers.** See GALLOPERS.

Sense not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Another term for the fairground RIDE, usually referred to as

GALLOPERS but see ABREAST and GALLOPERS for other

definitions.

**Kadi.** See CADY.

**Kecka.** No, don't do that.  
Sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Acton and Kenrick*: **kek**, none, not any.

Generally regarded as a Romany term and not widely used on the fairground. The majority of showpeople would however understand the word but not necessarily use it in conversation unless perhaps when dealing with Gypsies. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1:  
*"Kecka", it means keep quiet, doesn't it.*

**Keckerocka.** Don't talk, keep quiet

Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Generally regarded as a Romany term and not widely used on the fairground. The majority of showpeople would however understand the word but not necessarily use it in conversation unless perhaps when dealing with Gypsies. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF8:  
*"Rocka" means to speak, "kecka rocka" means don't speak.*

**Ken.** Place where somebody lives, a house, shed, wagon, etc.

*OED*: **Ken** n<sup>2</sup>, a house.

*Hotten*: a house. *DHS*: a house. *DU*: a house, **ken** 2, any building.  
*Acton and Kenrick*: a house.

Said in everyday conversation by showpeople; however, more frequently used in the Northern, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Scottish Sections of the Guild.

**Khinder the cookies.** To urinate in your underwear.

Not found in dictionaires consulted.



Acton and Kenrick: **khin(der)**, excrement.

I only came across this term once during my fieldwork and it is not known through my own personal knowledge.

Roughly translated "khindered the cookies" = "shit your pants" or "wet your pants" When interviewed, Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2, explained that this term was one used by her cousin Pamela, who travelled in the Eastern Counties section of the Guild and was very knowledgeable about slang: *Or if they are frightened they will say "trashed" or "khindered the cookies" (wet her pants) but that's one I've never heard of, only when Pamela travelled and she knows more slang from round there.* In late August when finishing the glossary I asked one of my aunts if she had ever heard this term, she replied that they said **khinder ken** = "shit house" and this was a Romany term found in Lincolnshire but not used by showpeople.

**Kicksters.** Pockets, see DINARI STRUCK.

**Kiosk.** See CANDY, CANTEEN and HOT DOGS.

**Kushti.** See CUSHTI.

*Brown:* good. *Acton and Kenrick:* good.

**\*Lean for Mandy.** An expression that describes someone who has no money.

**Mandy** is the Romany term for "I" or "me".

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Birch:* **mandys**, mine. *Acton and Kenrick:* **mandy**, I or me.

Only heard during conversations with the Francis family and would

appear to be a Gypsy term that they became familiar with, and used with reference to lack of money.

**Lessee.** Showperson in charge of the running and leasing of the fair to other travellers.

*OED*: a person to whom a lease is granted, a tenant under a lease. *Braithwaite*: generally refers to the showman or group of showmen who hold the lease for a particular fairground. The lessee is responsible for allocating ground to the tenants, organising the layout and ensuring the proper conduct of the fair.

The term universally applied on the fairground to the showperson who runs and organises the fair and to whom rent is paid. Celine Williams, TR/VT/CW1: *Well you know the Flat Iron in Manchester, you know what I'm speaking about, the Guild, the Van Dwellers Association, well that's the man who was the Lessee of that ground,*

**Letty.** Place of abode. SCARPER THE LETTY = leave without paying.

*OED*: letty n., a bed a lodging. *DHS*: (parl), a bed, a lodging. *DU*: a bed, also **lettary**, lodgings. *Seago*: lodgings. *Allingham*: lodgings.

The term **letty** is one that is usually associated with families with circus connections. Seen as a circus expression by Thomas Frost in his account of *Circus Life* published in 1881, but also taken by the *World's Fair* in 1916 to be a term particular to showmen. Eric Partridge believes it to be a word with both circus and PARLYAREE usage. However, in the course of my fieldwork, the term **letty** has only been mentioned specifically by Mrs Marshall and her daughter and they both refer to it as a circus term. Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM2: *"Letty" is the room or the bed, so if you scarper the letty, it's to do a bunk.*

**Loaver.** Money.

*Hotten:* money. *DU:* money, a variant by gradual corruption of LOUR. *O'Shaughnessy:* money. *Birch:* luvver, money. *Acton and Kenrick:* money.

Standard term for money on the fairground, has regional variations such as LOUR but basically seen as the same term. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *Loaver, that's money.*

**Lour.** See loaver.

*OED:* lour n<sup>2</sup>, money.

Regional variation of the term LOAVER, found in particular in the Yorkshire section. Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2: "*Lour*", [it's] not, it's "*loaver*".

**Mace.** To owe somebody a favour or to return a bad turn.

*OED:* mace n<sup>4</sup>, swindling, robbery by fraud. *O'Shaughnessy:* owe. *Acton and Kenrick:* defraud.

This term is not a common one on the fairground but found in conversation with showpeople in the North of England and in the Eastern Counties Section of the Guild. Sometimes used in place of FAKE, but has a more defined meaning than FAKE and is generally used in reference to swindling or getting one's own back on a person.

**Mandy.** Romany for "I" or "me", see DICKI AT MANDY and LEAN FOR MANDY.

**Mas.** Meat.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted. *Birch:* meat. *Acton and Kenrick:* meat.

This was a term not known to most of the informants but commonly

used when in conversation with the Francis family and therefore could be seen to be a Gypsy word. A reason for their usage of this word is that they may have learnt it a result of extensive dealings with Gypsies. Also heard in East Anglia but again in relation to a family with strong Gypsy connections.

**Meg.** Halfpenny.

*OED*: **meg**<sup>2</sup> 2, and **mag** n<sup>3</sup>, a half-penny.

*DU*: **meag**, halfpenny.

*O'Shaughnessy*: ha'penny.

The old terms for money are rarely employed now as the currency is no longer in use. However, through conversations with Tommy Russell, and Mr Edwards, a china trader on the Castle Market in Sheffield, certain Traveller words for different coins, which while not tape-recorded, have been noted down.

**Menagerie.** Fairground show comprising wild animals in cages, similar to a modern zoo and normally distinct from a circus, where the animals usually perform tricks and other specialized acts are available.

*OED*: a collection of wild animals in cages or enclosures, esp. one kept for exhibition, as in zoological gardens or a travelling show. Also place or building in which they are kept.

A term for a travelling show which presented live animals in cages as the main attraction. Two of the most famous shows were Mander's Royal Menagerie and Bostock and Wombwell's Menagerie. They were very popular from the 1830s and died out around 1930. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *What happened with the menagerie show was that they had three beast waggons and they put a little truck between the two front waggons and that formed the stage.*

**Menzies.** Money, pennies, see CLOD.

**Mill.** Bare fist fight.

*OED*: mill n<sup>1</sup> 8 a, a pugilistic encounter between two persons.

*DU*: mill n. 8, to defeat in a boxing match: not cant but pugilistic slang.

*Brown*: bare fist fight

Very rarely used on the fairground and only heard in conversation with boxing show proprietors and ex-boxers.

**Minge.** Pubic hair.

*OED*: minge n., the female pudendum, hence by extension, women, regarded collectively as a means of sexual gratification.

*DU*: female genitals.

*Acton and Kenrick*: vagina.

Extensively used on the fairground either as a term of abuse or with reference to pubic hair. No regional variations were found and the usage appears to be widespread throughout the community.

**Mingra.** Police, usually referring to the detectives rather than the police on the beat.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*O'Shaughnessy*: policeman. *Birch*: mingra-muskreer, policeman. *Acton and Kenrick*: policeman.

The terms most frequently used to denote a policeman are either mingra or MUSCRA. They are found on fairgrounds throughout the country and I have found no regional preference for either word.

However, within one family the varying terms for police are used to denote their differing ranks. Mrs E. Francis, uses GAVVER when referring to a policeman on the beat, as opposed to mingra or PLASTRAMINGRA which is said by the Francis family, when

pertaining to a detective. However, the terms appear to be interchangeable and are said in reference to the police. Mrs Renee Marshall in conversation with her daughter Mrs Sandra Wright,  
TR/VT/RM2:

*R: "Mingras" is police, the "muscras."*

*S: "Muscras", .... "mingras", there's another one, "joll, the muscras are coming."*

**Mochardi.** Taboo

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.  
*Brown:* taboo. *Acton and Kenrick:* unclean.

Rarely used on the fairground and perceived as a Gypsy term, found in conversation with the Francis family. I first came across this term when talking with Traveller-Gypsies. However, a similar term can be found in the Eastern Counties Section of the Guild, where it is pronounced **mocharti**, and means "dirty" or "bad luck". See Fieldwork Notebook, July 10th, 1996 for details of conversation with Sandra Wright and the term **mochardi**.

**Monnisher.** Woman. See BEWER, DONAH, MORT OR MOZZIE.

**Mooley.** Face.

*OED:* a mouth, a face.  
*Hotten:* the mouth. *DHS:* (ex Rom), mouth, face.  
*Brown:* face.  
*O'Shaughnessy:* face. *Acton and Kenrick:* **mui**, mouth, face.

Standard term for face among members of the fairground community.

I have never heard it used with reference to the mouth but always applied to the face, see Gladys Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: "*Mooley*", *that's your face*.

**Mort.** Woman.

*OED*: **mort** n<sup>4</sup>, a girl or woman.

*DHS*: a woman. *DU*: wife, woman.

*O'Shaughnessy*: woman. *Birch*: **mort-rawney**, lady. *Acton and Kenrick*: woman.

This term for a woman is not as common in usage as DONAH and BEWER, for example, but is more widespread than MOZZIE.

However, it is a term I have come across in everyday speech and one that is widely used within my family circle. Sandra Wright,

TR/VT/RM2:

*V*: *What do you say for woman?*

*S*: *All sorts, "dorner", "mozzie", "bewie", "bewie"*

*isn't used up here, Notts. and Derby, bewer,*

*V*: *Mort*

*R*: *Yes that's one.*

**Motor Cycle Speedway.** See ARK.

**Mozzie.** Woman.

*DHS*: (Lingua Franca), wife.

Not as extensively used on the fairground as either DONAH or BEWER but quite often found in conversation when it is used to denote a woman. Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2: *All sorts, "dorner", "mozzie", "bewie", "bewie" isn't used up here.*

**Mummer.** Actor.

*OED*: **mummer** n. 2 a, an actor in a dumb show, one who takes part in a mumming, **mummer** n. 2 b, a play actor.

*Hotten*: a performer at a travelling theatre. *DHS*: an actor, contemptuous, or an actor in a dumb show or in a mumming. *DU*: **mumming**, a theatrical booth, **mummer**, an actor.

Found in *The Era* and *World's Fair* with reference to travelling actors

and used in the Lily May Richards' biography of her father, William Haggar. Rarely said on the fairground in everyday speech but the older generation of showpeople use it in reference to the actors who performed in the travelling theatrical booths.

**Mumper.** Tramp.

*OED*: a beggar, mendicant. Also one who sponges' on others.  
*Hotten*: a beggar. *DHS*: a beggar. *DU*: a gentile beggar.  
*Brown*: **hedge mumper**, tramp.

Very rarely found in everyday usage on the fairground, and never found as **hedge mumper**.

**Mung.**

Beg or borrow,  
*OED*: **mong** v<sup>1</sup>, to traffic, to barter,  
*Hotten*: **munging**, whining or begging. *DHS*: (ex Rom), to beg. *DU*:  
 to beg, **munging**, begging.  
*O'Shaughnessy*: ask. *Acton and Kenrick*: **mong**, to beg.

A commonly used term meaning to beg or to be on the lookout for free handouts. Sometimes found in the same way as scrounge, e.g. "what are you on the mung for now?" and also used to mean what are you wanting of us this time?. Mrs E. Francis, VT/VT/BF11: *And out the woman would go and they would go munging, mung chavvy munging at the door.*

**Mung Chavvy Mung.** Expression used to describe someone who is always on the scrounge or lookout for something for nothing.

Sense not in texts consulted.

Found in all areas where the fieldwork was conducted. I often found this term applied to my work with the fairground archive or during fieldwork. The showpeople would greet my arrival for an interview



by saying "mung chavvy mung, what do you want to know this time."  
 Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM3: *Mung chavvy mung, that's when they are going around begging. (laughs).*

### **Munjari/Mungaree.** Food

*OED*: food.

*Hotten*: **mungarly**, bread or food. *DHS*: (parl), food, scraps of food, a meal. *DU*: **mungarly** also **mungaree**, **mongaree** and **mangary**, bread, food.

*Seago*: food. *Allingham*: food. *Brown*: to eat, food.

The word for food is either SCRAN or **munjari**, both equally common.

The *World's Fair* in 1911 had the following headline: *At Peace After The "Munjari."* Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM1: *Munjari's the food and "munjari struck" means you've got no food.*

### **\*Munjari plenty.** Abundance of food.

Expression not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Used in the same way as MUNJARI or MUNJARI STRUCK and often posed as a question, e.g. "do you want food or are you full up now?"

### **Munjari struck.** Without food.

Expression not in dictionaries or specialised texts.

Used in the same way as the previous entry and again can be posed as a question; "are you munjari struck?" = are you hungry? Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM1: *I always remember the munjari, munjari struck, (laughs), it means no food.*

### **Muscra.** Police.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*O'Shaughnessy*: policeman. *Birch*: **mingra-muskreer**. *Acton and Kenrick*: **musgro**, policeman.

The term most commonly used to denote a policeman is either MINGRA or **muscra** and is said on fairgrounds throughout the country. See MINGRA for use of both words together and GAVVER for the differing appliances of the terms **muscra**, and GAVVER, the latter also being found in reference to the police. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF8:

*Yes the muscras and gavver, yes the gavvers have come.*

**Mush.** Man, or person.

*OED*: **mush** n<sup>s</sup>, man, chap, hence also used as a form of address.

*DHS*: **mush** 7(ex Rom), a man but only in combination. *DU*: **mush** n. 5, a fellow, a person, an individual.

*Brown*: man

*O'Shaughnessy*: a man. *Acton and Kenrick*: man.

The generic term for a man on the fairground, its usage is extensive and often found in conversation with showpeople. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *Well you see sometimes we say "mush" for a man and sometimes we say "omey."*

**Nanti/Nantee.** Nothing, or don't do that.

*Hotten*: not any, or "I have none," also means "shut up!" or "leave off!" *DHS*: (parl), no; not or nor. Also absolutely, I have none, shut up, stop. *DU*: not any, none, often elliptically for 'I have none', 'I haven't any', **niente**, nothing.

*Seago*: no, don't. *Corrigan*: no, don't or not.

*O'Shaughnessy*: say nothing, keep it quiet, stop it, beware.

See *World's Fair*, April 4th, 1908 for use of the word **niente**. Also in the *World's Fair*, October 28th, 1916, in response to a recent debate over the use of slang on the fairground, the editorial contained the following: *But such words as "narked" and "gaffs" are a part of and parcel of the showmen's language, and surely our contributor would not stop the use of such great words as "mungari," "dinarli," "nanty" and "scarper."* Mrs. E. Francis, TR/VT/BF8:

V: *How would you say stop, don't do that?*

B: *Nanti.*

**Nanti palari.** Don't talk.

*OED*: PALAVER, talk, see PARLYAREE, no definition but records the use of **nanty parnarly** in the 1890 *Dictionary of Slang*.

*Hotten*: **nantee palaver**, no conversation, i.e., hold your tongue, very often in this sense shortened to NANTEE only, cease talking. *DHS*: (parl), **nanti palaver**, shut up or don't talk. *DU*: **nantee palaver**, stop talking, hold your tongue, later corrupted to **nantee panarly** and in C. 20 usually shortened to NANTEE.

Used by both circus and showpeople, Sandra Wright believes the origin of the word can be found in the circus. However, the phrase is used extensively by showpeople with no circus connection whatsoever. Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM2: "*Nanti palari*" means *don't talk*.

**Nanti punt.** Don't want that, or cannot have that.

Sense not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Generally heard on the fairground, usage not particularly extensive.

However, in order to restrict the showchildren going on their RIDE without paying, certain showmen sometimes have a sign on the RIDE or show to prevent free rides, with the words "no nanti punters."

**Needy.** Lower class of travellers.

Sense not in *OED*.

*DHS*: (parl), a nightly lodger, a beggar. *DU*: a nightly lodger, or tramp, **needy 2**, a beggar.

*Brown*: low caste travellers. *Acton and Kenrick*: traveller.

Very rarely heard in the North of England, it is a term found in conversation with showpeople in the South East of England and East Anglia. The more usual expression would be PIKEY which carries the same connotations.

**Nesh.** Cold.

*OED*: **nesh** *adv.* 1 c, damp, moist, wet.

A common word in the North West of England and by no means unique to showpeople, though heard very rarely on fairgrounds outside the region. Used in the same way as "chilly", "it's cold" and usually found in reference to the weather. See Upton, Parry and Widdowson and other dialect dictionaries for a variety of meanings.

**Nicker.** One pound.

*OED*: **nicker** n.6, one pound sterling, see *caser*.

*DU*: **nicker** 2, a pound sterling.

Individual terms for money are rarely used now as the older currency is no longer in use. However, when in conversation with Tommy Russell he explained that **nicker** usually referred to a pound note.

**Nixy.** Nothing.

*OED*: **nix** n<sup>1</sup>, nothing, nobody, not possibly.

*Hotten*: nothing. *DHS*: (cant), nothing, nobody. *DU*: nothing.

*O'Shaughnessy*: nothing. *Acton and Kenrick*: nothing.

A term which like NANTEE is used on the fairground to denote nothing. However, it is normally used on its own and often found in relation to money or the purchase of an object, e.g. "I took nixy today," = I took no money.

**Omey/Homey.** Person or man.

*OED*: **omee**, a man, especially a landlord or itinerant actor.

*DHS*: (parl), a man, especially a master, e.g. a landlord. *DU*: **ommee**, **omey**, **omie** occ., **homer**, a man; hence, a master, a landlord.

*Seago*: a man.

The generic term for a man on the fairground, its usage is extensive.

Implies the same as the term *mush* and is often found in showpeoples' conversation. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *Well you see sometimes we say "mush" for a man and sometimes we say "omey."*

**Oras.** Eggs, see CANNI ORAS.

**Pagared.** Broken, tired, can used in the same way as exhausted. The word is pronounced as if rhyming with haggard.

*OED*: a madman or foolish person.

*O'Shaughnessy*: break, smash, wreck.

A common term on the fairground, used in the same way as "knackered" and therefore can mean broken, ruined or simply tired. See Fieldwork Notebook for entry under Sherdley Show, July 1996, for conversation with Mrs Hart: *The parney has pagared the gaff.*

**Palari/Plarey.** Talk, e.g. "can you plarey the backslang," = can you speak the lingo. See NANTI PALAVER and PARLYAREE.

*OED*: **parlyaree**, tramps and circus slang, to talk, to speak.

*Hotten*: to ask or talk, deceitfully or otherwise as occasion requires.

*DHS*: (parl), to speak. *DU*: **parlare**, to speak.

A widespread expression on the fair and often used in connection with NANTI PLAREY = stop talking or "do you plarey the backslang?" = can you speak the language. There are many variations which include **palaver**, **plarey**, **paralie**. Tommy Green, TR/VT/TG1: V: *What about nanti plarey?*

*T*: *Well it just depends who has taught you it doesn't it but there again that goes back to Italian rather than Gypsy.*

This emphasis on an external origin and one quite separate the fairground is illustrated by Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2: *I am trying*

*to think of the word travellers use instead of "palari," because a lot of travellers won't use that, it's circus.*

**Pannam.** Sweet STALL or brandy snap STALL.

*OED:* **pannam**, bread.

*Hotten:* food or bread, *DHS:* (parl), food, bread. *DU:* **pannam** or **pannum**, bread.

*Corrigan:* sweet or brandy snap STALL.

*Acton and Kenrick:* bread.

The word **pannam** is normally used in Yorkshire and refers to a STALL selling sweets and brandy snap as opposed to hot food. Sandra Wright, TR/VT/SMW1: *When they used to work the Pannam, there was always one row of brandy snap that was always loose not covered over and then the feast jellies would be next to it and we'd scoop them up with the scale and weigh them, on the Pannams then.*

**Parlyaree.** See BACKSLANG and PALARI/PLAREY.

*OED:* tramps' and circus slang.

*DU:* the language of circusmen, showmen and itinerant or low actors, based on Italian and to some extent on Lingua Franca. Common in England, ca. 1850, the term itself is not cant. It often merges with the language of tramps.

**Parlyaree** is listed in the *OED* as a form of slang used by actors and showmen, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is also used as a verb meaning to speak, and has many variations in the dictionaries and specialised references works, and in speech.

These variations include: **parlyaree**, **plarey**, **palari**, **palaver**, **parlary**.

The *OED* and Partridge make a distinction between **plarey** meaning "to talk" and **Parlyaree** meaning "the language". However, showpeople would use **palarey** or **plarey** as the word for speak or talk; for example "do you plarey the backslang," = do you speak the language.

The term for language is usually BACKSLANG and rarely **parlyaree**,

and during the course of the fieldwork I found no examples of the term **parlyaree** being used as a description of the vernacular.

**Parny (1).** Rain or water.

*Hotten*: rain. *DHS*: (ex Rom parl) water, *parnee*<sup>2</sup>, rain. *DU*: *parney*, *parnee*, *pahnee* or *pahny*, rain.

*Seago*: water. *Allingham*: rain, water. *Corrigan*: water or rain.

*O'Shaughnessy*: water, rain. *Birch*: water. *Acton and Kenrick*: water, urinate.

**Parny** is a commonly used expression for rain throughout the sections of the Guild and when in conversation with a showwoman at Sherdley Show in July 1996, about the state of the business, the following remark was made: *The parny's pagared the gaff*, meaning the rain has ruined the fair.

**Parny (2).** Urine, see PARNYING.

*Brown*: urine.

*O'Shaughnessy*: urine, urination, "I'm going for a parney". *Acton and Kenrick*: water, urinate.

Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM2: *Going for a parny, going for a pee.*

**Parnying.** Pouring down, raining, pissing down (with rain).

The word **parny** (spelt PANI in Romany) is commonly used throughout the fairground community to describe water or rain. It is also used in the same way that the slang expression "piss" is used in everyday speech, e.g. "I'm dying for a parny" = I'm dying for a "piss" or "it's parnying down" = it's "pissing" down. It is quite rare for it to be used as a straight substitute for water but commonly replaces the words "piss" or "rain" in traveller usage.

**Pester.** Payment, e.g. "chavvy pester? = has he paid?"

*OED*: *pester* v<sup>2</sup>, to pay.

*DU*: to pay.

*O'Shaughnessy*: pay. *Acton and Kenrick*: pay.

The most widespread term on the fair and found extensively throughout the Sections of the Showmen's Guild. Used across the community and possibly one of the first words learnt by outsiders coming into the community and by children growing up on the fair. Can be used as **pester** or **pestered** and is the main expression for payment or business transaction. Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2:

*V*: Do you say "pester," "chavvy pester."

*S*: Yes we use that, has he pestered, we use that.

**Pikelet.** Gypsy child or baby, see DORDY COUSIN AND DONKEY WALLOPER, or Fieldwork Notebook for details of conversation with William Wright:  
 Q: What do you call a baby Gypsy?  
 A: A **pikelet**.

**Pikey.** A half-breed or lowly kind of traveller.

*OED*: a tramp or gypsy, see **piker**<sup>3</sup>, a vagrant, a tramp a gypsy.

*DHS*: a tramp, a Gypsy. *DU*: a tramp a gypsy, see **piker** 2, a tramp a vagrant, occ., a gypsy.

This term may be used as an insult and implies an inferior group of Travellers, who display tinker-like tendencies and have an unsavoury reputation, usually a half-breed tinker, or someone with tinker blood in their veins. See Upton and Widdowson, 1996, for regional distribution of **pikey** in non-Traveller communities.

**Pikeyfied.** Used to describe something or someone with Gypsy characteristics.



Word not in dictionaries or specialized texts consulted.

This is a very common term on the fairground and is used to describe someone who has dealings with non-fairground travellers or displays tendencies more usual in Gypsy society. Can be seen as an insult or just as an expression of excessiveness. An example of the former was a conversation I had with a showwoman about my sister's decision to marry in red and gold. The woman remarked that it sounded **pikeyfied** but that was not surprising considering we were related to them. Realising that I had been insulted I retorted, "well you should know, you're married to one!"

**Plastraminga.** Detective; usually refers to the chief of police in that area, the main man, but also abbreviated to MINGRA.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*Acton and Kenrick:* **prastermengro:** policeman.

A rare term for policeman and only heard in conversation with the Francis family where it used is to describe the main policeman, who is usually the detective. See *World's Fair*, 1912: "*The Mushaki is a plastamengro*"

**\*Pobs.**

Apples.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*Acton and Kenrick:* **pobbel,** apple.

The usage of this word has been found exclusively among the Francis family, but not heard in conversation with other Travellers. Mrs E. Francis: VT/TR/BF8: *Pobs are apples, yes.*

**Poov.** To put the horse to graze.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Seago: pooving*, free grazing. *Brown: grazing the horses.*  
*Birch: field. Acton and Kenrick: puv, graze the horses.*

Mormally used in phrase "poovter grais" = put the horse in the field. This is an expression rarely spoken by showpeople and when used, it is normally in reference to when they lived in horse drawn waggons.

**Poovter grais.** Put the horse in the field, see POOV and GRAIS.

**Prad.** Horse, see GRAIS.

**Pulling down.** Dismantling a piece of fairground equipment after the fair has finished.

Expression not in dictionaries or specialized texts consulted.

This expression is extremely common and said by showpeople throughout the United Kingdom. It is used to describe the process of dismantling the equipment after the fair has closed. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF3: *the building up and pulling down has gone all they've got to do is just drop the sides down and they're open and finished with.*

**\*Put-put.** Traction Engine.

*OED: put(t)-putting*, to make an intermittent explosive sound characteristic of an internal combustion engine.

Only heard in conversation with the Francis family and possibly a family term said in reference to a traction engine.

**Radged.** Mad, idiotic, stupid.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*O'Shaughnessy*: idiotic. Birch: **divi-radged**, mentally insane. *Acton and Kenrick*: mad.

Very common term on the fairground, more widely used than DINGILOW and extensively found in the showland community. Never used as a term for insanity but more as a substitute for "mad", "idiotic" or "crazy."

**Rakli.** Girl.

*DU*: racklan, a married woman.

*Brown*: girl.

*Acton and Kenrick*: girl.

Not as extensively used as DONAH, BEWER or MOZZIE, for example, and heard when travelling in East Anglia; not common in the North of England.

**Railings.** Teeth.

Sense not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Heard on the fairground, especially in Lancashire where the meaning was explained to me by one of the young showgirls.

**Ride.** Any type of fairground equipment which is used for the purpose of carrying passengers.

*OED*: ride n.1 4 c, A roundabout or other device on which one rides at an amusement park or fair. Chiefly U.S.

Used by the showpeople to describe any passenger carrying amusement device on the fairground; can refer to a ROUNDABOUT, or any of the latest attractions.

**Riding Master.** Proprietor of fairground machinery, usually RIDES.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Braithwaite*: one who controls or owns a RIDE.

Once used by showpeople to distinguish between a ROUNDABOUT proprietor and a showman who presented live entertainment booths.

Now universally applied on the fairground to someone who owns ROUNDABOUTS and as such is part of the hierarchy. Also used on the circus to describe an equestrian circus proprietor. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF2: *what is in the trunk is in the branches. Sandra's husband was a riding master.*

**Ring the changes.** Money swindle usually operated by GAFF LADS to supplement their wages, by swindling the public out of their change when paying for a ride at the fair.

*OED*: ring v.8 b, changing bad money for good, see change n. 8 c, to remove to another place.

*Hotten*: in low life means to change bad money for good. *DU*: when a person receives silver in change, to shift some good shillings and put bad ones in their place. Changing bad money for good see ring v. 1, to change bad money for good, ring v. 3, to rob a person.

*Brown*: money swindle, where confusion is caused by giving and retracting a succession of coins.

This term is still used on the fairground and refers usually to the activities of GAFF LADS and shortchanging the public; not recorded in interviews but implied by Fred Warren, TR/VT/FW1: *When my father came to see me and I was driving the centre engine he said, "you shouldn't be up here, that's where the money is, riding the platforms", and he was right.* Basically the meaning is that riding the platforms is the way to short change the public, by handing back the change whilst the RIDE is moving.

**Rocka.** To talk, to speak.

Word not in *OED*.

DHS: (ex Rom), **rocker**, to speak, "can you rocker Romany?"  
 DU: **roker**, to speak, to understand.  
*O'Shaughnessy*: speak: "do you rocker Romany?" *Acton and Kenrick*: **rokker**, speak, talk.

Perceived as a Gypsy term rather than part of the showmen's language. See *World's Fair*, June 15th, 1912:

*Can you rocker Romany?*

*Can you chin the cosh?*

*Dicki at Mandy?*

*Can you fake the bosh?*

Originally from Mayhew's *London Poor* quoted in the *World's Fair* and basically translates "as can you speak Romany?" "can you talk your way out of a fight?" "eye up the person?" "can you obtain something by false pretences?" See also interview with Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF8: "*Rocka*" means to speak, "*kecka rocka*" means don't speak.

**Romany.** Gypsy or the Gypsy language.

*OED*: **romany**<sup>3</sup>, a gipsy also collectively, the gipsies, the language of the gipsies.

*Hotten*: a gipsy or the gipsy language, the speech of the Roma or Zincali. *DHS*: **Romany** race or language.

*Acton and Kenrick*: Gypsy.

Used when referring to the travellers the showpeople believe to be genuine Gypsies and not Irish or Scottish Travellers.

**Round Un.** Fairground STALL.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*Braithwaite*: any circular joint or STALL.

Standard term for a circular STALL on the fairground, used in the same way as HOOP-LA, to denote a STALL rather than the game played.

**Rumurred.** Married, a term widely used to describe matrimony.

Word not in dictionaries consulted.

*Acton and Kenrick*: rommer, marry.

Widely found in conversation with showpeople and Travellers, usually when enquiring about a person's marital status.

**Saltee.** See TRAYSALTEE.

*OED*: a penny.

*DU*: one or a penny.

**Sanddancer.** A term widely used by showpeople to describe a person who is the proprietor of fairground equipment in parks or on the seafront.

Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Travelling showperson who has retired and settled down in a house, usually has fairground amusements on the seafront and may be still involved in the business. Fred Warren, TR/VT/FW1: *A Sanddancer we class them, as they're a different kettle of fish you know.*

*They don't travel any more they just dance on the sands.*

**Scarper.** Go, leave quickly.

*OED*: to depart hastily, run away, to escape, make one's get away, *Hotten*: to run away. *DHS*: (parl), to run away, to decamp from. *DU*: to run away.

*Seago*: depart, go. *Allingham*, to run away, to run, to get out quickly.

*O'Shaughnessy*: go away.

General term to denote leaving in a hurry, the usage of this word is now generic and not exclusive to showland. However, it appeared in the *World's Fair*, June 15th 1912, in the following way: *We noticed an advert in this journal that someone claims to be great on cheap tober. We presume that he does not mean the "scarpering" stakes.*

**Scarper the letty.** To leave without paying.

*OED*: to depart or escape from a place, to leave one's lodgings without paying the rent.

*DHS*: (parl) to leave one's lodgings without paying.

This expression is spoken very rarely on the fairground and only really found in usage amongst ex-circus families on the fairground.

When interviewed Mrs Marshall, TR/VT/RM2 gave the following explanation: *Oh "scarper the letty" means get out of town (laughs)*

*"scarper the letty", "letty" is the room or the bed, so if you "*

*"scarper the letty", it's to do a bunk, because if you can't afford to pay, it's "scarper the letty. "*

**Scenic.** Electrically powered fairground RIDE, with lavishly painted scenery in the centre of the RIDE surrounding the fair organ.

*OED*: short for scenic railway.

*Braithwaite*: a generic term for electrically driven switchbacks having a profusion of scenery.

**Scenic Railway.** See SCENIC.

**Scran.1 (n).** Food.

*OED*: **scran** n. 2, a collection of eatables, provisions for a slight repast or picnic, a portion of food, broken victuals.

*Hotten*: pieces of meat, broken victuals.. *DHS*: food, broken victuals.

*DU*: food.

*O'Shaughnessy*: food, eat. *Birch*: food. *Acton and Kenrick*: food.

This is the most common term for food on the fairground, with no regional variations, possibly more common in the North West, where it has become a slang expression for food and used by Liverpudlians, but still very much seen as a fairground term as opposed to **MUNJARI** which is seen to have circus connotations.

**Scran 2 (v).** To eat

*DU: scran v.*, to beg for victuals, *scran v. 2*, to supply with food.

*O'Shaughnessy*: food, eat.

Used as a verb rather than a noun and various extensions include

, **SCRANNED**, **SCRANNING**. Mrs Renee Marshall,

*TR/VT/RM2: Oh scranred our way back, (laughs) we got back alright, we got back alright because my mother saved up for two years to get back.*

**Scranning.** Looking for food or the process of eating.

*OED*: the action of collecting broken victuals.

*Hotten*: **scranning**, or "out on the scran," = begging for broken victuals. *DHS*: out on the scran, begging for scraps of food. *DU*: to supply with food, see **scran**, v. 2.

An extension of the term **SCRAN (v)**, food, and one of the many uses of the word; see previous entry for further examples. Widely used on the fairground, especially in the North West.

**Scrannish.** Hungry.

**Scran struck.** No food; or hungry, famished.

Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Used in the same way as **MUNJARI STRUCK** and **DINARI STRUCK** and often inserted as a question, e.g. "are you scan struck?" = are you hungry:. I am familiar with this term and it is possibly more common in the North West where the idiom **MUNJARI** is rarely used.

**\*Scree.** Vehicle.



Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*O'Shaughnessy*: screeve, motor car. *Acton and Kenrick*: screeve, car.

Only heard in conversation with the Francis family and not a common term found on the fairground.

**Sea-on-land.** Early type of fairground RIDE, consisting of a circular track with between six and eight wooden yachts or boats, capable of holding six to eight passengers at one time, attempting to recreate the sensation of being aboard a seagoing vessel.

*Braithwaite*: an early steam driven roundabout having six or eight dummy yachts, complete with awnings, propelled about a circular track. The mechanism imparted a rolling and pitching motion.

First introduced in the 1880s, see Scrivens and Smith, *The Circular Steam Switchback* for further information regarding the history of this RIDE.

**Shamrocks.** Name adopted by the fairgoers in Sheffield and Hull to describe as set of STEAM YACHTS.

**Sheet.** Type of STALL found on a fairground, the term being commonly used to describe one where the customer has to knock over the coconut with a ball to win a prize. See COCONUT SHY.

Sense not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Widely used to describe a COCONUT STALL on the fairground, sometimes in conjunction with "coconut", but mainly to describe a throwing game on a STALL where a long runup was needed for the game. Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *This is our sheet here, our sheet, the Scots sheets are open you know they're not like the house tops you just have a front because it's a 24ft throw and that's*

*the front of the sheet.*

**Shit in the bucket.** Term used by Gypsy Travellers to describe a travelling showperson.

Expression not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Examples of this were also found in conversation with showpeople from Lancashire and the Eastern Counties section of the Showmen's Guild. Also one variation of a joke told to me by Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TGR/2 contains the following allusion: *They used to say that when a woman, when a woman has been found dead, how did they know that she was a traveller woman and that's what they used to say that she had the ring around her backside.* The other variation of this joke is as follows:

*Q: How can you tell when a traveller woman dies that she was a showwoman?*

*A: Because she has the ring of the bucket on her jeer.*

Mrs E. Francis interview, TR/VT/BF7: *Now I've told you that Showpeople and Gypsies have different names for each other, they call us "shit in the buckets" and we call them "shit up the hedge".*

**Shit up the hedge.** Showman's term for a Gypsy.

Expression not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Examples of this also found in conversation with showpeople from the Eastern Counties section of the Showmen's Guild. Mrs E. Francis interview, TR/VT/BF7: *Now I've told you that Showpeople and Gypsies have different names for each other, they call us "shit in the*

*buckets" and we call them "shit up the hedge".*

**Skipper.** A girl who has sexual intercourse outside marriage. Generally used to describe a girl as a slut or a tart.

*OED: skipper n<sup>3</sup>.2, one who sleeps rough.*

*Hotten: skip, bed. DHS: bed, to sleep in a barn. DU: skipper n. barn, bed, outdoor, improvised, a place where you shelter for the night without permission, skipper n. 2, a tramp.*

Generally applied on the fairground to a girl or woman who is considered immoral and free with her sexual favours. Found on every fairground I have ever visited or worked on and usually refers to the girls who follow the GAFF LADS around or a woman who has a bad reputation.

**\*Skitches.** Shoes.

Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Usage particular to the Francis family where it is a common expression for shoes or footwear. See Mrs. E Francis, TR/VT/BF8:

*V: Skitch*

*B: Skitches*

*V: Shoes.*

**Slide.** Type of fairground attraction, see HELTER SKELTER AND SLIP.

**Slip.** Name given on the fairground for a SLIDE, either known as a slip or a lighthouse slip because the design of the slip is similar in structure to a lighthouse.

**Slogger.** Boxer.

*OED: slogger n. 2 a, one who delivers heavy blows, a pugilist, a*

prize-fighter.

*DHS*: slogger 4, a hard punch, pugilistic. *DU*: slogger n. a, boxer.  
*Corrigan*: boxer.

Very rarely used and then only in conversations with ex-boxers or families who were once boxing show proprietors. Used in conversation with Annie Hayes, Ron Taylor and Harry Furness, but no recorded examples.

**\*Sooty.** Sleep; or can be used for bed.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Acton and Kenrick*: sutti, sleep.

Usage of this word is restricted to the Francis family; not heard in conversation or during interviews with any other showpeople. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF8: "*Sooty*" means bed and "*arrette*" means tonight.

**\*Sooty arrette.** Go to bed.

Phrase not in dictionaries consulted.

Usage of this word is restricted to the Francis family; not heard in conversation or during interviews with any other showpeople. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF8: "*Sooty*" means bed and "*arrette*" means tonight, "*sooty arrette*" they call it.

**Speedway.** See ARK.

*OED*: speedway 2 a, fairground ride, a loose term which could refer either to an Ark, mounted with motor-cycles or a ride called the Monte Carlo Rally.

Used in the same way as ARK and usually in the context of describing a RIDE with motor bikes instead of carved animals.

**Sprazer.** Sixpence.

*OED*: a sixpence, a sixpenny piece.

*DU*: a sixpence.  
*Allingham*: sixpence.  
*O'Shaughnessy*: sixpence.

The vowel in the first syllable is pronounced like ah. Such terms for money are rarely used now as the older currency is no longer in use. However, a series of advertisements in the *World's Fair* in 1945 included the following text: *Rytecrafft rides put up a flash that the flatties can't resist and their sprasers and holes pour in.* However, Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1, when interviewed defined the traveller words for different coins: *A "sprazer" is a sixpence.*

**Steam Swings.** See STEAM YACHTS.

A very rare fairground RIDE, popular between the wars and travelled by the Pullen family of South Yorkshire.

**Stall.** The general name given to the ROUND UN and the HOOP-LA. Therefore, a STALL can be a dart stall, a WHEEL-EM-IN or a side-stall, but used to apply to all types of games of skill and chance found on the fairground.

**Steam Yachts.** Type of fairground RIDE.

*Braithwaite*: a giant swing boat or pair of such boats coupled by chain drive to a portable steam engine.

The Steam Yachts have been described by showpeople and fairground customers in a variety of terms; for example, in Sheffield, they are known as SHAMROCKS, which is a reference to the names of the boats which were usually titled Shamrock and Rose. Other terms include STEAM SWINGS, BOATS, YACHTS etc.

**Struck.** See SCRAN STRUCK and DINARI STRUCK.

Sense not in *OED*.

*DHS*: panham struck, starving.

Never used on its own and only in connection with

DINARLI, PANNAM, SCRAN, MUNJARI.

**Stuff.** Generic term for equipment.

*OED*: equipment, stores, stock.

Found in everyday speech on the fairground, to denote anything on the fair; used in the same way as CHAT(T) but indicates larger objects.

**Swag.** Prizes or equipment.

*OED*: swag n. 8, a shop, swag n. 9, a thief's plunder or booty or a quantity of goods unlawfully acquired.

*Hotten*: a lot or plenty of anything. *DHS*: swag<sup>3</sup>, any quantity of goods, especially a peddler's wares or a thief's booty. *DU*: swag n. 2, any sort of goods, a quantity, a considerable number of articles, swag n. 3, a burglar's booty, swag n. 11, among tramps and beggars, some earn a precarious living selling "swag" - flowers, mats, brooms. *Braithwaite*: in showmen's language the collective name for prizes given on the various STALLS. *Corrigan*: swag-shop, shop or store where the prizes are brought. *Brown*: fairground prizes.

Standard term for fairground prizes or anything relating to the

fairground stall itself, so therefore the prizes can be sweets, goldfish, cuddly toys etc., but they will all be referred to as swag.

Mrs. E. Francis, TR/VT/BF3: *That's the reason why you have to put good swag on, by putting good swag on then, they will have a go to try for it.*

**Swag-man.** Person who supplies goods for prizes.

*OED*: a man engaged in the swag-trade or keeps a swag-shop.

*DHS*: a man in the swag trade or keeping a swag shop. *DU*: one who carries the booty after a burglary.

Supplier of prizes and objects for fairgrounds STALLS, see SWAG for

definition. **Swag-man** is a term also given to anyone who comes round the fairground selling articles for the showpeople, therefore fairs such as Nottingham and Hull have a **swag row** or **swag alley**, where the **swag-men** sell their goods.

**Switchback.** Fairground RIDE first introduced in the 1880s; see Scrivens and Smith, *The Circular Switchback*, 1995.

*OED*: applied to a railway consisting of a series of steep alternate ascents and descents, on which the train or car run partly or wholly by the force of gravity, the momentum of each descent carrying it up the succeeding ascent, especially to such a railway constructed for amusement at a pleasure resort.

*Braithwaite*: a circular ride comprising a plurality of cars driven around an undulating track.

**Tann.** To hit, e.g. "I'll tan him" = I'll beat him up.

*OED*: **tan** v. 3, to thrash soundly.

*DHS*: **tanned**, beaten. *DU*: **tan**, to beat up.

The usage of this word is not widespread and I have found it only in relation to the Francis family and showpeople in East Anglia. It does not appear in any of the specialised texts and is not a technical term unique to boxing shows. Usually inserted as a replacement for the words "beating" or "thrashing."

**Tatting.** Knocking from house to house asking for scrap

etc.

*OED*: **tatting** vbl.n.<sup>2</sup>, rag or scrap collecting.

*Hotten*: gathering old rags. *DU* gathering rags, **tats**. n. 2, old rags.

General term for rag collectors and used in particular for scrap collecting; sometimes used when describing the activities of scrap and metal dealers or Gypsy Travellers.

**Tell the Tale.** The ability to narrate a good story or entice customers to have a go on your show, STALL or RIDE through your ability to draw the crowds.

Sense not in dictionaries. *DU*: to practise the art of race-course swindle known as **telling the tale**, a species of confidence trick.

Commonly found in conversation when referring to a showperson's ability on the front of the booth and encouraging the customers to enter the show. Found in *World's Fair* from 1906 onwards in connection with the BIOSCOPE shows and the ability to narrate a story and explain the sequence of films being shown. Celine Williams, TR/VT/CW1: *When they had bioscopes they used to put the equipment up, but they also used to do what they call 'tell the tale'.*

**Thrummer.** Threepence.

*OED*: thrums, threepence.

*Hotten*: a threepenny bit. *DHS*: a threepenny bit. *DU*: a threepenny bit.

*Allingham*: threepence.

*O'Shaughnessy*: threepenny bit. *Birch*: three pounds sterling.

Such terms for money are rarely used now as the older currency is no longer in use. However, Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1, when interviewed explained the traveller words for different coins:

*A "traysaltee" is a "thrummer."*

**Tick-Off.** Fortune telling; used to describe a fortune teller's booth or tent.

*OED*: fortune telling, a fortune teller, to work the tick off, to practise fortune telling.

*DHS*: a fortune teller, to work the tick off, to practice fortune telling. *DU*: a fortune teller, showmen's and fairground slang.

*Allingham*: fortune-teller.



The semantic field of this word includes any sort of seer or any method of fortune-telling, and it is normally used to denote the type of booth the person has. Fortune telling for example would take place in a tick off tent. Mrs E. Francis, TR/VT/BF1: *She used to keep a kiosk in the middle of the ground, they were there for quite a few years, they had a tick off tent as we call it, fortune telling like.*

**Tober.** The place where the fair is held.

*OED*: the site occupied by a circus, fair or market, see toby n.<sup>2</sup>, the road.

*Hotten*: toby, the road. *DHS*: (shelta), a road, toby, the highway.

*DU*: a road, a highway

*Seago*: the circus field. *Allingham*: the fairground or market.

*Braithwaite*: the total complex of the fairground, its planning, organisation and induced atmosphere and more specifically the layout of RIDES, booths and joints. *Brown*: fairground.

*O'Shaughnessy*: market-stall, stallholder's or caravan site, rent for stallholder's or caravan site. *Acton and Kenrick*: road.

Tober is a general term for ground on the fairground, e.g. ground to let, or "cushti tober" meaning a nice bit of grass or land. Early reports in the *World's Fair* often contain the expressions "tober wanted" or "cheap tober": *We noticed an advert in this journal that someone claims to be great on cheap tober.* Mrs Renee Marshall, TR/VT/RM1: *And "scarper the tober", that means get off the gaff.*

**Tober mush.** Rent man or LESSEE, see TOBER and MUSH.

Mr Edwards, a Sheffield market trader, believes the term originally comes from the German word *doberman*, originally becoming *toberman* and then *tobermush*. Applied in the same way as *tober homey* and used on the fairground to denote the lessee or showperson in charge

of the fair, its practice is quite extensive. See **tober homey** for description of the common meaning of the two expressions.

**Tober Omey.** Lessee or rent collector.

*DHS:* a toll collector. *DU:* the toll collector at a fair.  
*Allingham:* rent collector on the fair.

See Horne's *Ballads of Showland* for **toberman** = the toll collector, and the *World's Fair*, January 16th, 1915 for the following description:

*Tober Homeys came in for a bit of kid but they were a merry crowd and took it all in the happy way it was meant.* From the frequency it was used in the *World's Fair* this was once a term used quite extensively in the North of England; **TOBER MUSH** is used in other regions.

**Tober sharper.** Showperson who attempts to steal another member's ground.

*Corrigan:* showmen who try to usurp or filch other showmen's space.

Heard extensively throughout the North of England, usually in relation to a showperson stealing or usurping another member's ground.

**Trashed.** Frightened, scared.

Sense not in dictionaries.

*Brown:* frightened.

*O'Shaughnessy:* frighten. *Birch:* fright. *Acton and Kenrick:* frightened.

A standard term found on the fairground for frightened or scared, its usage is common in the fieldwork areas and when questioned, the informants interviewed on language claim to have a knowledge of the meaning. For example Sandra Wright, TR/VT/RM2, insisted that she did not use the term **trashed** herself but knew showpeople who did:

*Or if they are frightened they will say "trashed" or "kindered the cookeries" [wet her pants] but that's one I've never heard of, only when Pamela travelled and she knows more slang from round there.*

See also Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *They say "trashed", that's right "trashed", that's a fright.*

**Traysaltee.** Threepence, see SALTEE.

*OED:* saltee, penny.

*Hotten:* saltee, penny, **tray saltee**, threepence. *DU:* threepence.

*Seago:* saulti, penny.

Such terms for money are rarely used now as the older currency is no longer in use. However, Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1, when interviewed explained the traveller words for different coins:

*A "traysaltee" is a "thrummer."*

**Tusheroon.** Half crown.

*OED:* half a crown, a coin of this value.

*Hotten:* a crown piece, five shillings. *DHS:* a crown piece, five shillings. *DU:* a crown piece.

This expression is rarely found on the fairground and only heard when in conversation with older showpeople such as Tommy Russell and Fred Warren.

**Twist.** Fairground RIDE first introduced over forty years ago.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Braithwaite:* also known as CYCLONE. An elevated four arm spider frame with revolving shafts suspended from each arm carrying smaller spider frames each mounted with four cars.

The **twist** is still popular on the fairground and as such the expression is widely used, Fred Warren, TR/VT/FW1 still operates Silcock's Twist: *Me and you could build a*

*twist up but you and me couldn't take money with it you want three good money takers to take money with it.*

**Two Ender.** Two shilling piece.

Word not in dictionaries or specialised texts consulted.

Such terms for money are rarely used now as the older currency is no longer in use. However, when in conversation with Tommy Russell he explained that a "two ender" was a "two bob piece."

**Vardo (1).** Caravan or waggon.

*OED:* a waggon, now specifically a gypsy caravan.

*Hotten:* **Vardo**<sup>2</sup>, formerly old cant for a waggon. *DHS:* (ex Rom cant), a caravan. *DU:* **vardo** n., **vardy** a waggon

*Seago:* wagon.

*O'Shaughnessy:* Gypsy caravan. Birch: **vardi**, caravan. *Acton and Kenrick:* caravan.

Traveller term for living vehicle, mainly used by Gypsy-travellers but often used by the older generation of showpeople. Mrs E Francis:

TR/VT/BF7: *Mind you "vardo" as well, you see in some places means a waggon.* Tommy Russell, TR/VT/TAG1: *"Vardi" is a caravan, well with us we call a "vardo", we don't call it a "vardi."*

**Vardo (2).** Look at.

*OED:* **vardy**, opinion, judgement, verdict.

*Hotten:* **Vardo** 1, to look. *DHS:* (parl), to look, look at, observe. *DU:* **vardo** v. to look.

*Allingham:* to watch, to look.

*O'Shaughnessy:* **vardy**<sup>2</sup>, opinion. *Acton and Kenrick:* **varter**, to watch.

Sometimes used as a term for look, e.g. "vardy the donah's moey"

= look at the woman's face. However, DICK is more commonly used in the North of England. Mrs E. Francis: TR/BT/BF6: *well mostly the word used there is "vardi", that means to look ... "vardi the chavvy."*

**Waltzer.** Popular fairground RIDE introduced in the early 1920s.

*OED*: **waltzer**. c, a fairground ride.

*Braithwaite*: a member of the Switchback family having freely pivoted tub shaped cars mounted on the undulating platform. Mr Jackson's Waltzing Discs emerged in 1919, and some ten years later the Waltzer, substantially in the form popular today, made its debut.

**Welt.** To hit.

*OED*: **welt** v. 5, to beat thrash.

*Hotten*: to thrash with a whip or stick. *DHS*: **welt** 2, a blow.

*Brown*: beating, punishment.

Very rarely heard on the fairground and I do not have any recorded examples of this word. It is a term that showpeople would recognise but not necessarily use themselves.

**Wheel-em-in.** Circular fairground STALL where pennies are rolled down a slope and, depending on where the penny stops, a prize is won.

Sense not in dictionaries consulted.

*Brown*: circular stall where pennies are rolled on to a chequered board.

General expression for this particular kind of stall, where the main attraction is rolling pennies down a slope in order to win a prize.

Celine Williams, TR/VT/CW5: *I've seen them take a wheel-them-in table off to put a baby's pram inside and sometimes the waggons might be too far away to bring them in.*

## 5. Conclusion

Upon examination of the material presented in the glossary the main conclusion is that it provides clear evidence that *Parlyaree* is flourishing on the modern day fairgrounds. The majority of the terms, with the exception of a few technical expressions, can be found in at least one of the source texts. However, with the exception of the *OED*, which draws its material from a wide range of published material, none of the texts consulted provides a definitive guide to the form, meaning and usage of the language spoken in contemporary fairground society. *Parlyaree* as found on the fairground appears to be a mixture of languages with its own unique technical jargon. However, it should be emphasised that this glossary reflects contemporary and authentic usage and is a compilation of words spoken in everyday conversation on the fairground. As Birch emphasised in his work on Travellers' cant:

*The important point is that an anti-language does not require the presence of an audience at all.*<sup>57</sup>

In other words the language is not simply used as a means of excluding outsiders, but is essential to the identity and cohesion of the society.

The majority of the terms used on the fairground can be found in specialist slang dictionaries consulted, but in many cases the meaning of the terms and the variety of interpretations found in the fieldwork were not in evidence. An example of this is the word *flatty*, listed in the *OED*, and the works compiled by Partridge, but not with the meaning found on the fairground. The definitions in Hotten proved to be closer to those which were found on the fairground than was the case with the entries in the later editions of Partridge. Words such as *bewer*, that Partridge states are obscure and rarely used, appear in everyday conversation on the fairground and in the fairground glossaries. The main reason for the inaccuracy of Partridge's observations is that no contemporary fieldwork on the use of language on the fairground had then been attempted and Partridge had to rely on printed sources. As the first autobiographical account of a fairground showman's life in the twentieth

century did not appear until 1970 the data could obviously not be utilised by Partridge in 1961. Hotten's methodology was similar to my own, in that his research took place in the field and relied on the informant's oral narrative. Words such as *chat(t)*, *dick*, *dibs*, *mummer*, *mumper*, for example, all have a meaning closer to Hotten's definition than to the later interpretation suggested by Partridge. According to Hotten in his introduction to the 1859 edition of *The Slang Dictionary*:

*It is quite impossible to write any account of the vulgar or low language seated on damask in one's own drawing room.*<sup>58</sup>

Therefore the original dictionary relied on information gleaned from informants in the field, who ranged from "chaunters" and "patterers," "tramps," "costermongers," "pedlars" and "hucksters." Because Hotten's work relied on conversation and everyday use, the flexibility of the meaning of words is more obvious and relates more to the contemporary usage employed on the fairground.

Sixty percent of the terms collected during fieldwork and presented in this glossary were found in the *OED*. However, the works of individual authors such as Corrigan and Braithwaite had the highest correlation of entries, as would be expected, and the glossaries in both these texts contained over ninety percent of terms listed in the present study. This is not surprising considering that Braithwaite's glossary deals solely with technical terms or jargon and Corrigan was a travelling showmen so his glossary is compiled by a speaker of the language.

The specialist books relating directly to circuses and fairs have a lower correlation: Brown's listing contains fifty percent of the terms, and Seago and Allingham fifteen and thirty percent respectively. The circus glossaries consulted also included a few individual terms which corresponded to those collected during fieldwork. However, it was found that the later material compiled by Mark St Leon on Australian circus,<sup>59</sup> and the glossary found in Hippisley Coxe's *A Seat at the Circus*,<sup>60</sup> bore little relation to the language spoken on the fairground, and were in reality composed of technical jargon used to describe acts and equipment in the

circus. St Leon's work on the language of Australian circus performers emphasises the way in which it can be divided into categories: words taken from rhyming slang; terms locally developed on the circus; surviving English circus terms; words with presumed Romany origin; and those from the Australian colloquial language. However, he concludes that little remains of the English circus vocabulary as described by Frost in 1875.<sup>61</sup> Cox also comes to the same summation that few of the words found in Frost's work are found on the modern day circus:

*Showmen's slang is generally becoming lost in the general colloquialisms of the day. Horses are no longer prads and I have actually been reprimanded for calling a trailer caravan a living-waggon.*<sup>62</sup>

Therefore a case could be made that circus jargon is in decline. However, an in-depth study of circus language by an insider needs to be undertaken before such generalisations can be made. Although Australian circus enthusiasts such as Mark St Leon have attempted to study the language, they emphasise the technical terms employed rather than the everyday conversation. Various words noted in the earlier works of Frost,<sup>63</sup> and Seago,<sup>64</sup> are still found on the fairground and the closer links that existed at that time between the two travelling communities may explain the similarities in expressions. However, present day circuses and fairs are quite autonomous and only one showman who operates a circus is a member of the modern day Showmen's Guild.<sup>65</sup> Also, since the demise of tenting shows on the fairground the fair has not proved to be an economically viable domain for circus acts and the two societies have become increasingly independent. Although the terms found in Corrigan's autobiography<sup>66</sup> correspond directly to the usage on the fairground today, the number of entries is small and the discussion of the usage is very limited. Other material which has come to light since then has been compiled by outsiders. The recent attempt by Francis Brown to incorporate slang into her account of family life on the fairground was secondhand, and since her contact with showpeople was a generation removed she relied on printed sources which do not take into account the flexibility of slang and the fashion for particular words on the fairground.<sup>67</sup> For example, when I was a child, *flatty* was the common term used



by my family for an outsider. In the last two years of the fieldwork I have noticed that the showpeople tend to refer to outsiders as *jossers* or *joskins* instead. A number of factors may account for this change, the most obvious being that the term *flatty* has become more widely known, and they have therefore adopted a more obscure term for general use.

The closest correlation between the vocabularies appears in O'Shaughnessy's glossary of market traders' usage. However, in order to assess the common use of *Parlyaree* or *backslang* in each of these communities further fieldwork needs to be undertaken among market traders in order to analyse the differences and similarities between the languages used by the two groups. Twenty years have passed since O'Shaughnessy's fieldwork, and the use of language may have altered dramatically within market trading communities as a result of the influx of immigrants and the change in the role of markets within the community. One possible short term effect could be that the community may have reverted to using slang in order to retain their group solidarity. The longterm effect of the increase of non-English traders could perhaps have resulted in the incoming immigrant group incorporating their trading terminology into the everyday slang found on the markets. However, I am not aware of any systematic academic study of the possibilities of such effects on modern day trading slang. O'Shaughnessy's study must be viewed in the context of the decade in which it was compiled; evidence on current usage is lacking and it is not possible to guess what changes may have taken place in the meantime. Even so, when I employed MacColl and Seeger's methodology and showed glossaries compiled by outsiders to interviewees, the result was that O'Shaughnessy's in particular was more familiar to the showpeople than for example the glossaries found in the books on circuses.<sup>69</sup>

The glossaries found in Acton and Kenrick's work were also shown to the interviewees selected for the fieldwork and although they implied that they recognised the majority of the terms, they insisted that they were Romany expressions and as such would not be generally used by showpeople unless in a

situation where their use would aid in the transaction. One example of this was with the expression *khinding her cookies*. Upon completion of the glossary I asked my aunt who had travelled extensively in the Eastern Counties Section of the Guild if she had heard of *khinder*, which was a term unfamiliar both to myself and the informant who had supplied it. Her immediate response was that in Lincolnshire they used the expression *khinder ken* for "shit house" but it was Romany and not generally used on the fairground. This corresponded with the entry found in Acton and Kenrick's work and again reflected the closer links found between Travellers and showpeople in certain regions of the country.<sup>70</sup> However, Donald Kenrick's research for example has identified the variety of ways in which Romany is used by Travellers, and the similarities in usage of language between the two groups are clear. Kenrick categorises Traveller usage of language in the following ways: for identification purposes, professional or trading means, self-identification as a group member, and as a secret language.<sup>71</sup> The final two of these groupings occur in song and wordplay and do not correlate with the findings in the present research on *Partyaree*. So although the corpora of terms used by both showpeople and Gypsies are quite distinct, the meaning and usage of the secret language are similar in both cultures.

A close examination of the twelve texts chosen as reference guides emphasises how the historical continuity of the language within the community has been maintained. Secondly, the prevalence of terms with meanings different from the definitions found in the reference works illustrates how showpeople have incorporated new terms and expressions into the language from other sources. The importance of minority groups maintaining their identity through language is illustrated in David Clement's work on *The Secret Languages of the Scottish Travelling People*. In this study he argues that when Travellers cease to become a distinct social group, their economic structure changes so dramatically that it affects their travelling patterns. A consequence of this is the demise of the secret language, because the everyday

need for the jargon in terms of negotiating business deals and maintaining their independence within the travelling fraternity is no longer necessary:

*When the travellers cease to be a distinct social group one feels that their language will also disappear, leaving only vestiges in playground slang and in academic studies such as this.<sup>72</sup>*

If we follow this premise, that shifts in the pattern of mobility and economic functions affect the traditional society, then by continuing to fill a similar economic niche to that which they occupied a century ago showpeople must also have retained strong links with their traditional culture because they have maintained their language. Nonetheless, in reading Clement's work we must take into consideration the major differences between what an outsider and a Traveller perceive to be the traditional culture. David Clement and others hark back to the days when Travellers' main entertainment was storytelling around the campfire and before such entertainment was replaced by television.<sup>73</sup> This is a condescending attitude and one common amongst outsiders to the community. Although Clement's conclusions reflect what he feels to be the eroding of the traditional culture and language, a more in-depth study of Traveller languages by an insider within the varying communities has to be attempted before such a statement can be conclusively proved to be correct.

Although an exploration of continuity in the existence of a secret language within travelling societies needs to be undertaken, at least one important conclusion can be drawn from the present research. Travelling showpeople, unlike some of their counterparts in other itinerant societies, have continued to maintain their economic links with the settled community. Although the landscape of the fairground has altered, the nature of the business, i.e. presenting an array of fairground amusements, has changed little over the century. Therefore, the present study offers convincing evidence for the dynamic usage of *Parlyaree* amongst the travelling showpeople, in contrast to regional dialect where substantial erosion of the lexis has been demonstrated recently by Upton, Parry and Widdowson.<sup>74</sup> One

of the main factors contributing to the continuity of the language is that showpeople's economic function has changed little since the introduction of steam-powered mechanised rides in the late 1860s. When the fairpeople no longer present travelling amusements, then perhaps the patterns of change within the community will be so dramatic that the language will be eroded. However, the present day membership of the Showmen's Guild is approximately 5,000 in total, and if one accepts the nuclear family as being four, the true number of showpeople living and working on fairs throughout the country is in excess of 20,000. According to figures held at the Central Office of the Showmen's Guild in London, approximately 250 fairs take place every week between February and November, with a slight decrease for seasonal holidays. The patterns of mobility may alter with the changes in the technology of transport, but showpeople have demonstrated their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and situations over time, a factor which is also reflected in the language. The language is constantly being adapted and utilised for different situations, and is understood by all generations. As with all "living" languages which are essentially dynamic, there is a natural process of adaptation or invention, and development and discarding of terms; certain words used to describe money, for example, have become obsolete. This is true as much in the 1990s as it was in 1916 when an editorial in the *World's Fair* of 28th October, contained the following observation on certain slang expressions found in the advertising section of the newspaper:

*These might be eliminated as, though they might have been needed in the olden days, there is not the same need for them today.*<sup>75</sup>

The latest attractions on the fair will also add to the technological jargon employed by the showpeople; words such as *Miami*, *Matterhorn*, *Terminator* have become used to describe the type of rides now found on the fairground, words which also reflect the trends in cinema and popular culture. Although the *Miami* will be advertised under the particular brand name given by the manufacturer such as *Tropical Trip*, or *Tropical Ride*, by virtue of the fact that the first prototype

machine was called the *Miami*, subsequent adaptations will also be identified in the same way. Therefore, not only is the everyday language adapted to fit a particular situation but the jargon employed for the technical side of the business is constantly updated.

The data in the glossary has demonstrated that a substantial and significant corpus of material is still constantly used by the showpeople; certain terms have been discarded but the language is still part and parcel of the traditional culture and the terms have been adapted for the modern generation. Certain of my informants believed that the language was in decline but through working and living on a travelling fair for the past three years I have come to the opposite conclusion.

The importance of maintaining slang terms within the society was again emphasised in the 28th October 1916 issue of *World's Fair*:

*Such words as "narked," and "gaffs," are a part and parcel of the showmen's language and surely our contributor would not stop the use of such great words as "mungari," "dinarli," "nanry," and "scarper." These are words that the outside public do not understand, but they mean such a lot to those who do understand them, and for our own part we should be sorry to think there was any chance of their being stopped. The average man uses bad language, but the showman is content with his own vocabulary, which is quite as forcible, and far more polite.<sup>76</sup>*

Conclusive evidence was forthcoming when the glossary was shown to my cousins, both of whom are in their early twenties. Not only did they recognise the terms used but, in keeping with their forebears, they rebuked me for compiling such a list: *how can we keep it secret if you keep on telling the flatties our business.<sup>77</sup>*

The fieldwork and the glossary compiled as a result of the research demonstrate not only the continuation of the language within the society, but also how the changing face of the material culture is reflected in the variety of terms used by travelling showpeople. The concluding chapter will evaluate how the evidence presented in the three case studies has demonstrated that the political actions taken in the late 1880s formulated the notion of fairground society, and how this has been reflected in the use of language, the role of women and the relationship between showpeople and other travelling groups in the economic, domestic and social environments.

Notes.

1. Mrs Renee Marshall: TR/VT/RM2, p. 8.
2. See Toulmin 'Crusties, Hawkers, Pikeys, Showmen or Travellers?'
3. See Chapter 6 for further details.
4. Originally from Mayhew's *London Poor* quoted in the *World's Fair*, June 15th, 1912, p. 8, and basically translates as "can you speak Romany, can you talk your way out of a fight, eye up the person, and obtain something by false pretences?"
5. Melch, *Tinkers and Travellers*.
6. Patrick A. O'Shaughnessy, 'Glossary of Market-trader's Argot', *Lore and Language*, 2 no. 3 (1975), pp. 24-30.
7. John Stevens: TR/VT/JS1, p. 4.
8. When referred to as *OED* the citation is from the *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, CD Rom version.
9. Acton and Kenrick, *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus*.
10. See Acton and Kenrick, for details of the debate between Hancock and Kenrick, pp. 8-9.
11. MacColl and Seeger.
12. Gladys Russell: TR/VT/TAG1, p. 19
13. David Birch, 'Travellers' Cant, Shelta, Mumpers' Talk and Minklers' Thari', *Lore and Language*, 3, no. 9 (1983), 8-30.
14. Birch, p. 14.
15. *World's Fair*, October 28th, 1918, p. 17.
16. See glossary entry for meaning of *joskin* on the fairground.
17. O'Shaughnessy, 24-30.
18. Tommy Green: TR/VT/TG1, p. 15.
19. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Historical Slang*, abridged by Jacqueline Simpson, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970). p. 11-12.
20. Eric Partridge, *Slang Today and Yesterday*, 4th rev. edn, (London: Routledge, 1970), pp. 247-248.
21. Eric Partridge, *Here, There and Everywhere*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), p. 117.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
23. Frost, *Circus Life*, p. 305.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
25. Frost, *The Old Showmen*.
26. Partridge, *Slang Today*, p. 247.
27. Edward Seago, *Circus Company* (London: Putnam, 1933), pp. 294-295.
28. Partridge, *Slang Today*, p. 249.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Partridge, *Here, There and Everywhere*, p. 125.
31. Phillip Allingham, *Cheapjack* (London: Heinemann, 1934).
32. See Appendix 1 for biographical details of Mrs Marshall.
33. Tommy Green: TR/VT/TG1. p. 15.

34. MacColl and Seeger, p. 38.
35. *Pikeyfied*: to display Gypsy-like tendencies, see glossary for full definition.
36. MacColl and Seeger, p. 39.
37. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF8, p. 5.
38. See Spradley, *Participant Observation*, p. 129.
39. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF8, p.4
40. Mrs E. Francis: TR/VT/BF8, p. 5.
41. These notes and other words taken down can be found in the Fieldwork Notebook, where the entry is dated and noted with the name of the informant who supplied the term.
42. When I was originally outlining the glossary, Dr Clive Upton would pose questions about certain terms and if I answered in the fairground vernacular his response would be, "is that in your glossary?" In this way, additional terms were added to the list originally compiled.
43. Partridge, *Here, There and Everywhere*, p. 125.
44. Clive S. Upton, David Parry and J. D. A. Widdowson, *Survey of English Dialects: The Dictionary and Grammar* (London: Routledge, 1994).
45. J. C. Hotten, *The Slang Dictionary* (London: Chatto and Windus, new rev. edn 1887; repr. Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1972).
46. Partridge, *Historical Slang*.
47. Partridge, *Dictionary of the Underworld*.
48. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London: Routledge, 1961).
49. Braithwaite, *Fairground Architecture*, pp. 151-175.
50. Seago, pp. 294-295.
51. Allingham, pp. 317-321.
52. Corrigan, p. 108.
53. Brown, p. i.
54. O'Shaughnessy.
55. Birch, pp. 16-17.
56. Acton and Kenrick, *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus*.
57. Birch, p. 16.
58. Quoted in J. D. A. Widdowson, 'Preface to the Reprinted Edition', J. C. Hotten, *Slang Dictionary*, p. 6.
59. Mark St Leon, 'Australian Circus Language', *English Today* 37, 10 no. 1 (1994), 43-49.
60. Hippisley Coxe, *A Seat at the Circus* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 223-239.
61. St Leon, p. 44.
62. Coxe, p. 233.
63. See Frost, *The Old Showmen* and Frost, *Circus Life*.
64. See glossary in Seago, pp. 294-295.
65. Conversation with Keith Miller, General Secretary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, and see *The Showmen's Guild of Great Britain Year Book 1996-1997*.
66. See Corrigan, p. 108.
67. See Glossary in Brown, p. i.
68. MacColl and Seeger, p. 39.
69. O'Shaughnessy.

70. Acton and Kenrick, *Romani Rokkeripen*.
71. Donald Kenrick, 'Romani Language', in *Romani Rokkeripen To-Divvus*, ed by Acton and Kenrick, pp. 79-88.
72. David Clement, 'The Secret Language of the Scottish Travelling People', *Grazer Linguistische Studien: Sprachliche Sonderformen* 15 (1981), 17-25.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
74. Upton, Parry and Widdowson.
75. *World's Fair*, October 28th, 1916, p. 17.
76. *Ibid.*, loc. cit.
77. Sherdley Show, July 28th 1996, see Fieldwork Notebook for full details.



Chapter 7.

Conclusion.

*We tell you these life stories to prove you  
That life as it's lived in a van  
Hath pathos and power to move you,  
As only true life stories can.<sup>1</sup>*



Figure 7. Mr. and Mrs. George Aspland, Boston, Lincolnshire, c. 1890s.

## Chapter 7.

### Conclusion.

The original aim of this study was to provide an insight into the way of life of travelling showpeople, analyse any change that might have occurred in their traditional culture over the past century and finally examine showpeople in the context of the fair itself. With the exception of authors such as Robert Sexton and Duncan Dallas, little research has been undertaken on the fairground community as a whole. Despite the abundance in recent years of publications relating to travelling fairs, previous research has been based on secondary or limited source material, and offers few insights into the traditional culture of travelling showpeople.

In order to present an in-depth account of how the community has developed over the century, the primary source material presented and analysed in the present study comprises a substantial corpus of tape recorded data collected during fieldwork interviews which focussed on the life stories and experiences of the showpeople themselves. The significant difference between this work and that undertaken by others is that it was carried out by an insider within the community and sought to bring forward hitherto unknown sources, oral, written and photographic, which would provide an insight into the way of life of travelling showpeople.

The fieldwork data was examined alongside the original published sources in order to establish the groundwork of the study. However, when the published material on the history of fairs and travelling communities was investigated it became apparent that showpeople had been ignored both by anthropologists and historians working in the field of popular culture and popular entertainment. Therefore it became necessary to narrow the scope of the study and concentrate solely on the showpeople themselves.

The central aim therefore developed into utilising my insider knowledge, combined with my academic training as a historian, in order to investigate the

following issues. Firstly, the relationship between showpeople and other travelling groups, secondly, the internal dynamics of showland society and thirdly the extent to which that society has changed or developed over the last 100 years.

Over the past century and a half, various writers have attempted to record the history of travelling fairs and showpeople by investigating what they perceive to be signs of decline or decay. When fairs have previously been the subject of historical investigation, the premise by which they have been examined is in the context of a dying tradition. The role of the showpeople and the part they have played in the development of such an important part of popular culture has been overlooked. The evidence presented in these studies is therefore distorted and carries within it a individual predisposition that has dictated the interpretation of the material. Thomas Frost predicted in the 1870s that fairs were on the decline and that the showpeople would soon be extinct.<sup>2</sup> Writing in 1976, Brenda Kidman described the pleasures to be found on the travelling fairs as anachronistic, and she continues:

*There will always be those who lament the changing face of the fair and turn nostalgically to preservation societies to safeguard the diminishing remnants of bygone merry-making. Meantime the vital textures of the travelling funfair slip away.*<sup>3</sup>

John Catt and Ronald Hutton both believe that the last remnants of the festival and wakes traditions in Lancashire can be found in the pleasure fairs. However, they examined fairs as the final manifestation of a once pure tradition; "all that survives apart from fading memories, writes Jon Catt, "are the pleasure fairs".<sup>4</sup> This theme is continued in Hutton's *Stations of the Sun*, where he states:

*Only the annual arrival of a travelling fun fair in some villages and towns stands as a memorial to the former existence of one of the most popular and long lived of British Calendar Customs.*<sup>5</sup>

Even the fairground enthusiasts who present "Old Tyme Steam Fairs" or "Traditional Victorian Entertainment" hark back to a better, more wholesome era, when fairs and feasts were better and grander than their modern counterparts. An editorial that appeared in the *Carter's Royal Berkshire Steam Fair Supporters Club* magazine, emphasises the traditional nature of their funfairs as opposed to the ones

presented by the modern generation of travelling showpeople:

*We are not interested in the modern fairground which obviously in time, will take its place in history and become "old time" - we are interested in the 'real old time fairground'!*<sup>6</sup>

Relatively recent studies by historians such as Hugh Cunningham and Robert Poole have presented a more rigorous examination of fairs, and demonstrated that the travelling fairs of the Victorian age were vibrant colourful events and often the focal point for a community. However, they state that the reasons behind this shift in popularity are a result of local solidarity or a more tolerant national policy towards fairs. When the showpeople are mentioned in these accounts, they are anonymous and are presented as insignificant to the eventual conclusion. Further research needs to be undertaken in order to fully challenge that assumption, but the initial research undertaken for this study has demonstrated that showpeople have often assisted and contributed to the maintenance of certain calendar customs and that if not for their presence and authority, many of the once thriving events would have been lost. David Braithwaite, in the introduction to the reprint of Henry Morley's *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair*, believes that the showpeople are omitted because they have always been reluctant to recount their family histories to outsiders, and consequently their contribution has been ignored.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it became necessary to narrow the remit of the present study and to examine the showpeople in isolation from the fair itself. Although the material culture was not ignored, the emphasis of this study lies in investigating the history and development of travelling showpeople. The continuity of the fairs as traditional culture has been examined in Chapter 3 and the conclusions drawn by previous researchers are illustrative of the wider issues presented in this study.

The reasons for selecting travelling showpeople for scrutiny as opposed to the fairs themselves have been stated throughout the study. It now remains to present the overall conclusions of the investigations. An important factor in this study is that the issues examined were not selected in isolation and then presented to the community in order to seek solutions to the problems concerned. The case studies arose out of

the views and opinions collected in the fieldwork and were a consequence not simply of participant observation but of a two way process involving close interaction between the community researcher and the showpeople. Therefore, the three principal focuses of the research emerged as the relationship between showpeople and the wider travelling fraternity, the role of women within the community, and the usage of *Parlyaree* on the modern fairgrounds. These topics were chosen in order to understand the society from the viewpoint of the showpeople and to produce an objective and constructive critique of how they perceive and organise their society. The methodology adopted is not purely that of an insider presenting an alternative viewpoint to standard documentation, but is also a means of facilitating further dialogue with the wider academic community on the key issues presented in the discussion. The first of the case studies, an examination of the nature of the relationship between showpeople and other Travellers, reveals that from the 1880s onwards travelling showpeople diversified from the wider travelling fraternity until they emerged as a separate and economically viable group. The political actions taken in the late 1880s formulated the notion of fairground society. Over the century the Showmen's Guild has effectively maintained the mandate set by the original founders in 1889: to separate showpeople from Traveller-Gypsies, and to defend the homes, liberties and way of life of the showpeople of Great Britain. This has since been reflected in the use of language, the role of women and the relationship between showpeople and other travelling groups, in the economic, domestic and social environments. The internal and external organisational strength of the Guild has created defined boundaries in which the society has developed. However, the fairground fraternity as a whole has always been united in the fight to carry on their way of life. This singular belief in the autonomous nature of the fairground community and its importance both culturally and economically is central to understanding the questions posed in this study. This section of the study effectively demonstrates the organisational strength of the Showmen's Guild and lays the foundations for a future in-depth study of the

growth and history of this unique trade association, which is to a large extent organised on ethnic grounds.

Although the material culture of the fair has effected change on a superficial level, the strength of the community and the importance of the family unit within the society remain as strong now as they were then. In an industry where family and genealogy are the key attributes for entrance into the Guild, the importance of the family must not be underestimated. Therefore, only through examining the role of women in the community can the centrality of the society be understood. The material considered in Chapter 5 highlights the contribution of showwomen in the economic, domestic and social domains. The upbringing of the children, the direct participation allowed in all aspects of the business, and the equal status afforded showwomen from the Victorian period onwards all contributed to the position of shared authority. The showwomen's achievements were made well in advance of their counterparts in the settled community and have remained so over the past century. The role of fairground women is therefore of central importance to the society, both on a domestic and an economic basis. The women are primarily responsible for the continuation of the tradition, not only for the education of the children and the home-oriented concerns, but also in providing the necessary financial and business acumen that is needed for everyday operations as well as for all emergencies. However, in order to fully appreciate the contribution made by showwomen to their society, a comparative study of the role of women in all travelling communities should be undertaken and this case study forms the necessary foundations on which to base any future research.

The continuity in the traditional culture was also revealed when investigating the existence of *Parlyaree*, defined in the *OED* as "*the canting jargon of the Victorian fairground*". The data presented in Chapter 6 demonstrates that the main corpus of the secret language used by travelling showpeople over a century ago is still found on the fairground; certain terms have been discarded but the language is still part and parcel of the traditional culture and has been adapted by the modern generation.

The importance of maintaining slang and occupational terms within the society is as important now as it was 100 years ago and demonstrates the strength of the community. The fieldwork and the glossary compiled as a result of the research reveal not only the continuation of the language within the society, but also how the changing face of the material culture is reflected in the variety of terms used by travelling showpeople. However, this aspect of the is merely a beginning, and the glossary consisting of approximately 200 terms currently in use on the fairground, as revealed during the fieldwork. One possible future line of enquiry would be to compile a more extensive glossary of older material from the *World's Fair* and other sources and to compare it with contemporary usage of Parlyaree in order to analyse any erosion of the traditional linguistic usage within the community.

The dominant concern of this study is to present a comprehensive account of the group of people who work and present travelling amusements in the United Kingdom. Although the research has been based largely in the North of England, and further studies need to be undertaken on a more national scale, the evidence demonstrates how the continuing dynamism of the customary society of travelling showpeople is manifested in language, the organisation of the society, and the importance of the family unit. The study therefore attempts to address the questions ignored by previous researchers by investigating the culture that ultimately effects changes which occur on the physical landscape of the fair. The most important aspect of fairground life is that the "show must go on", the business must continue.

Showpeople will always stress the variant nature of the business, both on a weekly scale and in the wider historical context. To the travelling showperson, the traditional way of life involves living on and presenting travelling fairs. Over the century, such fairs have altered dramatically. The introduction of steam and electricity, the changes in the patterns of mobility and the technological advances in the fairground rides have challenged, and will continue to challenge, successive

generations of travelling showpeople.

A central aim of this study was to investigate whether change in the material culture had been reflected in the traditional society. Only by presenting an in-depth analysis of the community can the history and therefore the contribution made by showland society to popular entertainment be fully recognised. However, due the sparsity of comparable source materials, the scope of this area of the investigation had to be narrowed somewhat. Other aspects touched on, such as the contribution of fairground cinema to the development of film, the impact of the boxing booths on the history of the sport in this country, and the questions of distinguishing ethnicity through material culture are just a few examples of the topics where further investigation is necessary. This research therefore represents only a proportion of the material and the analysis necessary if we are to come close to recording and appreciating the impact showpeople have had on popular culture. In the past hundred years the travelling showpeople have had to face new challenges to their traditional patterns of employment and mobility within the fairground but, as demonstrated, the important aspects of the traditional culture have not only remained constant but continue to be dynamic and necessary to the community as a whole. Only through further research and the accumulation of a body of evidence both comprehensive in detail and national in scope, can the full impact of fairground society on popular entertainment and social history be realised. By examining the community and culture of the showpeople rather than the fair itself, a wealth of material has come to light which has opened further areas of prospective research in the fields of social anthropology, popular entertainment, sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

This study was introduced with the words of Lord George Sanger, and the final line in his autobiography is a fitting way of drawing the present research to an end:

*What those days have been I have striven to tell you to the best of my ability, and if I have only brought to you something of the glamour and the romance which teem for me in recalling them my labour has not been in vain ... And now - Farewell! God bless you all, my friends wherever you may be. Good roads, good times and merry tenting! That is the showman's blessing. \**



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8. Sanger, p. 256.

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- (ii) Showmen's Guild records.

### **B. Parliamentary Materials.**

- (i) Acts of Parliament.
- (ii) Private Members' Bills.

### **C. Newspaper Sources.**

### **D. Audiovisual Sources.**

- (i) Index of taped interviews.
- (ii) Index of additional tapes cited.

### **E. Secondary Printed Sources.**

- (i) Unpublished theses and dissertations.
- (ii) Articles, monographs, books and journals.

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 VT/BF6. Transcript: TR/VT/BF6.  
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### (ii) World Wide Web Sites

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*Fairsnet: A Guide to North American Fairs*: [www://www.ns.net/fairsnet/](http://www.ns.net/fairsnet/)

*Het Molenschip, "The Ship You Don't Want To*

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*"Interactive Guide to the World's Columbian Exposition"*:

<http://users.vnte.net/schulman/columbian/columbian>

*National Fairground Archive*: [http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni\\_projects/nfa](http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni_projects/nfa)

*National Museum of Photography Film and Television*: <http://www.nmsi.ac.uk/nmpft>.

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*UK Gallopers*: <http://www.carousel.org/gallopers>.

## Appendix 1. Summary of People Interviewed and Biographical Information.

### Florence Campbell, née Shufflebottom.

Florence Campbell, interviewed at the National Fairground Archive, Sheffield University Library, in the presence of Mr Robert Campbell.

Tape: VT/FC1. Transcript: TR/VT/FC1.

Date: 1-2-95.

Length of interview: 50 minutes.

Subjects covered include: the family's Wild West Show, travelling in Yorkshire, and life on the front of the family show as a sharpshooter.

### Biographical Information.

Florence Campbell is the only daughter of Richard and Laura Shufflebottom who travelled the *Colorado's Wild West Show*. Her father, Richard, was the oldest son of Texas Bill Shufflebottom, who first pioneered the Wild West Shows as a novelty in England, after reputedly working with Buffalo Bill Cody in America. Florence worked as a sharpshooter and snake charmer on the fair, until the family closed the show in the 1960s. She is married to Robert Campbell, grandson of the famous "Donkey Dick" Smith from Yorkshire. They are both retired, but their son continues to travel on the fairs in Yorkshire and is based in Chapelton, Sheffield.

### Harold (Bonsi) Cubbins.

Interviewed in the presence of his wife on Windley Street Caravan Site, Bolton.

No tape or transcript.

Date: 8-2-93.

Length of interview: 1 hour (data from this interview was taken in note form after the tape recorder failed to operate).

Subjects covered include experiences during the Second World War, the Silcock

family, life on the road and the different types of living vans he has lived in.

### **Biographical Information.**

Harold and Gladys Cubbins are based in Lancashire on the Bolton site, where they have a permanent position. They own two children's rides, and used to own a *Swirl* and a *Noah's Ark*, which were opened on a permanent fair at Blackpool Pleasure Beach for six years. Harold has had a variety of jobs in the winter months to maintain his occupation as a showman. These include: working as a postman and a coalminer, as well as doing all types of manual work. His wife was not born into the business; they met at a fair in Yorkshire, and would be willing to leave the travelling life at any time. Harold believes that this is due to the fact that Gladys is a *flatty*, a non-Traveller, and therefore does not have the lifelong love affair with the fair as would someone who has been born to it. They never operate funfairs outside the Lancashire region and the majority of these take place in the Bolton area.

### **Elizabeth Francis, née O'Connor.**

Interviewed a number of times at the family's winter quarters at Crew Green, in Shropshire.

Tapes:	VT/BF1.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF1.	(2-5-91).
	VT/BF2.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF2.	(8-8-91).
	VT/BF3.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF3.	(5-12-91).
	VT/BF4.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF4.	(9-12-91).
	Tape lost.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF5.	(22-1-92).
	VT/BF6.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF6.	(4-2-92).
	Tape lost.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF7.	(6-2-92).
	VT/BF8.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF8.	(7-2-92).
	NB/VT/BF.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF9.	(8-7-92).
	Tape lost.	Transcript: TR/VT/BF10.	(10-8-92).

VT/BF11. Transcript: TR/VT/BF11. (7-12-92).

Dates; 2-5-91, 8-8-91, 5-12-91, 9-12-91, 22-1-92 4-2-92, 6-2-92, 8-7-92, 10-8-92, 7-12-92.

Length of interviews: 8 hours approximately.

Subjects covered include: travelling with her husband, growing up on the Winter Gardens Fair at Morecambe, history of the Francis family, and the early life of her husband, Arthur Francis.

### **Biographical Information.**

Betty Francis was born in Morecambe in 1926, the oldest of six children of James and Patricia O'Connor. Her father had the concessions at the Winter Garden Fairground at Morecambe which, after his death in 1963, was run by her mother and her sister, Mrs Shirley Toulmin. In 1946, she met and married Arthur Francis, the eldest son of W.G. Francis, who rented the ground on the Winter Gardens Fair, next to her parents. They left Morecambe and travelled around Lincolnshire with their own fairground equipment, and eventually settled in Wales. She has six children, all of whom still work on the fairground in Wales, and a sister who travels in the Lancashire Section of the Showmen's Guild. The Francis's fair was and still is a family orientated affair. They never opened on the large grounds, preferring instead to present small family village fairs in Lincolnshire and Wales. W.G Francis travelled to South Africa in 1946 and stayed there until his return in 1953. The family ceased travelling in 1992 and bought a piece of land in Wales on which they are in the process of building chalets and bungalows. They still attend local shows and fetes at the weekend, with their small family fair.

### **Harry Furness.**

Interviewed at home in Leamington Spa, in the presence of his wife.

Tape: VT/HF1. Transcript: TR/VT/HF1.



Date: 23-1-95.

Length of interview: 45 minutes.

Subjects covered include: boxing shows, and the illustrious career of his father, Harry "Kid" Furness. Harry Furness Snr boxed under the name of the "Mighty Atom" and travelled boxing shows throughout Lancashire and the North of England until his death in the late 1950s.

**Biographical Information.**

Harry Furness Jnr is the only son of Harry "Kid" Furness, a famous boxing show proprietor from Lancashire. Harry Furness Snr was perhaps the most successful of the boxing booth exhibitors between the wars, a living which he combined with promoting fights, refereeing, and training new fighters. The Furness family's involvement with the fairground began with Harry Furness who, after his retirement as the Lonsdale Flyweight Champion, took to promoting and presenting exhibition bouts in the North of England. Harry Jnr never travelled with the family, and left the fairground when he joined the army. He eventually married and lives near Weston-Super-Mare.

**Mrs Olive Green, née Pindar.**

Interviewed at her house in Bolsover.

Tape: VT/OG1. No transcript.

Date: 26-10-92.

Length of interview: 1 hour 30 minutes.

Subjects covered include: Traveller language, small family fairs as opposed to larger lessee-run fairs, life on the road as a child, and fairs in Derbyshire.

**Biographical Information.**

Olive Green was born into the Pindar family in the late 1920s. Her family owned and travelled a small family fair, that opened in villages all over Derbyshire. They concentrated on stalls and children's rides. She married a *flatty* (non-showperson) and

moved into a house. This transition was quite difficult as she could never get used to all the space. When you enter the house the interior is decorated and arranged in a similar fashion to a waggon, with its abundance of cut glass ornaments and mirrors, and the large Worcester figurines which have always been popular with Travellers. She still keeps in contact with her cousins, who married showpeople, and still sees her relations when they attend fairs in the area.

### **Tommy Green.**

Interviewed at Bolton New Year Fair in the paybox of his Cyclone Twist.

Tape: VT/TG1. Transcript: TR/VT/TG1.

Date: 4-1-95.

Length of interview: 1 hour.

Subjects covered include: the role of the Showmen's Guild, the changes in fairground technology and the history of the Green family of Lancashire.

### **Biographical Information.**

Thomas Walter Green is in his early fifties, and is the last member of the Green family still travelling. He describes himself as "a fourth generation travelling showman, with an excellent pedigree". His family became part of the travelling fraternity in the 1880s, when his grandfather John and his great uncle George Green, invested in fairground rides from their base in Preston. George Green eventually settled in Glasgow where he set up the famous Green's cinema chain. His grandfather John Green, retained his interest in the fairground, and from his base in Preston became a prominent member of the travelling fraternity and the then fledgling Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. Tommy Green travels a *Cyclone Twist*, and is the lessee of several fairs in Lancashire. Both he and his brother Peter were educated privately and Tommy has the reputation of being a scholar in the eyes of his contemporaries on the fairground. He was Chairman of the Lancashire Section of the Showmen's Guild, and

although he resigned in the early 1990s, he is still an active member of the committee and a delegate for the Section.

**Annie Hayes, née Hickman.**

Interviewed at Bettisfield in the presence of her son Bernard.

Tapes: VT/AH1/1, VT/AH1/2, VT/AH1/3. Transcript: TR/VT/AH1-

Date: 11-2-92.

Length of interview: 4 hours and 30 minutes.

Subjects covered include: boxing shows, horse-drawn waggons, travelling with Pat Collins in the Black Country, freak shows, and learning to read.

See also Annie Hayes' interview with Ned Williams, Transcript: TR/NW/AH.

**Biographical Information.**

Annie Hayes is the second daughter of Charlie Hickman, whose Boxing Show was a familiar sight in the Black Country between the wars. Annie's father, Charles Hickman, had a boxing show, in which Annie and her brother Charlie used to box. Her brother went on to become the Lonsdale Champion, before his untimely death at the age of twenty seven. She married Bernard Hayes and moved to Shropshire, but still continues to attend the principal fairs, including Nottingham, and the one day Statute Fairs at Burton, Stratford and Warwick. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Annie can read and write, and corresponds with people she has met in her travels over the years.

When her father retired, he dictated his life story to his wife who wrote it down. This was added to by the boxers who over the years had worked in Charlie Hickman's Boxing Show. This account was privately published by the family twenty years ago, and I have been allowed access to the material for my research. Annie is in her early eighties and although the great grandmother of many, she still continues to attend the fairs in her dart stall because in her own words *"there is nothing much left for me to*

do."

### **Joe Hives**

Interviewed at the Windley Street Caravan Site, Bolton, in his living waggon.

Tape: VT/JH1. No transcript.

Date: 14-3-95.

Length of interview: 30 minutes.

Subjects covered include: a history of the Hives family, and a discussion about Lancashire fairs.

### **Biographical Information.**

Joe Hives is in his late sixties and travels mainly around the Lancashire area of the Showmen's Guild. He is originally from Yorkshire and still retains his position at Hull Fair. He and his wife travel with side stalls and novelty stalls. His family originally travelled the fairs with china stalls, and he married into the fairground business.

### **Arthur Holland.**

Interviewed at Endcliffe Park Fairground in Sheffield in the Summer of 1994, in the presence of his wife, children and grandchildren.

Tape: VT/AH1. Transcript: TR/VT/AH1.

Date: 20-8-94.

Length of interview: 1 hour.

Subjects covered include: family history, bioscope shows, heritage, the importance of family connections, and fairground families in the Lincolnshire region.

### **Biographical Information.**

Arthur Holland is the sixth generation of his family to be involved in the business of travelling fairgrounds. In the nineteenth century his grandmother, Mrs Annie Holland, travelled one of the most elaborate and expensive bioscope shows in the country. Mr

Holland's position in the fairground hierarchy is that of a riding master and lessee, an inheritance he passed down to his twin sons. His family continue to travel in the Derby, Notts., Mid and South Lincs. Section of the Showmen's Guild.

### **Ralph Aspland Howden.**

Interviewed in his house in Boston, Lincolnshire, in the presence of Mr Neil Watson, a fairground enthusiast from Boston.

Tape: VT/RAH1. No transcript.

Date: 6-5-95.

Length of interview: 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Subjects covered include: the family bioscope show, the history of Aspland and Howden, and their involvement in the rise of cinema.

### **Biographical Information.**

Ralph Aspland Howden is in his eighties and lives in retirement in Boston, Lincolnshire. From the 1930s until the mid-1980s he continued to run the family cinemas, a trade in which the family had been actively involved since 1906. His father was Benjamin Aspland Howden, eldest son of Benjamin Howden, who was adopted by George Aspland and his wife because they were unable to have children. George Aspland was one of the most prominent showmen in the nineteenth century and the first showman to invest in steam-powered roundabouts. The Aspland family switchback still survives, and can be presently seen on show in the Cushing Collection at Thursford.

### **Billy Manders.**

Interviewed in his yard near Wem in Wales.

Date: 30-5-91.

Tapes: VT/BM1/1, VT/BM1/2. No transcripts.

Length of interview: 3 hours.

Subjects covered include: the Manders family history, his father Captain Lambretti the lion tamer, travelling menageries, backslang, and the Showmen's Guild.

### **Bibliographical Information.**

Billy Manders is in his early seventies and was born in a waggon at Hull Fair, which his family attended every year with their menageries and bioscope shows. His family were famous in the nineteenth century for these shows and held the rights to all of the principal fairs throughout the country. When I interviewed him, he no longer travelled but still went out at weekends with a *juvenile* ride that he made himself. He grew up with Tommy Russell whose family also had freak and menagerie shows. He is illiterate, and his daughter is the only one in the family who can read and write. He still speaks the *backslang* but remarked that nobody in his family learnt to speak it, because they lost contact with other showpeople when they settled down in their trailers. Through his mother he is related to the famous 'Lord' George Sanger, a heritage of which he is justly proud.

### **Mrs Renee Marshall, née Scott.**

Interviewed at the Showmen's Winter Site, Brighouse, Yorkshire, in the presence of her daughter, Sandra Wright, on each occasion and her son, John Walter Marshall, on the first occasion.

Tapes: VT/RM1. Transcript: TR/VT/RM1. (11-5-95).  
 VT/RM2. Transcript: TR/VT/RM2. (23-11-95).  
 VT/RM3. Transcript: TR/VT/RM3. (17-3-96).

Date: 11-5-95, 23-11-95 and 17-3-96.

Length of interviews: 3 hours and 45 minutes.

Subjects covered include: her early life in Ireland with the family circus, performing in the show, and the difference between the circus and the fairground.

### **Biographical Information.**

Renee Marshall, was one of the daughters of John Scott and Henrietta Baker, both members of prominent circus or tenting families who travelled Ireland, and in later years, the fairs in Yorkshire with Scott's Royal Circus. Renee was born in 1916, and performed in the circus tents with her family from the age of four onwards, until her marriage at the age of twenty three. When the family left Ireland and came back to Yorkshire in the 1930s, Renee married into the Marshall family, one of the oldest and most established showland families in Yorkshire. Her husband, Walter Marshall, was a prominent member of the Showmen's Guild and one of the founding members of the Amusement Roundabouts Association. The Marshall family have always been lessees and riding masters and were instrumental in the founding of the Van Dwellers' Association in 1889. This connection with Guild affairs has continued with her daughter, Sandra Wright, who became the first woman committee member of the Yorkshire section of the Showmen's Guild.

### **Ernest Percival.**

Interviewed at Chapeltown site in Sheffield in the presence of his wife and Richard Sissons, a reporter from the *World's Fair*.

Tape: VT/EP1. Transcript: TR/VT/EP1.

Date: 12-1-92.

Length of interview: 45 minutes.

Subjects covered include: travelling with his family, becoming manager for John Farrar, and life as a showman in Sheffield.

### **Biographical Information.**

Ernest Percival was born in the Midlands in the 1930s and moved to Yorkshire after the Second World War, when he met and married his wife. He sold the original arcades his father had left him and bought riding machines instead. The grounds or

positions to which he holds the rights at fairs throughout the country, are leased from John Farrar, a legendary Yorkshire showman. Until his death in 1992 he managed both Mr Farrar's grounds and travelled his machine. After a period of ill health Ernest Percival died in August 1992. His wife still travels with their son and grandchildren and they attend fairs from Kings Lynn in Norfolk in February until Loughborough Fair in November.

### Reg Pullin.

Interviewed in his waggon at Dinnington, South Yorkshire.

Tape: VT/RP1. No transcript.

Date: 10-12-94.

Length of interview: 70 minutes.

Subjects covered include: the history of the various branches of the Pullen/Pullin family, the family rides, and his travels around Yorkshire.

### Biographical Information.

Reginald Pullin is in his late eighties, and with his cousin Clara, is one of the last surviving members of the older generation of the Pullen family. Reg's father was John Pullen, one of the sons of William and Annie Pullen who travelled a set of steam swings around the North of England. The variation in the spelling of Pullen/Pullin/Pullan is due to a slight disagreement within the various branches of the family as to the correct spelling of the name. Although Reg no longer travels he still maintains a lively interest in the family and presently lives in his waggon in Dinnington.

### Tommy and Gladys Russell.

Interviewed on Windley Street Caravan Site, Bolton, in their home.

Tape: VT/TGR1/1. Transcript: TR/VT/TGR1. (30-1-92).



Tape: VT/TGR1/2. Transcript: TR/VT/TGR1/2. (30-1-92).

Dates: 18-8-91, 30-1-92, 23-12-92.

Length of interview: The first interview was not tape recorded, but written notes were taken of the conversation which lasted for an hour. The interview that took place on 30-1-92 was recorded and lasted three hours. The final interview was just before Christmas in 1992 and lasted two hours but was not tape recorded.

Subjects covered include: the menageries shows, the old style fairground side-stalls and games that used to be on the fair, life with the Manders family, Traveller languages, and illiteracy amongst showpeople.

### **Biographical Information.**

Tommy and Gladys Russell are based in the Lancashire Section of the Guild and are both from families who have been working on the fairground for generations. They are in their early seventies and belong to the prewar generation of showpeople. Mrs Russell's father, George Ryan, was a riding master and owned a Steam Yacht which in its day was the only ride of its kind travelling in the country. Tommy's family travelled with sidestalls and a small animal or menagerie show. Tommy was born at "full gallop", a term used by some of the older showpeople to illustrate that their heritage extends to the days of the horse-drawn waggons. He speaks backslang and some Romany and Scottish Cant, due to the fact that he spends two months in Scotland every year. Tommy's family did not open on the fairground during the Second World War, because Tommy enlisted in the airforce, and was sent to Canada. He built up his run of fairs after he came out of the forces at the end of the War. Gladys and Tommy are very keen on education and ensured that their children attended the local state school on a regular basis. Tommy can both read and write, a skill which is quite rare in showmen of his generation, but admits that it was not until he joined the forces during the War that he became proficient.

**George Simons**

Interviewed in the presence of his wife and Mr and Mrs Owen at Crew Green in Shropshire.

Tape: VT/GS1. No transcript.

Date: 9-5-91.

Length of interview: 30 minutes.

Subjects include: the hierarchy of the fairground, difference in facilities inside the waggons as opposed to twenty years ago, and life as a showman.

**Biographical Information.**

George Simons is the younger son of John Simons and his wife from North Wales. His older brother John is also a showman and they are both riding masters and lessees. He presently travels with his father around the North Wales area, but also attends Hull Fair with his children's ride. His waggon is one of the modern forty foot pull-out type, and is insured for £60,000.

**John and Lyn Simons.**

Interviewed at their yard in Wrexham, North Wales in the presence of their son and granddaughter.

Tape: VT/JAS1/1, VT/JAS1/2. No transcript.

Date: 7-6-91

Length of interview: 3 hours.

Subjects include: education, life travelling with horses, fairgrounds in the 1940s, and the education of travelling children.

**Biographical Information.**

John and Lyn Simons travel around the North Wales and Cheshire section of the Showmen's Guild. They recently sold their old Brayshaw waggon and moved into a forty foot German-built van, with pull-out kitchen and living room. Mrs Simons's

family were one of the last to travel with horses and never used traction engines. They feel very strongly about education and they were determined that their children would have a good schooling. Like his sons, John Simons Snr is a "riding master", which is a term used by showpeople to describe the roundabout proprietors. They have a good relationship with the local people and have only experienced prejudice when they have travelled outside their area.

### **Herbert Silcock**

Interviewed at Southport in the presence of his Mrs Silcock and Fred Warren.

Tape: VT/HS1. No transcript.

Date: 12-3-95.

Length of interview: 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Subjects covered include: a history of the Silcock family, Herbert's decision to stop travelling and settle down in Southport, where he opened permanent amusements on the seafront.

### **Biographical Information.**

Herbert Silcock is a member of a family, which is one of the most successful roundabout proprietors in Lancashire. His father was Big Ted Silcock who, with his brothers, Lawrence, Herbert and Arthur, travelled under the name of Silcock Brothers of Warrington. Herbert and his brother Teddy Silcock were the only children of Big Ted Silcock, the dominant member of family. Herbert and Teddy travelled together with their family, but Herbert left the family firm to settle down in Southport. The Silcock family still travel in Lancashire, the main branch of the family business being continued by John Edward Silcock, the only son of Teddy Silcock. However, Herbert still has a controlling interest in the family business and attends Sherdley Show at St Helens every August, with his set of Gallopers. He is married to Jane Silcock and they have two sons and two daughters.

**Pearl Smith, née Ainscoe.**

Interviewed at Chapeltown Showmen's Site, March 3rd 1995, in the presence of Celine Williams.

Tape: TR/VT/PS1. Transcript: TR/VT/PS1.

Date: 3-3-95.

Duration of Interview: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Subjects covered include: women on the fair, her life in the business, and the history of the Ainscoe family and their Fine Art Exhibition Show.

**Biographical Information.**

Pearl Smith, was born into a family of showpeople who had been travelling since the mid-nineteenth century. The family exhibited the Fine Art Gallery Show which originally belonged to the Storey family. After a series of tragedies, Pearl's mother settled down and ran a market stall in Doncaster. However, her children still continued in the business and Pearl married into the Smith family, from Yorkshire. They travelled sidestalls and novelty games throughout Yorkshire from the Second World War onwards. Pearl was an excellent driver and used to drive the lorries and loads for her husband. Her husband died and Pearl now lives near her daughter, Dixie Robinson, and her husband Stuart, on the waggon site at Chapeltown, Sheffield.

**John Stevens**

Interviewed in the presence of his wife and Arthur and Tracey Francis at Crew Green in Shropshire.

Tape: VT/JS1. Transcript: TR/VT/JS1.

Date: 5-2-92.

Length of interview: 45 minutes.

Subjects include: Traveller cant and other languages, traditional storytelling (including

two stories), and his family background.

**Biographical Information.**

John Stevens regards himself as a Gypsy; the term "traveller" is not one he would normally use and if so it would be very rarely. His parents were both travelling people, his mother being one of the Gormans, who are a well known family in the Midlands. The Gormans were and still are a very wealthy family who deal in a variety of commodities, ranging from scrap metal dealing and horse trading to the buying and selling of vehicles and associated items. John and his wife Anne (who is not from a Gypsy family, and comes from Wales), live in a rough-cast chalet in Welshpool and no longer travel. Their only daughter has been brought up in this area and does not regard herself as a Traveller-Gypsy; she recently married a soldier in Germany. However, John Stevens is in every other way a traditionalist and believes strongly in his identity as a Gypsy. His knowledge of the various Traveller-Gypsy cants or languages is extensive, even though he himself is illiterate. His family is of Irish descent, and he is a staunch Catholic, the religion which was once dominant amongst the travelling people in this country.

**Mrs Stockdale, née Howden.**

Interviewed in her home in Boston, in the presence of Neil Watson.

Tape: VT/AS1. No transcript.

Date: 6-5-95.

Length of interview: 90 minutes.

Subjects covered include: a history of the Aspland and Howden family, travelling on the fair in Lincolnshire and the family gradually leaving the fair and settling permanently in the Lincolnshire area.

**Biographical Information.**

Not known.

**Ronnie Taylor.**

Interviewed in the family living waggon at Nottingham, and Newcastle Town Moor Fair.

Tape: VT/RT1. Transcript: TR/VT/RT1. (10-6-95).

Tape: VT/RT1. Transcript: TR/VT/RT2. (15-6-95).

Dates: 10-6-95, 15-6-95.

Length of interviews: 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Subjects covered include: a history of the Taylor family and the rise and decline of the boxing shows on the fairground. The second interview is conducted in the presence of his wife Lily Taylor, née Studt, a member of the famous Welsh showfamily. Topics covered include: growing up in Wales, Mrs Studt's life as a child, and Ronnie Taylor's mother and her career as a boxer.

**Biographical Information.**

Ronnie Taylor is in his late eighties and is a member of the South Wales section of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain. He presently travels a boxing booth, a trailer mounted Funhouse and a Mirror show. With the retirement of Mrs McEwon in the West Country, Ronnie is the last person to exhibit or present live shows on the fairground. His family have been presenting boxing shows for the past century and he claims that the tradition started with his grandparents fighting in open air boxing matches in the Welsh mountains. Ronnie Taylor mainly travels around the South Wales area, but he still opens his boxing show at Newcastle Town Moor Fair in June and Nottingham Goose Fair in October.

**Arthur Tuby.**

Interviewed at his winter quarters in Mexborough.

Tapes: VT/AT1. No transcript. (7-1-92).

VT/AT2. No transcript. (27-1-92).

VT/AT3. No transcript. (10-3-93).

Lectures: VT/ATL1. No transcript. (29-1-92).

VT/ATL2. No transcript. (13-3-93).

Dates: 7-1-92, 27-1-92, 27-1-92, 10-3-93, 13-3-93.

See also appendix 1b for additional interviews conducted with Arthur Tuby by Benny Wilkinson and Frank Vernon.

Length of interviews: 6 hours, and two lectures given by Mr Tuby in January 1991 to the Rotherham Women's Institute and in March 1993 at The Traditional Heritage Museum in Sheffield.

Subjects covered include: the Tuby family history, growing up with his grandfather, traction engines and how to drive them, bioscope shows, dancing girls, and Yorkshire fairs.

### **Biographical Information.**

Arthur Tuby is in his late sixties and although he will tell you that he is no longer actively involved in the day to day running of the business, he is still regarded as the head of his family. He was born into a family rich in fairground tradition and heritage and his grandfather George Thomas Tuby was the first showman to hold the position of Mayor. His family live in the Mexborough area of South Yorkshire and travel predominantly around Mexborough, Rotherham and Conisborough. He is the third generation of his family to be involved in the fairground tradition, and he and his twin sons travel their amusements from the spring of the year until late November. All the successive generations of Tubys have been roundabout proprietors, and Arthur, with his cousin George Thomas, formerly the Mayor of Scarborough, and his cousin Roger Tuby, continues to play a major role in the running of fairs in Yorkshire.

### **Fred Warren or Glover.**

Interviewed in family living waggon, at Daisy Nook Easter Fair.

Tape: VT/FW1. Transcript: TR/VT/FW1. (17-4-92).

Tape: VT/FW2. No transcript. (12-3-95).

Date: 17-4-92. 12-3-95.

Length of interview: 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Subjects covered include: travelling in Lincolnshire, traction engines, early education, the Silcock brothers, and moving to Lancashire to work for Silcock's Amusements.

### **Biographical Information.**

Fred Warren was born in Lincolnshire in the 1920s and is the only son of Lottie Warren and Tommy Glover. His mother was the daughter of Frederick Warren who, in partnership with the Smith family, travelled the fairgrounds under the name of Smith and Warren. His parents never married and he was raised by his mother's people. His father Tommy Glover was a very famous traction engine driver for Thompsons, and afterwards for the Green Brothers in Lancashire. Fred Warren is presently the manager of Silcock's Fun Fair, a position he has held for over thirty years. During the late 1940s he went to Morecambe with Freddy Thompson, and opened on the same ground as James O'Connor. He married Audrey O'Connor, the second daughter of James O'Connor, and went to work for Edward 'Teddy' Silcock as his manager, a position he still maintains to this day for Edward's son John Silcock. One of his proudest memories is the fact that his mother drove the family's traction engine from Lincoln to Grimsby market, three days after giving birth to him.

### **Celine Williams.**

Interviewed at Fairfield, Chapeltown, Sheffield in her living waggon.

Tape: VT/CW1, VT/CW1/2. Transcript: TR/VT/CW1. (12-1-92).

Tape: VT/CW2/1, VT/CW2/2. No transcript. (17-1-92).

Tape: VT/CW3/1, VT/CW3/2. No transcript. (24-1-92).

Tape: VT/CW4. Transcript: TR/VT/CW4. (7-3-92).



Tape: VT/CW5. Transcript: TR/VT/CW5. (21-3-93).

Dates: 12-1-92, 17-1-92, 24-1-92, 7-3-92, 21-3-93

Duration of interview: 9 hours and 45 minutes.

Subjects covered include: Bioscope shows, life on the road, the start of the Showmen's Guild, fairs in the Yorkshire and Lancashire sections, and the role of women in travelling society.

### **Biographical Information.**

Celine Williams is in her late fifties and presently lives on the showmen's site in Sheffield. Her family originally come from Yorkshire but they spent a lot of time in Lancashire and she often tells people that she is as much Lancashire as she is Yorkshire. Since recording the interviews, Celine has sold her ground at Hull and other fairs, and her family sidestalls can be seen at Ironbridge Industrial Museum. Celine's great grandfather, Randall Williams was known as the "King of Showmen". He is widely held to be the first showman to introduce the bioscope, an early form of the moving picture, to the fairgoing public in 1896, and travelled all over the country showing these films in the lavishly decorated show fronts. Randall Williams was also one of the first showmen to introduce electric lights onto the fairground and in 1889 formed the United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers' Protection Association with other leading showmen of his day. Celine is able to trace her family tree on both sides back to the early 1800s. She has collected together a great deal of information about her family, believing it to be essential to preserve her heritage and that of the fairground tradition,

### **Jimmy and Sally Williams.**

Interviewed at the Showmen's Guild winter quarters near Walsall in the Midlands.

Tape: VT/JSW1. No transcript.

Date: 12-15-94.

Length of interview: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Subjects covered include: family history, and the differences between the Lancashire and Yorkshire sections of the Showmen's Guild. The interview was mainly conducted with Mr Jimmy Williams, his wife Sally joining in with the discussion.

### **Biographical Information**

Jimmy Williams was born in the Lancashire section of the Showmen's Guild, where he travelled with his family. When his father left to operate in the Midland Section in the 1940s, Jimmy and his brother Jos opened sidestalls and hoop-las with him. The brothers soon branched out and invested in children's rides and roundabouts. The Williams family can trace their ancestry as showpeople to the middle of the nineteenth century when their ancestors travelled with novelty shows and the larger waxwork exhibition attractions.

### **Rae Armstrong-Wilson, née Armstrong.**

Interviewed by Neil Calladine, in her living waggon, outside Nottingham.

Tape: VT/RW1. Transcript: TR/VT/RW1.

Date: 15-8-95.

Length of interview: 1 hour.

Subjects covered include: the attitudes she has encountered travelling in Nottinghamshire, the history of her mother's family Hibble and Mellors, and the role of women on the fairground.

### **Biographical Information.**

Rae Armstrong-Wilson is the daughter of the late Ray Armstrong, and a member of the Derby, Notts., Mid and South Lincs. Section of the Showmen's Guild. She is married to Joey Wilson and they have two children. Rae is presently a representative on her regional committee of the Showmen's Guild, and with Sandra Wright of the Yorkshire section she is one of the few women to hold this position. Rae and her husband are

both roundabout proprietors and lessees. This interview was conducted by Neil Calladine, the *World's Fair* reporter for the Nottinghamshire region, and is based on a questionnaire that I put together.

Conversation begins by referring to a questionnaire that Neil Calladine had received from myself, with a list of pertinent questions. Subjects covered include: the role of women on the fairground, the relationship between the showpeople and the settled community, and Rae's experiences as a committee member for the Showmen's Guild.

### **Sid Winnard**

Interviewed at Happy Mount Park, Morecambe.

Tape: VT/SW1. No transcript.

Date: 14-4-91.

Length of interview: 1 hour.

Subjects covered include: the Winter Gardens Fairground, the Silcock family, life as a painter and builder of children's rides, the new trailer-mounted rides, and his dealings with showpeople.

### **Biographical Information.**

Mr Winnard was born in Wigan in the 1900s and moved to Morecambe when he obtained premises for his workshop. He started working for his father but became involved in the fairground when doing work for the Silcock brothers in Wigan. He started out painting the waggons for the showpeople, but this became a full time job, especially in the winter months when the waggons were brought into his workshop to be repaired and painted. He started making coaches and buses for children's rides in the early 1940s and he subsequently went on to make complete rides for children, including the famous juvenile train ride which can be found on fairgrounds all over the country. He settled in Morecambe with his wife and after his retirement he "kept his hand in it" by making stools and chairs for showpeople, on which he lettered their

name in the style of the fairground. He worked for James O'Connor in the late 1940s and subsequently painted the machines and stalls on the Winter Gardens in the winter months. He was notorious in fairground circles for his itemised bills: every nail, screw, length of wood etc. was accounted for. His sense of humour was legendary and one showman remarked that old Sid's wit was as dry as the Sahara Desert. Mr Winnard died on September 8th 1993. He was the last of the fairground painters and craftsmen of his generation.

**Sandra Wright, née Marshall.**

Interviewed in the presence of her husband, William Wright, and her mother Mrs Renee Marshall.

Tape: VT/SMW1 Transcript: TR/VT/SMW1.

Date: 23-11-95.

Length of Interview: 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Subjects covered include: women on the fairground, fairground vocabulary, and the importance of the Guild in the fairground community.

**Biographical Information.**

Sandra Wright was born in West Yorkshire, shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War. Her mother, Renee, was a member of the famous circus performers, Scott's Royal Circus, and her father Walter Marshall was part of the famous Yorkshire showfamily of that name. Sandra Wright runs the family business and was recently elected to the Yorkshire committee of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain for the second year in succession. The discussion centres on the role of women in showland society, the domestic life that they face and how they combine the dual roles of wife and business partner.

### **Appendix 1b. Additional Transcripts.**

The following list of transcripts relates to unpublished material, supplied by fellow researchers working on the history of travelling showpeople. The data is mainly incidental to the main corpus of evidence used, but whenever cited in the main body of the study, a full list of the relevant transcript and biographical information is supplied together with the entry.

#### **All The Fun of the Fair: Local Fairs recalled by showmen and punters since 1900.**

Leicester Oral History Project: Tape C44.

Transcript: TR/VT/C44.

Date: No details given, 1986 to 1992.

Duration of tape: 1 hour.

The majority of the tape recordings consist of interviews with three members of the Showmen's Guild: Mr Holland Snr, his son A. Holland Jnr, and Mrs Bates. Subjects covered include: growing up on the fairground, education, and attending the fairs in the Leicestershire area. Other contributors are local people who have attended fairs in the Leicester area from the turn of the century onwards.

#### **BBC Radio Leeds, Phone-in on the subject of Leeds Valentine Day Fair.**

Tape: BBCR/LVF. Transcript: TR/VT/BBCR/LVF.

Broadcast: 22nd February 1996.

Duration of tape: 55 minutes.

#### **Further information.**

This phone-in programme was broadcast following a BBC Television programme on Leeds Valentine Fair. The basic premise of the radio programme was to provide a

forum for the people of Leeds to ask the organisers and the council about any difficulties posed by the fair during the time it was open in the city centre. However, the mood of the programme was very positive and during the fifty five minutes it was broadcast, not one single listener rang in to complain either to the council or the showmen involved. The main points of discussion centred on the growth of town centre fairs, and the benefits the fair brought to Leeds during the ten days it was present in the centre of the town.

### **BBC Radio 2. The Hoppings**

Tape: BBC2/NTM. Transcript: TR/VT/BBC2/NTM.

Broadcast: 21st June 1996

Duration of tape: 2 hours

#### **Further information.**

This programme was a collaboration between myself and an independent production company, Soundbite Productions, for BBC Radio 2. The premise of the programme was an insight into the world of the travelling showpeople and its history, which would be centred around the annual Town Moor Fair known as The Hoppings. Interviews were conducted with a variety of showpeople at various venues throughout the year and culminated with the gathering in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The transcript is taken from extracts of the interviews used in the programme.

### **Margaret Bird, née Shufflebottom.**

Interviewed by Brian Steptoe at her home in Norwich, shortly before her death.

Transcript: NFA-178-E11.

Date: 15-6-93.

#### **Biographical Information.**

Margaret Bird was born in 1899, the youngest daughter of Mrs and Mrs Texas Bill

Shufflebottom, a prominent family of entertainers and paraders who travelled the fairs with their ten children, performing a wild west act. Margaret started appearing on the family show at the age of four when she played the part of the Indian girl. After her marriage to John Willie Waddington Jnr, she travelled Yorkshire with a set of Steam Yachts. After his death she married Arthur Bird, and although they continued to travel around East Anglia during the Second World War and after, they subsequently retired to run a public house. Margaret died in January 1994, and her family collection of photographs and ephemera was donated to the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield.

### **Norma Davies.**

Interviewed by Ned Williams in her winter quarters in Warwick.

Transcript: TR/NW/ND1.

Date: 21-2-95.

### **Biographical Information.**

Norma Davies is the only daughter of Norman and Violet Davies of the Midland Section of the Showmen's Guild. Norma was born in 1930 and, before her marriage to Fred Warwick, travelled with her family. Her family primarily travelled with machines and Norma built the ride up every day, a fact that she feels was unusual. She is now divorced and has settled permanently in Warwick, where she operates a small funfair in the local park.

### **Miss Beatrice Percival.**

Interviewed at the caravan site, Stainforth, near Doncaster, in the presence of Mr Arthur Tuby, Mrs Margaret Vernon, Mr Benny Wilkinson and Mr Frank Vernon.

Transcript: TR/BW/BP1.

Date: February 1987.

Interviewed by Benny Wilkinson and Frank Vernon as part of their unpublished history of the Tuby family of Doncaster. Miss Beatrice Percival was ninety two years old when the interview was conducted in 1987, and has since died.

**Biographical Information.**

Not known.

**Mrs Lily May Richards, née Haggar.**

Interview by Dennis Pope and Frank Sharpe of the Canton Film Appreciation Society, 1971.

Tape: CFS/LMR. Transcript: TR/DP/LMR.

Length of interview: 41 minutes.

**Biographical Information.**

Lily May Richards, born in 1893, was the youngest daughter of William Haggar, a showman from Wales who became one of the leading figures in the early British film industry. She died in 1969 at the age of seventy six. This tape was donated to the National Fairground Archive by the Canton Film Society who had first interviewed Mrs Richards in 1961. Lily May appeared in several of her father's early films and wrote a biography of her father just before her death in 1969. A copy of this manuscript can be found in the National Fairground Archive.

**Gail Robbins.**

Interviewed by Ned Williams in her flat in Little Bloxwich.

Transcript: TR/NW/GR1.

Date: 26-10-95.

**Biographical Information.**

Gail Robbins was born in 1938 in Birmingham. Her mother, Nancy Robbins, used to perform for the Robbins family as "Madame Tiny" and her father was Sam Robbins



Jnr. She travelled with her family until the age of sixteen, when the death of her mother was followed shortly by the death of her father. She then travelled with her aunt and uncle and worked in the shooting gallery. She is presently living in a ground floor flat in Little Bloxwich and no longer travels on the fair.

**Mrs Kate Smart, Mr Bob Kemp, Mrs Minnie Kemp and Mr George Smart.**

Interviewed by Rod Spooner as part of the Fairground Association of Great Britain's Oral History Project.

Tape: RS/KS1. Transcript: TR/VT/RS/KS1.

Date: 25-2-82.

Length of interview: 85 minutes.

Subjects include: travelling with horse-drawn waggons, working during the Second World War, and the changes they have witnessed as a family in the travelling amusement industry.

**Biographical Information.**

The Kemp family were a prominent showfamily in the West Midlands. The interview consists of recordings of Kate Smart, née Kemp, her son George, and her brother Bobbie Kemp. Although the family made their living on the fairground and travelled with side shows, they would also spend part of the winter hawking until the season started. After her marriage Kate travelled a Three-abreast roundabout and a novelty ride known as the Yoyo, after the Second World War. Kate Smart and her brother Bobbie were both in their eighties when this interview was conducted and died soon after the recording was made.

**Mrs Ellen Smith.**

Interviewed by Frank Vernon and Benny Wilkinson in her living waggon near Rotherham.

Transcript: TR/BW/ES.

Date: 7-5-87.

### **Biographical Information.**

Mrs Ellen Smith worked as a waggon girl for the Tuby family, from the age of fourteen. The interview largely concentrates on the type of work she was involved in and her experiences on the fairground between the wars.

### **The Travelling Smiths.**

BBC Television documentary, transmitted 23rd May, 1961.

Tape: NFA-178-D5. Transcript: TR/VT/NFA-178-D5

Duration: 60 minutes.

### **Biographical Information.**

The Smith family consisted of Fred and Mary Ellen Smith and their children: Johnny, Glyn, Linda, Gerald, Danny, Jimmy and Billy. The extracts are taken from a documentary introduced by Allan Prior in 1961. A team of cameramen followed the Smith family as they travelled back from Hampstead Heath to their winter quarters in Coventry. Various members of the family are interviewed during the winter months, and an attempt is made to understand something of the nomadic lifestyle the showpeople lead.

### **Harriet Swann, née West.**

Interviewed by Ned Williams, as part of the research for his book *Black Country Circuses and Fairs*.

Transcript: TR/NW/HS1.

Date: 5-6-94.

### **Biographical Information.**

Harriet West was born in 1906 and was brought up on the fair with her three sisters

and four brothers. The West family travelled primarily around the Nottingham area, where Harriet received her education. After her marriage to Jimmy Swann in 1930, Harriet and her husband then travelled with Pat Collins in the Midlands. After the death of her husband in 1942, Harriet was left to bring up two small children and continue the family business. During the war she drove lorries for the government and maintained the family amusements. The Swann family have always been stallholders, but her children and grandchildren also travel children's rides.

### **Arthur Tuby.**

Transcripts supplied by Mr Benny Wilkinson, from a series of interviews with Arthur Tuby, conducted throughout February, 1987.

Tape: BW/AT1. Transcript: TR/BW/AT1. (February 1987).

Transcript: TR/FV/AT2. (2-2-87).

See previous entry on Arthur Tuby in Appendix 1 for biographical information.

### **George Thomas Tuby the Second, Mayor of Scarborough 1986-1987.**

Interviewed by Frank Vernon at the Yorkshire Miners Convalescent Home, location unknown, in the presence of Henry Robson, as part of the unpublished history of the Tuby family of Doncaster, written by Frank Vernon and Benny Wilkinson.

No tape available. Transcript: TR/FV/GT1.

### **Biographical Information.**

George Thomas Tuby is the grandson of the famous Tom Tuby, one of the first showmen to hold public office when he was elected the Mayor of Doncaster. His grandson George continued this connection between the Tuby family and public office, when he was elected Mayor of Scarborough. George Thomas no longer travels and lives in semi-retirement in Scarborough with his wife Anne. Anne Tuby is the great granddaughter of William and Aaron Pullen and has recently donated material relating

to her family to the National Fairground Archive.

**Appendix 2.      A Selection of the Various Acts of Parliament Relevant to**  
**Travelling Showpeople.**

- 1868.      The Metropolitan Fairs Act**  
 This Act conferred on the Commissioner of Police the authority to prevent the licensing or holding of fairs within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police.
- 1871.      The Fairs Act.**  
 This legislation introduced the means by which fairs originally governed by a Charter could be abolished according to the provisions outlined in sections, three, four and five of the Act:  
*Whereas certain of the fairs held in England and Wales are unnecessary, are the cause of greivous immorality, and are very injurious to the inhabitants of the towns in which such fairs are held, and it is therefore expedient to make provisions to facilitate the abolition of such fairs.*
- 1873.      The Fairs Act**  
 The "owner" or the person entitled to hold the fair can appeal to the Home Secretary for the right to alter the days when the fair takes place.
- 1908.      Middlesex County Council Act.**  
 Clause 31 inflicted a penalty on any Gypsy or other person who used as a dwelling place any van or living structure within 100 yards of a residential area which would cause annoyance or disturbance to the residents.  
 However, the following exemption was included for the benefit of the travelling showpeople:  
*This section shall not apply to any person dwelling in a tent or van or other similar structures who is a roundabout proprietor or showman or stallholder - not being a pedlar or hawker; nor to any owner or lessee or other persons who suffers any land to be occupied by such persons as aforesaid.*
- 1908.      Children's Act.**  
 Children of nomadic parents, including showpeople, were required to have 200 attendances at school per annum between October and March.

1930. Road Traffic Act.

1932. Town and Country Planning Act.

1933. Finance Bill.

1933. Road Traffic Act.

Rebate allowed on showmen's vehicles, on those that are adapted for his business; introduced the Showmen's restricted licence, a clause which has since been re-evaluated. The Showmen's restricted licence allows the vehicle to be taxed less expensively if it is only used for the purpose of transporting the fairground equipment, in particular the generator, and therefore is not bound by the full taxation and testing regulations.

1936. Road Traffic Act

This Bill was primarily sponsored by the Showmen's Guild and included clauses which repealed the condition laid out in the previous Road Traffic Acts which ruled that traction engine drivers and steersmen had to hold a Full Road Fund Driving Licence.

1936. The Public Health Act. (The Showmen's Charter.)

Travelling showpeople were granted an exemption from the Section affecting the licensing of moveable dwellings and sites for such dwellings:

*Nothing in this Section applies to a moveable dwelling which belongs to a person who is the proprietor of a travelling circus, roundabout, amusement fair stall or store (not being a pedlar, hawker or costermonger) and which is regularly used by him in the course of travelling for the purpose of his business.*

1947. Town and Country Planning Act.

Twenty eight days free of planning control for a licence to stay with their waggons in one area. The Guild was able to extend the original ruling from ten days to twenty eight, thus allowing their members adequate time to attend the fairs.

1949. **Vehicles Excise Act.**  
This includes a definition of the showmen's restricted licence and vehicle, and the tax duty to be levied on the showmen which is only a fraction of duties normally imposed.
1960. **Road Traffic Act.**
1960. **Noise Abatement Act.**  
Exemption for loudspeakers on street fairs. Penalties introduced for broadcasting or playing music over a certain level. The Guild campaigned and received an exemption for music on fairgrounds.
1960. **Betting and Gaming Act.**  
Prizes on fairground stalls permitted; see also Betting and Gaming and Licence Act 1963.
1960. **Caravan Sites and Development Act.**  
Primarily concerned with Gypsies and Irish Travellers, this Act's importance lies in the distinction it makes between travelling showpeople and other Travellers, with the exemption that a:  
*Site licence shall not be required for the use of the land as a caravan site by a travelling showman, and who is travelling for the purpose of his business or who has taken up winter quarters on that land.*
1962. **Education Act.**  
Grants to individuals or councils to promote and facilitate the education of Travellers.
1968. **Caravan Sites Act**  
Showpeople were granted a continuation of the clause in the 1960 Act in that "Gypsies" means persons of nomadic habit and does not include members of an organised group of travelling showmen.
1971. **Vehicles Excise Act.**  
Official registration of travelling showmen's vehicles. Schedule 3, part 1, paragraph 7. Special class three goods licence.

1988.

**Education Reform Act.**

Fine imposed for non-attendance of travelling children at school but exemption granted if parents are engaged in a trade that requires them to travel from place to place; they must prove that the child is registered at a school and that attendance is within the minimum number of school days stipulated in the Act.

1990.

**Town and Country Act.**

1994.

**Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.**

Includes an exemption for travelling showpeople regarding the right to stay for twenty eight days on private or public sites, as did the 1960 Caravan Sites and Development Act.



**Appendix 3. List of Figures.**

- Figure 1. Hives Family, London, c. 1900s. Joe Hives Collection, National Fairground Archive.
- Figure 2. Vanessa Toulmin, Warrington Walking Day, July, 1995. Author's Collection.
- Figure 3. Opening of Hull Fair, October, 1995, National Fairground Archive.
- Figure 4. Members of the Hives Family; 1900s. Joe Hives Collection, National Fairground Archive.
- Figure 5. Florence and Maisie Shufflebottom, Hull Fair, 1950s. Florence Shufflebottom Collection, National Fairground Archive.
- Figure 6. Lord Lonsdale and George Thomas Tuby, Doncaster, 1925. National Fairground Archive.
- Figure 7. Mrs and Mrs George Aspland, Boston, Lincolnshire, c. 1890s. Ralph Aspland Howden Collection, National Fairground Archive.

### Errata.

Page 126, line 12: *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth Century England*.

Page 128, lines 1-4. Note 139a. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW1, p. 1.

Page 140, lines 25-28. Note 180a. Murphy, *Showmen's Guild, 1889-1939*, p. 223.

Page 198, lines 29-33. Note 111a. Sandra Wright: TR/VT/SMW, p. 13.

Page 289, lines 11-13. Wrong alphabetical order, change **Steam Swings** to follow **Stall**.

Page 329. Reference: Braithwaite, D., *The Savages of Kings Lynn*, replace with Braithwaite, D., *Savage of King's Lynn: Inventor of machines and merry-go-rounds* (Cambridge, Patrick Stephens, 1975).

Page 329. Add: Braithwaite, D., 'An Introduction to Henry Morley's Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair' in Henry Morley, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859; new. rev. edn. London: Hugh Evelyn, 1973).