Travellers', Travellers', TRAVELES

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THE ONLY MAGAZINE FOR GYPSIES, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

YVONNE MACNAMARA TALKS OPERATION TRAVELLER VOTE

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TT ONLINE – YOUR VOICE ON THE INTERNET



FROM THE EDITOR By Damian Le Bas





Spring's here again, but it's no ordinary season for Gypsy, Roma and Travelling people. May the 7th is general election day, and there's plenty at stake for our communities. If you're not already on the electoral roll, then you need to register to vote by 20th April. You can read more about Operation Traveller Vote on page 8 of this issue.

"Come the Spring I'd get itchy feet, then good-bye town and smoky street. I'd want to be moving some place else" – those were the words of the famous Moving On Song by Ewan MacColl. Trouble is, there's still a shortage of stopping places across Britain, and the government are still considering a change to the legal definition of "Gypsy". This could rob those who stop travelling of their legal right to be recognized as ethnic Gypsies and Travellers.

Things don't have to be this way. On page 5 we look at a new approach to 'negotiated stopping' in Leeds, which has led to a 17-fold drop in the number of evictions of Travellers. It's eased pressure on Traveller families who face the dire health and wellbeing fallout of being moved on by force, and it's saved the local council a large amount of money. Couldn't other councils start following suit? "COME THE SPRING I'D GET ITCHY FEET, THEN GOOD-BYE TOWN AND SMOKY STREET. I'D WANT TO BE MOVING SOME PLACE ELSE"

'Moving On Song' by Ewan MacColl It was with great sadness that we learnt in December of the death of Sheila Stewart MBE, an inspirational, multitalented icon of Scottish Traveller culture. Travellers' Times offers our sincerest condolences to Sheila's family, and to all who have lost loved ones recently.

You can find the dates of the upcoming fairs on this page, and if you're getting in touch with us by post, please note that Travellers' Times has a new address (see the foot of the page). We're proud to be continuing our work training Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in journalism and media skills, so if you want to get involved in that, or if there's anything else – achievements, stories, event – that you think we should know about, give us a call on 01432 344039 or email us at travellerstimes@ruralmedia.co.uk.

All the best for the coming summer, The Travellers' Times team

FAIR DATES

KENILWORTH HORSE FAIR 26TH APRIL 2015 STOW FAIR 14TH MAY 2015 WICKHAM HORSE FAIR 20TH MAY 2015 DEREHAM HORSE FAIR 24TH MAY 2015 APPLEBY HORSE FAIR 24TH MAY 2015 HENLEY-IN-ARDEN HORSE FAIR 4TH JULY 2015 LEE GAP HORSE FAIR 24TH AUGUST 2015 BARNET HORSE FAIR 4-6TH SEPT 2015 LATTER LEE 17TH SEPT 2015 STOW FAIR OCT 2015 TBC



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COVER PHOTO BY PHILIP WOLMUTH: Yvonne MacNamara CEO of Traveller Movement PHOTO OPPOSITE BY DAMIAN LE BAS: Jake Bowers in his forge © National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups / Heritage Lottery Fund

INSIDE TRACK News from your world – in brief

The Traveller Movement is appealing a High Court decision concerning Channel 4's 'Big Fat Gypsy Weddings' programmes after a judge ruled there was "no clear evidence of harm attributable directly to the broadcasts". The Traveller Movement claimed in court that Ofcom's complaint procedures were unfair and biased towards broadcasters and that Ofcom had ignored expert evidence of the direct harm that the programmes had caused to Gypsy and Traveller children in schools across the UK.

THE High Court has found that Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, breached both English and Welsh equalities law and Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights with his controversial policy of 'recovering' Traveller site appeals. The judgement involved the cases of Ms Moore and Ms Coates, two Romany Gypsy women who sought planning permission for single pitch sites in the Green Belt. According to experts in the field of Gypsy and Traveller law, the judgement means that "the vast majority" of Gypsies and Travellers who have had successful appeals recovered and overturned by Mr Pickles' office may now be able to challenge those decisions in court.

FORMER Travellers' Times editor Jake Bowers is in the running to become the first ever Green MP for Hastings at this May's general election. "I'm a journalist and a blacksmith, but I'm also a father and a husband, and I've been campaigning on environmental and human rights issues all of my adult life," says Jake, pictured here at work in his forge.

BOXER Andy Lee made history for Gypsy boxing by winning the WBO world middleweight title in December. Lee, who fights out of Dublin, said after defeating Matt Koborov for the belt, "I don't know how long it's been since Ireland had a middleweight champion and I'm very proud to be champion from Ireland. It's what I've worked for my whole life". Elsewhere in boxing, Billy Joe Saunders (middleweight) and Tyson Fury (heavyweight) remain in firm contention for the world titles in their respective divisions.

THE No Mad Laws campaign, coordinated by Gypsies, Travellers and allies to highlight the disastrous effect that the Coalition Government's legal aid and judicial review reforms will have upon Gypsies and Travellers, was delivered to the Government in February. The petition states: "We the undersigned call upon the Government to ensure that Gypsies and Travellers who need advice and assistance under the legal aid scheme are able to receive it. Due to the legal aid reforms contained in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, Gypsies and Travellers on rented local authority sites are unable to get advice and assistance apart from in eviction cases and cases involving serious disrepair."



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TRAVELLERS ADVICE TEAM AT COMMUNITY LAW PARTNERSHIP

Provides advice, assistance and representation to Gypsies and *Travellers throughout England and Wales in the following areas:*

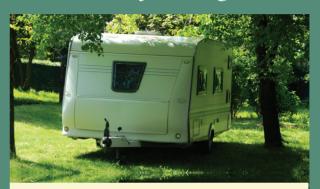
- EVICTIONS
- PLANNING MATTERS
- MATTERS INVOLVING RENTED SITES
- HOMELESSNESS
- OTHER RELATED MATTERS
- CASES INVOLVING BOAT-DWELLERS

Gypsies and Travellers on local authority sites are now also able to properly defend against eviction proceedings brought against them, after the Mobile Homes Act 1983 was brought into force on these sites.

IF ANY OF THESE ISSUES AFFECT YOU, YOU CAN **CALL THE GYPSY AND TRAVELLER HELPLINE**

0121 685 8677

Lines are open 9:00am – 5:00pm Monday to Friday



THE COMMUNITY LAW PARTNERSHIP LTD TEL: 0121 685 8595 (switchboard) FAX: 0121 236 5121 ADDRESS: 4th Floor Ruskin Chambers **191 Corporation Street** Birmingham B4 6RP EMAIL: office@communitylawpartnership.co.uk

LINCOLNSHIRE TRAVELLER INITIATIVE



Up and down the country, plenty of people are dedicated to helping people learn. But in Lincolnshire, there's one charity which has been taking the learning to the people. Their name is Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative, and their aim is to bring chances for lifelong learning to Gypsy and Traveller people. "On-site provision" is their specialty, and it's transformed the lives of many Gypsies and Travellers.

Courtney Smith is 16 years old. She's had support from the Prince's Trust and is full of praise for what Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative is doing. Courtney is now doing an Arts Award and is looking forward to studying hair and beauty at college.

"When Paul [of Lincolnshire Traveller Initiative] started coming here, I wasn't really bothered about doing anything like that. But Paul helped me with a lot of things. At the minute he is helping me with a book. My granddad passed away last June, and I'd done a book in school but I never got it

published. And Paul said to me if I ever wanted to do one about my Grandad he'd help me with it."

Paul Boucher of LTI explains what their work is all about. "We work with young Travellers who are on elective home education," he says. "It's a county council contract, but in actual fact we work with all young people that want to work with us," says Paul, who is currently working with over 50 people who are being home educated.

Courtney's story is one of many, says Paul. "We've got kids that have gone on to employment, we've got kids that have gone on to college," he says. LTI's work has been growing, and is now supported by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. "We're doing a lot of Prince's Trust work at the minute, getting qualifications for young Travellers that'll gain them access to college."

Projects like Our Big Real Gypsy Lives, Sew Into Fashion and the Traveller's Recipe Book have seen more and more Travellers getting involved with LTI's work. The TT team wishes Lincolnshire Travellers Initiative and the Learning Bus all the best for what promises to be a very busy future!



PLANS TO CHANGE THE DEFINITION OF "GYPSY" CONDEMNED





The government's plans to change the legal definition a Gypsy or Traveller were heavily criticised at a special meeting in the House of Lords this spring.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles – who was recently chastised in the High Court for his anti-Traveller policies – and his department have discussed restricting the legal definition of "Gypsy" to mean only someone who is permanently travelling.

Given the national shortage of temporary stopping places, changing the definition of "Gypsy" could potentially leave Gypsies and Travellers facing a choice between breaking the law by staying on unauthorized sites, and losing legal recognition of their ethnicity.

The plans have been decried by the Traveller Movement – which organied the special meeting – as "counterproductive and likely to increase unauthorised encampments".

Josie O'Driscoll, of the Traveller Movement advisory group, said that if the proposed change in definition goes ahead, it will lead to more Travellers taking to the road in reaction. Lord Avebury said, "if [Mr] Pickles does go down that route, he will be violating



several international conventions to which the UK is a party."

Siobhan Spencer MBE of the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups also expressed serious concern about the government's plans to redefine "Gypsy", which were unveiled by Brandon Lewis, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, last year.

Ruth Barnett, who was rescued from the Nazis by a Kindertransport to Britain before the outbreak of World War II because of her Jewish heritage, said it was "absolutely outrageous that these people should be defined from above without consultation".

Trudy Aspinwall of Save the Children spoke about the differences between England and Wales, where the Welsh Assembly has reintroduced the duty of local authorities to provide sites for Travellers. The Welsh government has also incorporated a wide definition of Gypsies and Travellers into Welsh law, making room for people who may have ceased travelling due to old age, bad health or family reasons, but are still Gypsies and Travellers all the same.

Also at the meeting, Lord Avebury confirmed he had suggested that the

government's new solution to the housing crisis in South East England could include 1% of all new "garden city" homes being pitches for Gypsies and Travellers.

The meeting also heard how fresh approaches to temporary stopping by Travellers can reduce tensions and save considerable amounts of money, compared with the traditional cycle of evictions from place to place.

Rob McCartney of Leeds City Council and Helen Jones of Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange told how the once-neglected Kidacre Street site in Leeds had lain derelict since 1985, but has now been renovated to provide new temporary pitches.

Since the site has been refurbished, the city has experienced a 17-fold reduction in the number of evictions that have taken place. Helen Jones said that councils should require actual "evidence of the harmful effect of Traveller sites", rather than just opinion, when planning their sites policy.

It was also crucial to listen to the concerns of settled people and businesses that may have had bad experiences with unauthorised sites, but likewise to be clear about the possible advantages for local business, such as increased trade.

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FOCUS ON PHOTOGRAPHY *By Julie Colman*

The Travellers' Times team were thrilled to see so many friends old and new at the TT website launch back in November. As well as a focus group meeting and the screening of the award-winning Roma film, An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker, we were delighted to display collections of work from local Herefordshire Traveller families, and photographers Elisabeth Blanchet and Sophie Brocks (pictured). Sophie's portrait of the

Ward Family was shortlisted for the Taylor Wessing prize and was exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery. Sophie has worked for a number of years with the Traveller and Gypsy communities, where she has built up strong relationships with many of families. Following requests Sophie recently started taking commissions for special moments such as Holy Communion, weddings, engagements and family portraits.



Speaking at the event local Herefordshire Councillor Nick Nenadich said: 'Having grown up and lived alongside local Gypsy families here in Herefordshire in the 1970s, I can honestly say they helped me discover many old country ways and traditions I would never have had the opportunity to experience. It was local living history and has deep connections with our very heritage. Far from being outsiders, I believe deeply that they are a vital part of this county's history, its heritage and should be a part of our county's future.' Please feel free to call **Sophie** on **07961 353 353** or take a look at the website to see some of her work. She is willing to travel anywhere in the UK.



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FOCUS ON OPERATION TRAVELLER VOTE



osie Toohey is a 17-year-old Irish Traveller. Since September, she has been part of the Traveller Movement's community internship programme, and now she's hard at work on Operation Traveller Vote.

"I really enjoy it," says Rosie. "Operation Traveller Vote is the biggest campaign we've got at the moment. I've been involved in the annual conference, youth meetings, I've been to the Houses of Parliament," she says. " And when I finish my internship I want to go to college and do an access course, then go on to university and study community."

Rosie is one of the new generation of Travellers who are going straight to the corridors of power to find out how politics works, and how it can be used to help win better treatment for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

- "The Traveller community are still very much outside the political process," says Traveller Movement CEO Yvonne MacNamara. "With the stereotypes that were bandied about in the run up to the last general election, we felt it was time that the Traveller community themselves took very much of a lead.
- "Travellers are the makers of their own destiny, in a sense. In areas that are marginal, and there are very large Traveller communities, they have the power to swing that vote. And by swinging that vote, they can be going in and demanding better provision in terms of accommodation, education and health, in relation to other communities," says Yvonne.
- "There's no reason why we can't have politicians within the Gypsy Roma Traveller community. Because the abilities and skills are there, but there are people who don't feel that they can stand up and be counted yet, for whatever reason. So what we wanted to do was challenge a lot of the hate speech and prejudice that actually is out there."
- The Traveller Movement are encouraging as many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people as possible to register to vote by International Roma Day, the 8th of April. So here are some tips about registering to make sure YOUR vote gets counted.

REGISTERING YOUR VOTE

It is very simple to register your vote and you can do so at:

- Your local Electoral Registration Office in your local authority
- Online at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk where you can also perform a postcode search to find your registration office. If you are a British citizen or an Irish or Commonwealth citizen resident in the UK you can vote in UK Parliamentary elections.
- Citizens of other EU countries cannot elect MPs, but can vote in any of the other elections that take place in Britain.
- People with term-time or temporary addresses can still register to vote.

VOTING BY POST

 If you want to send your vote in by post, you can apply for a postal vote – you don't need to give a reason. A postal vote can be sent to your home address or to any other address that you choose.

PROXY VOTING

 If you can't vote in person, you can ask someone to vote on your behalf, and tell them who to vote for. This is called a proxy vote. When you apply for a proxy vote, you have to give a valid reason. You might need support from someone like your doctor or employer. There are different application forms depending on your situation.

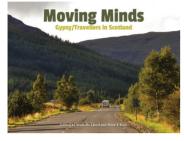
You can find out more and also apply for a postal or proxy vote by going online at www.aboutmyvote.co.uk or by contacting your local electoral registration office

Read our interview with Yvonne MacNamara in full, and much more, online at www.travellerstimes.org.uk



BOOK REVIEWS





Moving Minds

Edited by Michelle Lloyd and Peter E Ross 141 pages Published by MECOPP Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project)

Moving Minds is an anthology of stories and photographs that wonderfully demonstrate the rich Gypsy/Traveller culture and heritage, and the pride and determination that keep it alive. These anecdotes from individual Gypsy/Travellers and photographs from Chattery (Our Lives in Bits and Bobs) recall vivid moments in time and memories- both good, and not so good- of life as a Gypsy/Traveller. Real life accounts help to dispel myths and the lack of understanding of this community.

The book is not just about Gypsy/Travellers: it is also about humanity, and many people reading this book, Gypsy/Traveller or not, will find much to empathize with and reflect on.

The book is based on MECOPP's Moving Minds exhibition, originally created for the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival, a Scotland-wide festival which uses the arts to challenge perceptions about mental health and promote wellbeing. The exhibition has subsequently been on display in arts venues, offices and libraries across Scotland, including the Scottish Parliament.

You can buy the book online by visiting www.mecopp.org.uk or email michelle@mecopp.org.uk



Hearing the Voices of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

Edited by Andrew Ryder, Sarah Cemlyn and Thomas Acton 258 pages, paperback Published by Policy Press, University of Bristol

This book looks at the various ways that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and their supporters have fought for equal rights down the decades, from the 1960s and the Gypsy Council, to today, and the work of the Traveller Law Reform Coalition, the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups, the Traveller Movement, FFT, the Travellers Aid Trust and others.

It covers issues as varied as education, the importance of Traveller women activists, and the government's attitude to Roma people from mainland Europe.

The 20 people who contributed to this book are all seasoned champions of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller rights, many of them from the communities.

Each deserves a mention here for their commitment to the Gypsy struggle: Thomas Acton, Susan Alexander, Neil Ansell, Sarah Cemlyn, Gary Craig, John Day, Margaret Greenfields, Sylvia Ingmire, Arthur Ivatts OBE, Angus McCabe, Yvonne MacNamara, Sarah Mann, Peter Mercer MBE, Iulius Rostas, Andrew Ryder, Maggie Smith-Bendell BEM, Siobhan Spencer MBE, Natalie Stables, Rob Torkington and Sally Woodbury.

SHEILA STEWART



Sheila Stewart MBE, who died on the 9th December last year aged 79, was a Scottish Traveller, one of the famous 'Stewarts of Blair' and a renowned singer, author and storyteller. Born in a stable in Perthshire in 1935, she rose to become one of the most recognizable figures of Scottish cultural life.

Stewart wrote several books including *The Life of Belle Stewart*, about her mother, who was known as "The Queen among the Heather". Her uncle, Donald Stewart, was a major influence on her singing: she recalled how if she didn't sing the way he wanted, he would clap his hands and say "Shut up! You're not ready for it. We'll try you with that in a few months' time." In 1982, five years after the death of her husband, Ian MacGregor, Sheila sang the 'Moving On Song' in front of Pope John Paul II and more than 300,000 onlookers at Glasgow's Bellahouston Park. She lectured at Princeton and Harvard Universities, performed at the Smithsonian Institute and worked with many other famed musicians including Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger.

Sheila Stewart was a long-term defender of Traveller rights and sat on the Secretary of State for Scotland's advisory committee on Travellers. She is survived by her children, lan, Hamish, Heather and Gregor, as well as 13 grandchildren.

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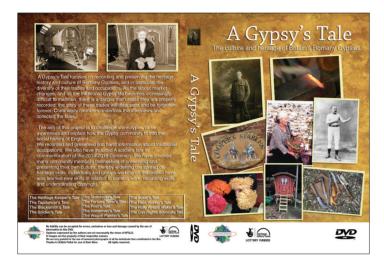
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A GYPSY'S TALE



"I've done it for them people who are all dead and gone, because if it wasn't for them, these wagons wouldn't be here,"



says Gordon Boswell at his Romany Museum in A Gypsy's Tale, a new DVD from the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups. A Gypsy's Tale contains 12 short films telling the story of traditional Gypsy trades from blacksmithing to boxing, wreathmaking to wagon-painting, alongside more recent work such as poetry and civil rights advocacy. "For Gypsies everywhere, work and tradition are important issues. They walk a fine line between learning new skills and trying to preserve old ones," says Tom McCready, Romany Gypsy and Heritage Officer of the National Federation. On the centenary of World War I, the DVD also tells the stories of Gypsy men like John Cunningham, who won the Victoria Cross at the Battle of the Somme. All the work on the DVD was carried out by people from the Gypsy community, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. To order a copy, visit www.nationalgypsytravellerfederation.org or call 01629 732744, between 10am and 3pm Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays.



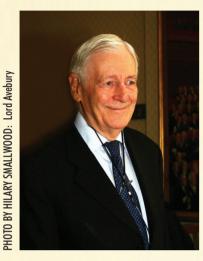
CONGRATULATIONS to our lucky competition winner Shannon Price from Peterborough who has won the 'Romance' Series set of four figurines!

Shannon's entry: "I would love to win these dolls for my mum as she has 4 girls – we're all married now and got babies of our own. I would love to give these to her so that she could be reminded of her 4 girls no matter where we are. She loves dolls and collects them and I know she would cry her eyes out if she won."

Shannon was over the moon when we announced she had won and surprised her mum with the figurines as a gift on Mother's Day. Visit the English Ladies Co or Travellers' Times website to find out what happened!

VISIT The English Ladies Co website www.englishladiesfigurines.com to see their full collection of beautifully hand-crafted figurines.

THE LONG FIGHT FOR EQUALITY Lord Avebury and Trudy Aspinwall



LORD AVEBURY: LIBERAL DEMOCRAT PEER

When I was in the Commons, Gypsies used to pass through my constituency on the way down to the hop fields. I also knew Norman Dodds, the great defender of Gypsy rights, and when he died I sort of took up the mantle of looking after Gypsies.

"In 1968, I chose the Caravan Sites Bill as my project, and part of that was to do with preventing the eviction of Gypsies from caravan sites without proper notice and procedure. And

local authorities were obliged under the Act to provide sites for Gypsies in their constituency. So any Traveller who lived in Orpington was entitled to go to the council and say 'Please give me a pitch on your site'.

"All this was fifty years ago, and we haven't made that much progress, because unfortunately there are still huge numbers of Gypsies who are not accommodated on proper sites. They try and get planning permission and all sorts of obstacles are put in their way. The Secretary of State has 'called in' all the applications by Gypsies in the green belt, and stymied them, and I am glad to say the courts have found that illegal.

"We passed the Equality Act in 2010, but Gypsies and Travellers still encounter prejudice and hatred. And this we have to conquer. If we're going to pretend that we are an equal society, the rights of Gypsies and Travellers are just as important as the rights of Black people, or Muslims, or any other minority. So we still have a huge task to undertake."

TRUDY ASPINWALL: PROGRAMME OFFICER, SAVE THE CHILDREN WALES

"Fifteen years ago, one of the first pieces of work I did as a children's right's officer for Save the Children was to go out and meet Gypsy and Traveller children in Wales, and talk to them about whether the Welsh Government had done what they said they were going to do in relation to improving education for Gypsies and Travellers.

"There have been big improvements in some areas, but the children and young people I work with now are still talking about those same things that were happening 15 years ago. It's just taken a long time to actually sit up and listen, and for Gypsy and Traveller communities to actually start using the legal tools that there are to challenge some of the stuff that's happened in the past.

"Gypsy and Traveller communities are as badly affected by the welfare reforms as lots of other communities, so it's really, really important that people get involved and vote. I would also say that it's probably as important for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales to vote in the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections."

Watch the full interviews with Lord Avebury and Trudy Aspinwall and much more online at www.TravellersTimes.org.uk



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