

THE MAGAZINE FOR GYPSIES, ROMA & TRAVELLERS

# THE TRAVELLERS' TIMES

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## BILLY WELCH AT APPLEBY FAIR

P3 NEWS | P6 'GYPSY KIDS' | P7 RACISM RESEARCH |  
P8 CHILDREN IN CARE: A TT INVESTIGATION | P9 BILLY WELCH  
AT APPLEBY 2017 | P9 YOUTH VOICES AT TRAVELLERS' TIMES





## EDITORIAL

By TT Editor Mike Doherty

Welcome to the 62nd edition of The Travellers' Times Magazine. I hope you like what you find in here.

As each issue of the TT magazine takes shape, a theme emerges. 'Belonging' is important to Billy Welch, Shera Rom, who is on our front cover and features in our interview article on page 9. Billy Welch tells us about Appleby Fair that, "when we come to this ground, and we sit around campfires, it gives us a sense of place, a sense of belonging, a sense of ancestry. We really feel like, for once a year, we have arrived home." So the theme for this issue is belonging and home.

On page 3, we cover 'negotiated stopping', a solution that works for both settled and Traveller communities. On page 14 we talk to Ebony Elliot for whom the stability of a negotiated stopping pitch in Leeds helped her to feel the stability of a home and gave her the chance to do well at school.

We have an interview with 'Gypsy Kids' Series Producer Nic Guttridge on page 6 and on page 12 we have Ben Bennett – an ambitious young Romany Gypsy and campaigner, who told millions of viewers of ITV's This Morning breakfast show that he wanted to become Prime Minister, and if he did, his 'home' would be his trailer parked outside Number 10 Downing Street – where the Prime Minister traditionally lives. Great stuff!

Many Gypsies and Travellers want to settle. As Billy Welch says, "Eighty per cent of our people live in houses now, and they have got businesses and they do not do a lot of travelling," so permanent Traveller sites and decent bricks and mortar housing are needed. Some of this is provided by the council and some council Traveller sites are decent, yet on page 5 we report on two council Traveller sites – one in Wiltshire and one in Hull – where the residents are battling for better conditions.

On page 4 we have research showing how many councils are failing to plan for private and council Traveller sites. Friends, Families and Travellers, the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups and London Gypsies and Travellers say that councils need to do better.

On page 9 we have an investigation on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in care. How many are there? What can

### THE THEME FOR THIS ISSUE IS BELONGING AND HOME

parents do to stop this happening? Is it always appropriate to take a child from its 'home'?

Then finally, on pages 10s – 14 we have Youth Travellers' Times – or YTT – where Gypsies and Travellers between the age of 11 and 24 talk about their experiences of life, home, belonging and their aspirations for the future. Many talk about the racism they face on a daily basis and on page 7 we cover the Traveller Movement research that lays bare the daily burden of the 'last acceptable racism' that many Gypsies and Travellers have to shoulder.

Let's not forget Gypsies and Travellers who are not in any way 'home'. A couple of weeks ago I interviewed, for the Travellers' Times website (travellerstimes.org.uk), Amanda Reed, a Romany Gypsy woman who runs the heritage and family history Facebook page 'Gypsyville'. Amanda told me that she visits many Gypsies and Travellers in prison and youth custody. If you are in a Traveller prisoner group and want to get your voice heard, write to Travellers' Times and tell us a little bit about your group.

#### LETTERS TO:

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We will try to fit you into the next issue of The Travellers' Times Magazine.

## 'NEGOTIATED STOPPING' SAVES LEEDS AUTHORITIES NEARLY A 1/4 MILLION POUNDS



PHOTO: © LEEDS GATE

ST HILDA'S NEGOTIATED STOPPING SITE IN LEEDS

The report, which covers three years of the years that Leeds City Council has used negotiated stopping, states that: "Negotiated Stopping was broadly consistent with [a total potential annual savings range of] between £190,640 and £238,350 in local authority and policing costs combined."

The report goes on to state: "Negotiated Stopping produced better community cohesion."

Helen Jones, CEO of Leeds GATE, told the Travellers' Times that negotiated stopping was a "locally developed method of positively managing unauthorised encampment – which has been taking place in Leeds.

"Negotiating stopping is not intended to address the need for permanent local pitch provision for Gypsy and Traveller families, neither does it provide fixed 'transit' site provision for mobile families," said Helen Jones.

A pioneering way of dealing with 'roadside encampments by Gypsy and Traveller people' saved Leeds City Council and police nearly a quarter of a million pounds in legal and clear up fees a year whilst improving "community cohesion", says a new report.

The report, published by De Montfort University and seen by the Travellers' Times, gives a big thumbs up to Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange's role in coming up with negotiated stopping to transform the relationship between Leeds mobile Travellers, local settled people, and Leeds City Council and police.

'Negotiated stopping' is an alternative to the more usual 'zero tolerance' approach and consists of a contract between mobile Travellers and councils that saves authorities money in clear up and legal fees, rewards good behaviour by Travellers living on roadside encampments and provides household rubbish and waste disposal from the council in return. The council also directs Travellers away from contentious public spaces – like playing fields – and onto more appropriate council land in return for a longer stay for the Travellers involved.

It has been described by Gypsy and Traveller campaigners as a "no-brainer", because a zero tolerance approach to unauthorised camps means that every time a council evicts a camp – they immediately create another one somewhere else.

"However it is an immediately available response to unauthorised encampment by mobile Gypsy and Traveller families which is significantly more cost effective; uses existing (police and council) staff capacity more sustainably; directly and speedily resolves issues of nuisance for local people; and, by delivering increased community cohesion and addressing nuisance, reduces local objection to much needed permanent pitch provision," she added.

The Travellers' Times has visited Leeds and talked to Leeds GATE, local Gypsies and Travellers, the Leeds police and council, and urges all councils to implement negotiated stopping instead of using wasteful and inhumane 'evict, evict, evict' zero tolerance approaches.

The TT believes that zero tolerance approaches to Traveller camps punish both good and bad behaviour by mobile Travellers and are the source of a lot of the current tension between Gypsy and Traveller people and non-Gypsy and Traveller people.

This year there has been an alarming rise in violence and hate towards mobile Travellers – which then affects all Gypsies and Travellers regardless of whether they travel or not because of the way it is reported in the media – and that unless councils start using negotiated stopping and similar approaches, there is a potential tragedy waiting to happen.



RURAL MEDIA CHARITY

COVER PHOTO: Billy Welch at Appleby Fair © Mike Doherty/TT

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# COUNCILS FAILING TO PLAN ENOUGH NEW TRAVELLER SITES SAYS NEW RESEARCH



PHOTO: © MARY TURNER

In the South East of England, FFT found that only ten councils out of 66 had identified a full five year supply, five local authorities had no identified need for sites, and that by the year 2033, a total of 1,745 additional pitches are needed in the South East of England.

In the East and West Midlands, the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups found that out of 70 councils across the two regions, 15 have identified a full five year supply of specific deliverable sites, 10 local planning authorities had not yet identified a five year pitch requirement figure and that 1,675 extra pitches are needed by the year 2034.

London Gypsies and Travellers found that only five out of the 33 London councils had identified a sufficient supply of land to achieve their local Traveller pitch target. In all but one case this had been through extensions to existing sites rather than planning for new sites.

Researchers for the NFGLG said that although some councils were doing good work on Traveller site planning, many were “failing to make sufficient progress.

“Provision of a five year supply of specific deliverable sites to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers should not be an impossible task, but the importance of it cannot be underestimated.”

The report on the NFGLG and FFT research can be found on the Travellers’ Times website in the accommodation resources section at [Travellerstimes.org.uk](http://Travellerstimes.org.uk). The separate LGT report can be found on their website at [londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk](http://londongypsiesandtravellers.org.uk).

Research by three leading Gypsy and Traveller charities has shown that councils are falling foul of government planning rules by failing to plan for enough permanent Traveller pitches and sites.

The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups (NFGLG), Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT), and London Gypsies and Travellers (LGT) investigated whether councils are complying with government Traveller planning policies that require them to identify a five year supply of Traveller sites to meet their local Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs.

Councils are meant to identify land that can be either developed by themselves for public rented sites, or bought and developed by private Gypsy and Traveller site developers.

# FFT FLAG UP TRAVELLING QUESTIONS

FFT have raised concerns about questionnaires from councils that assess the need for more Traveller sites in their area asking Gypsy and Traveller people about how much they ‘travel’.

The questionnaires are sometimes called ‘Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments’, and whilst FFT say that filling

in the forms is a “vital” part of the process of providing more land for Traveller sites, they warn that questions about ‘travelling’ should be handled carefully.

They add that because the definition of ‘Gypsy and Traveller’ for planning purposes was changed by the government in 2015, only those that ‘travel’ for part of

the year will be added to the assessment of the need for more Traveller sites.

They advise that Gypsies and Travellers confronted with those questions should include all travel to fairs and shows and seek advice from FFT on **01273 234 777** or visit their website at [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)

# I BATTLED THE COUNCIL REALLY HARD



PHOTO: © TT/MIKE DOHERTY

SHARON HIGH AND FORMER AND CURRENT WILTSHIRE TRAVELLER CHAPLAINS



MARNIE SMITH AND FAMILY



HULL INCINERATOR

“No one listens to you and in the end you just give up. That’s what the council want you to do, so that’s what you do,” says Sharon High, who has been a resident of Oak Tree Fields Traveller site, near Salisbury, for 27 years.

Sitting in her daughter’s caravan with her daughter and grandson, Sharon tells the Travellers’ Times about her fight for a better home to live in and lists the terrible conditions that the residents of Oak Tree Fields have had to put up with for decades.

“It’s the drainage and the flooding, the sewerage coming up through the drains, the dangerous electricity, the damp and cold in the sheds and the rats,” she says.

Sharon says that it’s the same for most of the plots on the site which houses about 30 children under the age of six.

“I’ve been around and I have seen some beautiful caravan sites,” says Sharon. “Why do we have to live like this in this day and age?”

The Travellers’ Times has seen documents from the council that show that Wiltshire Council did apply for millions of pounds from the government to refurbish all its Traveller sites, but they failed to finish the job and had to return the money. This left the residents of Oak Tree Fields living in conditions that are detrimental to their health and dangerous. They have tried

their best to fix problems themselves, but like any other council tenant, they need the support of their council to keep their homes safe and healthy. That’s what they pay their taxes and rent for. And there are many public Traveller sites just like Oak Tree Fields up and down the country.

The residents of Bedford Street in Hull, the 2017 UK City of Culture, were reasonably content when their council refurbished the site around 15 years ago.

Geordie Smith proudly shows me round his plot, his chalet and his day shed and told me how it used to be before the work was done.

The problem is that life on Bedford Street – and other nearby sites like Bankside – was ruined when the council gave the go-ahead for the construction of a massive incinerator plant on the other side of their street.

A similar plant had been planned for elsewhere in Hull, but a successful campaign by local residents and the environment charity Friends of the Earth, meant that it wasn’t built. And now the Gypsies are lumbered with an incinerator almost literally on their doorstep.

Although the Bedford Street Traveller site residents are concerned about the ongoing construction and worried about the potential degradation to the

quality of air that they will have to live with when it starts operating in about a year’s time – from the lorries that will feed it and from the potential emissions from the plant – most want to stay living where they are and do not trust the council to move them elsewhere. However, Marnie Smith and her family, who live on the Bedford Street site nearest the incinerator and who are probably the worst affected, do not want to move.

She tells the Travellers’ Times that the construction has seriously affected her health and completely disrupted her children’s schooling – especially when it was running late into the night. But she says she has contacted Hull Council and got nowhere.

“One night we had enough,” says Marnie Smith. “All the mothers and children got together and picketed the site to stop the construction vehicles going in.”

The direct action worked and the construction now ends every day at a more reasonable time. But the residents of the nearby Traveller sites want more engagement and dialogue with the construction company and the council, as they fear for their future health and safety.

By Mike Doherty



# I HOPE THAT 'GYPSY KIDS' WILL HELP CHANGE OPINIONS SAYS SERIES PRODUCER NIC GUTTRIDGE



PHOTO: MARGARET © KNICKERBOCKERGLORY



JAMES AND THOMAS © KNICKERBOCKERGLORY

The Travellers' Times has been contacted by many of our Gypsy and Traveller readers who watched the second series of CH5's 'Gypsy Kids'. The overwhelming verdict was that this series made a difference and may have helped to challenge racism towards Gypsies and Travellers.

At its peak, 'Gypsy Kids – Their Secret World', reached over one million viewers and also produced a vast amount of unique and positive coverage in the UK press and TV media – plus (as is always unfortunately the case) some negative coverage, particularly on social media.

Here, the Travellers' Times talks to Nic Guttridge, the series producer from Knickerbockerglory, the TV production company that made the show on commission from Channel 5.

Children rarely get the opportunity to have their voices properly heard on mainstream prime time telly, and it's been great to be able to give that opportunity to so many Traveller and Gypsy kids... says Nic Guttridge.

It's very easy to make sweeping statements about a community and to thoughtlessly expect people to conform to some sort of stereotype. As a 'gorger' I can now clearly see how one-dimensional the media's coverage of Traveller issues often is – but by spending so much time with so many different children we've been able to reflect an entirely different reality revolving around their wide-ranging interests, ideas and ambitions.

I can't say it's always been easy, but then filming with children always presents its challenges! But the energy and confidence of these kids has been amazing to work with – and their intelligence has also been striking. Whether it's come from lessons learned at school or in the school of life, these are all undeniably smart children and our whole team has taken great pleasure in bringing their stories to a wider audience.

Nine out of ten Gypsy and Traveller children have experience of being bullied. That is an extraordinarily shocking statistic and, sadly, it's backed up by the experiences of the children we've filmed with, who talk about the horrible things people have said and done to them as if it's just a normal part of life.

The first programme in series two covered the story of nine-year-old Margaret, whose family was living by the roadside and being constantly moved on by the authorities. As the programme unfolded I was stunned by the amount of racist abuse that was being displayed on Twitter in response to what was being seen on screen. People seemed to feel entitled to put forward truly vicious thoughts without any fear of consequences. I've heard members of the community talk about attacks on Gypsies and Travellers as being 'the last acceptable sort of racism' – and there may well be something in this.

The community's negative reputation is maybe not helped by some anti-social or illegal actions carried out by some its members – but all of this has been focused on and magnified by the press and has come to be seen as representative of the whole community. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that this has to be nonsense.

There's good and bad in every community and, in my experience, the good massively overwhelms the bad. For whatever reason this message hasn't got through to much of the wider public, but I would love to think that our series will help to open people's minds and change opinions. It was reassuring to see that, in amongst the stupid abusive Tweets about the series, there have also been many words of support for the community. So, perhaps we have already done a little bit of good.

If there is a third series, I very much hope that the community will embrace what we are doing so that we can bring the stories of many more amazing Traveller and Gypsy kids to the screen.

# NEW RESEARCH SHOWS SHOCKING EXTENT OF 'LAST ACCEPTABLE RACISM'



PHOTO: © MIKE DOHERTY/TRAVELLERS' TIMES

PATRICK O'LEARY SPEAKS ABOUT RACISM AT THE HOUSE OF LORDS, WESTMINSTER

New research published and presented in the House of Lords by the Traveller Movement shows that a shocking four out of five Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have experienced a hate crime or hate speech.

The Traveller Movement's research, 'The last acceptable form of racism?', sheds new light into Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people's experience of prejudice and discrimination in areas such as education, employment, healthcare and access to services. It also reveals the full extent to which hate crime impacts on community members' everyday lives, the coping mechanisms they use, and how likely they are to seek help.

Based on surveys of 214 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, the TM found that "the experience of racism and discrimination was so common for these communities that it has become almost normalised and many accept it as a fact of everyday life."

Reacting to the research, Irish Traveller Patrick O'Leary, who won the case 17 years ago that established Irish Traveller ethnicity in UK law, said that the racism "had gone on for far too long".

"When I won my case 17 years ago, I stood on the steps outside the court and said 'for the first time in our lives we feel we can proudly and publicly tell everyone we are Irish Travellers' but this research shows my people continue to suffer racism every single day and still have to hide who they are to try and stop it happening," said Patrick O'Leary.

"And what breaks my heart most of all is that too many of us see it as a fact of life and think there's nothing we can do about it," he added.

"But if we are going to be free from the racism we suffer we have to show, using the courts, that we will no longer stand for it.

"I hope this work by the Traveller Movement inspires more Gypsies, more Travellers and more Roma to come forward and challenge the racism that has gone on too long." The Liberal Democrat Peer and Traveller Movement Patron, Baroness Brinton, wrote a foreword for the research report and said that; "If action is not taken, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers will continue to face discrimination and will sadly see it as a fact of their daily lives.

"The pervasive discriminatory behaviour directed toward Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people is borne out of ignorance and is usually based on ill-informed cultural stereotypes," said Baroness Brinton.

"This lack of understanding or cultural awareness causes significant damage to the trust GRT people have in British society."

The Lib Dem Peer added: "This is precisely why education is so important. Prejudice and hate is not a characteristic we are born with: it is a learned behaviour... It is high time that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month was supported by the Department for Education and rolled out in schools across the country."

## THE TRAVELLER MOVEMENT RESEARCH SHOWS THAT:

4 OUT OF 5 (77%) OF GYPSIES, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS surveyed have experienced hate speech or a hate crime.

HALF OF GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER people have experienced discrimination in the workplace.

77% OF GYPSIES, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS tried to hide their ethnicity to avoid racism when dealing with non-Gypsy and Traveller people.

70% OF GYPSIES, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS said they had experienced prejudice in education.



# GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER CHILDREN IN CARE – A TRAVELLERS' TIMES INVESTIGATION



PHOTO: © NATASHA QUARMBY

A young Traveller mother crying out the name of her child through a megaphone stands outside the Royal Courts of Justice in the heart of London in a social media video clip seen by The Travellers' Times. Her amplified pleas for help competing with the London traffic, she is surrounded by a small knot of protesters and supporters who wave banners and hand out leaflets to city workers and tourists as they scurry past the imposing entrance to the big stone palace that is the beating heart of British justice.

The heart-rending scene – of a mother calling for her lost child and claiming “forced adoption” – has fuelled a massive Gypsy and Traveller social media campaign, and this is happening as statistical evidence emerges of what appears to be an alarming rise in the number of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children being taken into care – a figure which could include “forced adoptions”.

According to research by Dan Allen and Martin Naughton, two social work academics who run the Traveller and Information Romani Advice Network (TRAIN) which provides support for parents involved with social services, there has been a “disproportionate” rise in the number of GRT children taken into care when compared with children from other ethnic groups. Their research, using Department for Education figures, shows that in 2009 there were a total of 20 Irish Traveller children in the care of social services. In 2016 there were 90. With Gypsy and Roma children the numbers start at 30 children in care in 2009 which had risen to 280 in 2016.

The Travellers' Times spoke to Dan Allen, who says that social work “isn't very good at working with GRT communities generally”. “We have social services who are in fear of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities because they are going by anti-Gypsy stereotypes that are all- pervasive, and now we

have also got Travellers who fear any contact with social workers,” says Dan Allen.

A knowledge of the community amongst social workers is essential, says Dan, to stop miscarriages of justice. Dan Allen also says that some social workers can draw on prejudicial and stereotypical notions about Gypsies and Travellers when giving evidence to family law courts.

He adds that social workers, “are under pressure” with “massive case-workloads and short timescales”, and may be in danger of “escalating” cases when more preventative work could be done with the family to reduce the risk of harm to the child.

Dan Allen is backed up by Friends, Families and Travellers, who say that anecdotal evidence from their casework suggests that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families are more likely to be subject to care proceedings, that the professionals involved often have little or no understanding of Gypsy and Traveller culture and that Gypsy and Traveller children are more likely to be forcibly adopted than the wider population.

To try to get to the bottom of the alarming statistics, the Travellers' Times spoke to Yvonne MacNamara, Chief Executive of the Traveller Movement.

Yvonne MacNamara explained that it is important to understand the statistics have to be taken in the broader context and that there are a total of 70,440 children being ‘looked after’ (in care etc.).

“Out of this overall figure, and this is of all the children in England who are in care, 0.12% are of Irish Traveller heritage and 0.4% are Gypsy/Roma. When you are talking about small numbers such as these, it is particularly unhelpful if you hear ‘percentage increases’ bandied about because even one or two more children can seem significantly more in percentage terms,” she said.

She added that the current government statistics did not differentiate between adoption, fostering, care orders or placements – or how long the children remained in the care of social services.

Dan Allen, the Traveller Movement and Friends, Families and Travellers all advise parents to seek professional help if they are contacted by social services – and the sooner the better.

If you are or know of a Gypsy or Traveller family experiencing social work involvement and who would like support or advice, visit the TRAIN website ([train-uk.com](http://train-uk.com)) or call the Friends, Families and Travellers national helpline on **01273 234 777** or the Traveller Movement on **0207 607 2002**.

# BILLY WELCH AT APPLEBY 2017



PHOTO: GOD'S COUNTRY © MIKE DOHERTY

Appleby to the Gypsies and Travellers is unique and it is our Mecca,” says Billy Welch, the Shera Rom – or ‘Head Gypsy’ – who has been central to the organisation of Appleby Horse Fair, in Cumbria, for decades.

I caught up with Billy Welch on Fair Hill, only one part of the massive Appleby camping ground, on the Friday of Appleby 2017 last June. He is sitting on a camp chair outside his trailer tucked away behind one of the main gates that will become choc-a-bloc with traffic the next day.

“This is the most important event on planet earth in the Gypsy and Traveller calendar,” says Billy Welch. “The reason being that everywhere we go in the world, we are never really made welcome. Even in Darlington, where we have lived for 200 years, we still get people saying to us ‘why don't you lot go back to where you come from?’ So we never really feel like we belong, but when we come to this ground, and we sit around campfires, it gives us a sense of place, a sense of belonging, a sense of ancestry. We really feel like, for once a year, we have arrived home.

“We want to preserve our traditions and our culture for future generations and coming here reminds us of that,” says

Billy Welch. “Eighty per cent of our people live in houses now, and they have got businesses and they do not do a lot of travelling, so it gets the young'uns back and it refreshes the minds. It's where the young ladies meet their future husbands and the young men do their courting. It's not just about the horses, there are lots of other little traditions connected to Appleby. And it's important that the children know and understand it. At the end of the day it's their heritage and their culture.”

Billy Welch gestures for me to look behind him. Fair Hill undulates away from us, lined with its ruts and tracks and dotted with its colourful cars, caravans, vardos, tethered horses, vans and trucks, and the land dips into a valley and then abruptly rises into the slate grey/green Cumbrian fells and crags in the distance. Overhead a grey cloud-drenched sky scuds over the hill and away towards the fells. “Just look around you – it's God's country,” says Billy Welch. “It's beautiful. It's breath-taking and it's hard to explain. You have got to come here and witness it for yourselves.”

To Billy Welch, Appleby is not only sacred, running it is an obligation to his people and a promise to his father.

“My ancestors have been coming here for centuries and we have always been – unofficially – the guardians of the fair,”

says Billy Welch. “In the eighties it grew into such a huge event, such a volume of people flowing into the town, it needed more organisation. So my father got involved more – as a Shera Rom – with the fair, and more involved with the council and the police, and they started to coordinate it a bit more. When he died I inherited that responsibility. He raised me to do it. Even on his deathbed he said promise me you will look after the fair. I said there are a few things, Dad, I am going to do different. He said you run it how you want to do it but promise me you will look after it and preserve it for future generations and that's what I am doing. So I am going to take the good with the bad and I can't walk away from it, it's a promise I made with my father and an obligation to my people.

“If things are not perfect, as I have got older, I have learnt things are never perfect,” he says.

Billy Welch does not look like he is shouldering any burden today. In fact he looks relaxed and at home. I ask him how long he thinks Appleby Fair will continue.

“As long as there is a planet earth,” says Billy Welch, “Appleby Fair will exist.”

**By Mike Doherty**



# YOUTH TRAVELLERS' TIMES

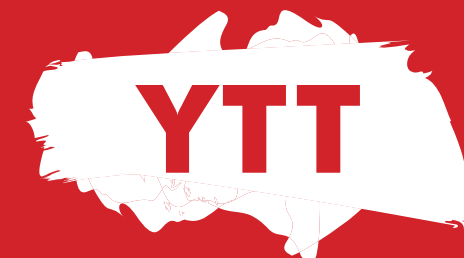


PHOTO: © CHARLES NEWLAND



The third category was creative weapons: "You can choose any weapon including swords or sticks and you develop your own routine. This category is non-contact, it is more to show your expertise of handling a weapon," says Henry-James. "My favourite weapons to work with are nun-chucks after I watched Bruce Lee in 'Enter the Dragon' and decided to teach myself – it wasn't without a few hits to myself though!"

This weapon is formally known as the nunchaku; a traditional Okinawan martial arts weapon consisting of two sticks connected at one end by a short chain or rope.

It is clear that Henry-James's is a focused and determined competitor, he started the sport at five years old with the full support of his dad, who said he was "over the moon" about his son's success.

## HENRY-JAMES SETS SIGHTS ON WORLDWIDE UNITED MARTIAL ARTS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Romany Gypsy Henry-James Thomas is a mixed martial arts champion who is currently taking the World United Martial Arts (WUMA) scene by storm.

At just 16 years old he has a black belt first degree in Karate and a black belt first degree in freestyle Kickboxing. And to top it off, he has just qualified for the world championships and will be representing Great Britain as part of the GB Team in the WUMA world championships.

When asked how he felt about representing Great Britain Henry-James said that it was an "honour to be part of the sport and represent my country and people".

In April earlier this year, at Perdisswell Leisure Centre in Worcester, Henry-James was on top form coming first in all three categories and taking the title at the Battle of England, being awarded with the belt he is wearing and three trophies.

The first category was Japanese Kata a martial arts form that develops the learner's ability to execute techniques and movements with the goal to internalise the movements and techniques of a kata so they can be executed and adapted under different circumstances, without thought or hesitation.

The second category was contact fighting with Henry-James defeating a 31-year-old ex-WUMA European champion. He went on to explain that there are no age or weight categories for the 16 and overs.

"He recently qualified for the world championships in Wolverhampton and is now part of the British squad. I am over the moon and love watching him compete," said Henry James's dad.

Henry-James says he knew even when he first started the sport he wanted to be world champion and is inspired by the technique of Bruce Lee and Alfie Lewis.

"I studied Bruce Lee and Alfie Lewis who inspired me to take up freestyle kickboxing. To all the Gypsy boys out there don't let no one put you down; if you put your mind to it I believe you can achieve anything".

Henry-James trains at Oxfordshire Freestyle Martial Arts Association in Witney with his Sensei, Steve Symonds, who is two times world champion. Henry-James said, "He has taught me lots of good moves that I use in competitions." He also stated he had experienced no racism towards him in the sport for his ethnicity and said, "I am very proud of being a Gypsy and representing my people, the sport is respectful of who you are and I would recommend it."

Henry-James plans to open his own dojo, explaining that a 'dojo' is the Japanese word for martial arts club.

YTT wishes Henry-James the best of luck at the world championships.

**By Lisa Smith**

PHOTO: © BETSY MOBEY



## BETSY MOBEY – ROMANY GYPSY ACTIVIST

I'm going to start with a short introduction about me and then swiftly move on to why I'm here. My name is Betsy Mobey, I'm an English Romany Gypsy, 23 years old, with a personal driving force built from a life-time of rejection, discrimination and unjust behaviour inflicted my culture.

Little over three months ago, Michelle Gavin from FFT contacted me on Facebook. She had seen that I was pursuing an acting career and had also probably noticed my social activism! They were casting for the lead in their play Crystal's Vardo and the casting was for a girl, preferably from a Gypsy/Traveller background. I thought it would be a great experience and lovely opportunity to meet FFT, as up until then I didn't have a clue that there were organisations dedicated to the GRT communities! Alas I wasn't suited for the playing age, but it led onto me meeting FFT and being offered an 11 month internship. I was flabbergasted! Finally I could practise what I preached.

I feel very fortunate to have found an organisation like FFT, with people that care as much as I do about my culture. I'm wanting to give something back to my community and the traditions that shaped the person I am today. The aim of FFT is to end racism and discrimination against the GRT community and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life. The internship encourages young Gypsy and Traveller people

aged 15 – 30 to be confident in engaging fully in society, with the aim of becoming role models for others and to develop a coherent voice so that change can happen.

The last couple of months have been a whirlwind of experiences and emotions and I have gained so much knowledge. In my first trip abroad as an FFT Intern I faced many different challenges, including confusion and misinformation about the heritage of Romany Gypsies in England. I also learned of our shared heritage across Europe and about the Roma and Sinti genocide during the Holocaust. In World War Two it is estimated that up to a million Roma and Sinti were murdered by the Nazis and allied fascist regimes and entire blood lines were wiped out. Dikh He Na Bister, in the Romani language, means to look and to never forget.

The Romani language is important to our culture. We have a human right to practice our language that unfortunately we, in

England and various other countries, were forced not to speak, which inevitably has led to a loss of it. In England we commonly speak Anglo-Romani, or Romany Chib, which is a mix of English and Romani. In many countries the Romani language is recognised and still intact. England also has some institutions teaching it, and it is an aspiration of mine to learn it.

My second trip was to Strasbourg for the 'Mirrors' training course on combatting Anti-Gypsyism, where I met Roma and non-Roma from all over Europe. We exchanged ideas, past experiences and knowledge and worked together to explore and deepen our understanding of the concept Anti-Gypsyism. We had some philosophical and inspiring debates. It was a remarkable experience.

I've met so many wonderful and inspiring people along my journeys, including Josie O'Driscoll and Sherrie Smith, two very independent mothers from the Travelling community who created the Romany and Traveller charity called GATE Herts. They were an inspiration to myself and also a good craic to be with.

I think if others started opening their minds and looking at the bigger picture and actively sought justice, then I truly think this world would be a much more happy and peaceful one.

**By Betsy Mobey**



PHOTO: BEN BENNETT © MIKE DOHERTY



## BEN BENNETT SAYS HE WILL PARK HIS TRAILER ON NUMBER 10 DOWNING STREET

'Gypsy Kids' star and young Romany activist, Ben Bennett, has wowed the UK's TV watchers and made a big splash in the press with a stunning interview on 'This Morning' breakfast show.

Ben Bennett and his mother Natalie appeared on the sofa in front of the ITV cameras with presenter Holly Willoughby and Phillip Schofield to tell how he had overcome being bullied at school and his plans for the future.

Speaking about his education experience, Ben said: "One moment that stands out for me, I was 10. I was sent out

of a classroom by a teacher because of my ethnicity. She said that the other pupils didn't feel comfortable around me and she didn't feel comfortable teaching someone of my ethnicity."

After relating an incident at his last school where he and his sister were attacked by 16 bullies, Ben Bennett then told the presenters: "I've been thinking about it, that I might want to become Prime Minister, I could make a change with the education system and make it a safer environment."

And when Phil asked would he actually live in 10 Downing Street – where the Prime Minister lives – Ben left them in stitches by joking: "I'd probably put my trailer on there."

Speaking to the Travellers' Times, Ben Bennett said that he did not get nervous about appearing on TV.

"It was a very good opportunity to address so many people and challenge discrimination towards my community," he said.

Ben Bennett added that he had been "overwhelmed" by the response to his 'trailer on Number 10' remark and that it was nice to see "a positive press" .

"I like to tackle serious issues sometimes with a light-hearted humour, and I do hope that the current prime minister applies for the appropriate planning permission ready for when I move in," he said.

PHOTO: BUSTER © TOMMY TURNER



## KUSHTI BOK BUSTER TURNER!

Buster Turner, a 14-year-old Romany Gypsy darts champion has only been on the darts scene for a few years but is already creating a storm. He won the World Youth Darts semi-finals at Lakeside Country Club on Sunday 13th August.

The son of Gypsy Factor's Tommy Turner, Buster played pairs with his partner Jack Seymour. The two play regularly averaging two tournaments a month together.

Buster first started playing darts when he was 11 and currently plays for Hampshire County Youth Darts.

"My uncle used to play darts on a Monday and I just started throwing them and having a go, then I started beating him at age 11 and he told me to keep playing," says Buster.

The young darts player has already won several competitions. Earlier this year Buster played in the Brighton Darts Open 2017 and he was the top youth player and got down to the last 32.

Buster also played in the World Youth Championships at Lakeside last year and got down to the last 16. Simon Whitlock, the 2012 European Darts Champion, coaches Buster once a week and reckons that he has got all the attributes to be a future world champion. Buster spoke about his ambitions for the future: "I want to become a professional darts player ", he said.

PHOTO: TOBY AND JO GORNIAK © STREET FACTORY



## 'PEACE AND ONE LOVE' SAYS STREET FACTORY!

Street Factory is an innovative Plymouth-based youth project run by Toby and Jo Gorniak using hip-hop dance and ethos to improve and empower the lives of children and young people – including Gypsies and Travellers. The Travellers' Times' Lisa Smith spoke to the husband and wife duo who run Street Factory about their belief in 'teaching in the community for the community' and about Toby's Romany heritage.

Street Factory's roots come from New York says Jo.

"I'm born and bred in Plymouth," says Jo, "and I had the opportunity to go to New York and work in City Kids, which is basically a really large organisation that works in the projects."

Jo adds that watching City Kids using "hip hop, rapping, graffiti and dance" to transform the lives of "kids that had got mixed up in gangs and crime" was a "transformative experience". When Jo got back to the UK, she and Toby became determined to set up a project in Plymouth using the same methods and ethos that she experienced with City Kids in the USA to empower and transform the lives of young people living in Plymouth.

So Street Factory was born ten years ago and has grown and grown ever since.

"We started on a small scale at first on our local church and soon we had over a hundred young people coming every Saturday," says Jo.

"We can speak six languages fluently, so if there are a new people coming to the community we can communicate with them which is really helpful," she adds.

And Street Factory isn't just for kids.

"We do work with the whole community. I would say maybe the main age might be from thirteen years old to thirty years, but we do work with the whole community," says Jo.

Toby's Romany Gypsy heritage has led to Street Factory working in rural Cornwall with Gypsy and Traveller young people.

"That project was mainly about inspiring and promoting

positivity and about being proud of being a Gypsy," says Toby.

Street Factory also work with young people to help them engage with school education and get something out of it – and with schools to better engage with young people who normally don't do that well. Toby often works in schools specifically with Romany Gypsy and Traveller pupils using the same model.

"I think the current education system is really trying but there is the difference of cultures and it is really important to support schools to have an understanding of the Romany Gypsy and Traveller culture," says Toby.

Toby adds that this is needed "because a lot of times in media, and in certain communities, we are not very much liked."

"We teach the children the next generation's about being proud who you are and to keep your head up high and tell people 'you know I'm a Romany Gypsy and this is who I am' and be proud of it," he says.

"I have got my own children and I teach my children to be proud of being Gypsy. Everyone at school knows they are Romany Gypsy, and that's also the message that Street Factory gives to all children from all communities – be proud of who you are."

**By Lisa Smith**



# YOUTH TRAVELLERS' TIMES

NEGOTIATED STOPPING IS THE BEST SOLUTION FOR EVERYONE, SAYS EBONY ELLIOT



PHOTO: EBONY ELLIOT © LEEDS GATE

YTT TALKS TO EBONY ELLIOT, WHO WENT FROM THE BOTTOM OF HER CLASS TO THE TOP DUE TO THE STABILITY OF LIVING ON ONE OF LEEDS CITY COUNCIL'S 'NEGOTIATED STOPPING' TRAVELLER SITES - WHICH ARE DESCRIBED ON PAGE THREE OF THIS ISSUE OF THE TRAVELLERS' TIMES.

Before I lived on the negotiated stopping camp in Leeds, I was still at school... says Ebony Elliot.

I didn't attend very much as we was always being shifted, I would only go about two days a week and I was expected to fail all my exams. My mam was bad with arthritis so she wasn't able to take us and pick us up every day. But when we first moved on the camp I was able to go more because we knew I'd be able to get home after school in the taxi which picked us up and took us home.

The camp was only small, only four or five families. We all had our own skips

and toilets so there was no mess, and it was a lot more hygienic so people were less likely to get ill. My mam was able to get doctors' appointments and she was able to get on the waiting list for the local site and housing lists. It was a lot safer as it was enclosed so we could play out in the daytime without having to worry about busy roads or injuring ourselves. We all knew when we were next moving so we could make plans to go places without having to worry about the police taking our things or blocking us in while we were out.

Because I was attending school every day I was able to make my grades better, in the six months I was on the camp I

went from being the bottom class to the second to top, and my predicted grades for my GCSEs went from Gs' and Fs' to Ds' and Cs'. Because I had improved so much I decided to stay at school which would have been impossible without the stability of the negotiated stopping site we lived on. I ended up leaving school with seven GCSEs and went on to college, and I now work in the hospital.

Overall the negotiated stopping is the best solution for everyone, it helps families to construct an easier and fairer life, it helps local communities integrate and it helps the local authorities as there are no clean-up costs.

**By Ebony Elliot**

## WHEN IS A TRAVELLER NOT A TRAVELLER?

**TEL: 0121 685 8677**  
**MONDAY TO FRIDAY 9.00-5.00**

The answer is when the Government decides they are not. The new definition of Gypsy and Traveller for planning purposes brought in by the Government since August 2015 excludes those Gypsies and Travellers who have stopped travelling permanently because of age, disability or ill health. The Travellers Advice Team at Community Law Partnership are very keen on taking challenges to this outrageous change in the definition of Gypsies and Travellers and have just lodged one such challenge.

The Travellers' Advice Team (TAT) at Community Law Partnership (CLP) provide advice and representation to Gypsies and Travellers throughout England in the following areas:-

- Evictions from unauthorised encampments
- Evictions from rented sites (local authority, housing association and private)
- Serious disrepair on rented sites
- High Court Planning Appeals
- Planning Injunctions
- Stop Notices and direct action
- Homelessness (including for those in houses who need a pitch)
- Allocation of pitches on local authority sites
- Cases for boat dwellers especially concerning the Continuous Cruising Guidance and Public Spaces
- Protection Orders

**The Community Law Partnership, 4th Floor Ruskin Chambers, 191 Corporation Street, Birmingham B4 6RP. E:office@communitylawpartnership.co.uk**

**Travelling Ahead**  
Working with Gypsy, Roma & Traveller young people, families and communities across Wales

**Advice Line: 0808 802 0025**

- \* Advice and support on your rights
- \* Forums to provide a stronger voice
- \* Tackling hate crime & discrimination

Email: [travellingahead@trosgynnalplant.org.uk](mailto:travellingahead@trosgynnalplant.org.uk) Web: [www.travellingahead.org.uk](http://www.travellingahead.org.uk)  
@travellingahead

The Gypsy and Traveller Plant  
Travelling Ahead is a project of Tros Gynnal Plant. Contact 01633 509544  
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