

**THE MAGAZINE FOR GYPSIES, ROMA & TRAVELLERS**

AUTUMN/WINTER 2024 | ISSUE 75 | FREE | [WWW.TRAVELLERSTIMES.ORG.UK](http://WWW.TRAVELLERSTIMES.ORG.UK)

**TRAVELLERS  
TIMES**



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## EDITORIAL



As the crisp autumn leaves fall and the chill of winter sets in, issue 75 of the Travellers' Times Magazine offers you stories of triumphs and challenges.

This issue delves into the rich history and culture of the Romany and Traveller communities. Our news features on Romany archaeology and the New Forest provide fascinating insights into our ancestors and their way of life. The stunning photographs of Appleby vardos and the England Slingshot Federation showcase the beauty and diversity of our cultures.

The profiles of Trish Reilly and Delaine Le Bas offer inspiring examples of individuals who have made significant contributions to their communities. The opinion pieces by Gemma Lees and Eszter Halasi provide thought-provoking reflections on disability rights and the lasting impact of the recent anti-immigration protests.

Beyond this issue, you'll notice a fresh look and feel to our pages, reflecting our commitment to staying relevant and engaging with our readers. We believe that a new design will better showcase the vibrant stories and stunning visuals that make Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities so unique.

We learnt from the Big Survey 2024 – thank you to the hundreds of readers who sent in your views – that 95% of the respondents felt that Travellers' Times magazine and website successfully represents Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the media. We know how important it is to make sure your voices are heard. Thank you to all our readers and the National Lottery Community Fund for your continued support.

**Liza Mortimer, Travellers' Times Project Manager**

# TRAVELLERS TIMES

## INTERVIEW WITH DAVID JOHNSON

TT Survey Prize Draw 2024 Winner and reader of the magazine for ten years.

**Q: Could you tell us a bit about you?**

**A:** I am a descendent of the Lee family in Essex, my Nan was Genty Lee, daughter of Jimmy Lee, and he was a horse dealer. My mum was Lily Millen and she had three sisters Naomi, Elvie, Genty and brother Frank, who all travelled with two trailers, and travelled between Essex and Kent.

**Q: How did you feel when you found out you won the prize draw?**

**A:** I was absolutely amazed as I never win a thing.

**Q: What do you enjoy reading about the most?**

**A:** I like the family stories and achievements.

**Q: How does the Travellers' Times represent your community?**

**A:** It gives Travellers a voice and a sense of worth because people still see Travelling people as worthless, but in my view, we give a service to people by recycling scrap metal and the like, way before it was environmental. My final word is to say thank you for Travellers' Times over the years keeping me connected with my Traveller roots, may the magazine carry on for years to come.



**COVER PHOTO: SONNA HARRIS TAKES AIM AT THE ENGLISH SLINGSHOT  
FEDERATION ANNUAL COMPETITION © DAN HAWORTH-SALTER**

The Travellers' Times is published by Rural Media. EDITOR: Mike Doherty; CONSULTANT: Damian Le Bas; PROJECT MANAGER: Liza Mortimer; ADMIN AND PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: Tammy Buckland; DATA AND RESEARCH ASSISTANT: Stacey Hodgkins; SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING: Elle Adams; DESIGN: thinkblinkdesign.com. The Travellers' Times is the national magazine for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, and people and organisations who work with them. We are guided by our editorial group and strive for accuracy and fairness. CONTACT US AT: The Travellers' Times, Packers House, 25 West Street, Hereford, HR4 0BX. 01432 344039 | [travellerstimes@ruralmedia.co.uk](mailto:travellerstimes@ruralmedia.co.uk) | [www.travellerstimes.org.uk](https://www.travellerstimes.org.uk)

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## GREEN BELT TRAVELLER PLANNING RULES TO BE EASED BY GOVERNMENT

Planning rules stopping Traveller sites from being built on green belt land are set to be eased by the new government in a major shake-up of the planning system in England.

The proposed changes include several significant adjustments aimed at addressing housing supply and urban planning.

Councils are meant to assess and plan for a five-year supply of land in their development plans for Travellers to build sites on, but many fail to do so.

This means that Travellers often have no option but to buy land 'off-plan', often on green belt, and then face a costly legal battle to get them authorised by councils and planning inspectors.

The current policy states that Traveller site development in the green belt are not permitted and considered 'inappropriate development' unless strict "very special circumstances" apply.

This will no longer be the case under the new rules if the local council fails to demonstrate a five-year supply.

Other adjustments that could help more Traveller sites to get planning include the relabelling of sub-prime green belt as 'grey belt'.

TT News

## GOVERNMENT "FULLY ACKNOWLEDGES" HIGH COURT JUDGEMENT ON ANTI-TRAVELLER LAW

The government has confirmed that it "fully acknowledges" a High Court decision which found that parts of the new anti-Traveller law amounted to unlawful discrimination.

In a statement released to the Travellers' Times, a spokesperson for the new government said:

"The government fully acknowledges the High Court's decision. As with all decisions of this nature, we will be taking the time to consider the ruling and determine the most appropriate next steps."

The new anti-Traveller law, introduced in 2022, made it a criminal offence for Travellers to pull on to land and then fail to comply with a request by the owner of the land to leave. The new powers also forbade anyone forced to leave from re-occupying the land within 12 months.

The High Court challenge was brought by Wendy Smith, a Romany Gypsy, supported by Friends, Families and Travellers and the campaign organisation Liberty.

Chris Johnson, Wendy Smith's solicitor, said that he hoped that the High Court ruling would prompt the government to review the new law in its entirety.

TT News

ILKLEY DRIVE: SARAH LOWTHER LEADING THE ILKLEY DRIVE WITH HER HORSE VIOLET © CATH MULDOWNNEY



## SHARKEY LOWTHER MEMORIAL ILKLEY DRIVE A WIN-WIN!

Over 30 yokes and lots of visitors turned out for the annual Ilkley Drive in memory of Sharkey Lowther earlier this year.

Now in its sixth year and organised by Sharkey's youngest daughter Sarah and her son Shak, the drive made its way through the beautiful Yorkshire countryside from Silsden to Ilkley, finishing with a great spread of food in the park, with friends and families getting together in the sunshine, and then a dip in the River Wharfe for many of the horses and riders.

Everyone had a great day, whilst raising money for the Sue Ryder Manorlands Hospice in Keighley. A win-win situation!

Cath Muldownney

A BBSTYLEHOUSE TRAINING SESSION © CATH MULDOWNNEY

## BBSTYLEHOUSE – TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION IN FASHION

A new designer clothes business has opened in Morley, Leeds – and is teaching young girls and women all aspects of the fashion trade starting right with the basics – how to use a sewing machine.

BBStyleHouse opened its doors to its new store and design academy earlier this year and sells its own British Born-branded contemporary and modern clothing for young girls and women, which is designed and created in-house.

Yet BBStyleHouse is more than just a designer clothes store and the business also offers training on useful skills for a career in the fashion industry.

"The plan is to teach women and children from all backgrounds the skill of sewing," owner Kelly told the Travellers' Times.

"I have been making clothing for over 20 years and have taught my own daughter Coco to sew and make her own clothes," added Kelly.

Coco is now 13 and works alongside Kelly on weekends teaching other young girls how to thread up the machine, to pattern cutting and various other sewing techniques.

"We at BBStyleHouse believe that young women should be able to earn their own money if and when needed, and learning a skill like sewing will give confidence to young girls to create their own style to be able to make their own designs and be as creative as they like," said Kelly.

Kelly is also planning other creative workshops, including flower wreath making, arts & craft days and hair and beauty training, so check out BBStyleHouse on their website [www.bbstylehouse.co.uk](http://www.bbstylehouse.co.uk) or follow them on Instagram.

TT News

## COUNCIL EMAIL ABOUT TRAVELLER FUNERAL SPARKS CLOSURES OF PUBS AND CLUBS – BUT TWO DEFY THE WARNING

### GYPSY TRAVELLER LEAGUE STEP IN TO SUPPORT THE FAMILY

Plans for a wake on the day of a grandmother's funeral in St Helens, Merseyside, were nearly wrecked after the council sent emails to local venues threatening to review their licences if they opened – yet two bars defied the official warnings and opened anyway.

Gelly Da Barr Smith's mum was due to be laid to rest on the 26th September, and she and her sisters were planning to hold a wake in St Helens, only to be told by many of the licensees of pubs and clubs that they would not be open.

"This is racism – it's because we are Travellers," Gelly Da Barr Smith told investigators from the Gypsy Traveller League charity.

"My mummy was English and born and bred here in St Helens and we have lived here all our lives," she added.

"We will do anything and everything for our local community and if our neighbours want anything doing we will help out."

Gelly's faith in community was vindicated however, when two local venues – The Millhouse and Dolliez Bar – defied the council and opened to welcome the mourners in.

TT News





MAIN: ROMANI COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY'S STUART EVE (CENTRE) AND TWO COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS AT WORK.  
PHOTO © ESZTER HALASI

## TAKING OWNERSHIP OF OUR OWN STORIES IS MORE CRUCIAL THAN EVER

An archaeological dig – the first of its kind – is turning up historical artefacts from an old Romany compound at Thorney Hill, New Forest, Hampshire.

The dig is organised by Romani Community Archaeology, a new community interest company led by archaeologists Stuart Eve and John Henry Phillips, who is Romany himself and one of the presenters of the hit Channel 4 archaeology show *The Great British Dig*.

"This was the first time an archaeological excavation of a historic Romany site has ever been undertaken in Britain, which in itself is a statement that Romany heritage is as important as any other part of history," says John Henry Phillips.

"It was equally important that the archaeology was carried out by Romany people, because taking ownership and direction of our own stories and the way Romany culture and heritage is shared is more crucial than ever."

Thorney Hill is one of the seven compounds that the Romany Gypsies of the New Forest were forcibly settled into in the early 20th century, after their way of life roaming the New Forest was brought to a halt by the authorities.

"Highlighting the story of the New Forest compounds and the 'Gypsy Rehabilitation Centre' is a unique opportunity to not only discover the tangible remains of a culture that has survived against the odds but stands to use the past as a powerful tool to shine a light on issues faced today," says John Henry Phillips.

After some local outreach events and in collaboration with film production charity Rural Media and the Travellers' Times, Romani Community Archaeology – funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund – worked on the dig with people from the local community and descendants of the compound residents from further afield.

"We uncovered the foundations of a road and two buildings, as well as a number of traditional Romany artefacts," said John Henry Phillips.

"These included a Farrier's hoof clipper, the stone sharpening wheel from a knife sharpening cart, and original Imari ware pottery imported from Japan between 1890 and 1910. This style was later adopted by Royal Crown Derby as 'Imari Pattern' and remains popular with Romany families today."

The excavation will soon be covered in a short film and will also appear on BBC Two's *Digging For Britain*, as well as a museum exhibition at the New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst, which opens in January 2025.

Romani Community Archaeology is now looking to excavate other historic Romany sites in Britain and would love to hear any ideas that people have for locations.

As well as highlighting Romany heritage and culture, the main aim is to train Romany people in the skills of archaeology, so John Henry Phillips is always keen to hear from people wanting to take part in the excavations – contact Romani Community Archaeology on [romanyarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:romanyarchaeology@gmail.com)

TT News



## FULL HOUSE FOR NEW FOREST ROMANY EXHIBITION

Driving through the vast landscapes of the New Forest, with the sun beaming and horses roaming in every direction, I wondered – no doubt like the organisers Tony Johnson and Steve Antczak – just how many people would turn out to the Romany Heritage exhibition that had been planned for months.

As I arrived at East Boldre Village Hall, where the exhibition was being held, I wondered if I had got my days wrong and I had accidentally rocked up to a car boot sale, as the car park was heaving, and swarms of people were queuing to get in!

Tony, who is a social historian, was glowing when he came to greet me at the door, completely overwhelmed at the massive turnout. I would guesstimate that over 70% of the people who visited on that first day were from the Romany community and some had travelled far and wide to be there.

I was lucky enough to be the one recording the oral history of the locals who had many tales to tell, and I captured many heartfelt stories from Romany families, which showed a true pride in their ancestry.

Tea and home-made cakes flowed throughout the day, made by the lovely volunteers, and panels and panels of beautifully displayed photographs from Tony's wonderful collection filled the main hall.

Dave Diben, forester, sat under his bender tent, carving out pegs and wooden flowers gathering a very interested audience, whilst others wandered the aisles looking at the fantastic traditional artwork of Dolly Romany Arts, who had art pieces depicting painted vardos, families sitting around the yog (fire), drawings of tarot cards and crystal balls, and a stunning Fabergé egg with the chakra wheel carefully placed inside.

We were also treated to Sherri Cowen's remarkable models depicting Romani life and the stunning artwork of Alan Langford, an equestrian artist.

Rebecca Johnson, who has both Romani and Showman heritage, was also there to support Tony and Steve. Rebecca became involved in the exhibition after a chance meeting in the New Forest Heritage Centre some months before.



MAIN PHOTO: FORESTER DAVE DIBEN  
© MARK JAMES

Other Romany volunteers turned out to help guide and talk to visitors, working alongside non-Romany volunteers, who did everything from assisting with parking, selling brochures on the door, making tea, and tidying up. I sat and drank a cuppa with Tracey Cooper, and we talked about the Forest and the wonderful local horse drive she organises in August.

Over the three-day period nearly 1,500 visitors came to be part of this wonderful exhibition!

Dee Cooper for TT News

Dee Cooper is the co-founder of the Romany/ Traveller women's writing group *Write into Culture*, and a regular writer for the *Travellers' Times*.



# SLINGSHOTS AND SOLIDARITY – WHAT MORE COULD YOU ASK FOR?

It's a gorgeous sunny evening on a Friday in August as we pull into the entrance of a farm in Gloucestershire where the England Slingshot Federation competition will take place on the following day. We follow the signs down a dusty track that leads to the campsite for the competitors and park up, and Dan, our cameraman, gets his kit sorted and we go to find the organisers.

"The weather will make a big difference with it being sunny," says Asa Wilson, a Federation committee member and co-founder who, along with Keith Dighton, set up the Federation over five years ago. "A lot will turn up on the Saturday morning as well. It'll be nice to get a 60 or 70 shooting, there's been a lot more shoots over the last three or four years, but this is the one to be at."

The campsite is already filling up and many of the early arrivals will have knocked off work early to drive to the shoot. Some tents are already pitched, and some are still going up, including a massive bell tent that quickly falls down again to roars of laughter, beers are opened, fires are being lit, and permeating all of this is the unmistakable sound of slingshots being fired; the slap of elastic followed by – if the shooter hits – the 'ting' of a steel ball bearing smacking into a tin target. This sound will probably go on until the sun sets, as friends meet up around impromptu ranges set up among the tents.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAN HAWORTH-SALTER



"It doesn't make a difference what breed, seed, generation or creed you're from," says Federation committee member Mark Miller. "You're here for the same thing. Initially, to have a good time camping, and then shooting in a competition and potentially maybe even winning some silverware – and if you don't, you've still had a good time."

Alongside the love of slingshot shooting, integration also permeates everything the ESF strives to do. Although the Federation was founded by two Romany men, it has always been open to anyone and everyone who wants to shoot a slingshot.

"We're just going to enjoy ourselves," says Andy Maund, who is here with friends and family who

are all part of a South Wales-based slingshot group called Team Grizzly. "There's plenty of food, plenty of drink, plenty of laughs and like-minded people all in one field. What more could you ask for? That's what life's all about."

"It's not all about the trophies, it's about having fun and taking part," adds Terence Hogan, who is also part of Team Grizzly. "And to spend the time with great people, especially all the Travelling lads and that's why I really love coming to these shoots."

Saturday's competition will be a hunter's course. Over thirty targets have been set up in woodlands surrounding a lake. The targets can be as small as a fifty pence piece and are set at ranges of up to seventy metres from the shooting

marks – although a lot are much nearer and the standard indoor range shooting distance is usually twenty metres.

The rules are simple and the competitors form into fours and, along with an umpire and scorer, take around half an hour to move around the course and shoot at the targets. If you hit the target first time, it's three points, hitting on the second attempt is two points, and failing to hit on the final third attempt gets you nil points.

"The course was outstanding last year," says Andy. "The quality of shooting is next level. The best in the country is here. So, to win anything, you really have got to be on your A game."

**Mike Doherty**











GLYN HEWITT WITH SHANISE MORLEY

## IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO KEEP THIS TRADITION ALIVE

The number of horse-drawn live-in wagons which travel to Appleby for the Fair continues to grow each year.

Vardos were the original Gypsy caravan drawn by a Gypsy cob (horse). Most Romany Gypsies call them Vardos, although some other traditions insist the word is Vada. Romany Shera Rom Billy Welch calls them Open Lot, which defines those with a canvas front. Those with wooden doors on the front are known as Live-in Wagons. In the South and East of England, where the terrain is flat, many are square topped. In the North they mostly come with bow tops to make them lighter to get up the fells and hills. But whatever they are called and whatever shape or size they come in, their popularity is increasing.

Billy Welch said: "90% of Gypsies and Travellers now live in houses, run businesses and the children go to a local school. But for two or three weeks a year, many want to return to the old way of life. That is what Appleby is all about, celebrating our traditions. About 140 of the 600 caravans on the hill this year are Vardos. Many use motor caravans, but more and more

want to travel in bow tops. It is like antique cars – they are coming back into fashion."

Billy explained that the ornately decorated Vardos appeared in the middle to late 19th century and Gypsies went back to their roots in Northern India for design. He doesn't own one himself but borrows a cousin's when visiting schools to explain the Romany Gypsy way of life. Pupils are particularly enthralled about how families lived in such tight spaces.

"There was a pull-out bed for the parents, the girls slept in a cupboard space under the one bed, and the boys slept outside the wagon, underneath with straw and bedding," he explains. "A good bow top will take five years to build and three years to paint and it takes artists. That is why they are so expensive." Prices seem to range from £10,000 for a self-build up to £100,000.

Matt and Ellen Howard, who met at Appleby, brought five "Vada" to this year's Fair with their relatives. "I have come every year all of my life," says Matt, now 76, who travelled from Bishop Auckland. "I have 25 horses on a smallholding, but we just bring two per wagon.



We take two weeks over the journey, stopping off in Barnard Castle, Brough and Kirkby Stephen at the designated resting places. We live in the wagons in summer months but store them for the winter."

Diane Nicholson, Ellen's sister, said: "We all used to live all year round in the wagons, but that all had to stop. It is not safe. We now travel in the summer to various fairs and exhibitions and play the part for a few weeks. There are not so many craftsmen left, so we paint our own wagons, including the gold leaf."

Glyn and Michelle Hewitt are unusual in that they live in their bow top all year round. Glyn, aged 60 and a father-of-seven, takes two months to travel the 60 miles from Middlesbrough. "We like to stop off and meet people from different cultures. It's our tradition. No matter what the authorities do, there will always be those who want to live and travel on the roads," he says.

The Lowther and Ewbank clan brought four bow tops the 115 miles from Bradford in West Yorkshire in just over a week. They also maintain their own bow tops, originally built by cousins, the Dugdales of Burton-in-Kendal. Ady-Lee Lowther, aged 16, said: "I enjoy coming to Appleby every year. It is fun and I am keen to keep up the family tradition."

It seems the future of live-in, horse-drawn wagons is secure – whatever they are called.

By Mike Glover



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY MILTON HAWORTH

TOP LEFT: ADY-LEE LOWTHER. TOP RIGHT: ELLEN AND MATT HOWARD WITH DIANE NICHOLSON FRONT OUTSIDE DIANE'S GOLDEN VARDO. BOTTOM: JOE EWBANK



TRISH  
REILLY



## I'VE SPENT MY LIFE PASSIONATE ABOUT JUSTICE FOR EVERYBODY, EQUALITY FOR EVERYONE

TRISH REILLY PERFORMS AT THE 2024  
ATCHIN TAN, GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL  
© ESZTER HALASI

"I hadn't seen the inside of a house until I was eight years of age, because when I was young we travelled," says Trish Reilly. "In our language, Cant, we would call it a nabus. And I didn't know the outside world. This is 1981 I'm talking about, when things were very different for Travellers, and we'd been used to living on the roads up until this point."

Trish Reilly is an Irish Traveller and a singer/songwriter and musician. Her music spans many genres and often moves beyond traditional folk music – although Trish sings and plays that as well and comes from a long line of traditional Irish Traveller folk singers. Trish was seized from her family at a young age and was brought up in a series of children's homes by the Irish social services. It wasn't until she was an adult that Trish finally managed to reconnect with her mum, dad and wider family.

"My four sisters and I were taken one day, just like that, by what we used to call the cruelty man – the officials

who would come out and take children – and they just whipped us away and gave us no warning and we were brought to live in a very large group home," says Trish.

"It was a time when the industrial schools (children's workhouses) were changing into larger group homes, and I stayed there for 10 years and I was told years later that they (the government) were sorry, if it was today, it wouldn't have happened," explains Trish.

"There was no reason for it other than I was a Traveller. I've spent my life passionate about justice for everyone, justice for everybody, equality for everyone."

Broken Lines, which Trish performed at the 2019 Ireland Traveller Pride event, is one of her songs which deals directly with forced assimilation by the state, which Trish says was a deliberate policy by the Irish government following their publication in 1963 of an infamous report on itinerancy and Irish Travellers –

and how to 'solve' that 'problem' in Irish society.

"In Broken Lines, that's the first line of the song – the final solution in 1963 to get rid of the problem of itinerancy," says Trish, explaining that one of the strategies in the report was to take Traveller children from their families and put them into industrial schools and children's homes as a way of diluting and eventually eradicating Irish Traveller culture.

"I was told I was nothing but a dirty tinker and I should be grateful to be there," Trish says of her time incarcerated in the children's homes. "I was a project. Their mission was to get me and carve me and shape me and mould me, and I couldn't talk my own language. They took my accent away from me. They forced me into what they thought was the norm."

"There was no reason for it other than I was a Traveller. I've spent my life passionate about justice for everybody, equality for everyone."

**Interview by Liza Mortimer**

PROFILES

DELAINE  
LE BAS



## IT'S IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE CAN ACCESS WHAT I DO

PHOTOGRAPH BY ESZTER HALASI

From jumble sales on the South Coast, to studying textiles at a college in Worthing, a stint at the world-renowned St Martins School of Art and Design in the late 1980s, Delaine Le Bas' "strange and interesting" career as an artist is currently reaching new heights at the Tate Modern, London, as one of four finalists for the prestigious annual Turner Prize.

At the Tate Modern, until the 16th February, Le Bas' installation Incipit Vita Nova. Here Begins The New Life/A New Life Is Beginning – drawing on themes of death, loss and renewal inspired by the death of her grandmother – will be shown alongside the work of the other three finalists. The winner will be announced at an awards ceremony on the 3rd December later this year.

The Travellers' Times' Liza Mortimer caught up with Delaine Le Bas at this year's Glastonbury Festival, where Delaine was working on the art and design for the Unfairground,

a festival space inspired by the warped chaotic culture of the underground squat party scene.

"If we talk about stereotypes, I did come from a family where I was the eldest. I'm female, so therefore there were two roles that were going to happen to me. I was either going to stay at home and look after everyone else, and not have any life for myself, or I was going to marry someone that everyone else wanted me to marry, and I was like, that is not happening. No way is that happening to me. So, I decided to go to college."

Le Bas' art isn't just about painting – she wouldn't have become a Turner Prize nominee if it was – it also includes textiles, drapes, sculpture, soundscapes, video, performance – and dressing up.

"My parents used to dress me and my sister, even though there's two years between us, they used to dress us the same," says Delaine Le Bas, remembering back to being

brought up on a family Traveller site near Worthing.

"My grandmother created a space for us, and she insisted that I spend one day a week with her so I could get my work done for college, because it wasn't easy at home."

Le Bas says that working her way through the emotions and feelings of losing her grandmother and creating Incipit Vita Nova – which was first exhibited at Secession in Vienna last year – "wasn't easy".

"But artists universally are often creating artworks in times of chaos. With all the things that are going on at the moment, there will be artists creating work, and work will come out of that chaos as well."

Watch the full video interview with Delaine Le Bas on the Travellers' Times' website:

[www.travellerstimes.org.uk](http://www.travellerstimes.org.uk)

**Interview by Liza Mortimer  
Write-up by Mike Doherty**



# WHY IT'S 'ROMANY GYPSY' AND 'DISABLED'

My artist bio reads, 'Gemma Lees, a Romany Gypsy and disabled poet, performance artist, comedian and journalist', and there are incredibly important reasons as to why I present myself and my career this way. Some folks may think that this is some deliberate ploy to garner sympathy or 'box tick' myself into work. It's true that some jobs, such as writing for Travellers' Times or being awarded an Unlimited grant for disabled creatives, would not have been open to me otherwise, but it goes much deeper than that.

'Intersectionality' was coined in 1989 by civil rights scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Inspired by the feminist and anti-racist campaigners of the 1970s, she discussed how the Black Liberation movement being dominated by men, and feminism dominated by white cis-gendered women, resulted in a distinct 'interlocking' of discrimination for Black women in America. Crenshaw argued that racism and sexism couldn't be considered alone, and that they had to be analysed as 'interdepen-

dent' to address oppression. Crenshaw illustrated this with the idea of a road with intersections and the more intersections a person has, the more potential for 'crashes' along the way, requiring changes in areas such as education, social policy, housing, employment and healthcare. Since its conception, the term intersectionality has widened to include factors such as age, socioeconomic class and disability.

So, my 'crashes' can happen at a number of my intersections. I'm a woman who is over 40, disabled, I belong to an ethnic minority and, due to disability, I can only work part time with my husband being my informal carer for both

me and our disabled son, our household is on the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. Things aren't all bad, I get to work with and spend a lot of time with my family, I belong to the incredibly beautiful and rich culture of Romany Gypsies; I am able to work with our people without exploiting them for my own gain, and I have channelled my struggles with my physical and mental health into live art performances, poetry, journalistic pieces and stand-up comedy. But at the end of the day, I do experience ever-present 'crashes' in my life and career. For example, I can't perform in a building with no access and I'm not going to get hired by anyone who is racist towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, even if a different reason is given at the time. So, these terms are inextricable to me and my career. I'm not just an artist, I'm a Romany Gypsy and disabled artist.

By Gemma Lees

PHOTO © CATH MULDOWNEY

# GEMMA LEES

OPINION

OPINION



PHOTO © ESZTER HALASI

## A BAD DREAM IN THE MAKING?

On Monday 29 July, earlier this year, an inexplicable tragedy struck, shaking English society to its core when three little girls at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class in Southport were killed by a knifeman.

The initial shock and sorrow about this were palpable across the country. Yet, amid this collective grief, a disturbing undercurrent began to surface. A handful of far-right influencers spread disinformation about the killings, leading to some people to take it upon themselves to become vigilantes. Together, they unleashed a wave of riots, hate and vandalism that swept across the nation, further compounding the sense of fear and unease.

At that time, I was in Slovakia, far removed from the turmoil back home. I was there to represent my photographs at an exhibition, staying in a small village near the Tatras, where the world felt distant. The tranquillity of rural life was a stark contrast to the chaos unfolding in England. Upon my return, I was met with an overwhelming flood of news reports detailing the riots that had erupted.

How could this be happening in 2024? And in England, of all places – a country I chose for my children so they wouldn't face discrimination because of their skin colour. I fled a country where my child endured daily abuse from schoolmates. Here, I believed we were safe. For 11 years, we lived with that sense of security. But Brexit in

2019 shook my confidence. We are migrants, and we are Roma. Now, I no longer feel secure.

Despite my fear, I felt a strong urge to act, to show solidarity with those under attack. I went to an anti-fascist and pro-migrant and refugee protest in Brighton and came home feeling a sense of renewed hope. The protesters were kind and supportive; their presence and voices were for us, the migrants, too. I was moved to tears and smiled when I saw their signs and heard their chants. They were standing up for us – for me.

Later that night, my son called me from the train station, asking where I was. I hesitated to speak Hungarian in public, so I hung up the phone. Earlier, I had already asked my son to stay home, even though he no longer has an accent. I left a country where my child was mistreated. I don't want to live in a country where we have to hide our Roma heritage or the fact that we are not English. When I moved to England, I found a welcoming country filled with kind-hearted people. I hope that the memories of those riots quickly fade away, becoming nothing more than a bad dream.

By Eszter Halasi

Eszter Halasi is an award-winning photographer who regularly works for the Travellers' Times





## 'PRISONERS' VOICES ARE SELDOM LISTENED TO' – SAYS FFT

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) have been working on a two-year project to better understand the impact of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) on Romany Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller and New Traveller young adults and their families.

"We have visited prisons across the country, talking to people about their experiences throughout the Criminal Justice System, including with family members," says Sam Worrall, Criminal Justice Policy Officer at FFT.

The project, supported by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A) and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, aims to amplify the voices of young adults from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities involved in the CJS to be heard by policy makers, commissioners and service leaders, to address practical changes to better support rehabilitation, and desistance from crime.

It is clear practical advice and support are severely lacking, with harsher sentencing conditions such as 'remand over bail' being disproportionately handed down to Romany, Roma and Traveller people," said Sam Worrall.

"Most of all, lifelong exclusion, discrimination and stigmatisation from wider society contribute significantly to negative confrontations throughout the Criminal Justice System pipeline."

As part of the prison visits and to break the ice, Sam Worrall encouraged Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoner groups to create artwork based around FFT's GRT History Month 2024 theme of 'family'. Some of the results are shown here plus a poem by George at HMP Frankland.

By Sam Worrall



## GOD'S LOVE TOKEN

By George

We are here for a good reason:  
 Proven.  
 To be  
 God's love token.  
 To travel.  
 To work.  
 To play.  
 Living a nomadic way,  
 Is to fulfil our aims everyday!  
 To our family,  
 We bind.  
 And in our love,  
 We find,  
 Our blessings  
 In kind.  
 Please,  
 Keep this  
 True Reality in mind!

# BOOKS FROM OUR COMMUNITIES



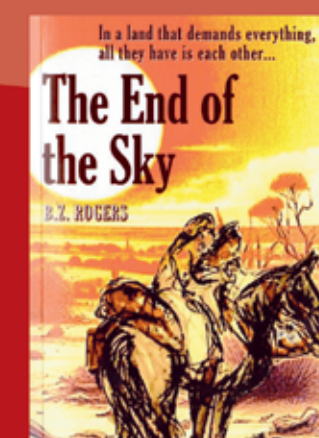
**Salvage** by Mark Baillie

Scotland, 1929. Without warning or explanation, council officials descend on a Traveller campsite and brutally remove a young girl. It is the last her family sees of her.

Decades later, Nash Lacklow is sick, angry and wants answers about what happened to his sister. With little time left, he enlists the help of his grand-niece Emma.

*Salvage* is Mark Baillie's first novel and is inspired by his own Traveller heritage.

Publisher: Tippermuir Books Ltd mail@tippermuirbooks.co.uk



**The End of the Sky** by Bob (BZ) Rogers

Traveller author Bob (BZ) Rogers' dip into genealogy has led him to unearth an extraordinary story of riches to rags and back again, scandalous romance and ruthlessness.

*The End of the Sky* relates the saga of Ellen Bullingham, born in Cheltenham in 1849 who began her working life aged twelve as pub servant before emigrating to Queensland with her young husband and baby son in 1873, leaving behind a two-year-old daughter.

*The End of the Sky* can be purchased at WH Smith, most other bookshops, and on BZ Rogers' website.

Publisher: Vanner Press



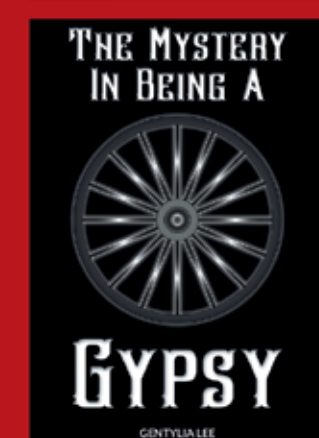
**KIN** An International Anthology of Poetry, Story and Art by Women from Romani, Traveller and Nomadic Communities

Curator and Editor Raine Geoghegan, Co-Editor Fíona Bolger

This anthology draws on Kinship and those who have gone before. Within these pages you will find themes of domesticity, life on the road, the old ways, crafts and creativity but we also explore 'otherness', issues of shame and trust as well as the Roma and Sinti Holocaust, also known as 'The Great Anguish.'

Copies of *Kin* can be ordered from Salmon Press (salmonpoetry.com) and will soon be available in selected bookstores.

Publisher: Salmon Poetry Press



**The Mystery in being a Gypsy** by Gentylia Lee

My Father had a question that he wanted me to find the answer to: "What did the Romany-Gypsies do that has resulted in the hatred, that we as an ethnic minority group, have endured for centuries?" This prompted me to research and then publish this book.

I hope my story goes some way to help change hearts and minds of those who hold unethical and unjust hatred in their hearts against us, for no other reason than the ethnicity we were born.

*The Mystery in Being a Gypsy* is available on Amazon.

Publisher: Grosvenor House





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