



Photo used with kind permission of L. Small

All of the above are members of the same Romany Gypsy family. They served in the British Army in World War I. Thousands of Gypsies fought, and many died, in both world wars. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Gypsies were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust in World War II



Modern caravans have replaced the old fashioned wagons. In common with the wider community the standard of living of the Gypsy community has improved over the years.

What do Gypsies and Travellers want?

- To be allowed to live peacefully as part of British society
- Recognition that a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle is a legitimate way of living
- Fairer representation in the media
- An urgent solution to current accommodation problems
- Greater tolerance and understanding

Do you want to know more?

Friends, Families and Travellers

www.gypsy-traveller.org

Travellers in Leeds

www.grtleeds.co.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Derbyshire Gypsy

www.dglg.org

Liaison Group

This leaflet was produced by members of the Devon Gypsy and Traveller community, supported by Plymouth & Devon Racial Equality Council.



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Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service are proud to be able to sponsor this leaflet



Myths and Facts

This leaflet aims to give some information

about Romany Gypsies living in Devon.

Romany Gypsies first came to Britain in the 1500s and have been living here ever since. Thousands of British people have Gypsy ancestry. Despite this, few people really understand the Romany life style and culture.

Originally Gypsies were nomadic and they travelled up and down the country to earn a living. Some Gypsies still travel with caravans for all or part of the year. Others live more settled lives in mobile homes or houses. For many Gypsies, the idea of living in a house is difficult; they feel claustrophobic and shut in. For others, they feel comfortable living in house but do not want to lose their culture.

The extended family is very important in Gypsy culture. The elderly are well respected and cared for within the family. Gypsies often live and travel with other members of the same family. Gypsies use 'aunt' and 'uncle' as terms of respect when addressing older members of their community. When someone dies, family members will sit with the body the night before the funeral. Funerals are big events with friends and family travelling vast distances to attend.

There are many different groups of 'Travellers' living in Britain. The main groups are Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, New Travellers and Showmen. What all the groups have in common is that they are either nomadic, semi-nomadic, or they have a nomadic heritage.

The other thing they have in common is that in 21st century Britain they all face a high level of discrimination and prejudice in their daily lives. They also experience great difficulty in maintaining their lifestyle and heritage. They are disadvantaged in many different ways including access to health care, education, and secure accommodation. As a result, life expectancy is significantly lower than the national average.

Gypsies are thieves and criminals!

In every community there is good and bad and there is no evidence in police statistics of higher crime rates amongst Gypsies than the general population. Contrary to popular myth they don't steal children either!

Gypsies are dirty!

Gypsies take great pride in cleanliness. The inside of a caravan is normally spotless. There are strict rules about washing that have been passed down through generations. Gypsies have separate bowls for washing hands and washing food. Tea towels are never washed with clothes. Baby clothes are always washed separately. The area outside the caravan is considered a working area and is not subject to the same rules.

Gypsies are an eyesore!

The popular media image of fields devastated by large encampments of Travellers is overstated. Often Travellers are forced by circumstances to move from place to place and they can end up in unsuitable locations without basic amenities.

About 21% of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK are homeless—i.e. they have no legal place to put their caravan.

In the whole of Devon, including Plymouth, there are only 29 pitches on council sites.

Some families buy land to put their caravans on as the only solution to their accommodation problems. These sites are usually well landscaped and discreet, and have less impact than traditional housing. However, planning permission must be granted and this is often difficult to obtain.

Other families have no choice but to apply for housing, though this often leaves them isolated from their communities.

Gypsies don't pay tax!

Like everyone else Gypsies pay road tax, they pay Council Tax on settled sites, they pay VAT on goods and services, and they are required to pay income tax when they are working or self-employed.

Gypsies are stupid!

Increasing numbers of Gypsy children are enrolled in schools despite the barriers they face. Children learn skills and trades at an early age from their parents; informal education is highly valued and seen as very relevant. Gypsy culture has a strong oral tradition with stories being passed down through the generations.