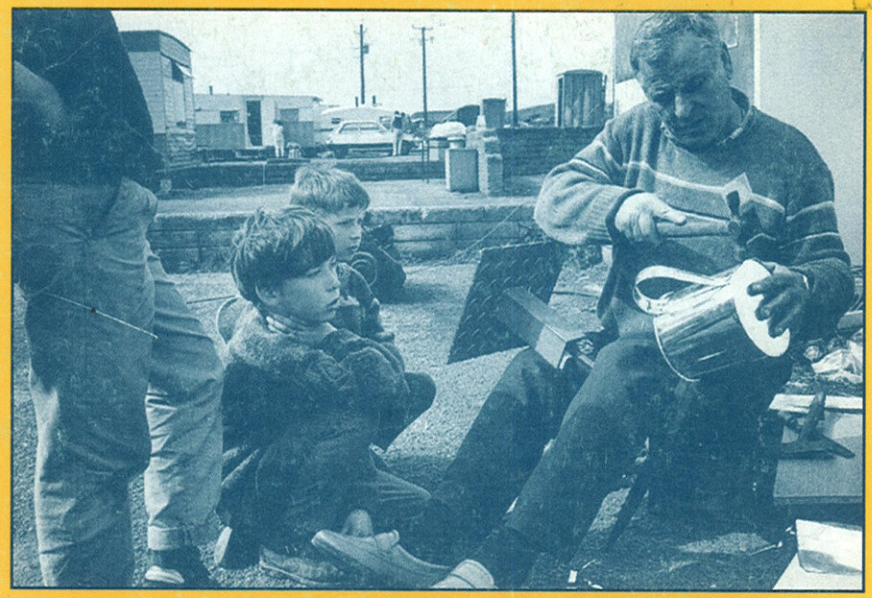
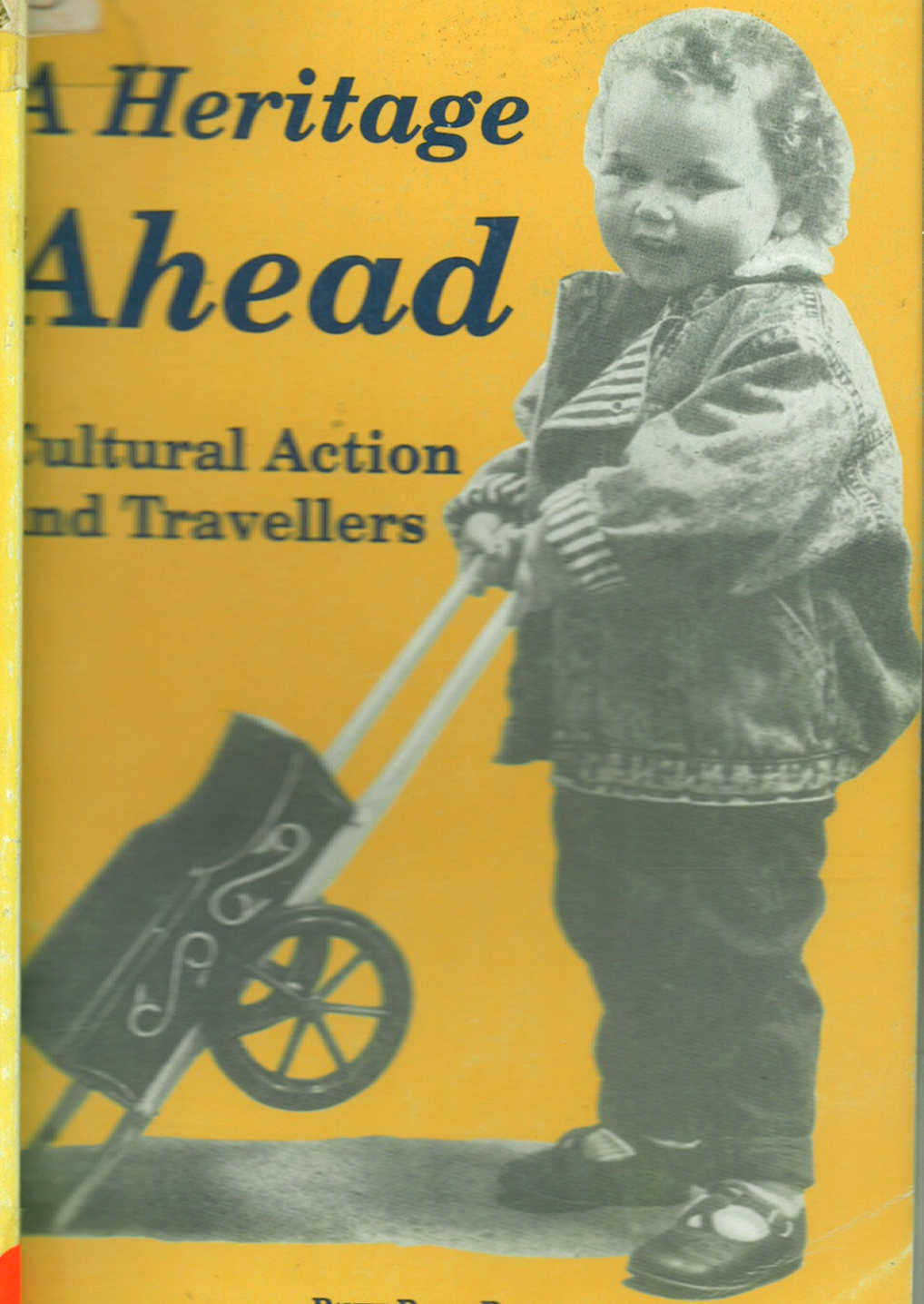


Over the last five years since the Travellers Cultural Heritage Centre was set up, Traveller groups around the country have increasingly used creative means to express identity through dance, photographic and art exhibitions etc.

The collection of oral history has been recognised as being important to local Traveller groups who are now rewriting and telling their own story. As the Travellers' Cultural Heritage Centre reaches it's fifth year of existence, we look back on this use of cultural action, the role of oral history and the arts and highlight some areas of Travellers heritage.It is celebration of the past and a vision of the future.

A Heritage Ahead

Cultural Action and Travellers



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A Heritage Ahead

Cultural Action and Travellers

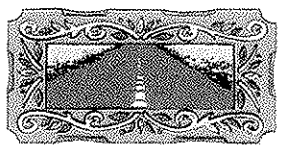
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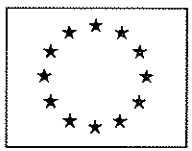
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Cauleys in Pavee Point wagon. Photo: Tony Gavin

Introduction

This book is a product of the Travellers Cultural Heritage Centre (TCHC) which is based in Pavee Point (previously the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group, DTEDG). The centre was set up in 1990 with the following aims:

- To research and document Travellers history which had previously gone unrecorded and therefore develop an appreciation of Travellers cultural heritage.
- To promote Travellers positive identity as an ethnic group and to enhance their cultural identity and self-determination.
- To resource the traditional skills of Travellers as well as stimulating creative development and reinterpretation of these arts.
- To improve knowledge and appreciation of interculturalism in Ireland.

Pavee Point, by setting up the TCHC,is pioneering the use of cultural action in the overall work with Travellers. As the TCHC reaches its fifth year of existence we look back on the work to date to analyse it, and to document it. We do this for two main reasons.

1 As an aid to ourselves to stand back from our work and evaluate both the aims and the work to date as a means of moving ahead into a new phase of development.

2 Over the last five years Traveller groups around the country have increasingly used creative means to express identity, through drama, photographic and art exhibitions etc. The collection of oral history has been recognised as being important to local Traveller groups and the

latter are now recording and telling their own stories. This book may contribute to the work of these groups with the possibility of stimulating discussions and sharing of ideas and experiences between groups. It may also help other Traveller groups interested in undertaking this kind of approach to appreciate the opportunities and benefits of cultural action.

This project began in March 1994 with a lecture series on different aspects of Travellers cultural heritage. These covered the areas of folklore, music and history with talks given by Bairbre Ó'Floinn, Nicolas Carolan and John O'Connell. This series culminated in a seminar on Travellers heritage. The guest speaker for this was Hugues de Varine (a consultant in local and community development, France, and former Director of International Council of Museums). The text of his talk is included in this publication. The discussion workshops during the seminar were on the topics of:

(a) the importance of a community recording its past;
(b) questions of who the researcher should be i.e. from within the community itself or an outside researcher and the benefits and limitations of both;
(c) how accessible the traditional museums/archives etc. are to Travellers, what materials have been collected by them and discussions on alternative approaches to museums;
(d) Travellers language, its importance to Travellers ethnic identity and its future.

During the evaluation process of this series and seminar it was decided to document the ideas that had emerged and to bring out this publication covering each of the themes of the workshops. Guest speakers and lecturers kindly agreed to submit papers and these together with our own pieces of analysis form the basic content of this publication.

This publication is divided into three main areas.

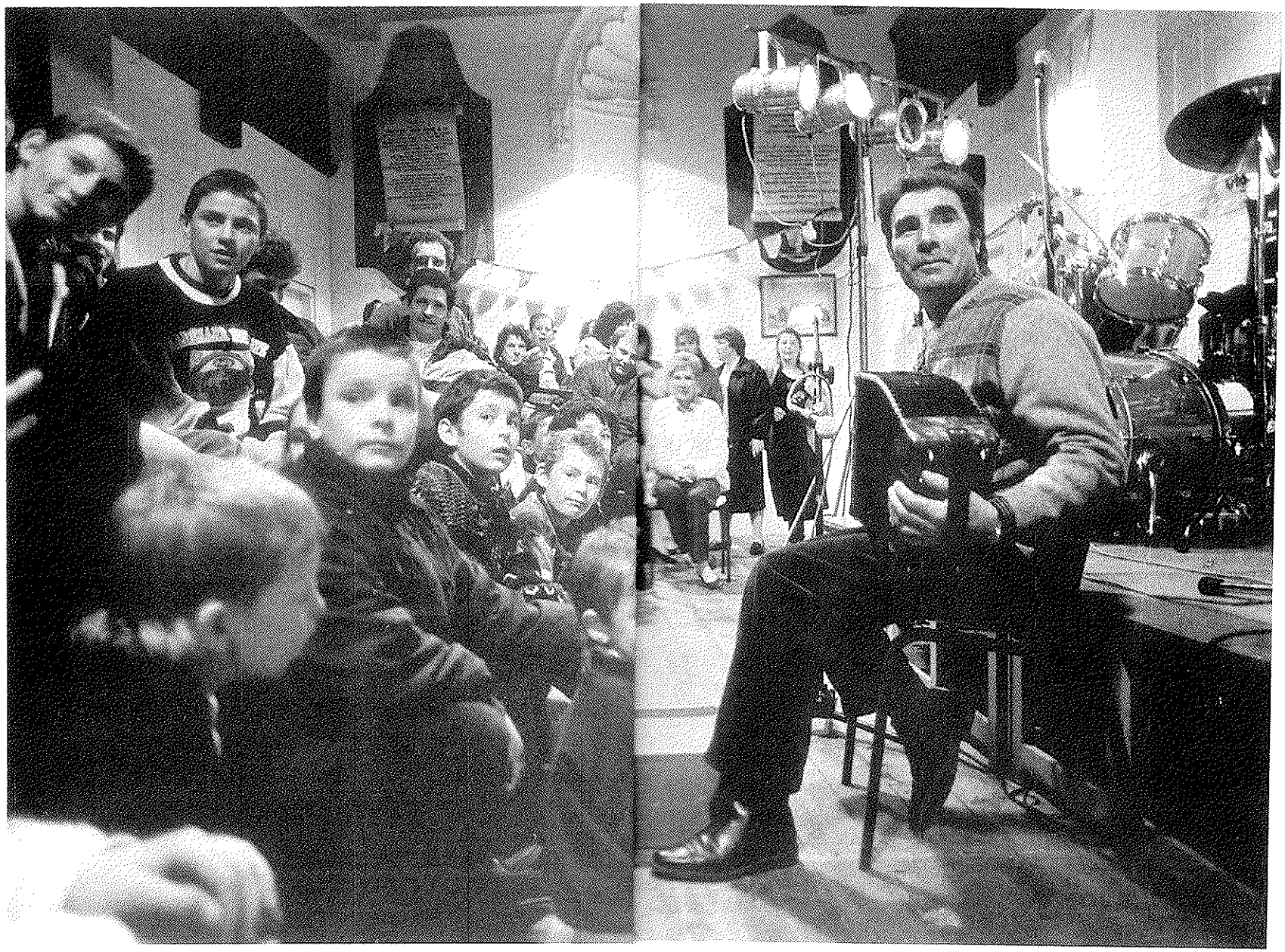
1 The role of the past,
2 The role of Arts in Community Development
3 Different aspects of Travellers heritage, i.e. music, folklore, language.

In the first section there is an overview of what is meant by cultural action, why this type of action has been undertaken and how it fits into the overall work with Travellers. It also discusses the importance of a community knowing and appreciating their shared history. Why Traveller history has largely gone unrecorded and the consequences of this. The benefits of reminiscence techniques particularly for the elderly. The use of the oral research method and the audio-visual presentation of information. The processes involved and the benefits and difficulties of Traveller research group undertaking this work. The failure of classical museums in relation to the cultural identity of minority groups. The thinking behind a community museum.

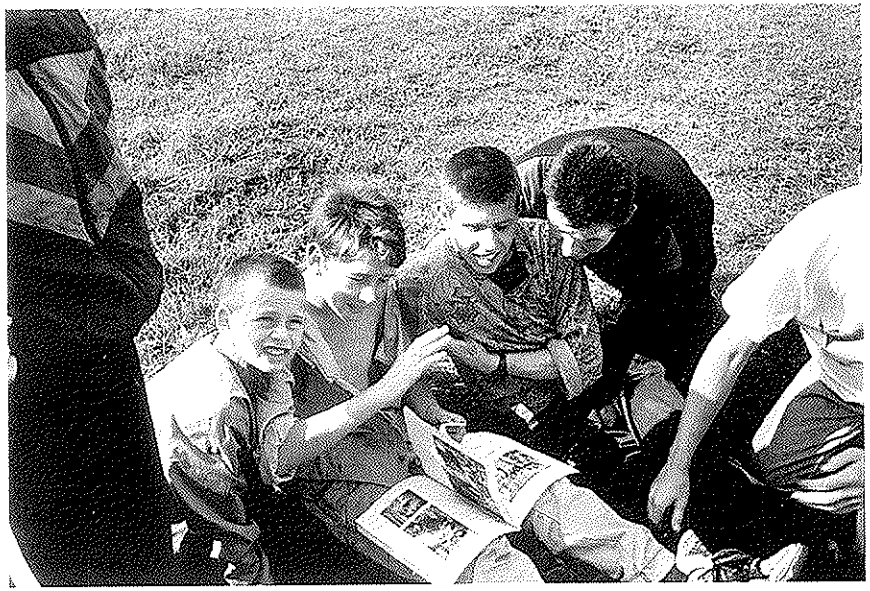
There are two papers in the second section. They look at how the arts mediums and a strategy of cultural action can be used to fulfil the aims of community development and the role of the arts in Travellers education, formal and informal.

The third section consists of three papers on different aspects of Travellers heritage. These include a selection of material collected by the UCD Folklore Department on Travellers oral tradition, a discussion on Travellers language as researched by Alice Binchy and finally a piece on Traveller musicians and singers as researched by the TCHC team in 1994.

The title of this publication represents our ideas on both the importance of appreciating the heritage of the past while also focusing on the need to carry that pride forward. That pride will ensure that Travellers control their future where awaits 'a heritage ahead'.



James Collins playing at Travellers Arts Festival Pavee Point. Photo: Derek Speirs



Reading Pavee Pictures in the park. Photo: Derek Speirs



Launch of Pavee Pictures Exhibition. Photo: Derek Speirs

Why Cultural Action?

Gearóid Ó Riain

Co-ordinator of the Community Development Programme

In this paper I am going to explain why I think it is important to include what we have been calling "cultural action" in the work with Travellers; why it is important to include it in an explicit way, in a systematic and planned way. Because, although we are all conscious that culture is a central part of the issues facing Travellers, and although it is often referred to directly in our work, it has rarely been given full-time attention and resources. Cultural action is an essential spoke in the wheel which, as it turns, means progress for a Travellers movement and any strategy which fails to recognise this is incomplete.

Firstly, let me tell you about the beginning of the Cultural Heritage Centre and how we came up with the idea in the first place. I will move on from that to deal with the reasons for engaging in this process, explaining it in terms of a response to the colonisation of Travellers. Then I will talk about some of the lessons learnt along the way in the hope that they may be of some use to you in undertaking cultural actions.

I remember meeting John O'Connell in the basement corridor of 39 Upper Gardiner Street, our previous premises. He was returning from an exhibition put on by the Inner City Folklore Group in a local library and he was very impressed. Mick Rushe and his team had interviewed a selection of ordinary local people, young and old and had recorded

their stories. They had dipped their fingers into a pot of gold which, although it was right beside the Financial Centre of Dublin, has not had its value recognised or recorded in the mainstream of Irish cultural life. The exhibition gave a fascinating insight into a community, a community rich in experience and in character. I think it was immediately obvious to John that it was not just an interesting story, but an important one to record and to tell and that a similarly ignored story was waiting to be told in the sector in which we were working.

Another stream which fed our thinking resulted from a visit by Niall Crowley to some "ecomuseums" in Denmark. These are community museums, again with the focus on telling the stories of ordinary people.

Finally, the writings of Hugues de Varine, contributed to developing our thinking on the subject.

As I said, we were in Gardiner Street at the time, waiting to move into Pavee Point. The coincidence of the above influences seemed to fit neatly together with the move to our more spacious base. Conscious of the possibilities the new location would offer we began to explore the notion of these ecomuseums and the possible application of de Varine's ideas to a Travellers' Cultural Heritage Centre (TCHC).

After being discussed and refined, applications for funding were made to FÁS and in January 1991 the TCHC came into formal existence with the first Community Response Programme (CRP) course. There was now a Cultural Heritage Team. Five Travellers, began training in heritage work and their first production was "Nomadism Now and Then", an audio-visual presentation. There have been several projects completed since then, including other A/V presentations, publications and arts festivals.

The discussions which took place leading up to this start set the centre on a very deliberate course and there was a sense of excitement, because although we had all been conscious of the richness of Traveller culture for a long time, the thought of ploughing this fertile ground, in order to nourish the "mortas cine" or "pride of a people" was challenging

and full of promise. It was true that a lot of the work already done before the TCHC and still being done independently of it could have been described as cultural action, and this is one of its strengths. It is integrated into the whole Pavee Point project and the whole Pavee Point project relates to it. But by allocating resources exclusively to this field it shifted this facet of the work up a gear. In the same manner defining it as a distinct area of work gave it a focus and a clarity of purpose which maximised the effectiveness of the investment of resources.

I now want to tease out in more detail the premise on which the work was founded. One way of describing it is to say that Travellers have been colonised. What I mean by this is similar to Freire's idea of the culture of silence. I want to talk of colonisation in order to draw out the parallels with the overall Irish experience of colonisation and responses to it.

An essential condition which has to prevail before any group can engage in work for self-determination is that they believe in their own collective self-worth and that they have a worked-out understanding of their own identity.

This equally applies to Travellers who share the characteristics of colonised peoples everywhere. The exact nature of the act of colonisation is unclear. We do no know when or how it started. It was probably not a premeditated, once-off act. Rather more likely is a gradual, seeping cultural domination. The coloniser may not have been from a foreign land but came instead across the border between nomadism and sedentarism.

If we look at the symptoms we can diagnose the disease. One of the principal legacies of colonisation is the depletion in the sense of self-worth of the colonised. This externally imposed self-devaluation serves to maintain the status quo by weakening the resolve of the colonised to work for change. It turns anger inwards and contributes to low self-esteem and divisiveness among the members of the community and can manifest itself in delinquency and break down of the fabric of the society. The maxim "Divide and Rule" comes to mind.

Like with overt colonisation:

(i) Laws have been made to prohibit Travellers from the use of their traditional lands and force has been used to implement them.

(ii) Travellers are seen as a problem, an obstacle to progress. Attempts are made to control them in order to render them unobtrusive to settled people, becoming something which, at the best of times, is only "tolerated".

(iii) The very existence of their cultural identity is denied or is seen as primitive, uncivilised or even savage and stuck in the past. Charitable members and institutions of the dominant group set about civilising and rehabilitating them "for their own sakes".

Of course Irish settled people should recognise and understand this process very well because as a people we too have endured colonisation. We should well understand because we paid in similar currency as Travellers have. Our lands, language and culture has been subordinated to a foreign ruler. In parallel we share the legacies of colonisation with Travellers. But we as settled people are both coloniser and colonised. I dwell on this to draw on the lessons which the national movement for self-determination holds for the Traveller movement.Let me now make the case that the seeds of Irish independence were sown in cultural action and that for Travellers there must also be a cultural revival if they are to achieve justice, human rights and control over their own lives.

The end of the last century was a key period in the movement for Irish independence. It is no coincidence that the beginnings of the moves towards independence were marked overwhelmingly by cultural actions asserting the value of Irish heritage. The Gaelic League was founded to revive the Irish language, the Gaelic Athletic Association was founded to revive the games. There was a resurgence of interest in Gaelic literature, mythology and culture in general.

In other words the symbols of Irishness which had hitherto been devalued, marginalised and were in decline (which in the eyes of the coloniser were primitive or even savage) were rising from the ashes to help restore the collective sense of self-worth of the people. The oppressed people, who tend to accept and internalise the negative, inferior status bestowed upon them by the oppressor were beginning to shake off the symptoms of the disease.

The cultural actions that the TCHC has undertaken have had the same essential aim: to resource Travellers collective sense of self-worth i.e. to say it is OK to be a Traveller; to say it is good to be a Traveller. The following five aims are based on that central theme.

(i) To promote and enhance the cultural identity and self-determination of Irish Travellers.

(ii) To promote Travellers positive self-understanding as an ethnic group.

(iii) To develop an appreciation of Travellers' cultural heritage.

(iv) To stimulate and support creative activities among Travellers.

(v) To improve knowledge and appreciation of interculturalism in Ireland.

We set about countering the negative propaganda and the destructive messages about themselves with which Travellers are constantly bombarded. Self re-evaluation as a necessary prerequisite to self-determination echoes of other peoples struggles, such as Steve Biko's simple but shattering message that "Black is beautiful" to his fellow South Africans. His message shook a system which equated being black with negativity and inferiority. A message widely internalised by Blacks. The parallel with Travellers is obvious.

So in tackling our overall aim of resourcing Travellers sense of self-worth and identity we set about communicating two key concepts. The first is that Travellers have a past. Travellers have their own story to tell, which hitherto had been ignored, forgotten or distorted to fit the settled people's way of explaining Travellers existence. The second one is that Travellers have a future; that Travellers aren't just an unfortunate group that have suffered and are more or less finished. But that they are a dynamic, evolving, resilient society, highly skilled at adapting to

new, often hostile circumstances.

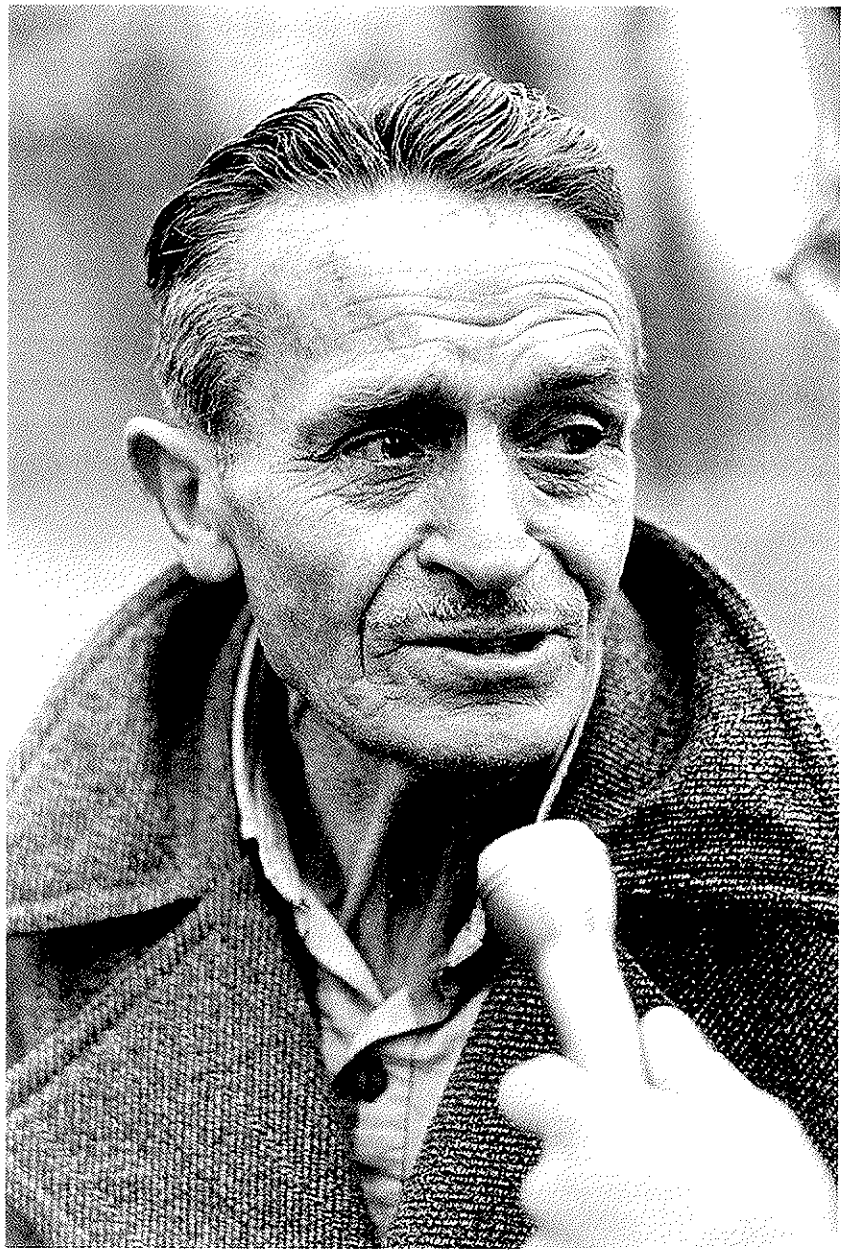
I remember someone saying to me after seeing "Nomadism Now and Then"..."but it is too positive, it is too hopeful. What about all the dire living conditions?" I didn't agree that it didn't illustrate the desperate conditions Travellers are in but previously we may have concentrated disproportionately on bad physical living conditions without realising that to get out of those conditions people need to be armed with more than statistics. They need hope and pride in who the person will be once they have succeeded in changing those conditions. So, just as settled people learn about who they are and have that identity reinforced in school and in history classes and in all the media that surround them, Travellers need to have their identity reinforced because as a society they need to be well disposed to themselves. They need to have access to their past because that makes them who they are today, as they move forward and make decisions about the future.

The TCHC has also been working to encourage other institutions to take Travellers on board in their own arena. Other institutions have a responsibility to acknowledge and reflect the existence of Travellers in their particular field. The TCHC has attempted to be a catalyst for this type of recognition, acknowledgement and resourcing by linking up with national cultural organisations, e.g. The Irish Museum of Modern Art, the UCD Irish Folklore Department, the National Traditional Music Archive, The Abbey Theatre. In all of these places there was a high degree of goodwill and openness. If this type of contact was developed there would be a great multiplier effect, giving Travellers a profile in many new sectors. Of course this role as catalyst could also be applied to local as well as national institutions to great effect.

The TCHC is also willing and available to resource and encourage other Traveller groups to incorporate cultural actions into their work in an explicit way. Some have already begun to go into action. The Ennis, Tullamore and Navan groups have run projects of a specifically cultural natur

No matter what form they take it is important to use whatever opportunities present themselves to resource Travellers in celebrating their identity and in deepening their awareness of their own heritage. The older generation of Travellers are a particularly rich resource to the younger generation. There have been huge changes in Travellers' lives in the past three generations. This crystalises the importance of facilitating communication between them before the memories are gone forever and future generations are left vulnerable to assertions that they have no past as Travellers and therefore have no future as Travellers.

Cultural questions are central to the problems facing Travellers. Cultural actions, thus, must be woven into the overall project to create a society which respects and validates Traveller for who they are.



Field recording in Maynooth 1991. Photo: Derek Speirs

Travellers and History

John O'Connell

Director of Pavee Point.

Should Travellers take an interest in their own history and should people working with Travellers encourage this? What relevance does the past have for the present and the future? Is it better to forget about the past and get on with the challenges we face today? Is the writing of history and research into the past something which should be left to the experts? Isn't there a danger of becoming sentimental and nostalgic when we remember the past instead of facing up to the responsibilities of the present? These are some of the questions one comes up against when one begins to focus on Travellers' cultural heritage. Some of these questions have been posed by Travellers themselves who seem somewhat ambivalent and even embarrassed by efforts to focus on the past. It is as if the focus on the past is opposed to modernisation and the many benefits of progress.

These questions are not of course unique to Travellers. But given the lack of information about Travellers' in Irish history the questions take on extra meaning. These questions have been raised in reaction to some of the developments around the Pavee Point Cultural Heritage Project.

When the question of the origins of Irish Travellers arises there is often mention of the Famine but this is no longer accepted by many as an adequate explanation. References to Travellers pre-date the Famine

and Traveller identity, language, as well as their resistance to assimilation require further research in order to arrive at a more adequate explanation. While the famine may not shed much light on the origins of Travellers, the way the history of the famine is being discussed is interesting and relevant for looking at the value for Travellers in looking at their own history.

The Great Hunger or Famine is being commemorated this year to mark the 150th anniversary of that tragic event. This in itself is the cause of some debate among academics, journalists, social activists and others. Some question the timing of the commemoration, others question and/or provide reasons why we did not mark the 100th anniversary in some way. Some commentators question the value of recalling the event. Others argue about its relevance and meaning for us today.

In an article in the Irish Times, under the heading "Neurosis behind attempts to 'revise' the Famine", journalist John Waters condemns historians who question the horror of the Great Hunger and deny its brutality: "the kind of debates now being conducted between those who think we should remember and those who think we should forget contribute nothing to the possibility of that process being realised. In fact, because they suggest that the Famine is a matterof controversy, or that remembering it has to do with clarifying peripheral details, they are damaging the chances of a true process of remembering. Of course, we need as much information as possible about our history. All of us have emerged from that history and therefore need to understand as much as we can the forces that made us the way we are. But the essence of that history is irrefutable. It is a calamitous history, characterised by outside interference and violence of an extreme kind. The Famine is the most calamitous recent episode in that history, and in that sense serves as a doorway of comprehension to the wider historical experience.....The attitude of revisionist historians to the Famine has been characterised by evasiveness. The attitude of the neurotics who feed off this version



McDonagh children Navan. Photo: DerekSpeirs

of history is nothing short of hysterical denial. They are afraid because they know that the meaning of the Famine challenges everything they want to believe". (The Irish Times, 21 February 1995).

The debate arising from the commemoration raises questions similar to those being raised in relation to Travellers' history and the relevance of Travellers' cultural heritage.

One of the difficulties in relation to Travellers' history is the lack of data. The lack of written materials and the reliance on oral tradition within the Traveller community has contributed to the invisibility of Travellers in the history books. But it also widely accepted that the writing of history is not a neutral exercise. The women's movement has drawn attention to this by focusing on the male bias of historians. Likewise, Marx highlighted the tendency for the ruling ideas of an era to be the ideas of the ruling class. For most of us history in school

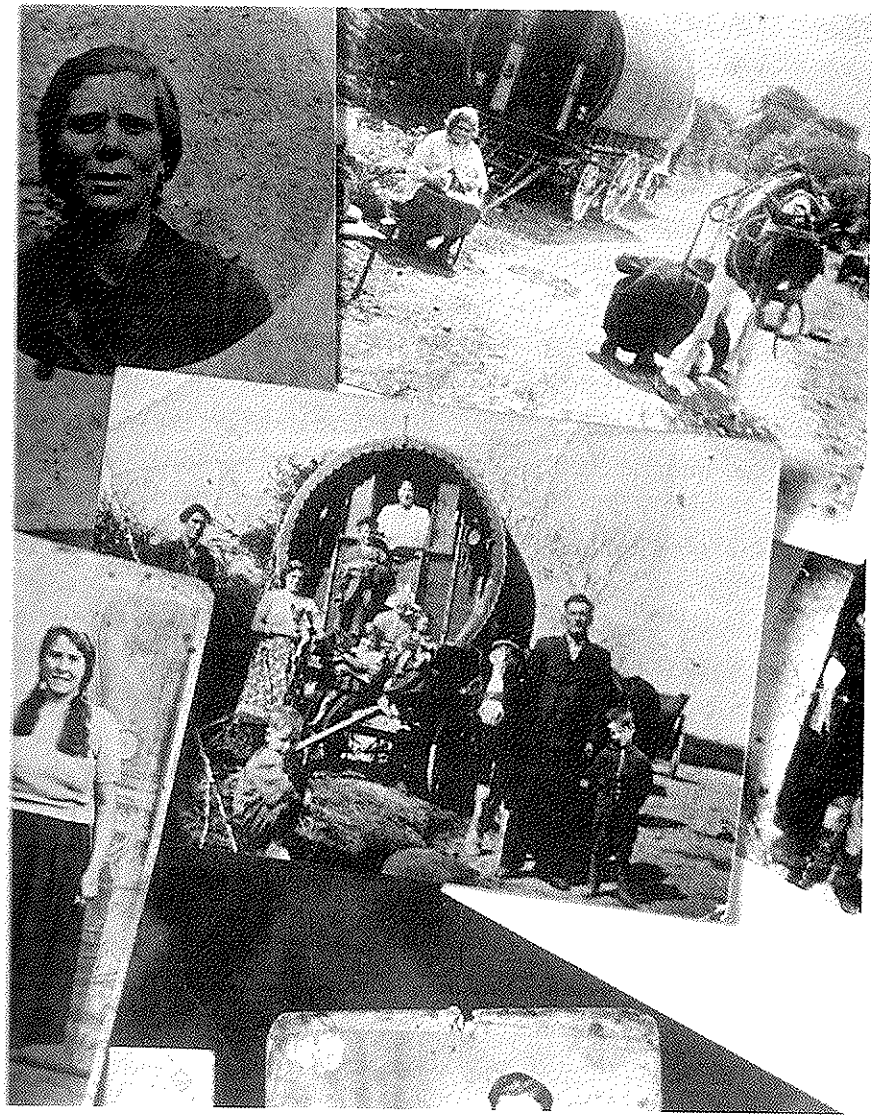
confirmed this as we memorised dates, battles and the names of kings and queens with little or no reference to the lives of ordinary people.

Even the Bible has been the source of much controversy in this regard and scripture scholars and theologians debate over the historicity of certain events and interpretations. Indeed the word hermeneutics or science of interpretation is largely associated with scriptural scholarship. It opened up new approaches which show the importance of the socio-economic, political and cultural context, the purpose, perspectives and bias of the historian, the target audience, the style and form of presentation, the sources of information and the influences on that information and so on. All of this touches on questions about the reliability, the validity and the representativeness of the points of view presented as well as the inferences drawn from events, norms and symbols. But it also opens up the notion of the 'underside of history' by posing questions about the meaning of the biblical message from the perspective of the oppressed, the marginalised and the excluded.

When people have no official history they tend to invent it by resorting to legends and myths. This is true not only of the marginalised but also of the dominant sectors in society. Certain explanations and justifications can be provided by ideologies to avoid critical and challenging questions. Obviously these are not very satisfactory and given that a basic human need is for knowledge and understanding it is not surprising that people thirst for the truth. We want to know who we are individually and collectively and where we have come from. It enables us to develop a sense of dignity and a sense of purpose.

Unfortunately many ordinary people like Travellers tend to be written out of history or forgotten by historians. It is important therefore that Travellers are given an opportunity to tell their own story, to write their own history, to record and recall memories and to interpret the past. This is important for developing individual and group self-esteem and confidence.

When it is suggested that Travellers themselves should be involved in



Selection from the photographic archive in Pavee Point. Photo: Derek Speirs

this process and become key players in recording their own history many people raise questions about objectivity and neutrality. This is a valid enough challenge because there is a danger of just reinforcing legends and myths which console and comfort but do not question or challenge. However, there is also a risk in looking for the 'hard facts' as though these existed in some kind of vacuum untouched by social realities and subjective interpretations. In reality it is important ..."to appreciate the complexity with which reality and myth, 'objective' and 'subjective', are inextricably mixed in all human perception of the world, both individual and collective" (Thompson, P. 135). It is important therefore when looking at the past to acknowledge the variety of perspectives and values and also to consider diverse viewpoints and opinions.

Professional historians are not immune from bias, values, commitments and ideologies any less than anybody else. This is not necessarily a problem once these are made explicit and the position of neutral spectator is questioned. Once opinions are made known they can be tested in terms of logical consistency, empirical evidence, comparative analysis and relevance.

The involvement of Travellers themselves in telling their own story means that they become subjects rather than objects in the process. This in itself is very important for the development of awareness, pride and a sense of worth. Travellers' oral history is very important therefore not just for recording 'the facts' but also for capturing the experiences, the imagination, the feelings, and the perspectives which are associated with events and relationships. Sometimes these are best reflected in the symbols, the songs, the stories and the myths of a group and not just in the so called 'hard facts'.

The value of remembering the past has been seen by some commentators as providing a kind of healing or therapy (cf. Thompson, 1978; Butler, 1963, Merriman, 1980). We all know that memories can store up strong feelings and have experiences of how recalling the past events

can release powerful emotions. This has been found to be very valuable in work with the elderly enabling them to reflect on their lives, express their feelings and find validation for their contributions. Before the advent of television perhaps there was more scope for story-telling and for healthy reminiscing to take place in a normal inter-generational context. In relation to Travellers we have found that certain symbols such as the Travellers' wagon or tent can trigger off reminiscing. Likewise photographs and slides can evoke times past and help stimulate discussion, story-telling and reflection.

Denial of the past or flight from the past do not constitute a healthy strategy for coping with difficult times or memories. The past is relevant for the present and the future, and reflection on the past can throw light on contemporary issues and challenges. It is important that ordinary people, including Travellers, are actively involved in telling their own story and not just become the objects of the stories of others. In the growing appreciation of cultural diversity in Ireland it is all the more important that Travellers' perspectives are included and that Travellers themselves are encouraged to remember their past in order to move forward with confidence and self-esteem.

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Julieane Joyce and Bernadette Ward T.C.H.C. recordings. Photo: Dublin in Dept.



T.C.H.C. research team at work. Photo: Derek Speirs.

Travellers on Research

Travellers' Cultural Heritage Centre Research Team

Our research team presently comprises seven Travellers. Through the FÁS Community Response Programme we have undertaken several projects on Travellers heritage, nomadism, the story of Traveller women and research of Traveller music and crafts. Since the programme began in 1991 approximately twenty Travellers have received training in research methods and audio visual skills as well as developing skills in communication and leadership through this process. The training process has opened up many opportunities for us but has also allowed us to make some contribution to the Traveller community as a whole in terms of documenting our past.

In this paper we would like to share our experiences of oral research work and of the production of a slide show as an example of that work. By outlining the processes involved and some issues that arose for us we hope that other Traveller groups find our experiences helpful in undertaking similar research projects in their local area.

In the beginning the group decided to bring out a slide show telling the story of Travellers history because there was very little evidence of our past having been recorded or represented in museums and archives. What information was available has mainly been collected by settled people. In some cases this has meant that our history was given

a romantic image, in others it has been represented with a negative bias. We did find some collections which were neither of the above, particularly from the UCD Folklore Department which showed a great respect and understanding of Traveller culture in their collection of stories and material from Travellers for the last 100 years. However overall it was obvious to us that much of our past was being lost and because of this the huge oral heritage of our community had both declined and lacked recognition or appreciation by both the settled community and Travellers themselves.

We saw the need to share our past with our young people so that they would know where they came from and be proud of their past. This is particularly important today as our young people face increasing discrimination for being members of the Traveller community which could make them be ashamed of their culture and deny their identity.

However, we were also aware that many museums focus on the past making no links with the present and with little relevance to life and issues today. We saw no benefit to going down that road and have attempted in all our work to record the wider story from the memories of our older generation to the hopes of our youth.

Although our main concern was to record our history as a resource to Travellers we also hoped to help break down barriers between settled people and Travellers. The discrimination faced by Travellers is often the result of ignorance or fear on the part of settled people and by telling our story and showing the issues affecting us in a creative and non-threatening way we could help combat that ignorance and replace the fear with respect for our own distinct culture.

The initial part of the process for the research team was to identify what skills they would need for the oral research project. These include the following:

Literacy

Although the advantage of the oral research method (collecting by recorded interview and presenting in audio-visual) is that it is not essential for either the researcher or the target group to be literate. However a certain level of literacy is important to make the project more successful. For example the researcher does not have to rely on memory in asking questions and can have full questionnaires prepared for the interview or flash cards to remind them of important areas to cover. It is also important as a means of storing the material. If all taped interviews have been transcribed there is both taped and written records of the material. The group found that the project itself was an incentive to develop and improve literacy skills as the content of their learning (e.g. transcribing interviews) was more relevant than most of the adult literacy programmes which generally do not reflect Traveller culture or experience. Some of the more literate in the group developed computer skills as part of the project for the same reasons as above.

Interviewing Techniques

The group spent the early part of the course in training and group work before beginning the interviews. Most of this training centres around developing communication skills leading onto interviewing techniques. This for the most part is done creatively e.g. role plays, mock interviews, while videoing the training to evaluate progress and areas for improvement. The next stage was to identify the content of the research. This involved identifying what areas of the work would be covered, what age groups and what the focus of the research would be. For example in 'Nomadism Now and Then' the group wanted to focus on subjects including customs, beliefs, cures, and changing economic, accommodation and education issues. Questionnaires covering these areas were drawn up. The group then endeavoured to research a cross section of the community in terms of age, sex, different counties, urban and rural etc. Other skills required for interviewing were in the use of the recording equipment and again this was practiced in the group with each other before the start of the research.

Personal and Group Development

As part of the overall training there was an emphasis on personal development and group work skills which acted as a basis for developing skills in communication, decision making and conflict resolution. The trainees would set personal and group goals short and long-term and these as well as the research work were evaluated on a regular basis.

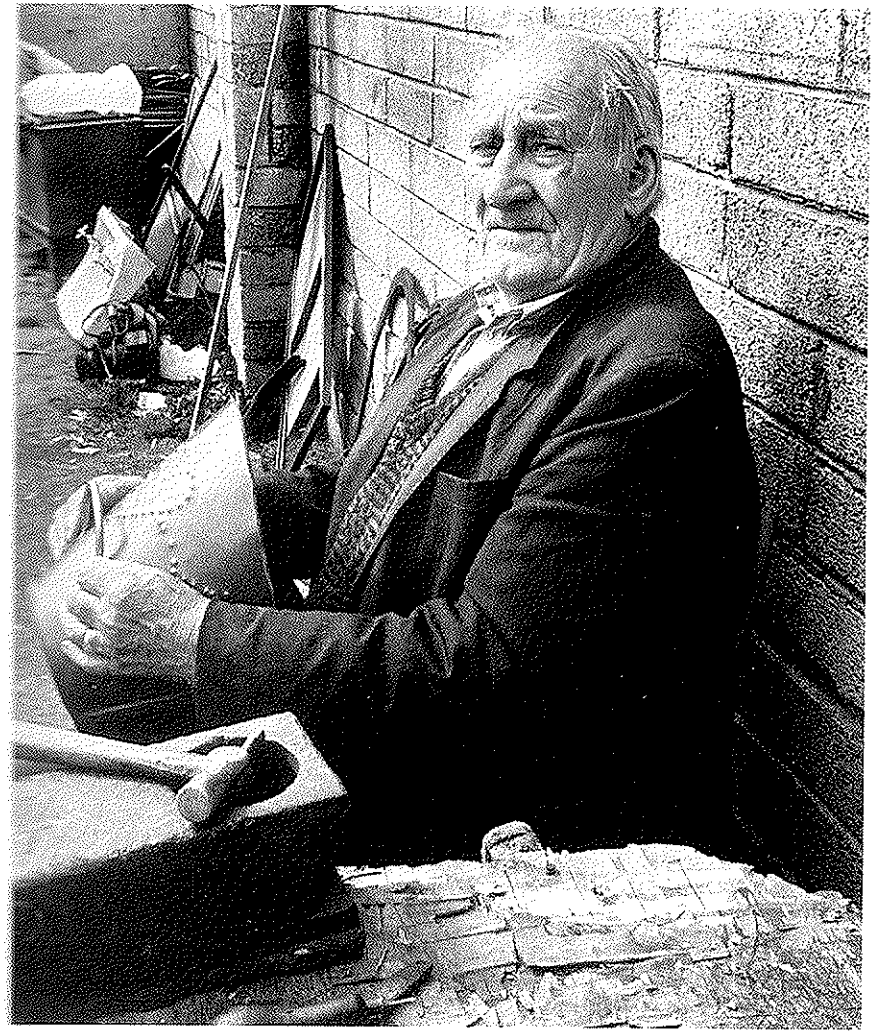
Background Research and Editing

Some background information was necessary, and while the research team being members of the community itself was an advantage in that they would have more contacts etc, some work was needed in researching areas unfamiliar to the group e.g. with different families, different areas of the country or different economic situations. Also the need to find photographs, slides, music etc. for the slide show gave experience in archival research and involved visiting museums, archives, libraries, etc.

The editing process was the longest part of the project and involved drawing up an outline format of the presentation. Having the written transcriptions made the process easier in pinpointing the relevant pieces from each interview so that each area identified could be covered. From these a narration could be composed to link the areas together to create the overall story from past to present. With this script the old photos could be matched and new photographs taken to provide images to match the story. The audio and visual parts were then combined in professional studios which allowed the voice-over and the slides to be fitted together and pulsed.

Altogether the entire project including the training process could take from six to nine months to complete. The group found it beneficial to divide the process into short term goals and deadlines. So dates were set for completion of training, preparation for interviews, questionnaires, completion of interviews, editing etc.

The final stage was the launch of the new material and most groups



Paddy McDonagh Coolock. Photo: Derek Speirs.

would be familiar with the amount of the work that is involved in a public launch, from media coverage, to preparation of venue, invitations to be sent out, speeches to be prepared etc. However,the feeling of completion of a project makes such an event worthwhile. Particularly for trainees it is great to have a visible end- product on completion of a training course.

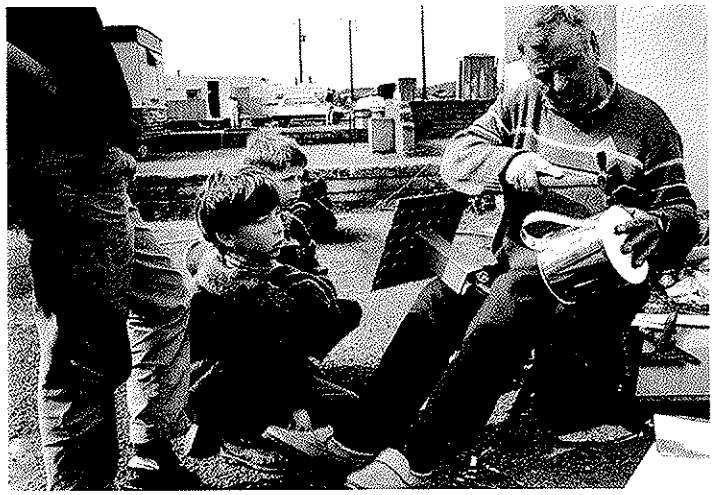
One of the main issues that arose for us during the course of the research project was being a Traveller researcher. This has both advantages and disadvantages. In may cases an interviewee would be more relaxed with a Traveller and we feel possibly more honest and open than they would be with an outside researcher. There was also a higher level of participation and interest in our work as most Travellers understood the benefits of having their and other Travellers stories recorded for the TCHC. Hence the overall feeling of Traveller ownership of the project and material was greater. There were some issues that arose particularly in terms of sometimes being too familiar with the interviewee e.g. occassionally stories were not told because the inverviewee knew the interviewer knew the material already. On the other hand there may be a reluctance to go into unfamiliar camps or to unfamiliar Travellers. There may be a chance that some material was held back due to embarrassment or because the interviewer was related etc. There was one or two instances where we experienced suspicion or misunderstanding. However, overall the advantages outweighed the problems and in most cases if an issue arose, it was only necessary to talk it through with the interviewee or the family in question. We made a point of explaining our project before any interview took place and outlining how the material would be used.

The slide show can be used for many different purposes. We have found it a good resource for showing to both Traveller and settled groups alike. The fact that the audience does not have to be literate is an advantage of this type of presentation, making it accessible to all. A publication can deny access to many people although there are obvious

benefits to publishing material also! The slide show presents information in both audio and visual. The combination of sound and images is effective and many images remain with the audience. It has lobbying power in putting issues forward in a persuasive but non-threatening way. Although it plays only a small part oral research has a role to play in Travellers struggle for equality and justice today, but it also ensures that we pass on as much of ourselves as possible to future generations.



Sarah Joyce in Pavee Point 1992. Photo: Derek Speirs.



Davey Collins Dunsink. Photo: Derek Speirs.

Community Museums

Hugues de Varine

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Former director of the International Council of Museums.

The following text is a brief summary of my intervention at the DTEDG seminar of 26 March 1994. I must underline the fact that I am not an expert in the culture neither of the Irish Travellers, nor of nomadic groups in general. My suggestions are merely a contribution to the Travellers' cultural movement. It is short and summarises a talk which was completed by concrete references to personal experiences and to various sites, about which it would be impossible to give here enough details to offer useful information.

Culture and Development

Culture is an essential dimension of development because it is the language and the heritage of the community, because it is the expression of its identity. In the case of the Travellers, one can say that their culture is also their territory.

By culture, I mean the values, the way of life, the beliefs, the social inter-relations, the memory, the creativity and of course but not primarily, the aesthetic activities and products of the group, whether past or present.

This living culture is for the community:

- a source of self-confidence and the framework of the whole life, it

has to be recognised and valued not only by the members of the community, but also by the societies outside the community,

◆ a resource for development, because it offers many opportunities for education, creation, production, trade, social promotion, within the community and in relation to the outside world.

Because the community is conscious of its culture and uses it as a resource, this community will have a feeling of equality, of equal dignity in relation with other communities, whether they belong to the majority or to other minorities.

As a dimension of development, culture is on a par with the social, economic or political dimensions. In fact I believe that it comes first since there is a cultural component in every action and aspect of development. This has to be reminded constantly to the political, administrative and social leaders who seem always to consider only the aspects supposedly more "useful" or "efficient" of the development policies, like employment, quality of life, housing, transport, social benefits, security, etc.

The Museum: A Cultural Tool For Development

A museum, or more exactly a certain kind of museum, is a useful instrument for serving development through cultural means.

The development needs information, presented and disseminated in such a way that everybody in the community can understand it and make use of it. A museum can be a communication medium.

Development needs active links with the past and the memory of the community, in order to establish a continuity and to relate the unknown future to identified values and facts validated by tradition. A museum can be a community archive.

Because of all that, the fundamental objective of such a museum cannot be to serve some idealistic idea of culture, to serve the arts, or to please foreign visitors, or to cater to captive audiences, like school parties.

Such a museum must answer to the needs of development and be integrated in a coherent and comprehensive effort to serve the needs of the community as a whole. It is not qualified by a scientific reference (art museum, science museum, anthropology museum...), it is called by the name of the community it belongs to, or by a symbol of this community.

The Museum as a Process

In my opinion, a community museum is not an institution following administrative rules, established in one or several buildings, housing a collection, receiving a public.

It is a process. It covers a territory (the use of buildings, temporarily or permanently, is a facility). It encompasses the total heritage of the community, whether natural sites, monuments, objects, activities, immaterial traditions or know-how, etc. It belongs to a population, and this population, because it lives on the territory, lives in the museum.

As a process, the museum is an open-ended project. It is in itself a cultural product of the community, because it is the result of the efforts of its members: it belongs to them as much as they belong to it. It is not a "cultural institution" made for the people, or for touristic visitors, or for learned users. It is not a treasure house, since it does not necessarily accumulate collections to hoard them and store them, and conserve them.

It utilises objects, documents which exist within the community, for exhibiting them, for school demonstrations, for interactive sessions with community groups, for publications.

If it must have an institutional status, this status should be flexible and remain under the control of the community. The financial sponsors, the scientific advisers, the technical staff should help without imposing their views and influencing the programmes.

The advantage of such a museum, in the case of Travellers, is that it does not need a fixed installation: it can be moved around, either in

"mobile museums" (specially arranged vans or buses) or as movable exhibitions to be put up in any available room or hall near a group of Travellers or in a non-Travellers environment. It also can (and in fact should) have a very small representative collection of objects, acquired, on deposit or on loan, in order to be able to offer permanent educational and cultural services to the community, but basically, any big exhibition or programme should rely on the total heritage of the community, i.e. the personal belongings of its members.

Which Language?

A community museum speaks normally the language of its community, in our case, it would be the language of the living culture of the Travellers, as it is expressed by the objects and documents constituting its heritage.

But a museum speaks also the language of the object, of the real thing, whether it is a tree, a car, a candle, a photo, a song. And this object has to be translated, interpreted, commented upon, into the proper dialect(s) which can be understood by, say, an old Traveller, an adult one, a youngster who does not know the traditions, a sedentary Irishman, or a foreign tourist. It means an effort to communicate with as many users, or consumers, as possible.

Of course, technicians (museographers, exhibition designers) may have to be involved. Such activities, in our days, ask for a strong professional component to be able to compete with commercial exhibitions and fairs, and with television programmes. But the technicians are always to be carefully controlled by the community.

Also community members have to be trained, as much and as soon as possible, in what the Canadians call "popular museography". I would suggest the creation of a permanent (and travelling...) "museum workshop" for such a training, with the initial help of museum specialists invited from permanent institutions, preferably regional and small ones, which have a strong community commitment. It would include

theory and practice of planning, collecting, identification, conservation, presentation, communication, with direct relevance to local and community problems.

A Museum for Whom?

A community museum is made, first of all, for the community itself. The community is both its subject and its object. It's programme, it's policy, its exhibitions, its educational, scientific, artistic, social activities will be planned so as to respond to community needs. We must never forget that community members are not a "public", because they do not visit the museum, they live in it.

But the museum is also a communication media for the community to present itself to the outside world, and to bring the outside world within the community. In that case, the museum will reach a public, in the traditional sense.

So its message, or to put it better, one of its messages, has to be tailored to serve the type of relations one wants to establish with other groups and societies, recognition, image building, inter-cultural dialogue, political and even economic relations.

And the museum must reserve part of its programmes for opening a "window" on the rest of the world, exhibitions invited from related or distant societies and cultures or sent to them, exchange of programmes or information, study visits to other institutions. This will help community members to expand their awareness of what happens elsewhere, to obtain information or initiation into new technologies or methods, to acquire a more critical mind by comparing their situation with others.

The Ways and Means of the Community Museum

We are very far, here, from the big, ambitious, rich, national, official museums, dealing with famous works of art or scientific discoveries, and using the talent of designers, interior and exterior architects,

museographers of international repute...Even if we obtain public or private subsidies, we know that we must, in the long run, rely on ourselves, on voluntary work, on modest budgets, on simple technologies.

But it does not mean that popular museology and museography are necessarily poor, miserable. They must keep in line with state-of-the-art museum techniques and principles. This can be achieved through intensive training of the people selected by the community to lead the museum and heritage programmes, and through the mobilisation of both the imagination and the varied competencies of members of the community. It will be sufficient, since the quality of a community museum is conditioned more by the process (i.e. the various participatory steps and preparatory actions before the final opening of a museum or an exhibition) and by the effectiveness of the end product, than by the amount of money spent on it.

From time to time, it will certainly be possible to produce a big, prestigious, exhibition, with the aim to put the community on an equal level with other communities, including the most sophisticated of them. Such events must also be organised with the help and assistance of major institutions, in order to benefit from their fame and to reach their public.

The "New Museology" Movement

The above remarks are the result of personal experience, mostly in the so-called Ecomuseum of the Urban Community in Le Creusot-Montceau, in Burgundy, France. They were also inspired by the extraordinary and innovative movement of the "New museology", which is largely made of community museums. This movement, which remains essentially informal and is considered by the Museum Establishment as somewhat subversive and revolutionary, is active in Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Canada, Brazil, Mexico. I know of many local development professional and museum specialists which are inspired

by this movement in their daily practices, in France, Spain, India, Germany.

But of course, there is no universal model of such a new, or community museum. Each community is different, and must create its own model, and keep it flexible, our museum in Le Creusot-Montceau was created in the early 70s. More than twenty years later, it was necessary to reform it drastically, because the structure and its founding fathers had aged and were no longer recognised by the new active generations as relevant to present day problems and needs.

This is my conclusion, in culture, as in development, there is nothing final nor complete, everything and everybody is moving along, with highs and lows. A community museum is a living thing, to keep it alive asks of a lot of imagination, energy, humility.



Tullemore Travellers Movement Arts Group. Photo: Dublin in Depth



Nellie Joyce displays the art of flower making. Photo: Derek Speirs

Community Arts and Community Work

Anastasia Crickley

Chairperson of Pavee Point.

Overview

Community Arts work can be viewed as a blow against what Paulo Friere calls the "culture of silence" to which the poor and marginalised are condemned because of their powerlessness and lack of access to the tools with which to address their situation. Viewed in this way community arts is clearly a step in Friere's "Cultural Action for Freedom" and part of a community work process of collective action for change. The relationship between community work and community arts is not always that clear however. While community arts is generally recognised as having a positive contribution to make in work with marginalised peoples there is sometimes a vagueness regarding the exact contribution that community arts makes to community development and collective action.

There are many questions and many challenges in building links between community arts and community work with Travellers. Community Arts take a number of forms and seem to have a variety of valid meanings not all of which can be easily connected directly (or sometimes indirectly) to community work and community development. There are

also different approaches to community work which have different outcomes and different results.

Essentially however community work and community development are about empowerment, participation and the right of people to make collective decisions regarding their lives. Community work is concerned with analysis of social and economic situations and collective work for change. While it may have individual outcomes it is fundamentally concerned with collective development and change for geographic communities or communities of interests i.e. Travellers. The concern with empowerment means it is primarily targeted on the most marginalised.

Sometimes there is confusion between creating the conditions for collective action processes and collective action itself. Some training and education programmes are in themselves collective community work and action processes; many raise consciousness regarding issues experienced by Travellers as a group but do not actively address them or address them only as learning exercises; others are strictly concerned with personal development.

With these thoughts as a background I will now briefly describe the emergence and development of community work and community arts in work with the Travellers over the past decade. I will then outline some of the meanings given to community arts in work with the Travellers and explore how I see these connecting with community work. In conclusion I will raise some more questions and pointers for the future. Throughout my thoughts are based primarily though not exclusively on the work of Pavee Point. This is not because Pavee Point is not essentially the best at doing or combining community arts and community work. Pavee Point however has been synonymous from the outset with the development of community work and community arts work with Travellers and I am personally familiar with the ongoing struggles and outcomes of these attempts.

Community Work and Community Arts Work with Travellers.

The emergence of community development approaches in work with Travellers a decade ago coincided from the beginning with the use and integration of community arts. Both were received with initial scepticism. Community development refocusing the issues away from the perceived wisdom of Travellers as the problem needing to be rehabilitated, and calling for direct participation by Travellers themselves, posed a major challenge to policy makers, politicians and many involved in work with Travellers. Community art, possible only with direct participation, directly challenged Travellers internalised perceptions of themselves as dependants and objects rather than subjects of their past, present and future.

The first Leadership and Development Programme run by Pavee Point from January to June in 1985 had a very clear emphasis on collective action for change.Participants, through the process of the course, became actively involved in work on a number of Traveller issues. Art took many forms in the process of the course from music and song workshops, including one facilitated by Christy Moore, to drama, used to enhance participation, development and consciousness raising. The open day at the end of the course involved Travellers, for the first time, dramatising scenes from their lives, not only for those attending but also on the television news of the day. They posed challenges both for settled peoples perceptions of Travellers and for Travellers perceptions of themselves. The approaches to both collective participation and community arts piloted in that initial programme have since been taken up by a variety of Traveller groups and Traveller projects throughout Ireland North and South.

Collective community work approaches and community arts methods have remained key features of Pavee Point's work over the past decade. The focus in both areas has been dual - that is on process, or

the way things get done, and on product or the uses/outcome of the work. The first FAS funded programme for Traveller women sponsored by Pavee Point in 1988 developed and extended the focus on community arts for example to reminiscence and craftwork. A community arts focus is now a particular feature of programmes for Traveller women with a number of groups hosting exhibitions of paintings and crafts i.e. Exchange House's N.O.W. womens project. Collective action has been facilitated by the development of the National Traveller Womens Forum which grew from the first womens course. In the past few months drama was used to great effect by Traveller women involved in Pavee Point's pilot healthcare initiative to negotiate with and educate the Eastern Health Board regarding support and the issues involved.

Community Arts has been the central feature from the start of the Travellers Cultural Heritage Centre at Pavee Point which promotes greater recognition and understanding of Traveller culture, produces materials and acts as a resource to other groups throughout the country. The centre is a community arts project which is primarily targeted on Travellers developing their own insights and having the space to reflect on their culture in the past, now and in the future.

Traveller Art, Culture, and Community Work.

In effect given that so many Travellers do not read or write (up to 85 % of Traveller adults) it is inevitable that alternatives have to be found to the written word as the basis of meetings, development initiatives, and training programmes. As work with Travellers increasingly becomes less sceptical about their rights to be subjects rather than objects of their future, such alternative approaches inevitably come under the banner of community arts.

Art however is not just a new way of working with Travellers. Art in the past was a key element in Travellers lives. Some of the forms they practised were exclusively Traveller, others involved a distinct Traveller style within a more universal tradition i.e. singing or storytelling. All of

them celebrated and expressed with pride a distinctive way of life which was central to their art and it's practice. However transformations in the economy have transformed the infrastructure around which Traveller art was practised (i.e. plastic has done away with the need for tin ware) challenging Travellers to find new focuses of artistic expression, and connection. Community arts work with the Travellers can play it's part in fusing new focuses of artistic expression particularly in view of the fact that Traveller art practice in the past, took place in the community and was in effect community art. The contribution of community art to the future of Traveller culture is in my view directly connected to it's capacity to support, enhance and be part of collective consciousness raising and action, i.e. linked to community development and action. I will now look at some key community arts approaches and their connections to collective action.

Community Arts and Community Action

Over the last decade in the work of Pavee Point and other groups a variety of approaches and methods in community arts have been developed, illustrating a variety of objectives for the work. The five objectives I will focus on are by no means exhaustive, but they are I believe of value in demonstrating links/cut off points between community arts, collective action and community development.

Access

From the outset Pavee Point was concerned to secure Traveller access to the arts in a number of ways. Traveller participation as audience at cultural, theatre and media events demonstrates their rights as citizens. Collectively analyses and responding to the portrayal of Travellers in the arts and in particular in the media has led to some more sensitive portrayals as were evident in the film "Into The West", to voluntary guidelines for reporting on Travellers being set with the National Union of Journalists, and to rights of reply being available to discriminatory comments and reporting. The achievements of individual Travellers as



Loyko a Russian Gypsy band at Travellers art festival. Photo: Derek Speirs

actors and presenters has raised consciousness of Travellers and settled people regarding Travellers capacities as leading participants in the arts. Traveller spokesperson's media responses and appearances have also done that. In effect, work on issues regarding access to the arts has raised individual and collective consciousness of Travellers and also been the ongoing basis for collective action by Traveller groups.

Artists

The objectives of portraying and developing Travellers as artists has been a creative and developmental focus in community arts work with Travellers which overlaps with access issues and has had some positive effects for individual Travellers and groups of Travellers. However the richness and diversity of the dramas, photographs, paintings, craftwork and books has in many cases not translated into collective ongoing "cultural action for freedom " by the groups involved in the process of

their production. This raises questions as to whether the groups were used as tools for individual development or steps toward collective consciousness raising.

Personal Development and Consciousness Raising

Personal development programmes have become a central feature of work with women including Traveller women over the past decade. Such courses have been somewhat led by the fact that funding is available for them and trainee allowances are important wages for participants. They have also been based on the thesis that the most marginalised need personal capacity biulding in order to make individual progress or be empowered to work collectively. Using community art as the tool in personal development and consciousness raising is an important educational method especially in work with non literate people. It can also create the climate and conditions for collective action and development but is by no means automatically linked with it. Feeling personally positive and being aware of the issues affecting oneself as a Traveller woman are important but will not of themselves remove the blocks or create feasible and creative opportunities for collective action and involvement.

Changing Attitudes and Behaviour in The Settled Population

Arts projects and responses developed by Traveller groups in the past decade have had considerable affects on individual attitudes and behaviour in the settled population. In the face often of local opposition this has been very difficult to translate into collective action by settled people in solidarity with Travellers. A number of Traveller support groups have developed but in many areas where Travellers find themselves isolated there are supportive individuals wary of any collective involvement when using community arts to try to change attitudes and behaviour in the settled population it is more useful in my view to acknowledge that the best effect will be in individual change and creating the conditions for collective action rather than continuing to confuse this with collective action itself.

Community Art as an Integral Part of Collective Development and Action for Change

Traveller events, projects and problems have targeted the integration of community art and collective action for change in a number of ways throughout the past decade. The earlier annual marches in Dublin for Traveller rights combined artistic expression with consciousness raising and action. More recently the Annual Traveller Pilgrimages have created different opportunities for the same integration, not just through the events themselves, but through preperation for, participation in them and the alliances, networks and collective work that have come from them. St. Patrick's Day parades have provided a similar focus. Some training and development programmes have been able to make the same connection but as outlined earlier this was neither automatic nor easy.

Conclusion

I have outlined examples of how community arts and community development can be linked. It is clear however that arts work by virtue of being prefaced by the word community is not automatically the same as or integral to community development. Community arts work which is not integral to collective development may make valid contributions to individual Travellers lives. However Community arts work, like other forms of interaction with Travellers could also be used to reinforce the "superiority" of the settled way of life e.g. to blame nomadism for bad education and accommodation arrangements.

For community arts work to make a contribution to community development and collective action for empowerment, the two need to be integrated from the start. This means that art is not just an end in itself, or connected primarily to self development and expression which in other situations it validly might be, but also an integral part of collective development and action process. This demands that art must be a tool of that process rather than art being a central feature which assumes

that collective processes will flow from it. Such a focus demands particular skills in community work and collective development from those leading the intervention. It also poses particular challenges especially to training programmes which demands individual rather than collective outcomes. A glance at the past decade indicates that these challenges can and have been met. The changes in responses by Travellers to their situation, and the way in which public discourse if not public practice acknowledges Travellers right to their own culture are due in some measure to the successful integration of community arts and community work process.

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Art in school. Photo: M. Boland.

Traveller Education and the Arts

Fran McVeigh

Co-ordinator of Youth Work Programme.

Being neither a teacher nor an artist writing this paper has been an interesting challenge, not only because I have to write of education and particularly Traveller education without a formal education sector label but also because to discuss the arts with a background only in using creative activity as a tool within my work. Not that I would say that education is strictly in the domain of the teaching profession or that the arts is the sole perogative of the artist but in order to ensure that neither take offence by what is said I acknowledge that I wrote this as someone involved in the informal educational sector who uses a variety of creative activity as one method to develop individuals and communities.

In order to look at the area of Traveller education and the arts it is important to acknowledge as it does in the governments green paper on Education for a changing world (1992) that: "educational development of the individual takes place in formal and informal settings".

Formal education, provided by institutions such as colleges, schools, and training centres and informal education provided by voluntary and statutory youth and community services and other community based projects. The arts covers a wide variety of activity such as: theatre, film, video, music, dance, song, painting, crafts, mime, museums, art galleries etc. etc.

Both the arts and education claim in the broadest sense to develop the social, cultural, intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the individual. With such mighty claims it is crucial that Travellers have equal access to them. Three French experts in a report on the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in 1927 stated that: "Arts should not be seen as a privilege of a select few. It is a part of the social amenity to which everyone has a right". This should also be said about education. The links between education and the arts with regards to cultural development is significant. Both play a central role in the development of creative potential, so essential in all spheres of life.

Hugh Frazer, Director of the Combat Poverty Agency stated at a Creative Arts for Everyone (CAFE) AGM that: "Creative Activity is a human right and a human necessity. Without it our lives are diminished and impoverished".

Travellers for too long have been denied this right, they have had their creative potential stamped on by lack of access and opportunity.

Traveller exclusion from both education and the arts is based on a number of factors:

- nomadic lifestyle,
- discrimination,
- access,
- acceptance,
- inappropriate activities,
- lack of recognition of ethnicity.

This exclusion has lead to high levels of illiteracy, low level of school attendance (80% of young Travellers no longer attend school after the age of 12), and alienation from mainstream services. Travellers experience of formal education has been described by one young Traveller as 'a waste of time', "inappropriate" and "irrelevant".

Even though Travellers would have traditionally educated their children at home and in their own communities, an increasing number recognise the benefits of formal education and are now sending their children to school as well as availing of new educational opportunities provided through the informal educational system. What is on offer can depend greatly on the area in which Travellers live. If schools have moved on from providing special classes, (catering for all ages in the one class), separate play times and monocultural activities and recognise the need to develop mechanisms to work in an intercultural way Travellers experience dramatic changes. The use of creative activities as a tool for improving learning, encouraging participation and individual and community development is now widely used within work with Travellers both formaly and informally.

The increased involvement of Travellers in education cannot be claimed to be solely the result of an increased use of the arts but the holistic approach advocated can help develop skills, abilities, build self confidence and create a sense of personal worth, which encourages participation as equal citizens and a greater understanding of all aspects of ones lives.

The arts has a major role in developing our culture and if we viewed culture as the symbolic expression of peoples identity then the importance of Traveller participation in the arts as a means of exploring and expressing their culture is essential. In the past, Travellers expressed their cultural identity through their nomadic way of life, their crafts, their story telling and their songs and music. A number of factors have greatly effected this expression and has silenced Travellers. The challenge is there to redress this and encourage cultural expression once again.

The education system has tended towards passive reception rather than active participation in the arts.The use of art, music and drama has been recognised as holding the key to cultural and artistic development and as the role of education is to encourage information, appreciation and participation, the overall objective must be to firmly place Traveller education and the arts on the agenda.

In setting an agenda for the development of the arts in Irish education



"Game of life" at I.T.M. meeting. Photo: Derek Speirs.

both formal and informal the governments green paper commits itself to promoting creativity, innovation and enterprise which is seen as a significant advancement in the treatment of the arts in education. It also stresses the importance of developing an intercultural dimension in the education of all children.

"Recognition and acceptance of different cultures and life-styles in our midst must inform decisions on the provision of education. In such decisions, attention must be focused on the development of mutual understanding and tolerance and on the right of each child to an education based on the sum of cultures in his/her community and in his/her particular learning needs". (Niamh Bhreatnach, Minister for Education, May 1994).

At this vital stage of development within the education system the

opportunity of putting Traveller education on a firm footing is now. The back up needed for educationalist to develop their skills in relation to the arts is an understanding of interculturalism is recognised and with resources available should be used to create a more positive response to the needs of Travellers both young and old.

Developing new approaches to work with Travellers, adopting a community development model, has been a major part of the pioneering work of Pavee Point (formerly DTEDG). Pavee Point successfully challenged traditional thinking and practice and introduced new methods which included arts. The introduction of community arts, e.g. through drama as part of courses allowed for expression and communication of issues which effect Travellers, and a development of self and community confidence. The facilitation of community arts through collective activity provides a forceful language for communication of the realities of Traveller lifestyle and culture. The introduction of arts activities provided new ways for Travellers to become involved in their community and has helped strengthen Traveller identity.

Different media used in work with Travellers includes drama, oral history, music, visual arts for example photographs and craft work. Encouraging Travellers to produce dramas to highlight their life situation has in turn lead to a clearer understanding from the sedentary population (who have seen them) of their plight but also a fuller appreciation of Travellers cultural identity within their own community.

In the past the use of creative drama lead to small sketches being preformed as part of conferences, seminars and training initiatives. This in turn facilitated the participation of Travellers in productions in Team Theatre, RTE Glenroe and The Abbeys production of 'the Honeyspike'. The fact that Travellers acted in the national theatre meant that Travellers attended the performances and were able to interact and identify with the production.

Seeing your culture presented on stage or screen can have many differing effects, positive and negative. Travellers understanding of a

"dramatic licence" may not be totally understood so when a misrepresentation occurs, e.g. in the film "The Field" when the young Traveller women overtly challenges the sedentary men to dance with her, a sense of injustice is expressed. Travellers are traditionally represented as tinsmiths and flower sellers, (two trades which have all but fizzled out), roaming the countryside in Barrel topped wagons. Culture is not stagnant and moves and grows with each generation. Travellers education also needs to address the issues of a living, developing culture and encourage young Travellers to be as proud of who they are today as their parents and grandparents are of who they were.

Exposing Travellers to a variety of places and situations such as museums, galleries, historical sites and places of interest helps establish their right of access, challenges the establishments re that right of access and broadens ones educational base. Creating the "right" opportunity, making it culturally appropriate and educationally beneficial is no mean task but is essential if Traveller education is to play a role in the development and change for Travellers in Irish society.

Defining cultural appropriate resources can be simple, making things relevant, needs only right questions asked. Imagination and creative ideas assist in the delivery of information so vital in the enrichment of the lives of individuals of communities in exploring their distinct cultural identity. Exclusion and discrimination has robbed Travellers of their culture. Claiming it back is crucial if Travellers are to experience the same rights as other citizens take for granted.

Community arts is an important tool for self and collective exploration, analysis and development and this process within the Traveller community is often started through educational opportunities such as courses and schemes offered through voluntary organisations. Community art takes it as given that building culture is a dynamic, ongoing enterprise and that non-artists can just be consigned to the role of consumer, consuming the mass-media or the professional arts.

For education and the arts to be a reality for Travellers it is essential

that we educate with something tangible. The validation of culture comes from a sense of belonging and an ability to identify with the "object". Travellers educated with cultural appropriate resources, i.e. books, games and jigsaws with Travellers represented all appear to benefit from the system. A youth service that ensure its programmes are anti-racist and intercultural offers young Travellers the scope to benefit from as so many others do.

Educational opportunities for Travellers must therefore be:

- anti-racist,
- intercultural,
- culturally appropriate.

They must resource Traveller culture and create ways of giving people space to articulate their perspective.

This paper has attempted to outline the Traveller experience of education, the types of educational opportunities available to Travellers and the role that the arts plays in this educational process. The practices of the past have been challenged by new approaches which encourage the resourcing of Traveller culture rather than its assimilation. The paper has highlighted the role education plays in cultural development and acknowledged the role that culture has in educational developments. It is the job of those involved in both processes to ensure Traveller participation.



Irish Travellers and the Oral Tradition

Bairbre Ó Floinn

Archivist and collector for the Department of Irish Folklore, U.C.D..
(Roinn Bhealóideas Eireann)

Mother tells stories in the dark black roads
Poking the stick fire, afraid of the ghost.
Talking of hell, the Lord up above.
Me waiting to lie at my mother's toes.
(Chrissie Ward, 'Musha Mary Daughter')[1]

Tales travel

Folk-tales are the Travellers of literature.
Travellers are in a constant state of flux and movement.
They do not abide by the usual rules and expectations, or by the usua
conventions.
They have their own dynamics.
They adapt themselves to suit the situation.
They exist outside the usual norms and structures.
They lack a fixed and final form or structure, and so they are difficu
to label and control.

They lack respectability.
They are a threat to the established order.
As constantly changing Travellers, they can hardly be regarded as literature.
They have no vote.
Officially, they are almost invisible.

In the days when few settled people were interested in Travellers, the Irish Folklore Commission was collecting material from and about them. In acknowledging the existence of Travellers and their culture in this way, the Commission was almost unique. The Commission's work with Travellers was a logical extension of its mainstream activities. It had originally been founded in 1935 in order to collect the traditions of the Irish people - to record the history that had previously gone unrecorded. As such, the Commission was already, to a large extent, dealing with individuals and with communities who were marginalised. This marginalisation may have been because of language or physical location or economic circumstances, or because of colonisation. Thus, in many ways, Travellers were on the edge of a margin.[2]

The work of the Irish Folklore Commission is not surprising in view of the attitude of its Director, Seamus O Duilearga. As early as 1932, Seamus O Duilearga wrote as follows in an editorial note to an article on Irish Travellers which was published in Bealoideas, the Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society:

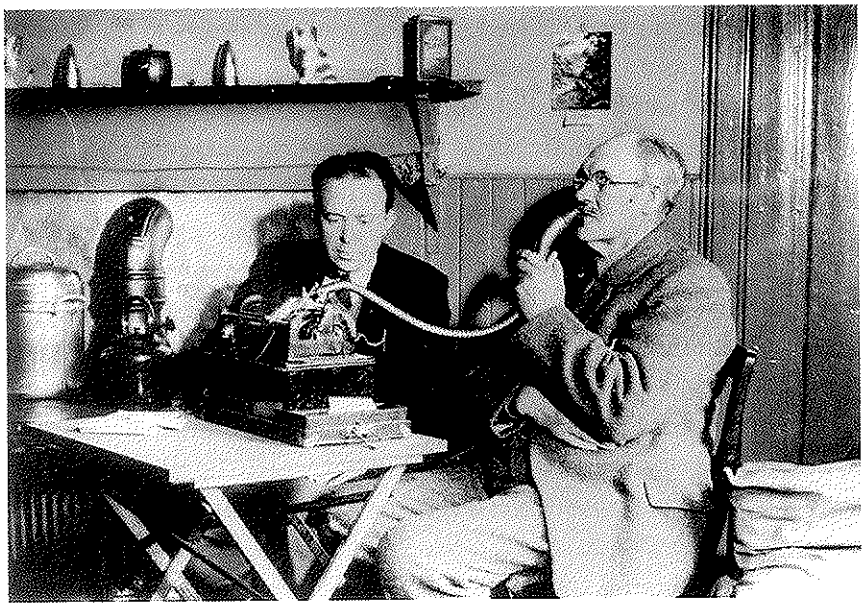
"This paper....is, to our mind, one of the most important contributions made to this journal during the five years of its existence. In congratulating Mr. Mac Greine on his work in an almost untilled field we hope that he will continue his researches, and that others may be encouraged to follow his example, and by their study of the "Traveller-folk", their manners and customs, language and traditions, provide material to folklorists and others interested in the study of Irish popular traditions".[3]

This was high praise indeed from the greatest expert of the day on Irish folklore, and a clear enunciation of the view that Irish folklore did not begin and end with the Gaelic tradition.

Padraig Mac Greine, author of the said article in Bealoideas, did a great deal of valuable collecting work among Travellers in his native Co. Longford, for the Irish Folklore Commission.[4] He was a school teacher by profession, and his collecting activities were necessarily carried out on a part-time basis, because of his own personal commitment to, and interest in, the material. It is to him that we owe the recording of the long folk-tales and legends of Nora "Oney" Power, and of her son John. Mac Greine also noted many words and phrases in the secret language of the Travellers, known as 'Shelta' or 'Cant', in which he was especially interested, and he wrote too of the customs and beliefs of the Travelliers people he knew. Much of Mac Greine's material has appeared in print over the years, both in the pages of Bealoideas, and more recently in the book of Traveller stories published by Gmelch and Kroup, entitled "To Shorten the Road".[5]

Mac Greine writes about his collecting work as follows:

"Towards the end of 1930, I discovered accidentally that some tinkers were very fine storytellers. This aroused my interest in them, and I proceeded to make the acquaintance of as many of them as I could. I found them always ready to tell stories, and to furnish me with the names of other storytellers, but they were not inclined, in the beginning, to talk about themselves, or to speak their secret language or "Cant". When they found that I was not an emissary of the law they had little hesitation in talking freely to me. True, I am indebted to one family who had known me and my people for years, for vouching for me to others, and for telling them what I wanted. When I speak to strangers in "Cant" I am invariably addressed by name in return. I have always found them kindly disposed and friendly and usually loth to accept money....I have tried to tell of them exactly as they are, and as they have told me of themselves. To three families, Power, Collins, and MacDonough, I am



Recording for the Dept. of Folklore U.C.D. Photo: Dept Folklore U.C.D.



indebted for most of my information.[6]

Mac Greine collected the following prayers in the 1930s from Oney Power, who in turn had learned them 'more than sixty years ago from her step-sister Julia Reilly', thus bringing us directly back to the 1870s.

When Entering A Church

In this chapel I enter in,
Outside this door I leave my sin,
Begging and beseeching to the Redeemer of all men,
Never to be guilty of any more sin.
As I kneel down at the blessed and holy altar,
Before the Father Almighty I make my moans,
Who, being standing by, pierced with crown of thorns,
Grant me the benefit of this Mass and holy water!
Amen.

Prayer When Leaving A Church

O God, be with you, Cross!
I humble to you, Jesus,
God may keep my soul from sin and shame,
Until I enter into this house of God again!
Amen.

Another Prayer

Being on Good Friday - God Bless Good Friday -
The day our Saviour was crucified.
The wicked Jews, being passing by,
They pierced him from the heart to the hand.
His Sacred Mother, being standing by,
With a sorrowful face and a mournful cry.

The gates of Hell will never enter in.
Amen.[7]

Mac Greine collected many beliefs and customs of Travellers, among them the following:

If you see a magpie in a flock of crows you will meet Travellers that day.

If you hear magpies fighting you will be in a row soon.

If a crane flies near you, or towards you, you will meet friends.

The scald-crows are said to be old tinker wives. The tinker women were so fond of fighting that they went neither to hell or Heaven. Your can see the grey Galway shawl on the scald-crow's back. They are old friends, and always bring good luck.

When tinkers die, they turn into grey horses and carry Orangemen and parsons to Hell.

Whatever way the first lamb you see in the year faces you should go in that direction for the year. Every Connacht Traveller used to do this.

If you get an egg with two yolks, someone in your family will give birth to twins, or you will have two weddings in your family.

On the Twelfth Night, a "cake" of cow-dung and ashes was made and twelve rushlights stuck in it. Each rushlight was named after a member of the family, and the first to burn out would be the first to die.

A lone bush is shelter for a soul.

The bean sí cries for a family when some member is about to die: "Och, och, ochón"! When she has cried the third time she ceases. She always cries for the McDonoughs, Joyces, and Wards. She carries a comb and is always combing her long hair. A Traveller will never lift a comb from the road. John Power says he knew a Traveller who lifted a comb, which he saw on the road. That night, the bean sí came to his fire, and he handed the comb to her with a tongs. If he had taken it in his hand to give to her, she would have taken his hand from him.[8]

The following riddles were written down by Mac Greine from John

Power:

Over gravel fast I travel,
On irons I do stand,
I drove the mare that never was foaled,
And held the bridle in my hand.
A train.

Under water long I lay,
Neither sank nor swam away.
All the story I can tell,
The water made my belly swell.
A bulrush.

What do we see every day that God doesn't?
Our equals.[9]

Mac Greine also recorded many words in the Travellers Cant:

Numerals:

one	-	niuc
two	-	ód
three	-	sícer
four	-	seácer
five	-	súcer
six	-	sé

Christian names:

Patrick	-	Stoffirt
John	-	Gisán
Thomas	-	Mútás
Michael	-	Srikel
Martin	-	Sartín
Brigid	-	Ribín
Winnifred	-	Grútín (t slender)

Mary - Srani
Catherine - Sraterine.[10]

Mac Greine also includes a number of phrases and sayings in cant, of which the following are merely a sample:

A man is no man unless he has a good comrade -
A gleoch is not burieacht unless granies a buri gleoch.

Fine talk, but poor! (Empty vessels make most sound). -
Buri tarim but gami.

The Mother of God bless you -
The Naderum of the Dhalun inoc you.

The curse of God on him! -
Tasp gut may luber him!

Tell me and I'll tell you -
Laisk my jeel and my jeel will laisk your gilhairt.

Fine day -
Laisiuil talosc.

I'm looking for my lodging and God knows where I'll get it -
I'm suini-ing for my nadas, and Dhalun where I'll bog it.[11]

Also included in Mac Greines collections are the following lists of Traveller family names to be found in various parts of the country:

Connaught: Ward, Burke, Joyce, McDonough, Mongan, Laurence, Quinn, Cauley, Collins, Maughan, Heany, Brennan.
Co. Offaly: Coily, Flynn, Carthy.

Co. Wexford: Cash, Donovan, Handragan, Doyle.
Co. Kilkenny: Delaney, Connor.
Co. Waterford: Power, O'Leary.
Co. Tipperary: Twohy, Flynn, Hutchinson, Dundon, Nerney, Reilly (known as the 'Bould Boy Reillys).
Co. Clare: Sherlock.
Co. Longford and Westmeath: Power, O'Leary, Donohue, Collins, Joyce, McDonough, Cauley, Keenan, Gavin.
Co. Cavan: McCann.
Co. Kerry: Coffey.[12]

Mac Greine was not alone among collectors in his interest in Travellers and their culture. Michael Mac Enri, who later worked as a full-time collector for the Commission in the west Mayo area, recorded material, consisting mostly of Cant words and expressions, from Mayo Travellers which was published in Bealoideas in 1939.[13]

Some years later, Seán Mac Craith worked for a short time as a full-time collector for the Commission in the south Clare area, where he also interested himself in Travellers, and where he recorded valuable material on their language and traditions.[14] He writes as follows:

'When I first started doing research about the habits and livelihoods of the Travellers, I did not realise the amount of material that could be collected....They are very proud of their past, and around a camp-fire, the older men can be heard spinning tales of long ago. Indeed, many of them have unusual powers of retention, and I know one old man - a tinsmith - who can name every judge in Connaught fifty years ago'.[15] Another old couple in Kerry recall the old Irish members of Parliament, and they remember incidents about a lot of them. Many of the men-folk were in France during the First World War, and these men, whose (knowledge of) geography is limited, speak of the towns of Flanders as if they were natives of that region.[16]

There are several explanations given in tradition for the origin of Travellers, and the following is one such, recorded by Mac Craith:

'Tradition again tells us that the Blessed Virgin once asked a herdsman to pick her a thorn from a furze bush, so that she could fasten her cloak. He refused. A tinker to whom she then turned refused also. A blacksmith, who had heard both refusing, fashioned a pin on his anvil for her. Ever since then, the weariness of the smith is on all herdsmen at the close of day, and tinkers are constantly roving'.[17]

Among Mac Craith's collections are the following descriptions of Travellers and their lifestyle:

'While the majority of them are tinsmiths, you will find that others of them are expert coopers, and in years gone by, 'twas always a Traveller who repaired the blacksmiths bellows in the area of Kilrush. A good many of them are chimney sweeps, while many more of them can repair old eight-day clocks in a manner that would shame many a city jeweller. The Traveller who follows the horse-dealing business is referred to by his own sect as a 'Tangler', a 'Blocker', or often a 'Swopper'. In Clare, you will always know a Blocker, the rest of the Travellers say, 'if he has a split in his coat' the Blocker comes to the place of the fair at least a week prior to the fair day, and on the night before the fair itself, he does most of his swopping and 'bouting' , and on the evening of the fair itself, when all the buying and selling is over, the Blocker can be seen, with as many as perhaps twelve animals, ranging from foals to old gapsers, tied 'tail-to-head', and he careering up and down, trying to get rid of some of his property. If any of the Travelling class can be said to be mean drinker, i.e., not fond of drink, it is the Blocker. He never gets drunk at a horse fair, as one of them told me. 'I watches my charges, and let the eejits do the drinking and cursing and fighting. I can always get 'blink' the day after the fair'.[18]

Mac Craith also collected a number of sayings and verses relating to Travellers and to life on the road, including the following:

A tinker, a woman, a child in her arms,
These three together, the luckiest charm.

Bless the pony and the cart,
And the cipins that light our fire,
May fortune follow us today,
And short be our every road.

A tinker finds and looses all,
But the rich they find and keep the lot.

No tinker's son was ever a priest,
Nor any beo[19] a nun,
Tis just as well, they would give us hell,
And so we say 'amen'.[20]

As well as the above, Seán MacCraith also collected very detailed lists of words in Cant, which he arranged alphabetically in his collections and which constitute a very rich source of information on the Travellers language.

Still in Co. Clare, Seamus O'Duilearga himself was responsible for a very valuable collection of folk-tales from a Traveller chimney-sweep called Paddy Sherlock. These stories were recorded in the 1930s, and they were later published in Bealoideas[21]. Seamus O Duilearga writes about recording from Paddy Sherlock as follows:

'The place of recording: the kitchen of the farmhouse of Seán Carun (Johnny Carey), in the straggling village of Luch, near Dubhlinn (Doolin), County Clare, which looks out to the Islands of Arainn and the distant hills of Beanna Beola beyond Galway Bay. The time of recording: the Christmas holidays of 1929-30 and 1930 - 31 which I spent in Co. Clare collecting folklore - mainly folk-tales - all of which, with the exception of these tales of Paddy Sherlock, were told to me in Irish....Members of the Sherlock family for three generations at least were known locally as good chimney-sweeps and thatchers, and had '

reputation and a name' as storytellers. Both Paddy Sherlock and his father, Thomas, (ob. 1946, aged seventy-two), had soldiered in the British Army, the father in India with the Leinster Regiment...

Paddy Sherlock told four of his tales to the largest audience who ever listened to him, on the invitation of the Third Programme of the BBC...at various times (including repeats) from 25 July, 1951 to 15 March, 1952 .....Appreciations in the Listener...of Paddy's unusual and inimitable style, together with many letters from enthralled listeners who had read many folk-tales but had never heard one before, testify to the interest shown in these tales from Clare. Like all folk-tales, these stories of Paddy Sherlock were meant to be told and to be listened to; they were never meant to be read. The voice is now silent which told them. Paddy died on 20 September, 1956, aged sixty-four. He was an honest man, a loyal friend, and nature's gentleman. *Requiescat!*'[22]

The Schools Manuscripts Collection of 1937-38 also contains a great deal of information about Travelling people, although it can often be difficult to tell whether the people in question were Travellers in the strict since, or simply individual knights of the road. Take the following account, for example, from the Dunlavin area of Co. Wicklow:

'Sometimes, Travellers call to our house and ask for food, for bread and tea. They are very thankful for it. A Traveller comes to our house at certain times of the year, and asks for a stop. We let him sleep in the stable on a bed of hay. In the morning, he gets up about eight o'clock, and we give him his breakfast. When he has his breakfast eaten, he goes off again. We call him 'the flowerman', because he sells flowers'.[23]

An account from south county Sligo in the Main Manuscripts Collection describes a Traveller thus:

'There was at one time an old tramp named Terry the Grunter. He used to wander round those parts of the country often time. He lived principally on his wits, and he composed satires about people who did not please him. He happened to be in Sligo when a certain solicitor died, and he asked some of his brother solicitors for 'help'. They refused him.

When the funeral was starting, four solicitors carried the coffin part of the way to the cemetery. The tramp wrote the following description of the affair.

'There is a knave overhead and four underneath,
The body is dead and the soul on a journey,
The devil is at law and wants an attorney'.

(One another occasion)...He...(a) clergyman who gave him a sixpenny bit. It looked a doubtful coin, so he passed the remark to the clergyman. He asked it back again to have a look at it, but the tramp doubted that he meant to keep it, so he stuck the sixpence down in his pocket, and turned away remarking:

'A sixpenny bit, from the Holy Anointed,
He thought to get it back, but he was disappointed'.[24]

In 1950, the Irish Folklore Commission circulated a detailed questionnaire on the subject of Travellers. The Commission by then had a network of correspondents all over the country, to whom it regularly sent questionnaires on various aspects of folklore. The questionnaire on Travellers enquired about the terminology, names, appearance, customs, itineraries, habits, language, songs etc. of Travellers. The response to the questionnaire was very good, resulting in over 800 pages of material[25]. It should be remembered, of course, that all of the Commission's correspondents were settled people, with varying degrees of sympathy towards Travellers, so the resulting information is very much the settled community's view of Travellers. Indeed, as an indication of relations between Travellers and settled people at the time, the material has considerable value.

The following example is from a reply to a questionnaire, although it should be said that the picture painted of relations between Travellers and the settled community is by no means always so rosy.

'A great resort for tinkers in this district is a large shed or outhouse at New Barn, Killsallaghan, Co. Dublin. I am told that many of them spend the winter there.

.....I knew tinkers in Co. Leitrim about 1912 named McDonaghs. They camped on our road every winter. They had canvas tents and asses and carts. They were the soul of honour and decency. The children used to come up to our house at night to be taught their catechism in preparation for Confirmation and Holy Communion. I never heard a wrong word out of their mouths. There were seven children, and the father and mother. The father (Martin) told us they were descended from the bards, and they were very proud of the fact.

One snowy winter, a neighbour of ours went down to the camp and brought the whole nine of them to his house, and kept them until the hard weather was over. They never forgot this act of kindness, and when they come around in summer now the men all go to help this man's son and grandson to save the hay or draw turf, or do anything else he may want done'.[26]

In later years, James G. Delaney worked as a full-time collector for the Commission, and subsequently for the Department of Irish Folklore. He worked initially in his native Co. Wexford, before moving to the midlands where he spent the rest of his working life. In the 1970's he recorded some stories from a Traveller in Athlone called Mickey Green as well as a great deal of material about the love of Mickey's life - - horses and their care. Three of Mickey's stories were also used by Gmelch and Kroup in 'To Shorten the Road',[27]

Although this article is not primarily concerned with music, it is only fair to point out that some of the most famous Traveller musicians of their day were also recorded by the Commission, and both Kevin Danaher and Leo Corduff did valuable work in this regard. Among those recorded by the Commission were the well-known Donegal fiddle-player, Mickey Doherty, and the Travelling piper, Johnny Doran, whose playing has had a significant influence on many of the younger generation of pipers.[28]

The relationship between the Commission/Department and Travellers reached a new departure, in collecting terms, when Tom Munnelly



Traveller family Co. Longford 1935. Photo: Padraig Mc Greine, Dept. of Folklore U.C.D.

started his recording work. Throughout the late 1960's and 1970's, Tom Munnelly collected extensively from Travellers throughout the country, uncovering a huge wealth of material in the process. Working independently at the beginning, because of his own enthusiasm for the material, he was subsequently employed by the Department of Education and, from 1974, by the Department of Irish Folklore, to continue the work. His brief at the time was to concentrate on the song tradition of Travellers, and he recorded hundreds of songs from them. Today, his collection is of enormous value and importance as a resource for anyone interested in Traveller culture. Some of the material which Tom Munnelly collected has appeared in published form, on cassette-tape and in print, as well as on record.[29]

In an article of this length, there are many interesting aspects of the

storytelling tradition of Travellers which cannot be discussed here because of lack of space. These include the Traveller as a disseminator of stories, the types of stories told by Travellers, common themes in Traveller stories[30], and Traveller women as story tellers. Likewise, the shortcomings of the Departments collections from Travellers, in terms of both quantity and quality, must await discussion elsewhere.

On this latter point, suffice it to say that, despite the best efforts of the Commission and the Department, undoubtedly a huge amount of Traveller tradition and tales has been lost over the years, and what remains in the archive today probably represents only the tip of the iceberg.

In conclusion, however, it would seem a pity not to comment on the distinctive narrative style of many Traveller storytellers, as it appears from the recorded material. Oney Power, for example, had a very characteristic storytelling style, with her vibrant and colourful use of language. Travellers, along with settled people, often made use of 'runs' in their storytelling. These stylistic devices consist of a string of stock, formulaic descriptions, usually involving elaborate and highly decorative use of language. It is perhaps too easy to draw comparisons between this very ornamented language and the musical style of some Traveller pipers, for example. As an example of verbal grace-notes, however, it is worth quoting the following piece, from one of Paddy Sherlock's stories:

'Out of that they did hear the Black Dog coming from the other end of the world, with the oul trees breaking and the young trees shaking, till they made the hard ground soft and the soft ground hard, till they drew spring-water through the green flags, until the cock crew in t he morning, until the Black Dog of the Wild Forest had to retire back again'.[31]

In another story by the same storyteller, we find the following poetic account of the hero being chased by his enemies in a variety of enchanted forms.

'They turned themselves into seven hawks, and they flew after the pigeon. The pigeon was right over the sea, and he looked back and he seen the seven hawks coming after him. He had nothing to do but to turn himself into an egg. He dropped right to the bottom of the sea, and they turned their selves into seven whales, and they went down after him. They came so convenient to the egg that the came to the top of the water again, and the seven whales to the top after him. He turned himself into a pigeon again, and flew into the cloud.....'[32]

For sheer poetic exaggeration, however, the following description of the hero striking a blow must reign supreme. It comes from a story told by John Power, Oney's son: '....Jack hit him. And whether he ever fell or not, I cannot tell you. He is going yet, I think.[33]

Another of the characteristic features of the language and style of the stories is the way in which the fantastic is mixed with the familiar. Take the following account of the brother setting out on a journey, for example, from another of John Power's stories: 'So, the son goes. And before he goes, he leaves a cup of water on the table. "If anything happens me again twelve months, that cup of water'll turn into human blood". "Righto,", says the brothers, "off ye pop"[34]. In another story, this time told by Oney Power, the following account of a big party illustrates the same point: "So begorras, the whole quality of the wide world was there. They came in carriages from Connemara, Kiltimagh, from Roscommon, County Galway, and from all the counties of the world. And such a party never was seen in the world'.[35]

Not for the Traveller storyteller the safe use of language and convention. Instead, Traveller stories are full of energy, colour and movement, as we see in the following folk-tale, entitled 'The Omadhaun Laois[36]'. This story was recorded by Padraig Mac Greine from Nora 'Oney' Power near Ballinalee in county Longford, in the early 1930s, and it seems fitting to leave the last word to her.

The story is a good example of a type of narrative usually referred to as marchen by folklorists, meaning a tale of wonder often with a strong magical content. These stories enjoyed great popularity across Europe

from at least the Middle Ages, although they had virtually disappeared from western Europe by the middle of the 20th century. Oney Power was a native of Boyle in county Roscommon, and Padraig Mac Greine describes meeting her as follows:

'I was cycling around a bye-road one day. It must have been in the mid-1920's, and I saw this poor dilapidated tent. A poor tent on the roadside and little old woman sitting by a stick fire. I stopped for curiosity more than anything else and I started to talk to her. So I asked her who she was and she told me. "A Power". I said, "do you know any stories?". "Ah,", she says, "I could tell you stories from this day to this day week".[37]

Once and once, and very good times, and twas neither my time nor your time but 'twas somebody's time; when turkeys chewed tobacco and swallows built their nests in old men's beards, and that is neither my time nor your time, there was a very rich man and he had three sons, Jack, Tom, and Bill. Jack was always called 'the omadhaun laois' because he was so 'thick'.

Well, the father got sick, and he sent for the three sons and told them that there was no cure for him except a bottle of the world's end water. The three boys started out to see could they get the water, and they travelled on till they came to where there was men cutting timber on the edge of the road. 'You's are working', says Jack, 'We are', says they. 'Did yous ever hear tell of the world's end water?' says he. 'No, never,' says they.

Well, there was a big swinglass (windlass) beside where they were working. And Jack went over to it, and says he to Tom and Bill, 'I'll go down here and see what's below. And I'll meet yous here in three days time'. They laughed at him, for he was an omadhuan, and said they would. So Jack lifted the lid of the swinglass and down he went, down the big chain, and came out at the other end of the world.

He travelled about, and when night came, he saw a light and made for it. There was a small house there and a little old man in it. And he made Jack welcome and gave him a bit to eat. Jack asked him if he ever heard tell of the world's end water, and he said he didn't. 'But', says he, 'I have a brother that lives a hundred miles away, and maybe he knows. Anyhow, it is too late for you to go tonight. Wait till morning, and I'll tell you the way'.

Jack waited. And when he had the breakfast ate, the old man told him the way, and gave him a belt to help him along. Jack bid him goodbye and put on the belt, and started. When he tightened the belt, every step he gave took him on three, and that evening he came to where the other brother lived. He was an old man too, and he was very glad to see Jack. He gave him his supper, and Jack asked him if he knew anything about the world's end water. But he said he didn't. 'I have another brother that lives a hundred miles away from here', says he, 'and maybe he knows. Anyhow,' says he, 'wait here tonight, and in the morning I'll give you directions'.

The next morning, when the breakfast was ate, he directed Jack and gave him a hoop to help him along. Jack furled the hoop along in front of him, and 'twasn't long till he came to where the other brother lived. He welcomed Jack and gave him a bit to eat. And Jack asked him if he knew where he would get the world's end water. 'I don't,' says he, 'but maybe I could find out. I have power over all the birds and I'll call them and ask them if any of them know where it is'. He went out and whistled, and all the birds came, and he asked them, but none of them knew anything. 'Bad enough',

'Wait', says the old man, 'the eagle wasn't there'. He whistled, and the eagle didn't come. He whistled again, and he didn't come. He whistled the third time, and on came the eagle in a great hurry. 'Why didn't you come when I called you?' says he. 'I was away getting a drink of the world's end water', says he. 'Bedad, you're landed,' says he to Jack, 'he'll show you where it is'. 'Take this man', says he, 'and show him the world's end water.

The eagle brought Jack away and showed him where the well was.

Jack spied a lovely princess lying fast asleep beside the well, and three lovely gold rings on her fingers. Over he went and took one of the rings without wakening her. He took out his bottle and filled it and started back again.

Well, if the road was hard for Jack coming, 'twas easy coming back. That evening he reached the swinglass and rattled the big chain. And the brothers were above and shouted down, 'Is that you, Jack?' 'Tis,' says he. 'Did you get the water?' 'I did', says he. 'Well', says they, 'send up the bottle first, in case you break it, and we'll pull you up after'. Jack sent up the bottle. And when they got it, they clapped down the big lid and went off and left him there.

Poor Jack was below and couldn't get up. He rambled about for a few days, and who did he meet this day but the eagle. 'What are you doing down here?' says the eagle. Jack up and told him the whole story, and says the eagle, 'I'll get you up all right'. 'How?' says Jack. 'Get up on my back and I'll fly up with you', says he. Up with Jack on his back, and in a few minutes the eagle had him landed above. 'Now you will do', says he. Jack thanked him and bid him goodbye, and started off home.

When he got home, he found his father well and them all in great humour. Jack went up and told his father his story, but sure, he didn't believe him, even though he showed the ring he had. They were all sitting down to their dinner this day, when a knock came to the door that nearly knocked down the house. When they went to the door, there was a giant there, and he wanted the man that stole the ring off his daughter's finger. He would take no less but that they'd have to get married. Jack was in great humour, and his father was so vexed that he put away the other two for the trick they played on Jack. Jack and the girl got married. And they had basketfuls of childer and threw them out in shovelfuls. They put down the kettle and made tea, and were happy ever after.[38]

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2 Cf. G. O' riain, ed., Traveller Ways Traveller Words, Dublin 1992, p.10.

3 Note to P. Mac Greine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers"', Bealoideas vol 3, 1932, p. 185.

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6 P. Mac Greine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers"', Bealoideas vol. 3, 1932, pp. 170.

7 Ibid., p. 301

8 Ibid., p. 302

9 Ibid., p. 414

10 Ibid., p. 182

11 Ibid., 1932, pp. 184, 294.

12 Ibid., p. 173 - 4.

13 M. MacEnri, 'Ceant agus saoghal na dtinceiri', Bealoideas vol. 9, 1939, pp. 21j9 - 229

14 See indexes to the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

15 Mac Criath was writing in the 1950's.

16 Ms 1436, p. 23, in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin. My thanks to the Head of the Department of Irish Folklore for his permission to quote material from the Department's archive in this article.

17 Ms 1436, p. 8, in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

18 Ms 1391, p. 24, in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

19 Presumably the word 'beoir', Cant for a woman.

20 Ms 1391, p. 38, in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

21 S O'Duilearga, ed., P. Shearlock, 'The Three Wishes', Bealoideas vol. 3, 1932, p. 434.; 'Clare Folk Tales', Bealoideas vol 5, 1935, pp. 24 - 27; 'The Beauty of the World', Bealoideas vol. 15, 1945 (1946), pp. 263 - 72; 'Paddy Sherlock's Stories', Bealoideas vol. 30, 1962 (1964), pp. 1 - 75.

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25 See indexes to the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

26 Ms 1255, pp. 380 - 81, in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin.

27 See indexes to the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin. See also George Gmelch and Ben Kroup, To Shorten the Road (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1978).

28 Both musicians can be heard on cassette-tapes recently published by Comhairle Bhealoideas Eireann (The Folklore of Ireland Council). These are, respectively, 'The Gravel Walks', The fiddle music of Mickey Doherty (Dublin 1990), and 'The Bunch of Keys', The complete recordings of Johnny Doran (Dublin 1988).

29 See, for example, T Munnelly, ed. and collector, Songs of the Irish Travellers, 1967 - 1975 (cassette), (Dublin: European Ethnic Oral Traditions, Trinity College, 1983); 'The Singing Tradition of Irish Travellers', Folk Music Journal vol. 3, no. 1, 1975, pp. 3 - 30; John Reilly, (T. Munnelly, ed. and collector), The Bonny Green Tree; Songs of an Irish Traveller (L.P. record), (London: Topic 12T359, 1978); 'Some notes on Irish Travellers and their traditions', unpublished article.

30 On these two latter points, see for example M. Mac Aongusa, The Alienation of Travellers from the Educationl System, Dublin, n.d.

31 S O'Duilearga, ed., 'Paddy Sherlock's Stories', Bealoideas vol. 30, 1962 (1964), p. 59.

32 Ibid., p. 14.

33 Ms 81, p. 66 in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin; published in G. Gmelch and B Kroup, To Shorten the Road, p 135.

34 Ibid, pp. 27 - 28,

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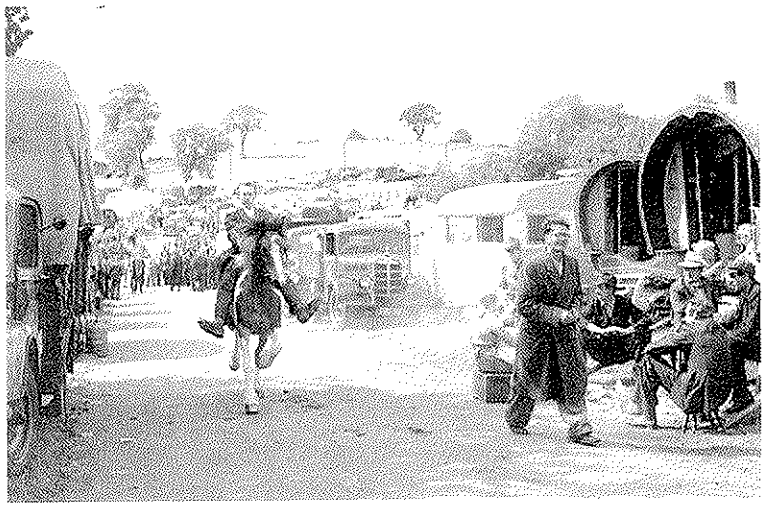
36 Cf. the Irish word 'amadan', meaning a fool or a simpleton; the meaning of the word 'laois' (or 'taois'?) is obscure.

37 G Gmelch and B Kroup, To Shorten the Road, p. 39.

38 Ms 80, pp. 175 - 82, in the Main Manuscripts Collection, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin; published in G Gmelch and B Kroup, To Shorten the Road, pp. 79-81.



Selling horses. Photo: Derek Speirs



Appleby Fair June 1964. Photo: John Hall.

Travellers Language

Alice Binchy

Researcher of Traveller Language.

Most of the population of Ireland, and of other developed countries, is sedentary. Sedentary people prefer to live in houses or flats rather than trailers or tents, and usually have the aspiration at some stage of their lives to put down permanent roots in an area. This way of life crosses social, economic, religious, political and ethnic boundaries and is common to all groups which make up Irish society, except one, the Travellers, who have a tradition of nomadism. Nomadism is a major cultural difference between Travellers and settled people, and it is one of the reasons why Travellers regard themselves as distinct from the majority. Another factor is the closed boundary between the Traveller and the settled world. One cannot become a Traveller by taking up a particular trade or choosing to live in a trailer. Travellers are born, not made, and only those with at least one Traveller parent are accepted by the group as true Travellers. Whether they choose to use the term themselves or not, Travellers are in fact a distinct ethnic group.

One of the ways Travellers mark the boundary between themselves and the settled population is through language. Travellers speak Cant or Gammon, and which name they use for it depends on their family background. Although it is referred to by different names, most Travellers agree that it is basically one language, with only small differences of vocabulary. There are two words for man, for instance, and Travellers

can identify a speaker as belonging to one or the other group by which term he or she uses. Another name for the language is Shelta, which is never used by Travellers, but which is accepted academically as the name for the Travellers language. Because of the clumsiness of referring to the language as Cant/Gammon, Shelta is used here to indicate the unified entity.

Very little is known about the origin of Shelta. There are several reasons for this. The most obvious is that it is largely an unwritten language: it was written for the first time in the 1880's, and then by people who never spoke it. What researchers at that time discovered was a language which bore some resemblance to Irish, and some to English. They decided that it was a cryptic code, designed to allow Travellers to communicate without outsiders knowing their business. Early work on the language consisted of collecting vocabularies from various places where Irish Travellers were to be found, and trying to work out a systematic basis for the language. It was very quickly recognised that some words were formed from Irish using a number of transforming devices, like reversal of one syllable, e.g. rodas "door" from doras, that some were formed by a kind of rhyming slang applied to Irish or English words, e.g. sraca "cake (of bread)" from caca, or srish from dish. As well as disguised words, there were some archaic Irish words which appeared in old manuscripts but had long disappeared from spoken Irish; and a number of words which did not seem to be related to Irish, whether disguised or archaic. The theory that the early researchers, notably John Sampson of the University of Leeds, and Kuno Meyer, a German expert on Celtic philology, arrived at was that Shelta was a language that Travellers had made up for themselves with the help of settled people. They suggested that Travellers shared their life on the road with other outcasts, including monks who had been displaced by the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. The monks had helped the Travellers to form their language, had contributed some of the archaic words which they knew about from ancient

manuscripts in their monasteries, and had also taught the Travellers techniques for disguising language which were used in the same manuscripts.

A later authority on Shelta, RAS Macalister rejected the previous theory and argued that Shelta was in fact modern, and had been formed since English became the spoken language in Ireland. He suggested this because the grammatical structure of Shelta, already in the 1880s, was entirely English, with very few signs of Irish grammar. His argument was that Travellers had a vocabulary of special occupational terms which they had used in the grammatical framework of their everyday language, and he suggested, rather vaguely, that they had picked up the archaic Irish terms from "other wanderers" whom they met on the roads.

The major flaw in previous approaches to the language arose from the way Travellers were perceived. It was thought that to be a tinker, as they were then commonly called, meant to follow one of a number of trades, all of which involved nomadism. The suggestion was that tinkers or Travellers were a sub-group of the mainstream group in society, spoke the mainstream language in their everyday life, but like many occupational groups, had a special vocabulary of occupational terms which they could use exclusively to their own group. In fact, nomadism rather than any specific occupation was and is the defining mark of Travellers, as the name that the group chose to identify themselves with illustrates.

Taking into account the important differentiating factor of nomadism, another hypothesis for the origin of Shelta becomes possible. This is that Travellers always were a distinct group, from the earliest times, that they held themselves aloof from the majority and so preserved their language from some of the changes that affected the majority language; that as time went on and maintaining their language became more difficult they formed the habit of adapting words from the language they heard around them, because it was important to them not to merge with the majority population.

There are obvious differences between codes spoken by occupational groups and those spoken by ethnic groups. The vocabulary of an occupational codes is clustered in certain areas relevant to the occupation, for example there is an extensive legal vocabulary relating to different types of legislation, different types of offences and different types of legal remedies. Lawyers do not need to have special terms for everyday items, because they function as lawyers of an ethnic group at all times, and their vocabulary covers all areas of everyday life. There are Shelta words for food, clothing, animals, modes of transport, types of living accommodation, family members - for the entire Traveller world. Codes spoken by ethnic groups are passed from parent to child, unlike occupational codes which are leaned from peers. Most Traveller children are exposed to Shelta, to some extent, from birth and they are aware from an early age that there is a larger world outside their community.

Travellers inhabit two worlds, the settled world and the Traveller world. They have a limited participation in the settled world, where they are not welcome and do not generally feel comfortable, but they have an alternative Traveller world where they feel at home. Their language use is also divided: Travellers are bilingual. But there is not a simple division between their two codes, English (or Hiberno-English as English spoken in Ireland is called) and Shelta. In the settled world, Travellers do not speak only Hiberno-English, and in the Traveller world they do not speak only Shelta. Travellers speak Hiberno-English when they deal with settled people in the settled world, but their conversation with other Travellers in the presence of settled people tends to be in Shelta. While there are some indications that in the past Shelta was the everyday language in the Traveller world, today most everyday conversation in the Traveller world is in Hiberno-English, and Shelta tends to be used in specific circumstances. Some examples of the types of contexts in which Shelta is commonly spoken, in both the settled and Traveller worlds, are given as follows.

In the Traveller World

1 When settled people are present, e.g. if a social worker or health visitor were talking to a Traveller woman on a site, the woman might use Shelta to control her children who were misbehaving.

2 When parents are giving orders to their older children regarding younger children, in the same way as settled parents might spell out words like "bed-time".

3 When the topic is one which according to Traveller cultural norms is better spoken about indirectly, e.g. pregnancy or women's health matters.

In the Settled World

1 When Travellers are earning a living in the settled community, e.g. Traveller women selling in markets, or Traveller men trading horses.

2 When Travellers need solidarity from their own group, e.g. when Traveller parents are called to meet their children's teachers.

Older Travellers say Shelta is dying out. Some Traveller women say that it is bound to die, since Traveller mothers and daughters no longer go out around the houses together every day, which in the past was an important context for speaking Shelta. But it must be remembered that one of the reasons why Shelta was spoken on those occasions was because of the presence of settled people. In the past Traveller lived much of their lives out of sight of settled people. Today, many Travellers live on publicly provided sites, and they have been drawn into the social welfare, health and education systems. They shop in supermarkets, attend clinics and collect social welfare in the heart of the settled community. Today, the presence of settled people is a constant reminder to Travellers that they are Travellers. This context for speaking Shelta will remain as long as Travellers consider themselves different from settled people. They do not speak Shelta to exclude settled people in any hostile way, but rather to preserve their internal

Traveller world which they feel is under threat.

Traveller parents, asked whether they would pass on the language to their children gave interesting answers. Two groups stood out as most likely to pass it on. One was those still living in a traditional Traveller way, usually on unofficial sites, in trailers. Although Travellers in this situation lack basic facilities, and endure great hardship, they have one advantage over their cousins in publicly provided accommodation: they can still live as Travellers. Families have free association with other Travellers, can have their kin living near them, and the are often more free to travel. Traveller men can follow Traveller trades, since restrictions on storing scrap metal or car parts are few. All of these aspects of Traveller life are denied, to a greater or lesser extent, to those living on official sites, in group or standard housing. These accommodation options offer greater material comfort, at the expense of the comfort families draw from being part of a country-wide network of Travellers. Travellers living on unofficial sites pass on the language to their children because they still have a use for it. They are still functioning as Travellers. The other group who say they will pass it on are those Travellers who are educated, who see the language as important as an element in their ethnic identity. This group has had access to settled values to some extent through education, and they see the language as a symbolic barrier preventing their assimilation.

One educated young woman said: "I feel that if I have any children, I'm going to teach them (Shelta)...I will make sure that they'll have their own language. They'd want to feel that they could say something to me without no one knowing". There are thus two reasons for maintaining the language. One group maintains it because it has a communicative value, the other for its symbolic value.

While Travellers lives have changed enormously in the past thirty years, there has also been a change in the way Travellers see themselves and their place in Irish society. In the past, it seems that Travellers accepted their low social status in the settled world: certainly, very few

Travellers challenged it overtly. The only way Travellers could hope to achieve equal status in Irish society was by denying their Traveller background and trying to assimilate. This as all beginning to change. Increased education and increased politicisation has brought a growth in Traveller pride. Travellers are now demanding to be accepted as equal but different, but their claim is not being heard at local authority level. Instead Travellers are offered an invidious choice: either accept publicly provided accommodation with modern facilities and pay the price by living, more or less, like settled people, or stay on the side of the road or on unofficial sites and continue to live like Travellers. It is interesting to reflect on the implications of this for the survival of Shelta.

If Travellers accept the first option, then it seems likely that visible differences between Travellers and settled people will gradually disappear. The essential question is whether Traveller identity will survive in these circumstances. If Travellers still feel the need to maintain a barrier between themselves and settled people, then Shelta will survive, and it seems likely that education will have a part to play in this. For those Travellers who remain on the roadside, it seems that Shelta will continue to play a part in their interactions both with settled people and with their own community. One way or the other, it appears that Shelta will survive in some form.

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John Doran. Photo: Cumann na Píobairí uilleann.

Pavee Pipers and Players

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Text of research on Travellers musical heritage on exhibition in Pavee Point.

Ireland is famous worldwide as a land of music and song. We have a thriving folk tradition that has evolved since ancient times, through the penal laws, the famine and the arrival of an age of mass media and modern music. Each musician has played a part but it is beyond doubt that without one group in Irish society we would not have inherited such a legacy. That group is the Traveller community. As Travellers have not been included in the written history of Ireland, little is known of their origin. Likewise in the history of music, little has been documented about the Traveller musicians of early times.

The Bards in ancient Ireland kept the chiefs and lords in constant supply of poetry, song and music and are possibly the first documented group of people to have travelled with their music. However, they were not representative of the voice of the people. Their music was confined to the upper classes. One of the last and most famous of these musical bards was Turlough O Carolan, born in Co. Westmeath in 1670, a blind harpist who travelled mainly in Connaught. However, again, it was

mainly through the gates of the nobility that he travelled and his musical style was influenced more by classical music than by the folk music of the people.

In contrast to this and much less documented in our history is the role of the traveller musicians who brought music to every village and every street. These pipers and fiddlers were 'minstrels of the multitude'. The first mention of pipes in Ireland was at the fair of Carman in the eight century and although the instrument itself has developed and changed the piper still had a place at the fairs up to recent years.

Traditional music was passed on orally until the collectors of the last century attempted to write it down, using a classical structure. An oral tradition depends on those who can pass the music on, not just from one generation to another but from one place to the next. With radio and television today it is difficult to appreciate the role of the Traveller musicians, but before the development of the media the Traveller was the 'radio'. They carried the tunes and the tradition, they were often the makers of the instruments, the teacher of the dances and the link between isolated musicians and also between communities.

Travellers' identity is often 'invisible' or not acknowledged in the history of music that does exist e.g. they are referred to as 'peddlers' or 'wanderers' etc, thus depriving the Traveller community of credit for the musicians it produced. There is no reason to believe that this ambiguity is a recent development. This would suggest that there were many Traveller musicians over the centuries who were not acknowledged as such.

The aim of this reserach is to highlight the invaluable contribution of the Traveller community to the folk music, song and dance of Ireland.

Piping

Uilleann pipe playing is one aspect of traditional music on which Travellers have had an impact since ancient times. Little has been documented and much of the detail has gone. Even within the last



Street piper. Photo: Traditional music archive.

century a lot of information has been lost. All that remains of many of the Traveller pipers are fading memories and old unnamed photographs. For some there is not even that much. The evidence that does survive suggests that the Travellers role in music, and piping in particular, has been significant since the instrument was first played. Two families we can name are the Cashs and the Dorans. The Cashs hail from Co. Wexford and the Dorans from Rathnew, Co. Wicklow. Both families were horse-dealers and tin-smiths as well as highly respected musicians. Their pipers played in typical Traveller fashion, standing with a foot resting on a walking stick or box. The families intermarried and descendants of both families carry on the tradition today although many do so in England.

John Cash was born in 1832. He learned the pipes from his uncle. James Hanrahan from Tipperary. He was a welcome figure especially by dancers. One dancer, Larry Piper who was near death is said to have danced on his kitchen table on hearing John play in his home. John died in 1909 but his son, James, had showed early signs of following in his fathers footsteps musically. At the age of nine, after he received his first bag and chanter, he disappeared and was found in the town surrounded by a crowd, having collected money for his playing. As an adult he was such a popular street player that he was invited to play in opera houses and theatres. Pat Cash also carried on the tradition and his son also became a piper.

When Margaret Cash and John Doran were married two great piping families were joined. That marriage of piping traditions produced two pipers of distinction, Johnny and Felix, who were at least the third generation of pipers (father and grandfather both named John). Johnny was born in 1908. He brought his music to many parts of Ireland, travelling in a horse-drawn caravan. A bicycle attached to the back served as transport to the places he was going to play. He was recorded by The Folklore Commission shortly before his death and that recording ensures that his piping will continue to influence the pipers of generations to come. Felix Doran moved to England and started a successful truck company. He returned to Ireland regularly and news of his arrival was always an excuse for a few days music for some of the best musicians in Dublin. His son Michael became proficient on the pipes as did Johnny's son Paddy.

Another piping family was the Byrnes of Shangarry Co. Carlow. Jemmy Byrnes and his three sons, John, James and Thomas. They travelled extensively to fairs and races.

Two families renowned for music today are the Keenans and the Fureys. Ted Furey played fiddle and Johnny Keenan the pipes. Having both lived for some time in Ballyfermot, their families shared their musical skills. The Fureys went on to become world famous with Finbar

Furey bringing the Traveller style of piping all around the world. Johnny Keenan was from Co. Westmeath. His music had been passed down through at least seven generations. As well as passing on his music to his family he also taught many pipers in Dublin. Paddy Keenan has developed the Keenan style that he learned from his father and has added his own innovations that mark him as a piper of distinction. Brendan Keenan is a fine whistle player and Johnny, another brother is a well known banjo player.

The Traveller style of piping has influenced other well known pipers. Willie Clancy who met Johnny Doran regurlarly in Milltown Malbay, was enticed to move from the flute to the uilleann pipes. The Rowesome family were influenced by the piping of the Cashs. Davy Spillane also acknowledges a strong Traveller influence on his playing. Many of the best of Irish pipers, then, have either been Travellers, or show a strong Traveller influence.

Fiddling

The fiddle was introduced into Ireland in the early 18th century. It was first played by classical musicians in Dublin. By the second half of that century it could be heard in, among other places, many isolated villages of Donegal. A distinctive style of fiddling developed in that county and has survived up to the present day. This style has influenced many players throughout Ireland and abroad and will affect fiddle music undoubtedly for centuries to come.

All of this is due to one main factor. Donegal is the birthplace of generations of Traveller musicians dating back to at least the 18th century. The Doherties, Gallaghers, McSweeneys and McConnells were four of these families. They were related to each other and shared a common musical heritage. They were also tin-smiths, horse-dealers and saddlers.

Hugh Doherty was born in1790 and as well as playing a part in bringing the fiddle to Donegal he was also one of the first to play the

uillean pipes in its present form in that region. From his marriage to Nannie Rua McSweeney come four generations of musicians. As they travelled these musicians passed on their expertise of fiddle playing. On each return visit to a village would add a few more tunes to the repertoire of the local musicians.

Those that have most directly influenced musicians of today are John, Mickey and Simon Doherty. John Doherty was born in 1895 and continued the tradition of his family. He was often heard in villages of Kilcar, Glencolmcille and Ardara teaching a beginner or teaching local musicians some tunes he had picked up along the way or playing for some local dance. Paddy Glackin a renowned fiddle player attributes his own style and the majority of his tunes to the playing of John Doherty. He has fond memories of getting tips and advice from John when he was first learning the fiddle.

Mickey Doherty had a passion for the music and a willingness to share his knowledge with each musician he met. Simon, a son of Johns other brother, Hugh was born in 1915 in Ballybofey and was well known for his skill in instrument making as well as for his music.

At the same time in county Longford the Smyth family of fiddlers gave to their county what the Dohertys gave to Donegal. There are local accounts that in the early morning these three Smyth brothers could be seen sitting by their tent on the side of the road, tuning up for a days music in the streets and fairs of the area. They became well known throughout the country at that time and much of their music has lived on long after their own fiddles have stopped playing.

The McDonoughs were another musical family. John McDonough was famed as one of the best pipers of his time. His daughter, Bridget, taught herself the fiddle. Her father had died while she was an infant. As a street musician she supported her thirteen children. She won many awards at Feisenna for her playing but always had to return to O Connell Bridge, Dublin, to make a living busking.

Another Traveller who, in his short life, travelled the country bringing



Ted Furey. Photo: Furey family.

music to the ears and hearts of Irish people was Stephen Dunne. He was born in 1910 in Lochrane Co. Galway, the eldest of ten children. The Dunnes had a long tradition of music. His father Stephen was a fiddler who was known to play in the streets of Dublin. His grandfather was also a fiddler as were his two uncles, Jack and Michael. One of the most famous of the Dunne family was Michael, known as the Fiddler Dunne. He appeared on the Late Late Show playing a box fiddle he had made. As well as the music, the skill of fiddle making was also handed down from one generation to the next.

There is no doubt that the Dunnes managed to pass on the tradition, as Stephens' son is the well known singer and instrumentalists, Pecker Dunne. Pecker (Paddy) learnt the fiddle from his father. He also plays

the banjo and guitar.Today the Dunnes of Limerick are renowned for their music particularly in piping and banjo playing.

In most rural areas fiddle music would not have developed or survived without the help of Traveller musicians. Isolated settled musicians depended on them for tunes, techniques and style and often for the making and repairing of the instrument itself. They had a pivotal role to play in the development of fiddle music in Ireland.

Instruments

The instruments mostly associated with Travellers are the mouth organ, tin whistle, fiddle, banjo and uilleann pipes. For those born into a musical Traveller family these instruments were handed down or the skill to make the instruments passed on to them. But in the absence of instruments Travellers have improvised, as they have in all aspects of their lives.

Sean Maher, Traveller and author of 'The road to God knows where', captures the musical relationship between Travellers and nature in saying that the blackbird was never taught music and needs nothing but its own voice to produce music. Sean too relies on his voice to create music and as well as playing keyboards is a fine lilter, whistler and singer. He remembers as a child playing music by blowing through a blade of grass held between his thumbs, he then advanced onto playing a rack (comb) covered in paper. Johnny Keenan (Ennis) remembers playing together with his brother on buckets and pans with sticks to entertain passers by.

Jack Cash (son of John) was renowned for his ability to play any tune, using nothing more than an ivy leaf. Although he must surely have regretted swopping the bag and chanter his father gave him, with one of the Dorans for a bucket of tools when he was a boy, the music he created with the ivy leaf is said to have surpassed the sound of any other instrument.

Where music was required for dancing an instrument would not be

missed as many Travellers could lilt reels and jigs making possibly the most natural music. Lilting has survived today among Travellers and the distinct style of ornamentation evident in instrument playing can also be heard in their lilting. Both Johnny Keenan (Ennis) and Jim Donavan (Finglas, Dublin) have been fine exponents of this form of music.

As in other places, they serviced local musicians by bringing the instruments as well as the music. The introduction of the fiddle into Donegal is another good example of the role Travellers played as bearers of culture. The combination of the nomadic aspect of their lives and their ingenuity and skilled craftsmanship is responsible for bringing the fiddle to the ordinary people of Donegal.

The fiddle was introduced into Ireland and became popular in the cities, but many in remote areas were unable to obtain or afford these instruments. The Traveller turned his skill of tin-smithing to solve this problem and made tin fiddles which became a substitute for the wooden fiddle in these areas. Simon Doherty claimed that his granduncles were the first to make a tin fiddle when one of their own broke while playing at a dance. After cutting the standard fiddle shape, other materials that would be needed were ash for the scroll and the pegs and sycamore for the fingerboard and the bridge. Such materials were easily available to the musicians in their travels. Travellers were also known to make uilleann pipes and tin whistles, again using local resources. The McConnells used elder wood from Glencolmcille for the chanter, drones and reeds and the elder berries were used to dye the wood black. Bog oak was used for the base of the chanter and the bag was made from a sheepskin sealed with beeswax. In addition to the tin fiddle a wooden 'box' fiddle also seems to have been provided as an alternative to the 'real thing'. This primitive instrument shows a very close resemblance to that of the Welsh and European Gypsies.

Johnny Keenan (Dublin) was a master of the art of uilleann pipe making and repairing, James Galway being one of the many proud



Johnny Doran Pat Cash and son. Photo: Cumann na Píobairí

owners of a Keenan set of pipes. He passed his skills on to his sons. They learnt to make their first reeds using an elder tree which was growing beside their home. This tree produced soft sounding reeds which allowed music to be played in the Keenan home until cockcrow while neighbours slept soundly. Johnny Doran was also an uilleann pipe maker. He could be seen by passers by making his regulator keys from silver spoons, using the wheel of his wagon as an anvil on which to do this work.

The Travellers' ability to adapt to their surroundings and improvise according to their needs together with their skills in craftwork and tin-smithing served them well and enabled them not only to provide themselves with the means of channelling their music but also of providing settled musicians with instruments ranging from a cheaper alternative to the wooden fiddle to the finest quality uilleann pipes.

Singing

Travellers have a distinct style of singing. Many aspects of Travellers' singing set it apart from Traditional folk singing or the sean-nós of settled singers. The songs are generally in English as Irish is not spoken by Travellers. Some songs are sung in Cant, the Travellers' own language, but these are now rare. The songs are generally sung with passion and intensity. The contrast is particularly evident between Traveller women and settled women singers. Traveller women sing with strength in their voices not just in terms of volume but with depth and vigour, whereas settled women tend to sing with gentler, voices. The style of singing among Travellers can vary with the mood or personality of the singer but there are certain features which distinguish it from all other styles e. g. at the end of each phrase the singer lifts the last note and ends on an 'e' sound. Thanks to collectors like Tom Munnelly (Roinn Bhéaloideas Eireann) the style has been documented for the archives as it is a unique part of Irish oral heritage.

As with music, the Traveller singing has mainly been performed out doors, either around the campfire in the evening, in the street or at fairs. The singers usually placed a flat hand around their ear and along the side of their face. This helped them to hear their own voice in a noisy environment. The necessary volume needed for street singing could suggest a reason for the strength of the singers voice. Although campfires are seldom lit these days and the street singing is becoming rare it is still a feature of the Traveller style of singing. For the women, they have traditionally been silently strong in all aspects of their lives and their style of singing certainly reflects this strength.

Where instrument playing has been male dominated, singing is an area where women have played a large role. Margaret Barry is one Traveller woman who reached fame as a singer.

Pecker Dunne is one of Irelands best known and loved performers. He has sung in every part of Ireland. Born in Castlebar, Co. Mayo, and

having spent his childhood in Wexford, he took to the road with the instruments and the songs his father had taught him. Pecker is also a songwriter and with many of his songs he tells a story. He transmits the warmth of his personality and pride in his identity through his songs and his music.

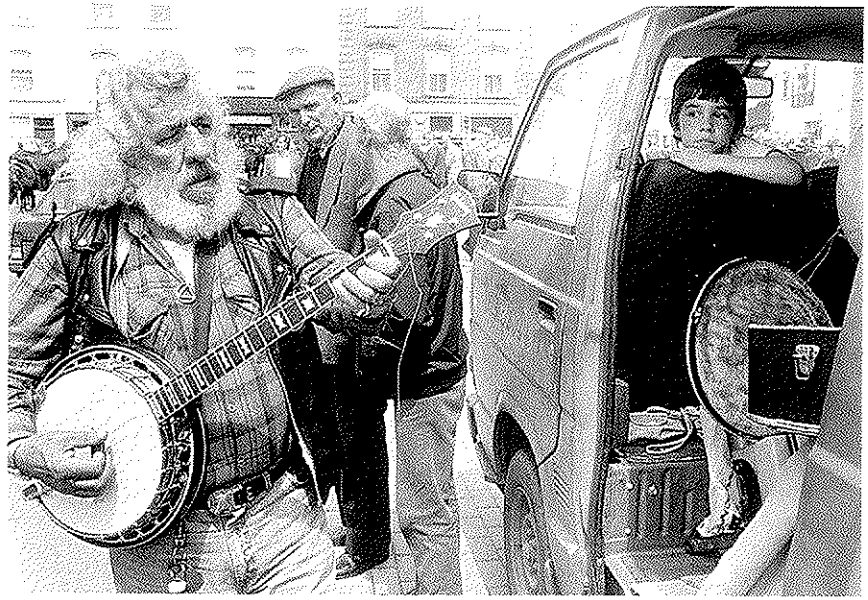
Many songs have been written about Travellers e. g. a popular song in Wexford and Wicklow was about John Cash. It began:

My name is Cash the piper
And I'm seen at race and fair
I'm known to all the jolly souls
From Wicklow to Kildare
I've played at dance and wedding
From Bray to Clonegal
But the cream of entertainment
Was at Mick the Dalty's ball'.

As well as servicing settled musicians Travellers also performed a service to settled singers. Many Travellers sold ballad sheets in the country either house to house or at public gatherings. Some Traveller singers sung at races etc. and sold the words of the songs they were singing. Illiteracy did not hinder them as the ballad sheet had distinguishing marks for each type of song e.g. love songs, rebel songs etc. These sheets were bought in Dublin, as were holy pictures and other items sold from Travellers baskets. This is another example of how Travellers, as commercial nomads, were important as bearers and custodians of culture.

Many factors have caused the singing tradition to decline. The lack of opportunities to sing is an obvious one since both the fairs and the fires are a thing of the past. As with the settled community the arrival of mass media entertainment has put pressure on Travellers ability to entertain themselves.

Some young Travellers have combined their traditional musical heritage with modern music. Cathy Maguire, a teenage Traveller from



Pecker Dunne. Photo: Derek Speirs.

Dundalk is on the road to fame as a singer. her parents say she was born singing. As she got older she interpretated the popular songs she heard with the style she inherited, resulting in a promising musical career.

Although lifestyles have changed any meeting of Travellers is still an excuse for a song. At weddings, parties and other social occasions singing continues into the night. Every Traveller has a song and for every song a story.

Dancing

Dancing was a popular national pastime up until the second half of the 19th century. Usually gatherings took place on Sunday afternoons. People would walk a couple of miles to an arranged spot, usually at a crossroads where a piper or a fiddler would meet them and play for a few hours. A description of Sunday amusements can be found in O'Neills



Ennis Travellers Arts group. Photo: Dublin in Depth.



Music classes Pavee Point. Photo: Dublin in Depth.

collection, quoted from a tourist visiting in 1674. "In every field a fiddle and the lasses footing it 'til they are all of a foam. Every countryman has his half-penny for the piper on a Sunday afternoon."

The dance-master was indispensable in order for this pastime to flourish. He had no fixed address but would travel within a well defined area, returning to the same locations several times a year. When he arrived in an area, the local people would meet in a barn to learn new steps and dances. The dance master was often able to provide the music himself on the fiddle. A collection would be made for him. In return, and as a treat, he would often dance a few steps of a hornpipe accompanied by his own music.

In the late nineteenth century the Sunday outdoor gatherings were strongly discouraged, mainly by the Church. The crossroads dances became extinct and this affected the role of Traveller musicians and dance masters. The house dances and dance lessons in the barns were also considered immoral and they too died out.

Travellers were possibly less 'available' to the wrath of the parish priest and so were able to carry on the music and dance tradition through difficult periods. Therefore the skills were not lost and were passed down to settled people.

The crossroads dancing and other open-air activities had a brief revival earlier this century. These events were opportunities for Travellers and settled people to meet, dance and play together. Again Travellers often fulfiled the role of music makers for these occasions e.g. the arrival of Johnny Doran was anticipated with excitement weeks before a scheduled open-air céilí. He would arrive mid-week and his music could be heard by anyone passing his wagon each evening. When Sunday arrived he would appear and play for the afternoon's dancing. A collection would be made and he would move on.

Although out-door dancing is not at present a common event, solo dancing as well as set and céilí dancing is popular in every village and town in Ireland. House dances continued in some rural areas until quite

recently. Dancing teachers today know little about the origins of their skills and little credit is given to those who travelled the country over the last three centuries providing Ireland with a heritage of dance that is the envy of the world.

However most dance activities take place in hotels, clubs and dance hall. as it has become more of an indoor event the situation is similar to that of the music where establishments e.g. hotels make difficult if not impossible for Travellers to attend and be part of the heritage to which their ancestors dedicated their lives.

A Parting Note

Historically Travellers can be seen to be the true bards of Ireland bringing music to every village and town, playing in the street for all to hear. Numbering only 0.5% of the Irish population the ratio of Traveller musicians to settled is exceptionally high. It is conceivable that they were the forebearers of the musical culture of Ireland. There is no doubt that they were one of the principal agents through which the tradition developed to its present state. Although the more famous musicians from the Traveller community have been recognised for their individual talent, the Traveller community as a whole has not received its due recognition for the part it has played in carrying the musical tradition from ancient Ireland to the highly acclaimed standard of today. Such recognition could help to combat the negative feedback this community gets from society.

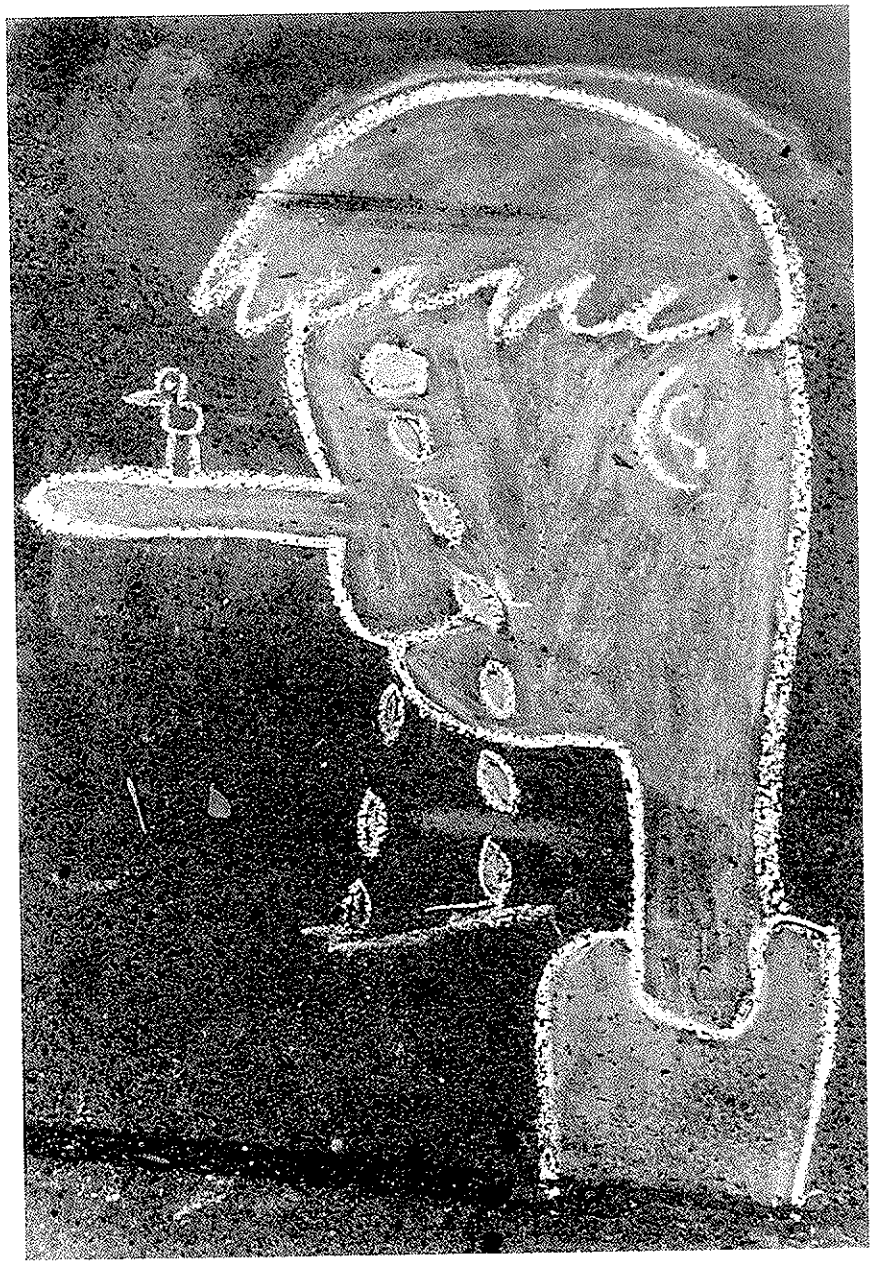
It is note worthy that, although Travellers are a small minority, the direction of the stream of influence has been Traveller to settled people rather than the other way around. This points to two factors, the strength of the Traveller tradition and the role of the nomadic musican.

Unfortunately the aspects of the Travellers' lifestyle that aided their musical contribution are undergoing a forced change. Travel and rural life were important contributory factors but nomadism is now opposed in many ways, by the closing of traditional camping grounds, the forced settlement and social welfare laws that pulled Travellers towards the cities.

The discrimination that Travellers face means that they can rarely attend a music session or other musical gathering. These are now indoor activities in contrast even to thirty years ago. As they have therefore less chance of playing with other musicians, the music is becoming less of a social medium. For many Travellers the lack of a social outlet for their music is causing a decline in their level of interest and dedication to their art forms. In this way both the Traveller and the settled communities lose out.

Travellers have a proven ability to preserve their cultural identity against all opposition, however this needs to be resourced to combat the negative pressures being exerted on them. They need space to meet and exchange skills. They need an opportunity to play music socially and to look at their cultural heritage and value it. Something valued will not be easily discarded.

The Travellers' Cultural Heritage Centre, in Pavee Point is responding to this challenge by organising and supporting a full programme of cultural activities, music classes and the Travellers' National Arts Festival. Dublin and Ennis, Tullamore and Navan are just some of thelocations for classes to date and other centres are preparing to begin a similar process in their areas. This action will provide a new base, on which the Travellers musical heritage can thrive and develop into a new century and beyond.



Traveller childs drawing. Photo: Derek Speirs.