

WRVS Heritage Plus presents

Hidden Photographs of a Hidden People



in and around the
south country hop gardens

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To listen to some of the interviews quoted in this book see www.heritageplus.org.uk

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Judges of Hastings www.judges.co.uk: postcard, page 3

Sussex Newspapers: photographs from *Sussex County Magazine*, pages 3 and 4

Peter Gillies: magic lantern projector, page 5

Hampshire Museums and Arts Service: photograph 'A minister with his magic lantern show', page 8

East Sussex Schools, Library and Museum Service: photographs pages 5-17

Gill Capon-Browning: Jamie Smith, page 19

Hamish MacGillivray: Hailsham War Memorial, page 19

Janet Keet-Black: Field Marshall Montgomery's thank you card, Henry Keet, page 19; photograph top right, page 20; Patience Keet-Harris, page 21

Mike Brooks: photographs, page 20

Beverley Walker: 'Chris Penfold Brown stepdancing', page 21

Chris Penfold Brown: Penfold sisters, Alice Brown, page 21

Anon: postcard 'Gospel Van Bethany', page 9; postcards, page 18

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Introduction

ypsy Travellers have often been referred to as ‘the secret people’ or ‘the hidden people’ and certainly, where the published history of Britain is concerned, this has until relatively recent times been an apt description.

The descendants of groups who left India over 1,000 years ago began to arrive in Britain in the fifteenth century and were originally believed to be Egyptian, a name from which Gypsy is derived. They brought their own trades with them and adopted new ones suited to the itinerant life in their new country and in doing so swelled the numbers of indigenous Travellers already moving between villages and towns in search of a living – pedlars, artisans and the dispossessed among them.

Generations later, we, their descendants, are still here but for many of us our history has been inaccessible, and yet, over the generations, our lives have been intertwined with the house-dwellers: the Traveller bringing the goods that the poorer folk could afford; the house-dweller working alongside the Traveller to bring in the harvest; the soldiers, shoulder to shoulder in the trenches.

With so little then being known of our travelling forefathers, myth merged with fact and Gypsies became a subject of fascination. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that with the invention of the camera, amateur photographers, many of them from the middle and professional classes, turned their lenses not just on the rural communities and their trades but also to the encampments. We should be grateful that they did. Albeit slowly, local archives are yielding their own secrets, among them collections of photographic plates and images.

Photographs are prompts to the past. They release our memories and evoke sights, sounds and smells of events long gone. Those memories can be happy, sad or bittersweet, bring forth a smile or a tear, or break the ice and prompt a conversation. They also form part of our personal histories and we pass them on to the next generation by way of the oral tradition to hopefully be recorded, thereby enriching the social history of the wider community. Just as importantly, they give each of us our individual place in the history of our locality.

“Hop-picking? Oh yes, I remember hop-picking. I was there!”

WRVS Heritage Plus is to be commended for its part in collecting and preserving the oral histories of local communities and I thank the WRVS and Hamish MacGillivray for inviting me to be part of this project.

Janet Keet-Black
Romany historian
August 2010

Note: The terms Gypsy, Romany and Traveller in this publication are interchangeable. The term ‘other Travellers’ refer to those not of Romany/Gypsy origin.

❖❖❖ Travellers in Sussex ❖❖❖



For hundreds of years, Gypsies and other Travellers have frequented the Sussex highways and byways in search of work. Where possible, they followed the agricultural calendar and at other times took work wherever it was available: on farms or in villages and towns.



'....you could be sure of finding him on certain farms in Sussex and Kent, where there was work on the growing crops to be done, sheep to be dipped, fruit to be picked ... and the harvest to be gathered in.'*

Many farmers relied on Gypsies to assist in harvesting certain crops, as there wasn't enough manpower available locally to bring them in on time.

When paid work was unavailable, Gypsies turned their hands to crafting items from raw materials that could be sold from door to door as they travelled.

*H.C. Visick, 'Sussex Gypsies', *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 5 (1939), p. 312.

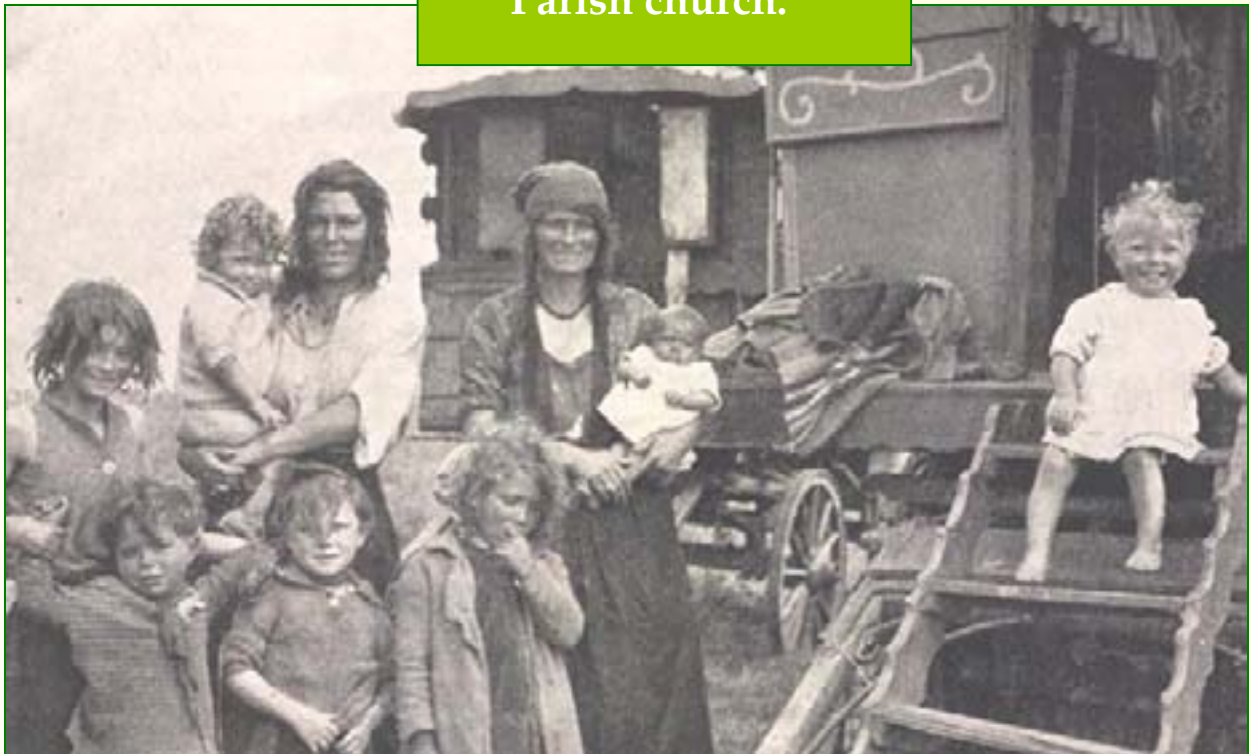
Gypsies have always attracted attention from the local community. Hubert C. Visick wrote of Gypsies stopping in the Eastbourne area when they were taking a rest from their travels:

'Half way up the hill after leaving Old Eastbourne, the road skirts a thin beech wood or hanger. If we take a rough cart track just above the hanger to our right, we shall soon come out on the rim of a great green bowl. In a short distance the track widens out into a grassy level floor. It is an ideal camping ground.'*

In the early 1900s, Odger Hilden and Agnes Lee stopped in this clearing and had a child baptised in Eastbourne.



'In due season a son was born and baptised in the Old Town Parish church.'*



.....
*H.C. Visick, 'Sussex Gypsies', *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 5 (1939), p. 307.

❖❖❖ The photographers ❖❖❖

Apart from Hubert C. Visick, there were other photographers with an interest in recording Gypsies and other Travellers in the late 1800s and first half of the twentieth century. Many of their photographs were also produced as magic lantern slides to illustrate lectures given to fellow enthusiasts, or to be shown in village halls and institutes as a forerunner to the 'moving picture'.

Frank Hinkins, magic lantern slide maker and photographer, lived for a while in Brighton but his main interest was in the Hampshire Gypsies. His son married a Romany girl from the New Forest and moved to Clayton before settling in Burgess Hill.

In a recently discovered box, part of the collection of Dr Habberton Lulham, there are two images that may have been taken by Hinkins. With a shared interest in Gypsies and photography, it is probable that Hinkins and Habberton Lulham were acquainted.



By Frank Hinkins?

**Hinkins and
Dr Habberton Lulham
were just two among many
photographers with an
interest in Gypsies and
Travellers.**

Around the same time that Visick and Dr Lulham were active, J.V. Haswell also photographed Gypsies on the Sussex Downs, but it is believed they were for a photographic competition.

An example of a magic lantern projector



Photograph by Hamish MacGillivray

The magic lantern projector above is owned by Peter Gillies, 'the magic lantern man', an authority on the subject.

The doctor and the mysterious box

by Hamish MacGillivray

In a library warehouse* near Eastbourne, there sits a mystery wooden box crammed with magic lantern slides. Who used these slides and who took the photographs? There is a clue as one slide shows a man in a trilby hat bandaging a woman's arm. It is marked 'Dr Habberton Lulham of Hurstp.Pt Photographer of Gypsies'.



"It's not what I call a 'happy snappy'. It's not just pick up the camera and flash! Job done. Somebody has thought about taking these pictures." *Peter Gillies*

By the 1920s Dr Lulham was well known in Sussex as a photographer, poet and lecturer who loved the Sussex Downs. He started his career as a young surgeon, and sometime cricketer, graduating from Guy's Hospital in 1896 (A). He worked at Sussex County Hospital in Brighton as a 'dresser' for the Senior Surgeon, Dr Blaker.

From the 1900s Dr Lulham contributed photographs to books on rural themes such as shepherds (B) and for his old boss Dr Blaker's boyhood memories (C). Dr Lulham also wrote books of poetry on the Sussex countryside that included *Songs from the Downs and Dunes* in 1908. He later became a vice president of the Sussex Poetry Society. According to Kelly's and Medical Directories he was still practising as a doctor in Ditchling and then Brighton at this time (D).

From the 1920s he may have stopped being a doctor due to sciatica and high blood pressure (E), and concentrated on his photography and public lectures. *The British Medical Journal* reports in the 1920s and 1930s his successful performances of lantern lectures at the AGMs of Sussex medical professionals (F). His best-known lectures were 'Human Nature through a Doctor's Eyes' and 'Rustic Life and Humour' (E).

Could some of the images of Gypsies and Travellers from the mystery box and in this book have been taken by Dr Lulham? *The Sussex Express* newspaper observed 'He was also an authority on gipsy life, and was an hon.member of the Gipsy Lore

*The Schools Library and Museum Service, East Sussex County Council.

Society.' (G). The clues available suggest that these slides probably did belong to Dr Lulham and many of the images were photographed by him. This collection of slides reflect his belief, of which he wrote in 1919,

'It is well in these times of relentlessly increasing mechanism to keep before one still, if it be possible, the memory and ideal of those unhurried, simpler...happier days...' (H)



The box found in the Eastbourne store

Edwin Percy Habberton Lulham, born Norwich 1865, took his own life in Hurstpierpoint, Sussex 1940.

-
- (A) Bryant Collection of Physician Writers and Time Test Match websites.
 - (B) *Shepherds of Britain* by Adelaide L.J.Gossett 1911 and *Shepherds of Sussex* by Barclay Wills, 1938.
 - (C) *Sussex in Bygone Days* by Nathiel Paine Blaker, 1919.
 - (D) Medical Directories 1911 and 1923.
 - (E) 'Slip out of Life' – Sussex Poet's Letter to the Coroner' obituary article *Sussex Express and County Herald*, Friday 15 July, 1940 page 8.
 - (F) *British Medical Journal Supplement* Sat Oct 24, 1926 page 138 and September 29, 1934, page 616 and November 3, 1934 page 233.
 - (G) See E. The Gipsy Lore Society was established by concerned professionals to record the traditions of Gypsy life before it disappeared.
 - (H) See C foreword by Dr Lulham page 10.

Dr Lulham's envelope with negatives and a small print from the Eastbourne store



'... after the dinner a lantern lecture will be given by Dr. Habberton Lulham on human nature through a doctor's eyes.'

Sussex Doctors AGM
October 24, 1925
'Supplement to the British Medical Journal'

The missionaries



A minister with his magic lantern show



Many of the images in Dr Habberton Lulham's collection were taken during hopping-time in September and October, when family and friends met up in the hop-gardens of Sussex and Kent.

Visiting missionaries also sometimes arrived with their own wagons and a mission tent would be erected for prayer meetings. To encourage pickers to attend, magic lantern shows were staged during or after the service and tea served at the end.



"We went because we were always given a good tea at the end!"

Aunt Britty

Some would light a pipe to relax during their short breaks between picking. It wasn't uncommon to see women smoking them also.

"Her jumper – that's burn holes from her pipe! ... 'Cos some of the old women used to fill the pipe up, turn them upside down and put two fingers over the bottom and puff it and it would all fall out."

Chris Penfold Brown



In the hop gardens



Missionaries took an interest in the social and spiritual welfare of Gypsies and other Travellers from at least the early 1800s. Quaker John Hoyland was the first to write of his concerns in 1816, and inspired the Reverend James Crabb to set up the Southampton Committee, recruiting influential members throughout the south to visit encampments to offer practical help and to spread 'the gospel'.

In the hop gardens, the Salvation Army, the Church Army and other missionaries dispensed religious tracts along with the tea and sometimes set up schools for the younger children.

The Church Army alone had a fleet of 62 vans, many of them visiting the hop-gardens, strawberry fields and fruit orchards during harvesting.

"The Church Army alone had a fleet of 62 vans."*

"The "Magic" Lantern plays a great part in the work."*

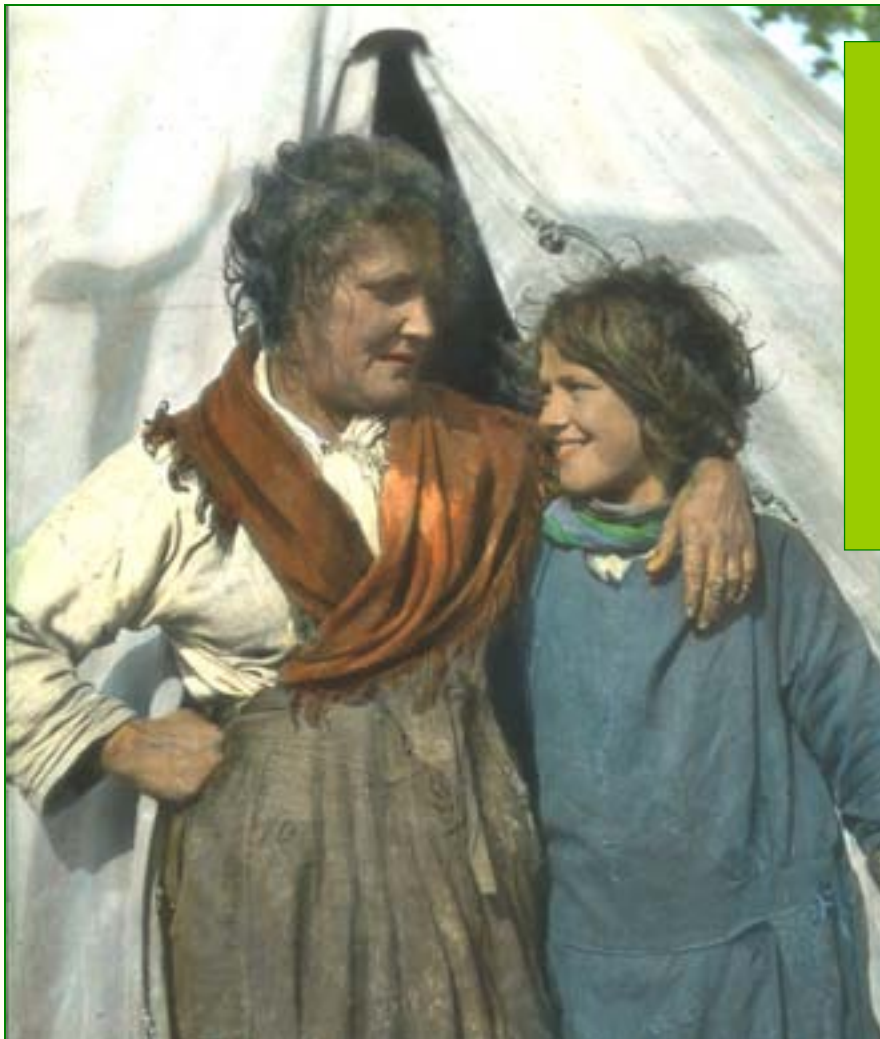
Gypsy and other hop-pickers arrived from as far away as Hampshire, Dorset, London and Kent. Others travelled just a few miles from their regular stopping places around Sussex. During late August, September and early October, many churches in the hopping parishes saw an increase in Gypsy and Traveller baptisms and marriages.



*Anon, *Gypsy Missioning in the New Forest* (1934), pamphlet published by the Church Army

In 1930, H W Jevons wrote, *'In Sussex London pickers are not so common as in Kent. Villagers, women from the seaside towns, and "cart people" or gipsies supply the labour as a rule. Only the bigger farms draw the London hopper into camps.'**

But Edmund Austen recalled in 1942 that at Conster Manor, in Brede, the pickers were mainly fisher folk from Hastings, Irish families from Brighton, and caravan dwellers from London, such as the extended Roberts family who returned to Conster Manor for over twenty years running and arrived with dogs, poultry, horses and half a dozen donkeys. Pickers without caravans were housed in barns and lodges divided by thatched partitions, or were given Army bell tents.



**"Mum and Dad
said all the time
you smell hops
you never die."**

*Hannah Essex
née Penfold*

*'When the day's work was over the occupants of these little colonies would gather round their fires ... singing with great gusto the latest music hall songs interspersed with Salvation Army melodies and ending up dancing to the strains of a concertina or tambourine. From the farm-house we could see the glow of fires lighting up the cone-shaped huts and their occupants and hear the echo of voices and sounds of music floating through the air.'***

* H.W. Jevons, 'The Sussex Hop Fields', *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 4 (1930), p. 730.

** E. Austen, 'Memories of Hop-picking at Conster Manor', *Sussex County Magazine*, Vol. 16 (1942), p. 247.

❖❖❖ Taking a break ❖❖❖



“Those hops are dirty to work with, you get bright green fingers, green sticky stuff down your arms and dress. But the taste. You couldn’t eat a sandwich, after hop picking, you had to hold a piece of paper to eat your sandwich or else the taste of hops would go right through onto your sandwich.” *Mary Penfold*

Accommodation

Before living wagons became available in the 1830s, a tent was the usual mode of accommodation when travelling, or night shelter was found in barns and outhouses.

Tents varied in style. Benders, consisting of a frame of bent hazel rods covered in whatever material was available – tarpaulin, old army blankets, sacking – could be easily dismantled and transported on tilt-carts to the next stopping place: not every family owned a horse. In the late 1800s, ex-army bell tents became popular. The type shown on the right was less common.

Tents were in use by a few families right up until the 1970s.



A bender tent with tilt cart



“Dad’s people had tents. They used to be beautiful inside. They had the wooden floors, because a lot of ‘em didn’t move around, they stopped in the same place and they had curtains draped all the way round – it was like something out of Arabian Nights.”

Mary Penfold

Wagons were of various designs but wheels needed to be above a certain size in order to cope with muddy conditions when travelling or stopping on verges.



“We had two bunk beds in our wagon. My sister and I started giggling at night on the bottom bunk bed. Our dad trying to get asleep on the top would swing his big old leg to give us kick but we were miles away from him.”

Mary Penfold

Parents generally slept in the wagon, with the younger children in the compartment beneath the double bed. Boys often slept beneath the wagon.

Outside fires provided heat for cooking, warmth on cold evenings and a place to sit and chat after a day's work.

“Conversation was good. Children would listen to the older ones. ‘Cos now they got television and everything else and don't notice the older ones.”

Mary Penfold





Hearth and home



“She’s making bread.
It’s a china bowl. Every
bowl has its purpose.

We never use a
washbowl for anything
else, only for washing.
There’s a separate one
for your dishes and
plates.”

Chris Penfold Brown

Out working too, there was a yog* for the tea,
A nice protected place he could always see,
When the yog was lit, and the kettle boiled,
The tea was fit for a king, but our clothes were soiled.

Soiled with honest dirt, from the hard work we did,
In his eyes you could see, his honesty was never hid,
Lets go find a pheasant’s nest, just for a treat,
The sweet taste of eggs could never be beat.

From ‘Father’s Yog’ by Chris Penfold Brown

*A yog is Romani for fire.



“I remember
one place some
people would pull
up in wagons, they
still lived the old
way, and they used
to put washing out
on the bushes. It
came out as white as
snow.”

Mary Penfold



❖❖❖ Moving and stopping ❖❖❖

Travelling is not a lifestyle choice – it is a tradition going back hundreds of years. The routes followed were usually chosen for a reason, dictated by the agricultural or fair calendar and the need to earn the next penny.

At the end of the hop and fruit picking, movement was towards the towns and larger villages or to established stopping-places, such as those in Sussex at Jarvis Brook and Hailsham.

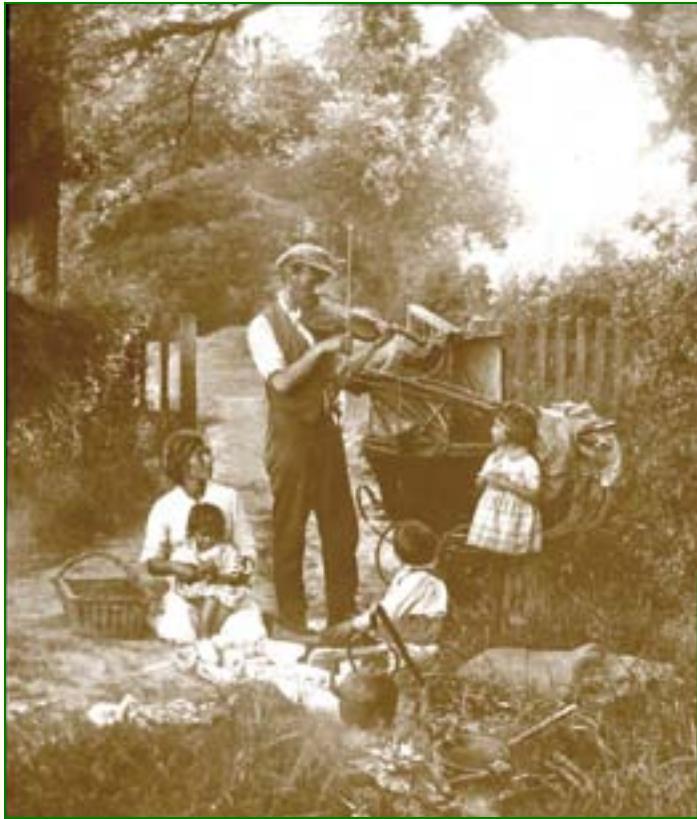


Though Travellers often stopped on convenient open space within the coastal towns of Brighton, Hastings and Eastbourne (such as on the Crumbles) they also stopped in lodgings or rented small houses. From there they hawked flowers, vegetables or fish or took on employment that afforded them a degree of independence.

“The women used to have their hair long. They would turn it at the bottom, twist it round the bottom and bring it over the top of their heads.”

Mary Penfold

Earning a living



'They was pretty good step-dancers ... and could rattle out a tune on the old mouth-organ and tambourine.'

From A Sussex Life edited by Dave Arthur

As well as seasonal work, Gypsies and Travellers had to find other ways to feed their families. They made beehives, baskets, pegs, wooden skewers and flowers, and could turn their hands to tin-smithing, china-riveting, knife-grinding and chair-mending. Years ago, Gypsies musicians were in demand at village fairs, being hired to play fiddle or 'squeeze-box' for dancing.

"They take the baskets into the town from where they were stopping ... full of little bunches of heather and do their fortune telling. They empty the baskets of heather to fill them up with groceries. They've had a good day because their baskets are full of groceries."

Chris Penfold Brown



Additional items hawked included wild flowers or flowers bought from market, lace, haberdashery and trinkets. Larger items, such as carpets, were transported by horse and cart. Many had their regular rounds.

Fairs and markets



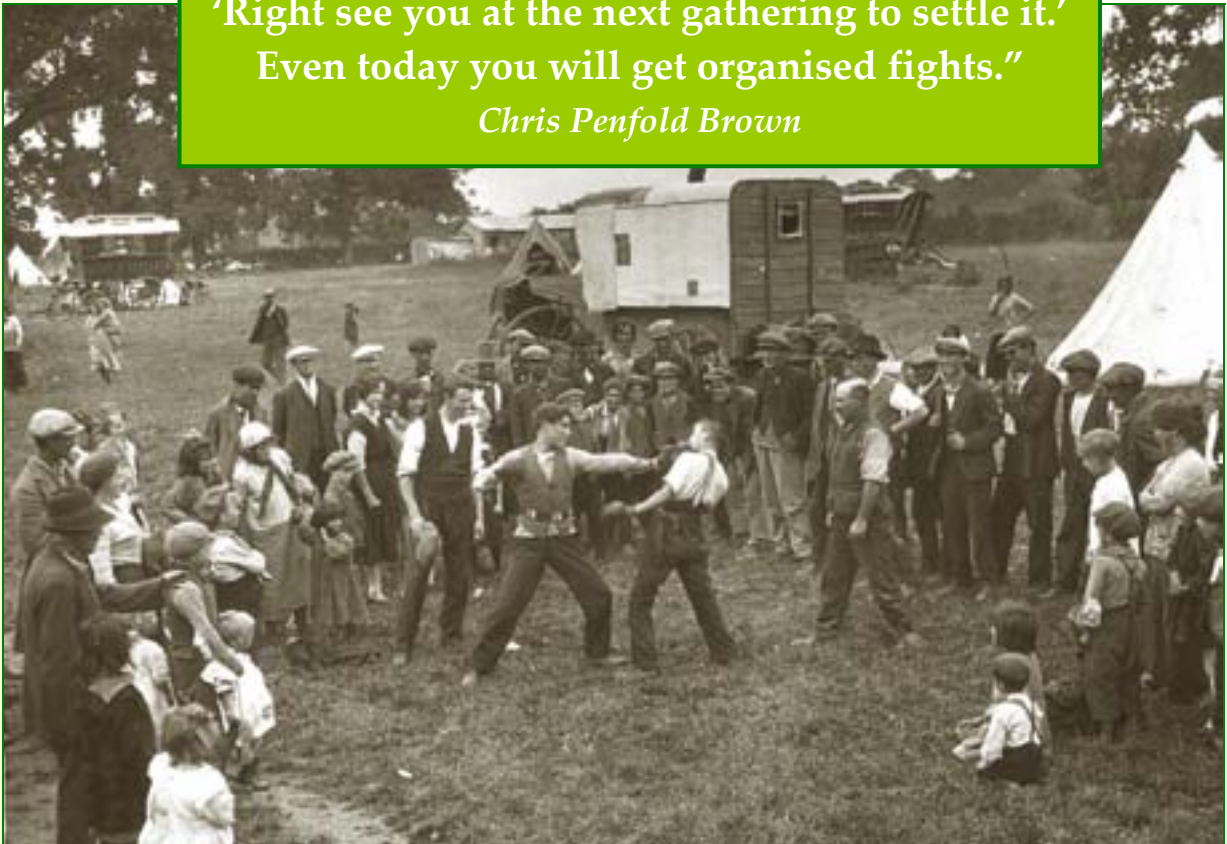
Fairs and markets played an important part in the travelling calendar. As with hop-picking, they provided opportunities to meet up with family and friends who they may not have seen for many months, and also an opportunity to work.

At fairs, the Cooper family ran coconut shies; their relatives, Caleb and Charity Smith ran swings and roundabouts. Others owned boxing booths, or earned money fighting in them.

Not all boxing, however, was confined to the booths.

"If they had disputes on one event somewhere, and they couldn't sort it out, they would say, 'Right see you at the next gathering to settle it.' Even today you will get organised fights."

Chris Penfold Brown





Markets and fairs once took place all over Sussex but many of them have disappeared. These included markets for selling livestock and horses, and also for pedlary. Less formal, but long established horse fairs also took place; it was the custom, on the second Sunday of the picking season, for Gypsies who had been working in the local hop gardens to gather at the Rose and Crown, Beckley, to barter or sell ponies.

According to a report in *the Sussex Express* of 16 September 1932, many hundreds used to travel in from miles around in their vans and traps but in 1932 only about 50 attended with few ponies to sell. Most of their bartering was done in the 'hoppers' room' of the pub. This was presided over by Jack Killick, son of Amos Killick.

A fair day in the 1830s



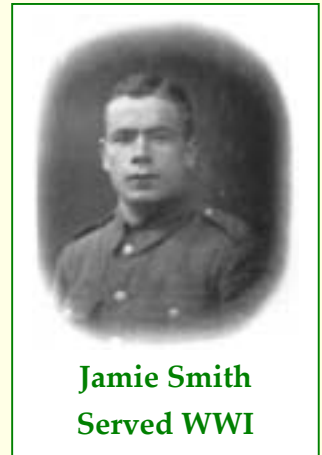
'Their carts were ranged by the side of the road, with here and there a pony tied to the tailboard ... At the cry for "Time", the gipsies poured out of the 'Rose and Crown'.... One or two tried to trot ponies up and down ... but were stopped by the police.'

**From the *Sussex Express*
16 September 1932**

Mary Ann Smith, one time landlady at the Rose and Crown, was born at Jarvis Brook, near Crowborough, site of a large Gypsy encampment.

❖❖❖ Serving their country ❖❖❖

Gypsies have served their country in peacetime and just about every conflict over the past three hundred years, including the two World Wars. There are records that place Gypsies with the British Army in Afghanistan in the late 1870s and defending the Northwest Frontier before WWII. Amongst the hundreds of medals awarded are the Victoria Cross, the Military Medal and the DCM. They hold pride of place in family memorabilia but are seldom talked about.



Jamie Smith
Served WWI



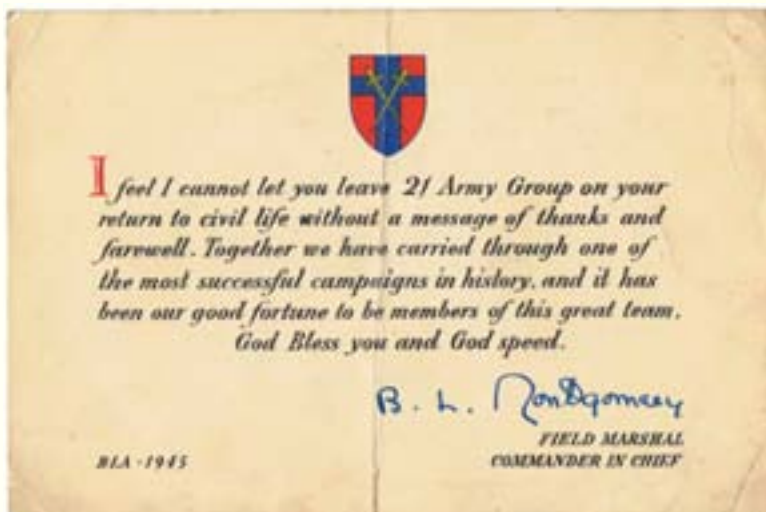
Many lost their lives. One family lost four out of five

sons in WWI, and there are two Abraham Ripleys commemorated on the War Memorial at Hailsham, uncle and nephew who marched off to war together.

'Everyone went out of the yard to see them off ...until only my mother stood looking down the empty lane, even after the sound of their boots and their laughter had died away.'
from Barbara Walsh in a letter to Janet Keet-Black

As with other sections of society, some avoided military service, many waited for conscription but others responded immediately to the call to arms or were already serving as regulars in one of the services. Henry Keet served in the Royal Artillery in India for three years before war service in North Africa and Europe. He received the card below when returning to civilian life.

Henry Keet



Travellers today

❖❖❖ Although there are far fewer now, horse fairs continue to be an important part of the Gypsy culture.

Hundreds gather at Stow-on-the-Wold and Appleby each year and further south at Wickham Fair in Hampshire,



and there are other, smaller events throughout the year. As

well as dealing horses and

showing their paces, traditional crafts such as flower and peg making are demonstrated and sold to visitors.



In common with any other ethnic minority, tradition and culture is important to the Gypsy Traveller but very few travel with traditional horse-drawn wagon. Those who are able to find a place on an official site either live in trailers or mobile homes. Others have to find a place alongside the road but the majority these days live in houses, although not

always by choice. Even so, the name 'Traveller' is still a self-ascription used, even by those who have been born and raised in bricks and mortar.

Today, there are many Gypsies who belong to the evangelical Christianity movement and attend the Light and Life Gypsy church. Their regular conventions have in many cases overtaken the horse fairs in importance.

'Traveller' is still a self-ascription used, even by those born ... in bricks and mortar.



Tarmacing, landscape gardening and tree surgery are just some of the occupations followed by Gypsies today but some run large building or demolition businesses, recycling plants or paper mills.

Glthough traditionally sons work with their fathers and daughters learn how to run a home, many Gypsies have also entered mainstream occupations. They have trained as teachers and nurses, journalists and documentary makers, dancers and classical musicians. There are also professional actors and artists, published authors and Oxford graduates. They are trained first-aiders, drive ambulances and fight fires. A growing number hold doctorates and some are heads of departments in universities.

More than one Gypsy has competed in the Olympic Games and world class show jumping, while those currently serving in the forces may also represent their regiments in the field of sport.



Patience Keet-Harris
emergency ambulance crew



Chris Penfold Brown
stepdancing

On meeting together socially, there is often impromptu singing, the preference for many being for country music, rather than the folk music of the past.

In towns and villages, Gypsies may be involved in the community, be it playing stoolball for their village, or performing in amateur dramatics.

But whatever the chosen course in life, most families remain close, elders are cared for and traditions and heritage acknowledged.

'... families remain close, elders are cared for and traditions and heritage acknowledged.'

Alice Brown, daughter of Chris Penfold-Brown, in a local musical

Sisters Chris, Alice, Mary and Hannah Penfold



