

Romany Theatre Company

Atching Tan Project

Reminiscence Interview – Transcription of Edited Interview

Date of Interview	Interviewer	Interviewee	Age Range of Interviewee	Duration of Edited Recording
06/09	Linda	Mick		16:38

Key timing	Initial of person speaking	Transcription of Interview
00:00	Linda	We are now going to talk about past times. What was it like for you when you were growing up?
	Mick	Rough
	Linda	How so?
	Mick	It was rough because we never had much money, we never had no food hardly, and dad used to work all week for 30 bob.
	Linda	What sort of work did he do?
	Mick	Mostly fieldwork, he used to get few borrikannis every night, and that was a substitute for our food.
	Linda	A borrikannis is?
	Mick	A Pheasant, and we used to have a few shushies (rabbits), and that was the substitute food for our week, coz we never did earn enough money to keep going
	Linda	So you lived day to day?
	Mick	Yeah
	Linda	What did you live in, in those times?
	Mick	We started off in horse and wagons and we progressed to a bluebird which cost dad £600, brand new. he had on HP. He was paying £10 a week or £10 a month
	Linda	Where did you travel?
	Mick	All over the country
	Linda	Not just east Anglia?
	Mick	No just all over, sugar beeting, strawberrying, pea picking. Where the work was we went.
	Linda	How have things changed for you being a traveller over the years.
	Mick	How has things changed? A lot, there's no more field work, travellers don't talk to each other any more, most of them are going t'oft, and the old ways we're losing it, the old way of working, the old way of living is gone and I don't think its coming back.

Linda	Why do you think that's happened?
Mick	'Coz the young 'uns don't want to know. how to live and how to earn money and how to earn their money properly, they don't want to do it no more so all them days are gone, and they wont come back
Linda	Why do you think the young 'uns don't want to do it?
Mick	Because its easier money now, they can do different things now. I suppose, I suppose one way it's a good thing, in another way they lose all their traditions. Won't they?
Linda	Traditions like?
Mick	Well like making their own wagons for a start, most travellers made their own, they were carpenters, they didn't have the money to but one themselves, they made their own. Most of them lived in benders
Linda	What's a bender?
Mick	That's a tent and we never lived one at a time we used to live in 20 and 30 lots of us up lanes.
Linda	Was it easier to stop in them days?
Mick	Not really, 24 hour stopping most of the time, but the travellers were a lot cleaner, no rubbish. If you went and looked where they were stopping, even with a tent you wouldn't see a fireplace because they'd cover it up with green grass and they'd move on.
Linda	So the values were different? Or more or less the same?
Mick	Well they had more respect for people the old travellers, when they see an old gorgia musgrove or an old rymers they'd say morning so, cause these were the people they were working for. Not now, they'd stick their fingers up at them. Ain't no respect for nobody.
Linda	What sort of work did you like doing?
Mick	Fieldwork, its all we knew.
Linda	Did you like any of it?
Mick	Not really
Linda	What did you used to do?
Mick	Pea picking, strawberrying, bean picking, apple picking, plum picking, potato picking, sprout picking, cabbage, green cutting. You go through it we've done it.
Linda	What are the biggest changes now with travellers?
Mick	They got educated from somewhere along the road and their old ways just disappeared, that's what education done to them, they left their old ways behind instead of taking it with them, they got educated and took a new way on but never took their old way with them so they left it behind.

Linda	What do you miss about the old ways?
Mick	The old ways there was more freedom, you know, you never had so much hassle with living, now you have to live day by day but back then you knew where you was going 6 months up the road you knew, knew where you was going to work, what day you were going to work, cause we had regular work at every farm, every other month we had places to go to. When we knew sugar beet was coming we'd pull up on the farm and go do it, or potato picking, we'd pull there and we knew we were going to start.
Linda	So you had somewhere to stop while you worked?
Mick	Yeah, the old rymers used to let us stop there and they liked us there, but no more.
Linda	Did you or your family face racism when you were growing up?
Mick	There wasn't so much racism when we were growing up but there is now.
Linda	Why do you reckon that is?
Mick	'
Linda	Cause the gorgia people have got to know too much about us so there's no mutual respect no more. The travellers know better cause they're just as bad, but they haven't no got respect for one another, but they used to years ago cause we knew what we had to do working on the fields and they knew what we was doing, in the farms and we'd come every year for work so therefore they respected that. We were honest workers.
Linda	What sort of racism do you face now then?
Mick	Now? Well every kind of racism, if you're a foreigner you don't get as much racism as gypsy does in this country now, cause foreigners got more rights than their own people. But the Romaness, the proper Romaness they weren't messy people and yet their still classed as messy people, Why? Because at the end of the day nobody wants them, nobody wants to be associated with them, but the real Romany people were clean people, honest people and they were people with integrity and they work for an honest living, and they done it all year round, done it for years all their lives, and they respected the people that lived around them, that's the difference but now none of its there, no respect, no honesty, no integrity, no nothing.
Linda	No mutual respect?
Mick	No its all gone, and most of its been sown from top from governments, the way they've changed the laws and that. Well they've change laws haven't they, they've done things that travellers didn't need at the end of the day, they've forced them to do things, they've forced them off the road, they've forced the good travellers off the road, the people that used to earn a good living, an honest living and they've forced them all in the same place, so they're all painted with the same brush so therefore you wouldn't tell a good Romany from a bad Romany.
Linda	So everybody gets tarred with the same brush?
Mick	Yeah everybody's tarred with the same brush.
Linda	Have you got any examples in your life about having experienced racism?
Mick	50 years of it. Where do you want me to start?

Linda	But can you remember specific one?
Mick	I can remember gangs of people used to come after us, try to smash up things we live in. That happened years ago, they used to chuck a brick or too at you and you'd get over that but now they want to burn you out and kill you. That's the difference.
Linda	Have you heard anybody actually have it happening to them?
Mick	Yeah. In Ely. Trailers got burned out a few years ago but they got burn all out, motors got burned up.
Linda	Because they was travellers?
Mick	Yeah. Children got beat up at school, still happening now, but at the end of the day I suppose people don't believe it.
Linda	How would you get it across that they would understand it?
Mick	How would you get it across if they would understand it? Racism is built in mankind. In this country alone racism is right in 'em. You know, they can smile and talk to you all lovely and dovley but inside there's a racism going on. Its never changed and it never will change, they might put it under cover but it will still be there, and somewhere along the line it comes out, and I'm afraid to say it never changed in 50 years and it wont change now.
Linda	Did you have a formal education?
Mick	None, I learned myself to read from nowhere. Never went to school.
Linda	Did you want to go to school?
Mick	Yes, but I was working at the age of 10 singling sugar beet crawling up and down the rows all day and everyday for weeks.
Linda	Why didn't you go to school? Because of the work?
Mick	Because of the work, Dad didn't think we deserved to go to school so we had to work for him. So basically at 10 years old I was earning my own food, I never got kept.
Linda	But was that the same way he was brought up the same way as he brought you up?
Mick	Yes, of course he was, earned his own living at 10/11 year old. I done the same, so we were brought up from our mothers, as soon as we could walk we started earning a living.
Linda	Is that part of the travelling community traditions?
Mick	It used to be because they were all hard working people but like I said it was the proper Romany people, not the ones today, not the mixed races people, these mixed race people though they don't know where they come from, they certainly don't know where they're going, they're all heading for a wide road to destruction. But the proper Romanies knew what they had to do and they were people with integrity and people who respected each other and other people as well and property, years ago but they don't respect nothing no.

Linda	Do you think education is a good thing?
Mick	I think education is a good thing if its given right but you must be educated in your own ways first.
Linda	So you should have some sort of travelling education.
Mick	Well yes if you try and educate a travelling Romaness child in the Gorgia way before they understand their own ways you're going to end up with trouble. Cause you'd be mixed up in the head in the end, he doesn't know his own ways nor the gorgia way, he doesn't know where he comes from he's in the middle road, that's a no mans land and he don't know where to go or where they come from.
Linda	How do you see life changing for travellers in the future?
Mick	I think travellers are going to become enslaved in their own lands and in their own sites. Cause that's what's happening there's no more freedom for them; they're gone.
Linda	And is that important?
Mick	Yeah freedom is always important at the end of the day for all man kind its important, but especially for Romany people because Romany people needed freedom, they needed freedom to hitch their old wagons up and take off, with a little bit of work when they wanted, and that was the way they earned their livings, and that was freedom for them.
Linda	What do you think the long term future holds for travellers?
Mick	Not a lot.
Linda	Anything good? Anything Bad?
Mick	Not unless they could actually bring themselves back to a place where they were sensible then it cant happen, but I suppose education is the only thing that's going to do that, and if they don't get educated in a Romaness way then it will all be gone, its your culture, your history, if you ain't got no history to your life what life have you got? You got no past have you? If you ain't got a past you cant call upon it any time you want too, I could go and earn a living just by hunting at one time, you cant earn a living now, the young 'uns don't even know how to pluck a pheasant or kill rabbits so how on earth are they going to live? If it comes to the crunch in this country the travelling people would all starve to death cause they don't even know how to live any more.
Linda	So the travellers in the old times used to live off the land?
Mick	Yeah most of them did.
Linda	So they knew what to pick, what to kill and what to eat?
Mick	Yes, and medicines as well they got off the land, they got everything, they were self sufficient in a way, the farmers needed them cause they needed them for the work cause the old gorgias wouldn't do the farm work, only the travellers done it for 40 or 50 years the travelling people were regular, and some of the farmers treat them like passing family, they knew they were coming and they got places ready. That's how it was.

Linda	What would you say are travellers values?
Mick	In what respects?
Linda	What do you think is most important to a traveller now and before in the old times.
Mick	The old times most important thing was daily food and to be able to live but now its money, they've taken daily food away and replaced it with millionaires and they cant be it but they struggle to get forward and they'll never get forward with it, but if they went back to living a simple life they could live lovely but they can't. Money has took hold of them, everybody's so greedy, they've gone like the gorgia people they want more, and more, and more and their stuck.
Linda	What do you think travellers could learn from gorgers?
Mick	What could they learn from gorgias? A lot. Trades, but like I said you cant give your old way up to learn the trades, otherwise you ain't got nothing, you're giving one up to take another. Carpenters the travellers were carpenters years ago, they made their own wagons and their own places to live. So we know they could do it years ago so at the end of the day that bit of cultures lost.
Linda	What could gorgers learn from travellers?
Mick	Well gorgers could learn a lot from travellers, they can learn mutual respect for one another, if you talk to them and not be afraid of them coz they're only human beings like them. Trouble is with them their education is the same as ours, they've been taught to stay away from us by their parents and their parents. Most of them are racists anyway, just like the travelling people, you stay away from the gorgers, you stay away from them so you never got relationships going with anybody cause we were told to stay away from each other so we're all to blame.
Linda	Can you speak Romany?
Mick	Some, but I'm not going to say none cause I don't believe I should.
Linda	Can you give a reason?
Mick	Cause I don't want nobody to know what I'm saying
Linda	Do you think its important that young travellers know their language?
Mick	Well its important for me. What young 'uns think is important is up to them but when they lose it you can talk to them now and they ain't got a clue what you're saying cause they're in cuckoo land. They've got a foreign language but not their own, so I say now if a man has got it and the young 'uns don't want to know, don't tell them.
Linda	So its up to the individual?
Mick	Yeah, if they wanna know they'll learn. If they don't, don't chuck good things before swine, it'll only get trampled.
Linda	Can you tell me any memories you have of being a child?

Mick	Nope, I was brought up from just about to walk and I worked from walking. As soon as I started to walk and I could hardly talk and I was singling sugar beet, that's what me dad taught me and that's all I done. Singling sugar beet and then we went on from there, work, work, work, work.
Linda	What was the values that your dad taught you?
Mick	The values he taught me was for simple reasons; earn me own living, and mind me own business most times, I'm not saying he's an honest man cause he weren't but he did teach many things, today we can mend our own cars and do things that most people cant do, but we can do it we put our hand to it, cause we use our brain not the pencil. Most travellers used their brains years ago and they didn't have to go through a bit of paper.
Linda	Do you think you were happy in the whole of your childhood?
Mick	Yeah, most travellers were; the old Romanies were they were happy to move about be clean, they were happy to meet one another each year cause that was all they met when they met up with the wagons at some old stopping place. They'd turn up at the same time for pea picking, sugar beeting, 'tatering. We'd work, hop picking.
Linda	What did they do? Just met?
Mick	Yeah they met, the children would play and leave each other after 3 months and they wouldn't see each other for another year and that was it.
Linda	Is there anywhere else they would meet?
Mick	Yeah, but with work mostly cause that's all we done, travel the country all year and worked.
Linda	What types of work did travellers used to do apart from what you told me, is there anything else now?
Mick	Well they're into everything now, where do you start?
Linda	What are travellers attitudes towards non travellers?
Mick	Arrogant. Arrogant people.
Linda	Does it go two ways?
Mick	No, I think the travellers have lost their place. They want to be middle class but they're Romaness and they cant have it can they. You're either Romaness or you're not, you cant be a gorgia and a traveller it just don't work and you cant tear yourself in two bits can you. A double minded person ain't going nowhere and that's what they've become; double minded people, trying to live like gorgers and remember the old ways but you cant. If you aren't brought up in the old ways and you don't keep the old ways it'll all disappear and you take on the ways of the gorgia which ain't the way of the gypsy so therefore they cant be the same and it cant be no good for them.
Linda	What makes you a traveller?

	Mick	You're born one. That's what makes you a traveller like every other human being, but our class was that we were born in wagons, tents, we were born that way, not that you can't become a traveller, you're born into it or you're not a traveller. You're born into being a Romaness or you're not born into one, you cant become one.
	Linda	If you went into a house and settled into a house would that stop you from being a traveller?
	Mick	No you would still be a Romaness, you've been born into it, house, bricks, trailer, tent, none of that makes you Romaness, you're born it.
	Linda	And are you proud to be a traveller?
	Mick	Yes I am.
	Linda	Thank You.

Key Timing Index	
Time	Topic