

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
17-11-09		Jane G	Rory C Pt 2		12:26
Key timing	Initial of person speaking	Transcription of Interview			
00:00	Rory	<p>It's about accommodation for gypsies and travellers going back I suppose a hundred years. People were living in basically bender tents and erm they'd be moved around with either, if someone had a horse or a donkey or a pony and a small cart. My great grandfather who's told my grandfather whose told my mum whose told me how they used to travel around and they would travel in such a thing. It was basically a small pony a flat cart of some description and everything was stacked on the back of that and they would live in tents and that's how they lived and got around. And the bender tent could be really ornate. It could be really big. They can be, probably about in their largest would be 4 – 5 metres long and almost like a wigwam with a bit in the middle so smoke would go out the top and the entrance to the side. They were really big and the smaller ones would just be very tiny almost like a igloo really and be covered in tarpaulins, carpets any materials to hand really and its something you see even in photographs from Eastern Europe, Asia, right down to people living in bender tents in Wales in the 1930's. The design is the same right the way through. Umm</p>			
	Jane	<p>Were they used in East Anglia? Were they used in this area at all?</p>			
	Rory	<p>They would have bin used everywhere. It was the main place that gypsies and travellers lived in prior to the wagons that's all people had and they would up sticks and go Literally. It was all made of hazel stick because the hazels very flexible, it doesn't break when you bend it, so your hazel rods can bend and then when you take it all apart it all packs away really small. So that's where the saying comes from, that's what I believe anyway, 'up sticks and go'. They're literally pulling ya hazel sticks and rods up and putting it on ya back or on a cart or on a horse or donkey and off you travel. So that's basically how I know my family got around. After that people moved over to wagons and that's something my family never did because they moved to London and lived on the edge of London, so didn't travel any more. But for other travellers who had a bit more money would umm get a bigger cart. More peoples dray thing would build their own basic, what people would call, gypsy caravan; a varda. Some are really roughly built in the early days, but it was like a house on wheels really. Umm and incidentally the word varda actually comes from Iran and that means literally what it is, it's a house on wheels and that word has stayed right across Europe to the back end of Donegal in Ireland. You'll hear the same words so there's evidence there that people must have travelled from that area of... yeah through Iraq and Turkey and Europe. And basically the wagons started to form as people became more and more wealthy especially during the late Victorian period. There was more need for travellers to work in the modern farms picking potatoes, hops and especially around London area, you had a huge market garden industry to feed London. It was almost like the home counties of London were supporting the population of a large city. So for families who had worked really hard, there was money to be had and some of the wagons were very ornate and very expensive. If people could afford them the Roll Royce of the wagons would have been a</p>			

Dunton and these wagons were thousands of pounds even then or then you got the basic Kent Wagons, which would have been a lot cheaper and more basic inside. Erm and often made by boat builders or even gypsy travellers themselves would actually copy the big Duntons and make their own version of Reading Wagons. People then started moving around in wagons and they all flashed up. They were very rough and ready really but it's the decoration on the wagons which makes them what they are. Coz they are just sheds on wheels really and people would add carvings as they got more money, but that hay day really of the wagon was really quite brief when you look at it in history really. Only going from the 1880's up to the 1920's. It's a very small window.

After the horse drawn period sort of lorries started coming into use, vans, lorries some sort of cars any sort of motor really would come into use really and early trailer drawn caravans would and depending on the wealth you can look at old photographs you can see some travellers are sitting there with large American Packard cars erm and the very latest Eccles trailers in the 1930's, sitting next to a really rough, old, seen better days Reading Wagon. And you know obviously some families had a lot more money and got into motor cars much quicker than others. And from about the 1950's the transition was almost complete really. People were either going fully on to motor drawn caravans and trailers and the wagon was really falling into disrepair. Anybody that was still living in a wagon in 60's was probably struggling to be honest. I mean, the wagons were often falling apart. They couldn't be repaired anymore. Umm horse dealing had slowed up really. Less horses to get. If you could find somebody to repair a wagon wheel, you'd be lucky. And a lot of travellers still in the wagons often got re-housed by councils during the late 50's. An awful lot got re-housed at that period and that history then disappears. Most wagons that are around today tend to be quite new. Umm a lot of the old ones traditionally were burnt when the owner died. Either that or they were left in fields and rotted away; left in orchards. Some were bought by museums. Some were bought by parks.

Sites I guess really sprung up as a necessity, I suppose, because of post war England was changing rapidly and there wasn't the place or space left anymore for travellers to stop. No sort of grounds on the edge of town and no need for people because the mechanisation of farms had totally wiped out the enormous labour required in feeding... Generally all farms. Tractors came in, combine harvesters came in. So people were literally sitting by the side of major roadways that were becoming busier and busier.

I think the first site was built by Barbara Cartland in Hertfordshire, off the A1. It's still there today. It's called Barbaraville and there was a lot of gypsy travellers stopped on the A1 coz there was a lot of verges on side the A1, all through Hatfield. A lot of the travellers were employed in the building trade in that period, which were building a lot of the new towns: Harlow, Stevenage, Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City. So they was stopped by the side of the A1 and the A1 was being expanded. It was all getting a bit dodgy and dangerous you know. Kids sitting by a really major road. Lorries thundering up and down from London to York. And Barbara Cartland set up the first traveller site. And she has a long history of good relationship with the traveller community and I think her son Lord McCorkerdale still manages that actual site there. She was a nice old lady really. Although I suppose the 1968 caravans act err you ended up with councils having to provide some sort of accommodation for err gypsies and travellers and I suppose at that time you started to get Irish travellers across, but not all councils did. Some did, some didn't. It depended on... though they were supposed to... you needed more of a

	<p>liberal minded council. Harlow where I lived for a while they were probably more liberal minded they had one there. Where I grew up in Cheshunt, there was one there as well. But they were always in horrible areas really. The one in Cheshunt was underneath the pylons next to the rubbish dump err and I think a lot of it... I think the hidden agenda was 'off the road on to sites, off the sites into housing'. I think that was the general view at that period in the late 60's. The idea was to house people and this was a stopping point, a jump between getting people out of trailers and into housing. I mean if anybody remembers, obviously I don't I'm not old enough, but even in the 1950's how many travellers were travelling around even round the edges of London and count them up and compare that to how many people are on the sites in the same vicinity. I would say that there were an awful lot were put into housing more so than on sites.</p> <p>The romantic notion its nice to roam around, but it's a hard life. Its nice in the summer but in the winter you've got a battle with mud a constant battle with mud. I'm sure a lot of people can look back on the old days with rose tinted glasses, but compared to all the amenities you get on a site and in a house it's a different world really. It's a harder life living on the side of the road. I'm sure with most people they would actually say they were better off now than they were before.</p> <p>One guy I found he found the hardest thing he found moving off the site and it was a little private site so he was always battling with mud he had back boards everywhere. Umm was sleeping upstairs for the first time in his life. He'd never been upstairs in a house. It was his first time. He got moved into a little council place, in a small village in Suffolk. Yeah he found it very odd and couldn't sleep for absolutely months having to sleep upstairs he found it very bazaar. Yeah, so there's things people often don't think about. Its different if you move into a bungalow I guess. It's not much different really. And people leaving into communities. I do know people who've gone the other way who've been in a house for years and felt left out of that community and then moved from house back into a trailer back onto a site and you've got older folk who feel that lugging gas bottles around and erm maybe cant afford a nice new modern trailer and still got you know even an old Vickers. You know I still now old folk who still live in old Vickers trailers and the condensation you get in them is terrible and you know they are on the housing list because they are getting too old arthritic and cold in the mornings to It would be nice to switch on some gas or something and sit by a fire in a brick building you know so its either way it depends on people really.</p>
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Key Timing Index	
Time	Topic
00:00	The change in the way Gypsy Romany Travellers live
12:26	End