



PAVEES

TRAVELLING

THROUGH THE GENERATIONS



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE



Foreword

Fáilte Roimh Leabhar Nua.

I have attended quite a few events over the past twelve months but one that has stayed clearly in my memory is one that took place in the European Union House in Dublin's Dawson Street last December.

It was organised by Pavee Point Travellers Centre and the purpose was to display the results of research done by representatives of that group into the Intergenerational contacts between the different age groups.

The results were depicted in various forms: pictorially, artistically, through the written word, orally with song and indeed practically with a display of one of their traditional trades of tin-smithery.

I enjoyed the experience greatly. Pride in culture was very evident and that applied to the young as well as the 'older' folk present.

Thankfully John Collins decided that the results that were presented in European Union House that day deserved to be committed to a book. He undertook the task himself and I am delighted to welcome it's arrival at Pavee Point, Dublin today.

May it travel well.

Gach Rath,
Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh



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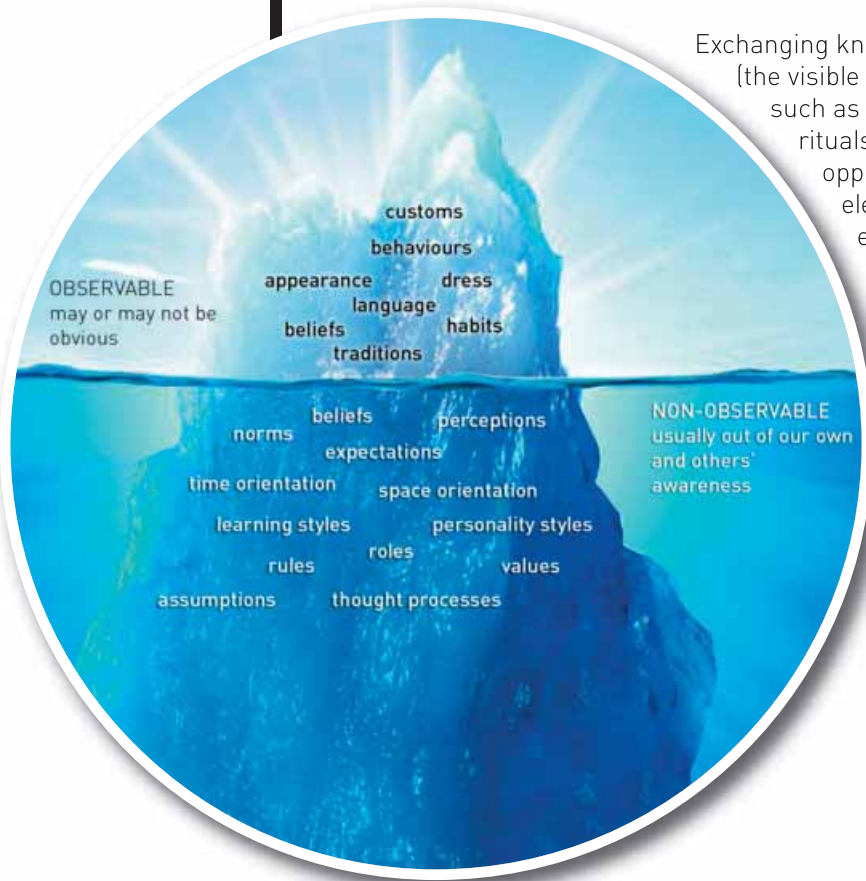
'Pavees Travelling Through the Generations' is part of the EU Year for Intergenerational Solidarity and Traveller Pride week 2013.

what is culture?

Culture is sometimes compared to an iceberg with only a small portion visible and the vast bulk underneath the water.

It is dynamic and constantly changing.

Important aspects of Traveller culture include nomadism, the extended family, family values, customs and traditions associated with travelling, types of economic activity, the marking significant events, music and song.



Exchanging knowledge of tangible cultural activities (the visible part of the iceberg above the water) such as tinsmithing, nomadism and marriage rituals would facilitate a shared space and opportunity to explore the more intangible elements of culture -the invisible elements below the water -such as core values, behaviours and beliefs in the community, and ensuring communication between generations will develop meaningful bonds across the generations.

background

The life of Irish Travellers has changed hugely within a few generations.

Many older Travellers on different sites fear a loss of culture is occurring. They feel intimidated by the young Travellers as they cannot identify with their modern ways, slang, and education. This creates a gap between the generations.

Similarly younger Travellers feel that older Travellers are always giving out about them regardless of what they do and so they don't make attempts to communicate with them.

To address these differences and narrow the gap between the generations, a group of Travellers of different ages came together at Pavee Point to work on a unique multigenerational project.

Travelling Through the Generations is the fruit of that work.

Young Travellers learned of the harsh realities of their grandparents' lives and older Travellers learned that the young generation is still very proud of their culture and identity.

about the project

Over a six week period 12 younger and older Travellers engaged in a number of creative activities in a facilitated setting.

Through group work and reflective practice, the group explored numerous issues relating to the need for intergenerational solidarity within the community.

From these early workshops, the group identified a number of core issues.

A self-directed programme began with the group breaking up into sub groups to explore each of the issues. Through utilising the skills and learning of both generations and developing on the earlier learning, the final projects were developed.

Project Aim

The aim of the project was to create space to explore and document an understanding of Traveller culture, beliefs and values, through intergenerational communication and solidarity.

Objectives

1. To create an understanding of the core values and beliefs informing Traveller culture.
2. To facilitate exchange of skills through intergenerational projects.
3. To develop an appreciation of the contribution of knowledge, experience and wisdom of the older generation to the community.
4. To facilitate a mutual understanding and respect between the generations.
5. To understand the elements of Traveller culture that need to be transferred through the generations.

meet the team



Johnny McDonagh



David Collins



Biddy Collins



Ciaran Collins



Dartin Collins



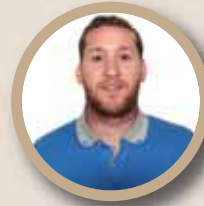
Molly Collins



Michael Collins



Sheila Reilly



Paddy Collins



Bridget Dinnigan



Kelly Collins



Nellie Collins

glossary of terms

Country People: Settled people.

Kick the Can: A game like football with a can.

Kiss Chasing: A game like 'Tig'.

'Wording' Slipper: The name given to used discarded horseshoes that Travellers would get from the forge and shoe their own horses.

Pavee Lackeen: Young Traveller girl.

Beoir: Traveller woman.

Tigeen: Term given to the original houses for housing Travellers. They were made from cheap materials and not intended to be for long term use.

Budget: The name given to the bag used for carrying the tools of the trade of tinsmithing.

Tinker's Dam: A ring of dough placed around a hole in a tin can while molten solder was applied to plug the leak.

Pottinger: Tin jug for drinking from.

Pandy: Tin bucket with handle to hold milk.

education

Travellers' Education status is considerably lower than that of their settled peers.

On average Traveller children finish full time education 4.7 years earlier than those in the general population.

Census figures for 2011 show that 17.7 per cent of the Traveller population is without formal education compared with 1.4 per cent of the general population.

55% of Travellers leave school before the age of 15 (Census 2011)

By the age of 17, 90% of Travellers have ceased their full time education (Census 2011)

Less than 1% of Travellers go on to third level education (Census 2011)

62% of Travellers experienced discrimination once or more in school (AITHS, 2010)

Traveller children, immigrant children and children with a disability are more likely to report being bullied at school (State of the Nation's Children, 2012)

education

complex reasons

The reasons for Travellers' lower education status are many and complex.

In the past education policy promoted a segregated model of provision. In practice this meant that in many schools Travellers were placed in special, all Traveller, classes with one teacher who catered for all Traveller children regardless of age.

The lack of visibility of Traveller culture within the school system can contribute to feelings of isolation experienced by Traveller children. Many Traveller children are aware that their identity will pose a problem for them at school.

It is difficult for Travellers to see the positive outcomes of staying on in mainstream education as many experience discrimination in trying to obtain employment.

Many Travellers find themselves living in poor accommodation and appalling living conditions. They experience poor health and widespread prejudice and discrimination. This can militate against their full participation in education.

But the picture is improving. Today there is a greater number of Traveller children in post primary education than ever before and more are accessing third level education.

Yet Travellers continue to experience challenges in accessing schools.



experiences

“not doing my leaving cert was a big mistake”

A growing number of Travellers are staying on in school longer today but this was not always the case. For many older Travellers, school was a hostile environment and a place to go at best sporadically and often, only in advance of receiving the sacraments.

Sheila Reilly recalls just two weeks schooling before her Confirmation.

One of **Bridget Dinnigan's** proudest moments is getting honours in Leaving Cert English as a mature student. Bridget left secondary school after just two years but returned to formal education when she was 40.

Her youngest daughter is now in third year and about to do her Junior Cert and she will be encouraging her to stay on to do her Leaving Cert.

“I have always talked to them about Travellers’ culture and Travellers’ ways but times are changing now big time with Travellers,” said Bridget, a Primary Health Care Worker in Pavee Point.

Johnny McDonagh left secondary school after his Junior Cert. “Not doing my Leaving Cert was a big mistake,” he admitted.

For Travellers like **Dartin Collins**, segregated education was a demeaning experience.

“The teachers used to shower us even though we did not need it because we were washed by our mothers before we went to school. When we were showered the teacher put back on the same clothes.”

Dartin’s memories are of limited reading and writing instruction. “The teachers have very low expectations of Traveller children. They didn’t seem to even try to teach us.”

“We would play games, mess about, doing nothing to tell you the truth,” he added.

Nowadays, Travellers like **Kelly Collins** are staying longer in school. Kelly completed her secondary education and achieved Fetac Level 5 in further education.

in our own words:

“I had a lot of settled girls as friends and I never felt left out. Anything that was going on in the school I would always join in.”

Bridget Dinnigan

“I left school at 13 to help out full time. School got in the way so my father was glad for me to leave and go out with him and help him full time.”

John Collins

“Travellers these days are more educated. Women are in training centres learning to cook and sew. Some Traveller men help to look after the children while the women are in these training centres,”

Mary Teresa McDonagh

“We even had our own space in the yard with a line in it. There were different play times for the Traveller children and the settled children. They didn’t want us to mix.”

Dartin Collins

I did not experience discrimination when I was in school. I got on well with the settled children in class and I am still friends with a lot of them today.

Ciaran Collins

our vision

That
Travellers
will:

- Obtain access to all mainstream provision
- Participate as equals, achieve our full potential and have outcomes similar to those of our settled peers
- Be participants in an education that is changing and evolving into an inclusive system
- Gain qualifications, obtain access to mainstream employment, aspire to promotion and participate fully as members of society

discrimination

and Travellers' changing relationship with settled community

Three generations of Travellers with very distinct experiences, Ciaran Collins, Dartin Collins and Molly Collins explore the changing relationship between Travellers and settled people and Travellers' experiences of discrimination.

The team also looked at a number of studies exploring the settled communities' attitude to Travellers, including Michael Mac Greil's studies *Emancipating Travellers*, 1989 & 2010; *Citizen Traveller*, 2000 and 'The All Ireland Traveller Health Study' 2010 research with Traveller men and women from different generations.



discrimination

policy decisions that have shaped attitudes

1963 - First Government report on Travellers

The Commission on Itinerancy Report approached the solution to the 'itinerancy problem' as rehabilitation and assimilation into the general population.

1983

The Travelling People Review Body Report suggested the best approach was integration and acknowledged Travellers as a separate group that experienced prejudice and hostility.

1995

The Taskforce for the Travelling Community conducted extensive consultation with Travellers and Traveller organisations and commissioned research. It highlighted various levels of discrimination being experienced by Travellers on an Individual and Institutional level.

2000

An attitudinal survey (undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes for the Citizen Traveller Campaign) found that 97 per cent of settled people would not accept Travellers as a member of their family and 44 per cent of those surveyed would not want a Traveller as a member of their community.

2000 - 2001

The Equal Status Acts prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, disposal of property and access to education. They outlaw discrimination in all services generally available to the public.

2010

A study by MacGreil found 60.1 per cent of respondents would still not welcome a Traveller into their family and more than 61 per cent of Travellers have experienced discrimination in shops, pubs and restaurants.

experiences

“we would sing songs and tell stories for the women of the house”

The relationship between the Traveller community and the majority population in Ireland today is characterised by hostility, prejudice, discrimination and conflict.

But this wasn't always the case.

A great-great-grandmother, **Molly Collins** can remember one settled woman who would keep half a dozen eggs on top of the press waiting for her to call. “She was a real nice woman. Settled people were a lot nicer to Travellers back then,” she said. “When I came up to their door the settled people would be like ‘come in ducky for an oul’ chat.”

In Molly's day the relationship between Travellers and settled people was much more intertwined. Travellers, like her father, made tin buckets and pans which were needed on farms and in houses and the women would go out “hawking the houses” to sell the buckets. Sometimes Molly would fetch water in the new buckets for the house. She also remembers collecting milk from the farm and eating with the settled family in their house at night.

“We would sing songs and tell stories for the women of the house. The settled men of the house would join in and tell ghost stories, we would be terrified walking up the dark lane back to our camp. In those days there was so much trust in people that the settled boys used to walk us back to our camp.”

Travellers would also pick potatoes and foot turf for farmers and were often paid in money or kind and let them set up camp on their land.

“Years ago we used to sit around the oul’ campfire and drink and have the oul’ craic and a good sing song. Sometimes we would play the tin whistle and get up and dance,” said Molly sadly.

Nowadays, relations have deteriorated.

The nomadic movement of Travellers is restricted and they are often refused service in pubs and shops and struggle to find venues for special functions, like weddings.

in our own words:

“Children are staying in school longer but still they find it very hard to get a job when they leave school because they are a Traveller.”

Bridget Dinnigan

“People are hearing stories about Travellers that are negative. When we go to pubs we get turned away because Travellers were fighting there last week. A lot of settled people think we are the same.”

John Collins

“Travellers also hide their identity in the workplace and also give false addresses just so they might get a job.”

Johnny McDonagh

“I think we are discriminated against because people haven’t enough knowledge around who Travellers are and what we’re about. They’ve probably never met a Traveller.”

Johnny McDonagh

“People generally only hear bad stuff about Travellers.”

Kelly Collins

“We have our own way of doing things – like having the craic. People don’t really know anything about Travellers expect what they hear and read.”

Michael Collins

“You’re followed around the shops if they know you are a Traveller.”

Bridget Dinnigan

nomadism/ accommodation

The failure of the Irish State to realise Travellers' right to accommodation is an ongoing and serious human rights issue.

It is estimated that up to 1,000 Traveller families still live on the roadside in appalling conditions, without access to water, sanitation and electricity.

Many others live in official accommodation that is poorly serviced and maintained and often situated in unhealthy or dangerous locations.

This has a negative impact on Traveller quality of life, mortality and on how Travellers can access healthcare, education, social welfare and other services.

Poor conditions and a shortage of adequate Traveller specific accommodation are considerable factors in increased numbers of Travellers living in and applying for standard local authority housing.

Traveller accommodation preferences are diverse but there are a number of barriers that Travellers face to accessing accommodation, above all in relation to living in Traveller specific accommodation such as halting sites or group housing schemes.



nomadism/accommodation

reports and legislation

1995 The report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community, which recommended the provision of 3,100 units including 2,200 permanent and transient halting site bays and 900 standard and group housing.

1995 Pavee Point recommends the Government set up an independent Traveller Accommodation Agency that would respect Traveller Culture.

1998 Traveller Accommodation Act obliging local authorities to produce five year plans for delivering Traveller accommodation. But a lack of political will and incentives or sanctions in the legislation have resulted in local authorities failing to provide adequate accommodation for Travellers. Traveller families often face discrimination, harassment and racist attacks by people who do not want them to live in their area.

2002 The Housing Act which changed trespass from a civil to a criminal offence. This criminalised nomadism which is a key part of Traveller culture.

2010 the All Ireland Traveller Health Study revealed that 2,753 Traveller men, women and children did not have access to running water. A significant number of families also reported lack of footpaths, public lightings, fire hydrants and safe play areas.

Report by Johnny McDonagh, David Collins and Biddy Collins

experiences

“it was a better time on the road”

Nellie Collins was born in a tent and never slept in a wagon bed.

“I slept on the floor and then it was flooded out,” she recalled.

Bridget Dinnigan was born in a house but she has strong childhood memories of going to visit relations who were living on the roadside in tents wagons and trailers.

Then every summer the family would lock up the house and go travelling.

“We would meet up with relations and other Travellers. Usually it was Dundalk where we stayed. My father would put up the tents, usually it was two; one for him and my mother and maybe the youngest baby at the time, and one for the girls, the boys would have a bed in the back of the van.”

“I used to love going away travelling and meeting up with all the Travellers. I remember the long hot sunny days going for walks down the road picking flowers and berries from the trees that we used to eat.”

“In the evenings all of us would play hopscotch, tig, skipping and Bobby House. There would always be an outside fire lit in the evenings. I remember sitting at it listening to stories getting told and the adults having a few drinks and a singsong around the fire.”

“When I think back it was a very happy and homely time and everyone got along together and helped each other. We were always a few weeks late going back to school after the summer holidays but the school didn’t pass any heed. They knew we were Travellers and understood our culture and traditions.”

James Collins wishes those days had never ended.

“It was a better time on the road. It was more homelier and the settled people knew all about ya.”

“I would love to go back on the road but the family won’t now.”

"I was talking to Jimmy Cullan from Edenderry in Co Offaly and he was saying that all the settled people we knew are dead and gone and there's only the younger people that wouldn't know us. So that has even changed."

Biddy Collins has lived in a house since the 2002 Housing Act which criminalised nomadism, but she misses the road.

"I would rather be travelling because it's part of who I am.

"The Government still don't get Travellers and our culture, I think we would still be travelling and living a nomadic life if it wasn't for the law," she said.

She misses nomadic life in a wagon.

"In the wagons there was a bed and an oul' stove to keep us warm. I just wish to God we could still live in wagons and roam the countryside and at night have an oul' sing song around the campfire. How I miss them oul' days terrible."

Johnny McDonagh spent his early childhood in a trailer and remembers little of those days except that it was very cold in wintertime.

He regrets not having the choice of travelling any more.

David Collins and his wife live in a trailer close to family on a halting site. Although the trailer is difficult to keep warm, they love the proximity to family and wouldn't want to live off the site.

"It's just not for us," he said.

Traveller women

Traveller women play a central role in their immediate family and the wider Traveller community. They have responsibility for the home, family and children. They also broker with service providers and often take on leadership roles in acting as spokespeople for the community.

Through the generations, this role has evolved. Traditionally their role was primarily as homemaker, wife and mother.

Today young Traveller women are moving into third level education, pursuing careers and achieving financial independence.

Report by Molly Collins, Sheila Reilly, Nellie Collins, Bridget Dinnigan and Kelly Collins



Traveller women

life of a Pavee Lackeen and Beoir

Traditionally Traveller girls were left at camp minding younger children in their family and extended family while their parents went out to beg and sell. **Sheila Reilly** (76) can list off the jobs she had to do.

"The straw for sleeping on would have to be lifted and tidied up and the road cleaned. We would have to wash the vessels. They were tin because if we used delph it would have broken with all the packing up when we were travelling from place to place. There was an aluminum pot, kettle and tea can. We had a grub box with food, no presses. There would be tea and bread for the kids,"

"Parents would leave the camp around 10 o'clock and go for miles to beg, chat and sell stuff. They would come back around 3 or 4 o'clock and prepare for dinner with whatever they got in the country, mostly cabbage, turnips, bacon and spuds," she recalled.

Bridget Dinnigan can recall taking turns with her sisters to go begging with her mother while her brothers went out to work in the country with their father. "I used to love it because you would always get nice food and nice clothes and whoever didn't go would do the cleaning around the house and help mind the younger ones and do the cooking."

Traveller girls were expected to take up all the duties in the home while their brothers played outside.

Nellie Collins was from a family of girls so she had to do boys' jobs as well.

"I had to feed, water and gather hay for the horses from houses. I had to collect sticks and water and light the fire. Mary, my sister, could shoe a pony and she would also have to milk the goat – she would drink directly from it. When I got married I was really bad at begging, I hadn't the training for it."

Traveller girls would also make flowers from crepe paper and sell them as they went along. Rules were stricter on Traveller girls growing up. As young teens, they were rarely let out and when they were, they were under strict curfew.

Traveller women through the generations

As well as taking care of family and home, Traveller women in the past would go begging and sell hand made buckets and cans door to door. On farms they picked potatoes and other crops or carried out chores for the farmer's wife in return for food and money.

Molly Collins can remember back to a time when Traveller women set up stalls at markets and fairs with the men and sold carpet, radios and blankets. They also indulged in a little fortune telling.

"They got to know the people they were giving fortune telling to and just basically told them lies to get a few pound," she revealed.

Bridget Dinnegan (50) left school when she was 14 and got a job in a shop and then a restaurant in Mullingar and handed over most of her wages to her mother. She can recall vividly how much stricter her father was on the girls in the family.

"We weren't allowed to wear make-up. We were never allowed to go anywhere on our own. An odd time a few of us was allowed to go to a matinee on a Sunday in the day time. As I got a bit older I was allowed go to the hop with my older sisters and brothers."

"It would be on Friday night from 8 to 12. We were given a time to be home which would be 15-20 minutes after it was over and by God did we make sure we were home on time 'cause if we weren't, we would never hear the end of it. We would get a few clouts and wouldn't be let go again."



She got married when she was 18 years old and had five daughters.

Nowadays Traveller women are more educated and are working more outside of the home. They are also marrying a little older and family sizes are smaller today.





Traveller women marriage

MARRIAGE continues to be a significant ritual in the life of a Traveller but the way in which couples meet, court and wed has changed vastly.

The first **Nellie Collins** knew she was getting married was when an older relative announced it to her. "Nellie, you're getting married," he told her after a night in the pub following a family funeral. "He brought him over to shake hands. I'd be ashamed to shake hands. Three weeks later we were married."

"There was no big fat gypsy wedding then - you'd just walk into the chapel and get married" Nellie's story is typical of her time.

Families would meet up in pubs or at the end of the day in fairs and markets to arrange their children's weddings. Matched weddings between families that knew each other worked out well although most of the younger generation scorn the idea today.

Mary Teresa McDonagh described marriage as a way to freedom for the Traveller girl.

"Single Traveller girls have little or no freedom compared to single Traveller boys. The only way a girl got freedom was after she married." If a girl got pregnant before she married she would "be scandalised," according to Mary Teresa McDonagh.

For her wedding at the age of 18, **Bridget Dinnigan** wore a simple wedding dress and veil borrowed from another woman. The reception was soup and sandwiches in a small hotel.

Nellie walked to the church to marry her fiancée and afterwards the family begged in town to raise the money for dinner. The reception was a few drinks in Mrs Bowe's in Drumcondra in Meath.

Today's younger Travellers argue that couples should be given more chance to get to know each other. The older generation is equally dismissive of the new phenomenon of couples hooking up via Facebook. Younger generation Travellers reject the portrayal of Traveller weddings on such TV shows as *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*.

But for today's young Traveller bride, who in many cases, has not had a Debs, wedding preparation begins months beforehand for the one big opportunity to really dress up and do it in style.

Traveller women celebrating special occasions

Through the generations, the calendar year is marked by the festive seasons and family events such as Christenings, First Communions, Confirmations and Weddings continue to be occasions of great celebration. The challenge for Traveller women in the past was to make these occasions special with scarce resources. Homes would be decorated with holly and many Travellers would go begging for decorations and toys in the days before Christmas.

Bridget Dinnigan recalls a small doll with no clothes on as a gift one year. "But we appreciated what we got," she said. Going to Mass was the main event on Christmas morning. "Let it be hail, rain or snow, we would walk to Mass," she said. Bridget remembers her parents going to the pub around Christmas time and how they would often bring a few people back to the house for drinks and a sing song.

Sheila Reilly remembers how her family would stay beside a town coming up to Christmas for fear of snow and to be able to get food. Families would gather firewood to last a week and stock up on potatoes in case of snow. Sometimes a red candle would be placed in a scooped out turnip. The women would make current cakes. With limited cooking facilities, Christmas dinner was often boiled chicken and vegetables. The next day families would call on houses and often be given turkey and goose carcasses and other left over treats.

At Easter, Sheila's family would leave the camp and go to the Friary in Ballyjamesduff to get confession and vigil Mass. On St Patrick's Day the girls would wear green ribbons and the boys would wear badges going to Mass.

For First Confession, Communion and Confirmation the Traveller family would pull into an area several weeks before hand and meet with the priest to arrange for the child to learn the prayers. Outfits were often given on loan and settled people would take a photograph to mark the occasion.

Nowadays, all these family events are bigger more extravagant affairs and alcohol plays a bigger role in the celebration than in the past.

"The Communion and Confirmation weren't that celebrated when I made them but now they are a very big thing. Weddings are always the most celebrated and again drink was the big thing involved," said **John Collins**.

Traveller men

Traditionally men are expected to take responsibility for supporting the family financially while women take responsibility for the home and the children.

Typically the man is considered the head of the family and other members including the women would look to them for permission to do a lot of things.

Once children reached the ages of 11 or 12 they were expected to finish their formal education and take on traditional roles within the family.

Traveller men are the stakeholders of many traditional skills such as tinsmithing or 'white-smithing', which are dying out. These skills would have been passed down through the generations.

The life expectancy gap between Traveller men and settled men is 15 years

Report by Paddy and Nellie Collins





Traveller men at work

“any pots, pans or kettles to mend”

These days Travellers are involved in scrap dealing, buying and selling and other trades.

But in the past tinsmithing, horse-trading and peddling were the main sources of income.

Tinsmithing was the principle trade of the majority of Travellers carrying their tools on their backs in a box or bag known as the Budget. They travelled farmhouse to farmhouse, often climbing over fences and across fields to sell new tins and solicit repair work. Those days most household utensils were made from tin. These ranged from cups, plates and pandies to buckets, cans and even baths.

Seated on a stool in the farmyard of the kitchen doorway, the tinsmith tightened loose handles, replaced worn-out rusty bottoms and plugged leaks with molten solder kept in place by a “tinker’s dam”, a ring of dough placed around a hole. Much of the work was done at home by the campfire, where soldering irons could be kept red hot.

Traveller men would also help out on farms, assisting with harvests in the summer months.

Assisted by the women, they would pick potatoes, pull beet and foot turf and in the autumn the men would go hunting and snaring and the women would sell the rabbits and hares that were caught.



Traveller men's memories

“you’d have good memories of the Travellers who sang them before you”

Paddy, Martin, James and **Hughie Collins** recall the songs and singers who influenced their lives. They would hear them sung around the campfire or played on wind up gramophones or old gramophones.

Popular songs would also be sung in pubs at weddings and funerals.

“I heard them from my mammy, brothers and other Travellers. They were homely songs to us.” Among the songs, which held the most memories were The Galway Shawl, The Factory Girl, Blackbird and Co Galway.

Topping their list of favourite singers, which included Elvis, Hank Williams, Jim Reeves and Paddy Reilly was none other than Ireland’s most famed Traveller singer, Maggie Barry.

Most older Travellers have heard of Maggie Barry and list her as their favourite singer.

The singer who was born into a family of Travellers in Peter Street in Cork in 1917 taught herself to play the five string banjo and the fiddle. When she was 16 she left home after a family row and started street singing and singing at matches and fairs.

In 1952 a song collector, Peter Kennedy discovered her living in a small caravan by the roadside near Crossmaglen in Co Armagh with her husband, daughter and two grandchildren. From there she would travel by bicycle with her banjo on her back to the perform. He recorded her singing and her song, The Factory girl made it to a collection of Folk Songs of Britain and Ireland.



In the 1950s she moved to London and teamed up with great Irish musicians there. She died in Banbridge, Co Down in 1989.



Traveller men

life of a young Traveller boy

WORK began early for the young Traveller boy but unlike their sister it was mostly confined to outside the home.

From the age of 10, **John Collins** recalls working with his father on rubbish jobs and gardening. He would have to clean the yard and clean out cars and wash them before he would accompany his father to sell them. He also towed and drove cars back from a sale at a young age.

"I left school at 13 to help out full time. School got in the way so my father was glad for me to leave and go out with him and help him full time." Sometimes he and a friend would mow lawns for money.

Johnny McDonagh looked after younger brothers during his pre teen and early teen years. Keeping the yard and car clean were among his outdoor chores. Johnny partook in a FAS course after completing his Junior Cert. He later worked on the markets.

Dartin Collins remembered how he and the other boys would get to play more than the girls when they were young. From the age of 12 he was going to the dump collecting scrap and topping trees to help supplement the family income. When he was older he worked the markets.

As a young child **Michael Collins** remembers begging with his mother. By ten he was working with his father collecting scrap and cutting grass for country people.



language

cant/shelta/ gammon

This is the language spoken by Irish Travellers. Passed on orally it was sometimes used to exclude outsiders from comprehending conversations between Travellers.

Cant words

James Collins

Curry - Horse

Loban - Tent

Sark - Field

Geig the Ceinya

- Beg the House

Go for a sup of Alamuc

- Go for a sup of
milk

camp sites

names of
camp sites
travelled to
in the past

1. Nine 'I' Bridge,
Co Meath.
2. Jack Highland's
Road, Co Meath.
3. Rabbitty Road,
Kells, Co Meath.
4. Andy's Road,
Kinnegad.
5. Highmeadow Road,
Co Meath.
6. Rock of
Bailieborough.
7. Beaches of
Bailieborough.
8. Hillahollow Road,
Kingscourt.
9. Thomson's Lake,
Co Cavan.
10. Rathburn, Mullagh,
Co Cavan.



faith and cures

“we were woken up to say our prayers if they knew you’d fallen asleep”

Travellers have strong beliefs about the power of prayer and wear icons of religious figures and relics of various saints. Devotion to particular saints such as St Anthony, St Martin, St Teresa, and St Michael the Archangel is very strong.

There is also a rich heritage of traditional or folk healing practices among Travellers. Travellers also hold strong beliefs in the healing power of water taken from holy wells as well as oils/ointments infused with particular herbal remedies prepared by traditional healers.

“Yes I believe in St Anthony and if you believe in him he will cure ya and cures will make your health better,” said one older man. “Belief keeps the family together and when someone gets sick or dies you can turn to God.”

“If you haven’t got belief you have nothing. When you believe in a well it will come true,” said another older Traveller man.

While faith may not be quite as strong among the younger generation, the Catholic religion is still practiced by most, at the very least on special occasions. “It’s very important. I wouldn’t go to church much but I would pray and I would have some holy things in my car,” said **John Collins**.

Bridget Dinnigan explains how Travellers would make the annual pilgrimage to Knock for the 15th August. “It was a big thing for Travellers and it would be packed with young and old.” In more recent times Lourdes and Medjugorje have also become pilgrimage destinations.

Holy wells were also popular haunts. “We would sit around the holy wells, take off our shoes and put our feet in and we would drink the holy water and rub it all over and wash our faces with it.

“There would always be something left at the well by my mother. Let it be a holy medal or sock or rosary beads for any of us that would be sick and we believed that we would be cured,” recalled Bridget.

Popular wells included Father McDonagh’s Well and St Kieran’s well in Co Meath.

family tree

WHEN Michael Collins and his great aunt Sheila Reilly set about compiling their family tree they encountered obstacles but were still able to trace the Collins family back to pre famine Ireland

“The Family Tree gives us an understanding of who our ancestors are and where they came from. It also showcases the connections and history of a family. It shows us the link between each of them and who came before and who came after whom.

The family tree also shows relationships through marriages.”



family tree

proud of our roots

"I wanted to do my family tree as there is no written documentation of my family. Because of very low levels of literacy among Travellers, many were not able to write anything at all. Our family was no different."

"As Travellers, the only knowledge of our family that passed down is by word of mouth. Over time this can be lost. I would like to get it written down as people get older and family members pass away and with them, the information."

"I wanted to gather and document this information, so, in time my children and their children will know who their family are and where they came from. This will remain in my family as a written record, which can then be used to add more names in future to continue with the Family Tree."

Michael and Sheila began by gathering photographs from many of their relatives and friends. Traditionally, Travellers would have been photographed by settled people so often times they didn't get the photographs and even when they did, because of the nomadic nature of Travellers' lives, they were difficult to preserve. Sheila had knowledge of older Travellers going back to 1865.

The pair also talked with older Travellers in the community to see if they could expand on the information they had. But again the information was scarce. Because nothing is written down there is less information available and because most Travellers die earlier than settled people, those with information had already died.

Michael was able to confirm some of the information he already had. On Sheila's suggestion, they began visiting graveyards to find out when their ancestors died, taking photos of gravestones and recording details.

"I have never been to my great grandparents or my great great grandparents graves before. It was both an exciting and sad experience for both of us to stand in front of our ancestors who walked on this world many years ago," said Michael.

Sadly many of the graves they found were without headstones or the writing had faded away.

They even travelled to Mullingar to look for the grave of Michael's great great grandfather but after going through every single gravestone they couldn't find it.

"We could have stood right in front of a grave where one of our relatives was buried but there was no way to confirm it. This was a disturbing feeling for both of us," said Michael.

They turned to Census records from 1901 and 1911 and searched for family names but again they hit a wall. The name Michael Collins and his wife Margaret and other family ancestors did not appear in the records.

"Maybe enumerators at the time did not record people who lived on the side of the road like Travellers did. Also it is very possible that in those days, Travellers weren't registered and counted due to their nomadic lifestyles or even were aware about the Census at all," said Michael.

Before the famine

But even with the lack of information, Michael was able to go back an impressive eight generations to famine or even pre famine times.

"What Sheila and I have now is not only pieces of paper which documents our Family Tree but with it, the process itself gave us a huge amount of emotional satisfaction. It was also a learning for us in relation to how to go about it."

Michael feels the information they have gathered is important not just for them but for the Traveller community. "The information I have gathered proves beyond doubt that my family go back before the famine. This fact disproves that Travellers have originated from the famine."

And they will be encouraging other Traveller families to begin gathering the oral history and working on their own family tree.



changes and challenges

'Travellers are very proud of their identity and try hard to keep the culture alive'

Kelly Collins



changes and challenges

changes

HUGE changes have occurred in the lives of Travellers over the past 30 years.

Travellers are staying in school longer. Living conditions have improved, being gay is not as difficult as it was in the past and Traveller women are finding careers outside of the home.

Today, Travellers are campaigning to be recognised as a minority ethnic group which they believe will assist them in preserving their unique culture.

Campaigns are also ongoing to improve Traveller accommodation and Traveller health outcomes.

While many of the changes are obviously for the better, some older Travellers still believe that life was better in the past.

“Times have changed since years ago. There was no drugs and fighting. When you would travel from a camp you would be welcomed back,” lamented one older Traveller man.

“The country people were great. They would give food and clothes,” said another.

A younger Traveller, **Martin Collins** pointed out that with the ban on nomadism, Travellers have become more private and are not as much there for each other as they were in the past.

Kelly Collins is also concerned about the negative reputation of Travellers in the settled community.

“I would like to change the stereotypical image of Travellers. I would like people to realise there is good and bad in every community,” she said.

changes and challenges

challenges

Travellers taking part in this project have expressed alarm at the increasing amount of alcohol abuse, drug use, gambling and crime in their community.

They are also concerned about a rise in family feuds.

“Young Travellers don’t respect the older Travellers word as much as they need to,” said **Michael Collins**.

The older generation also fears that valuable elements of their culture such as language and craft skills are in danger of getting lost for ever.

Johnny McDonagh believes the language and the stories should have been recorded sooner. He also thinks that young Travellers have it soft today in comparison with the older generation.

“A lot of Travellers have changed from years ago. There is a lot more crime and getting in with some settled people that are bad influences. There is more feuding within the Traveller community. Drink and drugs are huge issues for Travellers today. A lot of Travellers are in debt and some are homeless. But on the positive side it’s good to see more Traveller role models. Women aren’t just at home cooking and cleaning any more. They are out fighting the cause.”



NO DUMPING
OFFENDERS
PROSECUTED



"I've done my life travelling and a happier time I never had. It was the greatest in the world. You had everything - comfort, life and pleasure and something to always do. You could get up in the morning in the tent and hear the blackbird and thrush in the trees whistling...

The young people will be ashamed of being a Traveller in the future. However, no matter what you put on them - if it was silk you'd still know them. It's hard to burn the wildness out of a wild bird's nose -you'll tame them for a while but they'll fly away again."

Paddy McDonnell

This project has drawn the generations closer together and created a deeper understanding among the younger generations of the hardships their grandparents and great grandparents endured.

They have also learned more about aspects of their culture which are on the verge of dying out completely.



This book documents a Traveller intergenerational initiative organised by Pavee Point in 2012 to mark EU Year for Intergenerational Solidarity. It provides an insight into the lives of Irish Travellers from several generations in their own words. It documents some of the changes that have taken place during their lives- the move from being a largely rural people travelling the roads and earning a living tinsmithing and doing seasonal farm work, to the move to urban centres and participating in formal education and training programmes.

“In the wagons there was a bed and an oul’ stove to keep us warm. I just wish to God we could still live in wagons and roam the countryside and at night have an oul’ sing song around the campfire. How I miss them oul’ days terrible” Biddy Collins

It reflects the changes in Travellers’ attitude to formal education as well as documenting the change from a segregated education service for Travellers to a more inclusive one.

“Not doing my leaving cert was a big mistake” Johnny McDonagh

It gives a glimpse of the discrimination and prejudice they encounter in Irish society as well as the positive relationships they have had with settled people through the years. The importance of family, faith and cultural identity is also evident. In a project on his Family Tree, Michael Collins says:

“The information I have gathered proves beyond doubt that my family go back before the famine. This fact disproves that Travellers have originated from the famine”

Young and older Travellers are very conscious and concerned about the negative perceptions of the Traveller community in society:

“I would like to change the stereotypical image of Travellers. I would like people to realise there is good and bad in every community.” Kelly Collins

Insights into the lives of Traveller women are provided and the changes that have taken place are evident:

“There was no big fat gypsy wedding then-you’d just walk into the chapel and get married” Nellie Collins



European Year for **Active Ageing**
and **Solidarity between Generations** 2012



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