

## Traveller Collection at the Hugh Lane Gallery



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council



HUGH LANE  
dublin



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This publication documents some outcomes of the Traveller Collection project by Séamus Nolan, a collaboration between the Hugh Lane Gallery and Create, supported by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre.

Paper flowers made by women of the Primary Health Care Project, Pavee Point.



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create national development  
agency for collaborative arts





The public art gallery's relationship with its audiences has been evolving in diverse and interesting directions over the last fifty years. Increased access to, and interface with, the art works and artists have become a priority in the Hugh Lane Gallery's curatorial practice and the resulting responses have been rich and illuminating, informing us how best to develop future programmes of community engagement with art and artists. One of the strongest conduits into the world of the public art gallery is an imaginative and innovative schedule of programmes of learning. The quality and diversity of these programmes is crucial in breaking down barriers of perception and encouraging in-depth participation, appreciation and enjoyment of the visual arts from kindergarten to adulthood. Excellence in curatorial practice demands of the practitioners focus and innovation as well as ability to deliver creative and visionary programmes in their fields of responsibility. What we have come to appreciate in the Hugh Lane Gallery is the added value of cross-disciplinary collaboration in-house as well as with outside partners. A key component of our strategic plan (2018 – 22) is moving beyond the walls of the institution, building bridges between

the Gallery and our urban communities which make up the vibrancy and vitality of the city. A bridge may have many different components. It is the structure which facilitates crossing over from one place to another and, depending on its structure, it can allow for repose, contemplation and interaction. The Gallery is a bridge bringing its audiences into realms of experience that might not otherwise occur. A journey across from the familiar to the not so usual, to the strange or controversial encounter, encourages contemplation and debate.

In advancing this strategy of bridge building, I approached Ailbhe Murphy, director of Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts, with a proposal of becoming partners in a community-based artist practice project in Dublin. Ailbhe was very supportive and advised that such a commission would be supported by the Collaborative Arts Partnership Project (CAPP), a transnational programme funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union of which Create is the lead agency.

The commission set out to encourage in-depth engagement with communities of place and interest as well as with the distinct socio-political and cultural landscape of North Inner City Dublin—the Hugh Lane Gallery's immediate neighbourhood. It was a very significant commission in the collaborative arts sphere in Ireland, with forty-one submissions from across the CAPP network of partners, Spain, Germany, UK, Ireland, Finland and Hungary. Irish artist Séamus Nolan's proposal to deconstruct ideas on heritage and investigate the concept of archive by engaging with Traveller activists and archivists was most impressive. Charged with imaginative power and originality, his was the successful submission.

This catalogue charts Séamus Nolan's innovative approach to his commission and his exhibition *Traveller Collection at the Hugh Lane Gallery (22 June – 23 September 2018)*. This exhibition focused on the Traveller culture and visibility within national and private collections. For the first time in the history of the Gallery, representations of Traveller art were exhibited with the works by tinsmith James Collins and a series of beautiful handmade flowers by the women of the Primary Health Care Traveller Project in Parvee Point. Also for the first time, the Gallery borrowed an archive for a temporary exhibition, *Irish Travelling People: a Resource Collection, from the Special Collections of Ulster University*. This renowned and unique collection of twenty-five volumes was put together by Aileen L'Amie between 1975 and 1998.

True to his practice, Nolan's loan request for this archive was not for this exhibition alone. It was to form part of a life moving beyond the walls of the Gallery into the community, contributing to his online platform dedicated to Traveller culture. The entire archive was scanned over the duration of the exhibition and the digitised files uploaded onto the website Nolan created—[www.TravellerCollection.ie](http://www.TravellerCollection.ie)—alongside various private and public collections of Traveller culture.

During the exhibition and in association with Create's international symposium 'Practice and Power', organised to disseminate the results of the four-year CAPP programme with all of its partners, Nolan engaged the Gallery in a fruitful engagement with its nearby neighbour Pavee Point, the national non-governmental organisation committed to improving the human and economic rights of Irish Travellers. For 'Hugh Lane at Pavee Point', a one-day roundtable session, Nolan requested the loan of *The Street Singer* by Jerome Connor from the Gallery's collection as a representation of the shared traditions of Traveller culture within the museum. The sculpture shared the exhibition space with a photographic collection of Traveller musicians and dancers and the session launched with a live performance by singer Mary Brigid Connors.

Furthering the collaboration with our neighbour, Nolan borrowed a series of portraits of members of the Traveller community by Mick O'Dea PRHA from Pavee Point. This series of formal portraits of an Irish ethnic minority is unique and added a painting dimension to the exhibition. The formal transaction in creating portraits is one of democracy, relying on consent by both the sitter and the artist. In this series of portraits, the sitters were afforded the same dignity as with all formal portraiture. The resulting images are devoid of stereotype, such as backdrops of encampments or fortune telling.

Séamus Nolan's interrogation into the constructs of history and archive and how they can render a culture almost invisible raises important questions around understanding and appreciation of Traveller communities and culture. His is a desire to open up a shared space where issues of commonality can be explored and discussed, building an appreciation of an Irish culture which is poorly understood. The museum must play its part, as it is a space where complex and difficult subject matter can be subjected to critical discourse and interrogated through exhibition, debate,

performance and dialogue. Problematic issues require an acknowledgement of their inherent complexity as well as an in-depth understanding of what is at stake before any resolutions can be achieved. *Traveller Collection at the Hugh Lane* provided a context in which to engage in a set of ontologies and investigations revealing rich aspects of Traveller culture hitherto unknown to many.

Our engagement with the Traveller community and Séamus Nolan as well as our partnership with Create saw a new departure for the Hugh Lane Gallery, one that was as exciting as it was productive and illuminating, not only for our audiences and participants but also for us as Gallery personnel.

This catalogue continues the life of this exhibition and charts Séamus Nolan's ongoing work with activists and archivists of the Traveller community. It is enriched with contributions by Rosaleen McDonagh, Missy and Molly Collins, Eve Olney, Mick O'Dea, Séamus Nolan and Ailbhe Murphy, furthering the appreciation of Travellers' art, lived experience and archive material. Our thanks to Séamus Nolan for his enlightening exhibition which he set 'within as broad a set of ontologies and interpretations as possible'; to Ailbhe Murphy, Director of Create Ireland, and the CAPP team; to our lenders, Niall Burns and the Library of Ulster University, Martin Collins, Caoimhe McCabe and the staff and administration of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre and to Jessica O'Donnell, Head of Education and Community Outreach, who was the lead curator on this project and who organised the exhibition.

Traveller Collection at the Hugh Lane Gallery

Create is the national development agency for collaborative arts. We support artists and communities to work together to make exceptional art that reflects and responds to our times. From 2015 to 2018 Create was the lead partner for a large-scale Creative Europe cooperation project entitled the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP). The overall goal of CAPP was to improve and open up opportunities for artists who are working collaboratively across Europe by enhancing mobility and exchange while engaging new publics and audiences for collaborative arts. In its third year the focus of CAPP was on the commissioning of collaborative projects, with each of the nine partners in the CAPP network devising such an opportunity in their respective countries of Spain, Finland, UK, Germany and Hungary. When Barbara Dawson, Director of the Hugh Lane Gallery, approached Create about working together, it presented a significant opportunity to partner on such a commission for a collaborative artist. As it is Dublin's city gallery, the potential for a commission situated in the surrounding area of North Inner City Dublin, working collaboratively with local community interests and the art institution, was of tremendous interest to Create. So, too, was the opportunity to support the successful artist Séamus Nolan and his proposal to work with Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. Prior to this commission, Create has supported artists' projects centred on Traveller experience through our management of the Arts Council's Artist in the Community Scheme. We have led research and explored policy in the area of cultural diversity, but the CAPP commission was the first time we could support a project of such scale and one which set out to explore important and necessary questions about the politics of archives and Traveller representation in the context of national collections.

The presentation of *Traveller Collection at the Hugh Lane Gallery* coincided closely with the first anniversary of Irish Travellers being formally recognised as a distinct ethnic minority in the State, the significance of which was noted by independent equality expert Niall Crowley in his opening remarks at the exhibition launch. The exhibition provided an important focal point for the major culminating public event and presentation of CAPP, 'Practice and Power', held in Dublin in June 2018. 'Practice and Power' was attended by over two hundred artists, curators, academics and representatives of

civil society organisations from all over Europe and as far away as Singapore and Australia. The round table event 'Collaborative Practice and the Art Institution: Critical Platform or Institutional Capture?' hosted by the Hugh Lane Gallery during 'Practice and Power' explored key questions relating to the role of the institution in supporting and facilitating collaborative practice, many of which Barbara reflects on in her introduction to this publication. Similarly, for 'Practice and Power' Pavee Point hosted a discussion, 'Representation and the Archive: the Traveller Collection', which explored questions of representation and ownership of Traveller culture. It took place in the context of 'Hugh Lane at Pavee Point'. This day-long event centred around Jerome Connor's sculpture *The Street Singer*, an artwork borrowed from the Hugh Lane collection and shown at Pavee Point, and set out to initiate an engagement of equivalence between both organisations.

Working with the Hugh Lane Gallery has been a very positive experience for Create. We'd like to warmly thank Barbara Dawson, Jessica O'Donnell and the exhibitions team, as well as artist Séamus Nolan, ethnographer Eve Olney and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. We look forward to working together again in the future.

One of the founding aims of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre thirty-three years ago was to develop a better knowledge and understanding of Travellers' history and culture.

Negative messaging about Travellers, both in the media and through the mechanisms of the State, has resulted in a sense of shame being attached to Traveller identity. Promoting Traveller culture and identity aims to reverse this process by nourishing the 'mórtas cine' or pride in one's heritage for Traveller people.

Documenting and preserving aspects of Traveller culture and heritage became a major focus of Pavee Point when we moved into our current premises. In 1990 we established specific Traveller cultural projects, producing visual material, printed material and music and song.

In 1995 Pavee Point published *A Heritage Ahead*, which discusses cultural action and Travellers. In the same year Pavee Point hosted the first National Traveller Arts Festival. Since then Pavee Point has been involved in various cultural initiatives and developed our premises into a place where visitors, both Traveller and non-Traveller, can see and learn about Traveller heritage.

It was in this context that the recognition of Traveller ethnicity, something Pavee Point and other Traveller organisations had campaigned for over thirty years, brought artist Séamus Nolan to our door in 2017.

He suggested a collaborative art project looking at the idea of a Traveller museum.

The idea of a Traveller museum was not a new idea for us—what was new was having someone engage with art institutions with a view to furthering this idea. What was new was the possibility of giving more visibility to this idea.

Séamus did not come to us with his idea all sewn up. Instead he came with a certain amount of vagueness and remained open to what different Travellers were saying to him. He sought out Travellers all around the country and organised discussions to be facilitated by ethnographer Dr Eve Olney. Significant attempts were made to make this process meaningful for Travellers, using slide shows and examples. Pavee Point took part in this process and Travellers were asked to bring in an object. The idea was to discuss how this could appear in a museum. In this way the idea of presentation and representation were broached.

These were new topics for many Travellers and non-Travellers within our organisation—but one thing was clear—people had a lot of memory and emotion associated with various objects. Travellers enjoyed engaging with the objects, speaking about the objects and stories associated with them and making new connections in this way.

The main structure for consulting with Travellers were local Traveller organisations. This is an infrastructure that has developed since the 1990s and which consists of about thirty Traveller groups and projects around the country. Although some of these organisations struggle to survive in the context of austerity cuts, it is also the case that many now undertake their own cultural projects.

Pavee Point also engaged in another aspect of the project. Traveller Collection (we didn't know the name at this stage) was commissioned by Dublin City Gallery the Hugh Lane which is located just up the road from Pavee Point. It became part of Séamus's project to bring the two organisations together on the basis of parity. This was a step into the unknown for us. Although Pavee Point had carried out work in the area of Traveller culture, we did not consider ourselves on the same level as something as established as the municipal gallery.

When it was suggested that we exhibit some pieces from the Hugh Lane at Pavee Point we immediately thought of the things we were lacking—proper display facilities and conditions, proper security measures, insurance cover. One by one we overcame these obstacles with the help of Séamus, the Hugh Lane and Create. Create—the centre for the collaborative arts in Ireland—was very supportive in pushing the possibilities of the project to the maximum.

To our own surprise we succeeded, with the help of the other project organisations, in getting through the process of acquiring an official loan from the Hugh Lane. On the 21st of June 2018 a sculpture by Jerome Connor entitled *Street Singer* was exhibited at Pavee Point.

This was a first in terms of Pavee Point engaging with an art institution at this level.

What was even more surprising was that the Hugh Lane acquired an official loan from Pavee Point! At Séamus's suggestion the Hugh Lane borrowed our paintings by PRHA Mick O Dea 'The Martin Folan Collection'. This is a collection of Traveller portraits which had been donated to us by the artist. These paintings then went on display in the Hugh Lane as part of Séamus's exhibition.



Through work that Pavee Point was doing with the National Museum at Collins Barracks, Séamus got to know and work with tinsmith James Collins. James is one of about three or four tinsmiths left in the country and this great tradition was also represented in his exhibit at the Hugh Lane.

Séamus also engaged with the women of our Traveller Primary Health Care Project and commissioned them to make 500 paper flowers for his exhibition in the Hugh Lane. Traditionally, making and selling paper flowers was a way to generate income, these flowers have become a symbol of positivity and celebration and bring colour and cheer. It is a vernacular craft that has much in common with cultures from sunnier climes—but has a specific history within Traveller culture.

Séamus made sure he trumpeted Traveller culture at the Hugh Lane with two large banners using motifs from barrel-top wagon decorations.

By including wagons, tinsmithing and flowermaking in his exhibition, Séamus succeeded in giving visibility to three strong elements of Traveller culture and identity.

Art galleries and museums are not venues that all Irish people feel are open to them. Many Travellers would feel excluded from these places. They feel that these places are 'not for them'. However—by developing a sense of increased participation and visibility for Travellers in the cultural setting—we are also developing a sense of greater possibility, greater opportunity and increased participation overall.

As we know, exhibitions come and go and people move on. Pavee Point works for the Traveller collective so we must ask—what is the legacy of this project for the Traveller community? This was obviously a question that Séamus Nolan had also considered.

As the months wore on and he gathered more information on aspects of Traveller culture and heritage that were dispersed around the country, he devised [www.TravellerCollection.ie](http://www.TravellerCollection.ie).

This is more than a website—it is a place for Traveller culture to collect and be collected.

This website signposts the way to accessing existing collections and objects associated with Travellers. There is also a facility for individuals to log items into the collection.

Looking to the future, it will be necessary to see how [www.TravellerCollection.ie](http://www.TravellerCollection.ie) can be managed and developed by the Traveller community on an ongoing basis.

Working on this project with Séamus has also helped

Pavee Point look to the future and refocus our work in promoting Traveller ethnicity and culture.

Recognition of ethnicity in itself does not mean people, including Travellers, are automatically positive about Traveller culture and identity. To develop an ongoing collective sense of self-worth it is important that Travellers develop a contemporary understanding of an evolving identity in all its diversity. This requires an engagement process to reinvigorate cultural work and pride in identity.

This means that Travellers need to be allowed the space to explore and analyse evolving elements of Traveller culture and identity.

It is important to invigorate Traveller culture from within, but also to gain recognition for Traveller culture in existing art and cultural institutions. An enhanced cultural life for Irish Travellers means an enhanced cultural life for Ireland overall.



This publication charts the progress, findings, and the problems of a socially engaged artwork commissioned by the collaborative arts organisation Create, in partnership with the Hugh Lane Gallery. The term 'socially engaged', when applied to arts practice, presents a terrain in which the boundaries between art and the social are blurred, where the politics of the social might be engaged in the production of the artwork and, vice versa, the politics of the artwork might become entangled in the production of the social. The public call out outlined the desire for the Gallery to engage with its neighbours in the North Inner City, an area earmarked for major philanthropic and public investment towards cultural development, such as the proposed rebranding of the North Inner City as 'Dublin's north central quarter'. These tectonic plates of public and private partnership, engaged in shifting socio-economic and cultural perspectives, mirrored in sharp contrast the grass roots campaign which the North Inner City organisation Pavee Point spearheaded to bring Ireland into line with Northern Ireland, the UK and other EU partners in recognising Travellers as a distinct ethnic minority. This, then, was the starting point for the project, a proposal which asked how the material and culture of the Travelling people, this emergent ethnic group which had been purposefully marginalised and rendered invisible within State collections and museums, might become visible among the objects and archives which had previously signalled its demise.

The first day of March 2017, the date on which the Irish State acknowledged Traveller ethnicity, is by coincidence also the date which traditionally marked for many the day winter camps were dismantled and the roads became home to the nomadic crafts people, entertainers, labourers and traders throughout the country. Routes based on familial, occupational and generational traditions criss-cross the country, generating an alternative and unique cartography. In a similar manner, this catalogue navigates a trail of complex interdependencies and engagements, a collection of a number of short articles with which the artwork has engaged, articles with ontologies in broader cultural and political dialogues.

In order to gather a diverse and embedded response to the concerns of the project, a series of off-site conversations facilitated by independent researcher Eve Olney based on the methodology of sensory scholarship were carried out; her

findings to date are documented here.<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition *Traveller Collection at the Hugh Lane*, on which this catalogue is based, attempted to bring together varying voices and interpretations relating to the inquiry of the project. In the initial proposal, this inquiry set out to open up a dialogue around an appropriate approach to the integration of the narrative of Traveller history into the national project, and looked to a number of sites of Traveller visibility, to the archives and collections in which Travellers are identified. A small example of this material was presented in the Hugh Lane exhibition; the text from the exhibition reproduced here in the catalogue outlines the approach and the exchanges of material which took place.

For the duration of the exhibition, the University of Ulster's *Irish Travelling People Resource Collection*, twenty-five volumes of essays, articles, publications and images, which were compiled by Aileen L'Amie between 1975 and 1998, was loaned to the Gallery and photographed page by page. Sinéad Ní Shuinear, Victor Bewley and Aileen L'Amie provide brief introductions to the collection which are reproduced here along with a small example of items from the collection. Following the exhibition, the digital files were made available on the project website [www.TravellerCollection.ie](http://www.TravellerCollection.ie) alongside various private and public collections of academic, folklore, music, cultural and historic items.

In both the entrance hall to the Hugh Lane Gallery and in the exhibition space, 500 paper flowers made by the women from the Primary Health Care Traveller Project in Pavee Point were strewn along the floor, circling columns, across the mantelpiece of the fireplace and along the armrests and back of the public benches. Transcribed here, Missy and Molly Collins describe in their own words how domestic crafts served an important role in economies of trade and inter-cultural exchange. From flowermaking to dressmaking, the indexical relationship to material serves as a tangible connection to formative traditions and rituals, transmitting oral history and sustaining both economic and cultural independence. Without offering an analysis of the role of crafts to include contemporary concerns for a critical repositioning of material, it is important to offer the perspective of the women who produced the objects and the role the objects played and play in their experience of the world.

The catalogue also includes a selection of works from the Hugh Lane's own collection which have as their subject the activities or representation of Travelling people. Each artwork

is accompanied by commentary on its possible correlations with Traveller culture.

Pierre Nora famously argued that 'modern memory is above all, archival. It relies entirely upon the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image'.<sup>2</sup> The Hugh Lane collection is an archive not just of artworks but of items of historic and cultural significance; they are items with agency and, however subtle this agency, it is relative to the visibility or invisibility of Traveller culture within public space. The term 'archival retrieval', then, may go some way towards understanding this process of seeking out explicit points of reference to a particular theme embedded within a diverse body of material, retrieval based on culturally received ideas relative to Traveller culture, based on commonalities and perceptions or constructs of Traveller identity which may have as little to do with any lived experience of being a Traveller as they do with being a Martian. While my own experience of Traveller culture and history is extremely limited, my experience with the thematics which have informed this selection are based on writings and interpretations by other non-Traveller artists, writers and academics whose work, however problematic, has served to represent Traveller culture within our national public, or even private, collections to date. The paintings and sculptures were produced about rather than by Travellers and are presented here in an attempt to broach the question of shared cultural experience, representations of common and shared cultural practice which speak as much to a Traveller audience as to a non-Traveller audience. As such, these works are part and parcel of what is termed Traveller heritage, and access as well as ownership, and the right to interpretation must be considered.

One such work from the Hugh Lane collection, *The Street Singer*, a tiny bronze sculpture by Jerome Connor, was by invitation exhibited in Pavee Point on Midsummer Day 2018. The board room of Pavee Point was transformed to accommodate the sculpture, along side a photographic history of Traveller musicians, singers, instrumentalists and dancers, and launched by Mary Brigid Connors singing 'A group of young soldiers', a song she heard sung by her family. This short public exhibition event, 'The Hugh Lane at Pavee Point', facilitated a round-table discussion which invited speakers to consider the Traveller collection project, to present some of the findings, and tease out some of the issues to be considered. Extracts from this conversation,

transcribed and reproduced here, situate the lived experience of Travellers, in terms of how any manifestation of a collection or Museum of Traveller Culture must be managed and controlled by Travellers themselves, contesting the history of what Martin Collins terms 'a bloodless genocide', the attempted eradication of a people, their culture and their knowledge. Collins continues in describing how the ownership of not just the material of Traveller culture but also the ownership over the interpretation of that culture must be in the hands of Travellers themselves. Issues of appropriation or misappropriation, of the casual, institutional and governmental racism which continues to affect Travelling people, constitute the subject of the work of many academics, activists and organisations throughout the country, and, as such, he asserts that this history which has had such a huge effect on the culture of the Travelling people must become part of the conversation, and the material representation within the museum.

This raises the question which marginal communities have grappled with, that of ownership, not just of the interpretation of one's image but of the image itself. For example, traditionally in aboriginal culture the name of a deceased family member was not to be spoken for a specific length of time and any such transgressions were considered detrimental to the family. Equally, images of the deceased should not be shown without the consent of that family or community. While it is not suggested that Travellers should maintain the same cultural codes or practices as aboriginal Australians, I am suggesting that different cultural relationships to material offer differing processes of meaning and that the representation of Traveller culture and identity by national or public institutions must involve in-depth and ongoing consultation with Traveller communities.

In response to the analysis in studies by Julie Brazil of Jack B Yeats's numerous depictions of Travellers, Rosaleen McDonagh's short story gently deconstructs the image of the Traveller in Yeats's work, upon the basis of the intention of the artist, and reconstitutes the artist as the subject of the work as much as the Traveller.

The paintings in the Martin Folan collection, nine portraits of Traveller activists in the 1990s by Mick O'Dea, were loaned from Pavee Point to the Hugh Lane for the duration of the exhibition. In his introduction to the Martin Folan collection catalogue, reproduced here, O'Dea describes the ontology of the works and expands upon the legacy of Martin Folan.

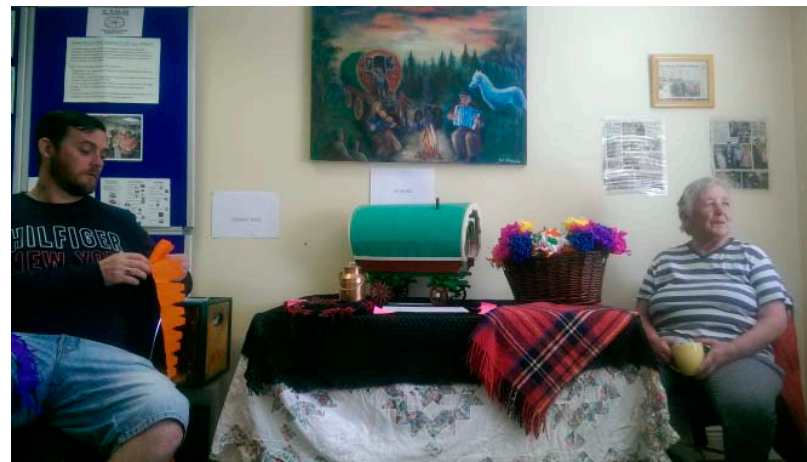
In a crude way, the issues of appropriation and control over interpretation discussed above are somewhat resolved, not only through making explicit the intentions of the artist, or through the collaboration of the sitters, but in the legacy of these works which are maintained in Parvee Point's own collection.

I have tried to gather a collection of articles which point to the varying and diverse nature of Traveller culture, and to engage as broad a set of ontologies and interpretation as possible within the context of the artwork, and the time frame. This artwork is not a museum to present the archives of Traveller culture nor the archives of settled visions or versions of interactions with Travellers but an attempt to open up a contextual space of commonality where previously these spaces served to exclude.

1. Drawn from more radical practices within cultural anthropology, sensuous scholarship foregrounds what are normally considered subjugated forms of sensory knowledge, an embodied knowledge, as a means of transmitting unforeseen aesthetic possibilities and modes of knowledge (instinctual, gestural, performative and virtual) to enter into the field of critical discourse, and help shape a more responsive understanding of interpreting socio-cultural / historical experience. This approach is framed through a series of 'productive encounters' between all groups/individuals concerned where a main thematic—such as 'history'—is explored

through an exchange, dialogue, performance, interface or process that generates workable solutions to problems that emerge in pursuing ethnographic research on difficult objects of study.

2. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', Representations, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, pp. 7-24. University of California Press (Spring, 1989), p.13.



(opposite)  
Shane Lynch and  
Bridget O'Reilly  
at the Traveller  
Collection  
workshop held  
at and run by  
Clondalkin  
Travellers  
Development  
Photo, Eve Olney,  
2018

(below)  
Members of  
Travellers of North  
Cork women's  
group at the  
Traveller Collection  
workshop, Mallow  
Mercy Centre.  
Photo, Eve Olney,  
2018





Selection of objects brought in for discussion at Traveller Collection workshop by Travellers of North Cork women's group at Mallow Mercy Centre. Photo, Eve Olney, 2018



Anvil and hammer head as objects for discussion by Travellers of North Cork men's group at Traveller Collection workshop at Mallow Mercy Centre. Photo, Eve Olney, 2018





### Involvement

I was approached by Séamus Nolan to contribute to this project because of my academic and ethnographic experience working with alternative kinds of archives and collections within my art practice-research. My interest lies in the kinds of collections and archives that lie outside or beyond institutional recognition. I am specifically interested in how value—either social, cultural or economic—can be attributed to collections that exist either parallel to, or in conflict with, the kinds of dominant narratives that dictate what constitutes a nation's 'history' or 'culture', as is the case in national museum collections. As cultural theorist John Frow argues, 'In the West collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture and authenticity...how to make the world one's own...' and this 'gathering' of material artefacts presents 'the idea that identity is a kind of wealth (of objects, knowledge, memories, experience)'. This understanding of collections and archives makes it therefore all the more problematic that any kind of representation of Irish Traveller culture and social history—besides some recent exceptions—has been presented from the perspective of those outside Traveller communities. Therefore the shaping of a socio-cultural Traveller identity has been regulated by people who lack an embodied and tacit knowledge of what it might mean when one identifies oneself as being an Irish Traveller. Hence people from Traveller communities have had to endure both offensive, highly prejudicial representations as well as romanticised objectifications of 'Traveller history' and 'Traveller culture' across mainstream media as well as academia.

### Outsiders

This brings me quickly to the main concern that Séamus and I shared with regard to our interests in exploring and pursuing the idea of a Traveller Collection project. We, too, are outside the Irish Traveller community and there was a lot of discussion as to how this might be addressed within the methodology and methods that would frame the project. We considered how we might acknowledge our own subject positions and present our personal and professional motivations in a transparent and sincere manner. What it really boiled down to was what kind of use we could be to those who are part of Traveller communities and interested in participating in this project.

I have learned, from past experience, that being from the 'outside' is not necessarily a negative thing. All my previous research-practice projects have involved starting from a point of ignorance and employing ethnographic methods in acquiring knowledge in that area of interest. This subject position then necessarily situates the groups or individuals I am engaging with as the 'experts' in their own culture. I also adopt an ethnographic approach to reading or understanding/critiquing archives. This simply means that I gain my knowledge not through existing classificatory systems established by institutional governing systems

of meaning but rather I interpret the collection or archive through how people themselves interpret and describe their engagement with collections. This in turn necessitates alternative understandings of archival knowledge. When you are dealing with people, you are working with different kinds of knowledge—not just empirical but knowledge based on local or personal experience. Some personal experience can also lie outside of language in terms of somatic or corporeal understandings of one's place within the world. (See Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia, 1997)) This is particularly poignant when there is no official documented 'history' of an entire ethnic group of people situated within a broader nation state.

So much of Irish Traveller tradition and culture is currently held orally within a highly complex social nexus of different groups and multifarious genealogical ancestry. In addition, an 'embodiment' of a history of Irish Travellers is not primarily oral either; as anthropologist Paul Stoller argues, 'rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories' (Stoller, p. 54). Also, Western societies maintain a strong reliance on material artefacts when constructing a memory of the past. How an object is 'historically' mediated by different groups and individuals can reveal very different interpretations of the same historical period. As American anthropologist James V. Wertsch argues, as opposed to settling for the simplistic view of there being in existence some kind of universal collective memory hovering above us, we actually need to consider how collective memory within individual groups is primarily based upon any one group's shared mediation of the material artefacts and signs/symbols of their present and past. Again, this deeper consideration of history and cultural memory really highlights the immense dereliction within prevailing Irish national narratives that project concepts of identity and culture, in terms how the absence of Irish Traveller narratives might be redressed.

Therefore it is within this interest in how historical and cultural narratives 'work' that I felt I could apply my usefulness to the project. The next step for Séamus and me was in formulating some of the broader thematic questions around the notion of an Irish Traveller Collection or archive coming into being and finding a method of engaging people in the subject.

### Questions/issues

Regarding my own research interest I had two leading questions in terms of the longer term possibilities for a project such as this. The first was, 'How can a future National Traveller's Archive or Collection judiciously classify the depth, intricacies and diversity of what might constitute an Irish Traveller 'culture' or 'history'? The second question was, 'How should this then be situated in relation to existing national narratives that have either ignored, deliberately omitted or strategically subsumed Traveller socio-historical status to date?'

Within the interests of the immediate project—whose objective is to initiate discussion and interest around this idea—Séamus and I considered some of the more practical questions that were then

discussed with staff and members of Parvee Point at a meeting early in the process. These included:

- What kind of interest is there within the Traveller community regarding an Irish Traveller Collection,?
- What kind of roles, training systems and resources need to be in place to facilitate such a huge undertaking by those within the Traveller community?
- How might things be documented, collected, stored, exhibited?
- Who or what agency from the Traveller community might lead a project like this?
- What might a future Traveller Collection look like?

Further—more thematically based—questions are included in the following categories of interest.

In term of processes of inclusion and exclusion:

- What gets deemed to be of cultural, social, political, economical and historical significance and who is setting the parameters for these value systems?
- How might these value systems that refer to notions of authenticity and identity be negotiated between the different groups/individuals involved in this task?
- What happens when people disagree?

In terms of ownership and access:

- Who is this archive primarily for?
- Who owns this knowledge/material—who are its keepers?
- What is the State's involvement in this?
- How is the material disseminated or mediated—made visible/accessible to the general public?
- Is there here a possibility for co-ownership between Traveller agencies and the State?
- How does it situate itself in relation to existing national archives and concepts of 'public memory'?

In term of representation/identity:

- What are the main motivations/objectives of those involved in bringing the archive into being?
- How might difference of opinion be considered and communicated to those involved in the process?
- How might the accumulative representation and constructed knowledge of a collection/archive be understood in relation to the present?
- How might hierarchies of value within the archival system then be negotiated within these operative systems of difference?

### Methods

My role then was to discuss these kinds of issues with different Traveller groups around Ireland to collect some general opinion and understanding as to how a Travellers' (National) Collection might eventually come into being. This practice is presented as a series of

workshops, simply entitled, 'What might a future National Traveller's Archive look like?' Within the timeframe of the project the workshops took place in:

1. Parvee Point, Dublin
2. Meath Travellers' Workshops Living History Exhibition (Navan, Co. Meath)
3. Travellers of North Cork (a women's group) including Charleville Women's Group, (Mallow, Co. Cork) (TNC-W)
4. Travellers of North Cork (a men's group) (Mallow, Co. Cork) (TNC-M)
5. Cork Traveller Women's Network (Cork City) (CTWN)
6. Clondaikin Travellers' Development Group (Dublin) (CTDG)

I structured the workshop loosely around the idea of 'a workshop strategy' called 'A Productive Encounter' that was conceived by anthropologists George Marcus and Christine Hegel and designer Luke Cantarella. They define 'Productive Encounter' through the relationship of three constituent elements, which are, 1) the main theme or question, 2) 'the interpretative community' (myself and any participants), and 3) a 'design interface' (any artefact or object). The idea is to discuss the topic by directly referring to the object in order to ground general opinion and conversation within concrete examples. This enables both free thinking and open discussion whilst also grounding the conversation within tangible examples.

### Thinking through things

In preparation for each workshop we asked that the participants agree upon one or two objects/things that they felt should be included in a Traveller Collection and that they bring this object(s) along to the workshop. The group then uses the objects to talk specifically about issues that arise concerning a Traveller Collection/Archive. The usefulness of this method became apparent during the first workshop which was with a group of people affiliated with Parvee Point. They had brought in a copper bucket and a miniature wagon. The latter had been made by some of the younger men in the group as part of a training course run by Michael Collins. The group was multi-generational and, as individuals shared their knowledge and experience in relation to Traveller wagons, some very different perspectives and personal histories were revealed. Language was also brought up in this session in terms of the way I was presenting my knowledge of archives and we agreed on some other terms to use in subsequent workshops. Each group brought different kinds of objects to the workshops, from an old anvil and hammer top over 100 years old to framed photographs and beanie pockets; each opening up a new area for anecdotal discussion. I would also integrate what was discussed, and what I had learned from the previous workshops, into the conversation as a means of constructing a type of dialogue between the groups. I discovered that many of the themes and questions that Seamus and I had spoken about in preparing the workshops were being brought up during the casual conversations around the objects.

As a means of presenting some of the points of view that emerged through these sessions, I have classified below some direct quotations from the workshops within the main thematic that were being considered at the outset of this project. The agreement the participants and myself stipulated that those who presented their opinion would remain anonymous but could be categorised within the group that they are affiliated with. Therefore each quote is referenced by the acronym of the organisation.

### Quotations

*Opinions on identity, representation, significance, need, value*

- I love the idea of that constant identity being reinforced. You can have Traveller kids going [to the museum] and saying to their friends, look, this is stuff [from our culture]. CTDG
- But they must start doing that [putting our culture into museums]...My daughter goes to school and if her class go to the museum ... the other little girls and boys would see then 'oh, that's something to do with her and [Travellers] have been here for years...not just the school saying she's a Traveller but that this is a history belonging to her... CTDG
- I see this room in this museum for Travellers [Cork Public Museum permanent Traveller exhibition] and one of the main things when we were building the wagon was I was saying I want my children to come into a museum and see something that relates to them. It was for us as Travellers but it was also for other people to see a more positive image of Travellers in general. CTWN
- I work with young fellas and I'm so sorry to say that I ask a lot of Traveller young fellas stuff and they don't know their culture, they don't know their language... TNC
- You are not going to rear your children with the Traveller culture when there is so much discrimination—why would you? TNC
- There is young boys taking their own lives and you can see that in the last ten years right...and I can tell you it's because of that—they are hiding it all the time and they are battling themselves inside then...between their identity and what they want to be and what they can't be—do you know what I mean?...that they can't come out and say 'I'm Paddy and I'm a Traveller...I don't wear it on my back'... TNC
- We need to change more the perception...TNC
- I think what's really missing is the representation—as we have some cracking pictures but its a photographer—a settled person—breezing in and then putting with the pictures, 'this is a day ...with Travellers...' Whereas if you actually sit down and talk to someone about it there is going to be a huge history that comes with that and the importance of people's names, where they are coming from...It can be really upsetting, I think, if people's history isn't visible and then when it is misrepresented. CTDG
- It's about reminding the national museums that, yes, they hold

the archives but this is not their stuff, this is not their culture—it belongs to the Travellers. CTDG

- There is a status in that [in being included in places like the National Museum at Collins Barracks]. There is real understanding that if your culture is represented alongside [thinkgs] the rest of the settled population really value—like an Eileen Gray screen—then there is a value put on it—you see your value...CTDG
- I don't think settled people realise or want to realise that Travellers are part of Ireland or part of history—they just see the negatives and that's it, they don't see that we have a part in museums because they think that everything we do is so negative. ...We are not seen as part of the history of Ireland. ...There's no part [of the displays about the Civil War] that shows that Travellers were part of that war. CTWN
- All them rebels that are being [remembered] in Ireland up there...sure we are all part of Ireland...TNC

*Opinions on what a National Traveller Archive/Museum would look like*

- I think it should be local and each local museum should have something working with [different] project but I do think there should be something national as well to recognise that we are Irish and we have played a part in Ireland but that we are Travellers too and should be proud of that. That there should be something that says this is what Travellers are. CTWN
- Definitely important to have a permanent site. CTDG
- I've been up to the museum in Dublin ... would you not want to see Traveller culture in that building? It can be everywhere else too...But would you not want to see yer culture in there? No matter where else in Ireland it is—a building in every fecking county in Ireland—but would you not want to see it in the national one of Ireland? TNC
- I feel strongly that it is not Dublin-centred, as no one outside would travel there...Women in particular would have difficulties getting to Dublin... if you could bring it down locally you would have better representation, I think, because a lot of things seem to be happening at a national level and to access them is going to be a problem for the women...TNC-W
- If it's in Dublin we can't claim it as our own as we are only the visitors coming in ...ok, we can represent because we are from a Traveller culture but we can't represent anything on a stand there because we don't own it—we are not part of it...Whereas if its down this side it's ours, we take claim of it. TNC -W
- ...it shouldn't be shoved into a corner..If it's standing alone it's not standing for much—it's where Travellers have always been put to one side...has to be part of it...it's not being recognised as anything then.TNC- M
- It would be good to have it spread out ... Exhibits would travel across the sites...sharing ...there is so much that we don't know about but if we had a system...TNC-W

- We need visuals, audio, we need them to be in structures and sites where Travellers feel important—as important as everybody else...CTDG

#### *Opinions on the logistics—how would it happen?*

- But you have to go around all the groups and get them on board and form the committees and... then you have to contact the National Museum to make sure they are going to accept it, which will be the biggest problem of all I guarantee you. TNC -M
- Before you go to the National Museum all this ground work has to be done first...so you're not bluffing it... 'We actually have a big proposal and this is what we propose..this is how we are going to work it...this is the funding...so ye have to play ball or ye will be seen to be completely racist or discriminatory'... You have to have something in your pocket before you get something back...TNC-M
- I think you need to have your research done with all the other organizations and see what they are coming up with and link in all the ideas together then and we all steer the one ship then. TNC-W
- We have a partnership with the museum and we would plan for Traveller Pride or Heritage Week. We would do different things but it is a complete partnership. For example, to facilitate anything like this [workshop] we contact the museum and tell them what we need and it's a very good working relationship with the museum themselves. CTWN
- We now have a new procedure—you can see the leaflets there—if anybody has anything they want to donate they contact the Cork Traveller Women's Network and we have a sub group that worked on re-designing the room and they would meet and decide how and what would be displayed. We would hope that it keeps to themes that we have planned for the year. CTWN

#### *Opinions on sustaining the project and critiquing the role of the Traveller Collection project*

- It's some of what we already do. We just don't document it or sell ourselves really well. We do it and we get in and then we leave and there is no evidence of it...and I'm sure that what has come up in a lot of the workshops is how we can sustain this because we don't have anyone doing this and we don't have the money and we don't have the staff to do it. But as we do some of that stuff already maybe it's about us sitting back and saying, how are we documenting it properly? How would the pop-up temporary exhibitions tie into this? CTDG
- I think it's a huge piece of work ...we've spoken about it loads of times especially when events are coming up and we put a load of effort into it and then we go away, nothing happens to it. We've missed all the opportunity of getting the photos, of getting the stories, highlighting our own good work, and we just go until

the next thing comes up and then we go again. CTDG

- And what does happen next—and as you were saying there is quite a lot of interest and if there is momentum to get things up and running and then the money [for this particular project] is gone for this. Like, I think this is only happening because there has been a budget allocated and people are interested in doing it. But what about when that's gone and you're not around?

CTDG

- The State should be funding this 100% - Aren't they doing it for other historical people? ...We are people, we are part of this country, so why not fund our projects?
- You need settled people as well to help you along that line not just ourselves ...it would have to work from both sides not just one side to go ahead...TNC-M
- There is funding there for the settled people's museums... and specially since the 1st of March 2017..the State should be involved...But I think it's down to us as Travellers to work on that...Not just this organization but all organizations...to pull together...TNC
- I know with that core group of people you've met it has got things going and got us chatting about archives and museums that we haven't before...but how soon are we looking at all that going? Are we saying, oh, we are really interested and this is what we could do and then we are going to get to that point and then nothing happens? CTDG
- I think it sounds really nice to say that we will have Traveller sustaining this but, to be honest, a whole organization of mixed cultures and backgrounds—where we are at now it's not something that is already there—so it's going to take a huge piece of work to get it to where it needs to be before we can start talking about how we sustain it. CTDG
- A lot of the times we are built up for things and there is a pot of money and we put in loads of energy and then [it goes nowhere]. It's not because we are not interested—and then it comes across as, 'well, Travellers are not there because they didn't care enough to be there'. CTDG
- I'd just be worried, how soon are you thinking that this will be gone and the money will be gone for the research...when this project ends? CTDG

#### **Final reflections**

The following is a summary of the main issues that arose through the workshops:

- The need for professional training and organizational aspects for Travellers to take roles in curatorship and documentation and archiving.
- The potential significance of having a National Traveller Archive/Museum—as expressed and discussed in the workshops in terms of ownership and control of representation and how a Traveller 'identity' might be understood.
- How having a permanent public platform for Traveller



(this page)  
Round table  
discussion at Pavee  
Point Traveller and  
Roma Centre,  
21 June 2018.  
(below right) Singer  
Mary Brigid Connors

cultural narratives might gradually erode the stigma/racism that Travellers currently endure due, in part, to predominantly negative media representation.

- How being recognised within a national institutional context presents significant opportunities of public engagement with other Traveller groups and the settled community (the need for the settled community to gain a better, more in depth, understanding of the Traveller community as expressed and discussed at the workshops).
- The need and will for Travellers to be included in dominant Irish national narratives such as the Irish Civil War.
- How Travellers might logistically organize a national archive/collection that is sustained and controlled by the Travelling community.
- How—taking Cork Public Museum as an example—the collaborative elements between Traveller agencies and institutions might work.
- The different kinds of content that the archive/collection would be required to accommodate in order to represent the diversity and complexity and depth of Irish Traveller culture and history.



Oein The presentations have brought up some very interesting points about how we need to have sensitivity around how we are engaging with Traveller history, both as a community ourselves and also in terms of the wider community which unfortunately doesn't have the best track record.

One thing about whose voice is heard and whose voice gets edited, I would agree, in respect to my own family, if we were to choose items to pass on there would be great variance in terms of what each person would choose, and the pitfall is that we might invite everything in to those spaces which might seem very inclusive, but is also very divisive because we are not highlighting anything or any substantial historical depth or insight, or things that actually might have a real connection whether rare or known by most.

I also feel that when we talk about culture and heritage around Travellers it's often very heavy, it's a very heavy subject when we talk about the struggle, and the history of isolation and attempts at assimilation, which is obviously very true and is still very immediate in many people's lives, but we must also remember that there is a great beauty that quite often many Travellers themselves are not as aware of as we should be. There is a history, there is a lore, there is a dynamism, and when we talk about it we can very easily fall into that stagnant space of 'it's a lot of work' but it is a very important and enjoyable work, which gives voice to the lives and stories of people who are not very often heard, work which gives huge insight into the past and into the future.

We need also to be very cognisant that we need to move beyond the structures and organisations which are very important in order to seed or to anchor but also we should be realistic to understand that not everyone is connected with an organisation, be it with the national or regional organisations, we need to make sure that through other mediums which are being developed we need to keep it as open as possible for everyone to be included.

Martin I think one of the main issues here is about the community having ownership and the right to interpret our own history, our own identity, our own lived experience. As has been pointed out, many others not from the community have fulfilled that function, who have done the research,

the documentation, the interpretation, who have decided what type of representation there should be in mainstream institutions, of Travellers and so on, so I do think it is about bringing that all back to the community, and I don't think it's a question of one or the other. Of Travellers just being visible in mainstream institutions, while I do think that's really important, I also think there is certainly a need for a National Traveller Cultural centre; there are precedents set with other indigenous groups, the Sami, the Roma, the Jewish community. There are examples and there are models which we could certainly look at and tweak but I think the fundamental issue is that the community must own the interpretation, the representation and the management, that whole issue of control is very important.

Also in terms of a National Traveller Cultural Museum/centre, it's not just about documenting and celebrating culture and identity but it's also about documenting the history and lived experience, and part of that history, if it has to be spelled out, is the ongoing exclusion, marginalisation, oppression, persecution, almost a type of a genocide without blood being spilled, because at the end of the day you're talking about getting rid of a people, of their culture, their history, their identity, their knowledge. So that story has not been told, and that story needs to be part of this discussion and of whatever might emerge in terms of a National Traveller dedicated museum or cultural centre, and it should also be told in the mainstream, and I don't know how comfortable people would feel about that being told in our mainstream institutions. So it's not just a story about culture and identity, which is very important, but it's also about people's history and lived experience, and you can't completely obliterate the experience of oppression and persecution and cultural denial which has maintained a silence for hundreds if not thousands of years. That is part of the narrative, that needs to be reflected and needs to be an inherent part of whatever structure emerges at a global or national level or at regional and local levels and I think both are essential, because there is a regional context as well, and regional specificities in terms of Traveller experience in Donegal as to Cork.

Oein I would very strongly agree, Martin, especially as someone who is from Galway and even tonight, which is the summer solstice, which means for two days we have bonfires which is not a part of the expression here in Dublin but which



is a huge part of my yearly connectivity with my family. So we don't need to trade one for the other, there should be a very strong focus to have a national as well as a local focus to make sure that all voices at all levels are actually heard.

Rosaleen I would echo Martin, but I want to say that on my journey here today I was thinking about how on Monday and Tuesday the O Connor family were in the news when they were evicted, and that part of the narrative of our history belongs not only in a museum but in our academic syllabus. I also think that [of] our other uncomfortable issues we have not named, one would be racism and that would be both within the museums and outside the museums, the other would be the owners of Traveller artefacts and the misappropriation of Traveller identity for economic exploitation of our people, and the other, I suppose, which is an issue for me and I'm always hesitant to say it, but the legacy of Traveller history of the last fifty years has been on the one hand the romantic notion of the Travellers singing around the campfire and then you go to the other extreme where you have the Irish boxer Francie Barrett wrapping himself in the Irish flag at the Olympic games, for which he had to fight to be able to do, it was not an invitation, they did not want him as a Traveller to carry the Irish flag. So in order to narrate that or to curate it I would wonder if one museum, be it Traveller only or be it part of a national Irish museum, is big enough to hold or to document what we have been through.

Wednesday two weeks ago we had a meeting here, and the Monday previous to that I was doing my homework and I went into the National Gallery and I asked could I see the Yeats paintings, and they were looking at me, and I said the ones with the Travellers and there was a little difficulty understanding my speech, so I repeated, 'Travellers', 'Oh', the attendant said, 'you mean the itinerants'. I couldn't believe it, and I suppose I'm reminded all the time that sometimes you get into a headspace where you expect racism in certain spaces but for that moment I was caught off guard. So I think along with this initiative there has to be an acknowledgement first of all that racism does exist in the artistic arena despite the liberal agenda, racism towards Travellers is very much part of that agenda, and also the need for training, for anti-racist training for those who work in galleries, for they are not immune, and I would imagine that over the years Travellers have been refused entry into national museums and that too has to be named and called for what it is.

The last thing that I would say is that as a writer I write for a Traveller audience, I have always, that's who I am, and I have been challenged too about being too polemic, too political, too insular, that I make it very uncomfortable for a settled audience, and I would respond by saying that I make it very uncomfortable for all audiences. I feel it is important, and again there is diversity among Travellers and everybody has a right to identify whatever way they want to be identified, but when I was accepted into Aosdána I was accepted as a Traveller. I'm not there just as another playwright, I'm there as an Irish female Traveller playwright, and part of this project as well as all the other elements I want to mention is building self-esteem and confidence. There are Traveller artists in lots of arenas, I know them and they are not out, they say they couldn't, that their career would be damaged. I know one Traveller who hangs paintings in one of the galleries and he has never identified [himself] as a Traveller, his employers don't know, his colleagues don't know, and some of his family don't know where he works because on the other side of it is that within our community sometimes, and rightly so, art would be the last thing on our agenda, because we have to fight for basic human rights. Art is seen as a luxury and that's also another factor, when you consider this initiative. Now is the moment, now is the time, we have to decide on the place, but I would not want other issues to lose their priority over and above an art museum. I say that as a writer and hopefully someone who would have their work documented, but, like Monday when that family were evicted and shoved into a hotel room for two weeks, I know where my priority is and it certainly wouldn't be in a museum while people are still living in very harsh conditions.

One more thing, photography, one of the most consciousness-raising exercises, and I know Martin will kill me, because it should have been a letter but it was a photograph of Dunsink twelve or thirteen years ago now. I remember the circumstances very well. There was a barrier and people were not able to get in or out of their homes and Derek Speirs took a photograph for the Irish Times of Martin being arrested, and those are equally important ways of narrating our lived history and also for telling our young people, the wagon is fine and lovely and romantic but what happens behind the wagon is a lot more sinister.



### Oh, Had I the Wings of a Swallow

My family insisted that this man had potential. They warned me about talking too much and being overly opinionated. The arrangement was for a Sunday afternoon, 3pm, the Merrion Square entrance of the National Gallery.

My companion suggested the third floor, the Yeats Room. For a moment, there was an uncomfortable hesitation. We made our way towards the lift. On several occasions my visits to this room invoked a sense of unease. With great enthusiasm my companion produced a library book about these particular paintings. The tinge of blue echoed through. My own viewings of these paintings were of wild coastal scenes, horse races, farmers, card players and local shops. The colloquialisms felt familiar. Yeats is believed to have said that the deep, intense blue was a colour that 'always affected' him.

For most of my life, public spaces such as art galleries felt closed off to people like me. An innate feeling of lacking overwhelms me. There are subtle subjective and objective reminders of elitism associated with galleries. However, the paintings are portraits of my people so the kernel of the building, if not the Yeats Room, is a contradiction or an emotional oxymoron. Monologues with the words exploitation, voyeurism and misappropriation are tucked into the pit of my belly. My companion is an art historian.

We move separately to either end of the room. My attention is drawn to the painting entitled *The Tinkers' Encampment*. The colours, vibrancy, brush work and energy of the piece pulse through me. The abstract marks capture a rawness that inculcates my rage which quickly subsides into nostalgia for my childhood.

Us the Travellers, with an aggravated history and ambiguous connection. A cumulative eclectic, searching for a cultural position to be engaged with. Yet here in this room, the presentation tells us of our integral relationship as Travellers with Irish identity.

Moving from painting to painting, slowly breathing, manoeuvring our way around the room. Furtive smiles with nods towards particular pieces. Sitting in front of one canvas brought me to many places: Sligo, Tullamore and Mayo, where often strangers would stop their cars to take photographs of us. It is said that Yeats's interpretation of the Travellers is unromanticised. The faces he paints are lived in. They tell a narrative of nomadism.

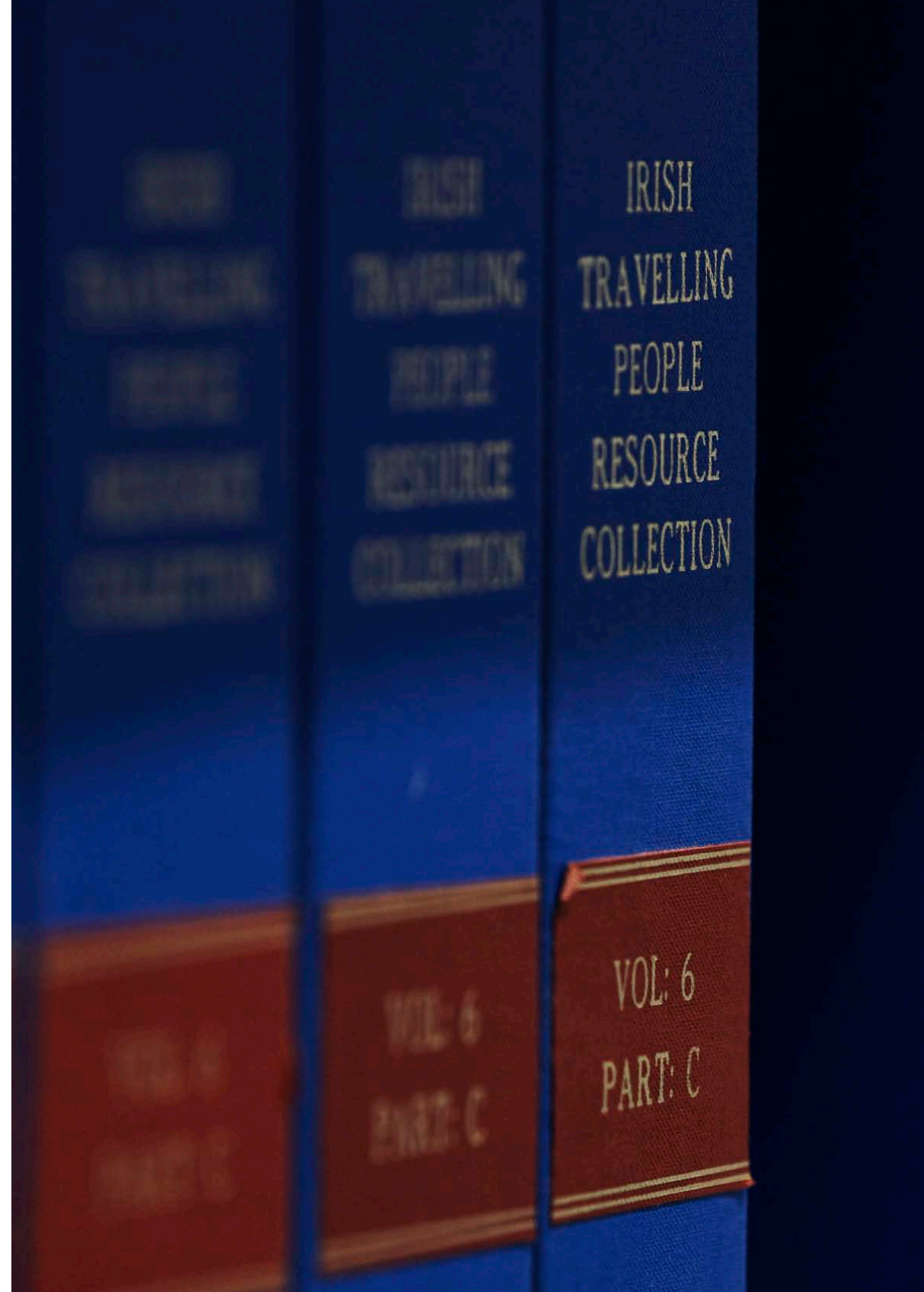


It's estimated that Yeats had twenty-four pieces that depicted Traveller identity. Unlike other painters who made portraits of Travellers, he pushed himself beyond the encampment and propelled his portfolio to include the female and male Traveller form. Slowly moving through Yeats's family room, more paintings of diverse figures. The clown, the person of small stature and the tinsmith. Sitting in silence, the chemistry between my companion and the electricity between my body and the paintings creates a complex pressure. Tilting my head, my response is coded. The backdrop of my own narrative also curates the tension between the outside gaze and the inside landscape. The oil paint lends itself to a rich texture that echoes aspects of Traveller ethnicity.

The subtlety of this painter's work encapsulates the presence and the inflection of authenticity. However, the problematic legacy of misappropriation both politically and ethically brings its own entangled contention. This lies between the artist's *settled identity* and the *Traveller* of the painting's subject.

His charm is infectious. Studying the painting, cautiously glancing, enquiring. The close proximity of my companion is telling. The conversation about the paintings is full of contradiction. Reticence engulfs me. The composure of my poise becomes unsettled. Turning, moving, attempting to create some distance. The interruption on our familiarity disorients him. The sudden chasm creates confusion. It makes a new silence. My attention is ignited by the painting's brashness. Yeats's women are assertive, in content and form. His intentions come with a discerning invitation. Boldness dares me. Whispering with absolute certainty, 'Travellers, Travellers, Travellers'. The word reverberates around the room.

We are both fixated on the painting entitled *Singing 'Oh, Had I the Wings of a Swallow'*, which illustrates a young woman singing for her supper, on a train in 1920s Ireland. Rapidly glancing at the painting, then turning towards me, his words, '*gens du voyage*', the French word for Traveller people. A slow smile gathers momentum. We move closer to Yeats's painting. The passion of the Tinker Woman tells me on this occasion there will be no need for explanation or interpretation. We head towards the lift, into the café. His library book is opened. Glancing furtively at the images while my companion brings the tea and cake, my agitation remains close; the allegory within Yeats's work concerning Travellers can only be understood by way of honouring his intent.









**The Martin Folan Collection**  
**Introduction to the catalogue of an exhibition**  
Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin, 2015

The artist Martin Folan approached me in 1990 to get involved in some way with Pavee Point. He already had previous experience working on projects with them. For instance, on one occasion he set out from Limerick on a Travellers' walking pilgrimage to Gougane Barra in County Cork, led by a large fibre-glass boulder that he had fabricated; it was wheeled in front of the pilgrims. The boulder symbolised the settled community's attitude towards Travellers. A sign was carried with the boulder, on which was written, 'Roll back the Boulder'. Irish people know exactly what that means.

Martin and I had previously discussed the portrayals of Travellers in art, how they were cast as 'types' with their caravans used as props to populate picturesque landscapes. It was my opinion that many artists had kept them at arm's length, never too close or personal. As a straight-up portrait painter, I suggested making a series of close-up portraits of Travellers at different locations in Dublin and Navan. I would concentrate on individual portrayals without the props that indicated that they were from the Travelling community. I was making portraits of particular people who I was introduced to and who agreed to partake in the project and be painted. The occasions could be very social and in some cases we enjoyed the company of the sitter's friends and family as the portrait was being painted. At that time I had the ability to paint in the public realm without being too fazed.

The idea was to make up to sixteen portraits but the series stalled at nine for a number of reasons. We all felt that it was a good thing to do, the idea was solid, but with no finances in place I got caught up in other projects and work that paid the bills. The completed paintings sat in my studio safely stored for the past twenty-three or twenty-four years. They have never seen the light of day in an exhibition. Each portrait was painted on the spot in someone's home or caravan. The paintings were commenced and completed in one session; that was the philosophy, the live encounter with the painting as the by-product. Martin Folan put me in contact with Pavee Point and they set up appointments in Dublin and Navan. I was using the oil paint in thin washes, influenced by recent periods of work in Latvia where I had exclusively specialised in the use of watercolour.

They are open-ended portraits, not finished in the conventional sense. They are not painted from photographs. They depend on the co-operation and collaboration of all concerned. The outcome was usually of an introspective portrayal. I was painting someone alone with their own thoughts for up to four hours. You can't pose for two to four hours, you just sit and as you do you muse and think. I had the privilege of painting the portraits in those circumstances.

We hoped to create something new by being utterly conventional in our approach. My approach to painting people was that I painted people. At the end of the day they were not defined by their status as members of the legal profession, etc., rather, as people, period. I was much more interested in the individual psychology of the subject than emphasising their rank or station in life.

Martin Collins of Pavée Point phoned me last year and I said to him that I was waiting since 1993 to make the call or receive the call. As it transpired, the latter applied. We arranged a studio visit and the present collection of nine paintings was donated to Pavée Point and will be known as the Martin Folan Collection.

Pavée Point has sourced funding for the framing of the paintings and the publication of this catalogue. I would like to thank Martin Collins of Pavée Point and Kevin Kavanagh for providing his gallery. We are very grateful to all and for the goodwill generated around the project.

My friend Martin Folan tragically took his own life in Limerick last year. It was a shock to his family and many friends. Limerick marked his passing with a very moving ceremony officiated by his daughter Marina, where family, friends, and strangers spoke with great affection and love, paying tribute to a unique human being, artist, inspirational teacher and man.

I met Martin Folan in the National College of Art and Design in the late 1970s. The Fine Art faculty at the college was quite polarised between different tendencies in that polarising decade. Martin was a crossover guy; he moved between performance art, object making, photography, drawing and painting with ease. He communicated with all because he was interested in people, creativity and ideas. His largesse made many look small and diminutive in comparison, defending their own patches like Lilliputians. Martin would encounter such attitudes in the future, but what's new for real artists like him?

He was an inspiration to our generation. We celebrated his success when he was awarded the PSI Residency in New York in 1986. America inspired him and in many ways it was a 'coming home' culturally for him and his work.

Martin returned to Ireland and Limerick in particular when his wife, the writer and poet Mairead Byrne, was appointed the director of the Belltable Arts Centre. Martin was so proud of Marina, his daughter, and after his marriage broke up she was a constant source of joy in his life.

This collection is my small way of paying tribute to Martin Folan. His work as an artist was blooming again when he took his own life. After he had given to so many, for so long, selflessly, I was waiting with anticipation for even more of what I had seen in his studio in Wolfe Tone Street. Alas, it was not to be. However, we are only at the early stage of assessing Martin Folan's contribution to Irish art and I know that his legacy is in good hands.



Installation view: Christina Lawrence, Martin Collins, Mary McCann by Mick O'Dea (Martin Folan Collection, Pavee Point) with flowers made by women of the Primary Health Care Project, Pavee Point.



# Jeering in heroic rescue

By MICHAEL SHERIDAN

HUNDREDS of people watched, some jeering, as a woman who had earlier been seen jumping from Burgh Quay struggled in the swirling waters of the Liffey near O'Connell Bridge last night and it was left up to a 17-year-old itinerant girl to save the life of the 33-year-old woman.



Cathleen Maughan . . .  
second rescue.

Cathleen Maughan, who sleeps rough in the streets of Dublin, dived fully clothed into the river and managed after a fierce struggle to drag the woman to safety near the wall where she was helped by Jim Cotter, of Howth Road, until the arrival of emergency services.

"I saw the woman in the water, she was going under and I could not believe that one person among the crowd watching would do anything to help. Some of the people watching were jeering and shouting at the drowning woman," said Cathleen, who was recovering from her ordeal in the casualty department of the Richmond Hospital.

"I saw her disappearing so I jumped in, nobody else was doing anything. When I swam out to her she said that she was dying of cancer and wanted to be left alone. I had to kick her in the stomach to keep her from struggling against me.

"I thought at one stage that she would drag me down but I swam under her and took a firm grip before taking her towards the wall. Somebody helped me then, but they were a long time coming".

As the fire brigade personnel brought up both victim and life saver, jeering and shouting emanated from the crowd, some of whom viewed the rescue operation as a form of entertainment.

This was the second Liffey rescue for the itinerant girl whose family live in Engald. In 1981 at only 12 years of age she saved a drowning man and later was presented with a medal for bravery by the Lord Mayor.

But last night while the woman she saved recovered in St. James's Hospital Cathleen and her two cousins were wandering the streets of Dublin in search of somewhere to sleep for the night.

"We'll sleep in any old doorway we can find", said Cathleen. "I have been sleeping rough for three years. I have nowhere to go what else can I do. Nobody cares".

## Hate Campaign Grows Against Itinerants

THE FIREBOMB attack on itinerants parked overnight in Ardee, Co Louth last Tuesday is the most dramatic example so far of the growing antagonism from local communities towards itinerants unable to find settlements, permanent or otherwise. Another ominous development recently was the unsigned letter circulated among residents of the Clonsilla-Porterstown area of West County Dublin concerning a proposed itinerant settlement in the locality.

By Mairin de Burca

The anonymous letter warned local homeowners that "Our children, wives and senior citizens have the right to enjoy the use of Schools, Shops, Church—and even their own homes—without fear of the kind of activities known to be prevalent in the vicinity of such encampments. The immediate cause of such resentment is the shortage of designated camp-sites for itinerants in Co Dublin and the absence of any plans by the Council to provide any more.

Dublin Co Council has called a temporary halt to its policy of moving on itinerants encamped on their environs; but the decision indicates no

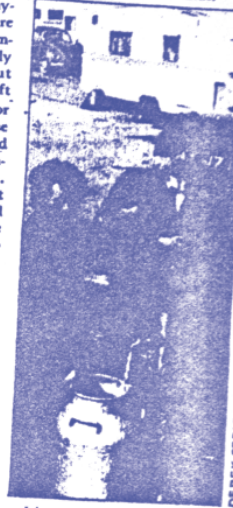
change of heart on the part of the local authority. In a recent Supreme Court ruling on the case of Rosella MacDonald (see *Hibernia*, 7 August) it was indicated that the Council was under an obligation to provide alternative accommodation to itinerants before evicting them from roadside sites. Since there are no vacant sites in the Co Council area the policy of 'moving on' or evictions has, perforce, to be halted.

Dublin Co Council's record for housing itinerants or providing sites for their caravans is abysmal. Only recently a planned new halting site was abandoned after agitation by the residents at Clonsilla and there are no

immediate plans for sites anywhere else. Recently there were mass evictions at Darnale/Priorswood and nearly 40 families were removed out to Blanchardstown and left in a field without water or sanitation. Some of these families have now moved back to the area and are encamped at Donaghmede. Council spokesmen claim that they were verbally abused when they visited the site and asked the families to move on again.

The itinerant families involved are long-time residents of Dublin and many have lived in the North County area for up to 12 years; despite this the Council refuses to make plans for their eventual housing, relying—at least until the recent Supreme Court hearing—on the policy of 'moving on' to harass them out of the area. Caught now between irate residents' groups and the spirit, if not the letter, of the law they have taken the decision to do nothing. They will neither

provide sufficient accommodation or remove the offending encampments. Perhaps they are relying on the escalation of local feeling to force the families out and the anonymous circular sent to all residents in the Clonsilla district could certainly be relied upon to do that.



Itinerants on a settlement  
provided by Dublin County  
Council at Dunsink

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 1986

EVENING  
PRESS

'Hate Campaign Grows Against Itinerants' by Mairin de Burca is reprinted from *Hibernia*, 4 September 1980 p 2 by permission of the publisher



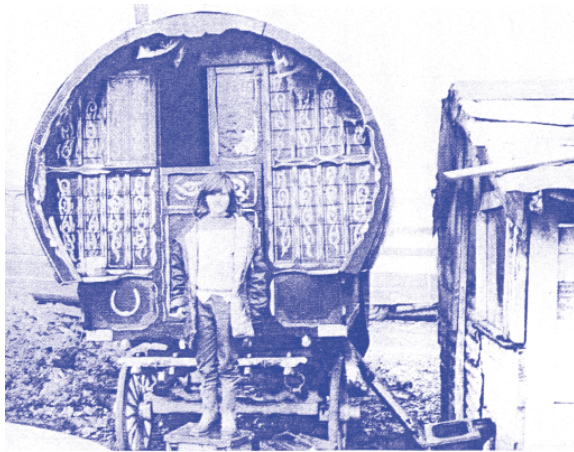
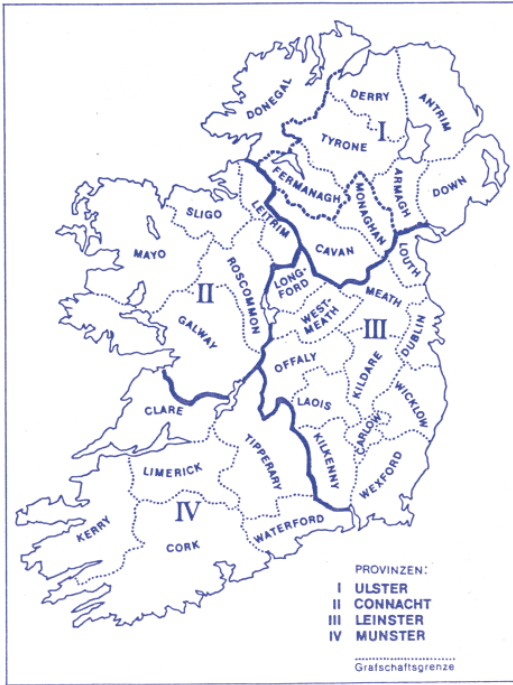


Photo: Katrin Reemtsma, 1985



Map out of the Merian-Magazine Irland, Vol. 5, 29. year's set

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### Foreword by Victor Bewley, Dublin, April 1986

It was a fortunate day for us all when Aileen L'Amie went to the Library in the University of Ulster at Jordanstown to look for some written material on Travellers. Like Mother Hubbard, she found that the cupboard was bare, or almost so. There was practically no written material on Travellers available in the Library. A lesser person might have left it at that, but she at once set about making enquiries to find out what written material was available anywhere, on any aspect of the subject. The result of her enquiries led to a massive collection of material now amounting to fourteen volumes.

The collection provides us with some record of the Travellers; way of life, values and customs in the past, and the problems they faced when, due to economic pressure, they had to make changes; their struggle to have their right to their way of life recognised; their wish to be accepted by settled people, yet maintaining their identity as Travellers. It is a record of the fear and prejudice of the majority, when they feel their interests threatened by a minority, even if it is only a small one, which seems to be a problem in many parts of the world today. Perhaps in reading these pages we may understand more how blinding prejudice can be, and the injustices to which it may lead.

It is most fortunate that the collection was formed at this particular time. If it had been done a few years later, much of the material might have been lost. May it help towards a greater knowledge of and understanding of the Travellers, who are such an interesting and likeable people, and towards their full acceptance as part of the community in which we live.



Introduction by Sinéad Ní Shuinéar, September 1985

This first volume in the *Travelling People Resource Collection* contains the source materials to which any student of Traveller history—or, indeed, of Traveller-Settled relations!—can turn with gratitude. Here he will find references from publications as varied as *Ireland's Own* to the revered *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, spanning nearly two centuries.

Journalists, novelists, amateur folklorists, serious and competent scientists: all have made their assertions and recorded their speculations. They are here for us to make what we will of them. One cannot but be struck by certain themes which crop up again and again in the most diverse of sources. Take, for example, the question of the racial distinctiveness of Travellers: of 16 sources mentioning the physical appearance of the 'typical' Irish Traveller, we have two descriptions of fair-skinned people, six of swarthy, sallown, or 'black', and one of freckles; hair is 'typically' black (4), red (7), yellow (5) or 'a fantastic orange fuzz' (1). The theme of occupation is another enlightening one. Virtually all the sources automatically treat 'tinker' (ethnic category) and 'tinsmith' (occupational category) as synonymous—indeed, Shelta [language spoken by Irish Travellers] is frequently seen as 'belonging' to tinsmiths and only 'borrowed' (and sketchily at that) by nomads practising other means of livelihood. Yet trading in horses and donkeys is mentioned just as often as tinsmithing (16 times in each case)—indeed, the Bealoideas [Folklore of Ireland Society] questionnaire specifically mentions both as criteria establishing group membership: the questionnaire concerns 'not tramps or beggarmen, but tinkers who move about in family or other groups, and ply a trade or calling such as tinsmithing or horse-dealing'.

The 1968 piece 'People of the Roads' contrasts 'tinkers' with 'pedlars of various kinds, selling pins, laces, tobacco, tea, and other goods', 'travellers (*sic*) who bought or collected eggs, old clothes, rags, feathers, and other goods', 'tradesmen such as tailors, stone-masons, 'spailpíní' [Irish migrant labourers] and others (who) went from place to place in search of work', 'itinerant musicians and popular entertainers of other kinds'. Yet from the collected sources we can clearly see the scope of occupational fluidity typical of Travellers (and in fact mentioned specifically by two of the sources), as well as putting this diversity into historical perspective.

Mention is made of begging (7), hawking/peddling (7), fortune-telling (6) (one of which asserts that it is not practised by Irish Travellers), poitín-making (2) and repairing china (2).

Skilled metalwork, selling feathers, making and hawking paper flowers, work in the construction industry, soldiering, fruit selling, harvesting, music, scrap, trading in goats' meat (1), cattle-dealing, car- and lorry-dealing, shopkeeping, rags, bottles, horsehair, chimney-sweeping, and 'Gypsy'ing' (as an occupation?) are all mentioned.

How do Settled observers perceive Travellers? Something like the blind men and the elephant. Opinions on a subject as relatively objective as Shelta range from assertions that, insofar as it ever existed at all, it is no longer spoken (one of these dates from 1908) to assigning to it an origin in 'the secret language of the bards, which was probably that of the druids', to '(derivation) from echoes of Pictish and Boglatin and Gaelic and the speech of Masons' to the flat assertion that it is 'more English than Irish'. The subtleties of non-verbal human behaviour (no doubt often further confused by tongue-in-cheek verbal backup) are even more difficult to classify and interpret. It is hardly surprising, then, that assertions about the lifestyle of Travellers are even more wildly divergent than those concerning their language: for example, two of our sources hint darkly at casual wife-swapping, while another two praise Travellers' exceptionally stringent sexual morality! References to 'sharp' business practice, thievery, falsehood, general lawlessness, and even 'unnatural powers' occur with monotonous regularity. Of particular interest is the frequent (11 different sources) mention of faction fighting, generally in connection with drink and/or fair days. Astonishingly, the Settled population seems to have viewed these as a good-natured spectator sport: 'A few weeks ago I witnessed one. I never enjoyed myself so much' (written in 1909), and the statement, in an autobiography published in 1942, that such faction fights were 'the only excitement that ever came our way'.

This ambivalence—often justified by contrasting a mythical, romantic free spirit from the past with the degraded parasite of the present—is an ongoing theme and no less prevalent today than a century ago, the most extreme example being the extract from Charles Duff's 1952 publication, *Ireland and the Irish*. 'The tinker did useful work in the past', he writes, and was 'not regarded as a bad nuisance'. He goes on to describe the contemporary version much as a zoologist would describe a rather exotic and certainly dangerous alien species: 'The main characteristic of the tinker we now meet is his aptness to 'fly off the handle'. And then he can be a dangerous and violent creature.

It is advisable to be cautious with the tinker from noon onwards'.

Yet amongst our sources there is no shortage of counter propaganda, of assertions of a 'carefree, colourful existence', the 'noble life of the open road'; they 'may well excite the jealousy of kings', 'kinder hearts and better dispositions could hardly be found, there are no more charitable or interesting people in the UK'.

No aspect of the Irish Travellers has been the subject of such unbridled speculation as the as yet unsolved question of their origin. Within our Part I Resource Collection (in which the question of origin is dealt with peripherally, and/or by writers without specialist training) hypotheses cover Phoenician tinsmiths, the Lapps, a 'prehistoric guild of bronze workers', armourers to the ancient kings of Ireland, the 'dregs of aboriginal pre-Celtic goldworkers, victims of Cromwell, able-people', famine victims, able-bodied voluntary beggars, Picts, tinsmiths who gradually evolved a separate identity. Part II deals in more detail, and hopefully more scientifically, with the same question. The two parts are presented in tandem (and indeed, it was difficult to know where to draw the line between them) because the scientific analyses are to a large extent directly based on the historical sources comprising the first section.

'That the days of the tinker tribe are passing quickly there is no doubt, and it bids fair that ere long their existence will only live in tradition'. These words, written in 1918, have been reiterated by virtually every Settled observer; indeed, the latest tendency is to assert that the (noble, romantic) 'real' tinkers are at last extinct, and that the caravan dwellers on today's grass verges are mere 'itinerant tradesmen', 'carpet dealers', 'scrap merchants', 'tax dodgers', and so on.

Perusing the source materials, tracing the repetition of this and other themes in the Settled view of Travellers, it becomes easier to put it all into perspective. And let us remember the most fundamental truth of all: that the Travellers themselves have heard it all before (if they were listening) and continue to ignore it and survive despite our varied efforts to 'civilize', 'settle', 'assimilate', 'save', 'train', or otherwise control them.

**Editor's note to Volume 1: Early History, Part A, by Aileen L'Amie, April 1986**

This volume forms part of a resource collection on the Irish Travelling People. The collection and its accompanying teaching kit of photographs, slides and tape are held in the Library of the University of Ulster at Jordanstown [Co. Antrim].

In addition to the 12 volumes listed below there are two supplementary collections, the first containing three reports/surveys by the West Midlands Education Authority and the second containing some recent annual reports of councils and committees for Travelling People in Ireland.

- VOLUME 1 Early History (Parts A-C)
- VOLUME 2 The Republic of Ireland 1951-81 (Parts A-C)
- VOLUME 3 Northern Ireland (Parts A-D)
- VOLUME 4 Britain
- VOLUME 5 The United States of America
- VOLUME 6 Shelta, the secret language (Parts A-C)
- VOLUME 7 Folktales and Folk Music
- VOLUME 8 Education (Parts A-E)
- VOLUME 9 Gypsy Site Provision in England and Wales (Parts A-D)
- VOLUME 10 Table of Contents and Bibliography
- VOLUME 11 Health and Welfare
- VOLUME 12 Annual Reports (Parts A-E)
- VOLUME 13 Republic of Ireland 1982-85
- VOLUME 14 Gypsies and Other Nomadic Groups

Due to the amount of material some volumes have had to be bound in separate sections, e.g. Volume 6, Part A, and Volume 6, Part B. Many of the volumes contain material which has been specially written for the collection. The page numbers in each volume are prefixed by the volume number, hence 5.16 refers to volume 5 page 16 and 12A4 to volume 12 section A page 4. The supplement page numbers are prefixed by the letter 'S' followed by the page number. Any other page number present will relate to the original book or journal from which the material has been reproduced. Where the material consists of an extract or extracts this fact is indicated in the table of contents, e.g. Maher, Sean (1972), *The Road to God Knows Where* (extracts pp. 146-9). Where all or part of an article appeared directly relevant to more than one area of the collection it has been included in each of the volumes concerned.

The term Early History has been taken to include the period up to 1950. However, some pre-1950 material can be found in Volumes 3 to 8 where its inclusion was considered to be more appropriate.

Thanks are due to many people whose help made it possible to compile this collection. Special thanks are due to the staff at the University of Ulster Library, to Carole Blair and May Crumlin who checked the page numbering and to Muriel Beeckman and Sadie Walsh who cheerfully completed a massive amount of typing. A full list of acknowledgements can be found in Part B of this volume.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

WAGONS and TRAILERS



The above photographs are reproduced with permission  
from "Irish tinkers are unwelcome" by Kevin C. Kearns,  
The Geographical Magazine, London, Volume L, No. 5  
(1978) pp. 229-234.

19.100

TARPAULIN and CANVAS TENTS

"The Irish Government has declared tarpaulin and canvas  
tents 'completely unfit' for human habitation and has  
prohibited their use. Such structures provide the only  
shelter for many impoverished tinker families who not  
surprisingly suffer from respiratory ailments.



The photograph (and caption) is reproduced with permission  
from "Irish tinkers are unwelcome" by Kevin C. Kearns,  
The Geographical Magazine, London, Volume L, Number 5 (1978).

See also Bender Tents by Edward Ayres. Macmillan Education  
1979. A small illustrated children's book.

19.12





With a red-haired wife and a piebald horse,  
And a splendid caravan,  
Roving the roads with the Cartys and Wards,  
The O'Briens or the Coffey clan.

Sigerson Clifford 1951



121



*Portrait of a Lady*, 1911  
Augustus Edwin John (1878–1961)  
Oil on canvas, 65.4 x 52.1 cm  
Reg. 121

The Welsh painter Augustus John is considered to have been one of the finest painters in the British Isles. His celebrated figure drawings and etchings, along with his colour and compositional work, have drawn comparisons with the work of Gauguin and Matisse. Throughout his life he had a particular fascination with nomadic peoples and their culture and in his later life, from 1937 until his death in 1961, he held the position of President of the Gypsy Lore Society.

Mary Burke equates the accumulation of writers and artists of the British Isles whose work appropriates the trope of the Irish 'Tinker' as a later flowering of the eighteenth-century 'academic craze' of European writers,<sup>1</sup> the romanticised 'Gypsy' and 'Tinker' representing a 'contrasting mythical, romantic free spirit from the past with the degraded parasite of the present'.<sup>2</sup> The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society devoted many articles to 'Irish Tinkers' in a bid to locate the origin of the true Gypsy. Many writers and artists idealised those who were seen as operating outside of society and its conventions, overlaying bohemian values to such a degree that 'Travellers were sexually and (to all intents and purposes) humanely "other"'.<sup>3</sup>

Following John's marriage to the artist Ida Nettleship they travelled together around Wales in a horse-drawn caravan, along with their children, his muse Dorothy (Dorelia) McNeill and their children. Following Nettleship's death in 1907, Dorelia and John were married and he continued to paint her throughout their lives. This 1911 portrait is described in the notes of the collection as showing Dorelia 'dressed as a Gypsy'.<sup>4</sup>



*Gypsies*, by Constantin Guys  
(1802–92)  
Ink on paper, 16.7 x 12.9 cm  
Reg. 367

Constantin Guys was a Dutch-born Crimean war correspondent, watercolour painter and illustrator for British and French newspapers. His works depicting the Second French Empire were praised by the writer Balzac, who compared Guys favourably to Whistler, and emphasised his portrayal of details of women's clothing and horse carriages.<sup>5</sup> In this painting the woman to the left wears a blue striped scarf and her right hand is in the pocket of her apron. The other figure wears a grey cloak which envelopes her. As with Augustus John's portrait of Dorelia dressed as a 'Gypsy', it is the costume which takes on a symbolic role in defining identity. In *The Devil's Cloth* (2001), Michel Pastoureau describes how the thirteenth-century 'sumptuary laws', which defined what one was legally allowed to wear, ordered that stripes were the appropriate dress for 'the hangman, the prostitute, the juggler and the clown'.<sup>6</sup> In this sense the stripe serves to classify, acting as an instrument of 'social taxonomy' which occupies a very distinctive positioning within visual culture, a positioning which relates to the outsider, the exotic and the exceptional. In dress history, the stripe and the 'Gypsy' go hand in hand.



*The Gleaners*, c.1850  
(A study for the picture in the Louvre, Paris), Jean-François Millet (1814–75)  
Chalk on paper, 14.5 x 21 cm  
Reg. 564

*The Gleaners*, which appears from its size and shape to be part of a series devoted to field work, is thought to be Millet's earliest surviving rendering in any medium of peasants gathering up grain after the harvest. This is the earliest of his twenty surviving treatments of the subject which ultimately led to the 1857 painting now in the Louvre. Coming only a few years after the 1848 revolution, the painting's message was seen as politically provocative. The controversy which attended the exhibition of the Louvre oil painting in 1857 centred on the socio-economic implications of the subject. Gleaning, the backbreaking job of combing the already harvested fields for any remaining grain, was the preserve, regulated by law, of the very poorest in French society. The burgeoning democratic aspirations of revolutionary French society recognised in 1857 'the ineptitude of a ruling order which saw some levels of society prosper upon the labour of others as inherently unequal'.<sup>7</sup> Agnes Varda's 2000 documentary film of the same title looks at the contemporary situation of gleaners in France and their role within the industrial agricultural system.



which sees millions of tons of misshapen food harvest left to rot in fields. The current legal situation enshrines the practice as both legally and ethically correct, a precedent which was set by the traditional role of the gleaners as an essential element of historic food production. In Ireland, George Gmelch, an American anthropologist who with his wife Sharon B Gmelch spent one year between 1971 and 1972 living on a Traveller site in Dublin, describes in his 1977 essay 'Economic Strategies and Migrant Adaptation' how the traditional subsistence economy of the Irish Travellers followed the yearly agricultural cycle of the rural population.<sup>8</sup> They performed services such as chimney sweeping, basket making, tin smithing and peddling goods, occasionally employed as farm labourers during harvest. Paddy McDonagh in the 1992 Pavee Point publication 'Traveller Ways, Traveller Words' describes how whole families were employed during harvest, in 'picking potatoes, turnips, and beet, in stacking hay and cutting turf'.<sup>9</sup>



*The Travelling Circus, 1906*  
Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957)  
Watercolour on paper  
27 x 36 cm. Reg. 599

According to Julie Brazil, twenty-four works relating to Traveller or nomadic culture can be attributed to Jack B. Yeats in the period between 1900 and 1928. Brazil's 2006 essay 'Jack B.'s Tinkers' looks in detail at how Yeats's work charts the changing attitudes to these people who were a once integrated and essential part of the rural economy. His compositions of Travellers tended to separate male and female, and rarely depicted community, reflecting the artist's encounters with Travellers who were performing the tasks of begging, peddling or collecting.<sup>10</sup> Brazil examines the Yeats's painting, *A Tinker*, 1905, in which the lone male Traveller comes to represent a threat to the isolated rural housewife. This shift in perception is taken up by José Lanters, whose 2011 examination of the 'tinker' trope in Irish literature describes how 'Between the creation of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, with its nationalist aim of depicting Ireland as the home of an ancient

and heroic idealism, and the formation of the Free State in 1922, when that idealism was put severely to the test, the 'tinker' trope underwent a remarkable transformation, from being the abstraction onto which Anglo-Irish Nationalism projected all their desires and anxieties about the independent nation that was yet to be created, to becoming the embodiment of everything that was objectionable about the Irish past and worrisome about its future'.<sup>11</sup>

Yeats's 1906 watercolour depicting a scene of a Travelling circus also draws attention to the diverse practices of nomadic peoples. The 1963 'Report of the Commission on Itinerancy' begins by defining Travelling people or 'itinerants', as they were unwittingly described, as being people 'with no fixed place of abode who habitually wandered from place to place, but excluding Travelling entertainers'.<sup>12</sup> The overtly problematic inception, process and recommendations of the Report have been dealt with by many writers, including a detailed critique by the Irish Traveller movement, available on their website. This

distinction between occupational and cultural practices within nomadic communities has served to divide the general perception of Travelling people and fails to recognise the interrelationships and diversity of Travelling culture. Michael O'Haotha's 2006 'Parley with me' discusses this distinction and attempts to reconstitute the 'Fairground Travellers' or 'show people' as part of the larger Travelling community, asserting that these entertainers, musicians, acrobats and animal-trainers were also an essential part of patterns, pilgrimages, harvest gatherings, weddings and sporting meetings which all Travellers followed.<sup>13</sup> In 1905 Jack B. Yeats was commissioned by the Manchester Guardian newspaper to illustrate a series of articles by John Millington Synge on the condition of the poorest parts of Ireland—Connemara and Mayo. Together the two men toured what were then known as the 'congested districts', dispatching regular articles and illustrations back to Britain. A further tour of Wicklow followed along with Synge's play *The Tinkers' Wedding* in 1908.



*The Freestone Man*  
(*The Tinker of Glencree*), 1918  
Philip Naviasky (b. 1894)  
Oil on board, 36 x 28 cm  
Reg. 918

In 1912, at the age of 18, Leeds-born artist Philip Naviasky, the son of Polish immigrants, became the youngest student to be accepted into the Royal Academy School and went on to study at the Royal College of Art. In 1917 he came to Dublin where he worked on several portrait commissions as well as paintings of Irish life such as *The Freestone Man (The Tinker of Glencree)*.

Ireland's history of stonecraft and building dates back 5,000 years to the standing stones and dolmens of the late Stone Age. Newgrange, which is recognised as one of the earliest stone constructions still standing, predates the Pyramids and points to a strong relationship to both the materiality of early civilisations, and concurrently to the value placed on the afterlife or the spiritual realm, the immaterial. Lynn Mesker discusses how ancient faith in the potential of monumentality to express immateriality has created a legacy and material presence which occupies our own world today. 'These people were so successful in their obsessive concern with preserving themselves for the afterlife that their remains permeate our own lives'.<sup>14</sup>

From secular to religious structures, stone has become a monument to the changing social, religious and economic conditions within Irish history. The grey stone walls which have become synonymous with the rural Irish landscape stretch for an astounding 400,000 kilometres throughout the countryside. In the main, these stone walls were constructed in the last 150 years and coincide with the shifting economic and social conditions of the eighteenth century. Access to global markets and cheap grains saw dairy and livestock become more profitable produce for landowners. Coupled with inheritance laws which divided property equally among male descendants, these smallholdings became smaller and smaller, the result being that they could not sustain



the growing population. The clearances which occurred in Ireland and Scotland saw landlords remove tenants and introduce larger pastures for grazing animals, heralding the break up of the 'Rundale village' system of open farming, and the removal of the commonages which had sustained more collective land usage. Single and double (stone-wide) dry stone walls, called *feidín* walls, were built without mortar, for both ease of building and also to allow light to travel through the structure, which seemingly deters sheep from jumping them.

José Lanthers refers to Jim McLoughlin in arguing that 'one reason why it is so difficult to clearly distinguish between the "settled" population and "Travellers" in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland is because large sections of the so called "settled" population were extremely mobile'.<sup>15</sup> Along with Travelling tradespeople, such as itinerant teachers (for whom the Department of Education provide a special curriculum), dancing teachers and musicians, poets and artisans, a huge amount of emigration and seasonal migrations to England and Scotland for harvest periods meant it was very common that there were many groups of Travelling people moving throughout Ireland. Irish language sources tell us that many of these Travelling people spoke languages of their own in order to protect their livelihood. *Cant na táilliúirí*, Tailors' cant, and *Beurlager na Saor*, the secret language of the stonemasons, are just two examples. Traveller Cant or Gammon, or the purely academic term Shelta, however, continues to be used to varying degrees by Travellers today.

'*Cohaecthe Beurlager na Saor?*, or "Do you speak the language of the masons?" was a question asked of someone looking for work. Unless they could speak the *Beurlager* they would not get the job or other masons would refuse to work with them'.<sup>16</sup>

The identity of the subject of this painting is not known, only the area in which he was encountered and the work he did at the time. A freestone man is a stonemason who is not necessarily attached to any guild. However, as we can glean from the above quote from Patrick McAfee's study of Irish stone walls, the language or cant itself operated as a kind of a protection of the trade, with skills being handed down from father to son and hostility towards those who did not belong to the lineage. The dual title points towards both the occupation and the heritage of the man.

A member of An Túr Gloine stained glass studio, the painter and stained glass artist Michael Healy exhibited regularly in the RHA and created many windows for churches all over Ireland. His first work in stained glass was of an angel, painted for the annunciation window in Loughrea Cathedral, Co. Galway in 1903. Healy's subjects were drawn on many occasions from daily life and the characters he encountered there. In this watercolour there are five separate figures and one couple, in sketches of two rows of three. In the top right, a tinsmith is depicted at work.

The tinsmith's skill and ingenuity can be seen in the elaborate stills, and 'the remarkable tin fiddles one may come across in the poorest parts of Donegal'.<sup>17</sup> Within the Trades and Crafts section of the Museum of Country Life, opened in Mayo in 2001, a tinsmithing display of objects such as a pot skillet, a mouse trap, a lantern and a cup, along with a 'budget', the tinsmith's collection of tools, are situated among an array of traditional trades and crafts of rural Ireland. Tinsmithing is an occupation



Six Watercolour Sketches  
Michael Healy (1873-1941)  
Watercolour on paper  
Reg. 1044

which has a very strong connection with the Irish Traveller, although far from the exclusive occupation or craft of the Traveller; even the name 'tinker' has become synonymous with the Irish Travelling people.

Sinéad Ní Shuinéar's article 'Apocrypha to Canon: Inventing Irish Traveller History' questions the association of Traveller culture with what she locates as a pejorative rather than a descriptive term 'tinker'. She suggests that the etymology of the term is bound up with the romantic and false dichotomy of the search for a 'true' gypsy. She traces the use and refinement of the term through articles and studies in the early journals of the Gypsy Lore Society, an organisation set up in 1888 to study peripatetic cultures throughout the world. The term 'tinker', according to Ní Shuinéar, described any non-Romany Traveller, gradually British or Celtic Travellers, and finally specifically

Irish Travellers. The association was, according to Ní Shuinéar, based on a spurious Gaelic etymology which combined the word 'tin' with the word for 'smith', which was falsely assumed to be *ceard* but is in fact *gabha*. The Irish for tin is *stán*, the root of *stánadóir*, tinsmith—a word never collectively applied to Travellers, who are known as *An Lucht Siúil*, literally 'the walking people'; the word *tincéir* is, like *búistéir* and *báicéir* (butcher and baker), derived from English and not vice versa.<sup>18</sup> There are many theories and ideas about the origin of Irish Travellers, accounts of a non-specialised variety point towards any number of possibilities, from prehistoric bronze workers, Pict tinsmiths to the armourers of the ancient Irish kings. The Irish Travelling People Resource Collection, compiled by Aileen L'Amie in the University of Ulster, contains one volume dedicated to the 'Early History' of Travellers, and presents a number of accounts and theories.<sup>19</sup> Considering that nomadism or semi-nomadism was the predominant mode of existence in Ireland, at least until the Viking settlements, coupled with the widespread use of metals for domestic, military and decorative purposes, it is no surprise that these connections are made and somewhat applied to the foundations of the trade. However, any generative assumptions can only serve to perpetuate fixities of identity, trade, origin and other qualities upon a people whose identity is contrarily orientated towards mobility.



*Street Singer*, 1939  
Jerome Connor (1874–  
1943). Bronze  
16.8 x 9.2 x 8.7 cm  
Reg. 1113

The artist Jerome Connor was for a time a professional boxer in a travelling show. His father was a stonemason and Connor subsequently trained as a sculptor. He was praised for his 'interpretation of the life of the working man...an office that he performs with remarkable directness and sympathy'. This small bronze head, perched on a rough base, on which the words 'Street Singer' are scratched in uneven Celtic lettering, is 'one of the little pieces of free work' done during the last years of Jerome Connor's life.<sup>20</sup>

Playing music and singing, like story telling and dancing, traverses all cultures, as ritual or ceremony, entertainment, as prayer, myth, lore and fundamentally as cultural memory. Ireland has a strong tradition of Travelling musicians and entertainers, from the iconic blind poets, bards and harpers, to the revered *seanachái* and the pipers, fiddlers and street singers. From Turlough O Carolan to The Fureys, traditional Irish music is in a constant state of renewal and re-imagining, a living tradition which draws upon a shared and dynamic repertoire of tunes, styles and interpretations.

Whether from the Travelling community or not, travelling has always gone, and continues to go hand in hand with the writing, collecting, and performance of music. It is perhaps for this reason, that as previously noted, the 1963 Report of the Commission on Itinerancy attempted to distinguish between 'itinerants' as a pejorative and Traveller musicians and entertainers. It described Travellers or 'itinerants' as being people 'with no fixed place of abode who habitually wandered from place to place, but excluding Travelling entertainers'.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, musicians and entertainers from the Travelling community were, it seems, either being appropriated as non-Travellers or simply being ignored in that no one from the Travelling community was recognised as a musician or entertainer.

Although the problems of identity which the 1963 report manifested have not yet been resolved, Traveller musicians today command the same respect as musicians from any other background, with Travellers being acknowledged as having carried, as well as orchestrated, many songs and styles throughout the country and beyond these Isles. When the Irish folklore collector Tom Munnally looked to the Travelling people for renditions of tunes which were thought to have been lost, he came across John O'Reilly in Boyle, Co. Roscommon, who was said to have a repertoire of more than 400 songs. A small example of these were recorded and released as *The Bonny Green Tree: Songs of an Irish Traveller* in 1978. Also around the same time, in 1975, Peter Kennedy published *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland*, while the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* gave an entire issue (vol. 3, no. 1) over to 'Music of the Travelling People'. In 1977 Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger released *Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland*, 131 songs complete with musical notation and editorial comment.

The Irish Traditional Music Archive contains numerous special collections such as those of Tom Greene, Alen McWeeney and Neillí Ní

Dhomhnaill. Jim Carroll and Pat Mackenzie have recorded examples of Traveller singers such as Kitty Cassidy, Mary McDonagh, Mary McGrath, Johnny Connors, Mikeen McCarthy, Mary Delaney, Bill Cassidy and Andy Cash, among others. These recordings present a variety of songs and airs which are categorised by the singer's ethnicity rather than the origin of the song collected.

Popular Traveller singers such as Margaret Barry, Pecker Dunne and Finbar Furey all came from and continue long lines of musicians and singers. The Pipers' Club, *Na Piobairí Uilleann*, recently identified as one of the UNESCO intangible cultures, carries a number of publications and recordings which acknowledge the huge contribution Traveller pipers such as Johnny and Felix Doran have made towards Traditional music. In *Post-Colonial Artist: Johnny Doran and Irish Traveller Tradition* (2008) David Tuohy and Micheal OhAodha state: 'In exploring the Traveller historical experience through the musical oeuvre of one man, it outlines the importance of human agency, cultural hybridity and cross-cultural borrowing and appropriation within the context of the shifting power relations and images that defined post-colonial Ireland',<sup>22</sup> while the 2015 publication *The Wheels of the World: 300 Years of Irish Uilleann Pipers*

by Colin Harper and John McSherry is a story of a continuum 'from John McSherry, a 21st-century icon, backwards in time through Paddy Keenan, Liam O'Flynn, Finbar Furey, Seamus Ennis, Willie Clancy, Johnny Doran, Leo Rowsome and Patsy Touhey'<sup>23</sup>—a lineage defined by the contribution each piper made to the tradition rather than to the piper's ethnicity. By contrast, *Free Spirits* (2011), by Tommy Fegan and Oliver O'Connell, offers 'accounts of the lives of the likes of the Keenan and Furey families, the Doherty and Rainey families in Donegal and Galway, as well as individuals like Maggie Barry and "Pecker" Dunne. And, of course, the Dorans, Johnny and Felix'.<sup>24</sup> In February 2019 the prestigious TG4 *Gradam Ceoil* Traditional Singer of the Year award went to the brilliant Thomas McCarthy, a Traveller singer and storyteller from Birr, Co. Offaly. McCarthy's grandfather was known as the *Seanachái* and himself continues an embedded tradition of 'orally derived knowledge'.

The extent to which Irish national identity is informed by the traditions of singing and storytelling is discussed in Jan Assmann's writings on communicative and cultural memory. Assmann states that 'Cultural memory is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity'.<sup>25</sup> The extent to which Traveller identity is interwoven within institutional memory, within cultural identity, points towards commonalities and equivalences where on a popular level there exist difference and divisions. Connor's *Street Singer* depicts a person wrapped tightly but sparsely against the elements, their features sculpted by the form of the song as it is performed. This is a shared experience and belongs as much to the formation of Traveller cultural identity as it does to non-Traveller identity. It is a heritage of performance, and reminds us that our identity is informed by pluralities and remains active and dynamic in practices of commonality and inclusion. 'Her eyes are barely defined, emphasizing the singer's intense concentration on the song. There is no attempt to idealise or romanticise the subject, yet the piece has a monumentality belying its small size'.<sup>26</sup>



*Tinkers among Ruins*, 1962  
Nano Reid (1900–81)  
Oil on board, 60 x 90 cm  
Reg. 1198

Drogheda artist Nano Reid is known for her abstract renderings of portraiture and landscapes, a type of abstraction which prioritises the personal vision, the emotion, instinct and intellect of the artist over any 'realistic' rendering of a visual scene.

A friend of mine is a wood turner in his late fifties; whenever I want to get a rise out of him I will segue into the conversation a reference to some piece of modernist or contemporary art. His immediate response reliably begins, 'abstract. I hate that f\*\*kin abstract'. Initially I had tried a didactic approach explaining how even a perfect rendering of a human face, for example, is not the actual face but an abstraction of visual elements through a treatment of perspective, composition, light and shade, tone and texture. It is an abstraction of

the face which prioritises the accuracy of form, or a combination of form and theme and other elements. After my long-winded musings earned the same response I realised that where once I saw abstraction as an antithetical process of deconstruction, I now also see a simple device for raising the blood pressure of a seasoned wood turner.

When this work was painted in the 1960s, the term 'tinker' was presumed to derive from the craft of tinsmithing, with the word itself describing the sound of the tapping of the tinsmith's hammer. As already discussed, the Gaelic etymology of the word is somewhat spurious, yet it was applied to Travelling people in the eighteen and nineteen hundreds, whether their trade involved tinsmithing or not.<sup>27</sup>

*Tinkers among Ruins* presents a picture surface combining representations of animals, people, ruins and a fire. These somewhat recognisable elements are scattered throughout the picture plane. The colour is made up of murky earthy tones which continue the lack of distinction between human, animal, object and landscape. The removal of scientific visual techniques such as perspective, and the ordering of the composition to reflect a visual landscape is opposed to a visualisation or abstraction of certain visual elements.

Leanne McDonagh, a Traveller artist from Cork, in her recent exhibition *Accommodation vs Assimilation* in the Triskel Arts Centre, Cork, presented a number of images of Travellers which teetered between figurative, recognisable forms and obscured, or abstracted forms. The focus is blurred, people and objects overlap and meld into each other. Her artist statement discusses the process and mechanics of visibility. Not simply the technology of the image but the mechanics of what is seen combine to render certain elements of Traveller identity in pristine clarity while other elements fade into obscurity. In an interview in *Travellers' Voice* in 2018, she described how 'The work that I create aims to be both subtle and contemplative, hoping to draw the viewer in, inviting them to explore and discover for themselves. I achieve this by capturing images that are hazy and whimsical in their appearance, images that need to be explored and questioned in order to be understood'.<sup>28</sup>

In a similar transgressive manner, the title of Reid's image combines two distinctive ideas, the 'tinker' and the 'ruin' and suggests a blurring between the two, that each somehow inhabits the other. Ruins have been a subject of study in many regards, by authors such as Mary Douglas, who writes on the ordering of decay (see note 31), Caitlin De Silvey, on the recovery of meaning, (see notes 30 and 33) or Tim Edensor on the transgression of form and meaning. On ruins, Edensor comments, 'Processes of decay and the obscure agencies of intrusive humans and non-humans transform the familiar material world, changing the form and texture of objects, eroding their assigned functions and meanings, and blurring the boundaries between things'.<sup>29</sup>

The notion of transforming the familiar world, of presenting or providing a space for the unfamiliar is refereed here in the amalgamation of ruin. The once cultural object of a building or structure has been left to decay. Without human intervention to preserve its form, natural elements begin to take hold. Wood exposed to rain becomes saturated, mould grows and wood begins to rot; crumbling mortar becomes a nursery for seeds and spores to take root. Paraphrasing De Silvey paraphrasing environmental archaeologist Martin Jones: the line between artefact, a relic of human manipulation of the human world and 'eco-fact', a relic of other than human engagement with matter, climate, weather and biology, is blurred.<sup>30</sup> This viscous contamination of elements Douglas describes as matter 'out of place'. In relation to ideas of waste and dirt she pronounces that dirt is simply 'unordered' material. In a broader sense Douglas describes how the ordering of our environment is simply the ordering of ideas; by consequence unordered material is dangerous, a threat to the familiar order of social values and beliefs.<sup>31</sup>

Caitlin De Silvey's work considers the possibilities inherent within the process of dematerialisation. Her point of departure is a suspension of contradiction, in which two opposing ideas are concurrently held, 'an inverted perception that resists the urge to settle the identity of the things we encounter'.<sup>32</sup> She points to an oscillating idea which straddles two points of reference, the eco-fact and the artefact. De Silvey asks if the process of decay, of ruin, is in fact a site of recovery, a space where if, instead of artificially preserving cultural items, maintaining the distinctions between elements in perpetuity, these elements are allowed to continue their natural processes of decay and contamination, to become 'generative of a different kind of knowledge'.<sup>33</sup> The ruin, the site of unordered classification, the process whereby the elements which have formed the foundation of its meaning begin to be affected by their compound elements, is where Douglas acknowledges danger and transgression and De Silvey sees opportunity.

To return to the painting, then, on a metaphorical level the tinkers among ruins are presented as an amalgamation, in subject and composition, in colour and in form. And to take De Silvey's position of optimism, of the generative and degenerative contradiction as a site of production, we must also consider the material form—the oil paint, the canvas, the wood, the natural compounds which are infused to create pigment, this multitude of distinctive elements which combine to produce the material of the image. The elements of this object, this painting are in a process of decay, of ruin—a process of becoming something else, which for the moment is held in perpetuity. It points also towards the space which preserves the painting, the environment



which the painting is situated, the temperature control, the security, the technology of preservation, the mechanics of the collection, the other works in this the 'municipal' collection, as well as the role of the curators, the museum, the building, the funding, the entire 'network', the 'hybrid' of natural, cultural, physical and structural elements which prop up this abstraction of the world. In a material sense the ruin extends from the image to the material to the entire network of cultural activity of which the painting is only one small element. Reid's *Tinkers among Ruins* might offer a device for discussing the complexities of cultural heritage. If the ruin is the process of becoming other, exactly which ruins are being presented, and how and where does the 'Tinker' inhabit this network of the cultural imaginary?



*Crossing the Bog*  
Henry Valter (act. 1854–98)  
Watercolour on paper  
22.8 x 35.5 cm. Reg. 1565

The etymology of the word Traveller comes from the verb 'to travel', to journey, walk or travail, a word which is interchangeable with the idea of toil, or labour, as an 'obstacle' or 'impediment', as well as a sense of 'span'. The constituent of travail or *trave* in Italian describes 'a beam, a shackle, or a frame into which farriers put unruly horses', from the Latin *trabs*, a beam, with its diminutive, *trabaculum*, a word which relates to medieval Latin *trepalium*, a kind of rack for torturing martyrs.<sup>34</sup> Fundamentally the beam, the object which may or may not carry martyrs, is an object which spans two or more positions, the most common use being a roof beam stretching from one wall to the other, from one fixed position to another. As an action, it is

the practice of moving between fixities, a process of journeying between two fixed points. If travelling is the thing or the action which spans fixed points then the Traveller is in a constant state of in-betweenness.

Henry Valter is known as a painter of streetscapes, seascapes and landscapes. He has developed the theme of travelling or crossing as a site of perpetual becoming. His seascapes depict the very real relationship between industrial capitalism and the natural world as the infrastructure which facilitates commodity exchange. His landscapes depict crossings of commons and bogs, again pointing towards an interaction between human and nature, the cultural and the natural. Valter's image does not show us the starting point nor the destination, but describes the in-between as a much more consistent element of the process. It is not clear where the image is set or the ethnicity of the Travellers depicted but it is clear that they are captured in the process of Travelling, moving between one place and another.

In accounts from the National Folklore Collection Schools' Collection in University College Dublin, we can gather that Travelling people played an important role in what was a rural and agricultural economy, from basket making, weaving, tailoring and metallurgy, servicing rural communities by either making, repairing, or otherwise trading in everyday domestic and agricultural objects such as 'tin-cans, porringers, scoops, boilers, artificial-flowers and mats'. Travellers also provided an essential role of communication: they 'brought news from other districts', telling of births, deaths, and marriages, collecting and disseminating

accounts of daily happenings, political developments, folklore, music and song.<sup>35</sup> As such, travelling occupations were defined by their necessity to travel, to carry goods or provide services from one area to the next, and necessitated the desire to travel, the traditional, cultural and familial activity of maintaining bonds with kin in disparate regions of the country.

Paul Delaney looks at the idea of Traveller identity as constructed not necessarily in relation to actual movement, but in relation to the practices of nomadism. 'Although many of these practices have died out as a result of the mechanisation of the land and the introduction of plastic, the Traveller economy still stresses the value of self-reliance and incorporates a choice of occupations that call for some measure of mobility (including scrap-recycling, tarmacking, dealing and hawking). All of which is to say that nomadism—for all its ambiguities and ironies—remains vital to the structural identity of Traveller society'.<sup>36</sup>

The 2002 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act made it an offence to enter and occupy land, or bring on to it any object that is likely to have one of five specified detrimental effects on the land or amenity. As such it is not an offence to Travel, but it is an offence to stop Travelling anywhere which is not either a private commercial caravan park or a serviced site provided by local council. The former are privately policed by commercial interest, while the latter has proven largely inadequate in providing or maintaining sites which meet the cultural specifics of Travelling people.

Travellers make up 0.7% of the total population of Ireland yet make up 9% of the current homeless population. The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) website details how in 2013 11% of the Travelling population were officially homeless, while Pavee Point in 2018 estimates that 18.6% of Travellers are currently homeless. Funding for Traveller accommodation, which is provided centrally from the Department of Housing and the Environment directly to local authorities in an attempt to avoid any local conflicts of interest, has dropped from €70 million in 2000 to under €3 million in 2014. Despite statutory obligations on local authorities to meet current and projected accommodation needs of Travellers, the Irish Traveller Movement in its current Accommodation Report published on the ITM website, 'Pavee Point (Traveller Accommodation Report 2018)',<sup>37</sup> and numerous local Traveller representation bodies have repeatedly reported that funding is being returned to central government unspent by local authorities. It was reported in the Irish Times in January 2018 that, although the overall budget for Traveller-specific accommodation had increased to €9 million in 2017, of this only €4.8 million was drawn down from the 31 local councils.<sup>38</sup> As recently as May 2017 the Travellers of North Cork organisation (TNC) launched an Accommodation Rights Charter which calls for transparency and accountability in local authority spending: 'National Government should publish how much of the Traveller budget councils are using and should be accountable for spending it right'.

Valter depicts the landscape as a site of transience and the people who appear within these landscapes are themselves constituted in relation to the shifting elements of their environment. The harsh realities of a hostile natural world are negotiated by the mechanics of human industry. Valter's subjects do not come to rest but, in tandem with their environment, continue in a process of perpetual becoming.



*The Demi-Gods*, c.1927  
Harry Clarke (1889–1931)  
Watercolour on paper  
44.5 x 32 cm. Reg. 1962

Harry Clarke is recognised as Ireland's foremost stained glass artist. This watercolour is a preparatory sketch for one of Clarke's last and most accomplished works, *The Geneva Window*, which was completed in 1929. Originally commissioned by the Irish Government to represent Ireland at the International Labour Organisation building in Geneva, the eight-panel window depicts scenes from Irish literature inspired by fifteen of Ireland's finest writers. One of the scenes is taken from James Stephens' 1914 novel *The Demi-Gods*.

The panel depicts the scene where the fictitious Traveller man Patsy McCann and his daughter Mary are eating a camp supper beside the glowing brazier of a 'little bucket of fire' when they are amazed to see three angels 'gorgeously apparelled in silken robes of scarlet and gold and purple; upon their heads were crowns high in form and curious of intricate workmanship, and their wings...of many shining colours'.<sup>39</sup> An alliance between the 'tinker' and the angels is created by Stephens. When dropped to earth, these three angels experience the world from the tinkers' perspective—travelling with Patsy and Mary for

a number of weeks, eating when they eat, sleeping when they sleep and essentially experiencing the world through the lens of this marginalised pair. Without 'property or prejudice', Patsy McCann is not bound to any moral or ethical values, instead roaming freely on the fringes of a society orientated towards material rather than spiritual fulfilment.

José Lanters euphemistically describes 'The tramps and Tinkers that wander in large numbers through the plays of the Revival period'.<sup>40</sup> Her extensive study of the tropes and symbolic appropriations of the 'tinker' within late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish theatre and literature points to the construction of the 'tinker' identity in relation to broader national and post-colonial narratives. Douglas Hyde's *An tincéar agus an tsidheóg* (*The Tinker and the Fairy*) is one such play which introduces the idea of the 'tinker' within the sovereignty myth of the nation. Freed from the materialistic or political burdens which were attached to the commercial or political classes, the Tinker was represented as the true inheritor of the governance of Ireland. A provenance on the basis that the Tinker exists as a trope without inheritance, without any possible material inheritance, this prophecy might never be fulfilled. Consequently it was Hyde himself who became President of the Irish Free State between 1938 and 1945.

On 26 September 1930 the then President W.T. Cosgrave wrote a letter in which he expressed his opinion that another scene in Clarke's panel, one based on Liam O'Flaherty's novel *Mr Gilhooley*, would need to be replaced. The scene depicted a scantily clad female dancer. Clarke himself died, on 6 January 1931 in Switzerland as the result of tuberculosis. However, 'The window was erected in Government

Buildings in Merrion Street [to be] sniffed over, but a decision was never reached'.<sup>41</sup> After his death in 1931, the window was loaned to the Dublin Municipal Gallery of Modern Art but was removed by Clarke's two sons when they found it had been relegated to storage there. In 1988 it was exhibited and sold by the Fine Art Society in London, when it was acquired for a sum 'in excess of £100,000' by the Wolfsonian Foundation in Miami, Florida, where it is now displayed'.<sup>42</sup>

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- 38 'The overall budget for building and upgrading Traveller-specific accommodation was increased to €9 million last year by the Department of Housing, but the 31 local councils drew down only €4.8 million of the available money last year', Jack Power, *The Irish Times* (Monday 29 January 2018)
- 39 James Stephens, *The Demi-Gods* (London: Macmillan, 1914)
- 40 Lanfers, 2008, p. 47
- 41 Nicola Gordon Bowe, 'Harry Clarke's Geneva Window', *Irish Arts Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2013)
- 42 *ibid.*





*What is your first memory of paper flowers?*

**Missy** My first memory of the flowers would be, I had an aunt, I had loads of aunts but one in particular, she's still alive, she's over eighty now. I remember she said to me, I'm going to make flowers now tonight Missy, for tomorrow, so that would be the flowers made in the evening for the next day to go along to the houses or shops or whatever selling.

We make flowers here with the wires from the shop but she didn't have them at the time, so there would be a farmer's gate or, maybe, a bit turned on one side of a hedge, the knitted wire we used to call it, so she says to me, we used to get water from this house, he knows, she says, so we'd go up and we'd get a bit of this wire, sure he used to say go on take a bit. So we would bring it back and I'd open the wire for her and try to leave it as straight as I could. And then she'd start to make the flowers.

Sometimes it would be by the light of a candle or an oil hanging lamp in a shelter tent. It would be generally coming up before the Christmas, making plenty of flowers, you would have the coloured paper and you'd make them in bunches, and you'd have a basket and that basket with the handle would be full with the flowers, red and white would be for the Sacred Heart, blue and white would be the Lady, so there would be a big big bundle of flowers and you would be just praying that there would be no rain, 'cause if the rain got at them the flowers would all die down. So that's what I remember and then you'd go to the houses, but she would make them lovely.

And the thing today, as well with the paper that we are making the flowers with, it's not as good as the paper years ago, the crimp paper, because when you got the crimp paper years ago and all the colours, when you would be putting your thumb out for to make a rose, well it stretched more, so you would be getting better value, cause pennies were short them times, very short them times, and you would sell them for a penny or twopence or whatever.

So that was when I was about eight years old, and it was nearly always with this aunt in particular. So I've seen loads making them from an early age and there would be some women that would make them out of elder bushes, different sort of flowers, peeling them down out of the elder bushes,

and they'd dye them. Some of the paper flowers they would dip in candle grease as well which keep them lasting longer, so happy memories, and always coming up around this time, and that time as well the paper decorations was made out of the same sort of paper.

So I'll let Molly say a couple of words now.

**Molly** Well my memory of the flowers was that they were a Traveller girl's livelihood. It was the only way you had for making a living out of, if you wanted to get a skirt or a jumper or something you'd make the flowers in particular colours, 'cause there was no such a thing as the rose bushes in Ireland in them times, there was only one time of the year that there would be roses in the houses, now they have them winter and summer. I have rose bushes at home and there's still roses in them. So there was a scarcity of flowers as well.

In nearly every house there was the altar with the Sacred Heart in it, and in particular the women needed the flowers for the Sacred Heart, and they would make vases out of little jam jars, cause there was no fancy vases in the houses in them times either.

So we would save up and get maybe five rolls of paper for a half a crown, and a half a crown was big money, its only two fifty cents now, and there was a ten shilling note and when you get a ten shilling note you were made up. So you would save up, there was always two girls, two buddies together, making those flowers and saving up. The roses was the most particular flower, and like Missy said the blue and the white and the red was very popular. I learned them from an old aunt that I had, they were from down the country, and she used to make displays. She'd get a long wire, she'd knit it in together and she'd put other wires out of it, this would be like a branch, and she'd call it a splay [display] and they were very popular, you could get a shilling for them, where you would get the penny and the two pence or the three pence if you got the right woman would give ya for the ordinary flowers.

We recycled everything, as well as the flowers, we got the porter bottles, you'd come on to where there would be just maybe a man in a cottage, and he would get his few drinks maybe each week, there mightn't be many, but in the year they would pile up an awful lot of bottles around the house. So if you went with the flowers to him, and he'd buy the flowers, which he would buy them too, and he would give you the bottles in the place of money.

If you're going to Mullingar there's a village there called Clonard and there was a very decent respectable man in a bar there, he'd always give ya four pence for the porter bottle, and we'd gather the bottles for Clonard. So when we got this we'd have the makings of the skirt, costs one and eleven a yard, so get the yard and a half to make the skirt. We made our own clothes, and we got twelve and six for a pair of wellingtons, so we were clothed and we were shod for the winter out of the flowers.

And then we saved up as well. I remember me-self selling the flowers and ah, the first time that Woolworths came to Ireland, there was one in Mullingar, and me and another cousin, her husband was me husband's uncle, and we were selling the flowers in the town of Mullingar, that was a great town as well, but if the guards ever came across you, you were arrested, but when you would be selling something, you would be safe when you would be selling the flowers.

I remember me-self buying the first basket in Woolworths, and a gross of clothes pegs, so the gross of clothes pegs was only a half a crown, that was twelve dozen of clothes pegs for the half a crown. Then we went from better to worse, you would get maybe a pound, two pound, or three pound when you'd have them sold, and all them kind of things. And when you think on the ways children is reared today and girls coming up teenagers, they don't even believe the stories that you tell them about the ways that we had to live. And my father, we would have to hide the price of the flowers on him, maybe make a purse out of a little child's stocking, put a little running string on the top and put it in here, keep it in here hid, 'cause he'd take it off you and he'd get the pony shod out of it. [Laughs]

**Missy** Also I remember making the flowers me-self and selling them me-self, when I came on a bit, and going out in the country, we used to call it, and me brother would be with me and that, and I'd say to him, don't crush me flowers, because nearly every house you'd go into that time, there was the Sacred Heart altar, and for sure you were going to get the penny. And the penny was the big penny with the hen on it, and when you'd have a few of these pennies you'd think you were made up like, and as Molly said you'd save them up and the other thing we used to sell as well would be canfer [camphor] balls, little white canfer balls. And there was a lovely smell out of them, and that was to keep the moths away from the clothes, so you'd sell them. You'd

get the canfer in a chemist or a hardware shop, but I had two grandfathers and there was one in particular, he used to send up here to Dublin, and he'd get, they'd call it swag. Swag would be butter dishes, mugs, scissors and all, but he'd get it addressed to the station and it would be that height, a big box. And he'd open it up and he'd have a big square basket, and he'd go the farmer's house, I usen't be with him but I seen it done, he'd put the basket on top of the table, and the people that would know him would say, 'what have ya got for us today John?' and John would show them what he would have. There could be a glass butter dish, a glass sugar bowl, it wouldn't be cut glass but it would be nice, and there would be the mug with the blue band on it. There's some of them in the museum, we were there the other day ourselves.

So me grandfather passed away and granny would still go to these houses and the dresser would be there and she would get very lonely 'cause she'd look and she'd see this stuff on it, if you know what I mean, so it was always kind of trading, you know.

And maybe sometimes you would trade in a couple of flowers if you were short for butter or whatever, and they'd say 'go on', and I remember one day a woman had traded with me, when I'd given her three or four flowers. She hadn't enough money with her, 'I need to give you another penny' and she'd go to me, she said, 'If you like, if you don't' in other words she was telling me she wasn't forcing me, so I swapped with her and from that then, me brother used to say 'will we go to, if you like, if you don't'. That was the way things used to happen, there was great memories.

**Molly** There was so much value set from the flower paper and then the flowers, because there was another old lady, and she used to make flowers and only make about three dozen of the flowers and she'd go up the town and she'd sell them but you'd think that those were flowers that grew because she'd put them into resin. She'd melt resin, and put them into it and they'd come up real stiff, like a natural rose. It would be like a wax, and then there was different names put on the flowers. My mother used to say 'I'll make a few quick daisies', when she would be in a hurry so she would get the paper and cut it and she wouldn't fold them down or knit them or anything like that, so she'd make the quick daisies, but no matter what kind of a flower you made, you sold 'em. I remember one girl, we were all pals and we were friends and she might get something better than what I would get out of

the price of the flowers, or I might get the cheaper thing, or I might get the better thing, this kind of way. What happened, I remember her buying a black roll of flower paper. I never saw it since or before, and I said to her I said 'ohh, you're not going to sell that 'cause no one will buy a black flower' like that, and this was outside a village called Killucan in County Westmeath, so she went off with the flowers and they were the very first, from the bunch of flowers she had to sell, the black ones was picked, I couldn't believe it. Then there was brown flower paper, that would make a brown rose, and as Missy said there, something about putting a name on a house, there was one girl, and she was aged, when we would be only children maybe twelve or fourteen years of age, this girl could be in her twenties, and a girl in her twenties would be called old, so it's the same way you get with the Travellers, if you're twenty you're old. [Laughs] But she got the blue roses and she put them in the altar in the church, and Sunday morning came on, and the priest says, well, she nearly died, the priest said 'who put the artificial flowers on the altar?' and he says, 'who ever seen blue roses?'. So after that she was telling us, and she was very good to us, and she says, 'ooh, I was put so much embarrassed' so we used to call her Blue Roses after that. We'd say 'we'll go around to Blue Roses today, we'll go into Blue Rose's'.

You'd give away the flowers, there was cottages with old women in them, they were very popular all together, because you won't see the altar in the houses today, or Sacred Heart picture, but when all the old people died the younger people puts them out the door, and without a Sacred Heart in your house it's not a home. It was always put on display, when you'd go in the door, the Sacred Heart always took your eye, and no Traveller, even if they have houses or caravans or anything, doesn't be without the Sacred Heart.

There was places, in particular towns, there was a shop in Kells called Connolly Brothers with all nationality of delph in it, and we used to go there and we would get the cheap delph, lovely mugs and everything and it might be only a shilling. There was another one in a town called Granard in the County Longford, and we had our own particular places to go and to pick up bargains, out of the price of those flowers... but the flower paper always came before Christmas because that was the best time when they would want them for the altar and there might be a nice bunch of them as well on the table, as I said earlier there was no flowers in the winter in Ireland.

*Would Traveller women exchange flowers between themselves, or were they just for selling?*

**Molly** hey would, as Missy said there earlier on, me uncle's wife, these would have to be made with the light of a candle because you would be busy all day and days would be short in the winter time, and it would get dark early and you would have no light, you were in the dark, lonely road, twisty windy roads and you would be making them with the light of the candle or the light of the, we used to call it the starling lamp. Farmers had those lamps as well for going down the fields for a cow in calf or anything like that. But in the dark, or by the light she'd be making them and we'd be stemming them with the paper in the bottom of them, and we learned for there as well.

**Missy** It's a kind of sad today 'cause children doesn't see, I suppose, it's with all the silk flowers that's out and everything else. I like flowers now, me daughter does be giving out to me over them, and I have them stuck in places, but here when we were making the flowers, I brought home a bit of the paper, and I was sitting in the house one Saturday, and me own little grand daughter came in, and here I was trying to make 'em and she says 'what are ya doing, ould mammy?' Says I, 'I'm making a flower'. Well, when I looked around me there was about six little girls. 'Will ya make me one, Missy, will ya make me one?' and they were fascinated, and each one went on with a couple of flowers in their hands, and says, 'how can you do that?' I says, 'look at me now' and I says to me grand daughter Ciara, she's an oul' woman, and I says to her, 'when I'm dead and gone you'll be able to do that now'.

In a way it does be sad, it's like our own language and like every tradition we have, and I suppose when the older people goes like Molly and me-self and others, well there's not many 'cause we only have about eight over eighty, it's going to be very sad, they don't see, the right camp, we used to call it, the shelter tent, it used to be bigger than the ordinary tent. It would be a shelter made over a fire, but by God it would support you in the winter. You would have the fire in the middle, with a hole in the middle and the black smoke would go on up, and when you'd have one of them for Christmas and maybe a piece of holly stuck up in the corner of one, the goat maybe in another corner, the dog in another corner, [laughs] and then you'd get the red candle for Christmas. My mother, the Lord have mercy on her, used to always get one, and we used to love it.



**Molly** We recycled everything when they'd bargain with the flowers as well, so I mentioned the men, in the spring time of the year, they would cut the tails off the plough horses. One young woman asked me, 'ah sure, ya wouldn't eat the horse hair?' She thought we were gathering the horse hair to eat it, so the horse hair was gathered and there was feathers gathered when the O Dearest mattress came in, and you'd get them maybe for a bunch of flowers. The thick of feathers that was worth money and horse hair was sold by the pound because there was a fellow here in Dublin that used to buy them, for the horse's collar for stuffing. They used to make polishing brushes and scrubbing brushes and make every kind of clothes brushes out of them.

**Missy** The number one feathers would be geese feathers, ya get the thickest of them. I remember me father, mind you going back now, and we went out to Roscommon, Connard we used to call it, and he and a brother in law of his, and they'd gather the feathers and they would be number one. Duck feathers or hen feathers were no good.

The horse hair, there was a man in Athlone called Campbell, and he would come out in a little van, and he'd get out his ouncel, for weighing, and he'd weigh the feathers, he'd weigh the horse hair and he'd buy it off 'em then. But these are not there any more.

**Missy** I have one, a blue one that I made me-self, stuck in in the Lady at home, that's about all that I have, but I have a cousin and she was over with me not long ago, she's gifted with her hands, for beady pockets, and she told me she can make the bouquets for girls getting married, of silk flowers, any sort of flowers, she's just gifted.

**Molly** England is a great place to sell paper flowers, but we would make them out of toilet roll, the real colourful, dearer soft toilet roll, so we'd break the squares off and we'd put them on top of each other, we'd have about three to four, and we'd put them like a fan, and pull them up each side, and they are made like coronations, and then you got branches off of prebby bushes, from outside of the houses. They love them with the bit of green leaf, up over the flower, and you'd get a shilling and two shillings in England for them.

**Missy** Also the gypsy women in England now, they'd be all

into flowers, 'cause I lived in England and I used to see them going around selling the flowers, so they were kept going there as well.

**Molly** The flowers is a generational thing through Travellers. I remember two sisters and they were Gavins and they had always a basket, and always flowers and lace, there was rolls of nice lace for women. For women would wear petticoats, and made their own clothes. Settled women made petticoats, and there would be the lace in the bottom of them, and they'd have rolls of lace and they were fortune tellers, as well as selling the lace and the flowers, and they sold nothing else only the lace and the flowers, and they were two sisters, when I think back at the way they used to be in the basket with the lace and the lovely flowers. It's a handed down thing from generation to generation for Travellers. The flower making, and the value and the profit, when there was no work. Travellers never got any work, except at certain times of the year, at certain times you could pull the beet, you could pick the potatoes, you could foot the turf at certain times of the year, and you could till out the land with the farmers. The weeds grew and all kind of things, where everything was perfect. There's no weeds in the land any more what ever they're throwing on it, and yer eating that in the food, so that's why there's so much cancer out there, because the way the land is. There's potatoes, you'd see the men coming home from the market or from the fair with the bundle of green plants from the cabbage on the back of the bike. They were sown with the cow dung, and the potatoes were sown with the cow dung. I go out a lot around the country and I see this big big wide thing on the road and this dirty smelly water running out of it. Well, they're spraying that on the land, and without that being stopped the people are dying like sheep and they're suffering with pain and cancer and everything and all for what you're eating.

**Missy** Just to get back to the flowers again, I've seen them, and not only one aunt, but I've seen 'em made, and she put a wire in the shape of a heart and she'd make all little flowers going around it. They were skilled at it, it was a kind of a gift, in a way, that they could do all them flowers and whatever, and then they could make their own decorations or whatever, but again what was very popular with the Travellers at the time, and still I love it, a big bunch of holly. That was free, 'cause you'd be near a wood or get it in a hedge and you

could take it. I told that on the Joe Duffy Show one time. But you know at this time of the year, I love a bit of red holly, berry holly coming into the house. I wouldn't be into a whole lot of decorations but I like the bit of red holly, so it was all that sort of stuff like.

*What did ye think of the flowers in the Gallery?*

Missy Lovely, the way they were laid out absolutely lovely,

Molly I think you learned us something with that, because we always kept the flowers in a bundle, and there would be the odd one scattered around but when we went into that display, that place, and seen the way they were fixed around the ould-fashioned fire place, seen them up along, and the colour of them, it stood out and it made the place so cosy looking.

Missy I think me-self when I seen that idea, if you did put down your mind to it, you could decorate with that. Say, like, if you didn't have a big hotel, but you had a hall or something like that and you made those changes of all those colours of flowers going around it, wouldn't it be a lovely thing, now.

Molly The flowers is alive, it brings life into ya, and the colours, when you're down and out the colours will lift you up, and when I went into that, I said 'for God's sake, we'd never think of doing that around the house with the flowers'. And I learned how much the flowers, the paper flowers can do when you put your mind to it.

If you don't see it too often, I remember a Mr Shally, he used to be over the Travellers' football and he had one of these copper buckets, and I went around to Mrs Shally's door one day and she had the copper bucket shining in the hallway, and she had a bunch of paper flowers down in it, and I said 'my God, we'd never think of doing that', and the bucket stood out, and so did the flowers that was in in it.

Absolutely, and we used to get great craic with young boys and with young girls in houses that you'd go to with the flowers. You'd tell fortunes, and you never told a fortune, but you'd say ya did, maybe for six pence or a shilling, and you'd be telling more lies than the truth and you'd be just saying, what's your name? Maybe John, so I'd say to the girl then when it would be kind of forgot. 'I'll tell you yer fortune and I'll tell ya one thing there's the letter J for your boyfriend',

because I was after getting his name. So that kind of craic anyway.

The main thing about the flowers is that, it was our way of living and our way of earning a few pence, we didn't look for very much in them times, the greed has set in now in the people, but there was no greed them times. You settled for what you had, and the ould women in the houses, the young and old they loved 'em. They loved the paper flowers and then the plastic ones came in, and the winter rose bushes as I call them, not the same.

Missy I suppose why we think so much about them, that they bring back so much happy memories, 'cause we always say now, 'the children doesn't see what we seen', they have no fields to run out, and they have no green roads the same as what we got. My family was born in England, all but one, and they came back here and they didn't experience what we did, they haven't seen the horses, they haven't seen all the traditional ways that we had. The women baking the bread outside around the campfire, coming home and putting on the metal oven, and then the skilliten pot, stand boiling the spuds and cabbage, the water being drawn from the wells. You'd always try and stay at a camp where there's fresh water, clean water we'd call it, you would never use a river water, only to wash clothes. The spring water, the boys would have to draw the water, there'd be two cans of water, two buckets of water, so it's all them sorts of things that we seen. Where we're living now there's fifty houses plus there must be fifty trailers as well, or forty anyway at least, yes, they are getting the bit of schooling fair enough, but they're missing out, and we're not the only ones that's confined to the one place as well. There's a lot of the ould ways that you would not be able to carry, 'cause you're not allowed to travel any more.









### Screening of video and audio pieces during exhibition

Audio slideshow, 2 min 45 sec

*Irish Circus Handbills: A visual history* by Micheal Ó hAodha and Tom McCarthy, 2013

Voiceover from interview with Micheal Ó hAodha

*Beady Pockets*, 5 min 30 sec

Written by Rosaleen McDonagh and read by Ronnie Fay, 2016

*Personal Beliefs and Rituals*, 8 min 20 sec

Kitty McAleer & John Connors

Excerpt from 'A Bird in the House, God Bless her' created by Michael Fortune in collaboration with the Southside Traveller Action Group, 2017/18

*False Lankum*, 3 min 28 sec

Sung by John Reilly, recorded by Tom Munnelly, from the National Folklore Collection, 1971

*Would you like to Suni at our Vardo?*, 15 min 40 sec

Created by Karen Harkin and Cliona O'Carroll, Folklore Department, University College Cork with the Cork Traveller Women's Network, 2009

*Oh Had I the Wings of a Swallow*, 6 min 10 sec

Written by Rosaleen McDonagh and read by Kathleen Lawrence, 2018

*The North Strand* (excerpt) 2 min 7 sec

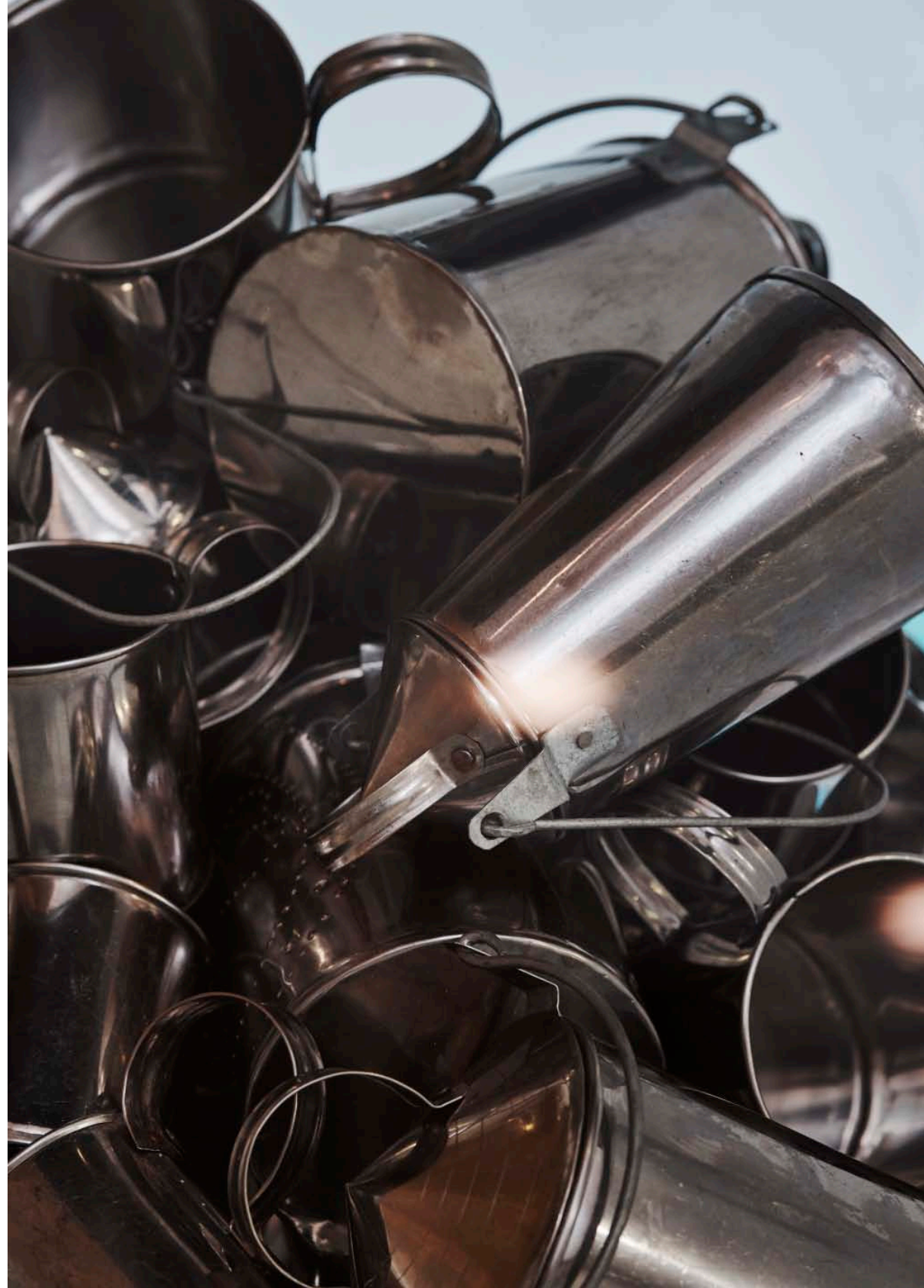
Sung by Jim Cassidy, recorded by Tom Munnelly, from the National Folklore Collection, 1971

Photographs by Derek Speirs, 4 min

Excerpts from *30 Years of Pavee Point* publication, written and edited by Ronnie Fay and Caoimhe McCabe, 2015

*My Darling Brown Haired Boy*, 2 min 20 sec

Sung by Ann O'Donnell, recorded by Tom Munnelly, from the National Folklore Collection, 1972



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Launch of Traveller Collection  
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