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U N I V E R S I T Y O F S O U T H A M P T O N

TRAVELLING PEOPLE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the First Half of the Twentieth Century

By

R. D. Sexton

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For

Valerie and Alyssa

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

HISTORY

Doctor of Philosophy

TRAVELLING PEOPLE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

by Robert Douglas Sexton

Families of travellers have all long been widely referred to as 'gypsies' by the settled population; this history sets out to test the validity of the popular conception. The groups studied are gypsies, showmen (of the circus and fairground) and canal boatmen. The origins of all three are examined but particular emphasis is placed upon cultural practices and values, aspects previously unrecorded for showmen and canal boatmen. Oral history has been employed where appropriate; hence this work's concentration upon the years c1900 - 1950.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

A work of this kind requires acknowledgment to be made of the various contributions of many people, first among whom is my supervisor, Dr. John Rule of the University of Southampton, patient friend and mentor throughout its production. Dr. Paul Thompson of Oxford gave valuable advice on the oral history aspects of this thesis.

A particular debt is owed to the President and Secretary of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain who permitted me access to records previously confidential to it's membership. Material was also readily made available by the Curator of the British Waterways Museum at Stoke Bruerne, Northants and by the Archivists/Librarians of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Transport and General Workers Union and the Local Studies Dept. of the City of Birmingham Libraries. Further information was forthcoming from the Secretary of the Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain.

The willingness of individual showmen and boatmen - and their families - to tell their stories was, of course, central to the completion of my research. Too numerous to mention here by name, this in no way detracts from my sense of obligation to them : a full list of interviewees is, however, given in Appendix 1 (pp. 375-377). Additional oral material was made available by Arthur Wood from the B.B.C. Radio Stoke series of programmes entitled 'On the Cut'.

Finally, my thanks are due to my wife for typing the manuscript.

R. D. Sexton
September, 1988

G L O S S A R Y

of terms used in the text

G - Gypsy
S - Showmen
B - Canal Boatmen

Back-end Run (S) - Sequence of, often major, fairs in September/ October at end of annual round.

Barker (S) - Showman who gives speech outside booth (see below) or circus to attract custom.

Bender (G) - Tent, the framework made by bending saplings to shape.

Booth (S) - Structure at fair in which performances (human or animal) are given or in which static exhibition is housed.

Butty (B) - Trailing boat of pair, incorporating domestic cabin.

Chap (S) - Employee, often casual, of showmen (see also 'gaff lad' below).

Chavvy (G/S) - Child.

Chop (G) - To deal, trade or exchange.

Cut (B) - The canal itself.

Fat Show (S) - Freak show, from the inevitable 'fat lady'.

Fire Bucket (G/S) - Home-made brazier (i.e. from oil drum or rectangular tank) on which to place pot for laundry or food preparation purposes.

Flattie (G/S) - Member of the sedentary population; term used by showmen throughout U.K. and by gypsies in Scotland.

Gaff Lad (S) - Youthful, usually casual, employee (term mainly confined to north of England).

Gallopers (S) - Roundabout with decorative model horses on which public may ride.

Gorgio (G) - Member of the sedentary population (but see 'Flattie' above).

Hufflers (B) - Person offering services to boatmen e.g. to prepare locks (see below) for them.

Joey Boating (B) - Short distance work where cargoes could be delivered within one working day (prevalent in the Birmingham area).

Kittle Box (G/S) - Food storage cupboard slung below chassis at rear of vardo (see below).

Kushti (G/S) - Comfortable, easy, secure.

Landsman (B) - Member of the sedentary population.

Legging (B) - The practice of working boats through tunnels by laying a plank athwart the bows, a man lying on each end and 'walking' along the tunnel walls; hence 'legger'.

Lessee (S) - Major showman who has responsibility for whole fair site and sub-lets plots to other showmen as his tenants (see also Riding Master below).

Lock (B) - Walled chambers, with gates at either end in which boats are raised or lowered by varying the water level, thus enabling them to pass between adjacent sections of the canal.

Mahogany Van (S) - Heavy living van usually constructed mainly of this wood and originally intended for haulage by steam traction engines.

Mollycroft (S) - Clerestory roof as fitted to vardoes and 'mahoganies' (see above and below).

Mush (G/S) - Man.

Nanti (G/S) - Free of charge.

Number One (B) - Owner boatman working his own craft; self-employed boatman.

Paddles (B) - Sluice gates raised or lowered to adjust water level in a lock (see above).

Parney (G/S) - Water.

Patter (S) - The public address of the barker (see above).

Pikey (S) - Gypsy.

Pound (B) - Length of canal between locks (see above).

Ride (S) - Machine on which members of the public ride, but only those employing a basically circular motion about a central axis.

Riding Master (S) - Major showman, usually owning one or more of above rides. The term is usually synonymous with the role of 'lessee' (see above).

Sandscratcher (S) - Showman operating more-or-less permanent seaside amusements; hence 'sandscratching'.

Say (G/S) - Family history, handed down orally from generation to generation.

Scholar (G/S) - Literate person.

Scrat (G/S) - To feed, cater for.

Side Stuff (S) - Minor piece of equipment usually relegated to the perimeter of the fair site.

Square Show (S) - Booth (see above) in which performances take place; term used to distinguish from circular (i.e. circus) arena.

Stall (S) - Piece of equipment (often minor - see 'side stuff' above) at which public play simple game or purchase refreshment.

Swag (S) - Prizes given at fairground games.

Tapping (S) - Practice of 'short-changing' customers.

Tatting (G/S) - Door-to-door collection of waste materials; 'rag-and-bone' calling.

Tinker (G) - Gypsy of Irish origin; term also used interchangably with 'gypsy' in Scotland.

Tober (S) - Venue of circus, once also fair but rarely so used in twentieth century.

Vardo (G/S) - Horse-drawn living van (the 'traditional gypsy caravan').

Windlass (B) - Large metal key to operate paddles (see above).

Wire Act (S) - Balancing act on wire or rope suspended between two points.

"Our history isn't like your history -
our history is handed down".

Mr. R. Stevens, showman
17th February, 1986.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Origins of Study

The popular assumption is that all families which travel from place to place in some form of mobile home are gypsies. Yet it is generally agreed that gypsies are an "ill-defined people". Many attempts have been made to find a definition which adequately encompasses what is meant by use of the description 'gypsy', none of them successful. Nevertheless, the majority, sedentary population has frequently been sufficiently confident of itself to identify travelling showmen and those canal boat families who lived on board their craft as gypsies. The existence of the tendency to give a common identity to all these groups was given a nice twist when, as recently as 1970, The Times referred to caravan-dwellers as "Bargees on Land". [1]

Certain other groups whose lifestyle included an element of geographical mobility, on the other hand, have rarely been identified as gypsies. Individual nomads such as tramps or itinerant craftsmen are examples, but, at first sight more surprisingly, nor have some groups who did frequently take their families with them on their travels. In this category were the 'navvies' who built the canals and railways and whose modern counterparts can be seen housed in temporary settlements near to motorway construction sites. It seems, therefore, that more or less continuous mobility and the means of support are also factors in the popular conception of gypsydom, all aspects to be returned to later. [2]

The bestowal of a gypsy identity has almost invariably been made without reference to the travellers themselves. This omission and the resentment frequently felt against such popular labelling was impressed upon the writer in the course of researching for a short dissertation upon canal boatmen undertaken in 1977. The danger of the loss of the wealth of information which resided with elderly members of the canal boatmen's community also became clearly apparent.

Among a mainly illiterate people, when the way of life itself has died away, as in the case of the boatmen, or when younger members of the group have become involved with modern educational or media-inspired values and cultures (as instanced by gypsies and showmen), recollections of family history, practices and customs current in even the recent past, upon which the original hypothesis of a gypsy identity for all these traveller groups could be tested, might be lost forever.[3]

It was also hoped that lessons might be learned for the reception of more recently arrived minorities who, firstly, wish to retain a separate identity in the face of the native majority's ethno-centric assumptions or, secondly, suffer from the latter's lack of discernment in identifying the variety existing in the origins, cultures and needs of the minorities.

Review of Literature

i) Gypsies

As, up to the present time, no comparative work on the traveller groups has been attempted, existing literature falls naturally under the three separate headings. Preliminary research revealed that on the gypsies much had already been published. An early study was that by John Hoyland, published in 1816, which set the pattern for many later works by combining historical inquiry with an assessment of the current condition of the gypsies, as it's title revealed; A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies. Studies of gypsies, broadly of this genre, have continued up to the present time, examples in recent years being produced by Thomas Acton, Barbara Adams, Judith Okeley, A. & F. Rehfisch, David Sibley and others (see bibliography). Two recent studies, by D. Mayall and G. K. Behlmer have concentrated upon the period immediately preceding that with which this study is primarily concerned.[4]

Other works produced over the years range from the romanticization of the gypsy, as exemplified by George Borrow in mid-nineteenth century to the ferocious missionary zeal of George Smith,

a few years later, intended to reform the heathen outcast (see Chapter 6, pp.121-123). Throughout the period covered by this thesis, the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (see also Chapter 6) has yielded information of an historical, topical and biographical nature. There are additionally a limited number of books in the latter category, some autobiographical, which though aimed at a popular market and tending towards the 'romantic' image, have nevertheless produced some useful material.

ii) Showmen

There is a complete absence of any significant research or literature for this group of travellers. The few books which have been published have concerned themselves with what might be called the 'public face' of this branch of the entertainment industry, rarely making more than passing reference to the people behind it. An early example was Samuel McKechnies' Popular Entertainment Through the Ages, of 1931. In recent times one or two books on the circus have appeared but these rely heavily on the colourful illustration to which the circus lends itself. Circus - A World History by R. Croft-Cooke and P. Cotes and Here Comes the Circus by Peter Verney are typical examples of the type.

One or two auto-biographies by members of the Sanger and Chipperfield families, both in their day arguably the most famous names in the circus, were useful as, with the decline of the circus, the surviving showmen from that side of the business are now relatively few. Nevertheless, the nature of the showman's calling encourages a bias favouring effect rather than accuracy and the recollections of 'Lord' George Sanger in particular have to be treated with some reserve. Two further books require special mention; the first, R. Croft-Cooke's The Circus Has No Home, an account of the day-to-day life of the circus with which the author travelled in the nineteen-thirties, helped, in certain respects, to overcome the paucity of survivors. Similarly, The Travelling People, by Duncan Dallas, a by-product of a Granada Television programme, describing the modern life of fairground showmen in the Midlands and north of England was used to give reassurance of the absence of regional

variations before research visits to an area of the north by the writer became possible (see below).[5]

iii) Canal Boatmen

A fairly extensive literature exists on the canal system istelf, it's origins, the part it played in the process of industrialization, the cargoes carried and subsequent decline. A series of books dealing regionally with the network and with specific lines of canal have been produced by various authors and published by M/s David and Charles of Newton Abbott, Devon over the last thirty-five years or so. With one notable exception, however, significant studies of boatmen are lacking; a frequent pattern is the inclusion of a single chapter on the subject, considering them as merely an aspect of the overall canal picture rather than as a group deserving of study as a variant of a wider, travelling lifestyle. Examples of this treatment are British Canals by Charles Hadfield and The Inland Waterways of England by L. T. C. Rolt. A few books owe their origin to the surprisingly early discovery of canals as a form of leisure activity. One or two date from the early years of this century when freight was still being carried in some quantity. Though aimed at a popular market and generally written in an anecdotal or narrative style, some observations on passing craft and crews give insights into current attitudes towards them. In this category come E. Temple Thurston's book, The 'Flower of Gloster' and C. J. Aubertin's A Caravan Afloat whose title suggests a confusion with the land-based gypsy. Two further works worthy of mention came late in the canal system's freight carrying era. These were written by people who, for varying reasons, went to work alongside the long-established families of boatmen and then recorded their impressions. Maiden's Trip by Emma Smith covered part of the Second World War period and Tim Wilkinson's Hold on a Minute the years immediately afterwards.[6]

The exception noted above is Harry Hanson's study of The Canal Boatmen, 1760 - 1914. The period covered makes it and the present work broadly complementary as far as boatmen are concerned. His findings on the origin of twentieth century boatmen's families are referred to in Chapter 4 (pp. 68 - 74) and can be compared with later

generations perception of their own past (see Chapter 3, pp. 26-27). The era considered by Hanson of course precludes the use of certain methods of research used here (see below) and his examination of the possibility of a gypsy origin for boatmen's families is based mainly upon surnames (see also Chapter 3). [7]

Sources and Methods

i) Gypsies

The extent of the literature, both primary and secondary, pertaining to gypsies, as itemized in the bibliography (pp.472-483), led to the decision to abandon thoughts of attempting to make contact with and interview members of this group. In view of the considerations of time and cost, the decision was welcomed as releasing resources which could then be directed to a more thorough study of the remaining groups. In many of the studies of gypsies referred to above considerable attention is given to the cultural practices and value systems which distinguish them. Though "over-generalization" must be guarded against when dealing with such a widespread and fragmented group, a sufficient consensus exists among modern researchers upon the subject as to those practices and systems to enable other travellers to be compared to them. The gypsies have also been the subject of a number of officially inspired inquiries both at national and local level. Gypsies have, during the period of this study, consistently been seen as a 'problem' by bureaucratic and administrative forces, unable to accept their refusal to conform to the norms of a sedentary society. The various reports and their findings provide further justification for directing scarce research resources to the other groups, especially as the focussing of attention suggests that at the official level too, itinerant families are immediately thought of as predominantly gypsy - indeed, one such report is entitled Gypsies and Other Travellers. [8]

This study, therefore, makes no claim to originality as far as gypsies are concerned. Nevertheless, this body of travellers remain the control group as it was with them that the showmen and boatmen were popularly identified. The extent of the material relating

to gypsies which has been included is consequently intended to be only that which is necessary for comparative purposes and to assess the validity of the identity assumptions.

ii) Showmen

An approach was made to the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain, the powerful professional organization which claims to represent over 95% of the country's showmen. A high degree of co-operation was forthcoming. The series of Yearbooks it has produced since the turn of the century were made available, up to the end of the nineteen-fifties. These books, hitherto confidential to the organization's membership were made available upon condition that the Guild's rules were not disclosed (but one exception was later agreed to, as explained in Chapter 6, pp. 131 - 134). Quite naturally the Yearbooks, in the form of the Guild President's or Area Secretaries' Reports, concentrated upon topical economic and administrative problems. The showmen's newspaper, World's Fair which has been published weekly for over eighty years also yielded valuable supporting information in these respects.

In order to learn of the family histories, self-perception, cultural practices and value systems of the showmen, interviews were arranged with elderly members of the society, contact with the first two candidates being arranged through the Showmen's Guild. Thereafter, by personal recommendation separate interviews to a total of 27 were conducted, between 3-12-85 and 8-9-86, covering an area south of a line drawn across the country from South Wales to the Wash. The possibility of regional variations was at least partially guarded against when additional funding was obtained, allowing a further seven showmen to be interviewed, all within a twenty-mile radius of Manchester between 21-1-87 and 27-2-87. Although an admittedly small sample over a limited area, no significant variations came to light.

In all cases the application to showmen was made by the writer in person, it being anticipated that letters sent to often illiterate members of a society generally suspicious of outsiders, might well fall upon stony ground. As it was, credibility having

been established by contacts with the respected Guild, showmen declined to co-operate on only two occasions, in both cases due to ill-health. As the program of interviews progressed the writer found that word of him had often preceded his visit and some later interviewees displayed an almost child-like eagerness to co-operate - anxious not to be left out of the fun! A full list of the names, dates and places of interviews with showmen is given in Appendix 1 (pp. 375 - 377). As the information gained by this method is central to this thesis for both the showmen and canal boatmen, the form and content of the meetings is given below in some detail.

iii) Canal Boatmen

A valuable source of information on the canal boatmen is the series of reports by the Canal Inspector appointed under the Canal Boat Act of 1884. These were contained within the Annual Reports of the Local Government Board until 1919 when they were transferred to those of the newly created Ministry of Health. These reports concentrated upon the conditions of the boats while, in the years between the First and Second World Wars, the N.S.P.C.C. became involved with the lot of the canal boat children. Their findings were published in two special reports and, on a more regular basis, in the society's journal, Child's Guardian. Taken together, these two sources gave much detail on the domestic scene on the canals, while the Record, the house journal of the Transport and General Workers Union, to which (or it's predecessors) many boatmen belonged, gave coverage to current economic problems and trends. [9]

The short study of canal boatmen made by the writer at Ruskin College, Oxford has already been mentioned. Use has been made of some material it contained, especially that derived from interviews conducted in 1976 with three elderly boatmen who lived locally. This helped offset the difficulty in making contact with a reasonable number of boatmen who lived within economic travelling distance for interviews, as the survivors have rapidly diminished over recent years. When suitable elderly boatmen were located, application was made in person to them for help. The reasons were as given for the showmen and the meetings themselves were similarly conducted as

explained below. A study of archive material at the British Waterways Museum at Stoke Bruerne, Northants elicited from the Curator information that a series of programmes on canal boatmen had been prepared by B.B.C. Radio Stoke. Cassette copies of the ten half hour programmes entitled On the Cut were obtained and permission for their use secured. Of course, the content of the programmes did not cover all aspects with which this thesis is concerned but valuable information was gained from boatmen living in an area of the country which could not otherwise be reached because of the time and financial limitations; in this instance there is a suggestion that traditions varied somewhat away from the 'narrow canals' (see Chapter 4, pp. 68 - 74) as, for example, on the Leeds and Liverpool route.[10]

The Interviews

Use of oral history methods to gain information on cultural practices and details of day-to-day life was anticipated as a major element from the project's inception. No other method was possible among groups who, until recently, remained largely illiterate. This project was not, however, intended to rely entirely upon oral methods but rather to use them where it was considered appropriate and in conjunction with information on other aspects of travellers' lives more readily or more accurately gained from written sources, where available. Use of orally given material dictated the limit of the period of history which could be studied. Today the minimum age of people with realistic adult recollections of the years immediately prior to the Second World War is about sixty. Making due allowance for the credence which can be given to the most elderly (the oldest interviewee was a lady of ninety-two) and to variations in transmission of what today's (say) sixty-year-olds learnt first-hand from their parents, the early years of the twentieth century are the furthest period to which one can reasonably return by oral history methods.

Considerable reliance was placed upon the methods and principles of Paul Thompson in arranging and conducting the interviews - not least in the emphasis which he places upon the need never to lose sight of the respect due to elderly people who are invaluable

repositories of experience and knowledge. The relative newness of oral history methodology, while producing for the social historian "a new set of heroes", is open to criticism. A possible objection relates to "the problem of the authenticity of retrospective evidence; it was open to charges of unrealistic memories". However, some check against, for example, to roseate recollections of times past may be made by reference to known economic factors at the time affecting the community being studied. Also, generalizations and conclusions should only be drawn from consensus opinion gained from a sufficiently numerous cross-section of the subject group. Hence the concern expressed above to obtain not only the requisite number of sources but also from some variety of regional backgrounds.

Once the person approached had agreed to talk to the writer, unless distance prevented it, the normal course was to arrange a preliminary interview to explain the life history approach and how the information would be used. Two further interviews were frequently needed either to gain all the desired information or to avoid tiring elderly informants. Interviews, other than the preliminary one, were taped for later transcription (with the exception of two with showmen and two with boatmen who considered the machine intrusive). The 'Check List' used by the writer will be found in Appendix 2 (pp. 378 - 379). This was preferred to a formal questionnaire as the latter might tend to limit the information gained; rather the list was seen as a series of 'prompts'. Direct questions were avoided except for details such as date-of-birth, etc. The open-ended approach led to the gathering of anecdotes and subjective opinions on aspects of travellers' lives quite unforeseen initially. Showmen are both very protective towards their old folk and generally, once initial suspicions are overcome, gregarious. Consequently, at these interviews it was not unusual to soon have half a dozen people of various ages in the caravan, all anxious to prompt the interviewee and make their own contribution. Where considered appropriate, such information from younger people has been used and duly accredited. In all cases where digressions were made or vagaries of memory caused the life history to be recalled out of chronological sequence, it was important not to interrupt but

let the story be completed. Only then did the 'Check List' come into play to regain control of the interview and avoid omission of any subject. A consequence of the oral methodology used was that the interview material does not generally lend itself to tabulation, so very little appears in this work.[12]

Aims and Structure

The aim of this thesis, as finalized, is to test to what extent families of travelling showmen and canal boatmen can be legitimately identified as gypsies, by reference to their history, culture and practices during the first half of the twentieth century. To achieve the objective the study is divided into fourteen chapters, including the Introduction and Conclusion. A common format is employed throughout (with the exception of Chapter 6, for reasons there explained) in considering the gypsies, who are the control group, first, followed in turn by showmen and canal boatmen.

Chapter 2 giving estimates of numerical strengths and trends, Chapter 3 concentrating mainly upon subjective factors such as how travellers were seen and regarded by themselves, other travellers and the sedentary majority, and Chapter 4 presenting an outline history up to the end of the nineteenth century, may all be considered of an introductory nature to the main body of the study. Chapter 5, however, continues the theme of Chapter 4 in dealing with the general and economic history of travellers but for the period concentrated upon in this century from 1900 - 1945. This is followed by Chapter 6 which provides a link explaining the contiguous and inter-related legislative and organizational developments as it is only against the contents of Chapters 5 and 6 that many aspects of the work of the travellers becomes explicable in Chapter 7. Not until this stage is it appropriate, in Chapter 8, to deal with travel patterns, the motive power used and the home itself - this last perhaps the principle factor in the identification of the other groups as gypsies - as these items are the result, rather than the cause of the inter-related economic and work considerations.

Chapters 9 to 12 deal with the daily lives of travellers, each one relating to one of the obvious stages of human life in the

progression from cradle to grave. Against the full spectrum of historical, economic, environmental and social considerations dealt with in Chapters 3 to 8, the customs and practices of domestic routine can be set in context. In Chapter 13, a general appraisal of the position at mid-century is coupled with an assessment of prospects and pointers for the future as they appeared at that time and developed during the decade of the nineteen-fifties. All chapters include a brief resumé in which developments, trends, similarities and contrasts between the groups, on the aspects there dealt with, can be stressed. The content of each of the resumés will, in the Conclusion (Chapter 14) be taken into collective consideration to attempt to objectively assess the validity of the original assumption.

CHAPTER TWO

POPULATION ESTIMATES

Gypsies

Early in the nineteenth century it was estimated that there were 18,000 gypsies in Great Britain. Towards the end of the century the reformer George Smith (see Chapter 6, pp. 114- 116) believed the figure stood at about 20,000. By 1910 the 18,000 estimate was reverted to, but as with the first two calculations, the justification for the numbers given remained obscure. [1]

Just over twenty years later, claiming the census of 1931 as the source, the number of gypsies had leapt to 45,000 despite the 'loss' of Irish travellers. After the Second World War the various estimators' figures varied widely. Norman Dodds, the M.P. for Erith, Kent whose constituency had a large gypsy population, thought there were 100,000 nationwide. In 1965 a figure of 15,000 was, at the time, "considered to be an underestimate of true numbers". A decade later, the "best estimate" was of between 8-9,000 families representing some 40,000 people. [2]

In contrast, in Scotland a more consistent attempt has been made since the end of the last century to find the numbers of gypsies there. The estimates were as follows :-

YEAR	ESTIMATE	
1893	1,702	
1917	2,728	
1935	c 2,500	
1956	c 2,000	in 460 families
1961	c 1,000	" 231 "
19-3-1969	1,452	" 303 "
20-8-1969	1,598	" 344 "

The accuracy of all these figures depended, of course, on the thoroughness of the surveys and the skills of those involved.

Apart from the 1961 figure, there was less fluctuation than with some of the examples noted earlier. The 1935 estimate was arrived at by a police survey undertaken on 12th December, 1935; 1,266 gypsies were noted plus "vagrants .... with hawkers licenses" who, with their families, totalled 1,530 men, women and children, so giving the overall "upwards of 2,500" people. [3]

Various difficulties have arisen when making estimates of the gypsy population. In the two surveys made in Scotland in 1969, for example, the time of year would seem to have been a factor, suggesting some families travelled only seasonally, remaining effectively hidden or in houses in winter. The gypsies have probably never been anything but unevenly spread through the whole country depending on such factors as terrain, climate and economic opportunity. For these reasons, by the mid - 1950's it was believed over 43% of the total were to be found in south-east England. Thus individual estimators may have made erroneous guesses based upon local experience. [4]

Since 1978 the Department of the Environment has organized six-monthly 'caravan counts' undertaken by local government Health Officers. In June, 1982 over 9,000 caravans were located in England alone in which lived some 30 - 50,000 people in 7 - 8,000 families, including some 12 - 15,000 children. These caravan dwellers were considered to be "mostly gypsy". The problem has, since the Second World War, therefore, increasingly been to isolate the gypsies from other caravan dwellers, the total of which had increased to 95,000 by 1957 and to 184,000 in 1961. The question of isolating gypsies, however, is not new; whereas the 20,000 estimated early in the century were thought to be "true gypsies", the 1935 figure for Scotland clearly revealed the inclusion of many who were not. [5]

Showmen

In 1908 it was claimed by the Rev. T. Horne, chaplain of the Showmen's Guild, that there were 4,000 showmen's caravans on Britain's roads containing "something like 12,000 souls". Early lists of

membership of the Guild were, for example, 229 members in 1901 with 194 different surnames, indicative of the practice of only the senior male of an extended family being represented. The increase in Guild membership to 510 a decade later is, therefore, no evidence of any overall increase in the numbers of showmen as the percentage of them represented remained small. Taking 1937 as a typically representative year of the pre-Second World War period, the membership total of 2,502 revealed not only increasing Guild strength but a change in registration practice as most young men then joined the Guild when they married. [6]

It was only in the post-Second World War era, with the Showmen's Guild realistically claiming to represent over 95% of all showmen and the practice of all males registering their membership upon obtaining their majority, that Guild figures can be used to make an estimate of total members. The membership for 1947 was 3,703, that for 1957 was 3,955 and for 1967, 4,231, which suggests an overall population figure of perhaps 12 - 15,000. [7]

Assuming Horne's 1908 figure (the only known early estimate) to be correct, some explanation of why the total of showmen remained so little changed over half a century is necessary. The number of fairs held annually in c1900 is not known but in the 1930's 250 were held every week from Easter until October, "including 1,200 chartered fairs". This gives a total not far removed from the estimated 7,000 held in 1970. It is, over a 70 year period, the circus which has suffered a spectacular decline; in 1900 there were around 50 travelling circuses, in 1939 (due to a brief revival in that decade) there were still 30 but by the 1970's the total was down to a mere 6. Even in the 1930's the Sanger family, possibly the greatest name in the circus in this country, was "slowly leaving the business", after five generations as showmen. [8]

Other 'borderline' areas have arisen since 1945; for example a minority of showmen have ceased to travel or to travel regularly but nevertheless remain members of the Guild and consider themselves as 'travellers'. Some have moved into non-mobile amusements (including arcades) while others, particularly elderly people, spend

their summers at seaside funfairs - a practice known as 'sandscratching'. Yet others, with regular seaside bases, travel with part of their equipment to some of the profitable autumn fairs and identify as 'travellers' on the strength of it. [9]

Canal Boatmen

The numbers of canal boatmen as shown by census figures is as follows :-

CENSUS YR.	NO. OF BOATS WITH PEOPLE SLEEPING ABOARD	NO. OF PEOPLE
1901	2,649	6,869
1921	1,760	5,306
1931	1,561	4,484

These figures suggest the rate of decline was quite gradual during the 1901-31 period but as the census' from 1851 to 1871 inclusive consistently indicated c11,000 to 12,500 people living aboard the boats, a quite rapid drop from 1871 to 1901 is evident. In 1930 the N.S.P.C.C. estimated that 500 families were living aboard, a figure given wide acceptance as it was quoted authoritatively by The Times. The number of children of the families was said to be 1,700, so giving a total not far short of the 1931 census figure. A modernization scheme for the Grand Union canal would, it was anticipated, mean the end of "this old and distinctive class .... in five years or so", but, as it was never completed, the number of families living on the boats was in 1936 still "rather more than 400". By the time of the 1951 census, as will be shown in Chapter 13 (see pp. 357-359), commercial carrying on the narrow canals was rapidly dying out and the boatmen, as families of travellers, nearing extinction. At the census they were already so few as to be 'lost' among those sleeping on board ships in port, people who lived on house-boats, etc. - all coming under the heading of 'Civilian Ships, Boats and Barges'. [10]

Particular attention was paid to the children living on canal boats and the estimates of numbers may be used to confirm those of

overall population trends. At the turn of the century 1,370 children were recorded as living on board while in 1910, 27 Local Education Authorities, allowing for the possibility of duplicate counting of a moving group, agreed the total was "something over 1,000". At the end of the First World War there were still 1,063 children on the boats, a figure which, though statistics were admittedly "not accurate or complete", was thought to have increased to 1,112 in 1921 and again to 1,803 by 1928. This seems, however, to have been a post-war peak, as the number then fell away to 1,609 in 1929, 947 in 1932 and 597 in 1936".

While these figures confirm the estimates for the canal boatmen's total population, some reservations must remain; for example, other estimates concerning only the children fluctuated from only a little more than 100 in 1919 (the usual "much exaggerated" assessments being due to duplicate counting), to 1,041 little more than a year later, to no less than 2,613 in 1925. [12]

The boats themselves provide little or no help in reaching firm conclusions. Boats were registered when new, giving details of the numbers of people they were permitted to carry but, for reasons discussed in Chapter 6 (pp. 116-121), how long they continued in service was not recorded, so the number in use at any one time remains uncertain. Nor, of course, were original registration details proof of the numbers actually living on board. An annual licensing system which would have given a better indication was proposed but never implemented. The estimates of the number of boats used as dwellings could vary widely over a few years; at the turn of the century the Canal Inspector gave the total number of commercial craft on all Britain's inland waterways (including isolated 'non-canal' areas such as the Broads) as c10,400. Of this total, he thought about 7,000 were used as dwellings, a figure generally confirmed when a survey was undertaken by various local authorities in 1908. Yet, within two years another estimate gave the number of canal boats used permanently as residences as only 1,000. Other problems included the alteration of boats' cabins without notification or re-registration (see Chapter 6 as above) or from the transfer of boats to short-distance day work,

especially in the Birmingham area. On this work, known as 'Joey boating', cabins of older craft were often removed in order to increase the short-haul load. [13]

At the 1841 census, the returns showed 28,166 people in the "canal business". Actually recorded as being on board canal boats at the time of the census were 23,226 men and 132 women suggesting very few were family worked or the boatmen's only home. The total was still thought to be around 35,000 people in Edwardian times when a majority of two-thirds of boats on the inland, mainly river, navigations of the north of England were worked by crews of men with shore homes. Of the remainder, although there was a hard core who lived permanently on the narrowboats, estimates of numbers must allow for a fluctuating minority who sometimes took shore homes depending on economic conditions. [14]

On the Shropshire Union canal, in 1900, more families were reported living "afloat" due to a slump in business. A survey at Leamington Spa in 1912 found, on the 50 boats checked, that 37 had women aboard which is roughly in line with the "probable" figure of 4 out of 5 boats on the Grand Junction Canal, which runs through the town, being the sole home in 1925 due to trade conditions. Even in the north, where, on the rivers and wider canals, it had always been less common, slump conditions were increasing the practice in the early 1930's. It therefore seems safe to say that while the total numbers employed on canal boats was declining, a relative or proportional increase in those living aboard resulted when trade was bad. [15]

Resume'

As the canal boatmen were the only one of the three groups which could be identified from census returns or whose homes were subjected to inspection, it is somewhat disconcerting to find that "reliable statistics .... (are) .... impossible to obtain", figures being either "non-existant .... (or) .... useless". The best, therefore, which can be done for all groups is to take the consensus of - or, as with the showmen in the early years of this century, only - opinion of those involved with each group. [16]

The estimates, by this means, are as follows :-

	APPROX. DATE	ESTIMATES OF NUMBERS
Gypsies	1900	18 - 20,000
	1950	30 - 45,000
Showmen	1900	c12,000
	1950	12 - 15,000
Canal Boatmen	1900	5 - 8,000
	1950	Virtual extinction during the decade.

The increase or decrease in the intervening years was not, of course, uniform; economic conditions in the nineteen-thirties, for example, saw a decline in the numbers of showmen and boatmen. Conclusions with regard to relative numbers and overall trends can, however, be made with some confidence; there is a marked contrast between the apparent 100% increase in the gypsy population, the near static position of the showmen and the almost complete disappearance of the travelling canal people.

CHAPTER THREE

ASCRIPTION, ATTITUDES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Family Origins

i) Gypsies

Gypsies will always emphasize their 'pure Romany' ancestry to outsiders in order to establish their identity, especially if it is to personal advantage to do so. Such an identity implies descent from the low caste tribes who, it is thought, originated in northern India and began their wanderings in the tenth century (see Chapter 4, pp. 49 - 50). John Hoyland, who published his findings in 1816, was the first to suggest an Indian source, though the word 'gypsy,' being a corruption of Egyptian, indicates a long-held belief in a vaguely oriental background. "Their peculiar notions and customs", he claimed, "leaves no doubt of their being of eastern origin". A major aspect of the theory, now widely accepted, was the gypsies "dialects or secret languages", a discovery presumably made possible by increased political and commercial contact with India during the eighteenth century. Hoyland gave examples of 52 words for everyday things (e.g. numbers, parts of the body, time, etc.) which were derived from "Hindoostanie". [1]

It is likely that some inter-breeding with non-gypsy stock had taken place by the time the first gypsies were noted in this country. Close examination of "the genealogies of celebrated Romany families .... have nearly all shown a scattering of non-Gypsy or gorgio ancestors". A family tree of the respected Herons, compiled early in this century and covering six generations revealed only one or two non-gypsy relationships. That such did occur is shown by a specific instance from around 1800 when Riley Smith of Northamptonshire married "the cook out of a gentleman's family". [2]

Gypsies disliked sea crossings; for this reason the gypsies of Britain, isolated to a degree from those on the mainland of Europe, may have shown a greater tendency to inter-marry with the sedentary population. Add to this the general introduction of passports from

1918 and the further restrictions on travel in parts of Europe since the Second World War and the result has been a dilution of gypsy stock due partly to increased isolation from continental gypsies and, therefore, more contact and inter-marriage with gorgios. In comparison with the modern gypsy, those of a century ago now appear - and are romanticised - as'genuine Romany'. Though it is, of course, better to be able to claim two gypsy parents, most gypsies acknowledge they have "a few gorgio ancestors mixed in". Consequently, since the Second World War, it has increasingly become necessary only to have one gypsy parent and, equally important, to have been brought up in the gypsy way of life to be able to claim the identity.[3]

ii) Showmen

a) Number of Generations

Few showmen can, perhaps, equal the Chipperfield family's claim to "go back centuries" in the business, at least to a fair held on the frozen Thames in London in 1684. The many generations include clowns, acrobats, musicians and animal trainers. Later linked to the Chipperfields by marriage, the Purchase family spanned seven generations of showmen, including a period as menagerie proprietors. The descendants of Thomas Cooke, a Scottish showman of the late eighteenth century, claim to be that country's longest established showman's family. Two descendants of the Fossett family are now the fifth generation of showmen, and the heirs to Paulo's circus, of Irish origin, make a similar claim. Other families of four generations standing are the Bartletts (on the maternal side) and the Coles who, at one time, combined some travelling to fairs with open-cast coal mining in the Forest of Dean.[4]

It is of interest that, with the exception of the last two, the above families all had strong circus links or identities and many of today's fairground showmen had grand-parents who worked in the circus. Maternal grandparents with Hannaford's circus, of the Biddell family and a grandmother who performed a 'wire act' in the Christmas circus at the Agricultural Hall, Islington in Edwardian times are examples. Less commonly, circus people sometimes

acknowledge a fairground parent or grandparent; Freddie Ross (born in 1872 and later 'Count Rosaire') was the son of a fairground operator, while a recent informant, a circus performer, claimed a grandmother from the fair, though in both cases the maternal line was circus, in the latter case of the Yelding family. [5]

Although some fairground families are said to have been "always in the business" or, more vaguely, "for years and years", few could give specific details beyond their grandparents. Recollections of them covered place of origin, some family peculiarity or detail, or, most frequently, the equipment they owned. A sedentary origin in a Gloucestershire farmhouse was an exceptional claim; most grandparents were associated with a location varying from the specific (i.e. Uxbridge, Middx.) to the vague (i.e. "from Ireland"). In the second category a childhood spent with a great-uncle or being "more or less" brought up by a grandfather were remembered while kinship with the Wombwell family (jointly owners of the once famous Bostock and Wombwell menagerie) was twice claimed. The fairground equipment which grandparents were recalled as owning was sometimes a fairly common item of their time such as a set of steam-operated gallopers. More frequently remembered items were those which now seem unusual, such as roundabouts either worked or drawn from place to place by horse power. Others were recalled as possessing a show of lantern slides, or "went round fairs, markets and like that" with their home-made sweets stall while one grandfather, owner of a boxing booth, had made his name as "One-round-Gratton". [6]

It has been claimed that most fairground families have been four or five generations in the business and are descended from itinerant travellers but, in the interviews, unlike those who identify with the circus, few fairground showmen could relate back more than a couple of generations. [7]

b) Flattie Forebears

Two of the most famous names in the English circus were Sanger and Mills. George Sanger claimed, in his autobiography, that he came from "good old Wiltshire stock", where his grandfather was a "well-to-do farmer" near the village of Tisbury. Sanger's father, press-ganged

into the navy, fought under Nelson on the Victory and, after Trafalgar, was invalided out with a pension of £10. per annum which he used to set up a peep-show. Bertram Mills, using the capital from his family's coach building firm, only entered the circus after the First World War, partly because he was determined to produce a better show than was currently to be seen - it is said for a bet - and partly to indulge his love of horses. [8]

The tendency to claim what might be termed 'respectable' backgrounds is not unusual among showmen. "I remember, years ago, my father telling me he had a lot of relations .... doctors, teachers and one went to Australia" according to one informant; another's family were "yeoman farmers" from Billericay in Essex. The father of one elderly showman, according to the family 'say', "was from Winchester college". The story was that he, son of a high ranking naval officer, was unhappy there and so ran away to join the fair, subsequently paying the price of being disowned by his family. [9]

A few knew only that a grandmother or mother came from outside showman's circles, "in Wales" or simply had been "a housedweller". Most, however, knew the trade or work of the flattie predecessor who had married into the showman's family; maternal grandmothers, for example, who were a servant and a barmaid were reported, while grandfathers had been a policeman from Woolwich, a dairyman, one who "worked on the boats fishing from Hull", an inn-keeper and a builder. These were, one feels, more likely social classes with which the average showman might come into contact. [10]

As with the gypsies, even the most respected families have the odd example of an outsider who entered the showmen's society. The Chipperfields had a maternal grandfather who was a horse trainer and eventually found work with the circus. The reason for the Anderton and Rowland inheritance - once the largest of all West Country fairs and circuses - coming under the DeVey family name was that a flattie (from Middlesborough) married the owner's daughter. Yet, in the thirty families interviewed only one person was met with who did not regard himself as being born and bred a showman; this solitary example, with a Royal Naval background, had fought in a boxing booth and later

married a showman's daughter." [11]

c) Gypsy Connections

In some instances the earliest knowledge of family origins was of a travelling life-style not obviously connected with show work. The significance of family 'says' regarding homes, work and so on will become apparent later (see Chapters 7, pp. 145-149 and 8, pp. 182- 191) but are included here to complete the perceptions of family background given by a minority of those interviewed.

In only one instance was a gypsy ancestor, a grandfather, specifically mentioned, others referring to the home and place of origin; one family "originated off Ditchling Common (Sussex) .... in them days they had what you'd call an old tilted van and a 'bender' .... they lived in the open, more or less". Another, well over a hundred years ago, lived in tents in the New Forest area of Hampshire. More common was knowledge of the work done; three grandfathers had done "a bit of horse dealing" and a great-grandfather was prepared to "deal in anything .... (and) .... went round the pubs" to do so. Of a maternal grandparent it was said, "he was a hawker of pots, brooms, kettles, pans .... anything" while another showman's family had, beside a little horse-dealing, done mainly agricultural work from its Oxfordshire base; "My grandfather went working for the farmers most of his time because in the fields years ago they had stones - tons and tons of stones in those fields and my grandfather and all his family had got to pick up all those stones from out of those fields, getting paid for that .... and he kept his family well, too. Then he used to go 'hopping' in the spring ...." [12].

d) The Relationship between Circus and Fairground Showmen

It is appropriate at this point to consider the relationship between circus and fairground from a social point of view as it is a subject on which showmen hold divergent views. If it is true that nearly 200 years ago, circuses were "little more than groups of fairground performers banding together to create a better show", then the view that modern circus and fairground people are "all showmen" is historically accurate. Certain well-known families which came to be

identified with the circus such as Sanger and Chipperfield either began as showmen or have had spells with specifically fairground entertainment. Similarly Billy Smart"started as a showman .... with .... roundabouts and stalls", later moving into the circus. Other individuals have made the transition, by marriage, from fair to circus and vice versa. That both elements played their part as representing showmen in general is shown by the president of the Showmen's Guild being Bertram Mills from 1935 - 38 while during the First World War, for example, it was Patrick Collins, who remained identified with fairground work but who had 'Sir' Robert Fossett, a circus proprietor, as his deputy in 1915. [13]

Some fairground showmen interviewed saw circus people as socially separate from them; they were of a "strange profession" with whom they "had nothing to do". In some instances circus folk agreed; "we are circus .... we are our own class of people". And certainly a number of circus proprietor families of the Victorian era were, as far as is known, never anything else; in this category were included the Cooke, Yelding, Julian, Fossett, Kaye, Duffy, Stevenson and Pinder families. [14]

A common opinion was, "Circuses don't mix very well with fairgrounds as a general rule"; "it didn't do anybody any good". Some showmen felt they did not mix well for economic reasons, the argument being that a large circus, with a show lasting perhaps 2 - 3 hours monopolized too many people for too long whereas the essence of the fair is that people circulate, spending their money a little here, a little there. Consequently "a large travelling circus is a distinct entertainment from the fairground" and is usually constituted as a large single unit compared to the individual units of the fair, each owned by a separate family. Here again different views became apparent; two circus people interviewed said the two could share the same tober in order to provide the public with a good joint attraction. Certainly, the Fossett circus, always a substantial show, was recognized as "a circus that followed the fair". Often, however, circuses within a fair were very small in size, with standing space only, which was acceptable as the show, an equestrian act with

perhaps a clown or two, may have lasted little more than twenty minutes or so. The question of the compatibility of circus and fair was well generalized by one showman, "There was only one or two people had very small circuses travelled with fairs .... when circuses were big they were off on their own". [15]

Clearly, the essence of the divide which many showmen saw between fair and circus has it's origin in other than purely economic spheres. When what, to modern eyes, seem typically circus-type acts were also to be found in fairground booths, those who performed felt a sense of elitism over those who did not; "they just stand there and take the money but we have to work for ours". An analogy was drawn by one showman who compared those who performed with stokers on board ship, "part of the crew - but people who thought that they were that bit special". Additionally, the international element increased the circus's sense of privilege. Foreign tours and exchange of acts led to some inter-marriage resulting in a lack of identity with the purely domestic fairground showmen. [16]

In the early twentieth century shows combining cinema with some acts such as juggling or acrobatics were quite common, for example, in Ireland and, in the West Country, Anderton and Rowlands set up included circus, bioscope and fairground rides. Yet by the inter-war years, a distinction was growing and recognized; the showmen's paper, the Worlds Fair spoke of "the circus .... and, indeed, it is a little world of it's own". In recent years, however, the pendulum has swung back again and in order to increase public appeal "the fairs are looking for the circus to come back". Be that as it may, in the period c1900 to 1950, the circus and fair tended to drift apart but the division among showmen began between those who performed, still as much at fairs as in the circus at the beginning of the century, and those who did not. As the division, however, does not necessarily indicate a separate origin and as a degree of mobility between the two has always existed, both are legitimately covered by the term 'showmen'. [17]

iii) Canal Boatmen

It has been speculated that on the very first canal, the Duke of Bridgwater's (see Chapter 4, pp 68 -71) the boatmen came from the ranks of the Duke's employees (mainly miners), from nearby existing river navigations and those who built the cut. As the canal system developed, more found work on the boats so that among boatmen of the twentieth century there was a "hard core of descendants of the original navigators or navvies who dug the canals". This idea of their origin is accepted by some surviving boatmen. In general, there seems no reason "to assume that they were recruited in ways other than those normally used to draw men to the new industrial areas", that is, from still-rural hinterlands with a surplus population. It also seems likely that early canal carriers were those who had previously been carters on the roads. Pickfords, the "first of the large carrying firms" made the transition and possibly many small firms or individuals did the same.[18]

Canal boatmen quite rapidly became "a class, in short, apart"; by the beginning of the twentieth century, it had long been recognized that "the calling is hereditary". Some boatmen have more recently recalled that their families "came off the land a hundred and fifty years ago" while others knew the place of origin, in one instance, Welshpool. Generally, however, recollections reached back only as far as grandparents who had all been born and bred boatmen, although exceptionally, one informant claimed four generations who had all worked for one carrying company.[19]

As a group and as travellers, canal boatmen clearly do not have a long history compared to both gypsies and showmen; if they were recruited from the sedendary population up to two centuries ago then it seems reasonable to assume that they would have taken to the boats the cultural practices and education levels of their class. Consequently, in the period covered by this thesis their isolation, culturally and educationally, was almost certainly less than for the other two groups.

'Real Romanies' and Other Travellers' Relationship to Them

i) Gypsies

Quite recently, the idea of the 'real Romany' has been dismissed by some as a myth while others have acknowledged "the true gypsies, or Romanies, have the right to follow their traditional mode of life". Yet others saw the genuine gypsy as nearly extinct as early as 1913, "the old families of which few, alas! are left". Clearly, such various viewpoints left the twentieth century gypsy with much space to manoeuvre to his own advantage, as already suggested, and claim a purity of descent which has been rejected, at least in part, because of the modern era's complexes upon the subject of unsullied race.[20]

Gypsies themselves put considerable faith in claims of Romany heritage and those well placed in the hierarchy despise those not of "the true old black blood". Almost certainly more valid by this century were the claims to a gypsy identity made upon cultural aspects such as the observance of certain cleanliness rituals (see Chapter 11, pp. 296 - 300) and a knowledge of gypsy secret languages.[21]

There were, however, two groups from whom the gypsies distanced themselves, in comparison to whom they could put themselves forward as the genuine article and, in so doing, neatly side-step the impossibility of finding an adequate definition of themselves. The first group was Irish travellers "prejudice against .... (whom) .... was especially strong". There was, of course, an element of scape-goating in claims that the latter monopolized the dirty or unruly element among travellers. In Scotland, the poorest travellers have long been referred to as tinkers though these in turn, along with their Irish counterparts, set themselves apart from "the Flattie or country people", significantly using the same term as the showmen for the sedentary population. The second group date almost exclusively from after the Second World War; those people who, largely due to housing difficulties have taken to living in caravans. These, all too often, include elements which would be considered 'inadequates' in any lifestyle and, when they become dirty, are castigated equally by gypsy and showmen travellers as those "who

don't know how to live in a van". [22]

ii) Showmen

a) Perceptions of Gypsies

Showmen fully subscribe to the view that "there's two classes of gypsy", those who acknowledge a gypsy identity being "much happier with the word 'Romany' than the word 'gypsy' " in order to emphasize the point. A high opinion was generally held of the "real gypsies .... (who) .... never caused anybody any trouble", some were "just like showmen .... they're spotless" and "I've never known anyone (i.e. a 'real' gypsy) to be done for cruelty or anything like that". It is interesting that just as there were "genuine gypsies", so there were "showmen proper"; when, in the 1920's the Showmen's Guild announced in it's 33rd Annual Report that it was "eliminating .... any objectionable or questionable .... games or forms of .... amusement", those responsible were "undesirable people" who besmirched the reputation of the real showmen. [23]

Showmen, like gypsies, hold tinkers and newcomers to the life-style responsible for "giving all travellers a bad name". One showman with experience of the country claimed, "you go to Ireland - it's terrible", a major complaint being the state in which Irish tinkers, of which there have been an increasing number in England since the Second World War, leave their camp sites. A number of showmen concurred, "what people class as gypsies are not gypsies at all", there were few real ones left because "a lot of flatties have got in, got the gypsies disliked, they have .... a lot of 'em". Due to the twin influx of tinkers and flatties it was said of gypsies, "A lot of them have settled down .... and they go out travelling from their houses". [24]

The change, attributed to the decade of the fifties, was illustrated by one showman's recollections of the traditional annual meeting for Derby day, "You could go to Epsom with the old Pikies and you got no trouble. You can go there now and you can get your throat cut. They come round, set fire to your stuff, smash your stuff up at night. No Pikey would do that to a traveller because they're .... well, you're one of us". [25]

b) Rejection of a Gypsy Identity

That showmen were popularly regarded as gypsies was recognized in the address of the president of the Showmen's Guild in 1918 when he claimed, "We have been gradually evolving from that period when we were looked upon as a gathering of gypsies". Castigated on another occasion were those who failed to see the difference "between the true and legitimate showman and his family, well cared for, and the veriest wretch of a gypsy". Even when it was acknowledged there were a few "gypsies who have become showmen in a small way .... they have altogether adapted themselves to the circumstances of show life and, so far as I can speak for the half-dozen people, I should say they were quite up to the standard of the people they travel with from fair to fair". [26]

A number of showmen interviewed however, would have rejected even that 'half-dozen'; there was, they claimed, "no connection whatever" as gypsies were "entirely different". That the suggestion of a gypsy identity was something to be regarded as offensive some showmen learned young; playground fisticuffs in the face of the taunt were not uncommon. A few showmen admitted that it was possible to "rarely find a gypsy among them" though Sanger had to resort to the distinctions of "genuine gypsies" and "proper showmen" to deny it. Less confident was the woman who merely saw herself "more as a showground person" although some distinction was apparently drawn from the gypsy side as when a recognized showman was referred to as a gorgio. A peculiarity of the denials of a gypsy link was revealed by one showman who volunteered that the Circus Krone of German origin was gypsy owned and that the largest circus in Paris was controlled by a "very dark skinned family" but who, nevertheless, insisted there was absolutely no connection in this country. [27]

c) Acceptance of a Gypsy Identity

Showmen who, in the face of the 'official line' of the Showmen's Guild over a period of nearly a century (see Chapter 6, pp. 124 - 131) admit - and in some cases, stress - a gypsy identity require close attention. To some, quite simply, "they're all the same" but a number made specific reference to blood. "They've got

the blood in 'em" and "you don't call yourself a true showman if you don't recognize - or won't admit - that you come from gypsy blood" were two opinions, while another recalled how she had explained to her daughter why she had spoken familiarly to an old gypsy woman selling 'lucky heather', "they're blood .... and she knew who I was", it being believed mutual recognition was natural and inevitable. Reference to gypsy blood led directly to other physical characteristics which, quite specifically, were shared in the circus; "the real circus people, they are travelling people. They was like gypsy people, I'm certain of that - a black strain of people". Another, referring to gypsies, justified his opinion that showmen "come somewhere from there" by pointing to his young granddaughter; "look at the black head of hair on her", he said. [28]

Of those who considered there was "no difference at all, actually speaking", most showmen referred to the time or 'generations' factor. Strong views were expressed by this minority; "you're not a true showman if your ancestors weren't born and bred in wagons .... and before that, tents" and "nine showmen out of ten today, if you get back to their grandparents, they was what you'd call gypsies" although another opinion suggested a longer time span for the identity - it was simply a question of "if you go back for enough". There were accusations of denials of gypsy ancestry being a deliberate deception; "they can say that but that's a lot of eyewash" and "those travellers who tell you they ain't got any Romany blood in their veins ain't being honest with you .... or else they've forgotten about it". [29]

A more cautious assessment was that a few gypsies had become showmen and specific instances were recalled to confirm the view. "We've had one or two very good gypsies come along with us and settle down" said one, while one gypsy, in his autobiography mentioned five relatives who had, at one time or another, joined the fair. Two brothers had been manager and labourer, "keeping the cars in repair" on a scenic railway in Blackpool, while of grandfather, father and uncle it was claimed, "they used to fight in boxing booths .... for a few shillings". And another gypsy, Charlie

Oathwaite, was the owner of a set of gallopers. Such examples within living memory prove little of the origin of long-standing show families but the possibility of similar earlier moves which became permanent cannot be discounted. [30]

d) Understanding of Romany Language

"We can understand one another - our languages are the same" and "if they say anything in their language, we know what they're saying", were said to confirm the common identity of gypsies and showmen. Perhaps of special significance is the showmen's use of the Scottish gypsies' term, 'flattie' for a non-traveller instead of the commoner English gypsies' 'gorgio'. A number of writers have noted the showmen's tendency to lapse into the use of gypsy terms, even by those who strongly deny any ancestral link. Count Rosaine, a circus proprietor, in the 1930's for example, was wont to refer to anything agreeable or comfortable as 'kushti' and habitually used the very common 'chavvy' for child. Another remarkable example, of significance for the proposition that gypsies came originally from India, was of the showman, in that country on military service during the Second World War, who was credited by his comrades with a knowledge of the local language because of the number of words he recognized, including 'parney' for water. [31]

Retention of a 'secret language' has certain advantages; "A lot use it, but only amongst one another if they don't want anyone to know what they're talking about". It was also used in the circus for the same reason, "circus people, if they wanted to say something to you on the side, they'd say it in Romany". Whether this language is tending to die out among showmen or, as seems less likely, is being used with greater circumspection, it's once-common use by showmen provides another suggestion of a close relationship with gypsies. [32]

iii) Canal Boatmen

Canal boatmen, seemingly with complete consistency, deny very strongly any connection with gypsies. That they were referred to as "water gypsies" was known by the boatmen and the catcalls of children

to the passing boats was clearly understood as intentionally derogatory and resented accordingly.[33]

Possibly "very few gypsies ever became boatmen" but as early as 1816 in his study of gypsies, John Hoyland refers to "Thomas Porter .... (who) .... worked at the Canal, Paddington". Whether this was an example of a gypsy who came to the canals or perhaps the first written instance of a confusion between the two groups cannot now, of course, be determined but if the latter, it certainly was not to be the last. Interestingly, it was found necessary to divide boatmen into two classes in order to justify the comparison; "I am personally convinced" said one commentator, "that at least half of them - and in that half are included nearly all the true bargees and not the mere hangers-on of the profession - are of gypsy blood". Physical characteristics played their part, they had "the high cheekbones and the swarthy complexions which are characteristic of the true gypsy .... then, too, there is their love of adornment and bright colours". Just as, in mid-nineteenth century the gypsy woman whose black hair "fell in braids" and whose earrings were "long loops of gold" was a distinctive figure so the boat-woman in the following century with her "dark face and plaited hair .... (and) .... long black cotton skirts and leather belts" was conspicuous. The male dress included corduroy trousers and 'choker' scarves which suggested the same comparison. But such traditional dress, already rare in 1939, was "no longer seen" on the cut after the war.[34]

Although it was an extreme opinion that "there are no people alive whom boaters detest more than gypsies", the former were prepared to use the latter in order to deflect any accusation of misdemeanour by a landsman. Yet it was not surprising that there was a "resentment" towards gypsies when shopkeepers in towns refused to serve boatmen and hung "No gypsies served here" signs on their doors to warn them of the fact. The confusion persisted to the end of the canal era, the last publication of the N.S.P.C.C., which became deeply involved with the canal people (see Chapter 6, pp. 141 - 143) still referred to the "water gypsies" as late as 1963.[35]

The Evidence of Names

i) Gypsies

The origin of gypsy family names can only be conjectured. Upon arrival in this country, up to five centuries ago (see Chapter 4, pp. 50 - 52), they are believed to have followed the custom of adopting "local names". It is how these names were chosen which is speculative; they may have been those of early social contacts, such as landowners or employers, or they may have been conferred by local inhabitants who came into contact with the new arrivals. The name Smith, derived from the most common gypsy trade, is probably in the latter category. Inter-marriage with non-gypsies is also possible but would suggest a higher level of inter-marriage quite soon after the gypsies arrival in Britain than has hitherto been assumed. [36]

Whatever the selection procedure, a number of surnames have long been established and recognized as those of major gypsy families :-

Ayres	Fleckie	Penfold
Allen	Fulcher	Plunkett
Baillie	Glover	Porter
Beldam	Gordon	Price
Blythe	Gray	Rossiter
Boswell	Griffiths	Ruthven
Bowers	Heron	Samson
Buckland	Ingram	Scampe
Buckley	Jones	Shaw
Burton	Kennedy	Sinfield
Carew	Lee	Smith
Chilcott	Lloyd	Stanley
Cole	Locke	Stevens
Collins	Lovell	Taylor
Cooper	Loversedge	Toogood
Corrie	Mansfield	Williams
Faw	Martin	Winters
Fearn	Matthews	Wood
Finney	Mills	Young [37]

The names are given as per the earliest known version of them but, as is to be expected with a still largely illiterate people, a degree of corruption has taken place. Already by c1800 the name of "John Faw" referred to in a "writ of Mary, Queen of Scots" had been Faa or Fay but his descendants "now take the name of Fall". With it's long pedigree, the name Fall was highly respected. Others who, by the early twentieth century, were an elite of "purer blood" were the Ayres, Boswell, Burton, Cooper, Gray, Lee, Lovell, Smith and Stanley families while "the Ingrams and the Chilcotts were regarded with something akin to awe". [38]

Names were often associated with regions of the country which is in line with the long-established travel patterns of gypsies (see Chapter 8, pp. 182- 183). In an area centring on the counties of Beds, Bucks, Cambs. Herts and Hunts, "the most common names .... (were).... Smith, Cooper, Taylor, Bosswell (sic), Lee, Lovell, Loversedge, Allen, Mansfield, Glover, Williams, Carew, Martin, Stanley, Buckley, Plunkett and Corrie". In Scotland were to be found the Winters, Faa, Baillie, Young, Ruthven, Gordon, Blythe and Fleckie families. In the London area Jones, Cole, Sinfield and Porter were familar and, at fairs in the capital, members of the Lee, Young, Price and Cooper families were noted. [39]

ii) Showmen

The most comprehensive source of showmen's names is the series of 'Yearbooks' circulated to the membership annually by the Showmen's Guild. Examination of these over the period 1902 to 1959 revealed the following gypsy names in the list of members included each year :-

Ayres	Fulcher	Porter
Allen	Gray	Price
Bailey	Griffiths	Shaw
Boswell	Heron	Smith
Bowers	Jones	Stanley
Buckland	Kennedy	Stevens
Buckley	Lee	Taylor
Burton	Lloyd	Toogood

Cole	Lock	Williams
Collins	Martin	Winters
Cooper	Matthews	Wood
Fearns	Mills	Young
Finney	Penfold	

As the majority of showmen remained illiterate early this century, a few additional names as interpreted by the officers' of the Guild might also be corruptions of gypsy originals :-

Byres	Currie	Loveridge
Carey	Curry	Lovett
Cowie	Ingham	

Discounting these latter, of the fifty-seven known gypsy names, thirty-eight or 66% have appeared in the membership lists of the Showmen's Guild. Of course, none of the names were peculiar to gypsies which precludes the drawing of too firm conclusions. Particularly common or regional names such as Smith, Taylor, Jones or Williams might be readily dismissed but the relatively unusual, such as Ayres, Boswell or Heron, for example, cannot. And certainly the percentage of names appearing is far higher than a random selection of a membership growing from 229 in 1901 to around 4,000 in 1960 would suggest. The growth of the Guild over the period (see Chapter 2, pp. 13 - 15) makes it impossible to estimate the relative proportion of showmen having gypsy surnames when the Guild represented only a percentage of them. Conversely the only two gypsy names which seem to have disappeared from the lists (between 1939 and 1945) were Finney and Lloyd. Also of course, descent through the female line may result in showmen with gypsy names rejecting the identity and vice versa.[40]

It is when considering circuses known to have travelled in Britain at some time from early in Victoria's reign up to the Second World War that a rather different picture emerges. The family names under which they operated were :-

Alexander	Crockett	Pinder
Austen	Cruikshank	Powell
Bailey	Duffy	Proctor
Baker	Fossett	Rowland
Bannister	Franks	Samwell
Barrett	Ginnett	Sanger
Batty	Hilton	Saunders
Boswell	Holloway	Scott
Brett	Kaye	Shelton
Butler	Lockharte	Stephenson
Carno	Macarte	Swallow
Chadwick	Mills	Transfeld
Chapman	Myers	Wild
Chipperfield	Newman	Wirth
Clarke	Omey	Woolford
Cole	Paulo	Yelding

A short supplementary list covers those families known to have operated travelling menageries, a form of show closely related to the circus (see Chapter 4, pp. 59 - 63) :-

Anderton	Sedgwick	Whittington
Bostock	Simmonds	Wombwell
Day		

A good proportion of the circuses referred to had disappeared by 1914, but the extreme paucity of gypsy names among them is in contrast to the fair side of the business this century. In fact, the only two typically gypsy names are Bailey and Boswell, as the Mills referred to was the Bertram Mills circus whose proprietor was known to have no gypsy connections.[41]

The showmen do not share the gypsy perchant for outlandish christian names, especially for girls. The only examples found were of three separate families who had daughters named Delcia, Darelia and Malvina, and an elderly showman who referred to his aunts Terschin and Honaria.[42]

iii) Canal Boatmen

A valuable source of boatmen's family names are the Toll-keepers ledgers which have fortuitously survived from the years 1906 to 1914. The toll houses were situated at the junctions and major intermediate points on the canal network and as the survivors came from near Rugby, that is, near the Midland centre of the canal network, can be regarded as reasonably representative. A surviving set of Canal Inspector's reports for the Banbury district and observations during the Second World War cover a later period. These sources jointly have enabled the following list of names to be compiled :-

Barton	Foster	Lumsden
Beauchamp	Fox	Mellor
Beck	Franks	Merchant
Blossom	Frost	Neal
Blowey	Garrett	Orton
Bodley	Gibbons	Pearsoll
Boswell	Griffiths	Phipps
Bray	Hale	Potter
Brooks	Hambridge	Sephton
Bunn	Hambry	Silver
Cartwright	Harwood	Skinner
Chatham	Hawkins	Smith
Coles	Hetherington	Stevens
Cove	Heaver	Taylor
Cox	Hopper	Tooley
Dowell	Hore	Townsend
Duckett	Humphries	Walker
Eakins	Johnson	Ward
Edwards	Juggins	Wheeler
Evans	King	White
Farmer	Knight	Wiles
Faulkner	Lansdown	Wilson
Finn	Lines	

The phonetic transcription of names by the toll-keepers and others led to some variations in these names; Hambry, for example, may be a corruption of Hambridge and Beauchamp was also variously spelt as Beecham or Beachy. Nevertheless only six names can be found which were shared with gypsy families. These were Boswell, Coles, Griffiths, Smith, Stevens and Taylor, all, as pointed out above, shared with non-gypsy members of the population and of which only the first two can be regarded as at all uncommon. Given the variety of gypsy names it was a coincidence that when a boat carrying gunpowder exploded on the Regents Canal in London in 1874, two of the boatmen out of the four involved in the accident had them; the four were given as Barton, Boswell, Edwards and Taylor.[44]

At the end of the eighteenth century a survey of "masters of boats" on the not yet fully developed canal system (see Chapter 4, pp. 68 - 71) suggested that only 103 out of 898 recorded (that is, apporox. 11%) had names which might suggest gypsy origins. Generally those who have argued a common identity have relied heavily on the similarity of their homes (see Chapter 8, pp. 213-215). Even where christian names were concerned, the boatmen relied on more traditional ones although, at least in Victorian times, biblical names, such as Amos and Eli enjoyed a vogue. All in all, regarding the possibility of a gypsy origin for canal boatmen, names suggest only an extremely small percentage may have come from this source.[45]

The Non-travellers' View of Travellers

i) Gypsies

a) Negative Aspects

For as long as most of them can remember, life "for the majority of travellers .... (has been) .... a life lived within a hostile, settled community". Already early in the nineteenth century, villagers regarded gypsies as rogues and magistrates thought "imprisonment and whipping" the only way to discourage their presence. Consistently, gypsies have been seen as a 'problem'; if travellers ceased to pursue the life style, then the problem would, as far as the sedentary population saw it, be solved.[46]

The idea that tinkers might be placed in "labour colonies" was first mooted in 1906. The suggestion was again considered and reluctantly rejected as impractical in Scotland just after the First World War. As a second best they were to be encouraged to settle and take regular employment; eventually nomadism could then be made an offence. When gypsies proved troublesome at Hurtwood, Surrey, a "local voluntary committee" took matters in hand; "camping was strictly supervised" and the gypsies encouraged to move into houses. It took 8 years to bring matters to what was considered a "successful conclusion". It was a fine example for those who were "convinced that efforts should be made gradually to absorb" all such travellers. Destruction of a life-style was, apparently, a subject for self-congratulation. In part of Hampshire it was claimed, "By 1965 the problem was completely solved since only two families remained unhoused and they were left only because of the special circumstances of their work .... On the whole the policy of spreading the gypsies throughout the estates has led to them being reasonably well accepted by other tenants and in quite a high proportion of the cases the families are now indistinguishable from other tenants".[47]

Legislation which has circumscribed the gypsy's freedom to follow his ancestral life-style will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6 (see pp. 121- 124) but the Highways Act, 1959 and Caravan Sites Act, 1960 may be mentioned here as their provisions directly affected the gypsies earning capacity. There is little doubt that these acts, to some extent, reflected the hardening sentiments towards gypsies of a large section of the population since the former began, before the Second World War, to increasingly move into the scrap metal business (see Chapter 7, pp. 145- 149), such work neatly confirming prejudices that gypsies were both dirty and parasites upon the economy. Though scrap dealing was the cause of the "negative stereotype" of the modern era, the gypsies image has rarely been good except when 'romanticized'. The latter tendency, applied to the 'Real Romanies' (see above), has enabled the sedentary population to take action against those it saw as troublesome while solving the collective conscience with the illusion of toleration towards a minority.[48]

b) Positive Aspects

In the nature of things, this section will be, as far as the gypsies are concerned, considerably shorter than it's predecessor.

The romantic image of the Romany has been closely linked to the travellers' adoption of the horse-drawn vardo in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 8, pp. 189 - 191). But while the picture of the gypsy world of which it was but the central feature has persisted, before the end of the century objections were being raised as to its validity. The reformer George Smith (see Chapter 6, pp. 121 - 122) complained of the "false sentimental halo" with which an "indulgent population" surrounded the gypsy. Undoubtedly, at a personal level, some "local characters" were well known, particularly in country districts, and so "treated with respect". [49]

The attitude towards gypsies has shown some improvement in recent times at a higher official level, although to what extent this has been reflected locally is open to question. The police have acknowledged, for example, that they are "less troubled by petty crime" by gypsies than by some groups of housedwellers, thus helping to remove a long-standing stigma from the former. Of greater importance, has been the acceptance of the principle of a travelling lifestyle. In 1976 the Env Secretary, Peter Shore and the Secretary of State for Scotland, John Menzies jointly declared they had "no wish to deny gypsies the right to a nomadic existence"; it was their right "for as long as they wished to continue it". [50]

ii) Showmen

a) Negative Aspects

The negative aspect of the 'flattie's' attitude towards travellers is inextricably bound up with the gypsy question. There is undoubted confusion in the public mind, not only as to whether showmen are gypsies but if they are of the 'real' or romantic variety. In turn, the showmen's attitude towards gypsies is coloured by the public uncertainty on the question : "We've been treated as though we were gypsies", something showmen had "suffered .... all our lives". It

was clearly understood to be an unfavourable reference to be "classified as gypsies and therefore .... shunned at all costs". The majority of people "don't see us in the right light, a lot of 'em don't", so identifying travellers as "all the same" and showmen thus undeservedly sharing "the bad name". Many showmen resented that they were treated by some "more or less as they would a gypsy", though not all felt as strongly as the 92-year old lady who recalled (with pride) "I hit a woman once for calling me a gypsy". [51]

Children learned young; the insult intended when "they called you gypsies" at school was, as already suggested, frequently physically challenged. The traveller child, spending much time in the open air, was not endeared to other children by the robust competence of the challenge; "a girl called me a gypsy, so I said 'I'll give you a gypsy's mark' - and I hit her". "It was terrible", another recalled, "I fought every kid in the school; they used to pick on me .... I will admit, I could handle myself, but every play time you bet they'd try to pick on me". Experiences such as these over generations served to colour showmen's opinions of education in general. (see Chapter 9, pp. 234- 238) [52]

In the context of the larger society, showmen also felt a sense of rejection or class denigration. Referring to racial discrimination against recent immigrants, one commented, "We had it before they knew what it was". Other showmen felt they were regarded as "rock bottom" in the social classification; "Oh, we're second-class citizens, ain't we ?" was how another put it. The general feeling against showmen - and, of course, other travellers - was closely linked to housing. Not only were middle-class housing areas less good for the showmen's business but it was, to a significant extent, "where you got complaints". The post - Second World War tendency to look upon caravans as a "sub-standard" alternative at a time of housing shortage has added to the unfavourable social labelling of all van dwellers. Such attitudes, it was recognised, gave rise to social complexes; some showmen have reacted with a 'chip-on-the-shoulder' belligerence while others have displayed an almost pathetic eagerness for respectability and proudly recall instances of social acceptance by their neighbours. [53]

Petty crime is another area with which showmen, like gypsies, have long been popularly identified despite the Showmen's Guild's assurance that an objective assessment had "entirely cleared travelling show people from any stigma of crime". The prejudice was long standing; an Elizabethan statute included strolling players in it's catalogue of "rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars". That 'rogues and vagabonds' tag persisted; Sanger recalled it as the popular view of showmen in Victorian times while one showmen interviewed had a life-time's experience of being treated "like dirt .... (because) .... they really think we're vagabonds and thieves". But if "almost without exception magistrate and constable alike, looked upon the showmen as undesirable vagrants", in modern times they have at least been spared the rough justice which, according to one family's 'say', a travelling conjurer met; "One of my forefathers - or, rather, his wife - was thrown in the village pond for being a witch". [54]

The prejudices shown towards travellers were sometimes genuinely hurtful; "Years ago we used to go to places and you'd get women come out and they'd say 'Get your children in, the gypsies have come - watch out ! .... it used to hurt you at times". The jibe still stung; the elderly showman still felt the need to deny it, "I don't know of one who ever took a child". "We tried not to take much notice of them" was one way to cope; another was to indulge in ridicule. Showmen had already learned to "laugh at the people for 'flats' " early in Victoria's reign and, more recently, when failing to come up to the standard demanded by her father for her high-wire act, a circus child recalled his censure, "you're just like a big, clumsy flattie". There were compensations, too, in the ambiguity of the flattie attitude to showmen; rejected outside the tober, once stood in front of his ride or in the ring, the showman became a hero. [55]

b) Positive Aspects

"I to Bartholemew Fayre ...." wrote Pepys, where he saw Lady Castlemaine, the king's mistress. It was an early specific instance of a social acceptance of them and their business which showmen are still anxious to stress. "Barons in their castles", amused by court jesters, was "where it all started", claimed one,

oblivious of the fact that when "jugglers, acrobats and conjurors were common" they were equally popular with lesser folk. [56]

Command performances before royalty and nobility were much prized in the circus. Sanger's first before Victoria was at Balmoral where he was received by the Queen (an occasion when his title of 'Lord' George Sanger, self-conferred to upstage American competition, caused him some embarassment). Repeat performances followed at Windsor, a privilege enjoyed also by the Chipperfield family. The Prince of Wales met the American showman Barnum and in the outcry over the sale of 'Jumbo' to the latter, both the Prince and Victoria were said to be in touch with the London Zoo's management to try and avoid what a jingoist age considered a national outrage. Such royal patronage was a clear signal that the circus was respectable, which was beneficial to showmen everywhere as all classes aped their social betters. Gladstone and the then Bishop of London went to the circus in London and, in Scotland, when the Duke and Duchess of Fife asked Sanger to perform, they "brought all their household with them". [57]

Such times seem somewhat Utopian to modern showmen, especially those of the fairground which has always had more working class connections. Nevertheless, certain fairs, such as those held in conjunction with either river or sea-side regattas catered for other social classes. Those held in the Thames valley or at Torquay before the Second World War were examples. One fondly remembered was the Dartmouth regatta where, at one time, King Edward VII was occasionally to be seen. An elderly informant claimed that her mother once offered a cup of tea, which "King Teddy" had accepted, stopping to chat with the showmen. [58]

But at the level at which showmen usually made contact with the sedentary population, it was generally agreed the least negative reactions came from working class people. Others considered general attitudes were "getting better towards showmen", most noticeably as class barriers have broken down since the end of the Second World War. The tendency to see the showmen's work "more as a business" has helped, even to the extent of local bureaucrats recognizing that "organised showmen presented little difficulty" to them. It was in

wartime that many showmen first felt they were part of - and needed by - a larger society with which they could then identify. The experience may have taken the form of military service or else finding local authorities were "glad to have you, to keep the people amused" (see Chapter 5, pp. 84 - 102). One other factor affecting the local population's attitude to showmen was the acceptance of the fair or circus as an item of the region's culture. Mainly in rural areas, of which parts of Ireland and the west country of England were notable examples, the annual visit of the showmen was always eagerly anticipated. [59]

Showmen were - and still are - fiercely proud of their integrity in business matters; it is of great importance to a showman to retain his 'name' and 'trust'; if one "said they'd do a thing, then by golly, they did it". Among flatties, this was gradually realized where a business relationship was built up. They were "wary of you at first" it was admitted, but the realization brought a change in attitude; "he's O.K., we know him". That this was to the collective advantage was understood and any showman who 'let the side down' was severely censured. At the beginning of the season, before the Easter fairs on Portsdown Hill above Portsmouth or at Hampton Court, for example, credit was often essential. The showmen were, at least up to 1939, not infrequently unable to pay for their food and fuel until after the first day; hence the importance of the trust in the showmen built up with local tradespeople. The "fags and beer" necessary when the fair at Hampton Court was being set up were obtained from the landlord of the "Cardinal Wolsey" but not paid for until the fair had opened. [60]

iii) Canal Boatmen

a) Negative Aspects

The very low opinion entertained of his kind by a large section of the population was well known to most boatmen. It is possible that this poor opinion was inherited from watermen of past centuries; the bow-hauliers who were paid to drag cargoes along river navigations were "casual labourers of the lowest class". Boatmen interviewed variously expressed the knowledge of their low status; "people had a bad

impression of us in them days","boatmen's names were a lot of dirt" and "people looked down their noses at the likes of us". Indeed boatmen knew they were regarded as the "lowest of the low".[61]

Manifestations of the contempt in which they were held were mixed. Town-bred urchins knew the boatmen could be attacked with impunity; "even the children out of the gutters get upon the bridges to throw all manner of filth at them as they pass along". Petty thefts along the line of the cut were almost automatically laid at the boatman's door and it was not unusual for one to find himself accused of theft for scavenging what had appeared to him to be discarded rubbish. No boatman would leave lying around any item of property which was still needed; his own poverty would not allow him to do so and he assumed,all too often mistakenly, that others would not either. Services others took for granted were often denied to boatmen. Wives were refused admission to shops and one boatman claimed a doctor refused to attend a sick baby, on the grounds that "boat people are dirty and bad payers". Relatively few members of the sedentary population ever had direct dealings with canal boatmen or ever saw them due to the limited extent of the canal network, yet their poor "image" was widespread, as the N.S.P.C.C. came to realize when it sought public support for it's campaign on behalf of the canal children.[62]

b) Positive Aspects

In view of the foregoing, withdrawal symptoms were a quite natural defensive reaction; "their chief desire .... (became) .... to be left alone". Yet the boatmen had their champions. Soon after the First World War, when conditions on the canal boats led to a government inquiry (see Chapter 6, pp. 118-121), "the majority of witnesses have agreed that, so far as health, cleanliness, morality, feeding and clothing are concerned, they are fully equal, if not superior, to town dwellers of a similar class". Sister Mary, who long ministered to boatmen's ailments from her base at Stoke Bruerne, Northants spoke for the boatmen's honesty in money matters and, on another occasion, a shopkeeper who welcomed his water-borne customers thought, "Boat people were as honest a people as you ever met".[63]

It was, as with other travellers, a question of knowing the boatmen by personal contact with members of their society and "those who were in a position to know compared the boating class very favourably with workers of a similar class on land". In the best position to know were the Canal Inspectors appointed under the Canal Acts of 1877 and 1884 (see Chapter 6, pp. 116- 118). Upon his retirement after 32 years service, one wrote of them in terms which might seem incredible to the boatmen's detractors; "... and I am even more sad to leave the boat people, folk from whom in all my time I can honestly say I have never had a cross word, let alone the kind of language ignorant humourists think it witty to attribute to them. 'Bargees' are decent folk in the best sense of the word". It might, of course, be objected that before an official of the Inspector's standing boatmen would be on their best behaviour. Nevertheless, his opinion cannot be entirely disregarded that "the decent, kindly and healthy state of the boat people as a whole is a proof there can be little wrong with their mode of living". [64]

Resumé

Clearly, the general indentification of all travellers as gypsies has not only had a distinct effect upon the relationship between the sedentary majority and the other groups of travellers but also upon the attitude of showmen and canal boatmen towards gypsies.

All travellers were aware of the suspicion, if not downright hostility, with which they were regarded by non-travellers. It was therefore, opportunist for them to collude in making a distinction between 'real' travellers and others. This suited the non-travellers problem of reconciling romanticized ideals with what, all too often, appeared to them to be the reality of an immediate, local problem. The separation of their kind into two classes provided the traveller with a convenient scapegoat from whom he could distance himself; into this role were cast Irish tinkers or newcomers to van dwelling. Knowing the low estimation in which they were generally held, travellers also stressed that when close contact with them was established, as in various business relationships, the stereotypes gave way to a relationship of trust and respect.

Gypsies placed considerable emphasis upon their ancestry and the possession of one of a limited number of recognized surnames bestowed status upon the holder, though, by the period under review the thoroughbred Romany had ceased to exist, if, indeed, he had ever done so. Though it was preferable to have both parents born members of the society, it was only essential to have one, provided one was oneself reared in the culture and life-style of the gypsy. Showmen, perhaps significantly, used the same criteria - and attitudes to marriage with non-travellers was, for both groups, affected by the criteria. (see Chapter 10, pp. 270 - 283)

"Members of the Showmen's Guild since its formation have seen obvious advantages in disassociating themselves from other gypsies and Romanies"; despite this a minority of showmen not only accepted but in some cases were at pains to stress their descent from gypsy forebears. The importance of self-ascription was shown by diametrically opposed views on the subject being held by showmen as closely related as second cousins. The incidence of gypsy surnames among showmen is of significance here, as is the showmen's admitted knowledge of the Romany tongue. This and other cultural similarities were considered by some of the minority to be proof of a common origin (see Chapter 7, pp. 145 - 181 and 9 - 12, pp. 220 - 345). The relatively few gypsy names occurring among specifically circus families suggested some distinction between the two aspects of the showmen's business, which will be further considered in the sections dealing with the earlier history and economic development of the circus and fairground (see Chapters 4, pp. 49 - 76 and 5, pp. 77 - 113). [65]

The desire to relate instances of meetings with royalty and other eminent personages revealed that showmen shared with other travellers a sense of social inferiority, yet in certain respects they enjoyed an advantage over other traveller groups in that they were generally associated in the public mind with amusement and leisure. Consequently, their coming, often an annual event, was welcomed by a large section of the population and the travelling life-style was recognized as a necessary concomitant of their profession.

Boatmen's family backgrounds, as recalled at the interviews, were rarely claimed to go back more than three or four generations as befitted a group identified by a relatively modern transport development. It was not surprising, therefore, that some folk-memory of sedentary forebears remained and rejection of a gypsy origin was more or less general. This seemed to be confirmed by an examination of known boatman's family names. Regarded by the sedentary population with something near contempt and accorded an extremely low rating in the social hierarchy, the boatmen were arguably the most wretched of the traveller groups. They lacked the self-esteem derived from a belief in the value of their ancestry and could not claim a Sanger or a Chipperfield as one of their own.

CHAPTER FOUR

OUTLINE HISTORY TO 1900

Gypsies

i) Origins of the Modern Gypsy

By the twentieth century the gypsies might reasonably be considered "hereditary wanderers" but why the low caste tribesmen of northern India first began to emigrate in a westerly direction can now only be conjectured. Pressures such as famine or some form of persecution may have provided the impetus but as they chose to retain a nomadic lifestyle thereafter rather than settle elsewhere, it is possible that they had previously pursued such a mode of living before leaving India. The name given to these nomadic people in Britain was, as already stated, a corruption of 'Egyptian' and thus evidence of some knowledge of their oriental origin but it was John Hoyland who, in 1816, first pointed to India and a departure time placed tentatively in the tenth century. The theory, now generally accepted, was based upon the gypsies' cultural practices and language as described in Chapters 3, pp. 19 - 20 and 9 - 12, pp. 220 - 345 [1]

In the course of their wanderings over hundreds of years, it has been suggested that the gypsies were caught up in the Turkish invasions of the Balkans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and this propelled them towards central Europe. Certainly, by Hoyland's time they were known across all Europe. The names by which the travellers were known in various countries and their original tribal name combine to suggest a common identity :-

N.W. India	-	Langari
Turkey & Middle East	-	Tchigenes
Rumania & Balkans	-	Cyganes
Italy & Hungary	-	Tziganys
Germany & Austria	-	Zigeuner
Portugal & Spain	-	Gitanos [2]

In the four or five centuries during which the gypsies trekked westwards to reach Britain, it is virtually certain that they absorbed some non-Romany stock. But it is in turning to Ireland and Scotland that discussion has arisen as to whether the local travellers were of gypsy or native origin. The principal argument for Irish travellers having a Celtic origin appears to be the possession of their own 'secret' language known as 'Shelte'. Others became travellers; displaced by defeat, as after the battles of Antrim and the Boyne or, at a later date, by famine. Certainly Cromwell, William III and potato blight were all responsible for an increase in the numbers of poor and wandering families in Ireland. But as gypsies had already made water crossings and reached the other Atlantic extremities of Europe, and as certain customs (see Chapters 9 - 12) have been noted as practised by Irish travellers, it seems unlikely that there was not an element of Romany blood amongst them. [3]

In Scotland, where the terms tinker and gypsy were used interchangeably, it has been suggested that the former element descended from itinerant Celtic tinsmiths. The gypsies, in contrast, followed their own ways to obtain a living, so that the two groups were distinguishable perhaps until as late as the early nineteenth century. The merging together, as in Ireland, has seen the common adoption of those same cultural traits relating to food, cleanliness and some language details. [4]

ii) Arrival in Britain

The first written evidence of the presence of gypsies in Britain was an entry in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer for Scotland: "1505, April 22nd. Item to the Egyptians by the Kinge's Command, vii lib" (i.e. £7.00). The first entry for England was a reference in the 22nd Statute of King Henry VIII in 1522 to this "outlandish people". It seems reasonable, therefore, to place the earliest appearance of gypsies in this country as most likely to have been in the second half of the fifteenth century although one authority suggests it may have been as early as 1430-40. [5]

These first arrivals travelled on foot and their only animals appear to have been pack horses and donkeys. It is possible that they

brought their tents with them but more likely that they built anew here what was to remain the gypsies only shelter until the nineteenth century (see Chapter 8, pp. 187 - 191). The years which saw the main influx of gypsies, or over what timespan, cannot now be determined but it should not be thought that the gypsies' coming was in any way an organized or coherent movement. Rather, it seems to have been the independent action of each family or small group whose internal recognition of their identity and place within the gypsies' social hierarchy was revealed quite quickly by the feuds which already existed between them. Already well placed in the Romany hierarchy and receiving the patronage of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1553 was "John Faw, Lord and Earl of Upper Egypt". [6]

iii) Reception in Britain

The early reception accorded the gypsies, at best favourable, perhaps due to a fascination with the newcomers, at worst suspicious, soon gave way to a generally hostile atmosphere. Repressive legislation followed in England in 1530, 1554 and 1562 which treated the gypsies as felons and ordered their banishment from the realm. Accusations made against them included harbouring Roman Catholic priests so, not for the last time, the gypsies unwittingly found themselves involved in the current controversies of the host country. In the reign of James I, gypsies were ordered to be "branded, whipped, executed or expelled from the country". [7]

Two hundred years later, the gypsies were no more popular. At the Norfolk Quarter Sessions in 1817 it was decided "That the clerk of the police do give public notice in the newspapers circulated in the County of Norfolk, that all persons pretending to be gypsies, or wandering in the habit or form of Egyptians, are by law deemed to be rogues and vagabonds and are punishable by imprisonment and whipping". By this time, new problems had arisen for the gypsies, which have echoes in modern times (see Chapter 8, pp. 182 - 186). The movement towards enclosure of common lands robbed them of their by - now traditional camping and grazing grounds. All that was left to the gypsies was, increasingly, the roadside verges from which, it was already recognized, "it is worse than useless and unavailing to

harass them from place to place when no retreat or shelter is provided". It was only because steps proposed against the gypsies were largely ineffective or, perhaps, in contrast to their lot in other countries, that one authority has stated that, at least from the seventeenth century, the gypsies found "a hospitable land in the British Isles". [8]

iv) Early Gypsy Occupations

The means by which gypsies obtained their livelihood have been many and varied and often well concealed from observers. Hoyland says, "More than half their number follow no business; others are dealers in horses and asses; farmers, smiths, tinkers, braziers, grinders of cutlery, basket makers and chair bottomers". Another long established craft was wood-carving, leading to peg-making. "The women mostly .... (carried) .... baskets with trinkets and small wares", which they sold, while all the family, in some instances, were seasonally employed in "plucking hops". When a gypsy encampment at Rushden, Northants was found almost deserted at mid-day because most of the occupants were at the nearby fair at Higham Ferrers, their interest in horse dealing was perhaps the major reason. But gypsies were also associated with the still minor amusement aspect of fairs, such as fortune telling. [9]

Gypsies were fortune-tellers in mainland Europe before their first recorded appearance in Britain. The statute of Henry VIII, referred to above, accused them of attempting ".... to deceive the people, bearing them in hand that they by palmistry could tell men's and women's fortunes". It remained a lucrative source of income : in 1612 they still ".... got much by palmistry and the telling of fortunes". But the gypsies' repertoire was wider in the arts of amusing their fellow men. In France, in 1671, the Marchioness de Savigne had known them ".... get their living by dancing, showing postures and telling fortunes". In Britain, gypsies were already proficient in the "art of juggling" while others were musicians "fiddling at feasts and fairs". Palmistry was generally women's work, but dancing was performed by both sexes and, perhaps surprisingly, "both men and women .... (were) .... musical performers". [10]

It has been conjectured that the gypsy association with performing bears can be traced to their passage through the Balkans - and to a later, lesser extent the Pyrenees - where the animals could be easily caught. By extension, where bears could not be easily procured, such as Britain, gypsies became associated with other performing animals including goats and rabbits. Partly due to the absence of wild bears, the gypsies use of performing animals did not persist in Britain during the nineteenth century as it did in Europe where the "fortunate few entered the realm of the circus". [11]

v) Missionaries and Philanthropists

The increasing attention given to the gypsies during the nineteenth century has been described by T. Acton as in the nature of a mission or crusade intended to redeem what was obviously recognized as a distinct and separate people. As such it may be related to the religious revival. Significantly, the first group, as far as can be traced, who attempted to convert the gypsies to Christianity and settle them in houses, were Quakers, late in the previous century. In the 1850's the London City Mission sent people into the gypsy camps in an attempt to convert them. About the same time, schools for gypsies were set up as far apart as Kirk Yetholm in Scotland, Farnham, Surrey and in Southampton. The idea was that gypsy parents would leave their children at these apprentice schools where they would learn a trade and, presumably, eventually settle down. The schools did not last long, the Southampton one not surviving the death of it's prime mover, the Rev. James Crabbe in 1851. As with later attempts at education and settlement, a sad lack of understanding of the travellers' culture and values was shown (see Chapters 8, pp. 182- 183 and 9, pp. 222-227). [12]

Perhaps due to the insensitivity of the approaches, it was still said late in Victorian times, "It is not creditable to us as a Christian nation to have had for centuries these heathenish tribes in our midst". The complainant, George Smith (see Chapter 6, pp. 121-124) showed no more sensitivity to those "living in the gutter" but others, most notably George Borrow, had begun to study the gypsies in their own right. Seeing gypsy horse dealers at Norwich fair,

Borrow joined them in their travels and, gradually becoming accepted by them, he was able to study and record their customs. Leland, who became the first president of the Gypsy Lore Society (itself evidence of the growing interest in gypsies) shared Borrow's fascination with the Romany language which he feared was dying out. [13]

vi) The Romantic Image

"In the third quarter of the last century .... (the gypsies were) .... generally more prosperous than they had ever been". The late nineteenth century agricultural depression had not yet affected an important aspect of the gypsies' work, while the increase in population and a general improvement in the standard of living ensured a demand for other gypsy skills. In an industrial age, but one which had yet to move into the era of mass production and the 'throw away' economy, there was work for "tinsmiths, copper-beaters, basket-makers and also by using the grinding forge". [14]

It was the time the gypsies could be seen to apply their traditional crafts and also when increasing numbers of them were taking to living in horse-drawn caravans (see Chapter 8, pp. 189-191). At a time of industrialization and urbanization in the growing "garrison - societies" of Victorian Britain, when the still-new disciplines of the factory and town life weighed heavily, the gypsies were ripe to become part of a Gothic ideal. They became the survivors of a supposed rural arcadia - outdoor, colourful, independent and carefree. To those who enquired a little more deeply, the romantic image was intensified by knowledge of the gypsies' origins in India long before imperial benefits were bestowed upon it, or by flights of fancy (which gypsies themselves professed to believe when it suited them) that they were condemned to wander forever as it was a gypsy smith who had forged the three nails used to crucify Jesus and who had refused to make the fourth when he learned of their purpose. [15]

For these reasons the gypsies were "indulgently tolerated" by most of the sedentary population, but in the romanticization of them can probably be traced the origin of the idea of the 'real Romany' when other travellers met with all too obviously did not match up to

the ideal. Sometimes these were Irish travellers whose numbers had increased in England after the potato famine of the 'hungry forties' although their appearances were still rare enough to warrant recording individual sightings. Examples were of Irish travellers noted in Bangor, N. Wales in 1854, Bath in 1876 and Liverpool in 1891. Despite the apparent rarity of them, other travellers were ready enough to acquiesce in giving them a bad name. Being poorer and having lower expectations they were accused of undercutting the other gypsies so that resentment against Irish tinkers by other travellers had an economic base.[16]

Showmen

i) Trade Fairs

At least as early as medieval times there were, at certain locations, trade fairs normally held on recognized dates as annual events. When trade was largely seasonal, often dependant upon the produce and resources of a given area, commercial development and population levels rarely justified the regular exchange or retailing of commodities, so fairs were often timed to coincide with the harvest. The goods disposed of realised the means of buying items brought into a district, by other traders, which were required to cover the winter months. Such fairs were the direct fore-runners of the modern showmen's so-called 'back end run'. The other events which encouraged a congregation of people were religious celebrations when pilgrims converged upon shrines for saint's days.[17]

Such occasions stimulated the local economy and brought wealth to a community. If taxes and tolls could be charged on the goods exchanged or dealers charged for licences to trade, further pecuniary gain was possible. Burgess, bishop and landowner alike saw the advantage of holding a fair if a charter to levy the necessary dues could be obtained from the king. It was then necessary to see that the fair was held regularly in order to recoup the expense of the charter. St. Bartholemew's fair, founded in 1120, was one of the oldest and came to cater for London's cloth and wool trade. A number of charters were granted by King John; those of King's Lynn, Norfolk,

(still the earliest fair of the season, being held on St. Valentine's day) and Wakefield, Yorks, were both granted in 1204. In the latter case ".... the royal licence .... (was) .... obtained on the 15th March, of that year" as, in an inflationary period, the King sought to replenish his treasure. Among landowners, the Percies, for example, obtained charters at various times for fairs on their lands at Ilkley, Carnaby and Pocklington, all in Yorkshire.[18]

The religious festivals soon led to an element of trade even before the formal institution of a fair, while in some cases fairs were set up at nearby locations in order to cater for those en route to the place of pilgrimage. Sometimes a major fair was held at a very small settlement but whose geographical situation was significant. Weyhill in Hampshire was thus strategically placed where the 'tin road' from Cornwall met the 'gold road' from Wales and other lesser drove roads. The fair was held in October when fattened cattle were in the area on hoof to London and the continent. Fairs, of course, varied from the small and predominantly local to the large and well known, in which category, by Elizabethan times, were included Stourbridge, Greenwich and St. Bart's. Not all were charter fairs; some had grown up by popular usage and became established traditions. Examples were Mitcham fair in Surrey and St. Giles's fair, Oxford, which, significantly, was held outside the town walls.[19]

Other types of fair grew up with the decline of feudal relationships of service. These were known variously as 'Mop', 'Hiring' or 'Statute' fairs where agricultural or domestic servants sought work and advertised themselves by wearing a "symbol of their trade". It was a fair of this type which featured in Hardy's 'Mayor of Casterbridge' although wife-selling was surely an unusual business. Hiring fairs were usually held about a month after the harvest and were common into the nineteenth century. The contract, sealed with "God's penny", between master and servant lasted for a year, until the next fair.[20]

ii) Early Amusements

The use of the Latin 'feria', meaning holiday, suggests that pleasure and amusement have always been an aspect of the fair.

Entertainers are known to have been present at the holy places of ancient Rome on the relevant god's day. Though no direct link is likely with the earlier period, ".... amusements were always an integral part .... (of) .... medieval fairs". Some element of relaxation was almost inevitable at such gatherings of people which were also social occasions and where money changed hands. At religious festivities the performance of simple plays on a suitable theme or sale of momentos and 'miraculous relics' might tempt the devout and gullible. At the trade fairs a wider range of amusement was likely including games of chance or performances by people or animals. When trading at the fair slackened off, perhaps later in the day, the transition to leisure might be made. As one showman conjectured, "It wasn't a far cry from the English fair when the hawkers came in and set their tables down among the village people .... boards on trestles, like that .... to having games and things on the tables". [21]

As trade became more regular and shop retailing common, so fairs became more leisure oriented. Significantly, the transition was made early in London where St. Bartholomew's had by Pepys' time been given over almost exclusively to amusement. The ".... tumblers, jugglers, stilt-walkers and bear leaders" of the typical Elizabethan fair had taken over. At St. Bart's, Pepys saw "a man dance upon his crutches without any legs upon the ground to help him"; a reminder that the appeal of the grotesque has long been catered for at the fair. Beside the "individual acts" were the shows, ranging from waxwork displays to 'Punch and Judy' and small theatres in their temporary booths specializing in bawdy plays. Amongst the jugglers and conjurors once common at fairs, a rare glimpse of an individual was of Pierre Gengoure (1486-1539) who, beside his displays of slight of hand at market places and fairs, was famous as a tight-rope walker. [22]

Beginning in the eighteenth century, a wider range of amusements was known to have existed. Booths contained shows of human curiosities which at that time included turbanned Indians and 'black giants' - both appearing as a by-product of increased

commercial and colonial activity. Peep-shows, fortune-tellers and both boxing and wrestling booths competed with games of skill and chance; all, arguably, catering for a variety of human weaknesses. Conjurors often used dog carts to haul their 'props' to the fairs or to the public houses which were their usual venues in between times. Early in the nineteenth century, an arrangement known as an 'Umbries' appeared by which the showman, by the aid of the light of a candle or lamp, deftly, with his hands, threw shadows upon a screen placed above head level. This contrivance was the precursor of the later 'Magic Lantern' shows and the cinema at the fair (see Chapter 5, pp. 82 - 84). The very earliest features of the fair in which the public participated, rather than merely observed, were the first roundabouts, propelled by human or animal agency, or helter-skelters, swings and chutes which relied upon gravity. Swing boats appeared at a 'frost fair' on the frozen Thames in London in 1814 (the latter, incidentally, which are known to have been held on nine occasions, being unusual among fairs of the time in being instituted solely for pleasure).[23]

Animals, as providing entertainment, were believed to have been present at fairs since at least the fourteenth century. Bear-baiting and cock-fighting were common at fairs but the more innocent performances have been undertaken by a wide variety of animals. Bears, horses and dogs were commonest but hares, rabbits and even pigs were not unknown - the latter being taught to tell the time and count by pawing the ground, the audience's attention being diverted from the judicious prods given to the creatures' hind-quarters. The training of animals, though not necessarily only for the fair, was sufficiently important for William Stokes to publish a work on the subject called Vaulting Master in 1652 while Sir Walter Raleigh, in his History of the World referred to a John Banks who was so proficient at the art, that had he "lived in olden times .... would have shamed all the enchanters of the world, for whosoever was most famous amongs them could never master or instruct any beast as he did". The widening of commercial and colonial activity, already referred to, also made the display of wild animals possible. A camel was shown at St. Bart's in 1647 and Pepys later records seeing an

elephant and a tiger there. These isolated examples developed into the collections of animals which became the travelling menageries. Early examples were those of Pedcock and Polito founded in 1708 and 1758 respectively. What was to become the most famous of menageries, George Wombwell's was formed in 1805 or 1807, though, at this stage, they were intended only for the exhibition of the animals.[24]

iii) Origins of the Circus

The creation of the first circus in Britain is usually credited to Philip Astley who was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs on 8th January, 1742. He gained an expertise with horses after he joined the 15th Dragoons where he became a "rough rider and breaker". As a young sergeant-major Astley made his name when he "captured an enemy flag" at the battle of Emsdorf, subsequently being presented to the King for his bravery. While in Germany it is possible that Astley learned of the acts of horsemanship given by the frenchman Defraine in a Viennese theatre in 1755. Be that as it may, on leaving the army, Astley, in possession of his white charger, which he was allowed to keep for good conduct after the custom of the time, decided to open a riding school for the nobility in London. Lacking capital, he set up a ring in the open in a field, near the site of the present Waterloo station, round which his horse could prance while he displayed his skills to the audience standing outside.[25]

So great was this first circus's success and so wide it's appeal, the riding school was forgotten. Horace Walpole found the show "much beyond my expectation" and, later, Dickens' description in The Old Curiosity Shop indicates he too had seen it. Astley's success quickly brought competitors. Hughes and Sampson both set up south of the river while, by 1766, on the other side of London a display of "riding acts and acrobatics" was advertised near the Mile End Road and a Mr. Price offered to "exhibit horsemanship" in Islington. The idea soon crossed the Atlantic and the circus quickly became popular in the U.S.A., especially in New England. The first circus in that country was opened in Philadelphia by John Ricketts, who was a pupil of George Hughes. John Sharpe and a Mr. Poole soon began business, the former in Salem,Mass. in 1771. The Turner

family's circus began around 1800 and continued for many years as a purely family concern in an age when, in the U.S.A., circus partnerships were formed and disbanded with confusing frequency. Nevertheless, the institution flourished; by 1826 the Mount Pitt circus building sat 3,500.[26]

It should be noted that the first circuses were located in permanent buildings usually constructed for the purpose. Astley's soon had it's own home, covered in and with tiered seats around the ring, which lasted for a century, in Lambeth. On the rare occasions when performances were given elsewhere, as when Astley's visited Paris, it was in a suitable extant arena. Travelling circuses came later, "springing up rapidly .... (after) .... the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars", until, by about 1830, they were the majority. Early travelling circuses were small, perhaps having only a couple of horses for the ring and another couple to provide haulage to "....their principal pitches ...(which)... were the fairs". The connection with the showmen of the fair soon grew. In the 1820's, Sanger senior bought two horses to diversify from his existing freak and peep shows and James Chipperfield did likewise to supplement his human performers. Boasting a ring and horses, they could then present themselves as circuses, parade the performers, both human and animal, before the tent to tempt the public in and so benefit from the circus' known appeal.[27]

The first circus performances had been solely equestrian. Accompanied only by a boy with a drum to provide timing and an atmosphere of suspense, Astley announced "Activity on horseback of Mr. Astley, S.M. of H.M's Royal Regiment of Light Dragoons". The essential connection between horses and the circus lay in the fact that of all the later range of circus acts only the equestrian ones required to be performed in a ring, as that dictated the path of the horse, causing it to lean inwards facilitating acrobatic leaps on and off the creature's back. Nevertheless, Astley and others soon diversified, introducing clowns, jugglers and acrobats to the ring. Davis, the manager of the circus after Astley's death on 20 October, 1814, introduced camels to the ring to illustrate the 'Tableau of

Alexander the Great' which formed the second half of the performance. After the show, the animals could be visited 'behind the scenes' for a small fee, thus providing a close comparison with the true menagerie.[28]

iv) The Victorian Circus and Menagerie

The circus became an amalgam of the equestrian display, the menagerie and the traditional fool; and "the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the tenting circuses at the height of their glamour and popularity". Until it's heyday was past by about 1900, showmen regarded the circus as bringing "us better returns than any other sort of show". As the circuses grew in size, the shows became longer and more expensive with the result that they became economically incompatible with the fair as explained in Chapter 3, pp. 23 - 26 . Indeed, even an individual circus could grow too big and the Sanger set up was amicably split in two by the toss of a coin, shared between the brothers George and John.[29]

Nevertheless, the largest British circuses might come together with the fairs "now and again" but there is no record of the great American shows, which re-crossed the Atlantic to enjoy a vogue in Britain, ever operating other than independently. Among them, the best known was Barnum and Bailey's. Phineas Barnum, born in Bethel, Connecticut made his money through various shady deals and was introduced to the circus by the Turner family. He later formed his own circus, before entering a partnership with Bailey, which expanded to become a 2-ring - and later a 3-ring - circus before he died in 1891. Perhaps Barnum's peak came when his circus performed at Olympia, London in a building much used for the purpose since it's completion in 1855 and which, previously, had housed the Paris Hippodrome Circus. Other large American shows were 'Buffalo Bill' Cody's 'Wild West Show' which came to Britain in 1865 and the Ringling Bros. circus which started up in 1885. The former was not strictly a circus but had much in common with it, not least the vast parades with which it advertised it's arrival, Buffalo Bill riding at the head. Sanger was not slow to imitate his transatlantic rivals, the grand finale of his parade at one time being a large figure of Britannia flanked by a

live (and presumably well fed) lion and lamb. [30]

Meanwhile, Astley's was still in business, the last permanent circus in London, though it's performances contained an element closely akin to the theatre. Always with animals included, it continued it's 'tableaus' such as 'Lady Godiva' and 'Gulliver's Travels'. Sanger satisfied a long standing ambition in buying Astley's in 1871, only to see it closed down seventeen years later on safety grounds in one of the first such actions of the newly-formed L.C.C. and about which he was understandably very bitter. [31]

The large and famous shows were very much a minority but their fame brought a degree of prosperity to the typical mid-nineteenth century circus. This was a small, usually family affair whose members doubled up as ringmaster, horseman, clown, acrobat and musicians as well as providing all the physical labour needed. Some were lacking even a tent, so, admission fees being impossible to levy, it was necessary to go round with a hat afterwards. It was as a small family circus that the Sangers' began in the 1840's. Others, apart from the insertion of the necessary ring were no more than a square fairground booth; Rosaire's circus began in this way, the Ross family previously having what was known as a "square show". This size of circus was compatible with other fairground items; it's shows were not expensive and might last only 20 or 30 minutes at the most. An exception, already mentioned, was the Fossett circus, which though it grew to a respectable size, continued to 'follow the fair'. Yet other showmen maintained a small circus alongside possession of other fairground equipment; in this category was the circus of M/s Anderton and Rowland. Even small circuses could not, however, confine themselves solely to regular fairs. Inanimate fairground equipment, generally speaking, incurred no cost when not in use but as soon as animals were included, especially expensive-to-keep foreign ones, it was essential to maintain a more regular income. This became increasingly necessary if a circus grew to the extent of needing to employ regular labour to tend the animals. Accordingly, the circus, between fairs, often circulated to not-too-distant villages where their annual coming might be the only

entertainment seen and so certain to generate worthwhile audiences even in sparsely populated areas in a series of 'one night stands'. It was the variety of showman's life which was most continuously mobile; "circus in those days, only used to do a day at a time" (see Chapter 8, pp. 195-196). [32]

Though to some extent overtaken by the circus, the menagerie proper, as against the display of circus animals which went by the same name, continued and, indeed, prospered. The infamous purchase of 'Jumbo' by Barnum was in order to present him in a travelling menagerie. For public display, the menagerie's beast wagons were arranged around three sides of a square, only the inward facing sides of them being open to view. The fourth side was made up of the ornate show front which contained the pay boxes and before which some animals might be paraded as a promise of further wonders within. [33]

In the circus, the animal cages were often drawn into the ring and the trainer went inside to perform the act. By the Victorian era therefore, it was no longer sufficient merely to show the animals in a menagerie; in order to compete, the trainer had to go into the cage to perform an act. Such acts were mainly "leaping acts". The father of one elderly informant had jointly owned a menagerie with his two brothers. They had lions, wolves, camels and elephants in their "wild beast show", one brother entering the cages as the lion and wolf tamer. Like the smaller circuses, menagerie shows rarely lasted more than twenty minutes and the menagerie also, for economic reasons, travelled additionally to the regular fair circuit. Those known to have been on the road between 1860 and 1900 included the Day, Simmonds, Whittington, Sedgwick and Bostock & Wombwell examples. Menageries were recorded, at various times, at, for example, Salisbury and Northampton fairs and several were to be seen "all in a line" at the large fairs at Newcastle Town Moor and Mitcham. [34]

v) Booths and Shows

Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, ".... shows were the prominent feature of the .... (amusement) .... fair-grounds". Sanger described a fair at Lansdown, Bath around 1840, "booths, shows and refreshment tents of all descriptions were erected

to form an enormous ring, in the centre of which were the droves of sheep, cattle and horses". The booths themselves were little more than mere tents usually, for ease of erection and transportation though as the latter became easier as the century progressed, the fronts of the booths tended to become more ornate to advertise their contents. In front of the booths, the 'barkers' - aptly named - fought to make the attractions of their show heard. A show might last as little as fifteen or twenty minutes and a typical booth, well filled, held perhaps fifty people. It was just such a booth or "square show" which the Ross family converted into Rosaire's circus. [34]

The booths or stalls which offered games of skill or chance and those which simply offered items for sale were usually open-fronted; the descendants of them can still be seen at fairs and elderly showmen have handed-down memories of those once owned by their families. At Bath, in 1840, there were several large drinking and dancing booths and at the other end of the scale were open stalls offering a coconut shy or shooting gallery, while another might offer a range of home-made lemonade and confectionery. In between, in size, were the ones showing, typically, 'talking' ponies, acrobats and wire-walking acts. The performers, between fairs or in the winter months, might perform the same feats as street acts (once common in northern industrial towns) or on the music hall stage. When they ceased to be a major fairground attraction their translation over some decades is now clear, "those booths and things that were run at that time were the beginnings of the circus acts of today". Right at the end of the nineteenth century came the first examples of cinema at the fair. It was the natural successor to the 'magic lantern' shows. An early 'moving picture' booth was the one opened at Woking, Surrey in 1899 by James Purchase. [35]

Two other kinds of booth were such a major feature of most fairs as to merit special mention; the freak shows and boxing booths. The former did not frequently survive the nineteenth century by very many years. In 1925 it was already said, "Perhaps the greatest change that has taken place in show life .... is the disappearance of freaks and monstrosities .... of old, freaks were the mainstay of every show".

Partly due to improved social provision for the people involved and partly due to a change in public sensibilities which baulked at the display of "two headed things and things like that" (in the case of animal curiosities even being "pickled" for continued exhibition after death), showmen had to give up what among themselves, were known as "fat shows" from the 'fat lady' who was an indispensable feature of them. It has been pointed out, however, that the freak shows provided a support for the unfortunates displayed there in an age when they might well otherwise have been reduced to beggary. [36]

The boxing booths survived rather longer after their decline from their Victorian status as a major attraction. A number of today's showmen recall earlier generations of proprietors and fighters. Pat McKeowan, founder of a well-known west country fairground attraction made his name by knocking out the champion of the Royal Navy in one round. The maternal grandfather of another showman, with his two brothers, "chucked out challenges" to the miners of South Wales and Bill Ross, uncle to circus owner, Count Rosaire, was the "nine stone four Champion of England". Female boxers were not unknown and there is at least the suggestion that some might be quite young. The N.S.P.C.C. found the show they were looking for after announcing, "Will our friends looking for a travelling show with 'the celebrated female pugilist' .... on finding it, at once send us word of it's whereabouts. We are anxious to see it". [37]

The religious revival of mid-nineteenth century, which ushered in a missionary zeal to 'save' the gypsies also brought censure to the fair. Shows like those described above were considered lewd and sinful. The pre-amble to the Fairs Act, 1871 considered many fairs "unnecessary", they had become the "cause of grievous immorality and are very injurious". The Secretary of State for the Home Department was, therefore, empowered to abolish fairs if a magistrate or "owner of any fair" represented that it's closure was "for the convenience and advantage of the public". Prior to this, many large fairs had been lost, London alone losing St. Bartholemew's, Camberwell and Greenwich between 1855 and 1857. Apart from fairs for special occasions, such as that in Hyde Park for the Queen's coronation in

1838 at which "all the famous names of the fairground world" were present, there was a compensating growth of fairs in the new industrial centres; Durham miner's gala, Lancashire 'wakes' and Glasgow 'holidays' were examples. Of course, not all fairs lost their trading element. This was especially true of those devoted to horse sales and an individual example was 'Pot' Floyd who".... used to auction china in the fairgrounds, always a carnation in his button hole" at what were otherwise predominantly fun fairs. It was also the idea of amusement for it's own sake to which the utilitarian economists of the time objected. Such leisure for the workers was, they taught, an "economic loss". Whether the objections were moral or economic, showmen naturally considered objectors ".... fanatics and faddists who waged their mistaken crusade" against the innocent fair. Less harsh attitudes prevailed towards the end of the century with a "return to a better mind of the employers" coinciding with a revival of the fair unashamedly devoted to leisure. [38]

vi) Mechanization of Rides

The first recorded appearance of a mechanically-powered piece of fairground equipment was of a roundabout, or 'set of gallopers' as it became known to showmen, at Aylsham, Norfolk in 1860. It was built by Frederick Savage & Co. of King's Lynn, makers of agricultural steam engines and destined to become the largest of British fairground equipment manufacturers. The importance of this development for the future of the fair must be stressed; it began the age in which the fair took on it's modern guise. Of course, the older and simpler items in which the public participated did not disappear at once, if at all; swing boats and helter-skelter remained popular and showmen still recall horse driven roundabouts which continued in use until their owners might advance to the steam-driven variety. Nevertheless, the new mechanical rides quickly established themselves, first to share the central ground of the fair site with the earlier booths and shows and gradually, over roughly a fifty-year period, to relegate them to the status of 'side stuff'. It could also be argued that the fair and the circus grew apart from this change in the former as it ceased to be primarily 'theatre' to become a participatory leisure

activity. The new steam powered equipment also had important effects on the showmen and their society. There had previously been the wealthy ones among showmen's families, especially the well-known circus proprietors, but now the fairground became a more capitalized enterprise. The new machines were often bought from the makers on the instalment system and whether showmen invested in them or not had considerable repercussions upon their status in the developing social hierarchy (see Chapters 5, pp. 81 - 103and 6, pp. 124-138).[39]

The new steam rides were a strange 'by product', an anomaly of the industrial revolution; the marriage of steam and iron to produce a machine for amusement. The timing of their introduction late in the nineteenth century can be seen as a small internal manifestation of the search for markets at the later stage of industrialization which showed itself overseas in the scramble for colonial expansion. The rides themselves were developed rapidly; soon the horses went up-and-down as well as round-and-round. The horses were replaced by more ornate ones and sometimes by other fantastically carved and painted creatures, such as cockerels. When the sets of gallopers were in operation at the fair, the small steam engine, on it's four wheel truck and from which the movement derived, was located in the centre of the ride, the latter being built up around it. Later engines might be diesel or electrically powered in this century, but the same driving principle was employed on such as the waltzer, chair-o-planes, octopus, rotor and sky-rocket. Though steam - and, later, other - power was applied to other fairground items like the steam-yachts and cakewalk, it was only the machines using the original circular motion which came properly to be called 'rides' in showmen's terms; all variations on a basic theme by Savage's. Reverting to the early days of the new steam rides, it should be noted that they were still hauled from site to site by horse-power or, occasionally, sent by rail over longer distances. Only as they became heavier, sporting such refinements as Marenghi or Gavioli organs (at first of the 'steam trumpet' type and later electrically powered) did the elaborate traction engines, now so beloved of preservationists, come into use for haulage purposes.[40]

Canal Boatmen

i) Early Waterways

Naturally navigable rivers had since earliest times been the means of gaining ready access to the interior of a country whether the aim was conquest or trade. Where no suitable water route was available the only means by which goods could be carried overland in all seasons was often the pack horse; progress, even in the summer, was slow and expensive as the bulk which could be carried was inevitably small. Only by water was it possible to carry cargoes in quantity and on an island like Britain, fairly well endowed with naturally navigable rivers, it was often most expedient even for inland trade to carry goods downstream for a sea voyage and then up another suitable river to gain the intended destination, rather than attempt the journey overland. On an island where geography and natural resources dictated a relatively high level of foreign trade from an early date, the rivers of Britain had, by the middle ages, become its major highways. Such were the advantages of water-borne transport, some quite early attempts were made, at least by the fifteenth century, to make other rivers passable by boat by the simple expedients of dredging and straightening. The first waterways which can be considered as canals were, in effect, by-passes of stretches of rivers which were difficult to negotiate by boat or short branches of artificial waterway leading off navigable rivers. Yet, paradoxically, it was the stopping up of rivers with weirs, in order to conserve water and provide the necessary power for varieties of water mill, which provided the impetus for development of the lock, without which, in it's more modern form, canal building would have been impossible. As eventually developed the typical lock consisted of a chamber sufficiently large to hold a boat or boats, with a gate at each end, between which the water level could be adjusted by means of sluices thus enabling the craft to pass up or down stream. With the aid of this device "it was an easy step" to progress from "river straightening" to building true canals.[41]

Obvious step though it may seem in retrospect, in the absence of a recognized civil engineering profession, it was left to the self-

taught James Brindley, "master craftsman turned engineer" to build the canal the success of which ushered in the canal age. The canal was constructed for the Duke of Bridgewater and opened in 1761 in order to carry coals from his mines at Worsley to the growing town of Manchester, a project the duke may have conceived on seeing existing canals in Italy when he made the 'Grand Tour' some years previously. Before his new venture was finished, it's route was altered so that it could be better integrated into a more ambitious scheme to build a canal linking Manchester to the port of Liverpool. Eventually a canal system was built up across England, it's fundamental layout being in the shape of a cross linking the rivers Mersey, Trent, Thames and Severn with it's centre in Birmingham. The system was largely completed before the end of the eighteenth century. Examples of early trunk canals whose objectives were self-explanatory were the Trent & Mersey and Thames & Severn, opened in 1771 and 1789 respectively. The new canals frequently crossed water-sheds, the gradients each side being scaled by means of double-gated locks. It was the problem of supplying water to the summit levels together with the cost of building all along the line of the new cuts which dictated the dimensions of their infrastructure. Summit levels could be reduced in height above sea level by long and expensive tunnelling. Water could be supplied to them by diverting streams where possible, building artificial reservoirs or pumping water up. Hence the appeal of locks of limited size so that each boat used less water in it's ascent to and descent from the summit levels. Although there was little co-operation between canal companies and no canal equivalent of the railway's 'standard guage', many canal locks were built 70' 0" long and 7' 0" wide, including those around Birmingham. These limited dimensions thus dictated the largest size of boat which could be used on many through journeys and have complete flexibility throughout the system. Adequate as both boats and canals might have been to meet the needs of the early stages of industrialization, the seeds of later inadequacies had been sown.[42]

ii) The Canal Age

"Before the Duke began his canal, the price of water carriage by the old (river) navigation on the Mersey and Irwell from Liverpool to Manchester was 12s per ton and from Warrington to Manchester 10s. Land carriage was 40s per ton. Coals were retailed to the port at Manchester at 7d per cwt, and often dearer. The Duke, by this navigation from Liverpool to Manchester carries for only 6s per ton, in a shorter time and as certain delivery as by land carriage; consequently one half is saved to the public of the old water carriage, and to the poor for coals, and almost 6 parts in 7 of land carriage". The specific mention of coal was a reminder that, from the very beginning, "canals were largely given over to the mineral traffic" which was to remain their staple.[43]

The canal age which followed the opening of the Bridgewater Canal lasted only to the coming of the first trunk railways around 1840, a surprisingly short time span in an age when progress is now imagined to have been comparatively slow. Nevertheless from an estimated 1,398 miles of inland, mainly river, navigable waterways in 1760, the figure increased to 3,074 in 1800 and 4,023 miles in 1850 mainly due to canal building. Investors' enthusiasm for canals was fed by mouth-watering dividends; in 1824 the Trent & Mersey paid 75%, the Coventry 44% and the Loughborough Navigation a fantastic 197%. In 1830, just before the beginning of the railway age dividends remained good; the Staffordshire & Worcestershire paid 25.7%, the Coventry 49%, the Erewash 48% and the Oxford (which ran southwards to the Thames from the midlands coalfield) 32%. All these canals served industrial, mainly coal-mining areas and while, in general, it was the case that the victory over existing road haulage for bulk traffics was "instantaneous and complete", not all canals prospered. Some, particularly in rural areas and dependent upon agricultural produce for much of their traffic proved to be over-sanguine investments. But perhaps the most "stupendous failure" among canals was the Portsmouth & Arundel which closed even before the coming of the railways, as the strategic justification for building it during the Napoleonic Wars had passed before it could be opened.[44]

Dissatisfaction with the canals was already being voiced in the decade from 1820; the first signs were seen of their inability to cope with an increasing volume of trade or to deliver goods speedily enough for its quickening tempo. The 7' 0" wide locks began to prove a "fatal drawback" as they not only prevented larger boats being used but also meant convoys of smaller ones could not be run as the locks could only pass one boat at a time. As business attention turned to the possibilities of railways, canal interests joined forces with their old enemy the turnpike trusts to offer "fierce resistance" to them. Some attempts were made to meet the railways in the matter of speed by introducing the so-called 'fly boats' which were simply boats given priority for quick passage. Competition was even entered into for passenger traffic on rare occasions, as when the Bridgewater Canal, for example, ran two-horse 'fly boats' from Altrincham to Manchester. But such responses did not last long and many canals, such as the Kennet & Avon and the Basingstoke, could only snatch a last burst of doom-laden prosperity by carrying materials for the builders of the new, parallel railways. [45]

iii) Canals in the Railway Age

Although most trunk railway routes had been completed by about 1850, railway mileage continued to grow and doubled between 1851 and 1871 so that there was virtually no stretch of the more limited canal system which was left unduplicated. Most canals had been expressly forbidden, when acquiring their Acts of Parliament, from acting as carriers. By analogy with the existing turnpike trusts, it was considered unfair competition to other carriers who would use the roads or canals, as the proprietors of them would naturally favour their own carrying business. The new technology of steam power meant that such limitations were impractical on railways so that in relation to the latter canal companies found themselves at a commercial disadvantage. Accordingly they began to carry in their own boats, often an illegal practice until sanctioned by parliament in 1845. [46]

A number of canals, away from the centres of industry lost what trade they ever had, ceased to be factors in the area's economy

and some, like the Wilts & Berks simply faded away. A few, like the Grand Junction with it's 'main line' from Birmingham to London maintained a good proportion of their trade though less profitably. The Bridgewater company, thanks largely to it's close relationship to the mines at Worsley and an aggressive management, exceptionally carried good loads and still made a profit at the end of the century. By that time however, it was estimated that about one-third of the remaining canal system was railway owned. Though it seemed an exaggeration to say that the railways became ".... unwilling owners .... (because) .... the canals were forced upon them", their interest in buying out canal proprietors was usually only to eliminate a competitor which might still undercut them. In this way the Kennet & Avon sold out their Bristol to London route to the Great Western Railway in 1851, for example, while the Great Northern's object in controlling the Grantham & Notts canal was to prevent the coal traffic passing onto the Grand Junction canal, so forcing it instead on to the all - G.N.R. rail route to London. By the time the remaining canal companies had persuaded parliament to forbid the practice under the Railway and Canal Traffic Act of 1888, the damage had been done to the canal system and it's traffic.[47]

iv) Effects of Railway Dominance

Undoubtedly, the object of the railway companies in acquiring canals was, in general, to neglect them, spending only that bare minimum upon them which would meet their legal obligation to maintain the canals in a nominally navigable condition. The attitude of railway managements was typified by the Great Central whose canals were said to have "continued peacefully to fulfil their role of subsidiary carriers" and who took six months to repair a 25 yard breach in the bank of one of them in 1884. On another occasion, after making the lengthy journey from his Manchester base to London in order to present his annual report, the company's Canal Superintendant, having waited outside the General Manager's office at Marylebone all day was dismissed unseen and told to come back next year. There were exceptions; the London & North Western Railway kept it's Shropshire Union canal in good order and maintained depots and warehouses along

it as it provided them with a tentacle into a rival railway company's territory. For similar reasons, the Midland Railway ran a fleet of boats onto the rival G.W.R.'s Kennet & Avon canal from it's railhead at Bath. Nevertheless, such instances cannot obscure the general picture of railway-owned canals. More typical was the refusal to allow the introduction of steam tugs for haulage on the grounds that the increased wash generated would damage the canal banks or the refusal of the G.N.R. and Midland companies to employ icebreaking boats in winter on the grounds that cold weather was an 'Act of God' and so outside their legal maintenance obligations.[48]

"In the second half of the nineteenth century when railways captured most of the trade in merchandise and perishable goods" as well as the bulk of the mineral traffic, the financial position of the independent canal companies also worsened. It was not so much that total tonnages carried declined but that goods were conveyed at lower rates which, besides impoverishing employees, left little money available for maintenance. So "the fabric of the canals began to deteriorate. Mud deepened in the bottom of the canal, increasing the danger of running aground and restricting the load of the boat". Thus conveyance by canal in less profitable loads also became slower as delays due to bank troubles and lock and tunnel repairs multiplied.[49]

v) Boatmen in the Nineteenth Century

The origins of boating families was discussed in Chapter 3, pp. 26 - 27 . As the canal network expanded so their numbers naturally grew and it is probable there was no lack of recruits, for at the height of the canal age, the boatmen, judged by the standards of the time, were "by no means poor". The same applied to those employed in regular capacities by the canal companies such as maintenance men or toll keepers. On the fringe of the new industry were casual labourers; for example, the men on the Trent & Mersey where it was the "occasional practice" to employ them to haul the boats, but who did not share in the relative prosperity. On the boats themselves were "all-male crews who could afford to house their families ashore". Some canal companies specified the crew size to be employed in order to steer the boat, handle the horse, work the locks and so on. The

formation, in 1829, of the 'Paddington Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge among Canal Boatmen and Others' does not imply that families were already frequently living on board but only that the boatmen had become a recognized employment group who, in the opinion of some, merited their missionary attention. [50]

Of course it was frequently necessary for the all-male crews to spend nights away from home. Sometimes needing to moor up at remote locations or wishing to save the cost of lodgings might well have been among the reasons for the building of some rudimentary accommodation on board the boats. "In the days before railways there were few family boats", but then, when "railway competition brought hard times to the canals .... the boatman was compelled to take his wife and family onto the boats with him". Then the early cabins became their only home, except when trade improved a little at which time a shore home might again be rented, only to be given up when the trade cycle or bad weather once more made it a luxury which could not be afforded. The trend to living aboard was less common on the waterways of northern England, built to more generous dimensions, where economic pressures were accordingly less. [51]

By the middle of the nineteenth century "the plight of canal boat people, suffering from low wages and bad conditions" was general on the narrow canals (i.e. those whose boats were limited to 7' 0" maximum width) where family boats had become the norm for all but a little short distance work. Their condition was for a time, generally unnoticed until the appearance of a somewhat exaggerated description in the Fortnightly Review in February, 1874 and a leading article in the Daily Telegraph of 7th August of the same year. But it was left to the reformer, George Smith, to try to ameliorate the condition of the people in what, due to their poverty and isolation, had rapidly become an hereditary calling (see Chapter 6, pp. 116-121). [52]

Resumé

The history of the ethnically identified gypsies naturally varies in it's content with that of the other two groups of travellers whose history derives largely from the institution or

industry with which they were identified. This does not, of course, confirm or deny the possibility of either showmen or boatmen adopting their present identity instead of the earlier ethnic one. Aspects of all travellers' lives and cultures will be discussed in some detail at a later stage to examine that possibility (see Chapters 7, pp. 145-181 &9-12pp. 220-345).

The history of the gypsies since their first appearance in Britain, some five centuries or so ago, shows that a degree of hostility towards them has been a factor in their lives throughout almost the entire period. Certain occupations, now regarded as being 'traditional' ones, have distinguished them since their arrival and were almost certainly the skills and crafts they had previously practised across Europe. The gradual absorbing of itinerant Celtic tradesmen was a process which, even now in the case of Irish tinkers, is not complete. In the absence of similar native travellers the gypsies of England could perhaps at least until quite recently, claim a more exclusively Romany origin and culture. These other travellers were, however, for the first time, as stated earlier, late in the nineteenth century of use to both gypsies and the sedentary population, as a convenient scapegoat, in an unspoken collusion when the former reached a degree of prosperity and the latter sought a romantic ideal.

Gypsies, in their wanderings across continental Europe were soon associated with the amusements (including performing animals) which were a common feature of the still mainly trade fairs. However, there seems to be little doubt that these amusements pre-dated the appearance of gypsies, probably also in western Europe but certainly in Britain.

The creation of the modern circus and the main period of the transition of the fair to eventually a centre of amusement began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The factors which made both possible were those which gave rise to the canal boat group of travellers and also provided the general background against which the gypsies reached their highest degree of prosperity. The general increase in population and the trend to urbanization brought both the

numbers and concentrations of people who were the markets of the growing circuses and funfairs. Colonial activity saw the importation of the animal and human offerings of both, while internal transport improvements meant both large shows and heavy equipment were practicable. The capitalist institutions of banking played their part in making possible the second transition of the fair, this time to a mechanized centre of leisure. The latter process was to take roughly half a century before it's virtual completion. It began in 1860 and in the longer term brought about the separation of the circus and funfair which had previously merged, both in their entertainment content and proprietorship.

As the wider effects of the period of the industrial revolution in it's later stages during the Victorian era brought at least a degree of prosperity to gypsy and showmen travellers, so those same effects, paradoxically, brought poverty and hardship to - and, indeed, arguably created - the other group of travellers on the canals. The canal system was the bulk freight carrier of the early industrial revolution but it was the advance of technology which produced the superior network of railways. The end of the canal age came in the 1840's and it was the impoverishment of those who worked upon them which, it has been suggested, led the boatmen to take their families afloat.

Thus the changes which took place in the demography, economy and industry of Britain from the eighteenth century had as profound effects upon the lives of showmen and canal boatmen as upon the majority, sedentary population. But, to the end of the nineteenth century, although imparting a degree of prosperity to them, it generally had less impact upon the lives of the gypsies.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY, 1900 - 1945

Gypsies

i) Early Years and the First World War

In the years before the First World War the gypsies were free of some of the pressures that later beset them; recalling those times, over fifty years later, one said, ".... and we could talk a policeman over - we wasn't hounded as what we are now". Clearly, distance had lent a certain enchantment for the gypsies were, in the Edwardian period, still affected in their seasonal agricultural work by the continuing depression in that sector of the national economy. However, other traditional sources of income continued, including fortune-telling, hawking and even occasionally showing performing animals, but the most profitable work was probably horse dealing. Despite the beginnings of mechanization of road transport, the horse population of Britain reached it's peak in the first decade of this century. This was to the gypsies' advantage and some horse fairs such as Barnet and Appleby reached their maximum size. [1]

Later it was claimed that, "the Italians and the Germans were coming over and buying the best horses in the country even twelve months before the war started". Whether many gypsies benefitted from these activities cannot now be established but the gypsies' knowledge of horses was recognized and used by the British army during the First World War. Some were given work in the army's veterinary services in France and others were employed "by the Government in purchasing horses" at home. Even after the war's end, gypsies benefitted from the disposal of the army's surplus horses which they bought up and often sold to former comrades-in-arms who were setting up in business on government grants and still regarded horses as the first choice in transport. [2]

Many gypsies "volunteered in the early days of the war", the numbers eventually seeing army service allegedly running into "thousands" and, of course, experiencing their share of casualties.

Because of the loss of both many of their menfolk and their horses, which were commandeered, the remaining gypsies' position was "difficult in every case; in some .... impossible". Many were "finding travelling almost impossible under war-time conditions". In Scotland, the women and children suffered considerable hardships where they tended to become less mobile, drifting towards the towns and staying near the post offices at which they regularly drew the allowances granted for the families of men in the army. Some gypsies, throughout Britain, moved into low quality housing, especially the elderly such as Esther Young and her husband Amos who rented a cottage in Norfolk while their two sons were serving in France. [3]

There were a number of other pointers to the hardships many gypsies suffered during the First World War and to the other changes which were to affect their lives afterwards. The increase to over 200 tinker children in industrial schools in Scotland in 1917 was attributed to war-time poverty and, further south, Guildford R.D.C.'s call for special compounds for gypsies stemmed from the condition of those seen begging by the road-side in it's area. The First World War tended to isolate the gypsies from continental kinsmen, a trend re-inforced by the general introduction of passports afterwards. Also, in the immediate post-war years came an early mention of scrap-dealing, probably in surplus military equipment left over from the war. [4]

ii) The Inter-war Period

Mass production methods in the factory became established as the manufacturer's norm during the inter-war period and had a significant effect upon the traditional craft skills of the gypsy. Metal work, such as the repairing of pots and pans, which had given tinkers their name, was "killed .... by cheap, factory made articles". Hawking was less profitable by reason of transport changes. The change did not take place all at once but gathered momentum during the nineteen-twenties and hawking was still described only as "dying" in 1936. The country bus and private motoring meant that the new mass-produced articles were readily available to most, as town shops became more accessable. Improved distribition methods, "the traders'

ubiquitous van and improved parcel-post services" all helped to make replacement, rather than repair of domestic items, both attractive and economical. Even so, the gypsies faced the added competition of "unemployed men hawking" in some areas during the depression. [5]

Although it was broadly true that gypsy skills were made redundant by that "mass production .... (which) .... sounded the death knell of rural craftsmanship" as well, there were odd exceptions. "One of the oldest of gypsy crafts .... (which was) .... still going strong .... (was) .... the making of clothes pegs". In a different category, seasonal agricultural work, though no longer as important a source of income as it once had been, remained of importance as mechanization had yet to make it's full impact upon agricultural methods. [6]

As with tinkering and hawking, "horse dealing between the two great wars was not as paying a business as it used to be". From it's Edwardian high the horse population of the country "declined rapidly" especially from about 1930 onwards. In consequence, some of the major horse fairs underwent their main period of transition to becoming predominantly amusement fairs. This applied, for example, to Yarm,Hull and Barnet during this period. [7]

To replace the older, failing sources of income it was to scrap dealing and, to a lesser extent, 'rag-and-bone' work to which many gypsies turned. It was an adjustment to the changes in transportation and the 'throw away' economy. It was not a change which gypsies necessarily welcomed; travellers were conservative by nature and horses had for long been an important factor in both their economy and culture. As one gypsy put it, "I had to start going into another trade - into the scrap trade". [8]

Whether a gypsy family faced increasing poverty or relative prosperity depended upon it's ability to adapt to the new conditions. Not all recognized that "there was a very good trade to be done in second hand motor cars". Nevertheless, this change brought others in it's wake. Though hawking had long been a mainly urban occupation, the gypsy and his principal source of income (i.e. that derived from

horse dealing) had always been rurally based. Now both he and his work became essentially 'of the town'. Additionally the new work, because of it's location and nature, was obtrusive. Restrictions upon the gypsies freely pursuing 'scrapping' were enacted in the Public Health Act, 1936 (see Chapter 6, pp. 122-124), where such "offensive trades" were identified as a public nuisance. From the gypsy viewpoint, this reaction to his attempts to earn a living appeared only as harassment. [9]

The processes of urbanization and industrialization in the nineteenth century had relatively little effect upon the gypsies when compared to the motorization and mass-production phenomena of the 1920's and '30's. It has been said that, "the gypsies' strength is their ability to apply themselves to a variety of jobs without specialization" and to exploit the 'gaps' in the host economy. These abilities enabled them to turn to scrap dealing, first merely as an alternative income source but one which was later to become the major one for many families. Gypsies themselves were aware of their adaptability and saw it as evidence of their superiority in the art of survival over the gorgio who, typically, had only one source of income and appeared unable to cope if that was for some reason lost to him. Some travellers, however, were unable to deal with the problems of economic change. In Scotland it was considered that the condition of many tinkers was, in 1936, "worse" than it had been in 1918. Some families were tending to break up, in certain instances "young tinkers were becoming wandering vagrants and tramps". Economic conditions in England all but eliminated the never very common Irish element; in 1939 it was said, "today an Irish tinker .... is a rarity on the roads of England". Camping sites, too, were beginning to be something of a problem as gypsies drifted towards the periphery of towns, often being "forced .... into odd corners, quarries, sand - holes and other damp places which are menaces to .... health". [10]

iii) The Second World War

The impact of the earlier conflict on gypsy life was considerable, but that of the Second World War has been described as "profound". The immediate introduction of conscription meant, "there

isn't a single gypsy family in England without it's representative in the armed forces". The enforced involvement in a wider society was experienced for the first time by women as many went into factory work. Good money was available in this type of work for the unskilled at a time traditional work suffered a further decline. Magistrates refused the necessary licences for the latter on the grounds there was more worthwhile work available so bringing about "the end of hawking for Rosie Griffiths and scores of other gypsies". In peace-time the licences had been grudgingly allowed as it was pleaded that gypsy women"could do little else".[11]

The Second World War was also seen as a "watershed" in two other important respects; prior to it the 'motorized'gypsy was a rarity but afterwards horse power for pulling the home or work purposes almost disappeared. This change was closely allied to the growth of scrap and other waste dealing which was promoted from merely an alternative to the major source of income (see Chapters 7 and 8, pp. 145-219). Gypsies were recognized as making a valuable contribution towards "Lord Beaverbrook's appeal" for rounding up almost anything re-useable for the war effort. The needs of wartime alerted many gypsies to the possibilities of scrap work for the first time. One man involved (who had been a showman but admitted his gypsy connections) worked closely with the W.V.S., the usual co-ordinating body for each area, and recalled, "I did wonderful business". Some worked in gangs as "demolition workers" while one observer noted "during the present war .... groups of gypsies, dwelling in registered caravans, may be found .... engaged in forestry". They were highly suited to these kinds of work as both required a degree of mobility. No temporary housing was required for a group who preferred to continue to live in their own moveable homes and, in the case of forestry work,did not object to the often remote locations. Although the economic opportunities were often good, some gypsies found the increasing restrictions of wartime unacceptable. For security reasons they were, in some areas, "compelled" to live in special compounds set aside for them, which, by the end of the war, resembled "the standards of the Stone Age". In order to escape these restrictions, the hazards of bombing and conscription, a number

of English gypsy families went to Ireland. Some inter-marriage occurred there with local travellers, mainly from the "eastern counties" of the country. Thus family links were forged and the Irish element awakened to the greater economic prospects of the larger, more industrialized island which led to the numbers who entered England in the post-war years (see Chapter 13, pp.347 - 348.[12]

Showmen

i) Early Years of the Century

There is a tendency nowadays to see the period immediately before the First World War as a sort of golden age but for the showmen of the fairground the temptation has a greater justification than for most; "1912-13 was one of the most prosperous periods that the fair ground had ever enjoyed". "Fairs were increasing in number every year", a fact which might not have been obvious to showmen in the south of England "who had seen the decline and compulsory closing of a number of fairs". Following general population trends most of the new fairs were in the north of the country; it was claimed in 1913 that more fairs were held within a ten mile radius of Manchester than had been held in the whole country one hundred years earlier. Even so, the number of fairs in some southern towns now seems remarkably high; four times a year, for example, a fair was held on Bournemouth beach.[13]

The fairgrounds were enjoying their heyday, the still-novel mechanized rides vied for position with the established booths. The menageries and human acts, such as knife-throwers and high wire performers, remained popular. Rides and shows alike sported heavy and ornate facades; the former noisily obtrusive as in the case of the scenic railway recalled as having "a beautiful big organ out front". In a supporting role, other showmen operated swing boats, shooting galleries, coconut shies and other "throwing things".[14]

A late form of booth show which enjoyed a brief but spectacular vogue in the pre-First World War era was the infant cinema. Interest was great enough for the showmen's paper, World's Fair to run a weekly feature entitled "Cinematograph Notes". The earliest films were

usually of a topical, 'news reel' type, the show lasting 20 minutes or so, which was the norm for most booth shows. The cinemas themselves were small at first, accommodating perhaps 50 people but had grown to include some 500 seaters by 1914. "At some of the big fairs up to three cinema shows were showing at once". Established showmen invested in cinema booths and equipment. Anderton and Rowlands added one to their other attractions while the Chipperfield family left the circus altogether to concentrate on a film show. In Ireland, the proprietors of Paulo's circus found their new cinema very popular though they continued to give juggling and similar acts between the films. [15]

There were, however, some clouds on the horizon for the generally booming fair. A few corporations sought by-law rights "to cripple the industry of the fairground and to abolish the Fair rights of the people". Luton, Beds. corporation, for example, tried to purchase the fair 'rights' from the Lord of the Manor in order to abolish it. The Showmen's Guild successfully opposed the closure; it was an early example of what was to become a major part of the latter's work (see Chapter 6, pp. 134 - 136). Land use was a growing problem, common land, especially near towns, was, in Edwardian times, often "cribbed" for municipal golf courses, a class diversion of land thus lost to the fair itself and to showmen whether for camping or grazing. Objections to the fair on moral grounds continued. While father acted as 'barker', the daughters of the family, dressed in tights, "went dancing up front" to attract the public's attention; showmen had to use all means at their disposal to gain custom. Their new rides and cinemas were expensive to buy and many were hard pressed to meet their commitments. They therefore also had to travel widely to reach the larger fairs beside using means to which those of 'high moral character' objected. [16]

The transfer of some circus showmen to the new cinema shows, mentioned above, reflected the fact that the Victorian circus boom was over. So great was the slump in the circus's appeal that, in 1912, it was bemoaned, "alas, there are only one or two left in England". This estimate was certainly too low as at least two are known to have

closed down soon after the outbreak of war in 1914. The music halls were very popular and many of the circus performers found work there even sometimes including the clowns and animal acts. The nephew of George Sanger performed his "stage aerial act" on the music hall boards for three years after his uncle's circus closed down in 1904. The closure signalled "the end of the spectacular side of the English circus". Other performers went abroad, to France, Germany, or the U.S.A., where the circus was still doing well. The decline of the circus also meant the end of the spectacular parades with which it announced it's arrival. But it was the dominance of the fair's newest sensation, the 'pictures', which did most to hit the circus. When it is remembered that "the second half of the .... (circus) .... programme was a drama - you know, 'Maria Marten in the Red Barn', 'Black Bess' or something like that", it will be appreciated that this was something the film-makers soon learned to do more effectively. [17]

ii) The First World War

a) The War Effort

Though no numbers were given it was claimed by the Showmen's Guild that a high proportion of "showlife men" had volunteered for the armed forces. "We have", it said, "sent the bravest and best of our sons to the front .... (because) .... we are Britons first and showmen afterwards". [18]

Like the gypsies, the showmen's means to continue his life-style was largely denied him when "thousands of our horses were commandeered". Loss of both their performing and working horses resulted in both the Paulo and Rosaire circuses being broken up in 1914, in the latter case "all but one of our horses was commandeered". Again, like the gypsies, the showmen's knowledge of horses was recognized. The father of one informant was employed "judging" horses or valuing them when they were commandeered. But at least on the odd occasion a showman was able to 'save' a favourite horse; one had "got this mare trained to go lame" for her part in his circus drama "Black Bess" and adroitly gave her the signal before the army's commandeers. Also of immediate use to the military authorities were

the steam traction engines which showmen had invested in as their equipment became heavier (see Chapter 8, pp. 201-202). Within a month of hostilities starting, out of an estimated one thousand engines, "eight hundred .... and nearly 2,000 skilled workers (i.e. showmen) were at work" for the authorities. Before conscription was introduced, it seems it was incorrect to claim, as one showman did, that his father and uncle were "taken in the army with the engines". It was more likely that the showmen continued as civilian employees driving their commandeered engines, as another explained it. Some showmen's engines were converted for agricultural work while a number found employment in camp construction work as around Aldershot where they were also used for hauling supplies, "carting food and that". [19]

Showmen who were 'on reserve' were called upon "straight away" and, of course, many others volunteered. The places served, such as Mesopotamia or in Ireland in 1916, are still recalled. Others moved into civilian occupations; F. Ross became a miner in Barnsley, Yorks, for example, and J. Butlin, Snr. became a docker at Barry, S. Wales. Yet others took up factory work or were engaged in camp construction tasks alongside their colleagues traction engines in the Aldershot and other areas. [20]

The war hit the showmen hard and they considered they had done more than their part; "Showpeople have felt the deprivations of war-time, and the attendant necessary sacrifices, more than any other class of worker". Difficult as things undoubtedly were, "at the present time, we are only asking for the chance to carry on until our heroes return", was the sentiment expressed in 1917. [21]

b) Business Activities

It is now necessary to consider what opportunities existed for those showmen who did try to 'carry on' during the First World War in the face of the official attitude towards their industry. The Ministry of Munitions waged it's "official crusade" against the "holidays of the workers". It was empowered under the Defence of the Realm Act to close down fairs, so placing showmen "completely at the mercy" of the bureaucrats in Whitehall, in turn under pressure from

the army authorities, who regarded such leisure activities as so many hours lost to munitions' production. The 'wakes' at Hyde, near Manchester, were "suppressed" by order of the Ministry, citing the front line need, as were those of nearby Denton as they "would impede the production of munitions". The situation was so bad that in 1916, only three out of twenty fairs of the "Midland Round" were held and in the Durham and Northumberland area only an estimated three out of ten. In some areas, where closures were not enforced, the local decision was to keep to the regular holidays in the normal way, fairs going ahead as usual. "The decision of most towns' miners' delegates" in South Wales and of the representatives of "cotton operatives" in Rochdale and elsewhere in Lancashire were examples. But it was only towards the end of the war, in 1917, that there was any real improvement in the situation. Meanwhile, the Showmen's Guild had helped to fight off a proposed "Amusement Tax" particularly aimed at the growing cinema industry but which would inevitably adversely affect the ones still in fairground booths. The governmental change of heart came too late, of course, for many showmen, when it was at last recognized that relaxation and amusement for the workers in industry was essential to keep up flagging morale. Belatedly recognition came that "all classes of entertainers were helping to win the war by maintaining morale". Whereas "early in the year .... great problems" were foreseen, in fact, "very few" fairs were stopped in 1917. It had taken nearly three years for the call of the Guild's chaplain to be heeded; "Let the misguided and narrow-minded men who would stop the wholesome amusement of the workers fall into line with Lord Kitchener's advice : 'Business as Usual' ". [22]

One of the most intractable problems for showmen was the loss of the fair sites when the ground was put to other uses. That at Bedford, for example, was taken over as a military exercise ground. Suppression of the St. Giles' fair at Oxford in 1914, which the town's councellors thought it "inappropriate" to hold in wartime was avoided but in subsequent year's the Guild agreed with the decision. "Oxford's reason .... was so reasonable and right .... No showman

would wish to carry on a fair in the heart of a city that had become a vast hive of hospitals for wounded soldiers .... (it was a) .... purely human appeal .... (and) .... showmen made ready compliance with the demands of humanity". The loss of fairs in designated danger zones, mainly along the east coast, was also readily accepted. But the attempts to stop Nottingham's Goose Fair because of Zeppelin raids was seen as a cover to mask local issues behind the move. Nottingham became something of a test case and "nothing more was heard .... of the movement to stop the wholesome and necessary amusements of the people who perforce have to stay at home" on such pretexts, either in Nottingham or elsewhere. [23]

The war had equally dire consequences for both the travelling circus and fairground. It "almost sounded the death knell" of the circus in Britain; the Rosaire and Paulo circuses, as mentioned, being "broken up" before 1914 closed. On the fairground side the effect was slower; "trade and business of the fairground .... (had only) .... suffered a partial paralysis"and there was an "extremely restricting effect" on the showmen concerned. Not until 1916 was "the travelling showman business brought almost to a complete standstill". Some showmen, not surprisingly, did not travel at all during the war. Those already possessing their own winter quarters could store their equipment (see Chapter 8, pp. 196 - 199), while others had to rent accommodation. [24]

After victory in 1945, in reflecting upon the lot of showmen during the Second World War, "a contrast .... (was drawn) .... to the action taken by many .... at the outbreak of the last war in closing down and selling their tackle". Despite the difficulties of the time, it was a course of action some showmen soon came to regret. One recalled afterwards, "we saw what happened to some of the poor fairground people .... thousands of people were destitute - you don't hear much about that now". A warning against a repitition was sounded in 1939; "When war broke out in 1914 many of us got into a panic and closed or disposed of our shows. A little later we regretted our haste". [25]

Despite the problems encountered, some showmen continued to travel with their families throughout the war, in one case, in a small family circus. Others recalled the booths or stalls they had; one had a boxing booth, for example, and another "coconut sheets and darts", it being possible to carry on as "there weren't no blackout then". Those who carried on did so despite huge transport difficulties. Where railways had been used, mainly by circuses, the rolling stock was now required for the war effort. In order to get to the next fair site it was frequently necessary to make two or three round trips with the remaining severely depleted motive power. It was, of course, an expensive and time-consuming process. The Showmen's Guild met representatives of the Board of Trade in Manchester to discuss the "utilization and rationing of horses" to alleviate the difficulty, seemingly with little effect. The war had profound effects upon the showmen themselves in their roles and relationships, just as it did for the majority, sedentary population. "Such business as wartime restrictions .... (allowed was) .... being done by the ineligible" (i.e. for war service). This meant the elderly and, more particularly, women. The business they were able to do was estimated to bring gross receipts down "forty to fifty per cent" on pre-war figures; an estimate which must be seen against the inflation of the time. Only very late in the war, in October, 1917, was it attempted to run a fair to support the war effort, too late to be of real benefit to showmen generally. Nevertheless, the Red Cross Fair held in Northampton was described as a "triumph", grossing "over £6,000" in two days.[26]

Because of travelling difficulties, non-mobile amusements of fairground type were a possible alternative. One showman who operated in South Wales opened seasonally at Barry Island, for example, while another started an "automatic arcade" in Watford, Herts and went into partnership with a brother-in-law operating an indoor shooting gallery in King Street, Hammersmith in West London. But the best business opportunities were those provided by the consequences of the war, "we have readily co-operated with the military authorities at the great training camps in providing recreation for our brave defenders". A "slide show" was, in this way, set up at Brookwood in Hampshire,

which included pictures purporting to show the sinking of the Titanic, then fresh in memory; the sentimental songs which the proprietor's two daughters sang as an accompaniment were very well received. A "bioscope show" entertained troops from the temporary camps around Harefield, Middx. and, as was to be expected, the vast camps on Salisbury Plain attracted other showmen. Singularly appropriate was the "22-shot Shooting Range" with which one showman travelled over a very limited circuit around Warminster, Wilts. The Chipperfield family, having entered the booming cinema business before the war, bought a suitable building in Amesbury at the heart of the Plain. But even the military custom proved to be unreliable, they and other showmen faced near ruin when the "Irish revolution came .... (in 1916) .... and all the troops went over there and that left us with nothing". [27]

iii) The Inter-war Period

a) Early Post-war Years

With the end of war-time restrictions on the holding of fairs there was a surge of optimism. A quick revival was expected with a high demand for amusement from a population who were war weary and whose working hours had been reduced. There was "no reasonable excuse" for not re-introducing 'lost' fairs and, indeed, revival was very much in the local authorities' interest. One of the arguments used against the closure of Nottingham's Goose Fair was that the corporation stood to lose "£7,000 in tolls" annually. Examples of fairs quickly announced as to be re-established in 1919 were those at Banbury, Ilkeston, Loughborough and Oxford. [28]

Starting up again was not so easy for the showmen, who usually got their steam engines back but only very rarely their horses. The few who had stored their equipment during the war were now strongly placed. Army gratuities came in useful; Frank Paulo used his to buy two horses and, with his two sisters, put their circus on the road again. Large families were an asset to the circus proprietor; the five children of the Ross family helped to get the Rosaire show going, though at first they couldn't afford a tent. Many showmen built themselves very simple stalls and could, at first, travel over

only a very limited round of local fairs. The only horse which could be afforded was needed to pull the caravan and so the cart for their stall they had to pull themselves. The side-shows with which the showmen began again were typically "coconut sheets", darts, hoop-la and "penny dip" bran tubs but an early novelty was a "snake pit", James Chipperfield seemingly able to catch and handle the adders with impunity.[29]

Under the circumstances it was fortunate for many showmen that business was good for a while with "war stagnation .... over". "Money was plentiful, wherever .... (the showmen) .... went, they got plenty of money". The years 1919 and '20 stood out, "never before or since has so much money been taken at the fairs". Showmen now recall that time; there were still lines of booths at the fair, all doing excellent business and some circuses were showing "three or four times a day". All showmen were also given a fillip by the impact of the new Bertram Mills' arrangement at Olympia, London where "visitors to the circus enter it through the fair". Yet the boom was both short and fragile. Some saw the period favourably in retrospect; "after the First World War .... that's what gave them the lift up". One showman recalled being able to afford a traction engine while still a young man. But prices had risen "tremendously" since 1914 and re-equipping at an inflationary time saw many showmen heavily burdened with debt when the boom passed. For whereas in 1920 it was happily stated "hardly a borough or hamlet" had not re-introduced it's fairs or wakes, by the outbreak of the Second World War it was bemoaned that "country and small town fairs barely managed to survive the last war".[30]

Even at the time of the brief boom an old trouble recurred. Hooliganism had "become rampant" and was, for the first time in the twentieth century, getting the fair a bad name. And, of course, those showmen who found themselves caught up in "the troubles" of Ireland did not share in the general prosperity. The Paulo family's circus had an enforced involvement, "when they used to do the cattle rustling and that sort of thing .... we had a drum to drive the cattle". Had father not agreed to go along and, quite literally,

beat the drum, the consequences, they were assured, would be unpleasant. The family spent their last few pounds on the passage to England. [31]

b) The Fair and the Depression

The general economic history of the inter-war period was dominated by the slump in trade and the fairground provides no exception. For showmen generally, the lean years began in 1921. Thereafter, though business was never brisk, 1926 to 1929 were poor years when the "slump in trade and vast numbers of people unemployed have had a serious affect on the takings" and the "long looked-for promised trade revival .... (was) .... slow at making it's appearance". Nineteen-thirty was no better, a year of "general depression" and two years later came "one of the most depressing years we have had". Not all areas were, of course, equally affected but even in the relatively prosperous ones showmen had to contend with those who had moved from some of the worst. A number "came out" of South Wales after the General Strike of 1926, echoing the footsteps of many ex-miners, and sought work in southern England. [32]

Nevertheless, there were some developments in the industry, even some positive ones as showmen struggled to adapt to the demands of the age. Booths and human performers were still to be seen in numbers at the larger fairs such as Nottingham and Hull but they were, at the time, rapidly declining into mere "side stuff" as the fifty-year transition of the fair to a predominantly mechanized form of participatory amusement, referred to earlier (see Chapter 4, pp. 66-68) neared completion. One of the major casualties was the travelling menagerie. Transport developments, that is, the motor bus and private car, made the large permanent zoos, such as those in London, Manchester, Blackpool and Bristol, easily accessible. The proprietors of the most famous of the travelling menageries announced in 1930 that they were selling up because "permanent zoos have grown in popularity in these last few years". The animals were sold to provide the nucleus of the newly-opened Glasgow zoo. The innovations were rides embodying racing cars, streamlined after the craze of the age, or the 'chair-o-plane' simulating the new experience of flight. The rides had to be fast at a time when the breaking of speed records

by land, sea and air made the headlines. Amplified music and increasingly garish flashing lights were in vogue at a time when it was still usually necessary to produce one's own electricity from the generator mounted on the steam engine. But undoubtedly the new item which made the greatest impact and was to show staying power was the 'dodgem cars', first introduced from the U.S.A. in 1928. Where showmen did make new investments against the unfavourable economic conditions, protection against the risk was sought through the Showmen's Guild (see Chapter 6, pp. 129- 134). [33]

Under the "changing conditions .... (in the) .... matter of road transport" showmen were coming to see the advantages of the internal combustion engine. One of the effects of the motor lorries' speed was that it would be possible to travel greater distances to get to the most profitable fairs with the result it was anticipated that the smaller and less money-making ones would die out. The general increase in road traffic resulted in fairs being moved from public streets; though this presaged the increasing problems which were encountered after the Second World War, alternative sites were, as yet, "easy to find". More serious in 1930 was the Road Traffic Act of that year which severely limited the number of trailers which a tractor unit was allowed to tow along the highway. Traction engines were a major investment for most showmen, so with many still quite new, not yet paid for and unsaleable, the conversion to the alternative, a number of lorries, was impossible. The Showman's Guild foresaw many "must close down, ... (their) .... livelihood lost" (see also Chapter 8, pp. 201 - 203). [34]

Just as the permanent theatres and music halls could offer their patrons greater comfort and more comprehensive facilities than the 'strolling players' of the early fairground, so did the fashionably plush cinemas of the period oust the travelling variety from public favour. The film industry reached it's "adulthood" in the years after the First World War and many earlier theatres and music halls were converted into cinemas. It meant financial disaster for those showmen who had invested heavily in film shows when the new suburban 'super-cinema' "swept the board". At a difficult time the loss of the cinema was, perhaps, the most bitter pill for showmen to

swallow, they had "brought cinema to the people .... only to see big business exploit it". [35]

The days of the early post-war boom when a married couple could live all summer on the proceeds of a "Penny dip" soon seemed very remote. "When the depression came, the bottom fell out of the business" leaving many showmen in penury. For "poorer members" of the profession it was "a critical time" and to help them the "crying need of the hour...(was)... for an appreciable lowering of ground rents". Showmen today recall "it did get bad", "we never had any money did we ?" and "that's how the living was .... day-to-day". One remembered having to hide his wife and family under the tarpaulins on the back of his lorry when crossing the Hamworthy toll bridge in Dorset because the fee was an impossible penny per head. During the 'thirties "business got so bad .... (that) .... a lot" of showmen gave up the work. Many went into the scrap or "dismantling" trades although a few returned to the fairground again after the Second World War. [36]

In the last pre-war years there was a little guarded optimism. There had been a fall in unemployment, it was claimed, "in fact, there were more people in employment than ever before". Hopes were also entertained as 1938 was "the first year in which holidays with pay were to become general for the workers in factory and office alike" and the wages they earned were said to be "good". Nevertheless, the effects of many years difficulties could not be wiped out overnight. If the report on the fair at Beaconsfield, Bucks in 1939 was anything to go by, there were still too many showmen chasing too little work; "the amusements were far too numerous for such a small place". The hoped-for recovery was still to come - and in a form no one could have foreseen in 1939. [37]

c) The Circus Cult

Bertram Mills, when he left the R.A.S.C. in 1919 as a Captain, had money to invest as the result of his family's coach building business being commandeered early in the war. After seeing the Wilkins and Young circus, he had a wager of £100 with Lord Danesbury

that he could produce a better one, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, pp. 34 - 37 . The new Bertram Mills Circus opened at Olympia, London. With a flair for publicity it's owner got the Lord Mayor of London to open the Christmas season there for many years. Although casting his net widely over the continent for high quality performers, Mills also turned to good account, as an example of his patriotism, the absence of German or Austrian acts, which he was anyway unable to use as the new Ministry of Labour was forbidden from issuing work permits to "ex-enemy aliens". It was a daring investment to make at a time when the circus generally was not prospering. Also it is interesting to compare the history of the circus in the inter-war years with earlier times. Mills, like Astley, began his show at least partly to indulge his love of horses. Just as in mid-nineteenth century, the circus generally benefitted from the renown and high standards of such shows as those of Barnum and Sanger, so the proprietors of smaller circuses now gained from the initiative of the sometimes resented "rich outsider" Mills. Again, a similarity occurred with former days of the circus in this country in that although the Mills circus appeared elsewhere than in London it was not until 1930 that his 'tenting show', a genuine travelling circus, took to the road. Just ten years after he began "the result .... (was) .... that the English circus, which Mills found in low water, was riding on top of a wave of prosperity". The circus had become a "cult". [38]

A number of family-owned booths gradually grew,in the wake of Mills' success, from fairground shows into large circuses. The Chipperfields kept their stalls but their 'talking pony' booth, with a ring inserted and space for nearly a hundred people, only a few of them seated, became a circus. The complete transition took over ten years. The Rosaire circus similarly grew from small beginnings, being supplemented in it's early days by a "novelty show of small animals". This was run by one of the family who was also a performer in the circus, the audience being invited to see it after the show. The growing circuses still often went to the major fairs, Rosaire's appearing regularly at the Sheffield Christmas fair. But the inter-war period was the principal one when fair and circus

"tended to drift apart", due to the economic incompatibility of the growing circus. "We used to go to fairs", recalled one showman, "but when the fair shut down we used to go away and do one night stands". The decline of the fairground booths can also be related to the circus boom as the performers naturally gravitated to the latter. Nevertheless some circus proprietors disliked too large a circus. Feeling it "became like a factory", they preferred to retain the "family element"; "we never employed anybody - just the family". In order to stay within the scope of what even a fairly large family could manage such shows not always included wild animals, being content with having only performing dogs and horses (see Chapters 3, pp. 23 - 26 and 8, pp. 195-196). [39]

The great circus parades were one aspect of the old circus which never revived : "The advent of motor traffic and the consequent congestion on the roads have long since put an end to processions except on very rare occasions". A small remnant remained in the practice of riding the elephants through the town's streets to the tober. An exception occurred in Abertillery, South Wales in 1932 when the circus coincided with the local carnival and joined the procession, "causing many of the older folk to recollect the days when a circus parade was the usual thing before a big show". [40]

The growth of the circus' popularity brought the question of cruelty to performing animals to the fore again. Since 1879, the police or local authority could apply to the courts to have acts they considered cruel stopped or subjected to certain conditions. Further legislation in 1911 had covered cruelty in general and specifically in regard to the animals in cages and when in transit. Such legislation was considered inadequate and Sir George Cockerill sought to bring in a bill in 1925, the first of several attempts made about this time (see Chapter 6, pp. 134-136). Showmen themselves vehemently denied accusations of cruelty, pointing out that the animals were the highlight of most circus shows and, therefore, far too valuable to be other than well treated. Animal trainers pointed out the folly of antagonising a creature of superior strength, "or they'll 'ave yer". [41]

iv) The Second World War

a) The War Begins

Unlike the earlier conflict, the likelihood of a Second World War had been foreseen for some time. When war finally came after "rumblings .... (for the) .... past five years", the Showmen's Guild praised Chamberlain for his "tact and patience" which delayed hostilities until the country could fight on "more equal terms"; a more enlightened and favourable verdict on the Prime Minister's conduct than he was usually accorded. Specific problems for showmen were foreseen. Government requisition of their lorries and traction engines was likely and general rationing, including petrol, would affect the movement of those they were allowed to keep. The Guild therefore pressed at an early date for their work to be considered "essential motoring" and the issue of "Showmen's Vehicle Fuel Ration Cards" (see Chapter 6, pp. 136 - 137). Great difficulties were anticipated but showmen were "stunned" when, in view of the worsening international situation, the Home Office's A.R.P. department announced on Wednesday, 30th August that, for fear of immediate air attack, in the event of war all places of entertainment would be closed down forthwith. Everything "came to a stop .... for a time", a "terrible state of affairs" which the president of the Showmen's Guild moved quickly to remedy.[42]

With churches the only places where "people could foregather" exempted from closure, the Guild wrote letters to Sir John Anderson, Minister for Home Security, on 7th and 9th September. Receiving no reply, Major H. Milner, M.P. agreed to table a question on the matter in the House of Commons. Anderson replied that "fairs were not prohibited by any Order under the Defence Regulations". His secretary also 'phoned the Guild to further explain that in practice, except in evacuation and designated military areas, fairs could stay open until 10.00.p.m. provided the lighting regulations were complied with. Still feeling the position was "vague" as to future possibilities, Anderson was applied to again. Though no guarantee was forthcoming, he assured showmen (and others) there was "every desire to avoid interference with fairs, street markets and established institutions

of all kinds". That assurance given, showmen turned to more day-to-day problems. Provision was made in the Guild's rules to protect showmen from loss of their rights at fairs under the 'Two Year Rule' if unavoidable circumstances prevented their attendance (see Chapter 6, pp. 132-134). A call was made for the exemption of "key men" from being conscripted. The waiving of the time limit showmen could park their caravans on fair sites under the Public Health Act, 1936 was sought. And, later, efforts were made to obtain priority in the allocation of scarce materials such as paint, timber and rubber. Grim though the prospects were in September, 1939, a year later it was admitted that showmen generally had been able to "carry on with less difficulty than we had anticipated". [43]

Nevertheless, many fairs were lost in the early years of the war, the financial loss to showmen of such a major fair as Hull, now in an evacuation area, was a "serious matter". Events of the war had direct consequences; the bank holiday at Whitsun, 1940, for example, was cancelled due to the fall of Holland and Belgium. In the "murderous raids" on London during the whole of the summer of 1940 it would have been "courting disaster", the Guild's area secretary admitted, to hold the regular fairs. At the same time, the Guild was arguing that fairs were relatively safe places for people to congregate. No doubt thinking of cinemas, it pointed out that fairs were in the open so allowing people to disperse more easily and, being usually held on grass surfaces, bomb blast would be less lethal in the soft earth. The Home Office, it said, "accepted this view". Even so, some showmen did not travel for a year or two, packing their equipment away in rented yards as some had done in the First World War. Others were deprived of their livelihood when police seized the stock-in-trade of shooting gallery owners. Security was not the consideration but rather the shortage of guns and ammunition for the defence of Britain. [44]

Perhaps because it had farther to fall from it's high-point in pre-war years, the circus seemed to fare worse in the early part of the Second World War. Where possible animals were put into winter quarters but the larger, wild ones did not survive long. Special food

was unobtainable and with unemployment becoming a thing of the past due to wartime labour needs, none could be spared to tend them. Bears, elephants and big cats were usually shot, the Rosaire children anguishing long over the fate of some new-born lion cubs. When Chapman's circus was broken up, an auction sale was held at it's winter quarters, at Cheshunt, Herts, but "low prices were the rule for cage and other animals" with the exception of the horses. In 1941 it was announced that the remaining Sanger circus, that of 'Lord John', was "to be closed down" because of "shortage of labour and feeding difficulties". That particular decision seems to have been rescinded as a show by that name was still advertising in 1945. Nevertheless, the very low ebb reached in the circus' fortunes was well shown up by the editor of the World's Fair feeling it desirable to publish an article entitled "Why the Circus will Survive". [45]

b) The War Effort

The exact number of showmen who served in the forces during the Second World War is not known. Most were called up, but some volunteered at a very early date, one, at least, thus gaining the place in the Royal Navy which he sought. But few could equal Jimmy Chipperfield's determination to become an air force pilot; he attended school regularly for the first time when he was twenty-six and learned to read and write in order to meet the entry requirements. On the home front, showmen took to scrap-dealing for the war effort in the same way as many gypsies. Some were engaged in either military construction work or demolition activities, being employed with their engines, as in the earlier conflict. Others took factory work, a number whose winter quarters were in west London helping to build Handley Page 'Liberators' at the Heston aircraft factory. Both men and women were engaged in factory work but "most of the women was on the land", part of the 'Land Army'. Also to women fell much of the fairground work which did continue; after a day in the factory they opened up the fair in the evening. The shortage of labour was why at Abingdon, Berks for example "owing to so many of the men usually employed on the machines having been called to the colours, only one ride was operating". Yet showmen were to find the

resources when government "advocacy" ensured "fairs .... (were) .... a leading feature" of the new 'Stay-at-Home' holidays scheme.[46]

c) 'Stay-at-Home' Holidays

As part of the attention given to the 'home front' at the highest government level in the Second World War, "they liked us to do the 'Stay-at-Home' holidays because it kept the morale of the people up". "People couldn't go to the seaside", partly because many coastal areas were 'out of bounds' to the general public and partly because of the Ministry of Transport's appeal to "stay put". This was designed to relieve pressure on an overburdened railway system so the majority of people "couldn't go anywhere". Response to the central government's initiative was good from those industrial towns, mainly in the north of England, which had regular holiday or 'wakes' weeks. It was quickly realized that what was at first called the 'Holidays-at-Home' scheme was "very favourable" to showmen and had "great possibilities". Thus "officially encouraged", showmen had the novel experience of being actively courted by local authorities. "We were paid by the councils to come in" to city centre sites such as public parks normally denied to the fair, in order to lay their amusements "at the very doorstep of the workers". The 'Stay-at-Home' holidays scheme got under way in 1941, the following year "the movement to provide amusements for 'Stay-at-Home' holiday-makers this year is gaining in popularity"; at the same time "plans are now being made by the government to encourage local authorities to do more next year".[47]

Although music levels at the fair had to be reduced so that people could hear the air-raid sirens or even approaching aircraft, the real problem was the black-out. Much fairground business was done after dark when, under normal conditions, it's gaudiness was a big part of it's attraction. In some areas, including London, "people came early" to the fair as it was limited to daylight hours only. At Christchurch, Hants. too, "we opened at ten o'clock in the morning as we had to close at black-out"; it meant closing down as early as four o'clock in the afternoon at Bolton's 'New Year Fair'.

'Double Summer Time' proved an "immense benefit", however, during those months when most of the showmen's business had always been done. Some fairs, however, managed to stay open during the hours of black-out. On a side stall one showman managed "with just a little light at night - just shining on the board" of the game they ran. On a larger item, a set of 'dodgem' cars at Uxbridge, Middx. had "cloths hung all round". It was even possible in some instances to black-out the whole fair. Grantham had it's "covered-in fair"; at Ardwick Green, Manchester, "the whole of the fair is covered in with tarpaulins and the like" and that at Maidenhead had "canvasses all over the top". [48]

From 1942 on, it was unusual for fairs in the London area not to go ahead "as usual". And while the season normally began in February with the fairs at King's Lynn, Norfolk and Wellingborough, Northants and continued through to October, now there was no "wind up to the season". In the Yorkshire area, for example, not only were the "majority" of summer fairs held but the local authorities had shown "enterprise and initiative" in helping to arrange winter fairs under "black out conditions". Typical of the new winter fairs on the other side of the country was that on the "Potato Market ground" in Warrington, Lancs. which had, it was noted the following February, opened every Friday, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday evening "since the last week of November". [49]

Though the season had been extended to become virtually a year-round activity, showmen had actually become less mobile as the majority of fairs now lasted for many weeks on each site. Only in this way was it possible to cope with the shortage of fuel and the absence of the labour normally needed for putting up and taking down. Fortunately public demand was there for such long stays because wages were relatively high, unemployment was no longer a problem and there was very little else on which to spend the money. Taking Hampshire as an example, during the period of the 'Stay-at-Home' holidays scheme, there were fairs lasting seven weeks each at Romsey, Winchester and Fareham. In Southampton fairs were held for about two months each at the Common, Hoglands, Veracity ground and Shirley

recreation ground sites. The local authority charged no rent and co-operated in the supply of fuel. In other areas, two or three weeks was permitted in public parks at Bristol and Taunton, for example, and over a month in Acton, West London; "a long time" of nine weeks was allowed in Poole Park, Dorset. In fact, there were not enough showmen to meet demand and some towns had difficulty in fulfilling their schemes. Grimsby provided an instance and the town council advertised for, "Holidays at Home Scheme .... Wanted .... Open Air Turns". [50]

In the first days of the war, it was said that the circus had been "harder hit than any other form of entertainment". At Christmas, 1942, only two of the traditional ones had been revived, those in Belfast and at Manchester's Belle Vue. Nevertheless, in the second half of the war, partly due to the 'Stay-at-Home' holidays, the circus enjoyed a partial revival. In view of labour and fuel problems it was the smaller, "less pretentious" shows which were able to carry on, though even these were invariably without their wild animals. [51]

The great advantage to the family circus was to have enough members either too young or too old for war service and thus have their own cast and labour force. Under war conditions, what might previously have been thought a poor or depleted performance could prove quite profitable, though it is doubtful if circus proprietors ever saw the kind of money made on the fairground. Operating mainly in the north of England, the Paulo family show "kept going most of the time" and as the war progressed things picked up further. Bertram Mills went on tour again, but managed in theatre buildings where the fire risk under canvas from bombing raids was thought high. A "new tenting circus" was announced against all current trends; it was called "Benet's Royal Court Circus" and opened on 21st May, 1942, at the "Swan and Bottle meadow, Uxbridge". And by early 1945, Sir Robert Fossett's set up had so regained it's old verve as to advertise in Reading, Berks the arrival of it's "Gigantic Circus and Zoo". [52]

Even when running the 'Stay-at-Home' holiday fairs, most showmen continued with their factory or other war-time jobs during the day, so benefitting from a dual source of income. Only very exceptionally was it possible to get a man of eligible age exempted from war service by describing him as the firm's "manager". A great part of the fair work devolved, at least during the day, on elderly showmen. The wife of one serving in the Royal Navy coped with the aid of elderly relatives. For over three years the 'permanent' fair in Maidenhead, Berks was watched over by Granny Beach, a formidable matriarch, well up to the task, who asserted her authority over all and sundry with hefty clouts. Sometimes the work of opening the fair was delegated to youngsters; "We had to open, me and my oldest brother" when they came home from school; too much business stood to be lost between 4 and 6.p.m. when their parents came home from work to take over. With the only work force available, despite spare parts and materials "specially allocated by the government", "maintenance and all that" of the heavily used machinery was a continuing headache.[53]

The women and elderly sometimes experienced problems in maintaining control over such labour as the fair could still employ but more trouble was experienced with the occasional violence from servicemen on leave. Certain elements soon acquired an unsavoury reputation; "the trouble we had with the Eighth Army when they came back - they was bleeders, they was". Nevertheless, "the money was there" and U.S. servicemen were particularly welcome. One of the showmen's 'stories-of-the-war' was of G.I.'s ordered to embark at Southampton at short notice and therefore unable to exchange their sterling allowances which they were not allowed to take with them. The money was thrown from the tanks and lorries on the way to the docks and caught by the local children who spent it at the fair.[54]

Today, some showmen are clearly uneasy about the profits made during the Second World War; "I took some nice money", said one, "but it was blood money". Some will admit only that they "did quite well" but others acknowledge "business was very good in the war" and say "the war made the showman". At the time, within their own

circle, there were fewer inhibitions. Even in 1941, when the 'Stay-at-Home' holidays scheme was only getting under way, "we enjoyed, in the circumstances, a very prosperous season". The effects of the war were "patchy"; in particular "Lancashire and Scotland had profitable times" and the Midland area secretary of the Showmen's Guild said they had done "remarkably well". After that there were no such qualifications. The fairground "industry received a tremendous fillip", it was "flourishing" as showmen did "phenomenal business". After the war, the Guild reflected, "the past few years .... (have been) .... most beneficial to members". [55]

Canal Boatmen

i) Early Years and the First World War

The general picture of inland water-borne transport was not a bright one in the early years of this century. The Canal Inspector, possibly the person best able to take an overall view, "regretted the increasing mileage of neglected canals". Those away from industrial centres, which were the source of bulk cargoes for which the canals were well suited, were particularly badly affected. More dependent upon the general traffics of agricultural districts, he recorded "the complete stoppage of some southern canals". Railway companies were neglectful of their canals but they were not simply "forgotten", it was alleged, as is usually assumed. The real reason for the apparent disinterest may have been a "very jealous hostility" to a form of transport whose potential, if developed, was realized all too well. The approach to the government made by the Associated Chambers of Commerce, the outcome of which was the Royal Commission on Canals of 1906, suggested not everyone was blind to the canal's possibilities; "They should - and are capable of being made - great arteries of national traffic". [56]

To reduce costs, the "masters" were taking advantage of the family-worked boats, as a means to reduce wage bills. The trend was particularly noted on the Shropshire Union system, one of the major carriers in the north west. The prospects for the boatmen were not good from either the earning potential or domestic comfort points of view, as it was said of the boats, "most of them were getting rather

old .... (and) .... relatively few new boats .... (were) .... being built". Aside from any consideration of patriotism, the high proportion of boatmen who volunteered in the early days of the First World War may have been because it seemed a rare chance to get away from the poor conditions on the cut. The anticipation of excitement and glory spurred many from a drab work-day world to join the colours, but for the isolated and illiterate canal boatmen the elements of opportunity and contrast were all the greater. Sometimes, by the women taking up civilian munitions work, it was possible to get away from the canal altogether. Thus were "wider horizons" passed on by family contacts to those who remained. And many did remain, the women proving they were quite able to continue to work the boat with the help of the young or aged. They continued to do so throughout the war and sometimes it tragically became a longer term arrangement than hoped for. The Yarnall family, based at Bull's Bridge in Middlesex, unusually for boatmen, kept a diary; the entry for "3-6-18 - Dad's address, Pte. W. Yarnall, No. 44624, 'B' Company, 16 Batt., Manchester Regt. B.E.H. France" was followed a few days later by the solitary, sad entry, "Dad left us the 18th of June, 1918". [57]

The tonnage carried on the canal network dropped considerably during the First World War; the figures, together with the estimates for other dates covered in this Chapter are given below. It is possible that there were fluctuations, even improved figures, during both wars when no accurate returns were kept.

YEAR	TONNAGE	
1913	31,585,909	
1918	21,599,850	
1924	17,000,000	approx.
1938	13,000,000	"
1941	11,000,000	"
1946	10,000,000	"

The claim that there was more work for boatmen, especially as the work-force was depleted, may well be justified. The commandeering of horses was a problem, which led to some unsatisfactory

attempts to use mules instead. "Considerable numbers" of boats were also taken for use "in Flanders and elsewhere" but this was less serious as there had for many years been a surplus of boats relative to the trade offered. Extra business on the cut came in the form of "pontoons" and other armaments. In a special category was the carrying of gunpowder. Because of the dangers, a higher rate of pay could be earned; the boats travelled all night, were given priority at locks and as a warning "had a red light on" day and night. [58]

Unlike the railways, the canals did not come under government control until 1917 (except the railway-owned ones which had indirectly done so since 1914). Then only a very limited amount of bulk traffics were diverted to the canals, mainly to alleviate an acute shortage of railway wagons. Generally, however, government control came too late in the war to be effective. Most of the loads lost since it's outbreak remained so. There had, quite naturally, been less inspection of the canal boats under the Canal Boat Act of 1884 and when the government inspector resumed duties, after war service, he found that family-worked boats were almost invariable on long distance work on the narrow canals. He blamed the shortage of houses and the resulting high rents. Children were still doing a large proportion of the work on the horse-drawn boats and a number of canals had become unnavigable during the war due to lack of maintenance. With much justification, the inspector recorded his first post-war impression, "no change worthy of special mention .... (took place) .... during the war" on the canal system. [59]

ii) The Inter-War Period

a) Post-war Changes

The end of government control of the canals came in August, 1920, at a time when economic pressures made the canal companies seek ways to "work canal boats in a more businesslike manner". The internal combustion engine had 'come-of-age' in the First World War so the substitution of horses seemed to offer possibilities, especially as, taking an index figure of 100 for 1913, the cost of a horse was now 202 and fuel, for the few steam boats in use, 252.

The general introduction of the eight-hour working day applied to some canal employees such as lock keepers, dock-workers, toll agents and clerks. The changes in industrial traffic flows also became more apparent. The canal system was generally linked to older industries and mines which were often worked out. The inflexibility of the canal network was increasingly being felt. Newer industrial sites were connected to the rail system and virtually every one could be reached by the motor lorry. Boatmen recognized the enemy; "lorries came along and trade slackened down". So did damage and pilfering en route, in addition to road transport's advantage in speed and cost. Coal, of course, remained the principal cargo, an important factor being that electricity generation was still a local concern: the concept of the 'national grid' was still a decade away.[60]

That "the canal carrying trade is in most parts dying .... for nearly a century it has held out against railways, but with the advent of heavy road motor traction it is unable to hold it's own" was a verdict given at the time. It was to survive, with a reprieve in the Second World War, for another two decades. But it was a bad time for the boatmen to threaten strike action. The eight-hour day for other workers had affected the boatmen's earning capacity. Paid by the load, any increased time spent waiting for loading or unloading, or at toll points was a direct loss to them. "The attraction of good wages and employment on shore .... had a considerable effect in reducing the number of boat people": for those who remained the difficulty experienced in maintaining income levels and the threat to the continuation of their traditional life-style resulted in a strike. The threat came from the government committee appointed, in 1921, to enquire into conditions on the boats. The strike, in 1923, lasted for 22 weeks. A combination of circumstances, industrial unrest, road transport and the expected strengthening of the railways by 'grouping', led many canal companies to give up carrying themselves. The Shropshire Union, Rochdale and Liverpool & Leeds canals all gave up at about this time. Some of the boats were sold off cheaply to the boatmen who worked them, thus giving rise to a proportional increase in the ranks of owner-

operators, the so-called 'Number Ones' (see Chapter 7, pp.176-178).[61]

b) Continuing Decline

"The canal boat industry .... (was said to be in) .... a somewhat critical position" although some of the newly self-employed boatmen were, at first, doing quite well, at the expense of long working hours. The effect of the loss of some cargoes and the neglect of certain canals resulted in the remaining traffic being concentrated on a limited number of trunk routes. The practice of running 'fly-boats' spread in an attempt to match the speed of road haulage. Boats carrying Guiness in barrels from the company's Park Royal, London brewery were so operated, to a regular timetable. Cargoes other than coal noted on the Grand Union canal between London and Birmingham in the nineteen-twenties were beer, sulphur, sand, metal, tea and sugar. But boatmen had to pick up what trade they could; one load consisted of "five tons of dead flies" from Italy, taken from London's East India Docks to Leamington Spa, Warwicks. for an experiment in glue making. Whatever the load, inadequate dredging meant that each boat had to carry less; poor maintenance meant less profitable boats, not necessarily fewer of them. In places the cut was "sometimes too shallow for two boats to pass". The inevitable impoverishment of the people working the boats meant that the proportion of craft permanently lived on had never been higher.[62]

Just after the First World War, though business was not good, "you were never out of work". A decade later the position was much worse as the "tendency to make less and less use of all canals persisted". It was more serious for the boatmen than the mere figures of declining total tonnages suggested. Compared to the latter there were proportionately more boats in use. Much of their time was taken up with empty return runs as the decline in trade often meant what remained was 'one way' only. Once back to the starting point it was nothing unusual to "lay about a week or so" waiting for a load.[63]

After 1926 "the volume of trade on rivers and canals had fallen off considerably and many of the .... (trade union's) ....

members had to suffer a precarious living". The union (see Chapter 6, pp. 140 - 141) "rendered help where possible" to those "experiencing lean times". At the worst of the depression, work in the Birmingham area, the heart of the canal network, "had been scarce". But few areas escaped; in most the situation was "bad" and the union acknowledged that "few members" were fully employed. Far from getting the rises for which they struck in 1923, only four years later, after being "locked out" the boatmen had been forced to accept a cut of 8½% in rates by the Severn and Canal Carrying Company. In 1933, a reduction of 7½% for all canal workers was recommended by the Wages Board, to which the union agreed. Many boatmen had no choice but to accept, like the widow who, with her children, operated a refuse boat from Paddington basin and explained to 'The Times' reporter, if she did not carry on she "would have to go on the dole". But increasing numbers, when they could find alternative work and accommodation, left the cut for good. Many found labouring jobs, ironically with the erstwhile competitor, in road repair gangs, while others found work as lorry drivers or mechanics in the same industry. It was not surprising that those who could leave, did so; as one boatman put it, with masterly understatement, "you didn't have a very lot of work".[64]

c) A Short-lived Revival

Though "still feeling the affects" of the worst of the depression and with trade as yet "generally slow", nevertheless, there were "signs of improvement". The number of motor boats was steadily increasing but the main hope for a modernized canal system came from the new Grand Union Canal Company. This was formed in 1929 by an amalgamation of several smaller companies and now controlled the main line of canal from London to both Birmingham and Leicester. In 1934 it was announced that the "Grand Union canal between London and Birmingham is being enlarged" and "forty-eight pairs of new boats" were on order. The modernization scheme was first proposed in 1930. One million pounds were to be spent, raised by a Treasury guaranteed loan, designed to help cut unemployment. The idea was that on the new, larger and faster canal, the boatmen would become "engine drivers"

and be able to "provide themselves with homes on land". It was, therefore, anticipated that the scheme would mean the end of, "this old and distinctive class, living in floating homes which .... (was estimated to) .... contain 500 families and 1,700 children, paying no rents, rates or taxes, within five years or so becoming totally merged in the general community". But the scheme was never completed; some locks and bridges were widened at the London end of the line, as far out as Hertfordshire. All but local workings had, therefore, to be conducted in the, by now, traditional way - and the lives of the boatmen likewise continued a little longer.[65]

At the end of 1934 there had been, for the past two years, an "improvement". A cargo new to the canal was partially responsible; motor oil was carried in specially built boats for the mainly short-haul trips from docks to the oil companies' inlaid distribution depots. As a first step to benefit boatmen, the trade union managed to get proposals from the Severn & Canal Carrying Company and Fellowes, Morton & Clayton, to reduce wages, cut by half. In 1935 it was possible, due to the upturn in trade, to get the wage cuts of the former carrier and J. Fairclough Ltd., partially restored. Two years later a major concern, the Birmingham Canal Company, agreed to fully restore their wage levels.[66]

But the hopes were short-lived; in the eighteen months or so up to the outbreak of the Second World War in September, 1939, the picture had become bleaker than ever. The Hednesford, Staffs. collieries transferred their business to road haulage, for example, and the Midland Carrying Company, mainly concerned with coal traffic, went out of business due to road competition. Dismissals were becoming frequent, especially in the Birmingham area, "owing to loss of traffic". So many boatmen were leaving what seemed a hopeless situation that the trade union had to remind them of their agreement with the Grand Union Company regarding the period of notice which they were required to give.[67]

iii) The Second World War

"In the war more work came to the canals"; it was something of a reprieve for the dying industry. The possibilities the canals

offered for alleviating the difficult internal transport situation were quickly appreciated. The boatmen's union published an article on the "Uses of the Canal in War Time" within three months of the start of hostilities. Only the railway owned canals came under direct government control once again but the Ministry of War Transport, realizing the canals' potential, was "anxious to make full use" of them and see "as many boats as possible fully employed". The "Regional Canal Advisory Committees" set up by the Ministry to encourage firms to "put as much traffic as possible" on the canal were successful. The "marked improvement in traffic .... since the outbreak of war" resulted in "numbers of men .... more remuneratively employed" and the return to use of boats "laid up because of lack of trade". [68]

There was a noted resurgence "in the short distance coal trade" but much of the new business was long distance, some of it for the military authorities : "most of the stuff was for the army". Some of it comprised steel, in various forms, for arms manufacture but also carried were food supplies, such as chocolate from Bourneville, Birmingham, taken to Liverpool and other ports to be sent overseas. In the opposite direction, boatmen "carried a lot of goods .... out of the docks". They "went into Limehouse .... (in the London docks) .... and fetched milk to Birmingham". The boatmen appreciated such traffics as "good to us because we got loaded both ways"; that is, they had a return paying cargo, having gone down to London with the normal load of coal. [69]

With the effects of petrol rationing, there was soon said to be "more work on the cut than there was on the roads". It was fortunate that the extra traffic could be accommodated in boats previously laid up as "quite a number of men" were continuing to leave the canal for wartime factory work. The result was a shortage of skilled men to repair and overhaul the boats, but the greatest need was for crews "to man the craft". [70]

A few boatmen, finding indoor factory work uncongenial, returned to the cut as trade picked up, while an "Essential Work Order" helped to stem the loss of labour. But it was the

independent Worcester and Birmingham canal's management which came up with the idea of recruiting women to work their boats. The plan was quickly copied by the Grand Union company and was later adopted by the Ministry of War Transport. The two people responsible for training the new all-female crews were Mr. D. Edwards on the Grand Union and on the Worcester and Birmingham, Sonia Smith, who was then hailed in the popular press as "The Queen of the Cut". At the maximum only eleven pairs of boats were worked by women, most of them young. Viewed with much suspicion by older boatmen who were very ready to blame "one o' they trainees" if anything went wrong, these few women had an impact on the boatmen's "closed community" out of all proportion to their numbers. For the first time many of the canal boat people mixed with others of a different social background - and on their own territory. Though an older generation might shake their heads, to the young, in particular the girls, whose range of social contacts had always been the most circumscribed, the newcomers were something to be admired and emulated, with their knowledge of fashion and cosmetics. It is doubtful if any other experience made a younger generation of canal boat people so aware of an outside world or made them so dissatisfied with their own way of life (see Chapter 10, pp. 283-289).[71]

Resume'

The gypsies' adaptation to the circumstances of a later stage of industrialization did not begin until the transitionary period of the showmen was nearing completion. Only in the face of mass-production techniques and transport developments, after the First World War, did they face major changes. The craft skills and horse dealing, for centuries the major economic supports of all gypsies, ceased to be in high demand. Though the transition came late in the industrial age for the gypsies, their main survival skill, as mentioned earlier, had always been to identify and exploit gaps in the host society's economy and trade patterns. The gypsies continued to display the ability to the full. This characteristic of the gypsies was, to a great extent, shared by the showmen who had changed both the nature of their identifying industry to accord with popular

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taste and also their alternative, winter occupations (see Chapter 7, pp. 155- 160). Both gypsies and showmen saw in this adaptability evidence of their superiority over the sedentary population.

The change or transition of the fair to it's modern image as a mechanized and participatory form of amusement, the movement which began in the last third of the nineteenth century (see Chapter 4, pp. 66- 68), was more or less complete by 1930. The circus and fair, as a direct consequence of the transition, reached their highest degree of separation, since which time the two have come to be generally regarded as distinct forms of entertainment. The boom which the circus enjoyed in the decade of the 'thirties also illustrated the phenomenon of 'good times' for one branch of the showmen's business contrasting with a slump in the other. It will be recalled that the mid-Victorian era was the high point of the circus' fortune when the fair was at a low point. During the years from 1900 to 1914 the positions were exactly reversed.

The canal boatmen, in contrast, experienced a continued decline in their industry over most of the period. Whether the lack of adaptation to new circumstances was due to the inflexibility of the infra-structure within which they perforce operated or was due to cultural factors connected with the form of employment will be returned to in Chapter 7, pp. 173-178 , and may have implications for settling the question of their gypsy identity.

There was a marked contrast in the experiences of all groups of travellers in the two world wars. In general, for all three the First World War was a time of hardship. This was largely attributable to the unforeseen suddenness of it's outbreak and it's unprecedented nature after a long period of European peace. Arrangements made to meet military needs were hasty and showed little consideration of the consequences for those whose livelihood might be jeopardised by, for example, the wholesale commandeering of their motive power. The Second World War, on the other hand, had loomed ever more likely for some years and, before it actually began, attempts were made at government level to plan for the expected emergency, whether to utilize scarce resources of materials and

transport or to maintain the morale of a civilian population which, with still bitter memories of the western front, was certain not to repeat the euphoric mood of August, 1914. The result was that all travellers had a relatively prosperous war, especially the showmen whose Guild was instrumental in forwarding their interests (see Chapter 6, pp. 136-137).

The history of travellers in the first half of the twentieth century reveals clearly the fallacy of the popular image of them as remote and exempt from the experiences and pressures acting upon the majority of the population. Showmen and canal boatmen had shown this to be so in the nineteenth century but the gypsies had largely escaped the need to radically adapt until the later period. The popular picture of travellers stemmed largely from the foregoing assumption but the consequences for travellers during the first half of the twentieth century were profound, both economically and socially.

CHAPTER SIX

LEGISLATION AND FORMAL ORGANIZATION

These two subjects are brought together in this chapter because during the period under review the single example of a strong and representative traveller organization had it's origin in the threat of legislation. This was the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain: because the Guild's activities had incidental consequences for the gypsies the usual order will be changed later in this chapter and the formal organization of the showmen considered before that of the gypsies.

Legislation

i) Smith of Coalville

Repressive legislation against gypsies followed soon after their first recorded appearance in this country (see Chapter 4, pp. 51 - 52). The first Act was passed in 1530: "From henceforth no such person be suffered to come within this the King's realm". Similar legislation was passed in 1554 and 1562. "Draconian measures" became the norm, punishments ranging from expulsion to execution. If less draconian, the spirit of much nineteenth century law was still unsympathetic to gypsies; the Prevention of Crimes Act, 1871, for example, made it an offence to be found wandering with a tent and no visible means of support. Small wonder, then, at the gypsies ingrained suspicion, long before the twentieth century, of anything which smacked of gorgio law and authority. [1]

Towards the end of the last century, however, a change became apparent in the nature of certain legislative proposals vis-a-vis travellers; they were now at least intended to be in the traveller's interests. The moving spirit was a little-known reformer and philanthropist, George Smith. As his work came to influence all three groups covered by this thesis, he is of considerable importance in providing an essential link between them.

George Smith was born in Coalville, Leicestershire in 1831 and was the eldest of ten children. He found employment in the local brickyards where by dint of long hours and industry he worked his way up to own a small yard and manage several larger ones. At this time, despite his "humble origins", he was said to enjoy the very respectable income of £450 per annum. From 1857 to 1872 he was also manager of the Whitwick Colliery Co. when he seems to have been pleased to adopt the style ".... of Coalville". In the course of his work Smith saw much of the children who toiled in the brickyards or lived on the canal boats which took the bricks away. Also in evidence were gypsies who often camped nearby and frequently stole from him. But Smith had grown up to absorb his parents' devout nonconformity; his father was a lay preacher and his mother in the chapel choir. So, inspired by a Christian zeal, he decided to take action to alleviate the hardship and suffering he saw. [2]

Smith's first work, published in 1871, entitled The Cry of the Children of the Brickyards of England earned him the attention of the Earl of Shaftesbury and J. Mundell, M.P. and resulted in the Factory (Brick and Tile Yards) Extension Act of 1871. It also earned Smith a reward of 100 guineas from Shaftesbury, perhaps to help compensate him for the fact that, angered by the loss of child labour, his employers had dispensed with his services. Local feeling against him ran so high that it ".... led to hatred and abuse and even physical violence .... and it led to his eventual expulsion from Coalville". Much Victorian philanthropy stemmed from the religious revival of the age and Smith was no exception. That his actions led to "deep poverty" for himself and his family for many years, he saw as God's will. Undaunted, Smith next turned his attention to conditions upon the canals and in 1875 published Our Canal Population. This led to the passing of the Canal Boat Act of 1877 and it has no doubt been due to the close link between his publications and ensuing legislation that he has been erroneously described as an M.P. [3]

Bankruptcy followed in 1876 but Smith's work continued to be recognized; he was "feted" by both the Duke of Rutland and Charles Kingsley. Relief came in more tangible form from various quarters.

Gladstone recommended an award of £300 as a Royal Bounty in 1884 and W. T. Stead, the great reforming editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, who also did much to reveal the extent of child prostitution in Victorian London, launched a fund for Smith which realized £1,480. [4]

When he later turned his notice to the gypsies, Smith wrote of those ".... living in the gutter ....". Such observations, it has been suggested, revealed ".... a deep contempt for and insensitivity towards the feelings of the objects of his benevolence". When dealing with alleged immorality on the canals, it has been allowed there was ".... some truth in Smith's allegations ....(but).... his exaggeration was at times ridiculous". Unattractive as he may appear to modern eyes, there seems little justification for thinking ".... George Smith's original mistake .... (was) .... of assimilating the difficulties of an ethnic minority to the problem of an exploited occupational group". He never appears to have made the error of identifying all travellers as 'gypsies'. Rather, his concern was over such problems as morality, ".... education and sanitation" which stemmed from the common nomadic life-style; it was due to this concern that, as stated above, the career of George Smith provides a valuable link in a work dedicated to a comparison of the same three groups of travellers. [5]

And, in the words of a Canal Inspector, appointed under the Canal Act of 1884, some credit must be allowed to George Smith: "However mistaken he may have been in some of his views and however exaggerated may have been some of the statements his enthusiasm led him to make, still, to him must be accorded the merit of having aroused the attention of parliament to the necessity of legislating for the peculiar conditions of this people and thus to him the canal population owe a debt of obligation the full benefit of which they do not give him credit for". Similar comments might have been made for all those George Smith tried to help. [6]

ii) The Canal Acts of 1877 and 1884

Smith began his campaign on behalf of the canal boatmen with letters to The Times, Daily Telegraph, Daily News and The Hour.

The Daily Telegraph had a leader on the subject as early as 1874. Smith's first book on the subject, Our Canal Population was sub-titled "A Cry from the Boat Cabins - With Remedy". Having established himself as a reformer by his work for the brickyard children, his recommendations rapidly bore fruit in the Canal Boats Act of 1877. The first paragraph stated that every boat used as a dwelling must be registered limiting the number, age ranges and sex of those it was permitted to house, based upon size, ventilation and facilities for the separation of the sexes, under penalty of fines for the masters or owners. In the event of infectious diseases on board (paragraph 4) the master of the boat was to report to the relevant Sanitary Authority, under the Public Health Act, 1875, which was empowered to remove the person or persons, detain the boat and order it to be disinfected. Paragraph 6 stated that for education, as per the Acts of 1870, 1873 and 1876, the child was deemed to reside where the boat was registered. As the habit soon developed of registering boats where they were built, to which they might rarely, if ever, return because they were regularly used elsewhere, paragraph 7 relating to sanitary matters seems more logical. In this case the boat was deemed to be registered with the Sanitary Authorities "abutting" the canal where it plied for trade. The concern for sleeping arrangements was a not untypical example at the time of the application of middle-class norms. The accommodation of the rural masses likewise aroused fears of incest and ignored the economic necessity of the arrangements adopted. [7]

Experience with the first Factory Acts, half a century earlier, was repeated. It was quickly realized that the 1877 Act needed strengthening and that some form of inspection was necessary. Smith argued the need in his second book on the subject, Canal Adventures by Moonlight. The Canal Boats Act of 1884 was the result. A Canal Boats' Inspector was to be appointed and an annual report was to be submitted to both Houses of Parliament, according to paragraphs 4 and 6, by the Local Government and Education Boards respectively, on the working of both Acts. The same detailed attention was given to accommodation on the boats; paragraph 1 ordered re-registration if "structural alterations" affected capacity. [8]

The first Inspector was John Brydon who remained to 1899; upon retirement he was succeeded by Captain Llewelyn (there were only two national inspectors before the post was abolished). Brydon, in his first report, confirmed that, without inspection, the 1877 Act had produced "comparatively little action" except as regard initial registration. He began by writing to the relevant Sanitary Authorities pointing out their duties under the Act and claimed to have made 6,700 inspections himself in the first year. [9]

There were then 3,600 miles of canal in use, covered, in the first year, by 101 local inspectors as well as Brydon himself. A year later there were 301 inspectors, 7 appointed by port authorities, 174 by urban authorities and 120 by rural ones. These early figures may be impressive but there is evidence that inspection soon became less than rigorous; "Except in large towns, the Sanitary Authority generally appointed an already overburdened official" to whom canal boat inspection was but one among other "more important offices". The newly appointed Llewelyn complained that inspection was, in some areas, "perfunctory". Nevertheless, co-operation was forthcoming from most canal companies and major carriers on the canal who allowed the inspectors "free permit" on their property and issued appropriate instructions to staff such as lock-keepers and wharf overseers. "The 1884 Act did result in a rapid and dramatic improvement", while there was, initially, a drop in the numbers living permanently on board. This tended to level off towards the end of the century but whether the Canal Acts or trade patterns were responsible is open to question. [10]

iii) Canal Legislation in the Twentieth Century

Despite occasional hopes there have been no relevant Canal Acts this century; there were, nevertheless, a number of inquiries which might have led to further legislation. The first was the Royal Commission which sat between 1906 and 1909. The Commission was the result of an approach made to the government in 1900 by the Associated Chambers of Commerce (see Chapter 5, pp. 103 - 105). It did not concern itself directly with the people who lived on the canal boats but in it's report, which ran to twelve volumes, it made

recommendations which, if carried out, would almost certainly have led to the elimination of family-worked boats. The Commission's principal recommendation was the conversion of the trunk routes, that is, the waterways ".... called the Cross, which connected Thames, Severn, Humber and Mersey, with a centre at Birmingham" to modern commercial canals with, mainly, a "100-ton barge standard". The first post-war report issued, after an absence on war service, by Inspector (now Captain) Llewelyn was not published until 1920 but described a canal system little changed from the Edwardian period. The report was now incorporated in the annual one of the newly created Ministry of Health. [11]

Renewed concern for conditions on the country's canals led to a trade-union-inspired deputation calling, in November, 1919, upon the President of the Board of Trade. The outcome was the appointment, by Christopher Addison, the Minister of Health, of a committee, chaired by Neville Chamberlain, to examine the whole question of 'living-in' on canal boats. The committee visited only Paddington and Brentford to see conditions for themselves but they found the majority of infringements of the 1877 and 1884 Acts was on narrow canals, that is, the canals on which 'living-in' was prevalent. They also found that, contrary to paragraph 7 of the 1877 Act, the habit had grown up of registering boats, for sanitary purposes, with the authority where they were built rather than where they plied for trade, thus making control less likely. Also, there was no way of knowing when a boat went out of service. In it's report to Sir Alfred Mond, who had replaced Addison, the committee suggested that annual licences would resolve such problems. But the idea was never taken up, presumably on the grounds of cost. [12]

Two years later it was still not thought practicable to act "at the present time" about 'living-in' on the boats although the boatmen's union, the T.G.W.U., hoped for an Amendment Act which would make employers "realize" that the condition and maintenance of the living quarters was their responsibility and so effect repairs "more promptly". The next move originated with Wolverhampton Education Authority who forwarded to the "Association

of Education Committees, the Home Secretary and the Board of Education" a more limited proposal forbidding children from living on board during term time. No legislation was immediately possible due to the "present state of public business in the House of Commons". By January, 1930 it was reported that Harry Gosling, M.P. was to introduce a Bill, which was then carried at it's second reading only a month later. Although said to be "now in committee", nothing more was heard of it. [13]

Loss of the Bill was due to opposition from the boatmen themselves. Helped by some people described as"social workers", forty of them petitioned against it; it was, they said, "gravely misled". The argument was economic; perhaps aided by the same 'social workers', a well-presented letter was dispatched to The Times. "This letter", it said, "is written at a meeting of canal boat people. Signed for all of us,

Elizabeth King - 'Excelsior'
Samuel Cove - 'Kingfisher'
Ellen Farmer - 'Industry'
Frederick Wheeler - 'Penguin' " .

They pointed out that "while so many of us are out of work, it does seem mad to turn us out of our homes". Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that a year later, in the case of the Paddington refuse boats, on which conditions were known to be bad, the Minister of Health considered himself "unable to act". [14]

When Captain Llewelyn retired in 1932, he was not replaced. His work was to be done by the "General Inspectors of the Department". It was considered there was "little occasion to criticize the administration of the Acts and Regulations by the Local Authorities", but to what extent the boatmen were increasingly forgotten among other duties without Captain Llewelyn to prod the local inspectors is a matter of speculation. The Canal Acts themselves were soon to be largely superseded: "It should be noted that as from 1st October next the Canal Boats Acts will be repealed except Sections 12, 16 and 17 of the Act of 1877. The provisions of those Acts are substantially re-enacted in Part X of the Public Health Act, 1936." Despite this

assurance, the virtual end of the Canal Acts, the abolition of the post of Canal Inspector and the absence of any further 'Canal' heading in the subsequent reports of the Ministry of Health combine to suggest a continuing decline in the canal industry.[15]

iv) Smith and Legislation for Gypsies

George Smith published his first work on the subject, Gypsy Life - Being an Account of our Gypsies and their Children, in 1880; that is, he had turned his attention to these people before the inadequacies of the Canal Act, 1877 had become apparent. An attempt was therefore made to cover the children of both groups by the insertion of a clause on van children in the Canal Act of 1884. Failing in this Smith "actually formulated" a Moveable Dwellings Bill which was presented to Parliament annually between 1889 and 1894. But Smith's health was failing and it seems significant that the Bill was not re-introduced in 1895, the year in which he died of cancer.[16]

Smith proposed the registration of the caravans in much the same way as the canal boats. Registration was to be the responsibility of county authorities but the licences regarding the vans fitness for habitation was to run only for three years before expiry, presumably as they were seen as less durable than canal boats. The Local Government Board was to be empowered to rule on what made a caravan fit for habitation and daily fines were intended for use of a non-registered van. After the experience with canal legislation, inspection was envisaged. For education purposes, the children would have come under the authority for the area in which the van rested at any given time. The Act was to embrace "any van, cart, carriage, wagon, vehicle or tent which is used for the purpose of an abode".[17]

The idea had support; for example, a letter signed "Chief Constable" was sent to the N.S.P.C.C., citing the dangers to children living in "hawker's vans" and proposing that "name, number and place of registration" be painted on. Why existing legislation was never used cannot now be explained. A modern authority claims it was available: "The overcrowding of a tent, van or similar structure has been an offence since section 9 (i) of the Housing of the Working

Classes Act, 1885 brought the matter within Section 91 of the Public Health Act, 1875". Certainly it was never used in this way and Smith's Bill was re-introduced annually to 1894 but each year with diminishing prospects as the showmen began to organize against it. Smith recognized the resistance and added a section to the second edition of his book on gypsies to counter it. An attempt to justify the inclusion of showmen's vans in the legislation by asking a panel of doctors to report on the health of fair and circus folk back-fired on Smith; they reported them healthier than other travellers.[18]

v) Gypsy Legislation in the Twentieth Century

Fourteen years later, a Bill was introduced to the Upper House by Lord Clifford of Chudleigh. A Select Committee under Lord Salisbury was appointed to enquire into the need for it, during 1909-10. The Bill proposed, "Every moveable dwelling shall be registered with the Council of a County" and generally followed the earlier proposals. Due to the showmen's opposition the Bill was not pursued and even in much reduced form, dealing only with the provision of gypsy sites, was annually rejected to 1914. The period after the Liberal 'land-slide' of 1906 was one of considerable social legislation. The immediate post-1918 period was of similar concern. An early inquiry, in Scotland, proposed schemes of "settlement and employment of tinkers", but the effect was negligible. With the post-war housing shortage, the housing of travellers was, as the Caithness and Perth County Councils insisted, "out of the question". In London, in 1922, the Tottenham council unsuccessfully sought powers for the "medical inspection" of caravans, while further attempts were made to introduce a Moveable Dwelling's Bill to parliament between 1923 and 1926, but failed for lack of time.[19]

Nearly a decade later, the "moveable dwellings bogey...(was)... looming again" as the West Riding County Council, with Ministry of Health backing, was proposing a Bill. In fact, the Housing (Scotland) Act, 1935 was first to be passed, by which a Local Authority could replace any hut, tent or van with a house if the former had remained on one site for over two years. Camping sites were permitted but the Act "emphasized" that this was not intended to encourage or

perpetuate the travelling life-style. It had been a "matter for regret" in some quarters that no action had been taken earlier but the Act of 1936 as it finally matured was of significance to all travellers, including, as stated earlier, the canal boatmen, the Canal Acts of 1877 and 1884 being largely replaced by it. Paragraph 92 referred to "premises, accumulations or deposits" which might be "prejudicial to health or a nuisance". Offenders, Paragraph 97 stated, could be fined or "otherwise punished". The Act became more specific (Paragraph 107) in restricting "offensive trades" in urban areas, such as "rag and bone" dealers (see Chapter 7, pp. 145- 149). The home itself could be condemned as unfit for human habitation, whether "tent, van, shed or similar structure", if overcrowded or lacking "sanitary accommodation" (paragraph 268). It has been suggested that the Public Health Act, 1936 obtained substantially what George Smith had argued for, over fifty years before.[20]

The pace of legislation affecting travellers quickened somewhat after the Second World War. First came the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, consolidated by a later Act after five years. Paragraph 12 (1) of the 1947 Act made it necessary to obtain planning permission to build on or develop land. Paragraph 12 (2) (6) explained, "the deposit of refuse or waste materials on land involves a material change in the use thereof", with clear implications for scrap metal dealing. Unlike earlier Acts of Parliament, it was the tendency towards mid-century for travellers to be effected by more wide-ranging legislation rather than that aimed specifically at them, though certain items were still so directed. It is going outside the period on which this thesis concentrates but the Highways Act, 1959 is an illustration. This made it an offence if "a hawker or other itinerant trader or gypsy pitches a booth, stall or stand, or encamps on a highway" (Paragraph 127 (c)) and receipt of complaints could lead, the next paragraph directed, to the removal of a "nuisance".[21]

Further restrictions came with the Caravan Sites Act, 1960 as revealed by it's Paragraphs 1 and 23. These respectively forbade the use of land as a caravan site unless licensed under the Act and prohibited them "for the purposes of human habitation" on common

land (as understood under the Inclosures Acts 1845 - 1882) or "any town or village green". This Act had meant the "virtual outlawing" of the gypsy's way of life and reveals the continued pressure to eliminate nomadism. Whether it was individual well intentioned philanthropy or modern bureaucracy - "A considerable diversity of opinion exists among local authority staff about solutions to the traveller problem" - such non-conformity has long been seen as a 'problem' requiring 'solutions'. [22]

The Showmen's Guild

i) Origins

The first warning of Smith's intended Moveable Dwellings Bill was sounded by F. H. Pedgrift, editor of the Era newspaper. A number of influential showmen were contacted by Dr. Crofts of the Liberty and Property Defence League, an organization founded in 1882 and since described as a "group of reactionaries". The League had been formed as a reaction to growing trade union power and, in response to it, encouraged the growth of "trade associations". Although facing a different threat the showmen seemed fertile ground for the formation of such an association. [23]

A meeting was held at the Black Lion Hotel, Stafford in 1889 which formed the "United Kingdom Showmen and Van Dwellers Association". The next known meeting, in January, 1891 was held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington under the auspices of the Liberty and Property Defence League. The meeting was chaired by H. E. Stephens, the Conservative member for Hornsey. He had, at first, been the only opposition to the proposed Bill in the House of Commons arguing that it would drive the gypsies from their "healthy, harmless country life" into city slums. Smith himself attended the meeting and got a rough reception. The new organization, under its original title of the 'U.K. Showmen and Van Dwellers Association' promulgated its first formal rules, adopted a constitution and instigated regular meetings in 1892. As such, it became independent of the Era newspaper with which it had been closely associated. Membership a year later was "almost 1,000" but by 1897 had dropped to 251 after disposing of the threat of

legislation. Discrepancies in the date of founding of the Guild depend upon whether the first informal meetings are counted as such. The Showmen's Guild Yearbook for 1902 referred to 1890 but the one for 1922 claimed 1888 as the year of founding. The Yearbook for 1938 explained the reasons for the variation and thereafter the compromise date of 1889 was shown for over twenty years![24]

The influential showmen known to have been contacted by Dr. Crofts included Messrs. George and John Sanger, Pat and John Collins, Joe Craddock, Bostock and Murphy. They immediately responded but in the early years, as the embryo Guild's first title implied, membership was open to "anyone" who was a van dweller. The dominance of showmen was there from the beginning but the move towards being an exclusively showmen's organization was shown by name changes: it had become by 1896 the "Showmen's and Van Dweller's Protection Association" and this was sub-titled in 1902, "(The Showmen's Guild)". The organization's first president was 'Lord' George Sanger; indeed, he referred to the Guild "which I established". His was a household name in late Victorian England and a measure of the resistance which George Smith, thinking no doubt of the familiar local gypsies of his native East Midlands, had drawn upon his proposals.[25]

Sanger admitted that gypsies were much in evidence at fairs, as "workers of the 'lucky bag' swindle, fortune tellers and owners of knife and snuff-box shies"; he had also known them "as proprietors of very large drinking and dancing booths". He insisted, however, the "proper showmen" kept away from gypsies, while "genuine gypsies" were not showmen. The use of the adjectives 'proper' and 'genuine' can be seen as an attempt to separate the two groups at a time (1910) when legislation was in the air.[26]

Another prominent member in the early days of the association was it's chaplain, the Rev. Thomas Horne, "by birth a travelling showman of obscure and poverty stricken origin .... (who) .... spent the first twelve years of life in a van travelling from fair to fair". He became a curate at Whiston, near Rotherham, Yorks, before his appointment to the Guild, where as a token of their gratitude for his support during a long dispute, the local miners presented him with an

illuminated address and a purse of £127 at the Drill Hall, Rotherham in 1894.[27]

The argument to be used to resist the proposals of Smith was revealed by Horne in a letter published in 1891. He spoke favourably of the showmen's vans (with a sympathy-gaining reference to Sanger), which he compared with those of the "veriest wretch of a miserable gypsy". The Bill, he argued, would mean "the punishment of the just for the unjust". When he appeared before the Select Committee in 1908, appointed to enquire into the need for Chudleigh's Bill, Horne said, "I have come across two or three - not more than half-a-dozen - instances of gypsies who have become showmen". The assurance was accepted, the Committee agreeing,"van dwellers are divided into two classes - the showman class and the gypsy class. As regards to the showmen class no legislation appears to be necessary".[28]

It may well have been in the showmen's interest to distance themselves from a group often viewed unfavourably by a large section of the population long before Smith's proposals. But it was he who caused the showmen's objection to a gypsy identity to crystallize positively into what has been the Showmen's Guild's policy on the subject ever since. The opinions of showmen on the relationship to gypsies was discussed in Chapter 3 (see pp. 28-31) but while some writers seem to have accepted the Guild's stance, others have been more critical; "at least until 1970 there were probably more Romany members of the Showmen's Guild than any other gypsy organization".[29]

Although created because of the threat of legislation, it would be wrong to see what became the Showmen's Guild, as continuing to exist for that reason only. In the second half of the nineteenth century some circuses had grown into large business organisations and, with the advent of mechanical rides (see Chapter 4, pp. 66 - 68), the fair was becoming a more capital - intensive industry, at least for some showmen. Once drawn together, it was, therefore, in their interests to maintain an organization to protect their investments especially as around the turn of the century the "crusade" against circus and fair continued.[30]

ii) Growth and Organization

The need to counter Lord Chudleigh's proposals brought new life to the showmen's organization. It had in the meantime absorbed one or two smaller groups, such as the "Roundabout Proprietor's Association" and had by 1912 established itself as exclusively "The Showmen's Guild". As such, at the A.G.M. held in Manchester in 1912, the President of the Guild was able to announce that it had achieved it's 'locus standi', that is,it had been recognized by parliament as the body authorized to speak for the showmen. The Guild could later also show a "Certificate of Registration as a Trade Union" as per the various Trade Union Acts 1871 - 1917; it remained as a trade union until it became an employer's association under Heathite reforms half a century later. [31]

The few years after the First World War were the ones when the Showmen's Guild got "on it's feet". This may be attributed to a number of factors; the role it played in the latter years of the 1914-1918 war or the need for protection in a post-war world in which the industry was no longer expanding but new equipment was extremely expensive when compared to pre-war levels (see Chapter 5, pp. 89 - 91). And as the Guild was seen to grow, so other showmen realized that prosperity or even survival outside it became increasingly difficult. [32]

Certainly this was a period of rapid growth in Guild membership, although it had been increasing before the war; in 1912, for example, it had almost doubled from 229 to 510. This had only increased to 655 by 1919, in which year there was an increase to 949, and again to 1,620 in the next year. Thereafter, partly for reasons discussed under the next sub-heading (pp. 129 - 131) membership levelled off; by 1932 the total stood at 1,894, an increase of only 32 in ten years. Some of the increase must be seen against a changed practice in applying for membership of the Guild. Prior to the First World War it was the practice for only the senior male member of a two, or perhaps three, generation family to join, but during the post-war period it became the practice for young men to apply when they married. By 1947 membership had risen considerably

to reach 3,703, an increase of 289 on the previous year. No doubt the Second World War was a factor in increasing membership but again a change in application for membership must be allowed for; it became usual for each showman to apply at the age of twenty-one and more recently, of course, eighteen. [33]

The Showman's Guild adapted it's organization to cope with it's growth. Up to 1918 there had been only "Divisional Committees" based on London, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, Wales and Scotland; now there was to be full "Sectional Working", each area being empowered to pass it's own bye-laws. The new 'Sectional Working' areas were :-

"1) Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland and Westmorland.

2) Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales.

3) Yorkshire and part of Lincolnshire.

4) Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire.

5) Lincolnshire (remainder), Rutland and Huntingdonshire.

6) Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire.

7) London and Home Counties, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

8) Bristol and District including Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire, Devon and Cornwall.

9) Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

10) South Wales and Herefordshire.

11) Scotland.

12) Ireland ".

The number of sections was soon reduced to ten, partly by re-drawing boundaries and partly by the 'loss' of Ireland. [34]

The Guild, until 1918, shared offices with the staff of the 'Era' newspaper at 5, Tavistock Street, London but then moved to Bloxwich, Staffs, possibly due to the influence of the Collins' family. By 1930 the head office was back in London, in which area, though at various addresses, it has since remained. The only attempt to give the industry a formal international aspect seems to have been the "Showmen's Congress" held in Paris on 22nd and 23rd July, 1937. It was the "first meeting of it's kind", being called by the newly-formed French showmen's association. The Guild foresaw "tremendous benefits" but it was ill-timed because of the international situation and no more was heard of the idea. [35]

iii) Power and Protection

"The Showmen's Guild is a very strong union" and "If you wasn't in the Showmen's Guild .... well, you've got to be in it" were two showmen's comments indicative of the role played in their lives by the Guild. It was claimed the Guild represented "at least 95% of all genuine travelling showmen", a position thought to have been gained before the Second World War. [36]

The growing power of the Guild was shown by the campaign, announced in it's 33rd Annual Report of 1922, to remove "undesirables" from the business. The aim was for "higher standards" in all facets of the fair and circus so that even the "most fastidious" could not object. The move was effective as membership declined that year "to some little extent", showing a drop of 140 on the previous year. One autobiography, interestingly claiming to be that of a gypsy, raises the question as to what extent the operation eliminated the gypsy element from the Guild . The writer received no sympathy from the Area Secretary in South Wales when such "thieving joints" as his received the attention of the police. The same scribe complained that he was eventually forced out of the fair-ground altogether; one influential showman, Stanley Thurston, having refused to allow him or his wife onto a site at Cambridge, where the latter wished to set up her palmistry booth. [37]

Having achieved the expulsion of elements it considered undesirable, the showmen sought to keep their society and profession exclusive. From time to time "the Showmen's Guild encouraged caravan schools as a means of resisting assimilation". Marriage to a non-showman presented the same risk (see Chapter 10, pp.278 - 280); "once upon a time if one of the daughters married a 'flattie' and he wanted to come into the business, that was a problem". In more recent times, the difficulty has been overcome by allowing the woman to become the Guild member, the husband being made to wait many years for the privilege. Thus, should the marriage fail, the stranger is kept out. Given such policies over some decades it is not surprising to hear the Guild referred to as a "near closed shop". [38]

The Guild's role in disciplining or arbitrating between members appears to have reached a peak in the early post-Second World War years. It may be that the circumstances of war time and booming business led to some laxness in the application of Guild rules. Be that as it may, internal disputes were expensive and time consuming. It was a time of "unrest" in which it was feared that the "old spirit .... (would be) .... lost"; members were reminded that the Guild's primary concerns should be "outside activities" and "oppressive legislation". "The problems which beset the showmen's business today are many", in the face of which, the plea for unity was made (see Chapter 13, pp. 349-355). [39]

Protection has also been given by the Showmen's Guild in the areaof public liability insurance. This has remained an aspect of it's work up to the present time but seems to have originated with a spate of claims against showmen, including a major one affecting the Hancock family, during the First World War. Examples were of a woman being accidentally shot and "seriously injured" in a rifle range mishap which cost the owner £350., while a girl who "broke her arm" in falling off a ride was awarded £166-5s-0d, though in this case the Guild considered her "injury .... (did) .... not appear very serious". Insurance arrangements for members were, therefore, made with the "Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation Ltd., 36-44, Moorgate, London, E.C.1." Popular attitudes to the profession were shown by the comment that it had been a problem to get insurance

companies "to look upon showmen as business men".[40]

The Guild sought, of course, to protect and regulate it's members at the fair site itself. Limitations as to time and place of newly organized fairs, for example, protected existing business and was first proposed in 1932 when economic conditions also prompted the 'Two Year' rule discussed under the following sub-headings. There was a tendency, at the time, for some showmen to interpret such protective rules as being in the interests only of more wealthy and influential members. After 1945 the Guild extended its cover to the permanent seaside funfairs and amusement arcades in which an increasing number of showmen began to invest their capital.[41]

From its formation, the Showmen's Guild had resisted what it saw as legislation against its members' interests but as it's power increased there was a trend towards a more positive involvement with parliament. The Guild presented it's first petition in 1911 and the exemption it was able to obtain for members under the Public Health Act, 1936 and the Caravan Sites Act, 1960 is discussed below. Certainly by the years after the Second World War, the Showmen's Guild had become "a large and wealthy organization". It had also become widely respected; "as a professional body and as an Employer's Trade Union, the showmen of Britain must rank as one of the best governed and most co-operative in the kingdom." The role of the Guild, therefore, developed into a dual one: in relation to the outside world it's aim was to protect the position and livelihood of it's members while it's internal role was one of control and discipline.[42]

iv) Before the 'Two-Year' Rule

The Yearbooks of the Guild were made available to the writer up to c1960 on the condition that it's rules should remain confidential, as explained in Chapter 1 (pp. 6 - 7) but an exception was later made in the case of the 'Two Year' rule (as showmen always refer to it). The rule concerned the relative placing of each showman's equipment at the fair site so, as will be self-evident under the following sub-heading, it's content must become plain to anyone who lets ground for

the purpose. In this thesis, the rule's importance lay in it's connection with the work-place and social status of showmen (see Chapter 7, pp. 168 - 172).

The situation had long been that there was "a lot of competition and clashes" for the best places; "it used to be catch-as-catch-can" and "you just got in where you could". Competition for places was always great at certain sites, the "big Whit-Thursday fair held in the Market Place (Walsall); there was always a rush for the ground there". Fights were not uncommon, though few perhaps as memorable as the one recalled by Sanger, when his parents' van was overturned in the rush to get to St. Giles's Fair, Oxford. The animal shows were more labour intensive and this gave a certain advantage in disputes; the men of Bostock and Wombwell's menagerie were renowned for their strong-arm methods. The more usual pattern was, "they'd have an argument today when the ground's being laid out but have a drink in the pub at night and the argument's forgotten", an example of a society ensuring that conflict and the competitive element within it was contained and not allowed to become mutually destructive.[43]

Apparently beginning late in the last century (notably when the new and expensive rides were becoming common) the practice began of certain showmen taking on whole sites and sub-letting to others, thus gaining some control over who came in. One showman recalled an alternative way of avoiding ruinous competition. A territorial boundary was drawn between showmen with similar equipment; "it was a sort of gentlemen's agreement they never stepped on each other's toes - they wouldn't clash if they could help it". The need for a degree of control was shown early this century by Rule 18 (the precursor of the Two-Year rule); "It is recommended that lessees who are Guild members shall give preference to members", guidance which was strengthened in 1918 when 'shall' gave way to 'must'.[44]

v) The 'Two Year' Rule

The first proposal for a 'Two Year' rule came from the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales section; "No member shall apply for the use of any fairground which another member has held for two previous years,

providing said member desires to occupy the same". It should be noted that at this stage protection was thus sought for Riding Masters but no similar security was given to their tenants. By 1930 only four areas of the Guild had adopted the rule under local bye-laws. The rule was extended in 1932 to give the same protection to tenants by the simultaneous proposal of the West of England, Midland, Yorkshire and Eastern Counties committees. Although rapidly adopted thereafter, the rule did not become universal until after the Second World War and was only embodied in the national rules in 1954. "If a master's got just a couple of rides, he'll let another ride in to make a big fair", the owner of the other ride becoming, for the purpose of that fair, at least, a tenant. Once both lessee and tenant have held their places for two years, security is achieved. One side affect of the rule, which has been criticized, is that the layout of fairs tends to remain unchanged year after year.[45]

In modern times, control of a fair has resided with a council or corporation (mainly Charter fairs), which collect rents from each showman, as does the Guild itself for those sites it controls; or with an individual showman. The very large Nottingham Goose Fair is an illustration of the former type, but in each of the three examples, the controller, in effect, takes on the role of a Riding Master. In all cases the 'Two Year' rule is applied as it is to mutual advantage in either simplifying administration or giving security of tenure and is indicative of Guild strength.[46]

When a site at a fair is not taken up or when trying to set up a new fair, it was the practice for the lessee to advertise the vacant places in the columns of the World's Fair. These vacancies were often of particular interest to younger, often recently married, showmen seeking to build up a regular circuit. The shortage of space at fairs led, in post-war years, to complaints from younger Guild members; what gave protection to established showmen seemed unfair and restricting to them. The unrest following the Second World War probably hardened opinion in favour of the security the rule gave, leading to it's adoption as a national one in 1954. There was much "overcrowding", blamed on "newcomers" who had joined the industry

during the boom of wartime and who were regarded as 'fair weather' men to be discouraged. At Nottingham in 1947, for example, "no fewer than 800 showmen applied for space" and at Bridgwater, Somerset "dozens of showmen were disappointed in not being able to obtain ground". [47]

After an expansive era in the fairground prior to 1914 when there was considerable investment in new equipment, the 'Two Year' rule can be seen as showing the need to defend it at a time of changed economic conditions. It was a conservative measure, protection designed to counter market forces. That no expansive period has returned in peace time is shown by it's universitality after the Second World War when showmen have preferred to diversify and invest in seaside sites, amusement arcades, and night clubs.

The effect of the 'Two Year' rule has been to make fair sites into a form of property. Members may not sell or speculate in ground so held but it can be given (for example, upon marriage when equipment and sites are often handed down together) or inherited upon the death of the owner. The impact of the rule was well understood by showmen; "to tell the truth, the sites and the good will of the sites is sometimes worth more than the stall itself". The sense of possession can be strong; "I own this place .... (said on site in the middle of a public park) .... by the rules of the Guild and nobody else can touch it". But the limitations were recognized too, "I can't turn them (i.e. the tenants) off and put someone else on their plot". [48]

vi) Legal Work

Resistance to legislation was, of course, the raison d'etre of the early Guild and legal work of various types has been a large part of it's task ever since. Early in this century, part of it's job was to "watch any attempt" at laws which might interfere with the showmen's "rights or business". A "fund .... (for).... pecuniary aid" was also set up for members seeking legal advice. [49]

From the mid-twenties there was an increasing need to deal with Local Authority Private Bills which sought to control fairs

and circuses by land use clauses, licensing rights and similar devices. But before this work escalated it was necessary to resist proposals on behalf of the circus showmen. As far back as 1890, "William Scholes at Olympia, a celebrated rider" had admitted that "some trainers are brutes" and had quick recourse to the whip. Now public concern was said to be growing again about animal performances. Sir George Cockerill had already introduced legislation to the Commons in 1925 and in 1929 "Lord Danesfort, vice-chairman of the R.S.P.C.A." intended to introduce a Bill to the House of Lords making it illegal to train and show the 'big cats', hyenas and monkeys, though why only these varieties were singled out is not clear. The last attempt by Danefort appears to have been in 1932. [50]

The previous year no less than 65 Bills had been deposited by local authorities which had to be examined in case they should interfere with the "inalienable right" of showmen to "purvey recreative and harmless amusements". Burgeoning bureaucracy was deeply resented, in it's 43rd Annual Report the Guild complained of "public authorities, in their zeal for greater administrative powers in the interest of the public good .... are ever ready to promote Acts of Parliament to support their pre-conceived notions for the 'protection and betterment' of society". Even during the war, fears were expressed; post-war "thousands of regulations" were foreseen. When new legislation came, nationalization of road and rail transport would "tend to restrict our activities" while "Town and Country Planning and New Towns Acts could wipe out our business". Local authority work again became expensive and time consuming if it was to be possible, in the Guild's opinion, for fairs to carry on. A bill deposited by Manchester Corporation in 1950 became a test case; the Guild took the case to the House of Lords and won it five years later. Although the agreement finally reached was regarded as a 'model', the need to be watchful of Private Bills continued. [51]

Where appropriate the growing power of the Guild enabled it to obtain for it's members a position of legal privilege. Outright opposition to the Public Health Act of 1936 would probably have been unavailing; instead exemptions from it's provisions was granted to

"a moveable dwelling which belongs to the proprietor of a travelling circus, roundabout, amusement fair, stall or store (not being a pedlar, hawker or costermonger) and is regularly used by him in the course of travelling for the purpose of his business". The 1936 Act has been referred to as the "Showman's Charter". [52]

The policy of seeking exemption continued after the war; it was granted under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act, 1960 to "a travelling showman who is a member of an organization of travelling showmen which holds for the time being a certificate" granted by the Minister if the latter was satisfied membership was restricted to "bona fide" travellers. In both the above instances it will be noted that the 'distancing' of showmen from gypsies continued, while in the second case the position of the Guild in relation to it's membership was strengthened. [53]

vii) The Guild in War Time

Although "energetic action" by the Guild had prevented the loss of St. Giles' Fair, Oxford in 1914, many fairs were lost in the early part of the First World War. Among other reasons, "the military and the police" took some time to convince that a fair with reduced light was no more a hazard than "a row of shops". Showmen were to suffer considerable hardships before the Guild responded with a campaign for government to "consider the average working class family, with but poor expectation of a yearly holiday". A letter was sent to the Ministry of Munitions arguing the need for "open air recreation" as a "social fact". Meetings were arranged nationwide to argue the "fallacy and futility" of discouraging holidays, with some success; by late 1917 the government had agreed that some amusement was "a national necessity" in maintaining morale. The front-line need had made the Ministry of Munitions' "labour officials" leaders of the anti-leisure "crusade"; when they were won over the Guild claimed the credit for "the complete reversal of the government's policy towards the curtailment of the people's open air amusements". [54]

In 1939, the Secretary of the Guild was corresponding with Sir John Anderson, Minister of Home Security some months before the

outbreak of war and in April of that year the Food (Defence Plans) Department had, in response to an approach from the Guild, agreed to the issue of "Travellers Ration Cards" for use "in any part" of the country. A most important concession negotiated by the Guild was an increased fuel ration "for generating and power purposes for fairground use". Exemption from coal rationing was also claimed though it is not clear if this was intended for domestic use or for the traction engines still widely employed. The latter, it was ensured, would not be commandeered as they were in the earlier conflict by contact with the Ministry of Supply (Timber Control), Agriculture and Fisheries (Threshing) and Transport (Roads and Bridges) departments. The Guild could claim, "we are in closer contact with Ministerial Departments of the Government than ever before". If the Showmen's Guild 'came of age' in the crisis with which the industry was confronted in the First World War, then these instances show it was a mature and established organization which made timely and high level contact with government in 1939. [55]

viii) The World's Fair

This newspaper, which has for many years catered for showmen's needs, first appeared in 1904. At first it was a single page news-sheet; it's continued publication was in the balance for a year or two but it then consolidated it's position. Although independent of the Showmen's Guild it has always had close links with it. The first editor, Frank Mellor, was also treasurer to the Guild from 1909 until 1930. It has always been a weekly paper, appearing on Saturdays. [56]

The World's Fair was in many ways complimentary to the Guild, carrying items on recent Guild activities as well as other news items of interest to showmen. It's columns have, since early days, been used to advertise vacant plots at fairs and also to announce a showman's whereabouts, for social and business reasons, especially when some variation to his normal itinerary occurred (see Chapter 11, pp. 305 - 307).

Of particular interest in a comparative work is the fact that, earlier in the century, the World's Fair often carried items about

gypsies, of which a few examples must suffice. News of evictions of gypsies was not uncommon; in one week cases occurred at Tooting, London and Llanelli, South Wales. The 101st birthday of Selina Smith, "Head of the Berkshire gypsies", was recorded; an article described the professional career of one of the Boswell family, who travelled the country offering his services as a rat-catcher to farmers, and a gypsy in Wales was fined "for defrauding a farmer by persuading him he was bewitched!" The question is obvious; 'why in a showmen's paper'? but it may be significant that such items seem barely to have survived the First World War, soon after which the Guild launched it's campaign against 'undesirables' (see above). [57]

Gypsy Organisations

At the end of the last century it was said, "The gypsies have no politics - they have less than no national aspirations". More recently it has been said of them, "they are a most disunited and ill-defined people, possessing a continuity, rather than a community of culture". Up almost to the Second World War most legislation which might have affected gypsies was rarely invoked, "sanitary officers and teachers were not interested in gypsies: as far as the 'improvement' of gypsies went, the law remained a dead letter". The only regular exception was when it was used to 'move them on'. When any matter concerning them was raised, it was usual to ignore the gypsies but to seek instead the views of ministers of religion, school teachers and health officials. Consequently gypsy culture and point of view have been completely misunderstood, even quite recently. [58]

The Public Health Act, 1936 included legislation which had affected all travellers, but even before the end of hostilities it was foreseen that plans for the post-war years - with their promise of 'order' and 'planning' - would increasingly affect the gypsy way of life, just as was anticipated by the showmen for themselves. The pace of legislation which concerned gypsies certainly quickened with the passage of those Acts mentioned under the previous headings, such as those concerning Town and Country Planning, Highways and Caravan Sites. [59]

The gypsy has always had a suspicion of those in authority. They seemed only to harass him; why, for example, did the policeman 'move him on', when there was nowhere he could legally stop ? And now bureacracy and authority seemed to be "increasingly officious" and their "interference increased". An early post-war example occurred when there was an "official ban prohibiting" them from the traditional camping site on Epsom Downs for Derby day. Gypsies were thus, individually, well aware of their vulnerability in the face of authority but collectively they had had little need of formal organization when much of the law applied to them remained a 'dead letter' or, as with the various Moveable Dwellings Bills from Smith onwards, their case was effectively fought on their behalf by the showmen. [60]

The only formally constituted organization concerning itself with gypsies was the Gypsy Lore Society, formed in 1888, by a group of philologists who had become interested in wider aspects of the customs and habits of gypsies around the world. At no time, however, has it been an organization of gypsies or fought currently on their behalf. [61]

It was left to Norman Dodds, the Member of Parliament for Erith, Kent, 1945-1965, whose constituency contained many gypsies, to first take up their cause in the Commons. His work eventually led to the setting up of the Gypsy Council at St. Mary Cray, Kent in 1966, consisting of both gypsies and their "supporters". Thereafter, a number of gypsy organizations have been set up in recent years and so fall outside the scope of this work. It is significant, however, that despite no longer being protected by the showmen, whose Guild in recent times has tended not to resist new legislation but seek instead to obtain exemption for its members, the gypsy cause has become fragmented. By the early 1970's there were at least seven quite independent organizations, including attempts at co-ordination by such 'umbrella' groups as the "Register of Gypsy Support Groups" and the "Association of Gypsy Organizations". [62]

It has been suggested that gypsies were too individualistic to organize or perhaps lacked the skills to do so; consequently most

leaders of their organizations have come from outside the "immediate or extended families" of gypsies. Most organizations remain "loosely constituted and to command indeterminate and variable followings", the "majority" of gypsies having had no links or contact with them. Though having a "keen sense of identity", it is clear that the gypsies have remained politically conscious only to "a very small extent". [63]

Canal Boatmen

i) Trade Unionism

At the turn of the century, three trade unions were involved in the inland waterways, the National Transport Worker's Federation, the Dockers Union and the Watermen's and Lightermen's Association. It was these unions which jointly, on 12th November, 1919, sent a deputation to the President of the Board of Trade; representatives from the Ministries of Health and Transport were also present at the meeting at which concern was expressed over conditions on the boats. The deputation was led by Ernest Bevin and the outcome was the Committee on Living-in on Canal Boats with which the unions then refused to co-operate as they were not represented on it (see Chapter 5, pp. 105-107). The trade union movement nevertheless remained opposed to the practice of 'living in' and the Trade Union Congress of 1924 passed a resolution to that effect. Six years later new attempts were being made but it was then noted that opposition came from certain women's organizations, dismissed as "of middle-class type", on the grounds that such legislation would "interfere with the equality of the sexes". [64]

The real opposition, however, came from the boatmen themselves (see above pp. 105-107); their objection to the removal of wives and children from the boats was based upon economic need. The trade union movement, on the other hand, could not, for ideological reasons, countenance the practice of family employment, where only the male head of the household was actually recognized as an employee - especially at a time of rising unemployment. Such a system was regarded as exploitative. The dichotomy between trade union and employee on this

issue does much to explain the weakness of unionism among boatmen.

The trade unions were also involved in more traditional union matters as referred to in Chapter 5, pp. 105- 111; "In 1923 they had a boat strike" over pay which the union supported. "They was on strike for 22 weeks" but the main consequence was a loss of trade. As trade on the canals declined in worsening economic conditions, the union was unable to resist the Wages Board decision to cut pay for all canal workers by 7½% but it "rendered whatever assistance possible in hardship cases". Later, meetings were held with employers to "ascertain whether it is possible to check the loss of traffic or to re-claim some of that which has been lost", but to little avail. [65]

During the Second World War no help was given on obtaining rationed goods, perhaps justifying the view that the unions were "not really interested in the boatmen". "What's the use of a ration card to the likes of us"? asked one boatman, who had never heard of Traveller's Ration Cards. A mainly illiterate group simply assumed that, being nomadic, they could not register. [66]

Though one boatman claimed, "my grandfather were a big union man", it was acknowledged that unions for the boatmen were "not as strong as they are today". Believing themselves to be too small a group to be of interest to a union hierarchy, "we didn't belong to unions". Certainly the Transport and General Workers Union, as successor to the earlier boatmen's unions, alienated sympathy by refusing to take up the boatmen's case over the obliteration of the traditional boat painting in favour of a standard 'house colour' by the newly nationalized industry after 1948 (see Chapter 8, pp. 213 - 215). When commercial carrying on the narrow canals was finally nearing extinction, the T.G.W.U. made a late attempt to promote the waterways by devoting the cover and five articles of an issue of it's house journal to them. [67]

ii) The N.S.P.C.C. Involvement

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children became involved with the canal population when conditions

were brought to it's attention by John Watts, Honorary Secretary of the Northwich, Cheshire branch, who had previously alerted the local rural district council, it seems, without result. At the following A.G.M., the Countess of Portsmouth was "ashamed to confess .... (the subject is) .... new to me"; she referred to the "harrowing details .... (of the) .... wretched life" of the children. The problem to be overcome was "public indifference" but after "an address" given by "Miss Dix of Coventry" the matter was brought to the attention of the M.P.'s for Coventry and Warwickshire. After the war, the matter was taken up again. This time the N.S.P.C.C. appointed it's own 'Special Inspector' for canals, D. Hackett of Wallasey, Cheshire being appointed. The post, it was announced, would be privately funded by John Watts for the first year, but he was still paying Inspector Hackett's wages a decade later. Both M/s Watts and Hackett appeared before the 'Living-in' Committee of 1921, in which year "families .... (were) .... found on board practically starving", in Staffordshire, due to a coal dispute depriving them of work. Inspector Hackett introduced to them the possibility of applying for public relief.[68]

As nothing concrete materialized from the 1921 committee, the N.S.P.C.C. itself prepared a Bill in 1925, to be placed before the Commons "before long", to which end an "ex-Cabinet Minister has promised his help". The N.S.P.C.C. proposed that no child under fourteen "shall reside or travel on or in a canal boat" and, recognizing one of the unchanged short-comings of the Canal Acts of 1877 and 1884, wanted the owners of boats to have to "each year take out a licence for each boat". Failing in it's own attempts, the N.S.P.C.C. later applauded the more limited attempt of Wolverhampton Education Authority when, a year or two later, it suggested the banning of children during term time.[69]

In 1919 the Society claimed, "most of the reforms won for children have only been secured after long and weary waiting. In the case of the children on canal boats the delay is disastrous". Such reforms as it wanted, however, never became law but the N.S.P.C.C. involvement illustrated the scarcity of other forces acting on the boat people's behalf. It was also one of the rare cases of N.S.P.C.C.

involvement on behalf of a particular group's needs as against the more usual pattern of dealing with individual cases.[70]

Resumé

The showmen, highly organized to protect their business interests and exercising control and discipline within their peer group, stand out clearly as the professionals among travellers. Throughout the period under review the gypsies lacked any organization comparable to the Showmen's Guild, while the canal boatmen (as a proletarianized employee group) were unionised but only to a very low degree. It was one of the most marked contrasts to isolate one group of travellers.

The influential role of the Showmen's Guild was evidence of the capitalist element - and the need to protect their investment - among that group. That the Guild's origin stemmed from the activities of George Smith is undeniable but resistance to, or exemption from, legislation should be seen from a business angle. Denials of a gypsy identity, especially in earlier days of the Guild when many of it's dominant members were not of gypsy origin, were an expedient means of protecting economic interests by avoiding restrictive legislation.

Gypsies also looked unfavourably upon any authority which might limit or restrict their life-style but lacking the cohesion or organization of the showmen, they relied upon avoidance or evasion to thwart it. In this, they were aided by the sedentary population's disinterest in them while they remained unobtrusive, thus making much legislation affecting the gypsy a dead letter. Latterly at least, some gypsies recognized the power and efficiency of the Showmen's Guild which had given a 'privileged traveller' status to it's members - and were accordingly hostile to it. It was doubtful, however, if many appreciated that "sheltering behind the showmen the gypsies escaped from the kind of legislation and state interference" imposed on French, Scandinavian and Eastern European brethren, especially after the Second World War. In the half century or so from the founding of the Guild a widening gap has opened between gypsies and

showmen; gypsy contact with - and, consequently, attitude towards - authority generally remained at a local level, that is, with the village policeman or petty 'town hall' official. The showmen, in contrast, saw their Guild, as in 1939, dealing confidently with central government and administration so giving them a quite different perception of authority'.[71]

The canal boatmen, as stated, in an industrial environment with mainly 'employee' status, had trade union representation but only to a very limited extent. Probably because of this, pressure on their behalf came from outside the group, first from George Smith and, latterly, the N.S.P.C.C. The activities of Smith resulted in the boatmen, of all three traveller groups, receiving the closest and most constant attention from central government, via the Canal Inspectors.

What was revealed for all travellers was the ethnocentric nature of virtually all legislation (or proposals for it) passed by the parliament of the majority, sedentary population. The view of travellers seen as a 'problem' to be 'solved' took little or no account of the rights of the traveller's themselves or of the cultural and economic requirements of their life-style. This trend has increased during the period under review with Town Planning, Highway and Caravan Sites Acts all reflecting the needs and pressures of the larger society.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WORK AND STATUS

Gypsies

i) Forms of Work

Already alluded to is the gypsies' adaptability in shifting their sources of income in the face of changing economic and social conditions. The sources themselves were those aspects of the economy often, at least initially, beneath the notice of most of the non-traveller population. As mentioned, travellers interpreted the ability to survive by exploiting such openings as clear proof of their superiority - and consequently came to view the typical sedentary employee with contempt. Yet, in reality, the gypsies only adapted when change was forced upon them and their range of skills, at any one time, was usually limited. Changes were often seasonal and almost invariably, when facing longer term ones, gypsies were able only to consider work which required very little capital outlay. Though in the period under review, the gypsies' sources of income altered considerably, it has always been the case that families with only a single source of income were a small minority, even when one such as the scrap business was both major and profitable. One result was that the gypsies were only very rarely out of work. Consequently they remained largely outside the scope of industrial and welfare legislation even when, as did frequently happen, they were under-employed. A commonly held view of gypsies as doing "as little as was compatible with survival" was generally inaccurate; rather, from the nature and circumstances of their work, gypsies had to work hard merely to survive.[1]

As the status of employee was normally unacceptable, gypsies often entered into partnerships with their fellows. The arrangements were extremely flexible and were rarely intended as more than short term or temporary expedients, sometimes being formed for a single job. A strength of the partnerships was that it gave the participants equal motivation in the venture's success, which was of particular importance

as much gypsy work involved contact with the general public and an element of 'salesmanship' on the gorgio's own territory, as with hawking, for example. When gypsies became employees in the two World Wars (see Chapter 5, pp. 77 - 81) they became "engaged in forestry" or other government work, the women entered factories while others served in the armed forces; but these were exceptions under peculiar circumstances and should not be allowed to obscure the fact that self-employment has always been the norm for gypsies. [2]

ii) Men's Work

The range of work practiced by gypsy men was wide, varying among "dealing in horses and asses, farriers, smiths, tinkers, braziers, grinders of cutlery, basket-makers, chair bottomers and musicians" but in each family, besides the first, the men would probably practice only one or two of the other, related skills. Horse-dealing was, until this century, the near-universal gypsy occupation. The boys learned from their elders who were "horse-dealers up to all the tricks of the trade". As the demand for horses began to die away after the First World War, individual gypsies were wont to remember fathers and grandfathers whose alleged knowledge of the animal outstripped that of their peers. The importance of the horse to gypsy culture is also illustrated by the continued dealing which took place between gypsy men even after the Second World War when demand for horses for utilitarian needs had largely ceased. [3]

Metal work (usually tinkering or repair work) and wood carving (or working with similar natural products such as cane) were also male preserves. Wood carving survived in a debased form as peg-making until after the Second World War although tinkering and basket work had both almost died out before 1939. A much less common craft skill was practiced by the "Faa gang" of Scottish gypsies, who, prior to the First World War, were known as "travelling potters", being observed as far south as Kendal, in Cumbria. Providing amusement by dancing, juggling, playing of instruments or showing performing animals was normally done by gypsy men although barely surviving into the twentieth century. In direct line, however, may be the occasional

gypsy claims to have been involved in fairground work. It was, for example, Ted Scamp's grandfather "Old Riley" who "had a bit of a travelling show at one time, gallopers and a shooting gallery". Less common men's work was the collection and sale of rabbit skins and the offering of one's services as a rat-catcher - the latter, mainly to farmers. The Hearne family, for many years, were well known as seasonal purveyors of wood and coal around Uxbridge, Middx., an instance of a type of seasonal work once quite common amongst gypsies.[4]

"In the past rag collection has been an important element in the traveller economy" and it was through rag collection that gypsies first saw the financial possibilities of waste material. Sylvester Boswell recalled tatting, that is, buying scrap brass and iron around Wisbech, Cambs., soon after the First World War but it was the motor age which made "breaking cars up for spare parts" profitable and led to the break-through to a new and major source of income for gypsies. Whereas rag collection had previously been merely "another occupation", after the "watershed" of the Second World War it was estimated that the male-dominated scrap business was the chief economic support of two-thirds of Britain's gypsies. The work required considerable physical effort in both the collection of material and in the subsequent sorting and dismantling. Weight and bulk dictated the use of, first, a horse-drawn cart and, later, a lorry which also placed it as essentially in the male domain. The work brought gypsy men into more regular face-to-face contact with the sedentary population and had repercussions upon the male and female roles within gypsy society (see Chapter 11, pp. 290-292).[5]

iii) Women's Work

Two kinds of work with which gypsy women had long been associated at the beginning of the twentieth century were hawking and fortune-telling. In 1816, John Hoyland considered hawking and fortune-telling already the most traditional of gypsy women's work. The range of goods sold at various times was wide; prior to 1914 "wicker arm-chairs, carpets and rugs, coconut door mats and many other household things were sold". Clothes pegs were hawked by the women but less

common objects were "cabbage nets" and flowers, made from waste wood shavings by the women and girls the previous evening. The clothes pegs were those made by the men, of course, but the tendency, most marked during the inter-war period, was away from hawking home-made craft items to selling such things as cheap jewellery or cosmetics bought from a local warehouse. Thus the decline of the men's craft skills and that of hawking by women can be seen as part of the same trend, recognized by the magistrates refusal to renew hawking licences in the Second World War (see Chapter 5, pp. 80 - 82). When hawking, a young child or baby was regarded as a "useful business assett". Even where it did not degenerate into "merely an excuse for begging", hawking was always a play on poverty in order to persuade the sympathetic house-dweller to make a purchase or give some useful item, frequently clothing for the young.[6]

Fortune-telling persisted more tenaciously into the twentieth century than hawking. Early in the previous century gypsies were noted telling the fortunes of serving girls in Mary Mitford's village of Three Mile Cross in Berkshire. Thereafter demand remained remarkably consistent; even after the Second World War, though banned from fairgrounds in 1947 "by order of the Showmen's Guild, there were (for example) many women engaged in reading the hands" of the gullible in the immediate area around Hampton Court fair the following year. Generally speaking, gypsy women's work was less varied than that of their menfolk and as the most traditional varieties declined in more recent years there has been no replacement work comparable to the scrap-dealing of the men, perhaps because the latter has proved so adequate an income source. Nor have the women usually encroached upon male preserves. Only in exceptional circumstances were they likely to do so but the case of Lurena Herne, a young widow with a growing family, was doubly unusual because "during the season they followed small fairs and wakes with an old-fashioned coconut shy".[7]

iv) Family Work

When doing agricultural work men, women and children worked side by side as a family unit. This kind of work was also unusual for gypsies as they became, in a sense, employees; but by being paid on a

piece-work, rather than a time basis, it was generally acceptable as the gypsies were able to retain a degree of control over their work-rate and income. The availability of agricultural work, of course, varied with the region and seasons and so it was rarely the principal source of income. The market gardens once to be found near large towns had provided some employment but transport developments brought such near-urban work to an end well before the opening of the twentieth century, so causing the gypsy to travel further in search of this kind of employment.[8]

Gypsies travelled considerable distances, such was the importance of seasonal agricultural work; gypsies from the New Forest district of Hampshire, for example, went annually to Kent for hop-picking. The Boswell family who lifted potatoes and picked strawberries in the fens in early summer were to be found in the apple and plum orchards around Hartlebury Common in Worcestershire later in the year. Other tasks for gypsies in the countryside included "burning whins, beating for game, berry-picking and gathering cones" before seasonal agricultural work began to die out. It had begun to do so before the Second World War but it dwindled most rapidly in the decade of the 'fifties due to increasing mechanization of the farming industry.[9]

v) Status

The gypsies self-ascriptive requirements to be considered a member of their society and the esteem "akin to awe" accorded the holders of certain surnames was referred to in Chapter 3 (see pp. 33 - 34). There it was explained that it was considered necessary to have only one gypsy parent and be brought up as a traveller in order to qualify but that traditionally claims of blood and name were needed to aqquire status among gypsies. For this reason, women were known to retain their maiden name after marriage, but prefix it 'Mrs.' if it was considered of higher rank than that of their husband. Nevertheless, status can be legitimately considered here as, in the period with which this work is concerned, the basis for it shifted somewhat from heritage to wealth.[10]

When gypsies first began to deal in scrap metal, those who did so, like their predecessors who dealt in rags, were regarded as on the lowest tier of the gypsy hierarchy; many old-established and respected families eschewed such work. It was in fact considered as only one step above the degrading status of being a wage-earner employed by a gorgio and facing the unacceptable rigours of factory hours and discipline. But as inter-marriage, sometimes with gorgios, reduced the reliance which could be placed upon blood and as those of previously low status were seen to become wealthier so success in business became an increasingly common measure of status. As scrap work was generally adopted as the major financial support so status was often effectively linked to it. [11]

Wealth had, of course, always been a factor among gypsies. At Fairlop fair in Essex, George Sanger had noted the competition in dress and jewellery. Another measure was the number and quality of horses owned, while later in the nineteenth century the expense lavished upon the decoration of a vardo gained currency as status-giving. In the latter instance a suggestion of leisured freedom might enhance it by attention to detail; one of the Boswell women "black-leaded the tyres" of the van. But this was wealth as a secondary factor among those already of some rank in the gypsy world. It was only the "enormous variation" in wealth coming with what might be called the 'scrap age' for gypsies which forced a reassessment and led to the transition to wealth as the primary measure of status among them. [12]

Showmen

i) Family Self-employment

"Family partnerships are the rule, not the exception, and wealth is measured by families". Consequently fairground equipment was similarly seen as collective property; in the case of one family, for example, it was no less than six major rides plus a quantity of 'side stuff'. Notwithstanding this, it should at once be pointed out that each caravan, which usually housed at most two generations, was domestically independent, the occupants owning - and

living on the proceeds of - a particular piece of equipment handed on between generations (see Chapter 10, pp. 274-283). The permutations were flexible, depending upon such factors as family size, age and so on. What remained unchanged was the showmen's commitment to the form of self-employment. The showmen's view of their own work was well expressed when the Showmen's Guild looked back upon the years of the First World War and referred to "the travelling showman .... (and) .... his enterprise, capital and life's work". [13]

One result of the organization of work was a lack of job specialization and it was unusual for the family to be unable to meet the great majority of skill requirements. Showmen, like gypsies, claimed to be "always adaptable" both in the sense of being able to undertake required tasks at the fairground and also to adjust to long term economic trends and changing public tastes. Though the fair was a competitive place where showmen vied for custom, the need at times for mutual support was recognized (see Chapter 11, pp. 305-307). An example given was of other showmen providing power in the case of a generator breakdown when the fair was open; a mutually acknowledged right to trade and compete. Self-employment remained the norm on those occasions, as in the nineteen-thirties (see Chapter 5, pp. 91 - 93), when people left the business. Scrap-dealing was one option but less usually another showman bought a farm. No doubt showmen once had reason to feel less isolated in their form of employment; until well into the twentieth century, business contacts were also not infrequently self-employed and when the showmen pulled onto site, "years ago we used to have the baker call, the milkman call, the butcher call - and the ironmonger, he used to call everywhere we went", most of these tradesmen then coming into that category. [14]

Some showmen, however, were not part of a family work set up but carried the spirit of independence to extremes. As late as 1920, Andrew Smith travelled southern England with his coconut shy. He slept rough under the cart on which he packed his personal belongings. The cart he pushed himself as the coconut shy which "he used to pack on his horse" was load enough for the animal. Smith conjures up images of the medieval fair but his spirit was not unique; Jimmy

Chipperfield's father "never wanted to be a rich man - he wanted the challenge of earning a living. He used to say, 'I like to be like a bird, wakes up in the morning with nothing; then he goes out and gets it' ". [15]

A rather more businesslike philosophy was to be expected from those showmen who had made heavy investments in major rides. John Whiting "roundabout proprietor", for example, had around £9,000 invested, a not inconsiderable sum in 1912, while John Hunt, at the same time, had an estimated £15,000 tied up in the "steam roundabout business - exclusive of his circuses, menageries, shows and novelties in booths". Even so, some showmen managed to build up quite substantial assets while taking a fierce pride in asserting "we never borrowed anything" and "we never had anything on the book". Though the Showmen's Guild was avowedly non-political, it was perhaps not surprising that a group with such an independent ethos was suspicious of authority and controls. Sanger's view of the new London County Council as "officialdom growing in power and .... (having) .... every desire to become tyrannous" has already been referred to. Again, in 1932, for example, the Guild referred to local authorities "zeal" for power as "harassment". And, after the Second World War it was likewise uneasy about the new Labour government's centralist policies and controls. [16]

As the family was the economic and work unit of showmen, "a large .... (one was) .... a distinct advantage to a successful showman". "A person with a big family had enough staff" to undertake the varied tasks and provide the quantity of labour showmen's work entailed. The family unit could extend over three, or even four, generations as the case of Granny Beach, already mentioned, illustrated. And the children, having "an economic, not merely emotional, importance .... the binding ties were correspondingly closer" as discussed in Chapter 9, pp. 240-245). [17]

Fluctuations in the availability of labour according to economic conditions consequently had a relatively small impact on showmen. When circumstances warranted it, the formation of partnerships might increase the number of hands. That formed between the

Purchase and Chipperfield families not long after the First World War was an example, later cemented by marriage. The original appeal of the business alliance was that each family recognised the complimentary nature of the other's equipment and skills. The degree of dependence upon family members was exhibited by the Showmen's Guild pressing in 1919 for the early demobilization of "pivotal or key men" and again by the letter sent in 1939 to Secretary of State for War, Hore-Belisha by the Guild, requesting "exemption" from call up of sons "actively engaged .... (in) .... 90% family run" seasonal businesses.[18]

The value of a large family was even more emphatic in the circus branch of the showmen's business, where children grew up to be performers as well as the labour for more mundane tasks. The formation of partnerships was not unknown, as for example, when one branch of the Fossett family linked up with Bostock's menagerie. 'Sir' Robert Fossett recalled that all eight of his brothers and sisters "became circus performers in their turn". At various times both the Rosaire and Chipperfield circuses were almost entirely dependent upon family resources. In 1926, Freddie Ross' wife was his show's "equestrian director" and all five of his children were in the ring. A further example was the Paulo's circus which later grew into a much larger set up, but, interestingly, has in recent times again become an exclusively family organization as, under economic conditions since the post-Second World War boom, "the big shows were going, that was certain".[19]

ii) The Work to be Done

The family labour force had to be flexible, prepared individually to undertake any task of which they were capable. The manual labour of putting-up and taking-down, usually to be done late at night or early in the morning, against the clock (in order to reach the next site on schedule) and in inclement weather was the most frequent and physically demanding for everyone - excepting some of the circus performers. Less frequent was the maintenance and even manufacture of equipment. Tables and stalls for relatively simple games such as 'hoop-la' and coconut shies were invariably home-made.

All Equipment, of course, needed to be maintained but "you couldn't afford to put jobs out - you'd got to do the painting and repairing yourself" if at all possible. Painting of the heavy and ornate woodwork predominant in the earlier part of this century required some artistic skill. James Chipperfield, a "self-educated .... (and).... very knowledgable" man adorned his vans with the intricately-worked announcements that they contained "Jungle Aristocrats" of which his shows were the "Universal Concessionaires". More mundane and immediate was the level of self-sufficiency required to meet a breakdown on the road, especially as a large amount of travel was necessarily done on a Sunday. The financial and accounting side or other business matters were usually alloted to a "scholar", by which term showmen referred to someone who could read and write. Each family usually contained one such, often a women. The actual handling of money was, however, rarely a problem. The skill was learned young (see Chapter 9, pp. 244-245) and was, of course, needed to mind rides or stalls, sell tickets and so on. The cash office of the circus was frequently the job of the young "as soon as the children could count money". And when all the 'behind-the-scenes' preparation had been completed, it was necessary for the showmen to welcome the public.[20]

A loud voice was the first requirement of the barker, which was, therefore, normally a male role. Beside simply making himself heard above the roar of his competitors, it was necessary to be able to "tell the tale" to attract public interest in the first place and then to enter into good-humoured repartee with the hecklers who dared to doubt the veracity of the extravagant claims which had just been made; "in those days you had some very elegant patterers .... talkers, you know". The visual aspect was also important; several barkers were remembered for their "dandy" dress. The daughters and, sometimes wives, were the "parading girls", who, dressed in tights, provided the "leg show" which tempted the male clientele with the prospect of more, once inside the tent. Both barkers and girls were associated with the fairground booths and circuses; the mechanical rides' noise and colour were their own advertisement. Consequently the decline of the shows and the former activities went

hand in hand, tending to die out mainly during the inter-war period.[21]

The public performances covered the whole range usually associated with fair and circus shows. Obviously age and sex largely dictated the individual performers. A family of circus proprietors might at one time supply clowns, magicians, acrobats, balancing and juggling acts and animal trainers - though 'doubling up' in more than one role under assumed names for public consumption was frequent. Musicians were also required with at least the ability to provide the dramatic backcloth of a roll of drums. In the days when "sketches" or plays figured in some booths or as part of a circus performance a limited acting ability and, lacking any modern aids to amplification, a strong voice were called for. Some performers faced some discomfort and even danger, though the latter was often more apparent than real. Animal trainers most readily come to mind but so do women folk, in particular, of the knife-throwing acts which were once popular in fairground booths and were ideal from the labour point of view for smaller show families with daughters. Another instance was that of the boxing booths; one informant remembered three uncles who were "the fighters .... chucking challenges out" to go so many rounds with anyone who cared to step up.[22]

iii) Winter Work

a) The Need for Alternative Work

Showmen's work was clearly of a seasonal nature (see Chapter 8, pp.192 - 199) and therefore alternative income sources were needed during the winter months when, apart from some work around Christmas time, fair and circus activity virtually ceased. The need for some kind of winter work was near-universal among showmen. Only one person was met with during the interviews, daughter of a Riding-Master (see sub-heading below) and married to another, who claimed never to have done any non-show work; "my father used to say 'we've got enough to last us the winter' ". Few showmen had sufficient capital to invest in major undertakings outside show work. One, however, had a business receiving and sorting rags for re-processing in Devonport and two others owned common lodging houses. All these businesses were managed for them during the travelling season (see Chapter 8, pp.192 - 195).

The choice of business was, however, significant for people who were themselves largely itinerant and also when the work (or the winter months' alternative types of it) of gypsies and showmen is considered. Frequent occupants of the lodging houses were recalled as being "hurdy-gurdy men" and German bands. [23]

Though it was estimated that "ninety-nine per cent" of showmen needed some alternative income, the degree of need obviously varied. And in this a kind of balance became apparent. The proprietors of larger circuses needed a greater proportion of the winter for painting and repair, beside time for the preparation and perfection of new acts. Riding-Masters had an even heavier burden of maintenance for their mechanical rides. On the other hand, the owners of the simpler stalls and side shows were favoured by less upkeep problems but their equipment was, during the season, less profitable, rendering their need to spend more time at other work in the winter all the greater. [24]

The need for winter work remained general up to the Second World War - always allowing for the above odd exception and the gentleman remembered for "spending most of his time in the pub" while his wife worked. Due to the "good times" of the war years, the post-war period saw an increasing diversion of capital into other ventures connected with the amusement industry, such as clubs and arcades. Traditional types of winter work were less in demand due to broader social and economic changes. And some of the less well-off among the younger element of showmen were, anyway, sufficiently degenerate (so one or two of the older generation hinted darkly) to be content "on the welfare". [25]

b) Men's Work

Although consideration of sex roles is left until Chapter 11 (see pages pp. 301-305), where family and domestic aspects are fully dealt with, showmen's alternative work is here broken down under separate headings for more ready comparison with the gypsies. Many showmen recalled either parents or grandparents who had also been horse-dealers. Though mainly winter work, this could also be done jointly with show work at suitable fairs or as alternative summer

work if show work was scarce. Stages of a transition from horse dealing to the amusement fair were suggested by a grandfather who "did a bit of dealing in between"; at an earlier stage of the move was another whose "main thing was .... (still) .... horse dealing - if it came to a fair or a horse fair, he'd go to the horse fair to do some dealing". [26]

More truly a winter alternative to showmen's usual work was selling logs or 'logging' as it was known. It was the one most frequently recalled at the interviews and was learned young by the boys (and, very occasionally, girls) who went out to help their father's from a young age. From about ten years old, boys might go out with brothers only a little senior, pushing their own cart. Regular winter rounds were built up, so the source of income became a reliable one. As demand changed after the Second World War, logging was sometimes replaced by the selling of bundles of firewood or kindling sticks to local shop-keepers. The only other items regularly hawked by the men had been "tinware and all like that" but seems, among showmen, to have been confined to the pre-1914 era. [27]

Peg making was widely practiced at least up to the Second World War. Showmen recalled "the men made clothes pegs and that kind of thing" and some had considerable skill at the art; "My grandfather was a wonderful peg-maker - he used to make marvellous pegs". Never the most remunerative of showmen's winter alternatives, another side-line which did not survive after 1939 was the trade in rabbit skins. These were collected from farms and then sold to furriers in the town. [28]

A number of showmen recalled that it was around 1930 that they first "went out getting scrap iron and that" and so "went into the scrap business". Due to the difficult economic conditions which affected the fair at the time a number of showmen, as already mentioned, moved permanently into the scrap or "dismantling" business. During the Second World War, despite the resurgence in the fortunes of the fairground, the particular opportunities also afforded by demand for the war effort caused others to make the same move. Where secondary incomes were sought in post-war years scrap metal dealing was frequent. [29]

c) Women's Work

In the winter, the "majority" of "the women went out with the basket". They began young; one remembered, "when I was ten years old .... in the winter I went round door-to-door selling with my mother and sisters". It remained the accepted seasonal work throughout the inter-war years. Something of social changes since then were highlighted by the claim that in some areas contact was made more frequently with servants than with the lady of the house. Regular rounds were built up and when confidence was established, the former "used to invite you in the kitchen sometimes and give you breakfast". The goods sold were mainly items like "lace, reels of cotton, buttons" or "aprons and pinnies". Some women were "hawkers of baskets" or clothes pegs made by their menfolk; of the latter item, one showman recalled, "my grandmother and my mother and all the girls use to go and sell 'em". [30]

The hawking by the women was almost invariably done on foot but the mother of one informant used a pony and trap to sell the plants which she bought from a local nursery. The only example of indoor work or employee status come across during the interviewswas of a woman, then single, who had worked for a number of seasons assembling radios in a West London factory during the 'thirties', the winter being the manufacturer's busiest time. Women did not generally encroach upon what were regarded as men's winter jobs. Exceptions were those who organized the buying of rabbit skins for subsequent sale to a furrier in Bristol and another who had a regular 'logging' round - but in both cases the women were quite young widows with children to rear and provide for. [31]

d) Family Work

The work in which the whole family toiled side-by-side was agricultural work. Established over some generations was the practice "after the 'back end' when the beer hops came out" for families to travel well beyond their regular summer area (see Chapter 8, pp. 192 - 196) to Kent for this seasonal work. In other areas "turnip pulling" or the lifting of other crops, which was temporarily

labour intensive, provided regular winter work. Of course, agricultural work might be turned to during the summer months if business was bad. One showman's wife recalled an instance from as late as around 1950. Having a bad season in the West Country and penniless, she had said, "I tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to find myself a farm and see if they want any labour - anything - I said, we can pull the lorry on there and stop for 'nanty' (free) and we can all earn a few shillings potato picking or something". The story was told with pride as evidence of personal resourcefulness to substantiate the claim that a "true traveller .... would find something and never starve". [32]

e) Other Work

In the previous three sub-sections the relatively common alternative, mainly winter, income sources for showmen were those which had already been met with when the work of the gypsies was discussed. But in the course of the interviews, showmen recalled other work they had done. Most were isolated examples but are worth recording as again showing the element of opportunism and resourcefulness enabling them to take advantage of a personal skill or a family or local circumstance. There was nothing new in this; early in Victorian times George Sanger's father had sold fish and groceries from a stall in front of the house he rented during the winter in Newbury, Berks. On trips to the London markets he sold toffee-apples from his cart en route. Some showmen, however, turned their hands to work which was related to their circus or fairground interest. The Chipperfield family, late in the nineteenth century became "mummers", setting up their booth, in London, on some spare plot of ground or in public house yards. They put on a different play each night, "some comedy, some serious .... a person with a big family had enough cast". In this century, some showmen did decorative work for less skilled fellows, carving and painting the heavy and elaborate show fronts or animals for the rides. Manufacturers such as Savage Brothers Ltd., of King's Lynn, Norfolk employed their own "Italian carvers" for new work, but for replacement jobs local showmen, on the spot, could easily undercut them. [33]

Away from the industry, the skills of lining, lettering and sign-writing were put to use on church porches, for example, and more than one showman painted signposts and milestones for the local highways authority. Looking back, showmen recalled work related to a specific era. In this class, in Edwardian times, was the help given in getting race-goers from Singleton station up to Goodwood Racecourse, high on the Sussex Downs; "we'd help push the 'four-in-hands' over the hill. Perhaps we'd get a penny or 'tuppence' for that .... that's what we had to do in them days". Also short-lived was the practice of going around the military camps, during the First World War, either selling fruit to the soldiers or taking in the officers' washing. It was sometimes possible to return to the same work winter after winter. One informant regularly joined his "Uncle Bill .... (who was) .... a wonderful dealer in antiques". Others gave help on a window cleaning round or returned to the Forest of Dean, where the family originated, to help dig for coal at a season of high demand. A few week's work might also be found each year "hollying for Christmas and selling Christmas trees". But the most unusual winter sources of income were, perhaps, those of the showman who each year visited the hotels in the holiday resorts along the south coast collecting, sorting and selling the bottles which had accumulated for him each year - or the one who recalled, as a boy, helping his grandfather "in the winter time, we used to get furze sticks and we had to boil 'em and skin 'em and then he used to send 'em to London to make into walking sticks and umbrella handles and things like that". [34]

iv) Showmen as Employees

When discussing the economic fortunes of showmen in the two World Wars (see Chapter 5, pp. 84 - 203), the work undertaken by them away from the fairground and circuses was mentioned. It is here of importance in stressing that they were the only occasions when showmen frequently became employees, especially if one extends that category to include service in the armed forces. Information on the First World War is relatively sketchy but beside the references already made to military service (see Chapter 5, pp. 84 - 89), one

or two specific illustrations of civilian work in the mining industry have survived. Count Rosaire, becoming again plain Freddie Ross lived in a mine-owned cottage in West Yorkshire, while the death was recorded of Thomas Evans, son of the "well known .... (family of) roundabout proprietors" who "for some years had been working for the Edinburgh Collieries company". [35]

In the Second World War, conscription meant that "most" showmen of suitable age saw military service but it was civilian work which was most readily remembered at the interviews. Before the end of September, 1939, "many of our people .... (had) .... obtained employment in other spheres", many for the first time having to learn to "adapt to the regularities of a nine-to-five life". Showmen's usual work, with it's alternating periods of languor and intense activity, was replaced by the rigours of a steady work rate. Factory work often alternated with evening and weekend work of the usual family self-employment type as mentioned earlier. This may well have prevented showmen from becoming institutionalized by factory employment as some stayed in one place for some years. At the "Heston Aircraft" factory in West London, attended by many of the area's showmen, one man claimed that his length of service of over six years, that is, throughout the war, was not too exceptional. More congenial to most were such open air jobs as "timber hauling" or labouring on military construction sites for the men or as 'land girls' for the women. Quite 'at home' were the man who found work in a breakers yard and the woman of circus background who was employed by the L.M.S. railway at one of it's goods stations in Liverpool where she was put in charge of the horses. [36]

A quite different type of employment was the practice in the circus of supplementing the show by taking on other family acts. Before they tended to die out at the fairground, the acts to be seen in the booths in summer might obtain work with a circus proprietor over the Christmas period. A 'wire-walker' and lion tamer were both recalled who forsook their booths and menageries to appear at the regular Christmas season at the Agricultural Hall in Islington, London in Edwardian times. At any time of year, a family of one time

circus proprietors, having given up their own show for domestic or financial reasons, might appear as an act in another circus. Even some famous names found work in this way. Sir Robert Fossett, at one time, did six months at Bostock's circus at Belle Vue, Manchester and a member of the Chipperfield family appeared in the Sandow's show during the Second World War. The positions of 'employer' and 'employee' might be reversed over a period of time. The Paulo family closed down their own show and appeared for other proprietors, including Bertram Mills at Olympia for several Christmases in the nineteen-thirties, for example, but again took on other family acts when they again ran their own circus in more recent years. The larger and more wealthy owners sometimes employed continental performers. As with the native acts, the most usual contract was to travel and appear with a show for "a season" when, in the normal spirit of family work they were expected to "muck in" with such tasks as setting-up, selling programmes and so on. [37]

v) Employment of Labour

a) Who Were the Employees ?

Showmen regularly employed labour to undertake or give help in those areas which purely family resources were insufficient to cover. This was principally the 'behind-the-scenes' manual work of putting-up and taking-down, but in other jobs some public contact was made as, for example, in the collection of money on some of the rides, the latter task often requiring a degree of agility, being done while the machine was in motion in order to maximise it's earning power. The employees were usually referred to as 'chaps', but in northern England the term 'gaff lads' has gradually come into use, while, in the circus, they were called 'tentmen' as descriptive of their principal job. The showmen did not have a very high opinion of the men they took on; they were described as "drifters .... really" and "drifters .... you know, that kind of people they were". The employees usually accepted it was casual work but the open-air aspect appealed to some. Recruitment was equally informal; "just chaps we picked up off the road and gave a job to". And they came cheap, especially when general employment prospects were poor. Referring to

the decades between the World Wars, one circus informant said, "you could afford more tent men then because you could get them for next-to-nothing and they could rough it". [38]

The 'chaps', often unreliable and "liking not to be tied" were, in the great majority of cases, young and single. Though it was claimed "you wouldn't get married men", there were exceptions; "you got mostly single men or men who had left their wives .... you know, running away from home or something like that", the latter type providing a smattering of older men. In only one instance was the claim made, "we had a married couple" which was stressed to show it was very unusual. During the Second World War labour became a problem for the relatively infrequent moves then made and reliance had to be placed upon those too old or unfit for military service. Gone by then was the workhouse which might provide a supply of labour if none presented itself. In the early years of this century one showman recalled that institution was in sight of the Brighton fair tober, so his mother ordered him, "go over there and see if you can find a couple or three 'mushes' - 'cos that's how the talk was in them days - to help build up". [39]

If one of the 'chaps' was literate, he might achieve a relatively privileged position as his skills made him privy to some of the showmen's business and financial concerns. But, in general, showmen not only had a low opinion of their employees but blamed their own, at times, poor image on the fact that no distinction between employer and employed at the fair was made in the public mind. Of the honesty of the young men the showmen had no illusions. When taking money on the rides, it was almost impossible to avoid the eagle eye of the showman's wife in the pay box but, anxious to enjoy the ride, when his change was given to him the customer was easy prey to 'tapping'. This long-established practice consisted of counting the coins from hand to hand to prove accuracy but actually giving them to the customer with the hand held face downwards and so retaining one or two unseen in the palm. Dark suspicions might be entertained afterwards but realized to be beyond proof. The 'blind eye' turned by showmen was relevant to their own concepts of morality as further discussed in Chapter 11 (see pp. 307 - 309). [40]

b) How Long They Stayed

It was most common for the casual labourers to be employed only for the duration of each fair or circus stop. A significant minority might follow a fair or particular showman's family for a whole season. Variations between the two were many and there was always the possibility of one of the 'chaps' leaving without warning. Some of them might return to stay season after season or for shorter periods when the showmen returned annually to their locality. There was a tendency for the circus' tentmen to stay longer, often for a minimum of a season, as especially the larger ones offered more regular work. Since the Second World War, labour exchanges have been increasingly used to find workers - a rare example of showmen's use of 'flattie' bureaucracy. But in earlier times, regulars were looked out for; "one man tramping the road, we'd pick him up each year. A very handy, clean man he was, like they were in those days .... but he'd only stop with us about six weeks". Prior to the Second World War, when unemployment was high, not only did the men "come cheap" but they were glad enough to come back seasonally "for years and years". A few were fortunate enough to find work with showmen all the year round. One who "had the same four men for five or six years", up to 1939, was able to keep them on for his reduced winter opening in an urban area. A few shared in the alternative winter work of the showmen, such as working in their scrap-yards. These were the chaps who "were with us all their lives .... they knew they had a job for life". Changed employment opportunities and social expectations probably explain why the longest serving 'chap' encountered after 1945 was the one who stayed for twelve years.[41]

c) How They Were Provided For

The 'chaps' who stayed for more than a few days and actually travelled with the showmen had to be accommodated. Facilities were often primitive. They might have to sleep in the empty "box trucks" or, if they were not prepared to sleep out of doors "had to sleep in the back of the elephant lorry". Sometimes a small 'room' was arranged in an equipment van, the dimensions of which can be speculated from the description of it as "a bit of a bed place up

front" fitted out with the requisite number of "bunks .... things like that, you know". Marginally more fortunate were those who worked for proprietors who supplied a 'chap's wagon'. Even then it was, typically, an old 'horse' van (see Chapter 8, pp. 203-206) about 14 feet long which slept as many as eight men; "take the shooting gallery, for instance .... well, that was a caravan with metal plates on the side, so it did two jobs; in there, there was four double bunk beds". Only in the very largest circuses were mobile dormitories provided, though personal space allowance remained limited.[42]

"Mother used to 'scrat' 'em" was one showman's description of the custom of providing food and cooking for the 'chaps'. When it is explained that this might mean doing so for, perhaps, a dozen men in addition to the family members, plus all her other chores, something of 'mother's' work-load becomes apparent (see Chapter 11, pp. 302-304). The claim that employees were, in this respect, "treated like we were treated" meant that they "always ate the same as we ate" in terms of quality and quantity. The common practice was, however, to keep the 'chaps' crockery and cutlery separate from that of the family; in one case a mentally-backward lad was confined to his own personal plate, knife and fork (see also Chapter 11, pp. 313-316). The only long-established exception to the rule was, apparently, among showmen who regularly travelled in the south-west of England; there it was claimed "we've never fed our men .... in this part of the country" although it was known that fellow members of the same regional area of the Showmen's Guild did so as near as the counties of Hampshire and Dorset. Some large circuses again, in more recent times, provided an exception as their tentmen were supplied with "gas rings" or even a canteen in which to prepare their food.[43]

Practices regarding the employees' laundry seem to have been more varied. In the interviews, recollections were about equally divided between instances where the washing was done for them or they had to make their own arrangements. The variations showed no particular regional differences though in no case was the laundry done

for the 'chaps' where food was not provided. Where it was done, in parallel with the practice with crockery and cutlery, it was usual to keep the men's clothing and bedding separate from that of the family (see also Chapter 11, pp. 310-311). If the 'chaps' had to do their own laundry, they were allowed, in the era of steam traction engines (see Chapter 8, pp. 201-202), to share in that common source of hot water supply. A further variation, which disappeared over the years, was to persuade domestic servants to take in washing and so make a few extra pence using their employers' facilities.[44]

Of the main body of employees it was said, "the proprietors used to treat them as a kind of nobody". The informant's own father had spent some years away from the showmen's world, from the mid-thirties until 1945, and, on his return, treated his men with "some respect"; he was looked upon as distinctly odd. The symbolic division between showmen and 'chaps' was the door of the former's home. The taboo was variously expressed: "The employees - you never had them in your van .... you gave them their food out and they brought their pots back" and "A chap was never allowed up in the wagon .... what you dealt with a chap, you dealt over the door" (showmen's vans, ancient and modern, had the door divided horizontally into two parts, the lower one normally remaining closed). Even a long-serving employee who stayed with one Riding Master's family for thirty-five years had never been inside one of their living vans. Given this relationship, the attitude of showmen towards young employees (who were also on occasions observably promiscuous with 'flattie' girls at the fair) consorting with their daughters and to the occasional marriage which did take place (see Chapter 10, pp.278 -280) becomes explicable. Though the Rubicon might never normally be crossed, a degree of paternalism in rare cases gradually grew towards the few. Fondly remembered by one elderly Riding Master were the long-departed "Bill Pulham, Old Cockney, Charlie Matthews, 'Lily' Harry.... (male, despite the name)...Old Sandy and Jock .... and when they died, we paid for their funerals and buried them in the same cemetery as my father and my uncle".[45]

d) Special Types of Employee

In the larger circuses an hierarchy of employees was able to develop because of the range of work involved. This manifested itself in the arrangement of living wagons around the tober itself and also in the order of preference within each group according to length of service (see below). The principal groups, beside the proprietor and his family were the grooms, artistes, musicians and tentmen. The grooms enjoyed a status almost on a par with the artistes as they were "very much connected with the performance". In later years the musicians, as the only unionized group, who did not share in any of the manual labour, were looked at askance as a necessary evil. The groups never mixed socially. All, except the tentmen, tended, as the twentieth century progressed, to live with their families and so were domestically independent within their own vans. An aerial photograph in the possession of Jimmy Chipperfield showed his circus at it's peak, with the demarcation clear; each group of caravans and the tentmen's dormitory and canteen were separately arranged around the tober. The only other employee, of even quite small shows, was the 'Advance booking agent'. He was rarely with the circus itself, his job being to go ahead to arrange sites, supplies of animal feed and other necessities, stick up posters and, if possible, commission the sale of tickets.[46]

A rare instance of female employees were the "calling-in girls" which one informant's father had found were a definite asset on his shooting gallery. What manner of girls they were or how they were recruited he could not recall, but the "young ladies - very smart they were .... a lot of them finished up as actresses .... (while others) .... stayed with families for years and married showmen's sons". Before the booths lost popularity, female wrestlers were not unknown but more frequent was the employment of young male boxers. To "work the booths" was a recognized training ground for them and, like other employees,they received food and lodging. Many who "reached the top of their profession started in the fairground". Famous names of the boxing world who began with Sam McKeowan's show, long a well-known feature of West Country fairs, included Randolph Turpin and Freddie Mills.[47]

vi) Status

a) Riding Masters

The dominant families of the fairground were the Riding Masters, already referred to elsewhere (see Chapter 6, pp. 131-134). In the minds of most showmen, ownership of major mechanical amusements and control of the sites went hand-in-hand. It was explained, "what we term a Riding Master is a lessee with the machines" or "they are the people who have the rides and take the sites". To a few it was sometimes more simply "a man who's got machines" as, in a minority of cases (as explained in Chapter 6), site control could be other hands. Nevertheless, Riding Masters were generally looked up to as the people to whom "others pay rent". The trend for those investing in the then-new rides to attempt to control whole sites began late in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 4, pp. 66 - 68) and the position of many families now recognized as Riding Masters was consolidated before 1914. A great-uncle of one showman was well-established by then as he had "two or three roundabouts". The massive construction and the nature of a machine which had to be easily dismantled paid dividends in the long run. Parts could be quickly replaced and, if necessary, it could be adapted to suit changes in public taste as, for example, in the replacement of horses by motor cars. Thus the Riding Masters might maintain the dominance of their equipment over long periods at the same time limiting the extent of further capital investment. The general prosperity of showmen during the Second World War (see Chapter 5, pp. 96 - 103) caused an upsurge in the number who could be classified as Riding Masters; ".... then the war came along and they got a 'Swirl' and a 'Noah's Ark' and got round to the position they are in today". In 1946 it was noted, "up and down the country the number of Riding Masters is increasing". Many of the new masters were of humble origin, "a lot of chaps who was only working boys on the fairground is master men now with machines of their own".[48]

The part played by Riding Masters in the development of fairground equipment also revealed the strength of their position and the determination of individuals to maintain it. The suggestions put

to manufacturers, sometimes in the form of the sketches sent to Savage Brothers, for improvements, might concern mobility, weight, storage-space requirements or ease of assembly. All these factors, of course, had an economic significance. On rare occasions it was even known for a Riding Master to commission a completely new type of ride. The Riding Masters were responsible for the creation of new business and took the major risk in a new fair's success - and the latter might well be necessary to recoup the capital invested in machines. The Riding Master in his role of lessee, would then advertise the space he had available (including the unclaimed space under the 'Two Year' rule) in the World's Fair. Typical and frequent advertisements were, for example, in the form, "Mr. P. Collins has spaces to let ....". As the lessee, a showman could play a protective role over the interests of lesser men who were his tenants, as well as guarding his own interests. In pursuing these ideals an amusing parochialism was shown by one Riding Master; "I can usually squeeze somebody else in if he's a Hampshire man; if he comes from London, I'll think twice - let him go back to bloody London". [49]

Status, as between Riding Masters, often took the form of competition regarding the cleanliness and decoration of almost any item of their possessions, be it living van, rides or haulage units. This aspect perhaps reached it's peak with the showmen's steam traction engines (see Chapter 8, pp.301 - 302). The opposition was watched closely; "the other man, if his engines were cleaner than yours, you had to catch him up". The need to 'catch up' manifested itself in another sense. Great pride was taken in the speed and efficiency with which putting-up and taking-down could be accomplished. Then, in the morning, it was necessary to get steam up early because "you had to be first ones out .... (of the fair site) .... they were that jealous". With advancing years and his family grown up a man might pass on his machines and role of Riding Master to his heirs, contenting himself with just a stall or two which could now adequately meet his needs. The status once accorded a master never left such a person but gradually merged, in his semi-retirement, with the respect always accorded old age (see Chapter 12, pp. 338 -

339). Once the position of Riding Master was achieved, it was generally handed down within the family and there was a natural reluctance to relinquish it. Referring to his own father, one master said "Every fair he got from the beginning he kept - and we're going to". [50]

b) Lesser Showmen

The 'side stuff' of the fairground, including the smaller booths before their virtual elimination, were owned and run by the elderly or younger members of a Riding Master's family, or by a generally poorer type of showman. The latter might own several stalls, the number varying according to family size and, therefore, financial needs. These were "what they called the tenants .... the people with the side shows". Their position was often seen as essentially dependant because Riding Masters "let the showmen with the stalls come in as tenants". The placing of the tenants living vans on the site, normally around the perimeter, was also under the lessee's control. It was the usual practice for him to place each stall-holder's home as near as possible to his stall, while the Riding Master took a prime site, often near the entrance or other commanding position. The other factor taken into consideration when arranging the domestic quarters was family relationships which were often complex and might well be based upon who to keep apart as much as who to put together. [51]

For economic and geographical reasons the areas travelled by masters and stall-holders broadly corresponded with each other, a relationship consolidated by the holding of places under the 'Two Year Rule' (see Chapters 6 and 8, pp.132 - 134 & 192-195). Some owners of booths or 'side stuff', in order to expand their own seasonal round or avoid too great a degree of dependence, consciously attempted not to always travel with one lessee. One informant changed "from time to time" in this way. It was also necessary to do so if new equipment was purchased which might be considered unacceptable competition for some of the present Riding Master's own stalls or those of other tenants. Others were content to travel in the wake of a family of masters, sometimes over generations. The Ayres family, for

example, remained with a branch of the Cole family in this way. The status of some showmen could also be seen in their dependence upon a master for towage, especially in the days of steam traction engines for this purpose, which were relatively expensive compared to the ubiquitous lorry and so well beyond the resources of a stall holder. A similar dependence, in more recent times, was occasionally brought upon the widows of poorer showmen who continued to travel. [52]

c) Status in the Circus

Among showmen who were principally associated with the circus side of the business the overwhelmingly important status-giving factor was the length of time the family had been identified with it; "true circus families go back hundreds of years" and "circus goes back generation after generation - they're brought up in the business", was the generally agreed opinion. When a showman transferred his interest from the fairground to circus proprietorship, as in the case of Freddie Ross ('Count Rosaire'), a degree of acceptance only came with time; in the nineteen-thirties he was still considered of quite lowly rank. Though most circuses remained small (see Chapters 4 and 5, pp. 61 - 63 & 93 - 96), certain members of old-established families were not poor. When he died in 1932, 'Sir' Robert Fossett left £15,000 and the will of Frederick Ginnett, in 1927, was "proven" at £32,139. But it was probably because the majority of circus families remained relatively poor that the factor of heritage was clung to so tenaciously. Otherwise, it would have been impossible not to give ground to the immediate success of Bertram Mills, a complete 'outsider' who set up his show after the First World War, or to Billy Smart, a fairground man, who became equally prosperous soon after the Second World War. It was also necessary to rely upon heritage in order to distinquish oneself from the purely fairground performers who occasionally took part in the circus as hired acts and often transferred to it on a more permanent basis as their own booths lost popularity (see Chapter 5, pp. 91 - 93). In this connection it was significant that, lineage or not, when an old-established family gave up its own show to become an act in another circus, as did the Paulo family at one time, they definitely lost status. To balance

this loss, one elderly lady who had latterly become just such a performer, claimed descent from the esteemed Yelding family, one of whom, she insisted, had been "a court jester in the Domesday Book". [53]

Canal Boatmen

i) Family Work on the Boats

As already discussed above (see Chapter 4, pp. 73 - 74) family working of the boats on the narrow canal system was the established norm by the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Thereafter, the pattern continued until the boats themselves disappeared after the Second World War. The family as the economic work unit "must have been almost unique in the England of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in an industrial setting." The paradox has already been remarked upon that it was on the canal system, an early product of the industrial revolution, a form of employment should have evolved which perpetuated much of a pre-industrial type; much of the work-place discipline and allotment of work remained within a patriarchal family organization as a result and a degree of control over earning capacity remained with the family. Away from the wider, northern canals, where "only large boats .... (were) .... seen and they contained no children", it was "quite common" for the father to take charge of one boat and the mother the other one of a pair, each helped by one or more children. This basic pattern continued after the transition from horse-power to the internal combustion engine. It did not obtain if the family was too few in mumber or too young to handle two boats, or in the case of the steam-powered fast or 'fly' boats which operated, for example, between London and Birmingham earlier in this century. Then, in order to keep going day and night, the family arranged shift working; "two's been having a sleep while two's been working". [54]

All the family were expected to turn their hand to any work of which they were considered capable. Though, in general "you didn't have your name on a job", the physical work of loading and unloading and the particular demands of 'legging' through tunnels (see below) was done by men. Women belped with the "sheeting down", that is the

covering of the load with tarpaulins when loading was completed and, occasionally, did some "shovel work" if the material carried, such as sand for example, was not considered too heavy. Once under way the major tasks of steering and lock work were largely shared (see also Chapter 11, pp. 319-321). The dependence upon family labour was widely recognized, "the only reason boating paid was because you were relying on cheap pairs of hands". The way of life would be destroyed if "family life .... (was) .... broken up"; it being "necessary to utilize the services of children because of the low wages paid". In fact, as the industry declined it became more necessary to rely on the services rendered by all members of the family. No doubt this was why even after "very careful consideration .... (it was never) .... considered opportune" to introduce legislation to ban the practice (see Chapter 6, pp. 118 - 121). At the very end of the freight carrying era on the narrow canals a number of boat-owning companies such as Fellowes, Moreton & Clayton, Samuel Barlow and Harvey & Clayton sold out to the newly - established British Transport Commission, with the anachronistic result that a modern, nationalized industry became the employer of the remaining examples of this family-based work group. [55]

ii) Boatmen as Employees

The 'Number Ones' always excepted (see below), it nevertheless remained true that over the country as a whole .... canal transportation .... was carried on by boatmen who worked for large carrying companies". Control of the industry and the impetus for improvement - or lack of it - therefore rested with the "masters". They were accused of using family work as a way of keeping down wages. Payment was always made by the load, a variety of piece-work; "that's why we used to work a lot of hours". When poor maintenance resulted in each boat carrying a lesser load to reduce the draught, it was the boatmen who were the first to suffer financially; there was little financial pressure on the carrying companies who consequently rarely pressed for improvements by the canal proprietors. There was little scope for the boatmen's families' to improve their lot. In a declining industry finding another employer who could provide work - and a home -

was not easy. Transfers did take place, however, on a few occasions; an example was when the Grand Union company acting as carriers on it's own line of canal, undercut the former employer of Griffiths of Bedworth so forcing the latter out of business. Another way by which boatmen were tied to one employer was a common practice in the days of horse drawn boats (see Chapter 8, pp. 210-211); boatmen were responsible for their own motive power, so the employers often loaned money for it's purchase. This forced boatmen, of course, to get the most out of the animals and generally look after them. But it depressed incomes still further and as they were generally so low, repayment was spread over a long period. [56]

The usual practice was for the companies to recognize only the father as an employee. He was regarded as "captain" and so it was recalled "only me Dad got paid". The economic consequences were clear to the boatmen; "Remember this - it didn't matter if you had only one in the family or twenty, it was only you got paid". And if the family was too young there was no way of increasing earning power, as the unit of earning capacity was, of course, the boat itself. Once the family began to grow up the remedy was to hand. "If you had boys of, say, fourteen or fifteen, they'd be quite capable of working two more boats"; in this way older children could branch out on their own, although the age at which most companies would officially recognize boys as competent to "take captain of another pair" of boats was sixteen. Although boatmen complained to the very end that "you got nothing for your wife, let alone your children", the only concession gained, as a result of union pressure, was that wives were occasionally insured under the Workmen's Compensation Act along with their husbands. In 1924 two of the biggest carriers, Fellowes, Moreton & Clayton and Thomas Clayton agreed to this but the Grand Union company, in it's capacity as a carrier, did not do so until 1937. The wives acting as "mates" might be protected but the children could not; the carriers could not admit that the children were working for them. In only rare instances were women 'captains' found on the boats. One case was where the husband had become disabled as the result of an accident and another came about as "My father died when I was eighteen and we (i.e. mother and sisters) worked boats on our own

for twelve years - just women". [57]

Other aspects of the boatmen's work may be considered here, as variations to the normal daily round were very few, both in their scope and frequency; the single type of industrial work and income base was almost invariable for boatmen. It was of little consequence for the employers if a boat was kept waiting at the wharfside for a load, as the boatman and his family would not, of course, be paid while they were idle. When the wait extended for some days it was sometimes possible to pick up a little casual work; the boatman would "see the stevedore .... he'd give you a job on the wharves". The other major source of stoppage was ice in winter. Boats could be frozen in for days or even weeks on end until the company's 'ice boat' came near; then it was possible for the boatman to make up some of the loss of earnings by offering his own and his horse's efforts to pull it. In both the above examples, boatmen were the preferred labour as they were deemed to "know the work". [58]

Employment of others by boatmen was only known to have occurred in two ways, both on a very small scale and which died out well before the Second World War. When boats were horse-drawn the usual method of getting through the not infrequent tunnels of the canal system was by 'legging'. This consisted of placing long projecting boards athwart the bows of the boat, upon which men could lay and so, one on each side, 'walk' the craft through the tunnel with their feet on it's side walls. It was tiring and dangerous work and as family boats normally supported but one adult male, recourse was had to hiring at least one 'legger' for the passage of a tunnel. At some points a team of such men might be posted, self-employed but given an arm-band by the canal company to show their official status compared to anyone else who might offer their services. The boatmen rarely took 'unofficial' help even if it was cheaper; in the blackness of the tunnel it was as well to know the man on the other end of the plank knew what he was doing. The 'hufflers' were the other group of men whose 'self-appointed' services might sometimes be used; they offered, for a small fee, to go on ahead to prepare the locks in readiness but obviously had an appeal only to boatmen

whose families' could not spare someone for the task. But boatmen clearly thought of themselves as employees; when they left the cut, they usually retained this status. The jobs they went to were labouring ones, frequently on road repair gangs and sometimes to maintenance work on the canals as the latter changed over to a leisure facility. The only skilled work to which boatmen transferred was as mechanics, an ability acquired from maintaining the diesel engines on the latter-day boats (see Chapter 8, pp. 212-213) but, again, almost invariably in the roles of employees. [59]

iii) The 'Number Ones'

The number or proportion of boatmen who were 'Number Ones', that is, self-employed men who, with their families, worked their own craft was, like so much else regarding travellers, difficult to establish. Estimates varied widely. George Smith, when he first turned his attention to the canals (see Chapter 6, pp. 114-118) thought "half or two thirds" of the boats were owner-operated. The Canal Inspector, looking back in 1929, seemed to confirm Smith's opinion; "Thirty years ago, individually owned and worked boats formed at least half of the boats on our registers". Later research suggested a wide variation in different areas, with as many as a third of boats being 'Number One' worked in some districts, but that the overall figure was nearer 10% in Smith's time. For reasons explained in Chapter 5 (see pp. 105-107) an increase in 'Number Ones', both absolutely and relatively occurred after the First World War. Whereas prior to 1914 the proportion had declined to less than 5%, estimates for the post-war period suggest about 11% in 1921, declining again to 9% in 1931. The slightly higher figure of 14 - 15% given by the Canal Inspector's own observations in the Stoke-on-Trent area in 1925 may have been due to regional variations. On the other hand, though it may be argued that there were ulterior motives for the picture it presented, the boatmen's union's own findings, at the same time, were of only 108 out of 1,920 boats 'Number One' operated, rather over 5%. It is also worth recording that, again in the mid-twenties, the Canal Inspector claimed there were as many as thirty female 'Number Ones', the majority the widows of boatmen. [60]

Before the First World War it was said to be the 'Number Ones' who were most troublesome to the canal inspectors, school attendance officers, health officers and so on; "the only class who (sic) does not seem to recognize the need for improvement is the small boat owner". This picture hardly conveys the impression of an elite among boatmen, yet after 1918, at least, the 'Number Ones' tended to be seen by other boatmen as enjoying a superior status. The 'Number Ones', some of them new to the rank, were, in the nineteen-twenties, restoring their boats to "good order" as "quite a few .... earned a good living". The position of 'Number One' was advertised on the boat itself, as part of the registration procedure, alongside the owners name. Whatever had been the situation before 1914, in the inter-war period, the pride taken in the condition and decoration of the boats, a mark of status among all boatmen, was particularly jealously indulged in by the 'Number Ones'. And they, in a remarkable parallel to the Riding Masters, upheld "family honour and prestige" in being first away in the morning, getting loaded first and so on - forms of competition with obvious economic implications. [61]

The newly-established 'Number Ones' began, in some instances, by hiring their boats from their former employers. The Rochdale Canal Company, in 1922, noted that "the discharged boatmen who hire our boats are doing a nice little business". But they gave away the price to be paid, "they work all the hours they can". From a former carrying company, "Lee and Atkins of Polesworth .... (it was possible to) .... hire a boat for ten shillings a week - then it was up to you to get yourself a horse and get yourself a contract". Later outright purchase of the boat might be arranged. The mention of a 'contract', however, dispels the idea of the 'Number Ones' ranging widely over the canal system and picking up a variety of work. Most of them, for economic security, sought to establish themselves on a regular traffic flow. In some instances, work was gained by a major carrier, possibly that department of the canal company itself, such as on the Grand Union line, which then sub-contracted the the 'Number Ones'. For some years, the Whitlock family carried raw materials to and from the Dickinson Paper Mills near Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire; "that was working for Fellowes, Moreton and Clayton with your own boat". [62]

"Owner boatmen were a dying breed in the years before the First World War" and, again, after their temporary resurgence were, by 1929, "rapidly ceasing to exist". A major problem was the introduction of diesel power towards the end of that decade (see Chapter 8, pp. 212 - 213). No 'Number Ones' are believed to have made the earlier move to steam engines, but boats so powered were relatively few. Now the more widespread use of diesel boats by the large carrying firms left the 'Number Ones', unable to raise further cash at a time of general trade depression, at a great disadvantage. A few were able to make the transition, including the Ambridge and Carter families, but others, including some of the recently established 'Number Ones', either became employees again or left the cut altogether. Soon after the end of the Second World War, there were "very few" 'Number Ones' left. The post-war years were a time "when the 'Number Ones' were driven off the canal". "British Waterways started up their own fleet and cut out all the 'Number Ones' " and the political atmosphere of the time did not favour them; the dockers at Brentford in West London were accused of deliberately delaying their boats, telling the 'Number Ones' "you represent private enterprise". Reduced again to the level of employees, "most of the Grand Union skippers" gained what remnants of status they could by recalling that "their fathers or grandfathers had been 'Number Ones'".[63]

Nevertheless, a couple of 'Number Ones' survived in such unfavourable times. Jack Skinner was one who worked mainly on the Oxford Canal, and Charlie Bellinger another, his usual route being from Birmingham down to the Severn. The latter's family was perhaps the ultimate example of the hereditary nature of their calling. Bellingers were known to have been at work on the Thames and Severn Canal early in the nineteenth century; in the nineteen-twenties they were 'Number Ones' owning their horse drawn boats and it was Charlie Bellinger who, as late as 1961, worked the last load of coal down to the Severn by narrowboat.[64]

Resumé

All travellers share the characteristic of everyone in the family working, most often together, and so making their economic

contribution. At certain times or when persuing particular income sources, gypsy men and women had their own recognized tasks, such as horse-dealing and hawking respectively. The same was true of the showmen in their winter work. Even then however, the family often shared in contributing to a common income source, the tasks undertaken by various members of it being essentially complimentary, as the example of peg-making showed. The family being the work unit had inter-dependant consequences for the value placed upon children, stability in marriage, sex roles and so forth of all travellers as discussed in Chapters 9 to 11, pp. 220- 333 .

Gypsies and showmen were alike in that they were only very rarely committed to one source of income. Showmen's work was self-evidently principally connected with the fairground and circus but their alternative income sources (mainly turned to during the winter months), like all the work of the gypsies, was variable both over periods of time and seasonally. Variations in the former sense were of particular significance during the first half of the twentieth century, hence one reason for this work's concentration upon that period, as many of the oldest established sources of income disappeared due to social and technological changes, only to be replaced by new sources divined by the gypsies and showmen themselves. The need of the showmen for alternative winter work, despite the degree of internal balance which emerged due to the earning power and maintenance needs of the show equipment owned, by its near-universal nature revealed the overall relative income levels achieved by that group. The alternatives resorted to, as a matter of economic necessity, opens up an area of speculation as to what degree this may have been a question of reversion to 'pre-show work' occupations - and therefore of considerable significance for the popular assumption of their having 'gypsy' identities. This matter will be dealt with below (see Chapter 11, pp. 290-333) together with other cultural aspects relevant to it. Here it is sufficient to say that the continued existence of gypsies - and, to a lesser extent, showmen - was largely due to a degree of income flexibility which was not shared by canal boatmen. They were effectively restricted to one industry which monopolised them all the year round; although often

equally impoverished, any variations to their usual work patterns, as in the case of some temporary loading work, were of a very minor character.

The boatmen were the only group for whom employee status was the commonly accepted one, the family work of gypsies and showmen being of the self-employment and entrepreneurial type. The family work concept suggests a pre- or early - industrial pattern but was practised by the boatmen in what, at a later stage of industrial employment, was a remarkable anachronism. Gypsies and showmen both escaped proletarianization, but only showmen made capital investments to any considerable degree, that by gypsies or the canals 'Number Ones' being fairly isolated examples of a relatively low level of industrial investment. Probably for this reason, the business partnerships of showmen, when they were entered into, were relatively long lasting compared to those of the gypsies.

The challenge presented by the need to carve out their own living led to a high cultural value being placed upon independence and self-sufficiency by both gypsies and showmen. This spirit was reflected by the dislike of controls upon the freedom to pursue their income sources and also in the need to 'sell' themselves to the sedentary population, to whom their goods or services had to be made acceptable. These groups, unlike the boatmen, consequently developed a certain assumed jauntiness and panache due to the degree of public contact , not unconnected with the 'conspiracy' of the build-up of a romantic image (see Chapter 3, pp. 33 - 46) - though the sedentary population did not exclude boatmen from it.

The relative impoverishment of the canal boatmen may be partly attributed to their being an employee group in a declining industry but also to the inflexibility of the network's infrastructure and that of the unit of earning capacity which, as stated, was the boat itself. There could be no way to introduce a gradual increase in income levels to meet family needs or economic demands in the way in which a gypsy daughter might, for example, go out with her own basket or a showman add a stall to his range. The nearness of the canal boatmen to peers in other industrial settings and transport work

in particular, such as dock workers or railwaymen was shown, despite the 'family' aspect, in the sharing of the norm of employment status in which "it was not the worker who initiated, controlled or directed his participation in .... (the) .... industry". [65]

Boatmen accorded status to the few of their group who were self-employed. But the range of wealth among boatmen was very limited and so divisions between them were few. The contrast between boatmen and both gypsies and showmen was most marked by what was the commonest work type for the former group being regarded as, under normal circumstances, more or less unacceptable to the other two. In the case of "showmen, their more complex system of relationships stemming from the employment of labour reinforced their view of it". The criteria for the achievement of status for gypsies and showmen was heritage and wealth. While these groups remained relatively poor and within a narrow band of income levels the heritage factor predominated. In the nineteenth century, the growth of wealth due to mechanization of the fair and capital investment by members of the showmen's society often previously of no distinction within it, saw the beginning of the transition to status founded mainly on wealth. Gypsies made a similar transition at a later date when scrap dealing became the predominant income source and social changes made claims based upon heritage somewhat tenuous. But it was significant that it was in the circus branch of the showmen's community that heritage retained it's status-giving place. This may be explained by the fact that the peak of the circus' standing was reached in the middle of the nineteenth century and never again despite some periods of revival really challenged the fairground with it's new mechanization. Thus circus people tended to cling to the older measurement of status by which present wealth became of secondary importance, just as, in the larger, sedentary society, clerical or 'white collar' employees looked down on manual workers as "social inferiors", basing their values upon a supposed 'ancestry' within the community, rather than current levels of affluence. [66]

CHAPTER EIGHT

TRAVEL AND THE HOME

Gypsies

i) Gypsy Travel

The desire to travel was part of "the way of life itself" and over many generations, since leaving the Indian sub-continent, the gypsies have acquired a "deep rooted habit of nomadism". The ideology of travel, among a people whose sense of ethnic identity might otherwise be seen as tenuous, has taken on a considerable significance. To many gypsies it has become necessary to travel for at least part of the year, even if one may have taken to staying normally in one place, in order to retain the gypsy title. Gypsies also justify the travelling life-style by deeming it to be "good and healthy". It has long been usual for the area travelled by gypsy families to be quite limited except for certain special occasions (see below). Hoyland, early in the nineteenth century, found for example, "the gypsies of Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, parts of Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire are continually making revolutions within the range of those counties". The general pattern has continued although a few families of "long travellers" were once also known. The Boswell tribe came into this category; Silvester Boswell claimed, over the period 1839 to 1905, that members of his family had been born in places as far apart as Ascot, Southend, Cambridge, Liverpool, Blackpool, Belfast and Inverness. [1]

In a life-style which was frequently a long way from secure, one reason for not wandering too far afield was the need to be near family for mutual support when required (see Chapter 11, pp. 292-294). Paradoxically, a common reason for gypsies to move on from a particular stopping place was the need to take evasive action when disputes arose - a not infrequent occurrence, either within the gypsy group or with gorgios. Whatever the individual's preference it has been suggested that, since the Second World War, gypsies have become "less mobile than in previous times". This trend may have been due to the problems of finding stopping

places and the desire not to quit one prematurely as long as they were left undisturbed, or possibly the change to scrap dealing made frequent moves less necessary. The latter work was a factor in suggesting that, since 1945, around 60% of gypsies circulated in south-east England, though the claim has recently been challenged. What remained constant, however, was the gypsies unwillingness to move far or frequently during the winter months. The nature of the home (see below) and the state of the highways made this explicable in the past. Nevertheless, as in more recent times, pressure to 'move on' from the authorities was an ever-present bane.[2]

The principal reason, however, for the gypsies' limitation of their area of travel was economic; William Bos, an East Anglian gypsy, explained "we do best where we are known". The seasonal round was sometimes extended in summer in order to reach a specific work target but, in general, variations made in search of some economic objective, initially at least, took place within the existing territory. Clearly new sources of income were more likely to be located within the known area and the expense of travel into an 'unknown' area would only be risked if word of it's offerings had filtered through or social and economic changes drove the gypsies from their existing districts. Though travelling was in itself extolled as desirable, therefore, apart from the examples detailed below, gypsies rarely made specific journeys for other than economic reasons. In consequence, the decline of agricultural work, which entailed going some distance according to the particular crop's sowing and harvesting times, was a major factor in making gypsies less mobile in the years after the Second World War.[3]

Additional to their normal travel area many gypsies made a number of longer journeys each year for other than principally economic reasons. These might be to certain recognized meeting places or to irregular and unpredictable gatherings such as weddings and funerals (see Chapters 10 & 12, pp. 270-274 and 335 - 338). Both served a largely similar purpose; as inter-related family networks grew up over many generations, such meetings re-affirmed

relationships and were a statement of the common identity. Cultural reassurance was necessary to a fragmented group which lacked any formal organization and was unable to keep in touch by other means when most were illiterate. The "far famed oak" which marked the site of Fairlop fair, in Essex, was just such a meeting place but had declined in importance by the beginning of the twentieth century. Derby day at Epsom has retained it's attraction and also surviving well into this century as places to which gypsies would travel over wide areas were certain horse-fairs. Those at Appleby, Westmoreland, and Barnet, Herts were examples which survived the Second World War; that they did so when the great majority of the gypsies attending had moved into scrap metal work confirmed that the gatherings also served cultural and social needs.[4]

ii) Stopping Places

It has been suggested that just as there has been little general change in the extent of the areas travelled by gypsies since Hoyland's time, so there has been relatively little change in the difficulties they experienced in finding a suitable place at which they were welcomed. "Some .... (gypsies) .... go into lodgings in London, Cambridge, etc." during winter, he noted, while during the nineteenth century, others became urban residents elsewhere in that season either by finding rented accommodation or camping on vacant ground. Between 1870 and 1900, for example, regular gypsy encampments were to be found in Battersea in the winter months. Gypsies were also regular visitors to Headington quarry, near Oxford and in the same locality an area known as The Slade has had, at least since 1861, a road known as 'Gypsy Lane' - evidence of the practice of regularly returning to the same spot after the mobility of summer. Such places, by the Victorian period, were already becoming more scarce; enclosure of land had been going on apace for some centuries but the use of remaining common land was now becoming more restricted. The Commons Acts of 1876 and 1899 meant such ground was no longer open to gypsies and the latter act, which permitted a local authority to pass bye-laws for the "prevention of nuisances", meant gypsies could now face fines for stopping in the wrong place instead of just being 'moved on'.[5]

At periods of general economic depression gypsies were unable to rent even slum property and they had nowhere else to go. An enquiry in Scotland, in the nineteen-thirties, said "We learn that police officers, inspectors of the poor and others are repeatedly appealed to by distressed tinker parents, almost at their wits end, unable .... to get houses or permission to camp" for the winter. Recourse, therefore, had to be made to "remote encampments", whatever the season, but these, of course, were also distant from possible sources of income. The beginning of the decline in agricultural work began before the Second World War (see Chapter 5, pp. 78 - 80) and this led to the loss of farm land as a stopping place. After the war, the movement of gypsies to the towns and industrial areas, in consequence of this and the transfer to scrap work, led to them tending to congregate in increased numbers on the few available urban sites. Here the travellers became more obtrusive and, lacking any obvious economic role, found their presence more resented. Yet these were the supposedly more enlightened years after 1945 when it was recognized "they have a legitimate need for camping sites"; the need was especially great for the widowed or elderly. The problem of stopping places was a major factor in persuading some more affluent gypsies to buy houses since the Second World War, despite their traditional dislike of living in them. As a measure of the move to scrap-dealing and the money some made out of it, one showman interviewed said, "most of the gypsies I know have got big houses now".[6]

The spread of motoring and growth of a leisure caravanning industry also led to a reduction in the gypsies freedom to stop where they chose. This, again, was a tendency which began before the Second World War and gathered in momentum in the decades afterwards. Aimed partly at the growing holiday market the Public Health Act of 1936 made it illegal to allow land to be occupied by "moveable" dwellings for more than forty-two consecutive days or more than sixty in total during a single year, unless "licensed" by the local authority. The Caravan Sites Act of 1960 developed the theme and closed to gypsies many of their remaining 'traditional' stopping places. The alternative was supposed to be the sites or compounds

specially provided for gypsies by local authorities, the idea which had first been proposed by Guildford Rural District Council in 1920. The shortage of urban sites, referred to above, plus the increase in those accommodated in 'official sites' (which, however, even by 1960 were still estimated to total only about 10% of Britain's gypsies) has resulted in them becoming only slightly more used to living and travelling in larger groups - a practice already long established by Irish travellers who also arrived in increasing numbers (see Chapter 7, pp. 145-150). The shortage of sites due to legislative controls and pressures of land usage has, during the twentieth century, led to the end of a more casual use of stopping places by gypsies. Whether going to 'official' compounds or other places known to be relatively safe from disturbance, the overall trend has been for gypsies to return to the same place, winter after winter. This has tended to become recognized as the 'home base', arguably making the traveller less truly nomadic and with consequences for marriage and funeral patterns (see Chapters 10 and 12 pp. 270 - 274 and 334 - 338).[7]

iii) Motive Power

a) Horses

When the gypsies first arrived in Britain, it has been conjectured that they came on foot, but with either horses or donkeys as chattel carriers. The gypsies certainly possessed horses in the eighteenth century and they had a high place in gypsy culture before they were used to haul a mobile home. The first vehicles pulled for the gypsies by horses were the carts used to carry their possessions; even this development only came in the nineteenth century as in it's earlier years pack animals alone were noted. One hundred years later, at the end of the First World War, many tinkers in Scotland still lacked any wheeled home but horses were a common possession. Nevertheless, during the inter-war period, over Britain as a whole, the horse was the usual form of motive power for gypsies' caravans. Even when scrap-dealing began to become a fairly common type of work, in the nineteen-thirties, it was recognized that such work required the use of either a "horse or motor" owing to the weight and bulk

involved - and so indicating that the horse was not yet considered supplanted by the lorry. After the Second World War, the horse as a form of motive power rapidly disappeared although a few of the more conservative and elderly kept faith with them for a few years more. Then the animal reverted to a former role as, primarily, a cultural and status symbol.[8]

b) Lorries

Just after the First World War, the first instances were recorded of gypsies' turning to the internal combustion engine. Although it was claimed only "the wealthier .... were going over to motors", it may be that military service brought home to the few the advantages offered by motor transport. The start of the period of transition began slowly in the nineteen-twenties and it was not until the following decade that lorries were used to pull the home in other than a handful of instances. The growth of scrap-dealing may have encouraged the use of the lorry prior to 1939, but the Second World War was really the "watershed"; horses were as rare after the war as lorries had been before it. At the time it was said "the motorization of travellers was gaining momentum": in the mid-fifties a "large majority of gypsies used lorries in the course of their work" and by 1965 surveys showed that 93% of gypsy families owned at least one vehicle. The two World Wars were as significant for the means of mobility for gypsies as they were for the wider society. The availability of cheap army-surplus vehicles after 1918 began a trend for gypsies which was then taken up only by the wealthiest or most daring and it was again the ready availability of ex-military equipment at the end of the Second World War which made the virtual completion of the transition possible.[9]

iv) The Home

a) Tents

The possibility that only the most impoverished gypsies made the crossing to England, that is, those with the minimum of goods and chattels, may explain why tents remained as the normal domestic accommodation for them in Britain, despite the rigours of the climate

and long after wheeled accommodation became common on the continent. The tents themselves were known as 'benders' from their construction which consisted of a circle of saplings bent over to form a low, domed shape. The tops of the saplings were tied together and the whole covered over. In earlier days skins or turf were used but, by the end of the Victorian era pieces of linoleum, canvas or tarpaulins had supplanted them. A bender tent was, typically, between 6 - 8 feet in height and covered an area of some 8 - 15 square feet. In the earlier years of this century there were older travellers who took great pride in their ability to build a strong and weatherproof tent from a framework of birch or hazel boughs - these being considered the most suitable woods. The tents were dark and offered no privacy and it was in comparison to them that later home developments should be seen as affording to gypsies a comparatively high level of comfort and space. Nevertheless, with a fire by the door, it was claimed a 'bender' could be warm on a winter's night although the bare earth floor might only be covered with straw or an odd piece of carpet upon which blankets were laid to form a bed. [10.]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the only accommodation possessed by gypsies were tents. Hoyland noted a camp at Rushden, Northants composed entirely of tents and George Borrow recorded their universal nature among gypsies in 1815. When gypsies arrived near a village a few years later, it was said "they had pitched their tents", clearly implying that this was the normal and expected procedure, and Sanger suggested that gypsies were distinguishable at fairs by their accommodation. By the middle of the century, the "usual abode .... was the tent or covered cart". The tent remained pre-dominant for many years, however, a "common object" of the rural scene. The Prevention of Crimes Act, 1871 made it an offence to be found wandering with a tent but no visible means of support and the diarist Francis Knight referred, in 1875, to the "tents of the tribe". Tents were still the commonest home for gypsies at Mitcham fair, Surrey, in 1879 and such was the poverty and conservatism of many gypsies, "many clung exclusively to their bender tents until late in the .... (nineteenth) .... century".

One branch of such a well-known and respected family as the Boswells remained faithful to "tent life" as late as 1895.[11]

Nevertheless, in the years up to 1914, use of tents was declining; after the First World War, the bender was to be found mainly in Scotland, evidence of the poverty of the north's gypsies and tinkers. Elsewhere tents survived but as adjuncts to other forms of accommodation, perhaps providing sleeping quarters for boys and single men, while some Irish families, conversely, used them as a form of day shelter, only using the caravan as sleeping accommodation. The loss of slum property for rental due to the general housing shortage may have led, in Scotland, to a revival in the use of benders, even after the Second World War. Whereas it was estimated that only 1% of gypsies in England and Wales relied exclusively on tents in 1917, the figure for Scotland was 36% and even after 1945 was, for some years, still "on a considerable scale" - perhaps as high as 25% and including the poorest, still dependant upon the declining incomes based upon basket making and hawking. In England, odd examples of tent-dwelling gypsy families were to be found within an hour's drive of London in the early nineteen-sixties, though there were then only twenty-nine such families identified throughout England and Wales, and those mainly in the north of the country.[12]

b) Horse-drawn Vans

When the horse-drawn gypsy caravan or 'vardo' was still a novelty, the one belonging to Jack Bosvile (sic) was described as "a kind of wooden house on wheels drawn by two horses". As the vehicle became generally accepted, many were simply conversions of older open carts, the construction of wood and canvas owing something to the earlier tents. Later, others were more heavily constructed homes, specifically built for the new demand by specialist manufacturers (see below), though the outside dimensions rarely varied beyond a range of 10-12 feet in length and 6' 6" in width. Differences in basic construction were identified by the place in which the style originated or from some feature of design. Thus the 'Reading' waggon had straight sides and large wheels placed outside the bodywork, for example; the 'Ledge' waggon had smaller wheels

with the body of the van above them and those with a semi-circular roof-line were known as "bow or barrel tops". The ornate vardo, of whatever design, now often thought of as the traditional gypsy caravan was always, in fact, the exception,though wealthy gypsies (or showmen) might commission the building of one with much carved woodwork and colourful paint as a display of wealth. Even then much of the effect was gained by the show of crockery and cut glass which, like the personal adornments of gold ear-rings, watches and so forth, were essentially forms of investment as recourse was almost never had to banking or other financial institutions. The few may have done much for the romantic image of the gypsies, but in reality "many more vans than not remained unpainted and gradually increased in shabbiness". This was particularly true of Scots and Irish tinkers who generally remained less wealthy and, if they had a wheeled van at all, had to make do with the home-made variety or already ageing specimens disposed of by the better off. [13]

Though it has been suggested that in the Middle East and parts of Europe the gypsy caravan was not unknown as early as the fifteenth century, in Britain it was "a comparatively recent introduction". In England, in 1833, it was "still a novelty" and there was "no evidence that .... gypsies took to it till about the middle of the nineteenth century". Still a much less common home for gypsies than tents "around mid-century", as late as about 1870 George Borrow could still say examples of the vardo were "not numerous and have only been used of late years". The new type of home was, therefore,only taken up quite slowly by gypsies and only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century could it have been described as a familiar or common object amongst gypsies in England and Wales. Elsewhere it was a rarity; early in this century few were to be found in Scotland, Ireland or even parts of northern England, due to a combination of poverty and the hilly terrain to which these vehicles were less suited. The same factors explained why the few horse-drawn vardoes to be found in Scotland and Ireland were generally of lighter and simpler construction than the English variety. Something of the extent of the adoption of covered waggons as homes was shown by the results of a survey in 1917 which found 93% of gypsy families in

England and Wales living in them but only 28% in Scotland. [14]

c) Modern Caravans

The above revealed the transitory nature of the supposedly 'traditional' gypsy home, for the beginnings of the move to the motor lorry which was to signal the end of the horse-drawn vardo dated from soon after the end of the First World War, a number of gypsies having "gone over" by the end of the nineteen-twenties. Just as the Second World War provided the 'watershed' in the change in motive power, so the lorry-hauled trailer caravans soon became nearly universal in England in the post-1945 years although, by 1969, only 69% of Scotland's gypsy families had them. Even the Irish, when they came to England in increasing numbers in those same post-war years, took to living in modern caravans. It was a family of Irish travellers, the Duffys, newly arrived in England and dealers in antiques, whose home by it's size and splendour was second to none in maintaining the tradition of indicating wealth and so acquiring status. Since 1945, vehicles have continued to be "an important element in traveller culture" but caravans have become much commoner as the sedentary population adopted them as either an adjunct to holiday leisure or, for the less affluent, as an alternative form of accommodation in view of the general housing shortage. In the latter case, caravans came to be regarded as a 'second class' type of home by the sedentary population, in which stigmatization gypsies found themselves caught up. Consequently, the decoration of caravans in a peculiar, identifiably 'gypsy' way, helped the latter to retain a sense of identity as well as distinguishing relative wealth and status within their own society. On the other hand, the comparatively plentiful supply of cheap, second-hand vehicles enabled even poorer travellers to obtain one. The best of modern gypsy caravans were embellished with much chromium-plating externally and fluorescent lights and plastic veneers inside, which were made to exist alongside more traditional decorations such as cut glass, mirrors, lace and so on. Such personalized 'motor trailers' and the specially commissioned caravans which wealthy gypsies could still afford, sometimes in excess of 40 feet long, like the highly decorated horse-

drawn vardoes of a century earlier, were very much a minority. And though by the standards of former homes, the modern caravan seemed to mid-twentieth-century gypsies quite spacious, they were nevertheless, by the normal expectations of house-dwellers, small. The consequent restrictions as to freedom of movement and disciplines imposed upon children in particular must, therefore, be interpreted against the background of the limited dimensions of the gypsies' various homes (see Chapter 9, pp. 220-230). [15]

Showmen

i) Showmen's Travel

a) Summer Travel

The summer 'fair season' lasted, traditionally, from Easter until early November, with some of the largest and most profitable ones, descendants of the 'harvest fairs' of an earlier age, identified as the 'back end run'. A few showmen did not travel the whole season; one, when also running a scrap yard in Bristol before the Second World War, travelled only during the most profitable part of the year. Since 1945, with permanent seaside funfairs becoming more popular, a number of the so-called 'sandscratchers' have travelled only during the back-end run when the normal holiday season has ended. They were not popular with other showmen who regarded the practice as unfair competition; "I don't like people like that because we've got to put up with this business all summer". The reasons for 'sandscratchers' going out at the end of the season were not solely economic however. In order to remain a respected and recognized member of the society, it was necessary, as well as being a 'showman', to be a 'traveller'. Showmen also regarded travelling as a desirable and healthy way of life. It was often a simply expressed urge associated with the coming of spring; ".... when that sun shines" or "when that old sun comes out again". Some showmen found the enforced lack of travel during wartime irksome but the way in which it might have resulted in the loss of this aspect of their culture was revealed by one showman who confessed that, at the end of the Second World War, he had preferred to argue in favour of staying where they were and continuing with the family's scrap business. But his elderly mother

would have none of it; early in 1946, she said, "When Easter comes, I go out and hit the road".[16]

The frequency of travel was dictated for showmen by the duration of the typical fair, which was only one or two days, and the time until their next opening. Thus, during the season, a move to a new site was an event which took place generally at an interval of only a few days. The majority of fairs were held towards the end of the week but exceptions were frequent; statute and other long-established fairs, whose origin was obviously unconnected with modern leisure demands, often took place earlier in the week. The longer fairs, that is those lasting up to a week or so, were welcomed as not only providing a respite from travelling but also because they provided an opportunity to catch up on maintenance work or other tasks when the fair was closed to the public. The usual frequency of travel was shown by the claim made by Tom Norman, in 1920, that it was "common" for his family to travel "five nights in one week". And, since the Second World War, Sunday was no longer respected. Previously it had been "very rare to travel on a Sunday", but such were economic pressures "we do it every time now". Of course, due to the nature of the family ownership of fairground equipment and the variety of sizes of fairs, it was very unusual for fairground showmen to travel in larger than small groups. Nor was it usually necessary, certainly since the end of the First World War, for many decisions to be made as to where or when one was going to travel. In the nineteenth century there was a greater need to know the date and location of various fairs and wakes as each provided something of a 'free-for-all' for showmen (see Chapter 6, pp. 131-134). With the gradual consolidation of annual rounds due to the growing protectionism shown by the introduction of the 'two year rule' less flexibility was necessary or, indeed, possible. For this reason, too, the more distant seasonal travels became less common; more recently, such rounds as the regular pre-1914 circuit of one family booth, with it's knife-throwing act, which began in London and included visits to parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire with the Collins family of Riding Masters, became unknown on the fairground. The problems to which such events gave rise, even on a more limited circuit, provide the

obvious explanation why "travellers try not to be married, born or die in the summer" (see Chapters 9, 10 & 12, pp. 220 - 289 and 334 - 345). [17]

b) The Area Covered

The general contraction of the geographical area covered annually was illustrated by the above showman's round, after 1918, settling down to a more limited circuit based on the East Midlands and including the "big street fairs" at Peterborough, Stevenage and Bedford. Though it has recently been claimed that showmen "often travel very widely", they do so less extensively than formerly. The claim of James Purchase to have visited "every town and village in England, Scotland and Wales" with a variety of offerings including "boxing, films and funfairs" may be treated with several pinches of salt; the fact seems to be that most show families (circus alone excepted, see below) consolidated their rounds in the inter-war period and have made relatively few changes since, continuing "to move locally, usually within no more than half-a-dozen counties.". [18]

Examples of the reduction of the areas travelled were of showmen who had, before 1914, covered both Hampshire and Sussex but then confined themselves to the latter county only or, in another example, once went from Hastings to Bristol during a season, before cutting back to cover the territory between Southampton and Lewes only. Regional variations existed and density of population was an obvious factor in determining the annual mileage covered. West Country showmen, based in Bristol, went regularly right into Cornwall but rarely seemed to go north or east of their base, although one, exceptionally, had, prior to the First World War, made excursions to Gloucester and Malvern. Typical southern rounds covered Sussex, Surrey and Kent while in parts of northern England the numerous urban concentrations led some Manchester based showmen to rarely travel more than 20-30 miles, even before 1914, while others never left the West Riding of Yorkshire. In the London area circuits were likewise comparatively confined though some occasionally went westwards into the Thames valley to the profitable annual regattas. Even in these last mentioned instances, however, the same overall trend of

a relatively more restricted and less flexible round developed. [19]

c) Circus Travel

As described in Chapter 4 (pp. 59 - 63) it was not long after the inception of the modern circus that Philip Astley took his show to Paris. Within a few years, probably by 1800, the first true travelling circuses were on the road, though to what extent these were really mere variants of the fairground booths cannot now be determined. In those early days the travelling circus flourished in the U.S.A., and in Britain, during the eighteen-thirties, there were known to be at least eight such tented shows on the road. The show was short and was repeated until the local demand was exhausted; it then moved on. The whereabouts of likely markets required a knowledge of local conditions and annual holidays. The high proportion of Roman Catholics in Liverpool and south Lancashire illustrated the need to know of an area's peculiarities, for example, as little business was forthcoming during Lent. The high degree of mobility persisted in the circus into the twentieth century both in the sense of the need for frequent moves and also, over a period of time, in the area of the country covered. The showmen generally agreed that the circus folk were the most highly itinerant of all travellers. 'Lord' George Sanger, when his circus was at the height of it's fame in later Victorian times, claimed to travel some 2,000 miles annually, often doing two shows a day in over 200 towns and cities. "With a circus you must open every day", for the economic reasons outlined in Chapter 4 (see pp. 59 - 63) and so, in the twentieth century, it continued to be the case that the "general run of circuses .... seldom pitched for a complete week". The pace of circus travel is emphasized when it is recalled that it always remained seasonal. The most concentrated period of the summer round was the same as for the fairground, from Easter to November - plus Christmas opening. [20]

Except for those few circuses which 'followed the fair', this branch of the showmen's business did not have a regular annual route. The different economics of the circus meant that the level of public response to a predictable, annual appearance might not be sufficient to support any but the smallest shows; Christmas opening in the

largest towns being the obvious exception. The route taken each summer season was, therefore, a conscious decision, depending upon which area it was anticipated might yield a good return. Large fairs in the chosen region could be attended or, if space was not available due to the 'two year rule' (see Chapter 6, pp. 132-134), at least a nearby site might allow the public interest to be tapped. Certain circuses were at one time associated with particular regions, such as the Paulo circus in Ireland or the Rosaire's in the north of England. In the latter case it was due to that area being the one in which the family travelled before they transferred their interests from fair-ground booths. But most circuses, including these two, as they grew larger began to make incursions into other regions. The proprietors of at least the smaller circuses frequently did not have the whole season's route mapped out. It was a case of deciding where to start and the general direction in which it was intended to go; "there was no advance agent then, nor even a route planned out in advance". The day-to-day lack of planning whereby a circus would give the number of performances local demand justified and then move on gradually died out as land pressures posed a greater difficulty in locating suitable tobers. Certainly since the Second World War, either a precisely planned itinerary or an advance agent were necessities. Even so, it was often desirable for a circus proprietor to keep his plans as secret as possible to avoid a competitor "cutting in front" and so exhausting an area's potential. The lack of anything comparable to the 'two year rule' for the circuses variable travels gave rise to the competitive element which was the nearest thing the twentieth century could offer to the Victorian era's 'free-for-alls' for a place at the fair (see Chapter 6, pp. 131-132). A very occasional variation to normal circus travel was the tour abroad, though this, of course, was open only to the largest and best known organizations.[21]

ii) Winter Time

Among showmen, circus and menagerie proprietors generally had the shortest winter stops due to the economics of animal shows and the level of public demand over the Christmas period. Their winter stop might be as little as a "couple of months" as they could be

"out till the end of November and early in the new year be off again". Although one circus family claimed that, prior to 1914, they had travelled all the year round in Ireland, such winter travel as took place was usually over a very limited circuit in built-up areas. Even some fairground showmen managed to find enough trade to justify at least the occasional opening; "it weren't no fortune but it was enough to keep the table". The venues were spare plots of land and public house yards, places lost to such casual use in the motoring age, which partly explains why such work rarely survived the Second World War. An example of such winter opening occurred in the valleys of South Wales before the decline of the coal industry there; showmen "opened in the different pub yards", but it was a dearly bought "bare living to get you through the winter on the Saturdays", riotous and drunken custom coming mainly at closing time.[22]

In the nineteenth century any form of regular winter stopping place was a rarity and, for the owners of just a few stalls or booths, it was to remain so until well after the First World War. Some well known stopping places might be quite frequently used by a number of show families but there was no question of their return being an annual event nor did anyone have any right of entry to it or specific place within. One site well known in south London, before the area was built up in the late Victorian era, was in Kennington Road, popularly known among showmen as 'The Mall'. The public house yard was another common solution to the problem of winter accommodation; it was welcomed by the landlord for the rent it brought in and was a convenient base for the showmen's alternative winter work (see Chapter 7, pp.155 -160). One such public house recalled was the "King Harry" in London's Mile End Road. Elsewhere showmen might take to locations outside towns which were generally recognized by the sedentary population as gypsy camps. 'The Slade', outside Oxford, was one example frequently used by the Buckland family of "well known .... travelling showmen". Probably the commonest of winter stops up to the outbreak of the Second World War were rural ones, though the ideal site would be near enough to allow access to a nearby town for logging and hawking rounds when no agricultural work was available. It was cheap to stay there, perhaps even free. "The

farmers used to let you go on a field, but they're scared to now - it's the local council, you see ....", an example of the burgeoning of controls which the Showmen's Guild and most travellers themselves complained of and which caused such winter accommodation to be virtually unobtainable after 1945.[23]

The trend from the relatively casual approach to winter stopping places to the acquisition of regular winter quarters may, therefore, be attributed to various factors including the increasing capitalization of the fairground which enabled showmen to think of purchasing land on which to place the large and heavy vehicles containing their mechanized equipment. It was probably the circuses and menageries which first demanded spacious winter accommodation. But very few proprietors could, in the nineteenth century, contemplate purchasing anywhere suitable, though the Chipperfield's circus had it's own base in Norwich by 1850. Among fairground showmen ownership of the winter site gained momentum between the two World Wars; since 1945 a majority of winter quarters became owned by showmen although, as explained in Chapter 7 (see pp. 168- 171), many of the lesser lights were accommodated as the tenants of the site owner, usually a Riding Master. Two show families interviewed had owned their present winter quarters for between 55-58 years, while another had moved once from Basingstoke to Stockbridge in Hampshire before the Second World War. A few had only acquired their first owned winter quarters since 1945 but, in common with longer established site-owners, these had rapidly become regarded as the base or 'home'. From them the seasonal excursion was made and, in a similar way to the gypsies (see above), had consequences for cultural patterns (see Chapters 9, 10 and 12, pp. 220-289 & 334- 345).[24]

The problems associated with finding or retaining regular winter quarters, either to purchase or just rent, due to pressures upon urban land needs first showed themselves in the decade before the First World War. In London, for example, showmen recalled having to quit regular sites in Hammersmith, Deptford and Stratford. The greatest difficulties have, however, been since the Second World War. Suitable sites have been hard to find and obtaining planning permission

to cover the showmen's requirements even harder because "the word caravan .... is associated in the official mind with 'sub-standard' housing" and carried gypsy associations. And those fortunate enough to already have their own quarters lived "always under the threat of compulsory purchase". One solution was for the Showmen's Guild to purchase land which it then rented to those members who found themselves with nowhere to go during the winter. A measure of the difficulties experienced was the sympathy expressed for gypsies when the latter petitioned the Church of England in 1950 to help them in finding winter camp sites.[25]

iii) Motive Power

a) Horses

Inprovements to road surfaces had made it possible for horses to pull larger loads without which it is doubtful if the travelling circus' and menageries of the early nineteenth century could have developed. Survivors of an earlier era were rare, though Andrew Smith after the First World War with his coconut shy packed on his horse, "poles each side, canvas on it's back and stumps on top of that" has already been noted. The distances travelled with horse-power between sites was considerable. Then, when the destination was reached, the unfortunate animals might be called upon to turn a pre-mechanical form of ride; horse-operated roundabouts in a few instances survived into the twentieth century. To "lighten the load upon the horses" on the road, it was the custom, especially in hilly districts, for the people to walk beside the waggons; "Exeter to Plymouth in those days .... they'd walk practically all the way because of the road and the hills". Animals capable of walking from tober to tober did so if it was safe to let them; the performing horses and elephants, for example, often walked, until increasing traffic made it too dangerous during the inter-war period.[26]

The number of horses needed by a showman purely for haulage purposes was considerable. One who only owned a few stalls and a living van required four. A pair of horses might be required to pull a single piece of equipment such as an 'hoop-la' stall and the same was true of the show booths when even a small one would include a

heavy and ornate front. The large cage waggons which conveyed the 'big cats' of the circus and menagerie would need as many as four horses each, which explained why horse-power was, in this case, often only used over relatively short distances (see below). This latter also applied to the earliest steam-operated rides which still relied on horses to get them on and off the fairground sites. The showmen's continued reliance upon the horse was shown by the Manchester and Salford Committee of the Guild pressing Board of Trade representatives in 1917 to ameliorate the conditions for "utilization and rationing of horses". Some showmen continued to rely solely upon horse-power as late as the early nineteen-twenties while others still used horses only to pull their homes. [27]

b) Use of the Railway

The larger circuses which throve on a growing population increasingly concentrated in towns quickly tended in mid-Victorian times to outstrip the motive potential of the horse. Use of the new railway system grew first in the U.S.A. where the distances to be covered were greater. The idea soon caught on here and was, towards the end of the nineteenth century, adopted by the owners of the steam-driven rides. Speed of transit was important in order to get the maximum return on such major investments. The practice continued long enough for showmen to recall the steam gallopers and gondolas "they used to send by train". The pressures placed upon the rail system when the First World War broke out brought the mobilization for military purposes of the special trucks used to transport fair and circus equipment. In addition, therefore, to having their steam traction engines and horses commandeered for the war effort, showmen's "cripplement was vastly increased .... (in this way, too) .... by the War Office". Fairground showmen never returned to the railway in any numbers and, during the nineteen-thirties, could look back with some nostalgia to the "railway days" of a generation earlier. The circus side of the business, however, did take to the rail again up to the Second World War and even, very occasionally, beyond it. The need of the circus, with it's large and heavy cages, to cover much greater mileages than was usual on the fairground side, in as quick a time as

possible was still beyond the stage of development generally reached by road transport during the inter-war years.[28]

c) Steam Power

The era of the steam traction engine was fondly recalled by a number of elderly showmen. Some had retained nameplates from engines disposed of half a century earlier and on one occasion the advice was given, "just ask Dad about 'Felix' to get him talking". The showmen's engines which achieved their full splendour in the Edwardian era were a development of the agricultural steam engines "which drove the threshing machines", ploughed fields and were otherwise the precursors of much modern farm machinery, rather than of the smaller steam engines which powered the first mechanical rides. The names of manufacturers such as Burrell, Foster, Fowler and Marshall were soon familiar to showmen but a large part of the engine's usefulness and appeal was soon as generators of electricity. This newly-controlled form of energy, in providing a convenient source of light and sound, gave the twentieth century fair much of it's appeal. The cinema, of course, would have been impossible without it and some early purchases of steam engines were as much for electrical generation as for haulage purposes.[29]

The great majority of showmen's engines were built (or, in a few cases, converted from older agricultural engines) between 1890 and 1930. A number of showmen interviewed recalled their family changing from horses to steam engines well before 1914. Then when war came the machines' wider usefulness was appreciated by others in "commandeering a great number of .... traction engines for military transport" (see Chapter 5, pp. 84- 89). After the armistice, showmen continued to buy traction engines, one family purchasing their first as late as 1926, significantly, when they obtained their first power-driven fairground piece, a set of swing boats. Apart from it's role at the fair site, the principal appeal of the traction engine was, of course, it's haulage capacity. Once the capital outlay had been faced, it was operationally much cheaper as it could do the work of a sizeable team of horses. At a steady 5-8 m.p.h. on a level road, a large engine was capable of pulling a 'train' of seven or eight fully loaded

trailers, including one of the new and larger living vans (see below). Of course, there were disadvantages too. Somebody had to get up at 3.00.a.m. in order to meet the day's departure time, as it took about two-and-a-half hours to get up steam. Once under way, water supplies en route could be a problem and in dry weather spark throwing sometimes led to claims for compensation; "my father once set alight to Bordon camp, burnt all the 'fuzz' bush (gorse), he did .... that cost him". Communication between the engine and the living van, which often led the 'train', was arranged by means of a "bell rope" and a code of signals devised. But the advantages of steam traction came to an abrupt end with the passage of the Road Traffic Act, 1930. This limited the number of waggons which could be pulled by a vehicle over $7\frac{3}{4}$ tons in weight to three. Thus what could be pulled by a single unit was much nearer to what even the simpler, cheaper lorries of the time could manage. Thus was inaugurated the move to more lightly constructed fairground equipment and homes. In retrospect the traction engines were largely obsolescent when they were still being built in the years following the First World War. But, once bought, they represented to showmen too big an investment to be disposed of and there was almost no market in which to sell them off for other uses. [30]

d) Lorries

The first intimation that showmen were using diesel lorries to any appreciable extent was the report, in 1917, that the Showmen's Guild had made representations to the Board of Trade regarding the shortage of diesel oil. Just how many there were at that time cannot now be established but the number was considerably enhanced by purchases of lorries from the Slough, Bucks, army dump after 1918. Some measure of the trend was Guild pressure once again, this time on the new Ministry of Transport, calling for better roads to accommodate the lorries, in 1920. On the circus side of the business the changeover to the internal combustion engine was gradual; horses, steam and diesel often existed for some years side by side. But for most fair-ground people the main period of change followed the above mentioned Road Traffic Act of 1930. [31]

Paradoxically, it was often the stall-holders, rather than the Riding Masters, who first broke new ground in using lorries. The relatively small lorries of 1918 were powerful enough to pull their loads and it was stall-holders again who, if they persevered with horse transport a little longer, after 1930 made the transition direct to the internal combustion engine. Several showmen recalled purchasing their first lorries about this time, the Tilling-Stevens petrol-electric chassis being a popular early choice. The rapid adoption of the lorry during the decade and the introduction of new, more lightly constructed rides and other equipment were inter-dependant. The changeover was sufficiently advanced for it to be concern specifically regarding the acquisition of lorries for military purposes which taxed the Guild in 1939. And it was primarily with diesel fuel in mind that the Guild pressed for the special "Showmen's Vehicle Fuel Ration Card" (see Chapter 6, pp. 136-137), a matter it had brought to a "very satisfactory" settlement by December, 1939. In 1945 came the opportunity for those few showmen who had not thus far turned to lorries once again to purchase ex-military vehicles. Others took advantage of war surplus materials to replace ageing pre-war lorries and, incidentally, to find other useful equipment such as generators and gun-carriages which were ingeniously adapted to form the centre trucks of new rides. [32]

iv) The Home

a) Horse-drawn Vans

At the end of the nineteenth century, when the horse was still relied upon for all but a few rail-borne journeys, horse-drawn caravans or vardoes were near-universal among showmen. Among those who were over about sixty years of age at the time of the interviews, the earliest home which they could remember was invariably one of them. The external dimensions of such living vans varied from 10-14 feet in length, with a width of about 6 feet. The standard internal layout had a cast iron coal or wood fired stove, usually of'Hostess' or 'Colchester' type, immediately inside the centrally placed end door, on the left-hand side. Opposite that was the "fancy cabinet" and cupboard space. Across the back end of the van were double bunk beds,

the top one used by the parents and the lower one, at near floor level, for children (see Chapter 9, pp. 232-234). The lower bunk usually had sliding doors and the top one was screened, during the day, by curtains. Interior lighting was by oil lamps. Showmen were quick to emphasize, " .... but wherever it was, you could bet your life everything was very, very clean .... it was so small you had to be clean and tidy" (see also Chapter 11, pp. 309 - 319). Distance lent an enchantment to recollections of childhood homes; they were described as "warm", "cosy" and "comfortable". One elderly lady said wistfully, "I can remember our two horses and I can even tell you their names - Dolly and Topper - pulling the waggon I was born in". A number of such living vans continued in use during the inter-war period; many showmen who married during that period started off with elderly examples which had been handed down to them. [33]

Showmen appeared to have only the vaguest folk-memories of homes other than caravans; "A lot of people, when they first started had no van or nothing, just the trolley as it was stood - they used to put a sheet round it and sleep underneath it". It was claimed that at some time in the past tents had been used, often by travelling conjurors whose equipment was carried on dog carts. The first use of wheeled homes by showmen "does not pre-date 1800 at the earliest" and their first introduction may well have been the result of the development of the vehicles necessary for particular categories of showmen; "it is likely that the 'house on wheels' was first used by travelling menagerie proprietors who built vans for conveying their wild beasts". George Wombwell was building his own "beast waggons" by 1805 and wheeled transport soon became a necessity for the new tenting circuses of the first half of the nineteenth century, not only to contain animals, but to carry heavy equipment and get from place to place quickly in a highly competitive industry. Given this situation, the placing of the showmen's personal belongings and domestic quarters on wheels seems, retrospectively, a natural development. [34]

George Borrow, speaking of the eighteen-twenties "concluded from the number of wild beasts, caravans, gingerbread stalls and the like, that a fair was being held" and George Sanger's reference to

the gypsies being "camped" near the fair but at a different spot to "the caravans", both suggest that caravans were associated quite specifically with the fair and showmen at that time. Sanger's father owned his own van, at least during the 'thirties' of last century and Mrs. Jarley was provided with a caravan by Dickens, in which to live as she travelled with her waxworks in 1840. A number of authorities agree that "it was little earlier than about 1850" that gypsies began to adopt the horse-drawn vardo (see above) in any numbers, it being considered a novelty only fifteen years earlier. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that a significant number of showmen "had living waggons for thirty years or more" before even a few gypsies broke this new ground. [35]

Whether home-made or commissioned to be built, the first wheeled vehicles owned by showmen were probably based in design and construction methods on current farm waggons. Right up to the early years of the twentieth century, apart from such 'specialist' items as the wheels, many showmen built their own homes; "used to make themselves a lot of 'em did". Pride was often taken in the achievement, "my father, he was a good carpenter, he could build one ....". An alternative was to adapt an existing vehicle and a number of showmen used "traditional bakers vans" in this way. The distinctions among horse-drawn caravans based upon a feature of styling or place of origin was mentioned when dealing with the gypsies' use of them (see above) but such expressions as 'barrel top' or 'ribbed', for example, were equally familiar to showmen. A number of those interviewed remembered the types of living vans owned by their parents in the early years of this century and the reference to the makers as "different firms who specialized in showmen's caravans" carried the implication that the latter were the major client group for the new (as against second-hand) vehicles. Among the specialist manufacturers still recalled were Evans of Bridgwater, Somerset, Thomas of Chertsey, Surrey and Dunton of Reading, Berks. [36]

Showmen recalled their horse-drawn vans as "all nicely decorated outside". The decoration took the form of both wood carvings and paintwork; colours were as eye-catching as possible with reds and

yellows predominating. Rural motifs such as birds and flowers (particularly roses) filled the panels of the vans. Just when these forms of decoration were first used by showmen cannot now be established with certainty but from the nature of their calling and in contrast to the gypsies, all showmen were required to make their arrival as public as possible. Colour was a useful pre-show advertisement but it took on an added significance when the living vans were used as part of the elaborate show-fronts presented to the public at the fair or circus tober, where they were used as pay-boxes, changing rooms and so on. [37]

b) Steam-hauled Caravans

The introduction of steam traction engines from around 1890 made possible the introduction of larger and heavier homes; there was no limitation on the number of trailers which could be towed and the engines had sufficient reserves of power. It was the age when, on the fairground, "everything got bigger" and growing numbers of Riding Masters began to feel that the old horse-drawn vardo was no longer commensurate with their rank or wealth. The possession of a 'mahogany' van proved "you weren't doing too bad" and as wealth increased so showmen "went in for bigger ones". A minority of showmen interviewed said their families' had acquired their first 'steam' or 'mahogany' van before the First World War but more changed to them during the decade of the nineteen-twenties. Once the implications of the Road Traffic Act of 1930 (see above) became apparent, relatively few new ones were built. Showmen who bought their first 'mahogany' van after that time, usually referred to second-hand ones in which a market persisted until after the Second World War among stall-holders and the newly-wed. Advertisements appeared in the World's Fair after 1945 offering older and smaller examples for sale, though modernized with calor gas and electric light installations. Use of 'mahogany' vans persisted much longer in the north of England and Scotland as they were considered to be warmer than the new-style caravans built after the Second World War. [38]

The vans were usually constructed of mahogany - hence the showmen's usual reference to the style - on an iron chassis. Most had

solid tyres when built but were later changed to pneumatic. The length was anything between 16-24 feet and almost invariably the design included a clerestory roof, known among showmen as a 'mollycroft'. The interior was divided into two or three rooms, dependant upon overall length. A living room, with one or two bedrooms was a common arrangement though some included a kitchen area; the inclusion of a lavatory in one maker's advertisement was exceptional (see Chapter 11, pp. 311-313). These vans, using "selected mahogany", were, like their predecessors, built by specialist manufacturers . At a court case at Belper, Derbys., it was claimed "ordinary carriage builders were not competent to construct the vans. They were only made in a few parts of the country". Curiously, from the advertisements appearing in World's Fair from time to time, it would appear the makers were not the firms which had built the horse-drawn caravans. Examples of the builders of 'mahogany' vans were Bute Street Joinery Co., of Cardiff and T. M. Balmforth of Brighouse, Yorks. [39]

c) Modern Caravans

The first homes associated with the internal combustion engine used by showmen were converted single-deck buses. These vehicles began to become available during the nineteen-thirties and the conversions were normally undertaken by the showmen themselves. They provided the first home after marriage for a few couples but were more frequently used as overspill accommodation for growing families; with the aid of internal partitions a number of rooms could be created. Second-hand buses were well thought of, largely because of their versatility; "made good accommodation they did - well made body on 'em; you could generate with 'em, live in 'em and pack stuff on top". [40]

Conventional modern caravans, intended to be hauled by motor lorries, remained comparatively rare before 1939. The 24 feet long "streamlined trailer" illustrated and described in World's Fair was "the only one of it's kind". After the Second World War the adoption of "motor caravans" was rapid. By 1948 the contrast could be made between "the little '12 foot' living van .... (and) .... the '30 foot' not uncommon today". The size and quality of the appointments went

forward rapidly with increasing affluence in the post-war years. Internal divisions allowed separate bedrooms to be provided, a modern kitchen equipped with calor gas cooker and sometimes a bathroom (though very rarely any form of W.C. - see Chapter 11, pp. 311 - 313). The growth of a caravan building industry for either leisure or housing purposes meant that showmen, like gypsies, could benefit from the economies of quantity production and cheap second-hand vehicles. The wealthier showmen boasted that their modern 'trailers', as these caravans were often referred to, "cost as much as houses". Modifications could be ordered to a manufacturer's standard design or an individual specification might be given by an affluent Riding Master to Mills of Colchester, Essex, a specialist manufacturer who started up in 1948 and was the only one to do so since the Second World War. Although generally more lightly built than the earlier 'mahogany' vans, a modern caravan still needed to be strong to take the strain of often being moved on and off muddy sites. Specially commissioned vans might, in recent times, be built up to the legal limit of 12 metres and articulated vehicles have been constructed. Though outside the period of this work, some measure of the cost of showmen's modern caravans was shown by the early nineteen-eighties claim that "one of the best vans costs over £1,000-a-foot". It was, therefore, no exaggeration to say, "the very luxurious motor caravans of some carnival operators or owners of travelling circuses are now worth fortunes".[41]

Canal Boatmen

i) Canal Travel

Many extended canal boatmen's families owned waterside cottages to which generation after generation in turn retired (see Chapter 12, pp. 342 - 344). These were often situated at recognized 'boatmen's villages' such as Thrupp, Oxfordshire and Braunston, Northants or else near to the cut in larger towns such as Banbury, Coventry or Ellesmere Port in Cheshire. But during their working lives boatmen, in the twentieth century, rarely had any home but the boat. Nor, as travel was more or less continuous (see below) did the majority of boatmen, in contrast to other travellers, associate

themselves with seasonal stopping places. Travel could be continuous even to the extent of not stopping at night; economic pressures were such that, with diesel boats, it was sometimes necessary to take a load of coal from Birmingham to London in 55 hours of non-stop travel. The entries in the log books kept at various toll points - "lives in boat" or "residence, boat" - reveal the boatmen's identity with the mobile craft; as one of them put it, "you was always on the move and you belonged to that boat". It has been suggested that much of the sedentary populations' lack of sympathy with boatmen (see Chapter 3, pp. 44 - 45) was because the boat, especially since dieselization, was seen as analogous to the train or lorry, unlike the caravan in it's various forms, as it was predominantly a cargo carrier rather than a home.[42]

Although boatmen were the most nomadic of all Britain's travellers in the sense of continually being on the move, their travels were, of course, circumscribed by the extent of the canal system. Even then, for reasons discussed in Chapter 7 (see pp. 172-178) most families were normally limited to certain sections of route. To boatmen who usually plied south of Birmingham, those who went in the opposite direction from the Midlands were "northerly people". Variations from the norm were only made in an "emergency and that sort of thing". The regularity of the boatmen's movements was shown by the use of identifiable canal locations as the nearest equivalents to addresses for contact purposes (see Chapter 11, pp. 321 - 323). Thus "Tom Phipps, Hatton Locks", "G. Wiles, Tushes Bridge" or "Jim Dowell, Stratton Wharf" were enough for most purposes. In 'horse days' canal-side public houses were often used as these, with their stables and other facilities for the animals, were regular stopping places. They were less used, however, in later years as motor boats could stop "anywhere". The exceptions, of course, were the 'Number Ones' who, as explained in Chapter 7 (see pp. 176-178), in a minority of cases ranged more widely in search of work; "where there was work, you went for it .... you didn't hang about for it". The father of one informant had, in Edwardian days (then, of course, with horse-drawn boats) regularly ranged over a triangular route, based on London, Birmingham and Bristol with occasional sorties further

north to carry tar and pitch to Rochdale in Lancashire.[43]

The long hours worked and the distances consequently travelled in summer were intended to help offset the occasional, unscheduled delays which occurred most often in winter. Ice on the canal was a regular problem and exceptionally hard winters were long remembered as they tried the boatmen sorely. 1895 was one such year; for two days, 7-8th January, William King recorded in his diary, "lay at fringhoe (sic) on account of ice", then again from 10-12th "lay at fenny lock froze up". But this was nothing compared with what was to come; the blank pages of his diary bear witness to a long period of inactivity from 31st January, when he "lay at Berkhampsted froze up till the 1st of March .... (when he) .... came from Berkhampsted .... (and) .... worked all night" to deliver his load. Other bad years were 1927 and 1947 when boatmen recalled they "lost 13 or 14 weeks", while as late as 1954 a wait of 6 weeks was recalled. Stoppages for maintenance took place from time to time but where this was planned it was sometimes possible to take avoiding action or adjust schedules accordingly. 'Washouts' due to broken banks or damage to lock mechanism could not be avoided and so caused enforced stops. But rare was the interruption to boatmen's travels which occurred in the autumn of 1902 when fifty pairs of boats were held up at Tring summit in Hertfordshire waiting a sufficient depth of water to pass due to prolonged drought.[44]

ii) Motive Power

a) Horses

Horse drawn boats were the norm until after the First World War. Horse-boats worked in pairs by a single family were quite common on the Grand Junction canal as early as the mid-nineteenth century and by the early years of the twentieth century they were a majority on the whole canal system. By this time single boats were mainly engaged on short haul coal work in the Birmingham area. The boatman's social life and the role of the public house in catering for the horses' requirements has already been alluded to. The decline of horse haulage therefore had wider repercussions than as simply a change in motive power. An early threat to the supremacy of the

horse came from attempts to introduce mules when horses were virtually unobtainable early in the First World War, but opinions of the mules' usefulness varied. The use of the internal combustion engine was strongly advocated soon after the First World War, but horses remained the usual form of motive power for almost another decade. The smaller carrying companies and the 'Number Ones' were slowest to abandon the horse as they lacked the means to purchase new diesel powered boats or even convert existing craft. Yet the decline in the numbers of horse-drawn boats was rapid in the years around 1930 as was shown by the recorded "number of movements" on the Birmingham and Worcester canal; in 1924 there were 315 but in 1934, the last year in which the passage of horse boats was separately shown, the number was down to eleven. On the still relatively well-used Oxford Canal, in 1950 only five horse-drawn boats were recorded as passing Banbury, showing that, even if only as a small minority, horse-power remained on the canal system almost to the end of the freight carrying era.[45]

b) Steam Power

Attempts to apply steam power to the canal system met with only very limited success. The infrastructure of the narrow canals so limited the size of craft and, therefore, loads which could be carried that it was impossible to utilize the haulage capacity of even the smallest steam engines which Victorian technology was capable of producing on a commercial scale. It was on the broad river and canal navigations such as those of Yorkshire leading into the Humber estuary that steam power could be economically justified, as a steam tug was able to pull a 'train' of several barges loaded with coal. In the few suitable locations the use of steam tugs continued to increase in the early years of this century and it was this growing localized use which partially explained the overall reduction in the numbers of boats permanently lived in. On the narrow canal system steam tugs were used to haul normally horse-drawn boats through a few of the longer tunnels in busy areas. Hauling a number of boats through at one time reduced congestion and eliminated the dangerous practice of 'legging'. Despite the general unsuitability of steam power for narrow canal use, however, there was enough demand for a

few special fast or 'fly' boats, such as for perishable loads, for at least 51 steam narrow boats to survive the First World War; but none continued in use after the general introduction of diesel power.[46]

c) Diesel Boats

As early as 1913 there were known to be 21 boats with "motor or oil engines" on the canal system but details of their size or type remained unrecorded. After the First World War the number grew to 62 in 1919 and 73 a year later, the majority powered by the 'Bollinder' engine, a popular choice as it was both simple and reliable. At first, the adoption of the internal combustion engine was said to be slow but by 1924 it's use was "greatly extended" and by the end of the decade the Canal Inspector referred to the "general adoption of diesel engines". The larger carrying companies sometimes built their own new diesel boats; twelve were reported under construction in Fellowes, Moreton and Clayton's yard at Uxbridge, Middx., in 1924. Others were constructed by established boat building firms such as Water of Rickmansworth and Bushnell of Tring, both in Hertfordshire on the Grand Junction canal. Lacking capital for the purchase of new craft, small carriers and some 'Number Ones' had their old wooden horse boats converted. The work was done during the winter months when earnings were generally lower. The 'Number Ones' came to some financial arrangement with the boatyard which had done the work; "you gave them so much a journey afterwards until it was paid for".[47]

On the "larger waterways" referred to above, diesel powered tugs replaced the steam driven ones but on the narrow canals a similar system could not be introduced due to the frequency of locks and the complications of working a 'train' of boats through them. Consequently the family-worked boats continued to ply, almost invariably in pairs, with no further reduction in the numbers of women and children. A horse boat making up the leading one of the pair, being without a cabin, could carry as it's normal load, about 26 tons if of coal. But a motor boat, because of the weight and space required for the diesel engine could only carry about 20 tons, which was about the same

as the trailing or 'butty' boat. Motorization, therefore, brought no gain in the quantities which could be taken nor was there any appreciable advantage in the speed of the craft as the increased wash and turbulence created would have damaged the banks and raised canal maintenance costs. The advantages were in the reduced running costs once the engine was installed and because a motorized boat could travel more continuously without the rest periods or breaks necessary for animal power. In this way it was possible to reach the destination more quickly, albeit with a reduced load, but for the boatmen, the change to diesel power clearly carried the implication of needing to work longer hours to achieve the same financial return.[48]

iii) The Home

There is extant a drawing of a narrow boat used on the Trent and Mersey canal in 1826. It was drawn by William Strickland for the report he was commissioned to prepare for the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Internal Transport. The boat had a cabin of the dimensions still common in the twentieth century and even had a stovepipe chimney in the position in which they were always later found. No details of external decoration were given nor was there any indication of the cabin's internal fixtures, so whether the boat was intended for family use or sleeping accommodation for an all-male crew cannot be established. The possibility of families living aboard narrow boats and with no shore homes before the coming of the railway age cannot, therefore, be entirely discounted. Families were also known to have lived on the salt 'flats' which, early in the nineteenth century carried that commodity down the River Weaver towards Liverpool. Though these were not canal craft, the practice of living aboard was established. Certainly, by the time boatmen and their families were forced to leave the cut in increasing numbers in the twentieth century, the life-style was so long familiar as to be regarded as traditional; "but when we came off the boats, we had a job to stick it .... with being used to being outside all the time, we couldn't do with being fastened in".[49]

The width and height of a narrowboat cabin was dictated by the canal's infrastructure. The cabin's length was kept as short as

was practicable in order not to encroach on cargo space and hence earning capacity. Inside the doorway, which was centrally placed and facing rearwards near the stern of the boat, was the stove. This was sometimes of the same make as those found in a similar location in horse-drawn vardoes but on the canal was inevitably coal-fired as the latter was the principal cargo ! On the right, opposite the stove, was a side table and bed which folded up "out of the way". This gave a little more space in a home measuring about 10' long and only 6' wide. At the end of the cabin was a double bed, screened by curtains during the day. Bunk beds were unknown due to the cabin's restricted height; hence the side bed. Oil lamps were used at night while horses remained the motive power but electric light came in with diesel engines which could charge the necessary batteries. [50]

As already noted, in the years after the First World War, living-in was mainly upon narrowboats plying about the canal system's London-Liverpool axis with it's heartland around Birmingham. On these canals many of the older, wooden boats continued in use and became prone to damp, as steel construction was only adopted at the time of dieselization. Externally, although a very few boats could be described as "ideal" and so accord with popular imagery, the majority were in a somewhat shabby state. The boatmen took to complaining "in the first place" to canal inspectors, rather than their employers, as the most effective way of getting repairs done to the cabins. Nevertheless , conditions,in some instances at least, were not as bad as some believed. Some small firms "around Runcorn .... (had the) .... worst reputation" for the condition of their boats but the same canal inspectorate found "the tales one hears .... (had) .... little or no foundation in fact". The trailing or 'butty' boat of horse days, with it's cabin containing the parents' domestic quarters, stove, table and double bed was retained upon dieselization. When the leading boat had no cabin or similar structure some extra accommodation was achieved by building tiny sleeping cabins in the bows. Even this space was encroached upon for carge space to compensate for the room taken up by the new diesel engine and so dieselization was in some ways a retrograde step as far as accommodation was concerned. The engine room became sleeping space as well and,

though bigger than the old 'fore-cabins', the fumes and smell hardly made it a healthy location.[51]

The similarities between the narrowboat cabin and the gypsy vardo in both layout and external decoration were central to the identification of boatmen as a variety of gypsy. It has recently been suggested, however, that boatmen adopted the themes such as flowers and castles, for example, from prevailing tastes in domestic decoration in the years before they took to living on board. Before the coming of the railways, as workers upon what was then the nation's primary internal freight transport system, they were tolerably prosperous and so able to indulge such tastes. In mid-nineteenth century the colours on the boat cabins, with red, yellow and blue predominating and "a couple of landscapes, in which there was a lake, a castle, a sailing boat and a range of mountains" were written of as if an already familiar sight. So well established was the tradition that by early in this century even company-owned boats were done in the same general style to "humour the tastes" of the boatmen. A painter skilled in the necessary arts was employed to decorate the boats at the Fellowes, Moreton and Clayton company's yard at Uxbridge right up to the nationalization of 1948. There were subtle variations in the design and painting of a boat, so that "everyone could tell which yard a boat was from". The "comment .... rising to indignation" when nationalization brought about the general end of traditional styles of painting has already been mentioned (see Chapter 6, pp. 140- 141). Many boatmen joined Steerer Phelps in lamenting "all our painting gone", for boatmen had, by this time, long regarded the style as peculiar to themselves. When interviewed, more than one boatman claimed it was a tradition they had themselves developed and owed nothing to any others' culture.[52]

Resume'

The emphasis placed upon travel per se as desirable and as a means of identity was shared by gypsies and showmen. Canal boatmen, on the other hand, though finding some problems of adjustment to a sedentary lifestyle when they left the cut, never appear to have

sought an alternative form of travelling lifestyle nor did they have any equivalent to the 'occasional' travel among house-dwelling gypsies and 'back end' seaside showmen of recent times, both of whom determinedly maintained a 'traveller' image.

A broad similarity existed in the travel patterns of gypsies and showmen, both in geographical extent and seasonal nature. The fixed times and sites of many fairs led to a degree of regularity in the annual round. Some divergence here took place in the twentieth century; gypsy travel was no longer so tied to fairs with the drift away from the horse dealing, whereas showmen's rounds became smaller and more regulated as the result of the 'two year' rule - paradoxically at more or less the same time as the faster lorries were adopted which might have been expected to increase mobility. In this way showmen's and boatmen's travel patterns became more disciplined and limited, though in the case of the former the relatively small circus side of the business remained exceptional in it's travel patterns. Whether in the earlier, wider summer travels or the more constricted ones, showmen travelled more frequently than gypsies as fairs were rarely of more than a day or two's duration. It was in the post-Second World War years, when showmen came to share some of the gypsies' problems (see Chapter 13, pp. 346-356) that showmen increased the length of their travel season due to economic changes.

Showmen preceded the gypsies, by something like twenty years, in the trend towards regular winter stopping places. Boatmen had the occasional 'handed down' family cottage for the elderly, which was their nearest equivalent though, of course, dissimilar in it's basic purpose. But the two, as already suggested, had comparable consequences in the practices which developed concerning, for example, marriages and funerals (see Chapters 10 and 12, pp. 270-289 & 334-345). Showmen, as befitted the 'professionals' among travellers (see Chapter 6, pp. 124-144) were the only group to own their winter quarters, though the movement was forced upon them by the need to store bulky equipment. The gypsies later regular winter stopping places were, in contrast, usually provided for them by local authorities or else remained 'unofficial'. The not unexpected result

was that the provisions made for them showed little or no understanding of the cultural practices or economic needs of travellers; an example was the gypsies' preference to stop in small groups and be able to move on readily. This was due to the incidence of inter-family enmities and evasive action being a common means of conflict avoidance.

Canal travel was quite different in character to that of the other two groups. It was an endless 'year round' mobility, the stops for loading were generally short and the route travelled inevitably the most restricted. Only occasionally were stops any longer than a day or two - and were then unwelcome as due to lack of work or stoppage en route. In view of the nature of canal travel and the duration of most fair stops, there was irony in the continued reference to these groups of travellers as 'gypsies', as the latter were arguably, especially as work patterns changed during the inter-war period, the least nomadic of travellers.

The dates at which the various groups of travellers generally changed from reliance upon the horse for motive power to some mechanical alternative revealed showmen as breaking the new ground first. This was consequent upon the mechanization of the fairground itself and it was to the same steam power to which they, at that time, inevitably turned for haulage purposes. Although some steam craft appeared on the narrow canals it remained exceptional and showmen may be considered alone in having a general and recognizable 'steam era'. But it was on the canal system that the internal combustion engine was first widely introduced. Gypsies still had little or no interest in mechanization in the nineteen-twenties and showmen, committed as they were to steam power, only turned to the diesel lorry in any numbers in the following decade. Coming last to any form of mechanical transportation, in this case the motor lorry, were the gypsies for whom the 'watershed' in the movement away from horse power was the Second World War.

Though horses had played a significant role in the gypsies' life, both culturally and economically, long before they were used to pull a wheeled home, it seems likely that as a result of the development

of wheeled vehicles for other aspects of the showmen's business (for example, to carry animals or tents for the circus), the latter had taken to living in variants of them before the gypsies' general adoption of caravans in the second half of the nineteenth century. Much of the confusion of identity then certainly stemmed from both groups sharing identically styled caravans or vardoes. Showmen were later the first to abandon the vardoes in favour of the more spacious 'mahogany' waggons as a direct consequence of the adoption of steam power for haulage purposes. Later movement to more lightly constructed homes was likewise first made by showmen due to their slightly earlier adoption of the diesel lorry. Similarly, the attachment of the 'gypsy' label to boatmen largely derived from the comparison of the narrowboat cabin to the vardo . But here again, the most reasonable arguments as to when living-in on the canal craft became the accepted practice (due to impoverishment caused by the development of a rail network over the years 1830-1850) suggested that what became the boatmen's 'traditional' home was established a little earlier than the gypsies' general adoption of the land-based equivalent. The boatmen, however, remained alone when, in the twentieth century, their industry turned to diesel power; it was the only instance in which the abandonment of horse power did not lead to material improvements to the home.

The question of the external decoration of their homes by the various groups must be closely linked to the adoption of the homes themselves. There seems no reason to believe that the colourful painting was generally introduced other than when the vardo or narrow-boat cabin were still relatively new forms of travellers' homes. The possibility of either showmen or boatmen copying a gypsy practice, therefore, seems most unlikely. Also the point that it was showmen who would wish to announce their presence is again stressed and points to them as the most likely originators of highly colourful external advertisement.

In this section it has been necessary to give more detailed consideration to aspects of travel and the home in the nineteenth century as they possess a continuity without which the position

inherited at the beginning of this century, and later developments, would appear out of context and incomplete. Developments in the home were clearly derived from changes in motive power, themselves linked to wider economic factors. For these reasons trends and changes in showmen's homes generally preceded those of gypsies. And there was paradox in that it appears to have been the gypsies who generally came last to the form of home, in it's size, style and external decoration, which led to the identification of the other groups as also being gypsies.

C H A P T E R N I N E

LIFE PROGRESSION I : BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Gypsies

i) Birth and Infancy

The gypsy way of life was identified by an "elaborate system of taboos". Many of these concerned women; childbirth was a major instance of when the female was considered "ritually unclean". The "uncleanliness" of women after giving birth might at one time have "lasted three or four weeks in England" but by the twentieth century the period of isolation had generally declined to about a week. Such was the fear of contamination, the normal practice was for childbirth to take place outside the living tent or van. Where climatic conditions made birth in the open air unacceptable, it took place in a separate tent erected for the purpose or occasionally underneath the waggon. After the birth the tent was disposed of or destroyed. The mother and baby could then return to the normal living quarters where they remained in isolation for the required time. The practice of 'outdoor birth' was still general at the beginning of this century and remained the preference for many women right up to the Second World War. Medical attention was virtually unknown; only one or two, usually related, women being present at the birth. [1]

The first child was usually born between a year and eighteen months after the parents marriage. Because larger families than became the norm among the sedentary population this century remained common, the gypsies' society remained a 'young' one, the average age continuing to approximate to that of the larger society in the middle of the nineteenth century. The women married young and pregnancies were frequent though pre-marital conception was extremely rare (see Chapter 10, pp. 270-271). Among Irish tinkers especially it was nevertheless not uncommon for women to have had as many as ten pregnancies by the time they were 26 - 27 years of age. Not surprisingly, "infant mortality .... (was) .... high" and "conversations with elderly women" suggested that the loss of five or

six children in infancy was "customary" amongst gypsies. The taboos and, to a lesser extent, infant mortality explained why gypsies began, before the Second World War, to favour having their children in hospitals. After 1945, the "great majority of women .... had their babies in hospital"; in Scotland, by the nineteen-sixties "almost all" gypsy women did so and Irish tinkers "insisted" upon it. Generally speaking, gypsies had very little to do with gorgio medical services; this exceptional willingness to take advantage of them and so temporarily remove the 'unclean' from their midst was evidence of the continued strength of this cultural norm. [2]

George Smith, whether turning his attention to the brick-yards, canals or the gypsies' world (see Chapter 6, pp. 114- 122), was always primarily concerned with the children. But although their lot might have appeared harsh to outsiders, there was complete agreement amongst commentators on the role and value of children in gypsy society. As only the strongest survived the first perilous weeks of life, those who remained appeared fit and healthy. The few who later attended school (see below) were observed to be "clean" and "well nourished". The importance of children in gypsy culture was shown in other ways; in the rare instances when children were "taken into care" by agencies of gorgio society, it was long remembered with much bitterness. And the willingness to take in abandoned children, which rebounded upon gypsies with accusations of child stealing (see Chapter 3, pp. 38 - 40), was another example. [3]

ii) Accommodating the Children

Gypsy homes, either tent, vardo or modern caravan, were over-crowded by the standards of most house-dwellers. Though rarely invoked against gypsies, their homes were potentially vulnerable to being considered "overcrowded, insanitary or dangerous" on which grounds infants might be removed for their own protection under, for example, the Children's Acts of 1908 and 1932. Younger children of both sexes and older daughters slept in the same tent as their parents or in the bottom bunk of the vardo (see Chapter 8, pp. 189-191). The lack of sexual separation of the children and their proximity to

the marital bed greatly worried George Smith, yet it is doubtful if overcrowding was greater than that occasionally found elsewhere at the same time, for example, in labourer's housing in certain agricultural districts (see Chapter 6, pp. 121- 124). Among gypsies "the boys used to sleep in a tent", erected for this purpose, from about four years old or else under the parents' caravan which had some sort of protective sheeting hung around it in bad weather. But "in hot weather, at least, many Romany men and women preferred to sleep in the open underneath their vans", while the young single men and boys eschewed even this rudimentary cover.[4]

iii) Education

a) Attitudes to Education

Considerable thought was given over the years to the question of education for traveller children. The gypsy view was, at least up to the Second World War, uncompromising; they were "unanimous .... (that) .... it was a waste of time". Even after 1945, "some traveller parents .... (continued to) .... have doubts about the relevance of much of what they believe goes on in school", thus making the value of schooling "highly questionable". Others viewed their own position with "complacency and .... (an air of) .... self-sufficiency" believing "you don't have to be able to read and write to earn a penny or two". Much of gypsy parents' attitude to education was coloured by their own unhappy memories of what little schooling they had. And, paradoxically, though professing to be scornful of education - "only gorgios read" - they were aware of their own disadvantage which they were unwilling to have highlighted when gypsy children were placed in a competitive situation with gorgio offspring in the classroom. The separation of children from parents was also unacceptable even at day schools, let alone the idea of apprentice schools at which they would be left, as was first suggested to gypsies over a century ago. The children themselves, used to a close family environment, came equally to "dread" the separation from brothers and sisters which school threatened. On occasions when gypsy children did go to school in Llanelli, South Wales, it was noted, "the only contact the parents have with the school is when they visit to complain

about some alleged unjust treatment of their child". More often than not, the complaint was a pretext to remove the child, revealing a parental unwillingness to hand over children to gorgio education. The long-standing gypsy view was simply expressed by William Bos as long ago as 1822, "I could not be happy if any of my children were taken from me, so they are not taught". [5]

The gypsy child's unhappy memories of schooldays stemmed largely from the ridicule or punishment which were the result of lack of conformity with or knowledge of the norms of behaviour expected from the majority's children. To the traveller child, "we seemed for ever in trouble - all because we were gypsies and looked different from others". Though gypsy children's freedom of movement within the home was severely controlled for space reasons (see Chapter 8, pp. 187-192), outside it there were few restrictions and there was less routine timing of work, meal and bed times. Consequently, the long periods of concentration, sitting still and in silence in the classroom, in a school which by its sheer size and population compared to the family atmosphere of the gypsy camp, all seemed "punitive". And, of course, such long periods indoors must, it was generally agreed, be injurious to health. From their experience of education the belief grew up among gypsies over some generations that "teachers were not interested" in them and did not want them in school. On occasions the repercussions must have been unwelcome to teachers; it was not unknown, for example, for other parents to remove their children from school when they found out that gypsy children were attending, claiming the latter were verminous. [6]

One reason for sending children to school was fear of "the consequences of failing" to do so. But since the Second World War there has apparently been a greater appreciation of the need for literacy. War experiences may have prompted this and so may the increasing need to deal with officialdom and it's forms in order to pursue business activities legitimately. Individual gypsies were "beginning to want .... (their) .... children to go to school"; "many" parents - and even "probably a majority" - wanted an education for their youngsters by the nineteen-sixties. It has more recently been questioned, however, in view of the small percentage of gypsy

children who continued to actually reach school on anything like a regular basis, whether the new-found enthusiasm for education was not merely another example of the traditional gypsy facility of giving the response which it was recognized gorgio authority wanted to hear as a means of avoiding further harassment. [7]

In a world where the full-time education of children had long been an accepted fact of life for the majority, sedentary population, that gypsies should not share in it's benefits was seen as increasingly "anachronistic". During the Second World War, it was confidently expected that peace would bring a renewed urge to tackle the problem. Though the travellers lack of educational conformity was undoubtedly seen as a problem, it was recognized in 1985 that "only in the last fifteen years" had any serious effort been made to meet the traveller child's difficulties in attending school. It is outside the main period of this work, but it is worth recording that it was only in 1973 that the first school inspectors were appointed specifically to deal with traveller children and the first courses for teachers were run to acquaint them with their particular needs. Nevertheless, the gypsies' traditional suspicion of gorgio authority seems well-founded when it can produce such ethno-centric and self-righteous documents as the 'Plowden Report' in 1967 to threaten their society and lifestyle :-

"They are probably the most severely deprived children in the country. Most of them do not even go to school and the potential abilities of those who do is stunted .... unless action is taken .... their children will in turn suffer educational deprivation which will become increasingly severe in their effect as general standards of education rise .... Improved education alone cannot solve the problems of these children. Simultaneous action is needed by the authorities responsible for employment, industrial training, housing and planning .... the numbers of children involved are so small that we believe a relatively small expenditure of money and effort .... could rapidly achieve long steps towards a solution .... " . [8]

The increased attention given to the question of educating gypsy and other traveller children came at a time when their cultural

isolation was tending to break down without the benefit of literacy. Gypsy men had, before 1939, become avid cinema-goers (especially liking 'cowboy' films with dramatic scenes of galloping horses) and then in the decade of the nineteen-fifties, television sets became common in gypsy homes. Despite the wider horizons presented by the visual and aural mass-media, education continued to be seen as a major threat to their lifestyle by the gypsies. Indeed, in 1936, "the idea that one could assimilate the tinker community .... (in Scotland) .... by indoctrinating the children was strong". Even if this, in post-war years, was not the ulterior motive the result, it was feared, might be the same. Gorgio schooling was clearly geared to gorgio needs and values and the product of it might no longer wish or be able to function satisfactorily in the gypsies' society. [9]

b) Frequency of Schooling

The Elementary Education Act, 1870 allowed local school boards to compel all children between the ages of five and thirteen years to attend school unless there was "reasonable excuse". Penalties could be imposed upon parents if children did not attend and the ensuing Act of 1873 made it a parental responsibility to see that a satisfactory education was provided. The 1944 Act confirmed that it was "the duty of the parent" to see that an "efficient full-time education" was given either by attending school "or otherwise". In 1873 'full time' was specified as being 250 attendances per year or 125 full days. No exceptions were permitted to any specific group or class of people until 1908. The number of attendances could be varied if "efficient instruction" was given in some other way as, for example, by private tutor or because of some "unavoidable" cause such as ill-health or distance of the home from a school (i.e. over three miles). People "of no fixed abode" were not forgotten however; "if a person habitually wanders from place to place" and thus deprived the "wandering" child of an "efficient elementary education" then, according to the Act of 1873, that child could be "ordered" to school, while by 1933 fines of up to "twenty shillings" could be imposed on the parents. [10]

As a result of lobbying by the Showmen's Guild it was allowed in the Children's Act, 1908 that elementary education might be suspended between the months of April and September if the parents' "trade or business" required it, provided 200 attendances (i.e. 100 full days) were achieved between October and the following March. The concession was confirmed in 1933 and, of course, allowed gypsies who were settled, possibly in houses during the winter months, to remove their children from school in summer for those seasonal excursions which confirmed their traveller identity (see Chapter 8, pp. 182-184). The special schooling arrangements for travellers provide a good example of the concessions which benefited gypsies as a result of the showmen's activities (see Chapter 6, pp. 114 - 144). But even these remained, like so much legislation concerning gypsies, something of a 'dead letter'. If a stop was for more than a couple of weeks duration a gypsy child might attend school occasionally but for a lesser period it was generally not thought worthwhile by both parents and teachers.[11]

Immediately after the First World War it was a "matter for regret" that so little had been done to provide an education for gypsy children. In 1936 it was claimed that in Scotland the position had so improved over the "last twenty years" that "about 84% of the 200 minimum" attendances was being achieved annually. But this figure is so much at variance with the closer examinations of the position made since the Second World War that it must be dismissed as hopelessly over-sanguine. Despite the alleged post-1945 new-found enthusiasm for education among gypsy parents, probably "less than 10%" attended school with any degree of consistency and among the rest it was "not regular and at the slightest excuse they were absent". But if among younger children only a "small proportion" saw the inside of a classroom at all frequently, the proportion of older ones who did so was lower still. Less than 10% were ever registered at secondary schools and among these there was a "precipitous fall" in the numbers and frequency of attendance after the age of thirteen; this was largely due to gypsy work demands (see below). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the position seems to have varied little; "only a minority .... (of gypsies).... ever attended school".[12]

c) Levels of Literacy

The parents who in the early years of this century, "insisted that we must go to school to learn to read and write .... and then we needn't go any more", though reflecting an attitude then common among working people, must be considered enlightened when the vast majority of gypsies grew up to be illiterate. The provision under the Elementary Education Act, 1870, whereby a school's inspector could consent to a child leaving between the ages of ten and thirteen if an agreed "standard of education" had been achieved, was generally irrelevant to gypsies on two counts; their offspring neither attended school nor got anywhere near the required level of literacy. Over generations a recurring lack of vocabulary among parents was transmitted to children at pre-school age leaving the latter disadvantaged when and if they ever entered a classroom. Any pre-school familiarity with books was of course lacking. By the years after 1945, it was claimed that the level of literacy of Scottish tinkers was marginally higher than elsewhere among the United Kingdom's gypsies. But most travellers continued to consider that only a very basic level of literacy was sufficient to meet their needs. And in the alleged post-war enthusiasm for education, gypsies generally set their sights for their children no higher. [13]

iv) Children's Work

a) Work as Education

The employment of children under a certain age (ten at the time of the Education Act, 1873, for example) has never prevented gypsy children from being involved in their parents' work. As a discouragement it was suggested that hawking licences might be denied to women who habitually took young children with them on their rounds. But the economic place of children in reality was linked to the size of the average gypsy household. In England and Wales, according to the 1961 census it was still as high as 4.5 when that of the total population was only 3.0. The larger number of children meant that, in the twentieth century, "the age distribution of the .... (gypsies) .... bore a marked resemblance to the age structure of the total population of the country in 1841, before the advent of widespread

industrialization". It is in the context of an earlier period, therefore, that the number of children and their work should be seen, not least as a form of 'insurance' or protection for the parent's old age (see Chapter 12, pp. 334-335).[14]

Working adults were frequently accompanied by children, but not solely to gain the sympathy of gorgios; "my children go out calling with me. Mine sits next to me when I tell fortunes; that's how they learn". When young children began to help in sorting out the scrap, their contribution was "as important educationally as it was economically". The work given to gypsy youngsters obviously depended upon their age and sex and it was significant that all of them, on the relatively few occasions they attended school, very quickly tired of any form of games, whether organized or in the playground. At home, toys were almost unknown. It was suggested that gypsy children soon learned to regard such activities as pointless in much the same way as those school subjects which made no contribution or had no economic value to the family's lifestyle. Theory was an extraneous kind of learning in a society where the practical handling and experience of adults' earning power, as in the dismantling of scrap cars for example, provided both play needs and education. Parental willingness to keep older children from school became explicable as they, not unnaturally, preferred them to "make their contribution to the economic and domestic life of the family". By their early 'teens "for most .... traveller children, participation in and contribution to the economic well-being of the family .... (was) .... an important objective".[15]

One consequence for the young gypsy was that "childhood .... (was) .... not bounded and separated from adulthood". Leaving the world of formal education early (if, indeed, it had ever been joined) and shouldering a degree of work responsibility at a young age, gypsy society reciprocated by giving a correspondingly early recognition of adult status. Rather than being seen as 'deprived', therefore, gypsy children, in performing their "daily tasks showed a range of highly developed, culturally appropriate skills that had been taught by the only educative agency most of them had experienced - the family".[16]

b) The Jobs Done

Gypsy children were involved in virtually all of the economic occupationsof their elders from an early age. As the involvement was intended to fit the young for their adult role, it was generally only the boys who were allowed to help with adult male work. Dealings with horses and, later, things mechanical associated with the family's vehicles and scrap-dealing came into this category. "Even as toddlers" male children went out on scrap collection rounds as a first step to learning the techniques of obtaining the stock-in-trade and to recognize various metals and so on. To help children learn how to trade and deal, they were allowed their own possessions from an early age, such as horses or poultry, which they alone had the right to 'chop and change'. [17]

The girls taken on hawking rounds, besides being a business "asset", were, like the boys, learning a future employment. To aid this dual function, the short term 'borrowing' of young girls by other women was a common enough practice. The other major role for girls, which has continued more widely than hawking, was child-minding. From the age of a "few months" babies were left in the care of quite young girls. Especially among Irish tinkers the latter might be adept at the required domestic skills by the time they were eleven or twelve years old. [18]

Again it must be stressed to what extent legislation, framed to meet the developing expectations and norms of the sedentary population and to protect their children from exploitation, left gypsy parents vulnerable to charges of law breaking. The employment of a child "by way of trade or for purposes of gain" covered all sources of income, while hawking was more specifically covered by the parental responsibility of allowing a child to "beg or receive alms" even on the pretence of selling something. Beside hawking, which might be considered a form of "street trading", was the prohibition on young persons from dealing in "old metals". Though this, as in the Children's Act, 1908, clearly was not framed to cover scrap-dealing, the gypsy adoption of which it pre-dated, the list of metals mentioned in the later Act of 1933 could include that business. Originating

under the Prevention of Crimes Act, 1871, the metals included lead, copper, brass, tin and "German silver or spelter". Work for children was, according to the legislators , incompatible with education rather than a form of it. The Education Act, 1921, for example, forbade it if it was "prejudicial to .... (the child's) .... health or physical development, or .... rendered him unfit to obtain the proper benefit from his education". The raising of the school-leaving age over the years only exacerbated the gypsies' problem; whereas it was illegal to employ a child under 10 in 1873, for example, by 1921 it had risen to 12, with severe restrictions upon it to the age of 14. [19]

c) Numeracy

The ownership of property which the children could dispose of, besides the skills referred to above, taught them the value of money and how to handle it. For the gypsies' high level of numeracy, especially in the realm of financial transactions, was learned young and has been widely commented upon and contrasted to their prevailing levels of literacy. Being illiterate, the skill with calculation was, in reality, a skill at mental arithmetic. Teachers, often ignorant of their gypsy charges cultural background and with a low opinion of their general academic abilities, have commented on their "good understanding of numeracy, especially when related to money" which many of the children were "adept at handling". [20]

Showmen

i) Birth and Infancy

The elderly showmen interviewed claimed, without exception, that they and their brothers and sisters, had been born in caravans, the majority of them in the small, horse-drawn variety. Most understood that previous generations had also been born in vans, suggesting it was the common practice among showmen even when the horse-drawn vardo was still relatively new. Quite large families of six to nine children all first saw light of day in the caravan; the largest was the 22 children of a maternal grandmother. As late as the nineteen-twenties, in a home only 8 feet long, "my mother had six children borned (sic)

in that". The practice generally continued in the era of the 'mahogany' vans, where space and the privacy of a separate bedroom made unnecessary the temporary ejection of the rest of the family. Though one informant said home births "weren't done so much these days", the great majority held that use of hospitals became near universal soon after the Second World War. Only in one or two instances was it suggested that hospital births had occurred before 1939.[21]

A favourite place to park the van when a birth was imminent was the public house yard; it was explained that there the mother "could have proper attention", although the presence of a qualified midwife was very rare as most showmen "couldn't afford it". A high level of self-sufficiency was usual, even the traction engine playing it's part; "I tell you what I did when I had my first baby. We came in off the road .... I turned the injector on, on the engine, so they'd have enough hot water ...." Other show women, most often relatives, attended the birth. "My mother" or "other showmen's wives looked after me" it was explained. Particular female relatives might be sent for over considerable distances; in one family "Uncle John's mother" was the recognized and trusted midwife.[22]

Confinements were usually short; "the baby was born and on the road they had to get, didn't they ?" Some elderly women claimed the van was not stopped specially as "they carried on just the same". It was general, however, to stop at one place but "you only waited a day - or two days". The husband and the rest of the family would go on to the next tober so as not to incur financial loss or, later, the place under the 'two year rule'. Economic pressures, therefore, dictated that short confinements were the rule, so that time taken and distance covered in retracing steps to collect mother and child were kept to the minimum. Only one showman had been prepared to accept a 'lost fair'; "forget about it - the wife came first". Some of those interviewed claimed infant mortality was not high, perhaps one in six children dying very young. In other cases it was as high as 50% and in one family of thirteen only five reached adulthood. Because of the infant mortality rates, those few showmen who considered formal religion important (see Chapter 11, pp. 307 - 309) had their children

"churched" (i.e. baptised) as soon as possible. That some did die young was due not only to lack of facilities in the vardo; dietary practices could be less than beneficial to judge by the following recollection : "We was fetched up on beer, see ? My mother always believed in it .... even when we was babies, my mother would always send out for beer and we all had to have so much", said one showman, indicating the quantity with his fingers. [23]

The importance of children to the showmen's culture and economy was emphasized; "we'd lay down and die for 'em, more or less". Their role was such that a childless showman, soon after the First World War, offered £100 for one of the Chipperfield family's sons. It must be stressed, however, that informal adoption of children was never common and such an offer would frequently cause grave offence. The continual physical closeness of children re-inforced their place in the showmen's consciousness; "they are never out of your sight" and "if our people, if they has children, if they're out of their eyesight for more than a minute - 'where's he, where's he to ?'". [24]

ii) Accommodating the Children

As a modern authority points out, "what constitutes over-crowding .... is .... largely a matter of opinion". But few would probably argue with George Smith's view that many travellers' homes were overcrowded in the light of some showmen's recollections of their first homes. A single horse-drawn van was the only home for many families as late as the nineteen-twenties when, in one case, a widow and her seven children had only a 14' long vehicle. The larger 'mahogany vans' generally brought some relief but space remained a problem in some instances, though one branch of the Castle family was surely exceptional; "they had an eighteen-foot van and eighteen children". As homes became larger (see Chapter 8, pp.203 - 208), showmen made favourable comparisons with former times; "at least they don't put 'em in the belly box which has happened many a time" : Children were so numerous - and victuals often so short - that it was not unknown for the infants' sleeping accommodation to be the food compartment under the vardo. Parents, in the bunk beds, were only

separated from children by the thickness of a board or hidden "behind curtains". "It wasn't necessary", in the showmen's view, "for every child to have a separate bed .... they'd sleep together". Young boys were not segregated from sisters when "four or five in a bed" was not unusual. "The sanitary inspector sometimes came round" but it was a simple matter to conceal the real position from him; "you wouldn't be there when he came round, would you ?" [25]

As stated, the normal sleeping place in the vardo for the girls was the bottom bunk. When a family had a number of daughters, the better off showmen sometimes provided a separate or "girl's van" for them to sleep in. Often, as the family progressed to better things, the old horse drawn van was put to this use. The versatile second-hand buses which became available around 1930 (see Chapter 8, pp. 207 - 208) were a boon as the interior, suitably partitioned off, provided separate rooms for boys and girls. The Ayres family, before the Second World War, had two such old buses used in this way. As an indication of changed practices and increasing affluence, one showmen said, "nowadays, as soon as a child gets that big .... (indicating the height of a toddler) .... it don't sleep anywhere near the parents - they buy a trailer". But at least up to 1939 many were unable to afford any overspill accommodation; then "they just had to manage somehow". [26]

Though it was claimed "those who had bigger families had two waggons", such were only very rarely bought for the benefit of older boys. The accommodation regarded as suitable for the boys from the age of "six or seven" was roughly similar to that provided for 'the chaps' (see Chapter 7, pp. 164-167). They were given a "sort of bed place", partitioned off in one of the "packing trucks". The latter became sleeping accommodation when they were empty of equipment of course, so to fulfil their dual function the beds were sometimes arranged to fold up against the wall. Even this level of covered room was an improvement on that afforded the sons of less well off stall-holders. Well into the inter-war period many boys had to sleep underneath the parent's waggon or some other cart. A number of those interviewed recalled how the "side wallings" of booths and stalls were used to give some protection at night. "They

used to sleep underneath the van .... put a tilt round it" and "a cloth would be put round the bottom of the truck and that's where the boys would sleep" were descriptions of the practice. Considered adequate enough in summer, the various forms of boys' accommodation were unheated in winter. On winter nights they heated a brick on top of the stove in the van, wrapped it in an old piece of cloth and nursed it in bed to fend off the cold.[27]

When the fair or circus was open in the evening it was necessary for the mother or an older child to "pop up and see how they was" - that is, the younger ones - in their bottom bunk in the case of the vardo. For their own safety, parents sometimes "tied 'em in, so's they couldn't get out". This form of control was sometimes used for very young children before bedtime; "they used to put a rope round you and stump you down". Once in bed, except for babies, a child was only taken into the parents bed at times of illness. A side effect of the cramped sleeping arrangements and large families was that, at any age, "they didn't like sleeping on their own .... they don't now".[28]

iii) Education

a) Attitudes to Education

"Some showmen were 'anti'" it was admitted, not least because "the boys was always kept at work". Remembrances of school revealed objections to it on grounds similar to those advanced by gypsies. "Going was just a discipline and I didn't learn anything" claimed one of those interviewed, while another said, "I wasn't interested in school at all .... learning ? I couldn't take to it at all somehow". At school, showmen's children became aware of their separate identity, sometimes as a result of poverty. "We always used to wear clogs, 'cos they was the cheapest. You'd go down to Portsmouth - you could buy a pair of clogs for a 'tanner' ". But the result at school was bullying and ridicule. Occasionally, warmer memories were evoked; one ninety-two year old recalled, "some of the teachers were lovely". Disinterest was, however, much more common; "they didn't want to know. They didn't want 'em in school - the school's don't want 'em". Showmen realised that their transitory nature as pupils was the reason "they

never took much care of you .... because they knew you were only there for a month or two, even in winter; you were never worth putting in for exams and things". Unrewarding as passing traveller children might be to teachers, it was not surprising that older showmen recalled, and transmitted to a younger generation, schooling as a futile exercise. "Sometimes they'd give you a bit of knitting to do .... you wasn't always in with a class" and one man of school age in the early nineteen-fifties recalled, "half the time, they used to sit you in a corner and give you some plasticine to play with .... because you was only there a day or two". [29]

The frequency with which show families travelled made their children's education a "particular problem". Problem or not, pressure was sometimes effective in ensuring school attendance; "somebody used to come round, so you had to go to school". But more commonly, the undesirable could be avoided; "the school board man used to come down to see how many there was .... we used to hop out of the way". Generally it was more likely that girls would attend school on something like a regular basis. As adults, women traditionally dealt with paperwork and generally took care of 'business matters' (see Chapter 11, pp. 302 - 305). Also daughters were more amenable to school disciplines as a more closely supervised and controlled upbringing was given them at home (see Chapter 10, pp. 274 - 277). If a family had a number of girls, it was sometimes considered necesssary to ensure that only one attained a reasonable level of literacy. She could then pass on her knowledge to the others - or at least the rudiments of it which were all that was thought to be required. [30]

"It was assumed children will remain in the business" and therefore some Riding Masters recognized that "giving them (i.e. their children) a good education, that was helping the business as well". "Those who so wished", it was alleged, had no difficulty "in achieving good standards of literacy" despite the lifestyle. Increasing bureaucracy impressed upon some men the need to read and write, as, for example, in applying for special rationing facilities in the Second World War (see Chapter 6, pp. 136-137). A few

accepted the challenge and learned the arts in adult life and saw to it that their children acquired them at a more appropriate age. Once literate themselves parents could, of course, help their children over any unavoidable interruptions in attending school. Since 1945, a recognition of the need for a general education has gained ground among showmen, with an emphasis that "we want them to read properly". By the nineteen-sixties it was said "now they make sure their children are educated" and there were "several examples" of parents obtaining "work programmes" from the schools attended in winter for sons and daughters to study during the summer travel season.[31]

b) Frequency of Schooling

Before the 200 attendances per year between October and March, referred to above, was allowed, George Smith's Moveable Dwellings Bill had proposed that the responsibility for the education of traveller's children should lay with the authority in whose territory the caravan rested. It is doubtful if the idea would have led to showmen attending school more regularly than, in fact, they subsequently did. Many of the showmen interviewed associated school attendance with the winter months, but few of the more elderly ones on a regular basis. Only during the inter-war period did "a few months in the winter time" become more widely accepted, but even this was interrupted if there was work to be done, for example, logging or in agriculture (see Chapter 7, pp. 156-160). The result of broken schooling was "you couldn't settle". One man recalled his education at this period, showing that the approach to school attendance was still often casual; "sometimes three months, sometimes four months, sometimes not at all". The trend to regular winter quarters had the affect of allowing children to return each year to the same local school; this, of course, made it more acceptable to the children and the teachers got "quite used to us coming there for the winter".[32]

The frequency and extent of summer travel, with showmen on the move "most of the time", dictated how long it was possible to attend any one school. If they were "less than a week in a place" it was often agreed it was "not worth going". The education received

in summer was, therefore, "not very much" as stops of more than two weeks or so which would have justified attendance at a nearby school were most unusual. In one case only did a showman, whose family travelled over a limited circuit mainly in west London, claim that it was possible to remain in touch with the winter school and thus obtain some continuity in his education. Many showmen's children ceased to attend school before the approved leaving age, though one, exceptionally, did not begin until he was twelve years old; attendances totalling about three months spread over a couple of winters was all he achieved. Some claimed they had "never done no schooling", while one boasted that her mother "had thirteen days schooling in her life". In another family of four children, only two attended school and then it was just spasmodically so meeting their business' anticipated need of "scholars" - the showmen's habitual reference to the literate. The not unusual "I went to about twenty schools, a week at a time" was replaced by something more consistent during wartime if the child's family ceased to travel. The only education received by some elderly showmen was during the First World War; Dennis Ross of the Rosaire Circus being one example. Even if families did not cease to travel entirely, the extended stops of the 'Stay-at-Home' holidays during the Second World War (see Chapter 5, pp.99 - 103) also had incidentally beneficial effects on the children's formal learning. [33]

After the Second World War, not only had showmen become more appreciative of the need for literacy but the pressures upon them to send their children to school were greater from another quarter. Referring to school attendance officers near their winter quarters in the Birmingham area one showmen recalled, "they were very strict on us going to school". In the circus, with it's regular "one day stands", the children "went to school every day .... a different school each day". Attendance on a regular basis remained, however, a thing of the winter months for many, but a great improvement was stressed; now children went "<u>every</u> winter". Special provision for showmen's children has been made in certain districts since 1945. A number of showmen have their winter quarters around Feltham in west London and there special classes were, and still are, provided for

their children in winter and study programmes given out for the summer travel season.[34]

c) Levels of Literacy

Showmen recalled that at least up to the Second World War, the vast majority were illiterate. One estimated that, despite an increasing number of so-called 'scholars' among the young, over 80% were unable to read and write in the nineteen-thirties and over twenty-five years later "many of the older showmen .... (were) .... barely literate". There was some unevenness in the elderly interviewee's recollections of their parent's abilities. One had parents who were "both good scholars" but the responses of most when the issue was raised, was with variants of "well, they couldn't read or write, I tell you straight". Some referred to the one child, usually a girl, of a large family who could "read and write a bit"; one boy in this category dealt with his widowed mother's "business letters". Though it might be thought that to be "a good scholar .... (who could) .... do all the writing" was an obvious advantage to a Riding Master, there was no indication that their families generally achieved a higher level of literacy before 1939, though at least three of those interviewed had realized their disadvantage and learnt to read tolerably well in adult life since 1945. The modification in the showmen's attitude to literacy was also shown by the frequency with which it was proudly pointed out, in contrast to their own lack of skills, that children or grandchildren were "good scholars".[35]

d) 'Non-travel' Schooling

Some parents who wished their children to receive a more regular schooling resorted to leaving them with a 'flattie' or recently-settled relative. Circus showmen, whose travels frequently demanded almost daily moves, and others whose winter break was for some reason shorter than usual, resorted to this device. In one case, only the threat of legal action by the "attendance man" gave rise to an informant being "left for a season" in this way. But in other instances, the arrangement was a voluntary one repeated over several

years. Lacking a suitable relative, two of the Paulo girls were left each year, for eight years, from the beginning of the season until the summer holidays, with the people from whom the family rented their winter quarters. Again, when children were so left for education purposes, it was not deemed necessary for all of a family to be taught; in one case only two out of four were ever left behind to attend school - and these were the two daughters. In another example, a family with only girls arranged a kind of rota system over several years, thus ensuring all received some formal education but never leaving the family show short of performers. [36]

Under what, to the sedentary population, were the "exceptional circumstances .... under which the children .... (were) .... living", the Education Act, 1921 permitted the use of public funds to send them to boarding schools. The idea of boarding school was not entirely novel; as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century at least one showmen's family had wanted to "see their children had an education .... so they sent my mum, her sisters and her brother to a private school and they had to stay there, all summer and all". The school was in London and the arrangement, needless to say, exceptional. By the decade of the nineteen-thirties the idea was taken up by a few more but not, as far as is known, by public funding. One informant spent the autumn and spring terms at a "private school" in Ashford, Middx., taking a work programme with her for the summer term which she missed. A scion of the Chipperfield's was sent to Marlborough College, evidence of some showmen's increasing affluence. In some cases the removal of young children from the showmen's environment was argued in view of the increased danger from the speedier lorries, introduced in the years up to 1939. However, it was only after the Second World War that a significant minority of showmen could afford the expense. On a new level of prosperity achieved during that conflict "the Riding Masters had got the money". "In the modern world," some now agreed, "you've got to be properly educated". But traditional thinking still surfaced; more daughters than sons were sent away. [37]

"Some parents" regarded children who were sent to boarding school as the "fortunate few" - and a daughter sent to 'finishing school' in Heidelberg reasonably came in that category - but to the great majority of showmen the idea remained unacceptable. To a society with severe standards of sexual morality (see Chapters 10 and 11, pp. 274-277 & 307-309), such institutions were suspect and one alleged incident of homosexuality became widely known. Though the children usually did not want to return to school after holidays and it was said "no sooner do they get school holidays than they're back working in the business again", the common fear was loss of the children to the family business and general lifestyle - the problems of "adjusting back". These had been appreciated by one of the Sanger family as early as the Edwardian period; going to boarding school he was "made aware of differences that had grown up between my own family and myself". To avoid the unacceptable separation from his children, one showman recalled that he had, since the Second World War, employed "private tutors for our children". Another development of the post-war era was the 'school caravan'. In this case a teacher was engaged for the 'van-cum-classroom' but it was only a viable proposition for a few larger circuses which could muster enough students to justify it and which travelled as a unit for a reasonable length of time (see Chapter 8, pp. 195 - 196). [38]

iv) Children's Work

a) Work as Education

"The children were taught from when they're young", many showmen remembering that "six or seven years of age" was when they had begun to do simple jobs in the fair or circus. Since the Second World War most started a little older, perhaps at seven to eight years old but it was still taken for granted "everyone had to do their little bit". Able to operate simple stalls, for example, the children appeared precocious to outsiders and were "deemed by .... (the showmen's).... community" to be adults by the 'early teens' as they were then "of an age to participate fully in the activities of the fair". Although sometimes gaining knowledge by working beside adults, much of the learning process was through play; "they played

with the lorries on the fairground" as a first step towards acquiring mechanical skills. Seeing their own offspring thus proficient at a relatively young age in what they considered important abilities without formal education, showmen frequently expressed doubts about many aspects of the latter. Recalling their own youth, showmen realized their work as children had also been their training; "you were learning the business, you see". The educational aspect waned as the maturing child was able to make an increasingly real contribution to the family economy, this in turn binding the generations more closely as a single inter-dependant unit. Seeing the role of the family and the work done by children as part of an educational process, one showman displayed his own ethno-centric tendencies in it's interpretation; "it's like your father taught you to read and write". Considerable pride was evinced in the achievements of the young in the skills and abilities of value to showmen. A grandson who could "mind a stall or mend a generator" was pointed out, "look at him .... he's only fourteen but he's coming on fast". [39]

b) The Jobs Done

That the lot of showmen's children attracted the attention of those who had the interests of the young in mind was not surprising in view of some of the ordeals they faced in the late Victoria era. Necessary to some theatrical performance in London, "father told a story of the younger children having to go to Drury Lane and be thrown in the water every night" recalled one showman, while another, from personal recollection, for the circus parade from "a very early age .... (was) .... strapped tightly to a miniature shetland pony". But it was, not unnaturally, actual performances by children which attracted early attention. The N.S.P.C.C. appealed for details of "child acrobats performing in the street and of performances in shows". Although the Children's Dangerous Performances Act, 1879 forbade any "public exhibition or performance" which might endanger "life or limbs", a nine-year-old "trapeze artist" with Stacey's circus was able to produce licences to perform, as required by the Act, from magistrates in Manchester,

Leeds, Scarborough and Cambridge. Some tightening up of the system followed the passing of the Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of Children's Act, 1889 which the N.S.P.C.C. claimed to have "obtained". It was cited when magistrates in Westminster refused a licence to "Listers Warren", a trapeze artist, in 1895. This latter Act referred specifically to the circus and children over seven years old could only be licenced to perform if "provision has been made to secure the health and kind treatment" of them.[40]

By 1904, any "acrobat, contortionist or circus performer" under 16 had to be licenced but one informant, as far as she knew unlicenced, practiced at the age of ten for her first public performance as a tightrope walker in Marlow, Bucks. A year or so later, father received his only summons for 'employing' her. Subterfuge was resorted to; for the rest of their stay in Peterborough she performed suitably disguised in new clothes and the case was dismissed. Other instances from the pre-1914 period were of an eleven-year-old performing what was known as a "bar act" on horse-back at the Dalston Coliseum in London and all the Rosaire children performing in the family's show. The youngest were Aubrey, ten, who was a clown and Dennis, only eight, who had mastered the art of fisticuffs very young and threw out challenges to children of his own age and weight. Less hazardous involvement with various forms of show was that of some girls who went "dancing on the front" and that of the "sisters .... (who) .... used to sing to the slides" at a 'magic lantern' show - or the boy whose job it was to pump the bellows for an early fairground organ".[41]

Most children, especially since the departure of most booths from the fairground, began by helping their parents on various stalls. "Picking up the balls" on a coconut shy, one showman recalled was typical work for a six to seven year old boy. Another remembered, around 1930 when she was not much older, being in charge of a small bagatelle game. Another simple game, often minded by the quite young was called a "Set of Dumplings", a variety of skittles played upon a table. By the time they were teenagers, either sex was considered competent to run a stall or game such as the commonplace "coconut sheet" or even, as in the case of one boy of thirteen years, a rifle

range. More recently, since 1945, children have served apprenticeships, for example, turning the wheel to operate a juvenile roundabout. Indeed, a number of such small items of equipment have been retained by some showmen, not for their earning capacity, but principally as a training ground for the young.[42]

Children were, of course, involved in what may be termed 'behind-the-scenes' work, beginning with helping to build up the relatively light and simple equipment which was their first responsibility. Horse drawn vehicles, of the smaller type, were driven out on the road, at least one girl doing so in the nineteen-twenties when she was fourteen years old. Perhaps more surprisingly, the potentially dangerous steam engines were the responsibility of boys, both at the fairground and between sites. "When I was nine years of age, I had to drive a steam engine on the roundabout" claimed one elderly showman, but others admitted that at such a young age it was under their father's watchful eye. The heavy work of fetching buckets of water for the steam engine was frequently deputed to boys. Within a few years they were called upon to drive the traction engines along the road but authority sometimes caught up. The widowed mother of one teenager, in Brighton in the early nineteen-thirties, when he was "about fourteen", was fined the not inconsiderable sum of £2. 10s. 0d. for his various offences, including towing too many trailers. The occasion could now be recalled with some amusement; "from one pier to the other, I collected thirteen summonses".[43]

Girls were frequently given domestic tasks while their parents were working, including "sticking" the apples and dipping them in the boiling toffee to meet demand on mother's sweet stall. Child-minding was, however, the most common responsibility given to them while the fair was open, one which they were deemed sufficiently mature for by about ten years of age. When space on site was at a premium, the living vans were grouped together, often at some distance from the scenes of activity. At such times, daughters and younger children assumed a "watch dog" role; if anyone came too near they would alert their parents. From such modest beginnings, therefore,

until at, say, fourteen years old and regarded as on the verge of adulthood - "he can build up, he can drive" - every child had some sort of positive role to play in the showmen's society, though the responsibilities which devolved upon the young during the 'Stay at Home' holidays boom of the Second World War may never have been exceeded; "we had to open, me and my eldest brother - I was about ten and he was about twelve - because my father didn't used to come home until seven or eight o'clock".[44]

c) Numeracy

Children were regarded as "sharp" with money, an expression indicating an early competence in handling it. "They're all good scholars when it came to reckoning up" was a common verdict, even elderly informants who remained illiterate claimed "sums ? .... I was top of the bill". So adroit were showmen in this particular direction it was even said of the father of one, owner of a shooting range, that an examination of the holes and tears in the backcloth enabled him to say with accuracy how much money had been taken that day. Such legendary abilities apart, girls in particular were encouraged to acquire numeracy skills as a preparation for adult responsibilities (see Chapter 11, pp. 302- 305). From as young as nine or ten, it was claimed they had "taken the money all day long". "As soon as they could count money", daughters were responsible for pay boxes on the shows and rides. Starting "as soon as I was big enough and knew what a penny was," it was not surprising that by the age of fifteen, one circus girl "did all the box office" in the family's show.[45]

Yet showmen, when questioned on the subject, were singularly unable to explain how their skill at mental arithmetic, especially in the handling of money, had been acquired. The universally agreed ability was dismissed as "just one of those things" by one showman, while another explained, "arithmetic .... they just learn themselves". The acquisition of those skills necessary to the showmen's calling without any formal or conscious learning process of which it was said "we learnt ourselves", stood out in contrast to the widespread lack of literacy among the elderly. The inability to read was

frequently seen as no great handicap and the contrast was lost upon the completely illiterate informant who said of his high degree of numeracy, "it just comes natural, don't it ?" [46]

Canal Boatmen

i) Birth and Infancy

"I were born on the 'Lilian Evelyn' " was one boatman's response when asked where he was born but the great majority only knew it was "on a boat". Though it was implied that this was the normal course other sources cast doubt upon it. The N.S.P.C.C. involvement was referred to in Chapter 6 (see pp. 141-143) and, in 1910, reported that births on boats were "not uncommon", citing one family of four children all of whom were born in the cabin as if this was rather unusual. Other findings, in the decade after the First World War were that children lived on the boats "from early youth, if not from birth" while statistically it was claimed, in 1920, of 1,041 children living aboard only 588 had been born there, while in 1929 it was only 1,475 out of a total of 3,425. Apart from the variation in totals, such discrepancies in information confirm the difficulty in obtaining reliable information on this group (see also Chapter 2, pp. 15 - 17). A likely explanation is that any enquiries of an 'official' nature would not be answered honestly regarding a practice known to be frowned upon. One informant's wife had one child born in hospital during the nineteen-thirties, the remaining two on the boat but the practice of hospital births never became widespread. Even after the Second World War "quite a few" were still born in the cabins. The comment that "if it was easy, it was on the boats" suggested that recourse was only had to hospitals under special circumstances. During the Second World War, "numerous babies" were observed to be born afloat and even at the end of the freight carrying era, the babies were still "generally born on the boats". [47]

It was the "recognized thing", when a child was due, to be at a certain number of places on the canal, if at all possible. This was to meet the twin requirements of having help to hand for the

mother and the possibility of work, on the wharves, for the man. The latter aspect would generally be met "anywhere where there was a centre of industry" but particularly popular on the Birmingham to London line, for example, were "Hawkesbury Junction, Stoke Bruerne, Bulls Bridge, Croxley, Brentford, Regents Canal Dock and Leighton Buzzard". Brentford and Stoke Bruerne, Northants were particularly popular at various times. In the years after the First World War, Nurse Jones was highly regarded at the former place, as was Sister Mary Ward at the latter for many years; she was still tending the boatmen and their wives as late as around 1950.[48]

It was "not always" possible to get to such as Nurse Jones or Sister Mary, who was " a lady .... who'd help anyone", or even unqualified but competent aid like that given by Mrs. Fielding. She was the wife of the Salvation Army Major in charge of the boat 'Searchlight' permanently moored at Hawkesbury Junction near Coventry ostensibly to minister for the boatmen's spiritual needs. The frequent absence of either doctor or midwife at births was one factor in the "extraordinarily high" infant mortality rate. Loss of unborn children was also said to be high; "there was hardly a mother among them who had not, because of her physical exertions, had two, three or even more miscarriages". The infant mortality rate among the boat people in the Birmingham area was, during Edwardian times, estimated, at 30%, to be double the area's average. The conditions on the boats and the boatmen's level of knowledge was revealed by specific instances, sometimes harrowing in their detail. Diet generally did not help; "when babies died, as they often did, for tinned milk is not the best diet for any but the toughest babies, the sickness that carried them off was bound to be bronchitis", the boatmen's diagnosis for a range of ailments afflicting all ages. Particular cases were traced where one woman had lost all fourteen of her children, another had lost eight and a further family had only six survivors out of the fifteen born. A police constable called to another boat, soon after the First World War, found the mother ill in bed, her dead baby hidden under a pillow out of sight of the other children as "she didn't know where .... (else) .... to put it". Yet here again there was some contradictory evidence. Nurse Jones, with

her "considerable experience", had never known the loss of a mother, of only one child stillborn and another who died in infancy. The manager of the Shropshire Union Canal Co., again around 1920 but, arguably, with a vested interest in showing the industry in the best possible light, claimed, "the infant mortality on the boats is exceptionally low, the children being invariably born healthy and strong".[49]

Provided there were no complications, confinements lasted an "astonishingly short time". In Nurse Jones's experience boat women were "very often .... confined today, but when you go to look for them next day they are gone". "On the second day you got going" claimed one informant, while another said, "you got going on the third day"; it was, however agreed, "you didn't stop longer than you could help". For clear economic reasons the family were all "on their way again within a few days of the confinement". If the boat had stopped without a cargo, a new consignment was obviously sought but if a stop had perforce been made en route, the carrying company would send another boat "and take your load off you", usually on the second day. When "they had your load off you and onto another boat", the first boatman did not get paid for the part of the journey he had completed and could be left stranded somewhere along the cut with no cargo. For the same reason, "sick children could not be attended without detention of the boat" and loss of the boatman's earnings.[50]

Never in the ordinary course of events in their life afloat were parents and children separated. Essential from a young age in the family economy, though it was considered some were "neglectful of their children", it was also admitted they were "seldom actively ill-treated". The Canal Inspector, in 1929, alarmed by rising allegations that children were overworked and their parents "indifferent" decided to make a personal investigation. It confirmed his belief, founded on long experience, that parents generally were "solicitous for their children's welfare and looked after them properly". About the same time, the N.S.P.C.C.'s own inspector (see Chapter 6, pp. 141-143) said that instances of neglect were

"all brought to my notice almost immediately, thus showing that boatmen .... are anxious to assist in the interests of the children". This, he considered, was "a healthy and encouraging" sign. Harsh though the lives of the children may seem, therefore, no general ill-treatment was evident. In a perusal of the Child's Guardian over the main period covered in this work only one specific instance of neglect was reported; in 1905, "Albert Tunley, a boatman and his wife, Elizabeth" were charged with and found guilty of that offence at Kidderminster, Worcs. [51]

ii) Accommodating the Children

As a result of the activities of George Smith (see Chapter 6, pp. 114-118), under the Canal Boats Act, 1877 the numbers and sexes of the people a boat could accommodate was specified as part of the registration procedure and the public health authorities empowered to take action if the numbers were exceeded. 'Living in' was, by the early years of the twentieth century, "practically confined to narrow boats". The Canal Inspector's findings, around 1920, when he was "happy to report .... boats and their inhabitants .... leave little to be desired" was prompted by his discovering only 66 cases of overcrowding in 19,387 inspections. Others claimed that "while cleanliness improved, overcrowding did not". But the first part of the claim may be questioned as numbers of people slept in cabins totally enclosed at night for warmth and the discovery that the heads of the seven Hopper children, during the Second World War, were all verminous was not too unusual. [52]

At the turn of the century, overcrowding on the boats was a "serious evil". In later, diesel boat days the boatmen regarded four people sleeping in the engine room and three in the 'butty' cabin (where other domestic requirements encroached upon the space) as not unreasonable. The youngest children, for about the first year of their lives, hardly ever left the cabin and slept "in the crook of father's arm". As children grew, their next sleeping place was "on the side bed", still in the 'butty' cabin, though depending on family size and the speed with which further babies appeared, progression to either the small 'fore cabin' of horse boat days or

the later engine room could take place as young as three or four years old. Space in the "fore-end of the boat" was such "you only got two .... (usually younger children) .... in that one". That serious overcrowding did occur was shown by the specific examples which came to light. In 1923, reporting on the boatmen's strike (see Chapter 5, pp.105 - 107), the Manchester Guardian reported five small children found asleep in a fore-cabin. About the same time a pair of boats was being made to accommodate a man, wife and nine children whose ages ranged from six months to eighteen years. Nearly twenty years earlier another pair of boats at Tunstall, Staffs. were home to a couple whose family comprised girls of 4, 11, 16 and 17 years of age and boys of 2, 5, 9, and 14. [53]

Officials of the local authorities, or even the Canal Inspector himself, wanted to know of the boatmen "how many was there in the family, where'd they sleep, how'd they sleep ...?" But the inspectors knew their hands were tied; they complained they were "powerless .... (because they were) .... by law .... only permitted to inspect the boats at hours when no boatman is ever found in bed". To protect the rights and (ironically) privacy of the boatmen, inspections had to take place between the hours of 6.a.m. and 9.p.m., so subterfuge was easy. When word got round that an inspector was in the vicinity "the surplus children .... (were sent) .... into hiding". If caught unawares the extra youngsters were "just visiting", "come to help with the locks" and, especially in the case of girls, "slept ashore". And, of course, his visit taking place during working hours, no inspector, whatever his suspicions, could prove otherwise. Two families who often worked together on the same route had no less than nineteen children between them; when interviewed, one lady recalled with some amusement how, as the inspector progressed from one pair of boats to the other, she and all the other children made their way in the opposite direction by a circuitous route through the nearby fields. [54]

The overcrowding and sleeping arrangements were "not satisfactory from a moral point of view" and the children were said to "have little sense of decency and morality". When a number of

children of both sexes shared the same bed, "they didn't take any notice of it" and the parents "weren't very fussed about that", at least until the girls reached puberty. Girls were then, younger children permitting, brought back to the "side bed" in the parent's cabin, a more considered "moral and decent" by the boatmen but condemned on precisely the same grounds by the Canal Inspector. But whatever the expedients, with large families a commonplace, there was a limit to the numbers of growing children a pair of boats could be made to accommodate. Younger children were, therefore, disposed of, more or less permanently (see below). In the early years of this century, the Victorian practice of girls going into 'service' was not unknown, while boys at "say, thirteen or fourteen .... (would) .... move off" to become "mates" on other boats before taking over their own pair. Problems of space were largely overcome with the introduction of diesel boats, working in pairs, for those few families who had previously worked only a single horse boat, but the difficulties had not completely disappeared even as late as the early nineteen-fifties as the following instances show : Alf Best had his mother, wife and two daughters aboard with him and R. Wilson, his wife and four children. [55]

iii) Education

a) Attitudes to Education

Despite some improvements over the years regarding the health and overcrowding of boatmen, right to the end of the freight-carrying era the "education problem remained". As late as the early nineteen-fifties the canal children were, it was suggested, "probably unique" in their isolation from the "influences of modern civilization - radio, films, newspapers, books, the Church, sport and youth activities of all kinds". The picture was overdrawn; the advent of diesel boats made battery operated radios possible and some of the younger generation became keen cinema-goers during the nineteen-thirties. Nevertheless, "the much discussed .... (question of education) .... appeared to affect the canal boat population not at all". In the few instances when children did attend school, they were often seen as "backward, undisciplined and different"; the feelings of inferiority engendered

usually guaranteed they did not come back of their own free will. [56]

Although they were "always badgering the lock-tenders to read and write their letters for them", the parents were generally "indifferent" to their children's education, at least before 1914. Occasionally, more definite sentiments were expressed; one boatman said, "if the lad grows up as good as his father, he will do. I never had any schooling nor do I see what good it does them". Perhaps due to the affects of the First World War, in post-war years it became "the ambition of the parents that their children should have a better opportunity", though the claim that they became the "strongest advocates" of it was an exaggeration when the "greater tendency" for all boatmen to have no shore home made regular schooling more difficult and a few still thought "children would have boated better without an education than with one". Though economic conditions were a major reason for boatmen leaving the cut in the inter-war years, "one of the reasons .... (was also).... to get their children educated". In one or two cases it was even claimed it was "for this reason alone" and "the whole idea of why we left the canal". However important education seemed to the minority, the urge to literacy was surely never greater than in Vi Potter's case; she had bought a second-hand volume of Punch and taught herself to read from that. [57]

The effect which education would have on children was foreseen by many boatmen, some who had "attended to .... (it) .... had seen them leave the canal". There were "quite a few as done that" because it "made them above their work". Their horizons and opportunities widened, few "would have come back boating", the older boatmen recognized, admitting "a lot of people would have been off" had they had the chance. Realization of lost opportunities may have come to some boatmen with age, but canal children generally were glad enough to avoid going to school and parents, unwilling to be separated from them and perhaps fearing the economic consequences of the loss of their labour, colluded with them. The more widely travelling 'Number Ones' (see Chapter 8, pp. 208-210) provided the most intractable group but, generally, the "canal boat people

defied everybody"; "apart from gypsies" (note the comparison) they were the "only" group to continually escape the net of the various education Acts. Boatmen "could, with a little dedication, succeed more or less with impunity" to thwart attempts to get their children to school. The year 1932, for example, produced only two cases of legal proceedings against boatmen for this reason so that it was not surprising that one Cheshire schoolmaster had long since given up hope of getting children off the canal which passed near to his school; "the whole matter", he said, "I consider a farce". [58]

Some of the canal carrying companies expressed concern over the education of their employees children. The Shropshire Union company, one of the largest in the north-west, did so but the earliest efforts to provide some sort of school was usually left to voluntary organizations. Perhaps the best example was that provided by the London City Mission at Brentford, where the Grand Junction line from Birmingham joined the Thames. Initially, lessons were held on a converted narrowboat presided over by "Mr. Knight, the local representative" of the society. Early this century it was "gratifying .... (that) .... the condition of children is not unsatisfactory from an educational point of view". It continued to produce such "satisfactory results" that it was eventually taken over by the Middlesex County Council and moved to "more commodious premises" nearby. Local authorities which showed a "special interest" in the education of canal boat children from time to time included Birmingham, Goole, Hull, Leicester, Liverpool, Runcorn, Sheffield and Stoke-on-Trent. All too often, however, once the difficulties were apparent and the burst of enthusiasm exhausted they were wont, in the words of one of their own inspectors, "to subside into the inaction of despair". Then only individual initiative might provide a contrast to the general picture as when, one boatwoman recalled, during a prolonged "freeze-up" the local schoolmistress was "very helpful". [59]

After the Second World War the problem posed to the educational norms of the sedentary society by the boatmen was tackled afresh. Again war had opened up new possibilities to some, especially those

who had departed on military service. After the war John Redknap, a young boatman, bemoaned the fact his "mates" had used their newly acquired literacy - "the army teached they" - to get jobs ashore. The "primary" need of canal children was said to be literacy though generally it was alleged they had "not matured to the same extent as children brought up under normal conditions". Overall, therefore, the position would not seem to have changed much compared to a half century earlier; in 1910, the opinion was given, "the plain fact is that as a class they are some of the worst educated people in the kingdom". [60]

b) Frequency of Schooling

With his usual tender philanthropy George Smith thought the children were "as stupid as the asses they drive". Attempts in some areas to remedy matters, as in Runcorn, Cheshire where between 1870 and 1921 convictions had been obtained against boatmen on 766 occasions for failing to send their children to school, were seen by the boaters as "punishment .... for doing what they are accustomed to do". The punitive approach proving to be ineffective in getting the children to school, it was "private liberality" which set up the 'barge school' at Brentford, referred to above, in order to cater for the society's peculiar circumstances. [61]

"I think I went to school half-a-dozen times, that's all" was how one interviewee remembered her schooldays. At their second school at South Wharf, Paddington, the London City Mission had, in 1929, ninety children on the roll. This was claimed to be "all the children of school age on the boats in the Paddington Basin". The problem, of course, was how often the children nominally on the school's register actually attended. The mission's other school at Brentford was, at the same time, considered "well attended" when only one-fifth of the children known to live on locally based boats attended at all regularly. An earlier claim that, whereas all children in Runcorn, Cheshire had achieved an attendance rate of 86.7%, the canal children had managed 33.3% seems very high. Given the authorities' problems of finding how many children were eligible in the first place and subsequent recollections by boatmen, the Birmingham admission that at

the two local schools which canal children could go to in the city, the rate was 21 appearances out of a possible 242, seems more likely to have been accurate.[62]

In 1900 some 1,390 children were "said to be attending school" but, as was still being pointed out after the Second World War, two or three days per month achieved little. What school-going there was tended to be odd days at the end of a run while loading was taking place. The "time for which each barge stops" was kept as short as possible for economic reasons, so attendances could be as little as a half-day at a time which many thought not worth while; "you weren't in a place long enough". The norm for canal boat children in the twentieth century was to attend school "a day here, a day there" knowing that the "next time they put in an appearance .... it may be twenty, thirty, forty or fifty miles away". Only on short haul work, such as the refuse boats plying between Paddington and West Drayton, Middx., was the "interesting experiment" possible, in the nineteen-thirties, of "providing continuous education". Otherwise longer periods of school-going were only possible at bad times for the boatmen, such as when waiting for a load when trade was slow or, as one informant recalled, a thirteen week spell of learning during a 'freeze up'.[63]

If it was correct to claim optimistically that the children on the Paddington refuse boats could "no longer escape a certain amount of schooling", the majority, nevertheless, "basically .... had no education whatsoever". Figures from surveys made in the years immediately after 1918 show how many of today's elderly were justified in saying they had, quite literally, no formal education at all. The family of seven children who had just twenty attendances between them were certainly not far from a literal absence of school attendance. But others who "couldn't go to school" and experienced "no trouble" from attendance officers apparently achieved it according to two N.S.P.C.C. surveys. In the first inquiry 20 out of 143 "had never been to school" and, in the second, larger one, 185 had completely avoided it out of a total of 1,442.[64]

Though school attendance officers might from time to time take action, privately they admitted "very little of practical value can be done". The only effective step would have been to prohibit children from living on board but it was "never found possible to proceed" with the necessary legislation especially as the declining industry became increasingly dependant upon child labour. Not until after the Second World War was a real attempt made to provide residential accommodation specifically designed to meet the canal boat children's circumstances (see below). [65]

c) Levels of Literacy

Despite the surprising claim made in 1903 that "most...(of the children) .... of school age are able to read and write", the overwhelming evidence was to the contrary. Over twenty years later 20% were considered "educated" but the level achieved does not seem to have been very high. Figures published by the N.S.P.C.C. in 1920, 1921 and 1928 produced the following accumulative totals built up over the eight year period :-

YEAR	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	'NIL'
1920	2	11	8	54
1921	20	118	159	444
1928	76	295	N/A *	995

This suggested very little change from the findings of an earlier survey in the Birmingham area which found 3% of the children could read "fairly well" but 54% "completely unlettered". Over the first half of the twentieth century, estimates varied between 75 - 85% of the total canal boat population being illiterate. During the inter-war period something like 1,800 children were believed to have grown up without learning to read or write and, in 1939, about 1,000 more were still doing so. [66]

Individual cases which came to light tended to make these estimates appear accurate. On one pair of boats a family of eleven (parents and nine children, ages 6 months to 18 years) were completely

* Not Available

illiterate and a boy of twelve charged with theft at Northwich, Cheshire in 1919 "could not read or write anything except his name". "The evidence was overwhelming and practically unanimous that under present circumstances .... (just after the First World War) .... canal boat children are scandalously under-educated" despite the sanguine hopes with which the first school had begun at Brentford - "the standard is not a high one .... but in education it is the first step that counts". "Reading ? .... you didn't seem to bother really" was how one boatman saw it and the lack of literacy became a handicap "only when they left the canal". Not until the Second World War did the proportion of boatmen and women who were literate increase appreciably and that, as referred to above, was because they were taught while on military service. [67]

d) 'Non-travel' Schooling

The Canal Boat Act, 1877 empowered carrying companies to build schools and provide lodging accommodation for the children who attended them. It is believed none did so but the provision of such schools and accommodation was seen by many as the "only satisfactory method" of dealing with the problem along with the corollary of prohibiting children from living on the boats during term time. Opposition from parents was foreseen but the Ministry of Health's committee which reported in 1921, for example, considered the "disadvantages are outweighed by the necessity of putting to an end as soon as possible to the limitations upon these particular children". Nothing was done at the time of course and it was not until the passing of the Education Act, 1944 that the Ministry and the National Joint Council for Inland Waterways (comprising both employers and employees' representatives) looked at the question anew. A hostel they "agreed" was needed. [68]

As the "hub" of the canal system, it was in Birmingham that somewhere, which "must be pleasantly situated, easily accessible from the city's canal wharves and near a primary school with available accommodation", was sought. The outcome was Wood End Hall, Erdington where it was hoped the children would feel "secure" in their - shades of George Smith - "new and rather wonderful way of

life". Initially intended to accommodate 15 boys and 14 girls, from the ages of between 7 and 9 until they were 15, the cost of converting Wood End Hall, some £11,500, was met by the Ministry of Education. Officially opened with some pomp on 19th June, 1952, by Sir Reginald Hall, K.C.E., C.B., member of the Docks and Inland Waterways Executive, the first children had actually begun to live in Wood End Hall the previous November. To announce the impending opening of the new hostel a letter was sent to the illiterate parents, an example of bureaucratic lack of imagination, explaining it's purpose and stating that attendance was to be on a voluntary basis. There were 21 children in the "first group" and, by 1954, between 30-40 had stayed at Wood End Hall at "various times", some gaining over two years "unbroken" education. Aware of the hostel's "promising start", parents were soon alleged to be "asking for more". [69]

Before the final decision was made, it was stressed that the proposed hostel had to be "good" to meet anticipated resistance from the canal boatmen. Opened with high hopes, Wood End Hall appeared in the minutes of Birmingham's Education Department until 1967 though "it was not clear whether it was still used as a hostel for canal boat children". Indeed, in view of post-war trade developments on the canals (see Chapter 13, pp. 357-359) and the response from boatmen generally, Wood End Hall seems to have served its original purpose for only a very few years. Some boatmen never applied on their children's behalf in the belief it was reserved only for the employees of the newly-created British Waterways Board. Others quickly dismissed it as a "failure", the absence of children leading to a breakdown of ties and relationships in a "very patriarchal" society. The theory that parents could visit their offspring "at any time" was also unrealistic; the boatmen were likely to be in Birmingham, in many cases, only at intervals of some weeks and then economic pressures dictated that they should load up and be on their way again as soon as possible. And anyway, as one explained "it didn't seem right to a lot of us at all .... to part with your children". [70]

iv) Children's Work

a) Work as Education

Young children chained to the chimney on the cabin roof were able to watch their mother at work so unconsciously beginning the learning process for the jobs which they were soon expected to do. Before actually doing any job themselves, children accompanying parents observed how oncoming boats were passed (the rule was to keep right), to give preference to loaded (i.e. earning) boats at locks and to leave the latter with paddles lowered in readiness for the next crew. One of the first jobs for children was to steer the 'butty' boat, perched upon a stool to see the way ahead. The mother of one elderly boatman had placed a piece of cheese on one corner of the cabin roof and a piece of bread on the opposite side. At about the age of four he could grasp her instructions as to how to turn the tiller; "if she wanted me to 'hold in' she'd say 'cheese' - or if it was 'hold out' she'd say 'bread'". The introduction of diesel boats gave older boys a "new intimacy with machinery", it being pointed out that "motor boats are in themselves a form of education to a most important profession" which proved to be of "value to boys in after life" when many of them had to leave the cut.[71]

Children usually began to do simple jobs when they were somewhere between 6-8 years old. The role of the children on the boats and the relative importance of their labour compared to the demands of school was soon shown at Wood End Hall. There it was bemoaned, "unfortunately, June, at the age of 13, returned to the boats" and "three of the boys returned shortly afterwards". At the end of the nineteenth century the way of life for the children apparently had much to recommend it. The Canal Inspector said, "I do not exaggerate at all when I say that morally and physically the boat child is, for the most part, superior to the land child in a similar station in life. It's open air life inures it to all weathers, and it's familiarity with it's work from a very early age makes it reliant and strong, bringing out it's best qualities .... On the boats boys and girls whose contemporaries ashore are .... a source of worry and anxiety to their parents, can be found doing their duty in a quiet

matter-of-fact way and taking a pride in it's successful accomplishment. Undoubtedly those ashore are more fully equipped in matters of learning but in the application of it I do not think most of them have any advantage over boat children". A similar opinion was expressed a decade later by the new Canal Inspector; the young 'boaters' were "no whit behind land children in honesty, manners and physique. Personally, I am of the opinion they are superior, and grow up to be better citizens by reason of their training to face hard work and to fight life's battles on their own account". Even the N.S.P.C.C., not given to exaggerated recommendations of the lifestyle, had to admit, "many of the boat children .... although unable to read or write, are sharp in many other ways and show keen intelligence". [72]

"Not in the olden days, but in the last part", by which the interviewee meant the years after the Second World War, greater restrictions were placed upon the work the children were allowed to do. Those under 14 years of age, for example, were not allowed to work the paddles at the locks as it entailed holding the heavy windlass against the weight of the sluices. One local inspector's remedy was simple and effective; "he didn't argue, he'd take it off you and sling it .... (the windlass) .... in the cut". The isolation of the boatmen's society, however, and the limited experiences of the young, it was recognized, fitted them only to continue in their parents' footsteps. The duality in the nature of the children's tasks as both educational and of economic significance made those tasks permissable, it was argued, at a younger-than-usual age. Somewhere between the extreme views of it being "earning a living", as the boatmen saw it, and "cheap labour" came the warning that "if you remove them .... the nursery for the boating population ceases". [73]

b) The Jobs Done

"I can steer a boat, I can lead a horse", one twelve year old girl sounded proud of her skills. Performing their tasks, children were estimated in 1921 to represent 1/9th of the canal industry's entire work force but, of course, a higher proportion of it on the boats themselves, where like the adults, they commonly worked until it

was time to tie up for the night. As stated earlier, such work was normally limited to the narrow canals, "no children" being seen on the larger waterways of parts of northern England. Even on the former some instances of child labour occurred that may be dismissed as exceptional. In the last years of the nineteenth century, a "mere child in stature and apparently in years" was observed pulling a boat near Worcester with her mother, while, in 1922, a boatman used his children, boys of 12 and 9 and a girl of only 10, to haul his empty craft "to save the cost of a horse". [74]

The youngest age at which children were noted doing specific tasks appears to have been at six years old. Though there was some disagreement between informants as to what were the first jobs given them, all said "we used to have to dodge the inspectors". The 'starting age' would obviously depend upon the number and ages of children in a given family, while the work done changed over the years as, for example, with the introduction of diesel boats. By about the age of nine, very few children were not expected to perform some task associated with running the boats and perhaps three years later were considered capable of involvement in all of the boatmens' jobs. [75]

Except "when there was anyone about", lock preparation and working was a frequent children's task. On many canals locks occurred at close intervals and times on a journey could be saved if locks were made ready for the boats' arrival at them. Young children could be seen "patiently trotting the miles of towpath between London and Birmingham", endlessly required to keep ahead of their parents boats - only the fortunate few latterly owning bicycles to save their feet. Though some were alleged to work the locks "from seven years of age" it is doubtful if any but the strongest could "do duty with the windlass opening lock-sluices or pushing the beam that swings the lock gates" until they were rather older. [76]

From early days of the family boats, the horses provided work for the young; as early as 1858 "stunted" children attended the horses. "Sometimes at six years of age they began to drive the horse" and were generally taught how to "look after" the animal. An occasionally even younger start was implied, with a comment on the

hours they toiled; "as soon as they can stand they are put onto the backs of horses and drive them along the canal path. At ten, eleven and twelve o'clock at night I have seen boat children working like men and women, driving horses". At a slightly older age, they were also required to walk behind the horse to guide the "spreader", where the tow rope was linked to the horse's harness, a job of some responsibility when close co-operation between the boat and the remote motive power was called for. Steering the boat, as indicated above, was learned young in the days of horse boats, "as soon as you knew what steering was, you was tied on a stool steering the boat". "The little boys aboard them, steering" were seen as late as the Second World War but the age at which they began to steer on horse boats was perhaps eight or nine according to most informants. Possibly because there was no horse to provide them with employment, it seems that on diesel boats the children learned to steer at a generally younger age. "Dad made me a stool", the first job now being to "steer the boat", it was claimed. Even post-1945 the "Hill's boy, at nine years of age, steered his father's boat" and from the age of ten or eleven upwards the sons were quite capable of handling a motor boat - loaded and hauling a 'butty', without parental guidance. [77]

Older children were expected to turn their hands to any task of which they were capable, which included the physically demanding work of loading and unloading the boats. Generally, however it was only girls who were expected to perform domestic duties, unless, of course, there were only sons in the family. At what age a young man might be expected to help in 'legging' through tunnels is not known; the claim to have done so at twelve years of age seems somewhat premature. But it was the conditions under which the young worked, rather than the work itself, which attracted attention. An example of this was on the refuse boats which carried London's waste to the dumps in Middlesex; on one of these, in the year of grace 1930, was found an orphaned family working a boat under the captaincy of a teenage elder sister. Nevertheless, though boatmen recalled, "I worked with my father .... I had to do the same work as my father did", the concensus of observers was that children were not generally

overworked by their parents.[78]

c) Fostering

"That's how it went in them days .... I went with different people .... as you growed up you went to work with families as hadn't got any children .... you worked for your keep .... lots done that", was one elderly woman's explanation of a common practice among boatmen. Given the allegation that "parents are, for the most part, perfectly callous about the danger of life and limb" it was not surprising that a boatman who had purchased two boys was even less concerned for their welfare, forcing them to work all night. Harry Gosling, M.P., in his 1929 attempt to introduce a bill to the House of Commons said "it was unknown for barge workers to give their children away to other boat people", using the practice as an argument for banning children from the boats altogether. "Child selling" was "in fact, rare"; much commoner was the fostering or loaning of the young capable of work and then it was usually to a relative or other known and trusted person. Boys were most often "sent to work" on other boats, though an instance of a girl of twelve was recorded and one interviewee claimed he had first been fostered when he was only six-and-a-half years old. Growing sons accepted the move in many cases, seeing it as a transition towards the day when they might claim captaincy of their own craft. The people who were interested in taking on the youngsters were the comparatively rare childless couples, newly-weds who had yet to produce their own labour force or whose own children were still very small, or elderly people whose adult children had moved off. Transfers of youthful labour could be on an indefinite basis but were frequently short term; it might be to cover for illness, for example, or to help in the speedy delivery of a special load. The practice continued on occasions to the end of the age of the 'family boats'; two of the Redknap brothers, aged 14 and 17, were thus working in the years following the Second World War.[79]

d) Dangers

The alleged "extraordinarily high death rate" among boatmen was attributable not only to infant mortality but also the accidents,

usually drowning, which befell the children. Boatmen had a rather fatalistic acceptance of their inevitability in view of their lifestyle; "we took that in our stride, sort o' thing". Although no statistics were ever kept, a relatively high accident rate, ranging from the minor mishap to the fatal, seems likely and gives added poignancy to the canal companies' agreement to insure boatmen's wives but not their children (see Chapter 7, pp. 173-176). Among travellers, only in this group were the dangers stressed, no doubt because it was the only one which received continued scrutiny from government agencies and voluntary organizations. Exceptions there were, but most accidents were suffered by older, working children as the very young remained relatively safe under the parental eye while they were firmly chained on the cabin top (see above).[80]

From early days of the family-worked craft, boatmen had become inured to one form of tragedy; "not a week passes", it was said in 1858, "but one of these canal children is drowned"; a matter "too common to excite much observation". To what extent the alleged frequency was hyperbole is now impossible to say but in 1925, by which time the numbers involved in the industry had declined considerably of course, the Manchester Guardian reported only six cases. One boatman interviewed, however, thought an estimate of "hundreds" of children lost in this way was not too high considered over a period of time. Others recalled, from their own knowledge, that "there was quite a lot of children drownded (sic) in them days". The Canal Inspector himself knew, "unfortunately the number of deaths from drowning is very large", but complained "there are no returns available". A few examples of individual instances which were published at the time most therefore suffice : at Beeston, Notts., in 1911, a boy of nine who "usually steered his father's boat" was drowned and a boy, thirteen years of age, had met a similar fate near Northwich, Cheshire, the previous year. About the same time an unusual accident was the overturning of an unevenly loaded boat which resulted in the drowning of "two little children". A further family, as late as 1938, had lost two children by drowning in separate incidents within eight months. The hours of work made children particularly prone to accidents. A girl of twelve said, "I often

work all night" and a mother fined for employing an under age child "had suffered acutely by the loss" of her daughter. The girl had fallen into the lock she was working at 2.10.a.m. one morning in 1936; it was her usual custom the mother admitted to keep her children "partially clothed" at night so they were ready for work at short notice. At a conservative estimate "95% .... (of boatmen) .... couldn't swim" and as they "mostly worked through nights", the drowning of adults was not unusual too; one elderly lady interviewed claimed she had lost four brothers and a sister in this way, one brother when he was eighteen and the sister as an adult.[81]

Though the children "were forever under the eyes of their parents", in the days of horse-drawn boats, those working with the animals were remote enough to come to grief before their elders could do anything about it. Rarely fatal, mishaps with the horse, usually injuries caused by kicks from the animal, were probably the most frequent of accidents. Young children, thrown from the horses back, were in greater potential danger as they might well land in the cut. Less frequent but often very distressing were accidents to children in the cabin, almost invariably associated with the stove. In conditions of overcrowding not unusual on the boats, one family of nine (that is, parents and seven children) experienced the loss of two children due to such accidents. In the second case a four-year-old upset a pan of boiling water and died of scalding. In another example, the coroner pointed out, in the course of an inquiry into the death of a child by an open grate, that it was an offence under the Children's Act, 1908 not to have a guard in place, but the father pointed out "there was so very little space". Even steam boats, in their occasional use, brought their own peculiar forms of danger. When passing through tunnels they induced "near suffocation" and one daughter, at least, "ended up on the cabin floor with a damp cloth over her face". First Aid equipment was, of course, unknown on the boats so when injuries were sustained 'home made' remedies were resorted to. One lad, when he lost the top of a finger in an accident with the windlass, recalled having it sewn back on by his mother "with a needle and thread". Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, however, the committee appointed to look into the question (see

Chapter 6, pp. 118-121) could find "no case" to exclude children from the boats on grounds of the potential dangers.[82]

e) Numeracy

On this subject there is again, in the boatmen's case, some conflict of evidence. A boy of twelve, charged with theft, "actually could not count beyond a dozen". The overwhelming evidence was, however, to the contrary; boatmen excelled at mental arithmetic and acquired the skill at an early age. In an industry where loads were usually paid for at so much per ton, often down to fractions of a penny, there was incentive enough to learn to calculate money. Outside observers noted the ability, "one thing they were good at, with or without an education, the boatmen were wonderful with figures". And the boatmen claimed it for themselves, "if you diddled a boatman on money, you got to be clever". How the skill was acquired they were not so sure. "Mother and Dad taught you - they were as good as any teacher", said one, while another gave some credit to an older child; "on my brother's sense of 'know-how', I sort of picked it up as we went along". The majority of boatmen could not say how they had learnt; they only knew it was necessary to them. "I'm a jolly good reckoner" boasted one elderly lady, and "I knew me money" claimed another. Both agreed, "it was something you made yourself know"; and one boatman said with some accuracy, "I was a self-learned scholar".[83]

Resumé

The remarkably short confinements of traveller women may be attributed primarily to economic factors, a consideration once shared with many working women; those once employed in the Headington Quarry near Oxford provide one example. Gypsy women were, among travellers, least pressurized in this way. This and the early abondonment of tents as dwellings probably explains the divergence of birthplace customs between gypsies and showmen in the twentieth century. Both groups revealed cultural sympathies in the desire to remove the ritually unclean mother from the home by the use of hospitals. Similar developments among Scots and Irish tinkers point to a cultural

affinity but the canal boat population did not display the same propensity towards hospital births, though this may have been due to economically-related travel patterns rather than inherited cultural factors. Once the children were born, space factors dictated sleeping arrangements. These also reflected a situation once more common elsewhere. The overcrowding, according to the predominant middle-class norms of the late Victorian age, applied, for instance, among those employed in the slate workings of North Wales. The travelling lifestyle per se obviously heavily influenced the space available in the home but economic factors played a significant part as shown by the progressive enlargement of the homes of the more capitalized and affluent showmen.[84]

There was much in common among all three traveller groups in the attitudes towards, and consequent participation in, the sedentary majority's education system. During the first half of this century some recognition of the need for a broader education, particularly literacy, was evinced by showmen and boatmen. The former related it to growing business demands and the latter embraced it largely as a means of escape from their existing socio-economic position. Both therefore, at least to a limited extent, were prepared to occasionally countenance the separation of children and parents, current work demands notwithstanding, with educational objectives in view. The difficulties showmen and boatmen experienced in getting to school regularly was shared with gypsies, but only the latter group, lacking the above motivations to acquire a formal education, have consistently proved so unamenable to it and even used the lack of literacy as an expression of group identity - "only gorgios read". The acquisition of the required numerical abilities by all groups provided ample proof of the adequacy of the concept of education by informal methods as a means of furnishing the young with the skills necessary to fit them for their parents' lifestyle. The secondary part played by school attendance in this process was at one time not unusual. There was "much absenteeism" in the late nineteenth century among the industrial and rural poor; "boys .... (were) .... employed by their fathers at busy seasons .... (and) .... poor parents badly missed their children's earnings". Seasonal work demands explained why

"for many country children .... schooling was something that happened only in the winter time". And in urban areas too, especially before the First World War, the percentage of children registered at school fell away as they neared the permitted working age.[85]

Education and the work of children were effectively two sides of the same coin and only in the case of the canal boat children could their employment be legitimately regarded as exploitative, in the conventional sense, as the majority of their parents worked for capitalist enterprises. The practice of such employees having their children work beside them was elsewhere largely to die out well before the opening of the twentieth century. Certain tasks, horse-minding for example, had long been allotted to children, sometimes as young as seven or eight years old; "in a carrier's family .... (they) .... were being forever called upon to mind the horse". The wide economic role of children in rural areas before the First World War is well illustrated in the impressive list of 51 different jobs they did, given by R. Samuel in an appendix to Village Life and Labour. The place and value of children in any society can be linked to their economic contribution;among travellers that contribution has continued throughout the period of this work.[86]

The behaviour and early maturity of traveller children was commented upon by teachers on the comparatively rare occasions they reached the classroom. They were said to be "courteous" and have an "extreme regard for good manners". The positive economic role was the reason for their society granting recognition of adult status at a relatively early age. A similar early maturation was noted in the Shetland Isles where children also found the regimentation and discipline of school life hard to accept. The family unit was of first importance to the traveller child and young adult as it fulfilled the sedentary population's educational institution and workplace roles; the child "relied upon the family for all educational functions". This was true for the boatmen despite the practice of adoption and loaning of children. The people to whom their young transferred usually performed, in these senses, the society's normal

family role. The tailoring of the child's upbringing - and, equally, the frequent rejection of the larger society's norms - was for specific ends; "the educational experiences of the traveller child have usually been received from his immediate family environment and have been moulded to ensure that he can take his place in the highly competitive traveller society and simultaneously withstand the social censure of being a member of a group of people despised by the majority society". [87]

Consideration of various aspects of the lives of young travellers brings out very clearly the increasingly 'dated' and anachronistic position of all three groups in the face of developments in the larger society in the first half of the twentieth century. In England and Wales, for example, the period of the greatest decline in infant mortality was between 1900 and 1932, when the figure per 1,000 live births dropped from 142 to 67. But it was only in the decade of the nineteen thirties that gypsy and show women began to use hospitals for childbirth with - in the absence of reliable figures, it is reasonable to suppose - a reduction in infant mortality rates. Similarly, whereas 36% of the population of England and Wales was aged from 0-14 years at the time of the 1871 census and had declined to 22% in 1951, traveller societies, the evidence suggests, remained 'young' in age structure as they did not share the majority's diminution in "completed family" size from an average of 3.37 in 1900-09 to 2.19 in 1925-29. A comparable time-lag of, perhaps, a generation was also apparent in the size of gypsies and showmen's homes where larger vehicles, with implications for sexual segregation and individual privacy, were only generally introduced in the inter-war period. Canal boatmen stood alone in not sharing other travellers' changed practices regarding hospital births or spatial improvements to the home. [88]

The inter-dependant areas of education and children's work, however, provided perhaps the prime example of what was increasingly assumed by the larger society to be 'normal' becoming distanced from what travellers themselves continued to regard as 'normal'. In this case, acceptance of the majority's verdict, backed up by ethno-centric

legislation, would, it was feared, prove incompatible with the traveller's lifestyle, leading to the break-up of family relationships, the alienation of children and, ultimately, to the destruction of their societies. Such fears were not groundless, the resistance of hand-loom weavers to the then-new factory based forms of employment and education in the nineteenth century could not prevent their assimilation into the growing industrial proletariat.[89]

CHAPTER TEN

LIFE PROGRESSION II : COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Gypsies

i) Adolescence and Courtship

A consequence of the early maturing of traveller children was that periods of adolescence and courtship were generally short; but there was one notable exception to the adult role allowed them. Sexual topics were taboo before the young and unmarried. The strict control could be linked to space factors in the home and the travellers lack of privacy throughout their lives; where the possibility of promiscuity and incest posed a threat, gypsy society developed protective cultural norms. Young men were, in certain activities, allowed a great degree of freedom; "sons might do as they wished". Drinking, gambling and fighting were widely tolerated and a degree of sexual laxity away from their own women-folk was permitted the gypsy bachelor; a not uncommon proof of manhood was much exaggerated claims of gorgio conquests. No such licence was allowed the girls; "laws laid down for the daughters were something closely akin to the purdah system". [1]

Once courtship began, the relationship continued to be strictly controlled, most obviously by the girls' parents. Virginity of women at marriage was expected; "a very high standard has always been set in these matters in gypsy families". Privacy during courtship was not allowed; leisure excursions, such as to the cinema, were group activities or a chaperone, often a married sister, accompanied the pair. One observer claimed to "know of more than one couple who had not been out by themselves before they married". Under such rigorous regimes it was hardly surprising that courtships were not prolonged. Early earning power and the low cost of setting up home made quick marriages possible. And of course, the lack of schooling and the economic integration of children in family work meant that the range of social contacts within an age group was limited. A courting couple had probably known each other since childhood and,

indeed, as their families were almost certainly known to each other over generations, the relationship rarely began without parental knowledge or approval. Although one post-Second World War survey suggested the age at which gypsies married was dependant upon individual circumstances, the concensus was that "the gypsies marry early". In some instances, "perhaps the girl sixteen and the boy eighteen" with the great majority of women wed by the age of twenty and the men a year or two later. Available evidence suggested that by 22 years of age, over 90% of gypsy females were married and over 60% of the males. [2]

ii) Choice of Partner

The travelling lifestyle prevented the formation, even had the gypsies desired it, of long-lasting relationships with the sedentary population. This and the lifestyle's peculiarities suggested that it was only within their own kind that suitable marriage partners were to be found; that is, those to whom the travelling lifestyle and all it's concomitants was acceptable. The range of gypsy contacts throughout Europe was, as suggested in Chapter 3, pp. 19 - 20, probably greater prior to the raising of customs barriers after the First World War and the division of Europe after the following conflict. The trend over the first half of the twentieth century was for marriages with close kin, albeit travelling farther afield, to become less frequent. Inter-marriage between kin groups became correspondingly more common within the United Kingdom though first-cousin marriages remained not unusual even in the years after 1945. Marriage, heavily influenced by parental approval though rarely overtly arranged by them, was generally between families of broadly equal status, as measured by lineage or wealth. Family considerations might also have a 'political' nature with the object of cementing kin network alliances or reducing long-standing feuds. It was with these considerations in mind (and, incidentally,to confound those who have tried to disentangle the ramifications of gypsy pedigrees) that women sometimes, after marriage, preferred to retain their maiden names but with 'Mrs.' prefixed. [3]

iii) 'Outsider'Marriages

Though it was once the "most dreaded thing" for a member of a gypsy family to "run away and marry a house dweller", very few gypsy families did not have "a few gorgio ancestors mixed in" (see also Chapters 3 and 7, pp. 19-20 and 149-150). The greater offence seems to have been to join the house dweller in a sedentary lifestyle and to lose the gypsy and traveller identity. Trends during the twentieth century, referred to above, led to a larger number of unions with 'outsiders'; in Scotland these were commonly referred to as "flattie marriages". There was some evidence that such marriages were beginning to increase in the nineteenth century, however, as shown by an examination of the Heron 'family tree' over six generations to 1914 - and the individual case of Riley Smith has already been noted (see Chapter 3, pp. 19 - 20). Some difficulties of acceptance by suspicious and conservative older gypsies were experienced by the 'outsider' who married and joined the traveller's community. Depending on the newcomers adaptability, so misgivings about them might diminish with time. As such marriages increased in numbers, the resistance to the practice proportionately lessened among the majority of gypsies. Again as already alluded to (Chapter 3, pp. 27 - 28), the gypsies had no conception of the 'half caste'. The supposed sins of the parents were not, therefore, visited upon the children, so long as the latter were reared in and absorbed the traveller's culture and value systems.[4]

iv) The Wedding

Few aspects of the gypsies' life have given rise to more romantic nonsense than their marriage ceremonies; stories of betrothed couples jumping over broomsticks before the camp fire must be consigned to that Romany mythology which gypsies, when it suited them, saw fit not to contradict. Certainly there was pressure upon the young to marry, and marry early, but of formal ceremony there was, in the years up to 1939 at least, usually none. "Most gypsy marriages were elopements", except among a few of the most affluent who often arranged them to coincide with the gatherings of the large autumnal fairs. When eloping, the young couple would simply spend a night

away from the parental homes, often sleeping rough. Their absence was assumed to indicate consummation of the relationship and upon their return the pair were regarded as married. Both sets of parents (but particularly those of the girl) made a "pre_tended fuss", a ritualistic display designed to show the absence of any collusion with the newly-weds and their own high standards of sexual morality; acceptance of a conventionally acquired 'married status' was then permissable. [5]

One gypsy opined, early in the nineteenth century, that "not one couple in fifty" had married in church. A general exception were the Irish tinkers who usually married in, of course, Roman Catholic establishments. But this was more illustrative of the gypsy practice of outwardly conforming to the customs of the host society, as many of the Irish on moving to England after the Second World War soon began to regard it as inessential. The period from 1945 saw registry office weddings become the norm for the majority of gypsies, whatever their origin, whereas previously it had only been used to any extent in the case of 'outsider' unions. The creation of the welfare state was the reason for regularising gypsy marriages as it was quickly learned that benefits thus payable were more readily obtainable. Informal marriage had the great advantage among poorer travellers of being inexpensive and so was particularly welcomed in Scotland and the north of England. Whether in church or registry office it was only a very few wealthy families who were able to use the occasion of a wedding for an ostentatious display of riches in order to indicate or establish their place in the traveller's social hierarchy. [6]

v) The Newly weds

Gypsy kin groups "did not own property in common", the normal domestic unit comprising only two generations, that is, parents and juvenile offspring. In view of this, "upon marriage, a young couple would immediately establish an indepentent unit", which entailed the acquisition of a caravan and motive power, formerly a horse and cart and, more recently, a lorry. Scions of more affluent families were the recipients of more help - and from a wider circle if

their wedding had been celebrated on a lavish scale. But poorer families also contributed to the newly-weds' needs, even if the resultant horse was badly winded and the van in poor condition. Where the young couple travelled would be, to a degree, dictated by economic considerations, which might explain why certain authorities have said there were no fixed rules of family 'alignment' after marriage. Others were more definite, claiming, "the rule held good; the men joined the people of their wives - the women brought their husbands into the clan". The general conclusion of observers was that, as "gypsy stock was matrilinear", it was most frequent for daughters to stay near their mothers, but with the qualification that the practice has tended to become less rigid. [7]

Showmen

i) Adolescence and Courtship

"The men did what they liked" claimed one showman but others suggested that the stern control exercised over daughter's activities was only marginally less in the case of sons. Nevertheless, the concensus of opinion was that, sexual matters excepted, a much greater degree of freedom was allowed the male child. "The girls stayed near the parents because they were very strict in those days" recalled one elderly lady. Parents discouraged daughters from any contact with other than show families; "if they forbade you to speak to somebody else with the show, ... (such as casual labourers) .... you couldn't speak to them". Clearly in the unacceptable category were not only the employees of showmen but also the 'flattie' public who patronized the fair. The elitism among circus families was such that daughters were regarded as "too good" to be allowed close social relationships with such as the fairs' minor stall-holders. Fear of censure was great among adolescent girls. Too great a familiarity with a 'flattie boy' would show "she wasn't much good" and her marital prospects impaired as "other men wouldn't want to go with her" - and equally "frowned on" by the daughters was any boy's association with a 'flattie girl'. Even when mixing with their society's sons, daughters were effectively brought to heel; "every girl knew their whistle - we knew our Dad's ....". "Then you'd 'ave to run like

bleeding 'ell .... and the boy - 'e'd stand there petrified", in case father decided to investigate. If his suspicions of male company proved justified, the visitation of an enraged parent accompanied by the girl's brothers might well be physically uncomfortable to the errant youth.[8]

The children grew up with few opportunities to form relationships with any but travellers. As they grew older and independent socializing began, "they'd go in groups .... they'd all go together", often to events arranged within their own society such as the inter-regional football matches organized by the Showmen's Guild. These outings included a dance after the game. Other gatherings of showmen, such as the Christmas-time fairs and circuses held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, London or at Belle Vue, Manchester, also supported meetings and dances after the general public had gone home. Except in the special cases of late night organized social gatherings, girls were expected to be home early; parents would not sleep until unmarried daughters were safely abed in the bottom bunk. "Of course, parents never wanted the children to leave home", explained one informant, the underlying reason for strict control of the young being largely economic. Loss of the by-now valuable labour of young adults was not to be lightly regarded, especially as it presaged some re-distribution of family wealth. Items of fairground equipment might no longer be supplied with the necessary work force and so have to be passed on to the independent offspring and newly-acquired spouse (see below). In the 'family shows' of the circus or one-time fair booths the problems posed were particularly acute. Because of the "trouble" it caused, "you could be almost twenty and never been out with a boy".[9]

"The majority of showmen were very strait-laced"; relationships with the opposite sex were never casual. Caught flirting in his youth, one showman's widowed mother reacted firmly; "she gave you a back-hander in about two minutes". The girls of the "circus and funfair were the most virtuous females in the country", it was claimed. "It was a crime if you got pregnant out of wedlock - you was mud" and the consequences were dire; "if a girl got into trouble, it was 'don't

darken my door again' ". Because "showpeople was always very strict on that - on their girls, very strict - you never saw any showgirls walking about with a 'bun in the oven' before they was married - no, never! " Parental oversight of recognized courtship was, as a consequence, "quite Victorian". Indeed, it could only begin"when the parents agreed"; "you had to ask her father's permission". In a close-knit community each youngster's family knew the history and repute of the other's; "we know what they have done .... or haven't done". Once blessed, the expectation of subsequent marriage was clear; "my mother wouldn't have you just going out with no girls - if you was going to get married, you got married and that was it". [10]

Few courtships were so easily conducted as the informant whose fiancee's family regularly travelled with his own. Given the showmen's normal travel patterns (see Chapter 8, pp. 192-196), infrequent meetings between illiterate lovers meant that use of third parties to convey verbal messages of affection were resorted to. The whereabouts of other families was usually known, so suitable couriers were easily identified; the practice was the mechanism by which news of forming relationships became common knowledge ensuring up-to-date knowledge of the eligibility of prospective partners to the unattached and also making philandery impossible. Major fairs served a social function in this way, while Sunday visits might be possible - "you'd know where they'd be" - if the distance was not too great. Otherwise it was a case of "waiting until we met" and contenting oneself with messages, even if only intermediately to "one of his family who might be there". The 'advance agent' of the circus might come in helpful to the young if he could be persuaded to note the number of a telephone box near to the next tober; then a call could be arranged for an agreed time. [11]

Even when a couple were betrothed "social rules precluded absolutely" their being alone together. Older brothers and sisters, themselves often newly-wed, were common chaperones but their sense of moral responsibility ensured close supervision. The past strength of this social convention may be measured by the fact that at the

interviews three younger couples were met with, whose own courtship took place during the decade of the nineteen-seventies, and who recalled they had never been alone together until their wedding night. One elderly showman, referring to the "terribly strict" times of his youth, was surely unfortunate in his experience of the chaperone system; "my father-in-law went everywhere with us". A short period of courtship under such impositions might be expected but the evidence was to the contrary. Influenced by family and economic considerations, plus the exigencies of travel patterns, showmen's courtships, it was agreed, generally lasted "a long time", even if one man's recollection of a six year wooing was exceptional. [12]

ii) Choice of Partner

When showmen "married among themselves", it confirmed the hope and expectation of all the society's parents. "They all marry in the business" said one interviewee, while another considered it the norm; "showmen marry showmen - we more appreciate that". In some families of as many as six or seven, all had married within the profession, although some had later left it for economic reasons such as during the difficult times of the nineteen-thirties, for example. Obviously, those brought up in the lifestyle, able to make a ready economic contribution according to it's peculiar demands, made suitable marriage partners. And the practice also avoided dissipation of the society's wealth by frequent admission of outside elements. The increasing number of 'sandscratchers' or seaside-based showmen since the Second World War also sought to marry within the enlarged showmen's world. They "always marry in", it was explained as they were, "after all, only fair people who've settled down". But one of the major reasons "they still like to come out at the 'back end' so their kids can be brought up as proper showmen" was that the youngsters could meet their peers at the large autumn gatherings and remain acceptable to them (see also Chapter 8, pp. 192 - 194). In this way, a number of the children of 'sandscratchers' have, through marriage, rejoined the full travelling lifestyle. [13]

During the heyday of the Victorian circus a large degree of inter-marriage occurred between circus families (see Chapter 4, pp. 61 - 63). Only with time would those who joined the circus,

usually from the fairground, see their children admitted to the charmed circle of highly eligible spouses. The proprietors of menageries were included in the select range of families where marriage, as for the wealthiest fairground showmen, served to cement business and economic alliances. Into the twentieth century such considerations still applied but it was the growing separation of the circus from the fairground which tended to keep the former group somewhat exclusive. Nevertheless, most markedly in the years since 1945, the continued decline in the number of circuses has resulted, if 'outsider' marriages (see below) were to be avoided, in an increased willingness to countenance unions with the fairground people.[14]

There was some disagreement among the showmen interviewed as to the frequency with which showmen married gypsies, on a par with the divergent views of a possible gypsy identity (see Chapter 3, pp. 29 - 31). One or two said "a lot" had inter-married, while others thought only "a few" had joined the showmen. The claim by Tim Norman, in 1920, that his fortune telling wife, Rachel was "a member of the famous Lee family of English gypsies", may have been due to a pardonable desire to increase business.But to support the claim of frequent alliances between the two groups, one elderly interviewee referred to a gypsy family of his acquaintance; "most of their girls have married showmen". At the other extreme was the Riding Master who thought it better to marry a 'flattie' than "a pikey girl". His reason was the latter's alleged inability to adapt to showmen's work, "they get embarassed to come out here and mind a stall".[15]

iii) 'Outsider' Marriages

Just as the gypsy families had a limited number of 'gorgio' ancestors, so among the large families common to showmen a few 'flattie marriages' had always been the rule. In many cases, to avoid a higher degree of overcrowding in the business than was alleged to have occurred, in the years after the Second World War for example (see Chapter 6, pp.129 - 131), those who married 'flatties', despite parental objections, not infrequently left the travelling life.

Showmen interviewed generally admitted, especially among the larger families, that the odd one or two had married and settled down to a sedentary existance.[16]

It had not always been so; perhaps up to the First World War, in the case of a 'flattie marriage' "they automatically brought them into the business". In the Victorian era such instances were rare; in Sanger's clan it was "severely frowned upon" and two of the showmen interviewed knew of grandparents who had entered the business in this way; the families had "not been very pleased" and "not taken too kindly to it at first". Though acknowledging that, during the twentieth century, a number of show people had wedded outsiders, the practice continued to meet with widespread disapproval; "we didn't like it - didn't like it at all", several showmen agreed. When the newly-wed 'flattie' joined the showmen "it was hard for them". The new-comer was regarded as an "amateur" and for many years "you could tell the difference somehow" because "if they're not brought up to it, then that's it - they don't settle down, do they ?" Some showmen were more charitable and gave the tyro a chance; "it depended on what they could do". But even so, acceptance was gradual, "after a long while they're accepted - but that's only if they're good". Undoubtedly 'flattie marriages' became more common after the Second World War. Whereas "it was more of a sin years ago - but now it ain't". Nevertheless, some showmen insisted, newcomers to the lifestyle were "not welcomed really" and admitted to being "cagey about them at first".[17]

Though showmen might have been prepared to accept a 'flattie' "if he was a straightforward chap", entering the traveller's world was more difficult for the male; "specially if it's a man - if a travelling woman marries an outsider". Largely because the necessary skills "weren't born into 'em", work demands posed the greatest hurdles to be overcome : ".... it's another story if you marry a 'flattie' boy and he's got to come in and learn the Guild part of it and the building up and the lorry part of it and where he's going next and what he's got to do next .... it's another story - it's very hard". Not surprisingly, therefore, it was more common for showmen to

marry 'flattie' girls and bring them into the traveller's world. The incoming brides were initially expected only to perform domestic roles not too different from their past experience; "the girls that come into this way of life, probably it's a bit easier for them, if they've got a good husband, because all they're expected to do, a 'flattie' girl starting off, is the washing up and the shopping and keeping clean and that - and gradually easing into it". Few showmen, however, would have supported the view of one elderly man, "some of their girls have turned out to be better than what some of the travelling girls have". [18]

Though the evidence suggested that 'flattie' marriages became more common during the period with which this work is concerned, actual numbers could not be easily established as many showmen were naturally reluctant to acknowledge 'outsider' elements in their family. "It didn't happen very often", insisted one interviewee while another dismissed the matter with "there was a few ...." There was significance perhaps in the fact that only the younger generation were prepared, at the time of the interviews, to admit "there's been more outsiders lately" and 'flattie' marriages occurred "now more than ever". Among the people spoken to in 34 interviews as shown in Appendix 1 (pp. 375-377) only one man acknowledged that he was an 'outsider'. Showmen themselves pointed to some reasons for the increase in 'flattie' marriages; 'sandscratchers' children had more opportunity to socialize with others due to a very limited travel season and the growth in the possession of regular winter quarters by a majority of showmen has had the same effect, especially as the children returned regularly to the same local schools. Showmen's attitudes to 'flattie' intruders was well illustrated by one wealthy Riding Master on the occasions of his children's marriages; his two sons received major rides as wedding presents but the daughter and her 'flattie' husband had to wait for some years for theirs. [19]

iv) The Wedding

Elderly showmen remembered that in their youth it had long been the custom for weddings to take place "wherever they happened

to be at the time". Examples were of marriages at Portsmouth and Battersea, in each case near fairs attended by both bride's and groom's families. Another instance was of a wedding in Epsom where showmen, many of them relatives,had gathered for the large 'Derby' fair on the downs. Marriages during the summer were usually arranged for a Monday or Tuesday, as, except for a few charter fairs, these were days when the fair often did not open. Saturday, at any time of the year, was shunned for weddings - as it also was for funerals (see Chapter 12, pp. 339-342) - although informants could not say why. The trend in the twentieth century has been for weddings to increasingly take place during the winter months. As this was the time when incomes were at their lowest, friends and relatives could give the time to travel over considerable distances to attend the nuptials without loss of earnings. By 1939 it was the case that weddings "usually took place in the winter". [20]

The trend was closely connected with the movement towards acquiring regular winter stopping places. The church or, more frequently as the century progressed, the registry office near to the winter quarters became the regular venue for the family's weddings. Prior to the First World War the majority of the society's weddings took place in church, usually Church of England though "any church" in the locational sense would do. More recently, and certainly since 1945, "for most of them it's the registry office". Whether the ceremony was religious or civil, the movement to winter time allowed the wealthy Riding Master to give a grand send off to his daughter. "The weddings in show business was just out of this world", one such daughter fondly recalled. They were "almost Victorian in their splendour and significance", the latter referring to the economic and social statements which the display represented to the multitude attending. [21]

Clandestine unions were once not unusual among showmen however, though these have tended to become less common. One showman recalled that, in the summer of 1936, he had secretly married and then continued to travel with his family till the end of the season. Only then did he tell his parents, "it was a case of just tie the knot and that was it". More frequent was the straightforward

elopement; "he came for our Mary Ann and they eloped. Mary put a bundle out of the back window of the wagon and they scarpered .... " [22]

v) The Newlyweds

Upon marriage the couple set up their own domestic unit. Incidentally, only very rarely did an unmarried son or daughter do so; separate domestic units were occasionally found in the case of bachelors whose parents had died but single women almost invariably attached themselves to a married brother or sister, though sometimes having their own van for sleeping quarters. Most newly-weds had to be content with a second-hand vehicle - in the nineteen thirties often an old bus which also did duty as an equipment carrier. Some "got the money together" for themselves while the deposit on a new van with one of the specialist manufacturers was sometimes received as a wedding present. Though "the parents used to help 'em", few could purchase a new home outright; hire purchase arrangements with the makers was most usual. Domestic necessities for the home were given as wedding presents. But only among the wealthiest of Riding Masters was it possible for "one side to buy or give a caravan .... and the other a ride". [23]

Earning power - and, since the introduction of the 'two year' rule, the fairground sites (see Chapter 6, pp. 132-134) - was given to the newly-weds by both bride and groom's parents, according to their family resources. One Riding Master explained that, as with the provision of a home, "it depended on the father and mother on either side .... on what they'd got". For the majority something far more modest provided their initial married income. Probably a simple stall, the parents "had no one to mind it now you're getting married and, anyway, you probably regarded it as yours already". If the minor item a young showman had "looked after" was not forthcoming - it might, for example, be needed as a training ground for younger siblings - then "you had to make your own stalls, more or less". The stalls which elderly interviewees recalled beginning married life with were often very modest and provided only an equally modest income; coconut shies, hoop-la and darts stalls were specifically mentioned. Occasionally, the newly-weds divided their time between

the minor piece of equipment they owned and a parent's major, more labour intensive item. Income could, therefore, be partly self-earned and partly waged from the parent. This was perhaps the nearest the modern fairground came to the circus practice where junior married members of the family partnership, again always domestically independent, received a smaller share of the unit's takings.[24]

With the stalls or, very occasionally, rides passed on, fathers "let you have some of their grounds". "He transferred the rights of it over to his son" under the terms of the 'two year' rule. Effectively a form of 'property' almost as important to the young couple as the piece of equipment itself, the gift was usually expressed in terms such as, for example, "I'll transfer thirty feet of ground at Salisbury fair". "Between both families" the pair, typically, "may start off with just seven or eight fairs". The pages of World's Fair then came into their own, the offers of vacant space being taken up so that, if they proved profitable, a secure round was gradually built up. There was no firm rule as to with which family the newly-weds travelled, rather it depended upon what, in terms of equipment and sites, had been given them. Gradually, they might build up a more independent annual itinerary and then their own motive power became essential. At first owning only small and light stalls, for example, most began by being dependent upon either parents or Riding Master for haulage; in the days of steam engines (see Chapter 8, pp.201 - 202), in particular, ample power was available. But whatever showmen's circumstances, the objective of the parents, when their offspring married, was the same; "the boy's family's taken care of him and the girl's family's taken care of her, so between them they got a good start".[25]

Canal Boatmen

i) Adolescence and Courtship

Control of children remained close during adolescence; "more people was more strict than on the land". Suspicion of contact with outsiders was common. "If they thought they was talking to a stranger,

they was after them", applied to both sexes, but the girls freedom was most circumscribed; "a lot of 'em were very strict, them what had a lot of daughters". The young adults' range of social contacts was generally limited to their own and courtship, when it began, was only with parental consent; "if their father thought you was alright". A public gesture such as to offer the intended a drink at a "boater's pub" would, if accepted, confirm the relationship and ensure it became common knowledge. "If a young man takes a girl to the pictures, he is courting her and no other girl from that moment may be treated to more than a 'how d'you do' and a nod". When some of the young, female volunteers during the Second World War (see Chapter 5, pp. 109-111) asked the way ahead, they were perplexed that the fellows on the passing boat would only answer with signs. They afterwards learnt that all three boys of the family were courting and, knowing they were being closely watched, were "terrified in case of a hint of infidelity". The boatmen's society ensured against the latter; "courting could never be clandestine .... behaviour was hung out like a flag for all to see". Pre-marital sex was, each couple knew, unacceptable, "because I'd get killed and so would she". The greater freedom allowed males was implied by a young man who, when questioned on the subject of sexual experience, replied "nor likely to until I'm married .... leastwise not with a boater". "What you learned", it was generally agreed, "you learned yourself after you was married".[26]

Conduct of a courtship clearly presented problems when "you might be three or four months - you might be half a year" without seeing each other. However as most boatmen, other than a few Number Ones, usually kept regularly to the same routes, verbal messages could be left with toll or lock keepers, the other canal employees thus helping to spread word of the boatmen's relationships and so aiding the latter society's defensive measures to protect it's integrity. Letters might also be sent on the young man's behalf by "a boater as can write", though both writing and reading was most usually done by an 'outside' confidante, often a public house landlord. If the fiancee was known not to be too far distant, the bicycle kept on the boat for someone to go ahead to prepare the locks, came in

useful for perilous evening excursions along the towpath. Wharves where loading and unloading regularly took place provided an opportunity for courtship, one such place in Birmingham becoming known as "the pictures" from a much frequented nearby leisure facility. The cinema enjoyed a great popularity with young boaters in the nineteen-thirties; it was something in which the illiterate could share, a new world which helped to lead to the breakdown of the community's isolation. The young cinema-goers could be seen as in a transitory stage, poised between two cultures. [27]

Quite late in the freight carrying era on the canals, perhaps as recently as the years of the Second World War, as more young people acquired some degree of literacy, it became the practice for messages to be chalked on the balance beams of lock gates. Some relationships were even confirmed in this way; a chalked response told one young man, "her people say it's all right to go ahead .... and I'll know". Soon "the many chalkings on the balance beam" indicated the wide acceptance of the custom. How long messages passed to and fro between the engaged couple, by whatever means, remained difficult to establish. Given the difficulties of conducting a courtship and the overcrowding on many family boats, the claim that boatmen "married young" seems tenable. Others suggested, however, that it depended upon how soon a boat became available from the employing companies in which to set up home. In a declining industry and against the vagiaries of trade conditions, the time which a young couple might wait could vary considerably. [28]

ii) Choice of Partner

Within the boatmen's society it was recognized that some families were "better class" than others. Although the term was not elaborated upon, the undesirability of certain families providing marriage partners led to intervention; "we used to try and persuade 'em not to" enter into wedlock with such. "Some people drinked (sic) a lot and we used to say you don't want to mix with them", was an objection not infrequently made. Having established a degree of selectivity, however, marriage partners were "almost invariably" found within the boatmen's ranks. "You knew all the people on the cut"

and so "you married Mr. 'So-and-so's' daughter". After twenty years of service one Canal Inspector had "yet to come across any of them who have come on the water from any other occupation". [29]

Marriages to outsiders did, nevertheless, sometimes occur. Often "it was the other people", that is, the landsmen who objected, mainly because of the boatmen's low social standing (see Chapter 3, pp. 44-45). On the boatmen's side it was believed only "someone off the land with pretty exceptional qualities" could make the transition; it was "very rare they married town people .... (because) .... they didn't think they could do anything else". One elderly boatman knew of three cases of "outsider weddings" and in each case it was of a man who married a woman "off the land", bringing her into the community where she was viewed with some suspicion until she had proved herself as a boating wife. Much less common were instances of boatman's daughters marrying landsmen, due to the greater control of the girl's socializing, and when such marriages occurred the woman invariably left the cut. A specific instance, in the early years of this century, was of a boatman's aunt who married a policeman. A major reason for a girl not seeking a husband from among the sedentary population, even if she had been free to do so, was that most boatmen would have regarded her as 'lost' to the society. Once settled, she would be regarded as an 'outsider' and contact with her family would be minimal. This probably explained why many clung so tenaciously to a seemingly unattractive lifestyle, only leaving it, whether before or after marriage, under extreme economic duress. [30]

iii) The Wedding

Of Buckby, in Northamptonshire, it was said, "here they tie up and marry one another". There were, in fact, a number of "recognized places" which were frequently used for the occasion, where some families had canal-side cottages to which generations of the elderly retired (see Chapter 12, pp. 342-343) and where christenings and funerals also took place. South of Birmingham, other centres were Braunston, Coventry, Stoke Bruerne and Fenny Compton, this last situated a few miles north of Banbury. Examples in the

north-west were Harecastle, near Stoke-on-Trent and Whitchurch, Salop.[31]

In the "old days", boatmen recalled, weddings were "always at churches and all white". Only during the Second World War did registry offices enjoy the boatmen's patronage. At that time, of course, circumstances dictated more hastily arranged and less pretentious ceremonies, away from the traditional places. Two interviewees were married at that time in the offices at Exall, near Coventry and at Uxbridge, Middx. The "slap up do's" of pre-1939 years were widely remembered, when boatmen "didn't care how much they spent". A wedding was one of the few times that travelling was either interrupted or a special non-paying journey made. The bride might leave for church from the above-mentioned canal-side cottage and after the ceremony all present adjourned to a suitable public house. There rarely displayed finery was shown off and a great deal of money passed over the bar. Most meetings with family or friends on the cut were extremely short for economic reasons so a wedding served wider social and familial purposes. Even the dogs - kept largely for poaching activities - appeared "beribboned" on the great day.[32]

iv) The Newlyweds

As stated above, the great problem for newly-weds throughout the first half of the twentieth century was to obtain a pair of boats and then sufficient cargoes to provide a tolerable living. Where young, single men had been able to obtain a pair of boats due to the employers' willingness to recognize 'captains' at the age of sixteen, a married home was readily available, though this usually entailed a younger brother moving off before long as the craft could not adequately support additional adults. Difficulties in obtaining a home were exacerbated as the children of 'Number Ones' also sought work as employees. The repute of the newly-weds' families became critical; the employers could afford to pick and choose, when they had craft available. Children of known "clean, quick, sober and efficient" boatmen were easily identified as "even the managers of the companies .... they knew everybody". The employers "found

everything for you but you had to look after it", one boatman said, meaning the boats themselves and all the equipment necessary to work them, even including the horse at one time, the companies stopping a sum from wages to pay for it. The newly-weds had to supply domestic necessities, ranging from crockery to bedding, which came largely as gifts from the wedding guests. Although one commentator believed "the man tends to leave his own family and to associate more closely with his wife's relatives", the difficulties increasingly faced in a declining industry meant taking the opportunities available and foregoing the practices and preferences of previous generations. Consequently, few could claim one family's continuity of four generations all 'captains' in Fellowes, Moreton and Clayton's fleet. [33]

Resumé

The degree of isolation of all traveller children from peers among the sedentary society, continued right through to marriage and was, therefore, a self-perpetuating feature of all three groups. As part of this phenomenon, courtship was closely monitored by parents. Space considerations in the home and the consequent lack of privacy heavily influenced attitudes to sexual matters, during both puberty and courtship, economic considerations additionally becoming particularly acute during the latter. Only among gypsies, however, were courtships consistently short due to low capital requirements and the ease with which a young couple might 'set up home'. The same early marriage was once common among the rural labouring classes and there also it was an effective disincentive to exploring new social or economic environments. The problems of setting up home experienced among young canal boat couples revealed the essentially dependent role of a mainly 'employee' group, in view of which cultural preferences were less developed (as, for example, patri - or matri-linear travel patterns). [34]

All groups preferred marriage partners to come from within their own society. As might be expected it was least common to have members of the sedentary population join the diminishing numbers of canal boatmen but only in relation to them did the principal rejection

of 'outsider' marriage not come from within the group. The cultural strength and sense of identity of gypsies and showmen was reinforced, as affluence increased, by a desire to protect the society's wealth, especially among the well organized showmen. Rejection of 'gorgio', 'flattie' or'landsmen' consorts was conveniently justified on the grounds of an alleged inability to conform to the lifestyle's demands. That such marriages occurred and, indeed, had long done so among gypsies and showmen was effectively concealed by a refusal to countenance the concept of the 'half-caste'; among boatmen the problem hardly arose. One showman spoke for all land travellers when referring to the children of 'mixed' marriages; "they're always accepted, oh, yes, definitely", provided, of course, they were brought up to absorb all aspects of the way of life.[35]

The actual marriage ceremonies of gypsies and showmen both ranged from elopement to occasions of considerable display and expenditure. During the first half of the twentieth century elopement was commoner among the former and the grander weddings for the latter, reflecting the respective society's level of affluence. It was also quite possible that showmen generally learned to love - and appreciate the value of - ostentation from the wealthier of Victorian circus people who saw the advantages of the public impression thus created. Boatmen, on the other hand, always seem to have made a family and social event of a wedding, despite the group's widespread poverty. Also, church ceremony was important among the canal population - perhaps a folk-memory of not-too-distant land-based customs - when such formality was far from universal for the other two groups. The breakdown of long-established usages was revealed by all travellers' widening acceptance, after 1939, of the practice of registry office marriage. Then, after the Second World War, an increased degree of inter-marriage with the sedentary population suggested a further reduction in the gypsies and showmen's isolation.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LIFE PROGRESSION III : ADULT LIFE AND DOMESTIC MATTERS

Gypsies

i) The Family

a) The Male Role

In the days when "more than half" of gypsy men appeared to "follow no business", the economic role of the adult males appeared to be subordinate to that of the womenfolk. Closer observation showed the men to spend much of their time in horse-dealing and also to possess various craft skills, such as basket and peg making. Though the sedentary population saw little of the men's occupations, it was undoubtedly the case that they were widely practiced, if languidly, passing the hours at camp sites until the womenfolk returned. Among the tribe there was no formal hierarchy. If a dominant personality emerged at a gypsy gathering or in an extended family, avoidance was easy if the authority was unwelcome. But within the nuclear family the father was overtly dominant, according to most commentators, despite the matrilinear domestic and travel patterns apparent following marriage (see Chapter 10 pp. 273-274). The dominance was possible at a time when women's hawking activities provided the main source of income, because there was "no rigid demarcation between work and home". Gypsy men were jealous of their role, regarding wives, children and chattels as their property. This and the frequent recourse to drinking, violence, bullying and boasting were all designed to secure male supremacy in the face of the women's domestic and economic strength. The male use of physical violence within the family, though still not unknown, is believed to have declined, particularly in the period since the Second World War. [1]

Certain areas were recognized as the male's domain and decisions related to them were made "formally by men". Decisions of where and when to move camp, and purchase or replacement of the home or motive power, were the major items in this category. Like

the lorries which replaced them, horses were a male preserve, although women's knowledge of the animal was certainly as great; "mother could buy one but she wasn't allowed to by my father - she used to make the running, but father would finish the business off". The growth of the scrap business, it's physically demanding nature and it's close relationship to the gypsies' modern form of motive power (see Chapter 7 & 8, pp. 145 - 149& 186-187) ensured the male identification with the new, major income source; developments which also had repercussions upon the traditional family role (see below). What remained unchanged from earlier days was the gypsy work-ethic as conceived by the menfolk. Work was seen only as a means to an end, that is, to earn 'enough' to meet immediate needs whereas, as the gypsies saw it, the typical gorgio "lived to work". The apparently undisciplined nature of the gypsy scrap-dealers work, in reality true to the men's dislike for regular hours or prolonged effort, has done much to underline the conflict of ethics between traveller and non-traveller in the twentieth century. [2]

b) The Female Role

"The mother is usually the main supporter of the family, and it is the women of the family who do the lion's share of the work"; thus the traditional role of gypsy women as it had been, probably for centuries, right up to the Second World War. The gypsy woman hawked and told fortunes (see Chapter 7, pp. 147- 148), from which she saw respite only when she was ill or gave birth. Yet despite her economic power, she also knew the male's prerogatives; "a gypsy woman took no part in her husband's dealings". Within the home, all duties and responsibilities tended to devolve upon the womenfolk. The cleaning of the home and it's immediate surroundings, the supply and upkeep of clothing and household linen were regarded as women's tasks, as was care of the children. Women were also solely responsible for daily food provisioning, it being seen as a great virtue in a wife to be able to 'get by' on a minimum of cash. [3]

Despite the strength of her economic role as the family's major source of income, it was not unusual for a wife to be beaten if she failed to carry sufficient food stocks or other domestic

requirements. Indeed, precisely because the gypsy woman was the main earner, such failure was seen as the more reprehensible. Though within the nuclear family women were the victims of violence, they also "prided themselves on an ability to fight". Lacking any recourse to (or faith in) gorgio systems of law and justice, disputes relating, for example, to property, theft or stopping places were settled within the community. If compromise, evasion and verbal recriminations failed to produce a satisfactory conclusion then, as a last resort, a physical decision was sought. In this escalating range of options, including the last, in which man and wife invariably presented a united front to the adversary, "women, as often as men, played an important role in settling disputes".[4]

c) Changes in the Female Role

The change in the role of gypsy women from being the main source of income for their families has already been alluded to, but is worth re-emphasizing as the trend to a subordinate economic role was diametrically at variance with the experience of women generally in the larger society. The beginning of the gypsy woman's loss of her former economic place began during the inter-war period and reached it's conclusion in the years after the Second World War; that is, at precisely the same time as sedentary sisters were gaining in economic power and independence. This does not suggest, of course, that gypsy women have had no economic role to play in more recent times but the change came at a time when the break-down of the isolation of gypsy society led to other changes from which women benefitted. Some increase in school attendance (see Chapter 9, pp. 225- 227) and the presence of (battery operated) radio and, later, television in the home, gave the opportunity of observing other female roles tending to make gypsy women less tolerant of violence or otherwise being subservient in the domestic setting.[5]

ii) Family Contact and Support

The "highly cohesive .... (extended) .... family units" of gypsies were a defensive measure necessary for a people living a precarious existence and merely "tolerated on the margins of ....

the housedwelling community". Mutual support, mainly within kin groups replaced the services of the gorgio majority, gypsies only towards the middle of the twentieth century taking advantage of welfare facilities as, for example, in the case of hospital childbirth (see Chapter 9, pp. 220-221). At times of illness, absence of the breadwinner (perhaps due to imprisonment) or old age, gypsies made special journeys in order to camp by the afflicted family and give practical and financial support. The adoption of children was also frequently due to the death or incapacity of the parents. Gypsy preference for marriages within a defined group was largely due to the wish to retain or re-inforce the supportive extended family network. The annual gatherings at recognized events served their purpose in this way, maintaining links with distant kin, informing relatives of changes in normal travel patterns and so on, all with the unspoken objective of maintaining the 'insurance' of mutual aid when required. Though various kin groups came into contact at certain horse fairs, for example, some extended families lighted upon a particular one as the special venue for all their scattered tribe. The fair at Brough Hill, Yorks, was of special significance to the Boswell's; "it was the meeting place of all our people". More frequent meetings were possible, of course, between relatives circulating in nearby areas and it was they who would be first turned to in an emergency. Regularity of travel patterns (see Chapter 8, pp. 182- 184) ensured that their whereabouts was known. Outside observers' lack of appreciation of the routine element of gypsy travel gave rise to the often expressed surprise at the rate at which news spread among travellers. It was in the gypsies' interest that all should co-operate in the quick spread of news; it gave the society cohesion and ensured a quick response when the need for kin support arose. Among a mainly illiterate group the spoken word was the only means of communication, even over longer distances, although use of the police was not unknown in extreme cases. Sylvester Boswell learned of the death of his mother in this way in the nineteen-twenties. With the tendency to officially controlled winter camp sites, often with a resident warden (see Chapter 8, pp. 184-186), the telephone has been increasingly used, since the Second World War

at least, to make initial contact with a member of the kin group within a given area.[6]

iii) Morality and Religion

George Smith referred to the gypsies as "heathenish tribes" but more sympathetic commentators recognized a basic, if ill-defined, belief in God. Some gypsies, particularly those in Scotland, considered early baptism of children desirable, while a majority, throughout the United Kingdom, put great emphasis upon Christian burial (see also Chapter 12, pp. 335 - 338). Only a very few gypsies, however, embraced a creed so thoroughly as one member of the Boswell clan who became an Evangelist and gave up his life in the funfair at Blackpool as he came to "consider it a wicked life". Irish tinkers alone among Britain's travellers appeared to embrace their Roman Catholicism seriously, at least while they remained in Ireland; that church's rites of baptism, marriage and burial were accorded their due respect. When the tinker families first arrived in some numbers in England after the Second World War, they were often contemptuous of the local travellers whom they regarded as "pagans". In reality it seems that even Irish tinkers had been merely conforming to the gypsy norm of professing the host country's dominant faith; once settled in England, though continuing to prefer the Roman Church for formal events, regular church-going among the adults rapidly fell away. For the vast majority of gypsies throughout the United Kingdom, superstition largely replaced religion, much importance being attached to events, certain objects, animals and words as portents. A number of deaths occurring in a family in a short space of time was certainly due to a curse and the report that a widow's hat had blown onto her husband's coffin at his funeral was a clear sign she was soon to follow him to the grave. It was significant that many omens related to death; the gypsies' religious beliefs, such as they were, revolved around the universal and very real dread of ghosts. Superstition and faith combined to provide the best protection; many gypsies carried a piece of bread at night, secure in the knowledge that "God's good grain" was a sure defence against the dead.[7]

Gypsies were generally more concerned, however, with behavioural considerations rather than moral abstractions in their concepts of right and wrong. Sexual conduct in marriage was an example, as one gypsy explained, "the priest says as how I'm living in martial (sic) sin but I've allus been faithful to my missus and she has to me". To ensure fidelity both husband and wife were expected to avoid being alone with an adult member of the opposite sex. Care was particularly important for women, gypsy society generally concurring that a "severe hiding" was warranted for any sign of sexual laxity. Marriage was seen as a permanent relationship and divorce rare. A slight increase in gypsy divorces has occurred since the Second World War and barrenness of a wife is no longer the only justification for ending a marriage as it once was. After marriage a greater freedom was allowed the gypsy male. In practice this often meant time spent in public houses; gorgio observers had long considered "strong drink is the bane of the .... (gypsies) .... life". There the men might be heard to indulge in coarse jokes and bragging about (gorgio) sexual conquests but this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that within their own society strict sexual moral standards were near universal.[8]

By the end of the nineteenth century it was recognized by some authorities that gypsies were "not particularly" criminal. Since 1945 the Police Federation has said their members were "less troubled by petty crime" committed by gypsies than some (unspecified) housedwelling groups. Undoubtedly scavenging of apparently unwanted items from time to time brought individual gypsies into conflict with the law; but as a whole, gypsies saw themselves as more sinned-against than sinning as the larger society whittled away their grazing and camping rights and the freedom to earn a living as they chose. They would no doubt have agreed with the anonymous eighteenth century writer of the doggerel verse :-

'Tis bad enough in man or woman
To steal a goose from off a common;
But surely he's without excuse
Who steals the common from the goose.[9]

But if poaching and the removal of the odd vegetable from the farmer's fields were regarded by gypsies as legitimate activities, "Standards of honesty among themselves .... (were) .... high". It was this double standard and the application of it's more negative aspects which earned the gypsies much disapprobation among gorgios - especially those who had been duped in some business transaction (see also Chapter 3, pp. 38 - 40). Gypsy horse-dealers, for example, were well-known as being "up to all the tricks of the trade". But whatever their dealings with the sedentary population, the gypsies saw nothing immoral in - and, indeed, greatly admired - the ability to profitably outwit the gorgio. An individual with sharp wits thus acquired status and the gypsies collectively relished tales of the besting of members of the larger society who, they knew, held them in contempt.[10]

iv) Home and Personal Hygiene

The need for cleanliness and order within the home due to the limitations of space was understood by the gypsies themselves and frequently commented upon by outside observers who had drawn premature conclusions from the disarray surrounding the travellers home, a contrast all the more marked as scrap-dealing became commoner. The care given to conditions within the home - whether tent, vardo or modern trailer - applied even when interior facilities and furnishings were primitive or sparse (see also Chapter 8, pp. 187- 192). Acute though gypsies aesthetic conceptions might be with regard to the home itself, they hardly extended beyond it. As suggested, the nature of modern work has aggravated the appearance of typical gypsy encampments but did not inaugurate the traveller's limited perceptions of external order. Since their post-Second World War influx, "Irish tinkers have .... (gained) .... a particularly bad reputation for leaving litter on their sites".[11]

Water supplies were always a problem, particularly of that sufficiently clean for food preparation (see below) and, to a lesser extent, for personal hygiene. Water carriers were specially kept for the purpose, latterly of a large and immaculately kept stainless-steel variety. Village water supplies were available or householders

might be applied to for water from private pumps or wells, but refusals were frequent. Then recourse was made to a river or stream if it appeared clean enough. Scarcity of water meant that hands and face were often only washed once a day and external dirt gypsies learnt to regard as "something that could be washed off easily rather than continuously". The bowl used for personal washing was of relatively low status being kept outside the home (see below) where both men and women washed, the women only withdrawing to the privacy of the van for the less frequent but more complete ablutions.[12]

v) Laundry

Water for clothes washing usually came from a stream, though cattle troughs were occasionally used if they seemed sufficiently clear. The weekly wash was normally done in a tin bath kept for the purpose; placed out of doors and supported on bricks, a wood fire was lit underneath the tub to boil the clothes. Even as late as after the Second World War washing was still usually done out-of-doors though from the nineteen-thirties onwards parafin or bottled-gas stoves began to provide the heat source. The preference for wood fires stemmed, of course, from the fact it could be scavenged. Most gypsy women did their laundry on Mondays, a reflection of house-dwellers' customs as the latter were preoccupied with the same chore and hawking rounds therefore yielded a poor response. Interestingly, in view of the taboos associated with women, for example, at child-birth and in the preparation of food (see Chapter 9, pp. 220-221 and below), gypsies in central Europe were known in the nineteenth century to wash the clothes of women, from puberty onwards, separately from those of the men. This custom does not, however, appear to have survived in this country into the twentieth century.[13]

vi) Toilet Facilities

Natural functions should always, according to gypsy custom, be performed at some distance from the home and camp site. Hedgerows and bushes provided the desired privacy and concealment. One of the reasons for early calls for special compounds for gypsies was the lack of sanitation at a time when housedwellers were coming to expect

some such facility. When official sites were provided, mainly post-1945, the communal facilities (including washrooms and laundry areas) were usually quickly vandalised. The problem was not, of course, peculiar to gypsy compounds but in their case the uncharacteristic behaviour was quite simply due to the fact that the provisions were not only unnecessary but, in the case of communal toilet facilities, were judged offensive. Unrealized by the planning authorities, gypsies continued to regard shared and indoor toilets "unhealthy". Toilet facilities in the home therefore remained taboo. Space considerations in even motor trailers was limited, so a combination of large families and chemical treatment of human waste, not surprisingly, led to no change in the gypsy preference for outdoor and relatively remote 'facilities'. When gypsies, since the Second World War, purchased caravans originally built for the sedentary population's leisure market, the closets fitted were never used and, usually, removed. In the few instances where gypsies ordered large, custom-built trailers it has remained extremely rare for any form of closet to be included.[14]

vii) Food

a) Preparation

The solid fuel stoves found in the traditional vardo and, in modernized form, in motor trailers (see Chapter 8, pp. 189- 192) were only "rarely" used for food preparation. All cooking was normally "done in the open, over a wood fire", individual gypsies remembering "Mother .... (always) .... used to cook outside". Sometimes, usually when coal was the fuel, a kind of brazier was contrived from a metal tank or old oil drum, over which a boiling pot was suspended. More traditionally-inclined or poorer gypsies still preferred the open wood fire even after the Second World War. By that time, however, indoor cookers were becoming established, fed by bottled gas cylinders; the change was encouraged by these amenities already being in place when gypsies bought second-hand vans intended initially for other markets. The preference for outdoor cooking survived the time when gypsies had no option in the matter, that is, it continued after the change from tents as the

normal dwelling. This was because the food was both prepared and eaten out-of-doors, mealtimes thus becoming the major daily social gatherings of the camp site when the day's work and events could be planned or reviewed. [15]

b) Crockery

Gypsies always placed great emphasis upon the possession of good quality china - and it's colour. "Mother's crockery was always of the very best", one recalled, "but she never used anything white .... and, yes, Crown Derby". Others agreed, "no well-regulated gypsy ever used white china", it is believed because white was the colour of mourning (see Chapter 12, pp. 335 - 338). Gypsies often had their own personal set of crockery and cutlery as it was not always washed after use. Except after the main meal of the day, if water was in short supply, items were only wiped. When the utensils were washed it was in a bowl kept specifically for this purpose. The bowl, with it's implications for the cleanliness of what was introduced into the body by the acts of eating and drinking, was of a higher status than the bowls used for washing oneself or clothing; unlike the latter it was, therefore, kept inside the caravan. It was of first importance that the bowls were not misused or served a dual function. When a gypsy, in more recent years, came into possession of a caravan with a sink already installed, it was often covered up out of use to avoid the risk. At the most, the sink might occasionally be used to accommodate the crockery or food preparation bowls, but it could not be associated with the bowls kept for other purposes. If for any reason the washing-up bowl was put to another use, it was regarded as contaminated and relegated to other duties. Similarly "a cup washed in water in which hands or face had been washed .... (was) .... regarded as dirty" and, being no longer fit for human use, was usually destroyed. Such was the fear of contamination, tea towels were kept apart from other items to be laundered; tea towels were themselves washed in the washing-up bowl. Strict adherence to cleanliness rituals associated with food were closely observed in strangers; failure to conform robbed them of the chance of social acceptance - a matter of some importance as explaining much resistance to official

gypsy sites since the Second World War; many objected to the close proximity of other caravan dwellers who were ignorant of such basic rules of hygiene and so obviously were not 'real travellers' at all. [16]

c) Menstrual Taboos

It was said, in 1944, "not so many years ago within the memory of many men and women now living, there was an elaborate system of taboos in force among English Gypsies and, though that system in all it's elaboration has died out, it would be a mistake to suppose that all the taboos have been discarded". No part of that system of taboos was more surrounded with secrecy than those related to menstruation, a recent female researcher still finding gypsy women reluctant to discuss the subject in the presence of their husbands. In connection with the ritual uncleanliness of women after childbirth (see Chapter 9, pp. 220-221), it was forbidden to touch kitchen utensils or prepare food for about a week although the prohibition was believed at one time to have lasted for up to four weeks. Such taboos were widespread among gypsies; those of the Balkans believed that a menstrual woman in crossing running water rendered it unfit to drink. By extension, in Britain, gypsies refused to eat or drink anything stepped over at any time by a woman, the receptacle itself also being contaminated and therefore discarded. At no time might "a menstruous woman .... cook food or touch food intended for a man". In the absence of direct information from gypsies, close observance of family routines has, on occasion, been resorted to and produced circumstantial evidence. In one case, husbands, whose usual role in domestic affairs such as food preparation was "minimal", were seen to do the cooking or make frequent forays to the local fish-and-chip shop at predictable intervals. [17]

viii) Animals

The animals with which gypsies were mainly concerned were horses and dogs. The significance of the horse, not only as a beast of burden, but as a symbol of gypsy culture, knowledge and ownership of which bestowed status upon the individual, has already been mentioned (see Chapter 7, pp. 145- 150). Piebald animals were always

particularly highly regarded but all horses, considered symbolically 'clean' and culturally acceptable, enjoyed a kind of privileged status among gypsies. The dogs invariably found near the tents and vans had a dual function, aiding poaching activities and serving as guard dogs. They were never, however, allowed into homes; dogs, being prone to biting and licking their bodies, offended the gypsy concept of internal cleanliness. Should an 'unclean' animal touch an item of crockery, then the latter, even if of value, had to be destroyed - although in contrast it has been facetiously said that a gypsy would happily share his plate with his horse! Cats, not surprisingly therefore, were particularly despised for their habits, the conflict between gypsy and gorgio ideas of hygiene crystallized in the habits of the one animal.[18]

Showmen

i) The Family

a) The Male Role

All showmen considered the male head of the nuclear family to be the "breadwinner" but only in the circus was the role of a male overtly dominant. Because of the hierarchical nature of the organization of larger circuses and the need for regular travel decisions (see Chapter 8, pp. 195-196), "all the big shows had an autocrat". Most showmen considered work was "the proper occupation for a man" and, at least among the poorer of them, acceptance of the challenge posed daily by the lifestyle was considered evidence of "character". Nevertheless, they did "not easily adapt to .... (the) .... regularities of a nine-to-five life", being used to the pre-industrial pattern of periods of intense activity followed by longer periods of languor. Arrived on site, the men "didn't do much .... not by day once they've got built up". Then conversation was usually confined to matters concerned with show life, outside subjects generally holding little of interest to the ordinary showman as there was "no real distinction between his work and his leisure".[19]

Horses and all things mechanical were regarded as essentially the men's concern and responsibility. Women of course often drove

horses and did a larger share of the driving when lorries came into general use but the steam engines were more exclusively a male preserve, probably because, being capable of a superior work load, there were fewer of them. The work of putting-up and taking-down, although aided by women, was always overseen by the men who shouldered the greater part of the physical effort required. As in the case of the men's role being identified with the horses and machinery, the need for sheer muscular strength, of course, largely provides the explanation. It does not, however, at first sight explain why travel decisions came within the male purview until it is remembered that in the days before the 'two-year rule' (see Chapter 6, pp. 131- 132) gaining one's place at the fair could also be a matter of brute force. Physically demanding and unpleasant tasks connected with the larger animals also fell to the men. When an elephant died on the road, the local police force and farm labourers helped the circus men to dig a grave. Unable to dig a hole sufficiently large quickly enough and the local butcher declining to help, "we had to get to work and cut Paul (the elephant) to pieces outselves .... it took us four days". [20]

b) The Female Role

The unity of home, work and leisure made it inevitable that women should play an active and integral part in the fair and circus. Though there were certain jobs with which men were associated, women had a supportive role in them. For example, putting-up was men's work but women helped "not with the machines, but the side stalls". This meant women sharing in the intensive work spells, often late at night and in all weathers. And when the fair was open, of course, wives were expected to be "outside .... minding the stall" (see also Chapter 7, pp. 150 - 155). [21]

All things domestic were regarded as the women's domain, even while she was engaged in her public role, which explained why "the wagons .... (were placed) .... behind your own stall", if at all possible. Shopping gradually tended to become a bigger chore for women as changes in retailing led to fewer tradesmen calling upon the incoming fair or circus in search of custom (see Chapter 7, pp. 150 - 155). Preparation of food was solely the wives' concern as was

the laundry; both these spheres frequently included providing for employees (see Chapter 7, pp. 164 - 167). Mealtimes therefore implied cooking for considerable numbers and the food had to be ready on time, to fit in with the putting-up, taking-down and public opening arrangements; precise mealtimes were, of course, particularly important in a circus putting on more than one performance a day. The routine invariably included a late meal, family and employees requiring a substantial supper after public closing. As part of the domestic work, it also fell to the women to make costumes for performers, latterly of course only in the circus side of the business since the demise of fairground booths and the dancing girls 'up front'. In view of the workload, it was not surprising that the loss of supportive daughters through marriage was not welcomed. "Mother liked to have the girls around her", not least to help mind younger children (see Chapter 10, pp. 274 - 283) while she attended to other duties. Even when she was working while the fair was open, there was no respite from maternal responsibilities. Showmen were adamant about this aspect of the woman's role; the "wife's place was to bring the family up". [22]

Business and money matters were largely the responsibility of the women, only in the case of the circus was it less so, as incompatible with the place of the male autocrat. The roles of husband and wife were well summed up by one showman, who said, "My wife, she's my treasurer and secretary .... she's the banker, always done the business while I'm outside". Others, when interviewed, similarly recalled advising anyone who approached them on business matters, "you see her in there, she's the governor - she'll tell you whether or no" and "see the missus, she'll pay you". The place of women in pay boxes at the fair and circus and the greater importance attached to the education of girls are thus explained. "Very few" women, one circus proprietor claimed, for his aspect of showmen's work, had not at least since the Second World War acquired the degree of literacy necessary to deal with the burgeoning bureaucracy unwelcome to all the profession. The necessity of getting someone to read all the incoming mail - a task which usually befell the village postmaster - and the inability to reply increasingly provided the motivation,

incidentally strengthening the place of women in the showmen's society. Control of finances brought another job for women; they had to go out to buy - and decide how much should be spent on - the prizes to be won on the stalls.[23]

Playing a full part in the activities of the showmen's lengthy working day, sometimes starting as early as 5.00.a.m. if very many miles were due to be covered and "lucky" to be in bed by midnight when she had washed up after the men's supper, a number of the showmen interviewed acknowledged that "a showman's wife had a harder job than her husband". "On the 'go', all the time" according to one man, another's wife confirmed, "the women worked very hard - I must say that". Just what went into the "hardest job" of the women was explained at length, "the wife's always done all the cleaning up, the cooking and all that with the children .... in fact, my wife works harder than what I do. Sometimes she feeds fourteen of us - fourteen breakfasts, fourteen dinners - then she's got to be outside ready for work at six o'clock".[24]

c) Changes in the Female Role

There were from time to time, instances of women assuming both male and female roles, usually due to early widowhood, just as happened in the larger society, thus proving that under unfavourable circumstances, some women at least were fully capable of the wider duties. One showman said of his widowed mother, proprietress of a scenic railway, "if she said that wouldn't be done, that wouldn't be done". When the matriarch of the Paulo family died, in 1949, the circus closed down, none of the next generation being willing to shoulder the burden. There was little doubt that "the women knew as much about the lorries and the putting-up and taking-down as the men" but only with the exigencies of war did they have the opportunity to display the abilities and so usurp traditionally male functions. One elderly interviewee recalled an instance from the First World War; when his father was killed in France, his mother and grandmother co-operated to continue the family business. At the outbreak of war in 1939 it was again anticipated that "the old 'uns and the women"

would have to carry on. When hostilities ended the part played by women was recognized; "our womenfolk did much to keep the flag flying - they steered engines, took fares" and did a lot else not previously considered women's work. One lady was proud of her mechanical prowess, learned perforce in her husband's absence, "I could tell the sound of a lorry, I could tell if it wasn't going right - I knew if it was a 'big end' knocking or what". Particularly after the Second World War, women continued to perform the various tasks, mainly due to economic pressures. Full employment and high labour costs meant "we cut down on staff", women filling the breach; "they never used to help build-up the machines, but they do today". [25]

ii) Family Contact and Support

"We go from place to place and carry news like that", explained one showman. Thus each fair served it's social function in the dissemination of information. Obviously the larger ones which, being more profitable, brought together showmen from a wider area had a larger part to play in this respect too. King's Lynn fair, for example, one of the earliest of the season, had a special function as a "meeting place of the clans" after the lull in the exchange of news (and gossip) during the winter months. Once the annual round began, each family knew "near enough" where kin and friends were at a given time should the need occur. The lack of variation in each year's travels made this possible and also explained why changes were advertised in the World's Fair (see Chapter 8, pp. 192-196). The less routine movements of the circus accentuated the need to advise kinfolk, often on the fairground circuits; it was both an unspoken offer of help and an insurance should the need of it arise. [26]

If they were not too distant, during the summer travel season, Sunday was set aside for visits to family and friends. Even when travelling within a given area it might happen that actual meetings between quite close relatives only occurred at one or two of the larger fairs - and then opportunities for conversation were probably limited due to commercial pressures. When the need to contact someone at short notice arose, the problem of locating them was greater before the general introduction of the 'two year rule' limited the likelihood of frequent changes (see Chapter 6, pp. 131 - 134). Then, in order to

make contact, one interviewee explained, "I'd go to the nearest fair and I'd say 'where do you think so-and-so is'.... somebody would know". If a personal visit was still impossible a telegram might be sent but among the illiterate the former course was naturally preferred; public transport was used in emergencies while to "hire a bicycle" was another solution. Only in extreme cases of urgency over distances otherwise impossible to span quickly enough was resort made to the police. Though they were often regarded as agents of 'flattie' harassment, the general reluctance to involve the police stemmed mainly from the belief that messages of a personal nature should be conveyed by kin. [27]

The examples mentioned by showmen at the interviews covered the support given to various age groups as well as at times of emergency. In the former category was the case of an orphaned child "more or less" brought up by a great uncle and aunt, while for the elderly themselves much support was given (see Chapter 12, pp. 338 - 339). In one case a maiden aunt was invited to travel with younger relatives and in another, an elderly couple acknowledged other showmen "were so good to us" in providing their transport needs in recent years. The way in which showmen generally rallied round those in need was recalled in the case of a family who, around 1930, lost all their equipment in a fire. At that time fire insurance cover was unknown but, albeit in somewhat reduced circumstances, the family concerned were on the road again very quickly. Replacement home and stalls were contributed towards by other showmen, most unrelated. "They'd always help one another", a mutual recognition of vulnerability; "up to the war (i.e. 1939), nobody had anything .... so you was all in the same boat". The picture of universal poverty was no doubt exaggerated but the degree of it among showmen was sufficient to ensure that the better off were constantly reminded of what misfortune might bring to them. Though the unity of showmen did not, of course, completely break down, especially in face of pressures from the outside world, increasing affluence and materialism after the Second World War brought discord. In 1947, the Showmen's Guild's London area secretary reported 110 cases of complaints filed against other members, as against only 36

the previous year. No doubt post-war pressures played a part but, in 1952, the Guild was still appealing for loyalty and greater unity. An unfavourable comparison was drawn with the spirit evinced by showmen fifty years earlier. The complainant was clearly mystified, failing to perceive the very reason for the loss of co-operation was that "life was so much easier in many ways". [28]

iii) Morality and Religion

Most showmen were nominally Church of England in their religious allegiance but, according to one authority, a large number of purely circus families were Roman Catholic. Rarely, however, did faith extend to regular church attendance even among those who claimed to be "very religious". "I say me prayers every night and all that but I just don't go to church" said one elderly lady, and another agreed, "We don't go to church but we are God-fearing people". High standards of behaviour were of greater importance than church-going to most showmen; consumption of alcohol, gambling and card-playing were often not countenanced in the home and, in the case of one martinet, smoking as well. Swearing was rarely heard in the home or in front of women but, like the other activities frowned upon in the domestic setting, a greater laxity was allowed the men on the not infrequent forays to the public house. Responsibilities towards the young and elderly were also taken very seriously. Non-compliance with the norms was, it was claimed, virtually unknown, "I don't suppose you've ever read they've ever been done for ill-treating their children - or their animals. I've never known anyone to be done for cruelty or anything like that". [29]

Standards of sexual morality were high throughout adult life. Showmen "enforce rigid rules" of conduct as "the majority .... are strait-laced". Any reference to sexual matters was normally forbidden except with the marriage partner. Coarse jokes near the family vans were likewise frowned upon in case they were overhead by a woman. The men "might tell a few jokes" over a pint at the 'local' but never was any sexual reference made to any of the society's females. Extra-marital affection was not tolerated; "you didn't touch anybody else's husband". If it was as much as suspected - " 'E's a bit sweet

there, ain't 'e ?" - all combined to oppose the implied threat to their community's order; "we'd be watching". Adultery was almost unknown, the penalties severe; "You knew in your heart as a man, if you did get up to anything or anything happened - you knew very well you might just as well leave the country because nobody on the fairground would speak to you. They'd call you every name under the sun .... and you'd be like an outcast". Not surprisingly, divorce was generally "unknown", or, on the odd occasions it occurred, "terrible". The rarity of divorce was, interestingly, attributed by one lady to poverty - "we had to cling to one another" - and the slight increase in it since 1945 to greater affluence. The disgrace of illicit union was, in one case recalled from before the Second World War, visited upon the children. Refused a divorce by the wronged wife, the showman's unwed partner "was blacked" by the other women; "you didn't mention her name", except in hushed tones and never in front of the children. Such was the shame of her illegitimacy, the daughter of the couple, "wouldn't get married until her father and mother were married". Only when her father's first wife died and her parents legitimately united, therefore, did she in turn feel free to marry.[30]

Extended family networks and detailed knowledge of many in the showmen's community provided their own controls; "Nearly everybody's related so you're frightened to say anything because you're talking about somebody you're related to" and "if somebody in your family's done good or bad during their lifetime, that's never forgotten - it's handed down generation to generation". Relationships between showmen were thus maintained at a high standard of rectitude and honesty, as were specifically business dealings with non-showmen, it being realized that an unfavourable reputation, once gained, would redound to everyone's disadvantage. No such scruples were entertained, however, in relation to the 'flatties' who came to the fair. Despite the efforts of the Showmen's Guild to eliminate dishonest practices, a certain sneaking admiration persisted for 'sharp practice'. By the twentieth century, public gullibility might no longer succumb to such deceptions as that practiced "at St. James's fair, Bristol in

1832 .... (when) .... an enterprising showman successfully exhibited a suitably shawen monkey as a fairy". Surviving into Edwardian times (and gleefully recalled) was a father's table-top "spinning game", a crude kind of roulette. This was adroitly manipulated by an unseen 'brake', in the form of a cloth tied around father's leg, acting on a corresponding but unseen wheel under the table. And, of course, the 'blind-eye' turned to the practice of 'tapping' as evidence of showmen's double-standards of honesty has been referred to already (Chapter 7, pp. 162 - 164). [31]

iv) Home and Personal Hygiene

"The showmen were very, very particular in their cleanliness"; this generalization was intended to cover the inside of the home, it's location and all aspects of personal hygiene - and in the consumption of food and drink. The need to be "very strict" within the home was attributed to it's size while the condition in which sites were left, whether the tober or winter quarters, was due in no small measure to the Showmen's Guild. It was realized that the reputation of the profession would be affected adversely if local authorities had to clean up after the showmen's departure and untidy winter quarters would add to the objections raised when applications were made for planning permission and so on (see Chapter 8, pp. 196 - 199). Journey times were not wasted; many a mother was remembered as "going along the road, she would scrub the floor, black lead the stove and clean all the caravan up". Some of those interviewed felt that improved facilities and larger homes had led to some laxity. Because inattention to order and cleanliness in the smaller homes led easily to squalor, "In the old days I think they used to worry more about hygiene than they do today". [32]

Clean water might be obtained from public supplies such as village water pumps. When stops were made on agricultural land, the farmer's supply was invariably made available. During the summer, as mains water supplies became commoner, application would be made to householders for the cans kept specifically for the purpose to be refilled, but "some would and others didn't want to know". In the absence of any more trustworthy source, water from "a nice clean

river" was made to do. The cans filled, "in the summer time .... (the boys then) .... used to have a bath .... " in the stream. Hot water for personal washing was most frequently obtained by boiling a kettle on the internal stove (see Chapter 8, pp. 203-208). The introduction of primus stoves and bottled gas appliances, mainly during the inter-war period provided an alternative source. In summer, the versatile steam engine was applied to. [33]

"Most of the men used to wash outside", the younger ones eschewing heated water as a sign of their masculinity. Personal modesty was not offended by public ablutions when "we was fetched up to always wash our feet and legs - never wash our body". Bathing for the great majority , however, was in the galvanized tub kept for the purpose and took place in complete privacy. An example of the typical prudery of showmen, though under rather different circumstances, was when one of the Purchase family in hospital, having been mauled by one of his lions, still resolutely refused to let nurses remove his clothing and would only do so himself when they had left the room. For anything more than washing hands, women invariably withdrew to the privacy of the home. Even with larger vans with separate rooms, the menfolk were usually sent outdoors; the males of a family kicking their heels, apparently with nothing to do, was a sure sign the ladies were bathing. In contrast to the man referred to above, most of the women were fastidious in personal hygiene even to the extent of having "top and tail flannels", it being abhorrent to wash face and private parts with the same one. It was, therefore, perhaps surprising that one or two interviewees recalled the use of public baths and wash houses, usually in the winter months. Their use, always commonest in the midlands and north, largely died out after the First World War as showmen's homes grew in size and need of the facility declined among the settled population. [34]

v) Laundry

In an old tin bath or "dolly tub", supported on iron legs or a few bricks over an open, wood fire was the time-honoured way to wash clothes. By the beginning of the twentieth century a coal-burning brazier, always referred to as a "fire bucket", was

contrived from "an oil drum - just knock holes in it". After the First World War, portable coal stoves were available but never achieved wide usage as they were quickly replaced by primus stoves. The introduction of the latter is still remembered as a major step in lightening the housewife's burden; "Oh, when they came along, that was heaven". Beside providing an immediate heat source the great advantage of the primus stoves, like the bottle-gas appliances which followed them into general use in post-Second World War years, was that they could be used, in inclement weather, under a temporary awning built onto the side of the caravan, known as an 'outside kitchen' (see below). [35]

There was, apparently, usually no separation of men's and women's clothes but "underclothes and sleeping clothes, you wash them separately". This segregation was not rigid, however, and nor was keeping traveller's clothing apart from that of 'flatties' as laundering was sometimes given to housedwellers to do. When the fair or circus pulled onto site, it was not unusual for local women to come touting to "take washing in". Besides providing a source of hot water the steam engines had a further domestic function - the warm boiler was an excellent clothes drier. Once dried, the clothes were pressed with flat irons heated on the fire, ".... and you'd spit on 'em to see they was hot enough". [36]

vi) Toilet Facilities

During the winter months, before the acquisition of regular stopping places, toilet facilities were often non-existant; "We walked over the fields" where "we used to go up and down" to find a suitable place "behind the hedge". Visiting fairs on the summer round might use householder's facilities; calling annually it was possible regularly "to make arrangements with one of the locals". "If you had a very nice lady in a house, they'd let you use theirs" for a small fee. Some showmen, however, preferred to make separate arrangements, "one place for the ladies, another for the gents". Only rarely were public house facilities used; this was due to their 'public' nature and was comparable to the showmen's reluctance to use public conveniences, except occasionally in larger towns when no

alternative was available. Portable closets were a more acceptable alternative, "we used to have a wooden one .... you built it up and dug an 'ole". The "sort of tent thing" which, early in this century comprised their only toilet facility, was recalled by elderly showmen with a certain wry humour, as "four poles with a bit of canvas round .... then a hole dug and the 'cowboy's bar' like where they used to tie the horses - and you had to be able to balance pretty well, I can tell you". The introduction of portable chemical closets during the nineteen thirties came as a blessing. The Guild encouraged their use, it being recognized that, at a time of increased attention to public health, lack of sanitation would provide another stick with which to beat their profession. Individual showmen saw the need; "you had to be clean because the health inspector came roundevery now and again". Provision of facilities for public use, it may be mentioned here, were only normally provided by the larger circuses. At the same time as the introduction of chemical closets for private use, a type of portable, public toilet was introduced which required pumping out by the local authority's services. [37]

The Bute Street Joinery Company of Cardiff advertised a caravan, as built for "Sidney White, Showmen", in the World's Fair, which, as early as 1916, included a toilet. Fourteen years later, Patrick Collins, jnr., wrote to the same journal complaining that most manufacturers of showmen's vans were not investigating provision of the facility. Both examples were, in retrospect, surprising as at the interviews most showmen claimed indoor toilets had always been unacceptable. "They didn't like 'em inside" it was said, showmen "never to this day" in the majority of cases accepting them. In smaller vans it was, perhaps, not surprising that any sort of closet near "where you slept or ate" proved unpopular. Since the Second World War, if modern vans were purchased with chemical toilets already fitted "we never used it" - and one elderly lady reacted more strongly; "there was one in there but we took it straight out". Some disparity in preferences seems to have existed between fair and circus showmen. "We found that fairground people liked to have their .... (toilets) .... outside" but circus families "in general" did not object.

Another circus informant, however, "wanted their toilets in a separate wagon" and the more affluent had vans built combining toilet and bath facilities. Though outside the period covered by this work, it may be commented that some breakdown in the objections raised to indoor sanitary facilities has tended to occur in more recent years as it is now possible to connect water closets to mains drainage at least during the months spent in winter quarters. Even conservative showmen allow "that's not so bad" but other arrangements still have to be made, of course, when travelling. [38]

vii) Food

a) Preparation

The visits of local tradesmen when the showmen appeared has been referred to (Chapter 7, pp. 150-155) and, of course, provisions were purchased direct from farmers when stops were made upon their land. A barter system often operated, labour being provided in exchange for foodstuffs and, when on tour, circus tickets were not infrequently purchased with eggs, milk or flour. Once procured, food was prepared by the womenfolk in the designated bowl (see below) and was then usually boiled - "we had all boiled stuff" - in a "three gallon pot". The source of heat was the same as for the laundry and the method of preparing dinner was described in some detail by one elderly showman; "We used to have a big old iron tank .... you knocked the bottom out of it and you put four bricks down. You put the tank on the bricks and that was your stove. You put two iron bars across the top and you put your pot on top of that you had to boil up in". To start the fire live coals were taken from the steam engine's' firebox - that useful machine ensuring an early dinner. Outdoor food preparation remained the usual practice for most showmen at least to the nineteen thirties and for a few it persisted until after the Second World War. It was the only way to prepare meals in sufficient quantities to satisfy family and employees alike (see Chapter 7, pp. 164-167), but even in the winter quarters, "mother always did the cooking out in the yard". The continued widespread use of the "fire bucket" was partly explained by the communal nature of mealtimes; "we sat outside .... everyone sat around". [39]

The 'Hostess' stove, a grey enamelled appliance which replaced earlier 'black lead' varieties was described as "one of the best things ever invented for showmen because you could boil the water, cook the dinner and keep the place warm with it". Only a few travellers resorted to the internal stove during the winter months but a larger number used it just for baking, summer and winter alike. Among the families interviewed, however, were four who insisted cooking had never been done outside by them. Perhaps significantly, three were specifically circus families and women from two of these expressed abhorrence at the idea of outdoor cooking on the grounds, "they'd call you gypsies". The majority however, preferring outdoor food preparation, had to wait until the inter-war period for the introduction of primus stoves which, as one interviewee expressed it, "made her day". Under cover, though still 'open-air', preparation of meals thus became possible in the "outside kitchen .... built up like a tent". Though widely used, most 'outside kitchens' were of crude construction, "on the side of your own caravan you had a cloth hung down, made special, supported by four poles".[40]

Only with the general introduction of "modern", motor-hauled trailers fitted with calor gas stoves has indoor cooking become the general practice. Early examples recalled were a 'converted bus' home prior to 1939 and a second hand 16' van advertised in the World's Fair in 1945 as equipped with "calor gas and electricity". Since the Second World War the kitchen fitments in the larger caravans developed apace, like the vans themselves, rivalling in luxury the homes of many members of the sedentary population. Though not many showmen achieved these standards, such scenes as those once common in the West Country soon became but distant memories; "Sunday dinner - most bakehouses would cook it for you. It was nothing to see four or five young boys or girls with a white cloth over it carrying their family's Sunday dinner one behind the other".[41]

b) Crockery

"That's one thing show people are very particular about" and "wouldn't have it any other way - funny people we are"; these definite

statements referred to the insistence that "you never wash your hands in the same bowl you does your washing up in". At the interviews, showmen and their wives stressed the importance of the rule that "you always had your washing up bowl separate from your hand washing bowl" .... "like we still do today" and "I have in this caravan now". Children soon learned that "you never washed your face and hands in that bowl" because "if your father caught you .... you'd get a bloody good hiding and the bowl would go out". If otherwise inadvertantly used the bowl's fate was equally sealed, "if a floor cloth, as I calls it, went by mistake in your washing up bowl, out that bowl went". The irreversible contamination caused by misuse will be noted. Most families possessed at least three separate bowls - "Ive got more bowls ...." - for washing up, food preparation and personal washing. The first of these had the highest status and was traditionally the only one kept indoors, one lady even suggesting that it would be discarded if it was touched by one of the others. In larger, modern caravans more facilities could be accommodated indoors but still determinedly separate; "that corner there is kitchen - food and hygienic" explained one interviewee "and in there .... (pointing to what had once been the closet) .... is the bowl where we wash our hands".[42]

Crockery and cutlery were kept in the "kittle box" of the vardo; the former was always of very good quality and invariably coloured. Concern for personal and 'internal' cleanliness was such that in some families "you all had your own - the woman would know which was which". Evidence of insufficient care regarding hygiene could provoke wrath; "if my father found a hair on his dinner plate ...." said one old lady, raising her hands in a gesture of horror. It was not, therefore, surprising that great care was taken to avoid contamination from 'flattie' employees. In order to ensure the showmen's own cleanliness, "we got separate cups and saucers and things for them". At the interviews the writer found on looking carefully (but, he hopes, discreetly) at the cup and saucer he was offered that, though of fine china, it was frequently of a pattern slightly different to that used by the family. Though it was not unknown for a separate bowl to be kept - "when we had chaps working

for us, they had a separate bowl and we had a separate bowl" - the commoner practice seems to have been to wash up employees crockery and cutlery in the one receptacle, "with a new lot of water" after the family's things had been done. The most extreme example of the fear of contamination met with was the case of a youthful employee already referred to (see Chapter 7, pp. 164 - 166), who was "mentally backward" and so allocated his own crockery, cutlery and washing-up bowl. Tea towels were "washed or boiled separately", normally in the washing up bowl. Not only was the inclusion of tea towels with other laundry considered a most unhygienic practice associated with flatties, but these particular items had become the measure by which showmen's wives regarded one another's domestic qualities - "How are her tea towels ? " [43]

Despite the great importance the majority attached to the foregoing customs, there were exceptions. One Riding Master's family, for example, not only did not practice the 'separate bowls' rule but appeared to be in complete ignorance of it, while two other interviewees, both of specifically 'circus' background either knew of the practice but regarded it as obsolete or recalled only that "mother had been very funny" about such things. Another lady had "always washed up in a bowl", but the sink in which the bowl was placed was used for hand cleaning and the washing of personal items of clothing - a proximity the majority of those interviewed would never have tolerated. A final exception which may be mentioned was of another Riding Master's family who did not keep any crockery or cutlery exclusively for their own use. [44]

c) Menstrual Taboos

"That's a taboo that isn't talked about between men and women of our life" was one elderly lady's way of acknowledging it's existence among showmen but at once enveloping it in secrecy. A moment's reflection, however, brought the claim that though the taboo was once universally practiced in the showmen's society, since the Second World War, due to an increase in the number of 'flattie marriages' it was not now so generally observed. A number of families denied all knowledge of any prohibition upon women preparing food and

though an added reticence may have existed before a male researcher it seems unlikely that such considerations would have led, as happened in two cases, to two widowers doing so. The taboo seems, however, among the majority of interviewees who were prepared to discuss the subject, to have related particularly to meat. One explained "when that time comes they would never handle raw meat", while in some families the prohibition was narrowed further, "With my mother it was pork .... we daren't touch pork but she never told me why we shouldn't". [45]

viii) Animals

Dogs were a familiar adjunct to the showmen's surroundings. Lurchers were a commonplace in the earlier years of this century, kept for poaching activities. The role of the working dog has gradually shifted to becoming primarily a guard dog and alsatians have, as a result, become more popular. Being regarded as an 'unclean animal', the vast majority of those interviewed said of dogs - and of cats - "we don't keep 'em in our places". It was consequently necessary to keep them away from any article associated with food and, therefore, the showmen's inner cleanliness; "If a dog touched a plate, my father would kick the dog out of the way and the plate would be broke". One interviewee claimed to have seen china thus contaminated disposed of "many a time" while one elderly lady told the following story : "Some people come to see us down in Barnstaple where we were renting some land. Landlady of the 'local' it was and fetched her dog up with her. Normally the dogs don't come in but, anyway, we let hers in. She had a cup of tea and what did she do ? She puts the cup down on the floor and tips some of it in the saucer. Well, we smashed them up because that we do not do", adding in disgust, " .... and I'd only given her one of my best cups, hadn't I ? " If not apocryphal, the tale was probably borrowed; the writer was, at the interviews, treated to it (with variations) on three separate occasions. It has value, however, in showing the desire to prove to an outsider that the very highest standards of cleanliness were maintained. [46]

Cats, as indicated above, were also generally not seen among showmen; "we never have cats". The animal, besides it's 'unclean' habits of licking and biting it's body, was also regarded as a sinister creature, associated with the night. One elderly lady claimed that, as recently as the early nineteen fifties her own mother had sat up all night beside a relative's coffin, firmly convinced that cats were attracted to the dead and would seek to harm them. Given such associations it seemed unnecessary for her to add, "so not may travellers had cats", while another creature, once all too familiar and regarded with superstitious distaste, was the rat. "You get showmen who don't like the mention of a rat; they'll turn and spit on the floor .... it's unlucky to mention a rat". To avoid the ritual cleansing of the mouth the word was avoided; "they said 'long-tail' instead". [47]

Adherence to cultural customs regarding animals became a measure of behaviour, "because there's good and bad among showmen," it was explained. In view of the strength of the convention among most of the families interviewed, the exceptions were, perhaps, surprising. Cage birds, for obvious space reasons, had long been permissable as pets but it was rare to come across someone with a distinct 'circus' heritage who claimed some showmen "adored" domestic pets. When the question of contact between animals and crockery was raised, this informant admitted she would "scald or bleach" the items in question but did not mention discarding them. This may be seen as a debased form of the above practices and, though it is again going outside the period with which this thesis is principally concerned, like the elderly lady who when interviewed continued to feed her lap-dog grapes, was certainly at variance with the views as expressed by the majority of showmen. As an example of the continued strength of certain taboos, more typical were the group of show families who shared the same winter quarters site and who refused to use the fish-and-chip shop opposite as a dog was reported to have been seen entering the kitchen. [48]

Canal Boatmen

i) The Family

a) The Male Role

Although on the boats "you all mucked in" and there was less obvious division of labour between the sexes (see Chapter 7, pp. 172-173), life aboard was "almost patriarchal"; the boats were regarded as being run by father, who was recognized by employer and family alike as 'captain'. All the family, however, had tasks to perform from "first light until dark" as a matter of course. "Hours and hours" .... "of untiring labour" were the norm, which undoubtedly led to the boatmen being a "hardy race", even benefitting from the conditions and outdoor life; it was "conducive to a sound and healthy" existence. "I've done so much as 17 .... 18 .... 19 hours a day" one boatman boasted, an estimated working week of 125 hours was not unusual said another, even "working all night" at times on the 'fly boats' when "you never took your shoes off your feet for a week". Yet, though the hours were long, the work had something of the 'pre-industrial' nature about it in that periods of intense activity, as when loading or negotiating flights of locks, were followed by periods of minimal effort - steering through the longer rural pounds. It was when boatmen left the canal that they realized how unused they were to the rigours of regular and consistent work schedules. That was also the time when the full advantages of being "your own master .... to an extent" became apparent; once ashore and no longer 'captain', many a boatman found he "couldn't stand being 'gaffered about' ". [49]

The 'captain' worked on and identified with the leading boat of a pair. Motive power was also his special responsibility and, of course, when motorization took place the engine was situated in the leading boat (see also Chapter 8, pp. 212-213). As one elderly lady saw it, the man "did the outside", by which she included not only motive power but also "generally" the loading and unloading and such attention as was necessary to the cargo and boats en route. Even when women became involved in such work as loading it was usually overseen by their menfolk. The task of 'legging' through

tunnels (Chapter 7, pp. 172 - 173) was the clearest example of work of a dangerous and physically demanding nature with which the male solely was identified. The man usually rose first in the morning and made tea, but this apparent male prerogative in the domestic sphere was in reality connected to the 'male related' motive power; tending the horse or priming the engine were the day's first jobs upon which the financial well-being of the whole family ultimately hung. Away from work, the male role was confirmed in the public houses where the sexes congregated in separate groups, the men alone allowed to make purchases at the bar. Thus the wives were seen to be essentially dependant upon their husbands. The men purchased the beer which was passed to the women by the landlord, a good husband being one who was attentive enough to ensure his wife's glass did not long remain empty. The men's talk revolved around affairs of the cut, "you didn't have time for pleasure". "Well educated in the lore" of their calling the boatmen were, according to at least one authority, keenly observant of the seasons and nature about them, an understanding gathered during the long hours of passage through the countryside. [50]

b) The Female Role

Just as the 'external' work of loading, attention to the horse or diesel engine and so on were men's work, so women "did the inside", by which was meant all domestic matters, revolving around the cabin of the 'butty boat' which was their domain. While the help given, at almost any time of the day or night, to the otherwise male-dominated aspects of work might vary according to family size and composition, the contents of the cabin, rearing of young children, clothing and food, were the wife's responsibility. "I always used to stay on the 'butty boat' ", recalled one, the woman's position strengthened by identification with the only area in which boatmen had any privacy. Respect for the sacrosanct cabin interior was such that when boats passed on the cut, though crews greeted one another they would "avert their eyes" to avoid looking into each others' homes. When calling upon a moored craft it was good manners "never to walk up to the back end of a boat and look in .... but to knock on

the side" and await a response.[51]

Until such time as they were able to commence work, young children were more or less confined to the butty cabin and so close by their mother. Indeed, the early job of steering was taught by the mother on the butty boat itself. Cleanliness of children, their nourishment and the beginnings of learning the boatmen's skills were all part of the woman's role (see also Chapter 9, pp. 258-262). The purchase of foodstuffs for all the family of course fell to the boatwomen and that it was "more general for it to be the women" who gained a smattering of literacy seems only to have been put to practical use when making selections of foodstuffs (see below). A peculiar phenomenon was that disputes were usually conducted by the women, whether merely verbal or, as occasionally happened, they became violent. The most frequent causes of friction were disputed precedence at locks or for loading, both having economic implications. It was known for the husbands of the combatants to withdraw for a chat on current affairs on the cut, or even a quiet beer together, to await the outcome. Since there had to be a loser in such conflicts, the practice may be interpreted as female collusion in maintaining the male role in the society by ensuring no man ever 'lost face' by defeat. Like other aspects of the female role in the canal's society, the practice remained to the end; as the way of life died out in reflection of the industry's decline there could be no question of changes in the roles of the sexes in order to meet changing conditions.[52]

ii) Family Contact and Support

"That was my brother - hadn't seen him for many a year", a boatman was reported as saying on passing the fraternal craft; nevertheless no more than a fleeting exchange of words was made, such was the mutual need to press on with their cargoes. Yet boatmen were conscious of belonging to a distinctive society wherein a sense of kinship ensured that support would be forthcoming should it be needed. "They do help each other wonderfully", Nurse Jones of Brentford assured the committee enquiring into conditions on the canal in 1921 (see Chapter 6, pp. 118-121). But though they were undoubtedly "in

the habit of helping one another", it is difficult to establish to what extent the mutual support was that between kinfolk or was derived from a keen sense of identity related to a particular industry and way of life. A network of inter-related families had grown up on the cut but the habit among boatmen of referring to a range of more distant relatives and close acquaintances alike as "cousins" confounded precise definition. [53]

The speed with which news spread among boatmen was commented upon by observers; "no accident can be kept a secret, no encounter is private, no conversation unrepeated". The canal-side public houses frequented by all the boaters, beside providing sustenance and amusement, had a major role in the exchange of information. Letters were also frequently sent to them to await collection, the literacy of the landlord being called upon to read them and write any reply required. Public houses at certain points on the canal system became bywords as centres for the dissemination of information; Buckby, Northants, being halfway between London and both Birmingham and Leicester, was an example of a "receiving station for gossip". Where it was a more urgent message, the toll houses (known among boatmen as "ticket offices") at which boatmen were obliged to call en route were favoured. As most boatmen were employees, the carrying company knew at any given time where a particular boat was heading and therefore could estimate it's present location. A telegram awaiting collection at a 'ticket office' became "a thing you dreaded". [54]

If a personal visit was deemed essential then, in the interests of speed, the canal had, of course, to be forsaken. Train or, later, bus would be taken to the area in question and then the towpath tramped, taking advice from passing craft, until the quarry was run to earth. The personal visit was preferred, rather than use the police or some other outside agency, not through animosity towards the latter but because of a general reluctance to disclose details regarded as being of a personal or private nature. The need for help was often financial, often to cover loss of earnings due to accident or for hospital bills. News of such insufficiencies became widely

known and the response equally general; one interviewee, who never travelled north of Birmingham, recalled making a small offering to help a needy family who normally plied between the Mersey and Rochdale. As was not uncommon among mainly illiterate groups, outsiders paid frequent testimony to the excellent memories possessed by boatmen. Any kindness done, however small, each boatman remembered "to his last day" and was, therefore, always willing to respond. Over time, however, this same trait gave rise to long-standing feuds between certain families which were, in some instances, perpetuated even after their precise origins were no longer clear. [55]

iii) Morality and Religion

On questions of morality "the majority of witnesses" before the 1921 Committee "agreed that .... they are fully equal, if not superior, to town dwellers of a similar class". This was, no doubt, partially due to simple religious conservatism for "there are none who embrace orthodoxy with greater ardour than the canal boaters". Very few of the society did not consider themselves as members of the Church of England, using it at least for the rites of baptism, marriage and burial. Superstition and a fear of ghosts was, however, also deep-rooted. After the Second World War, a teenage boatman was still able to repeat with great conviction how his "father heard tell of a woman thrown into Stoke Bottom one night - they got her out, she wasn't drownded (sic), not even hurt, but she never spoke again .... just laid in the butty and died, she did". No boatman, it was averred, ever moored at night at Stoke Bottom again for fear that they too might fall victim to the evil force which obviously lurked there. None of this, however, prevented a rich vein of blasphemy in the boatmen's everyday speech. "Their language is beyond description", a matter in which "women are quite the equals of the men", was a widely held view, though one observer said it was no worse than might be heard "any day on a London bus or tram". [56]

Boatmen generally were of a "very moral disposition" in sexual matters and they themselves claimed they were "above reproach". Though space factors resulted in the "enforced proximity of the sexes", standards of personal modesty were high. One informant's son

on his first visit to a public baths, refused to remove his underwear; he had been brought up "never to let anyone see you .... (because boaters were) .... very particular about that sort of thing". In married life, any hint of improper relationships were closely watched for; "if a woman talks to someone else's husband, and the wife not by, she runs the risk of serious calumny". One elderly informant recalled the great scandal caused when a man had been caught surreptitiously buying drinks for another boater's wife; the offence, he claimed, was long discussed - no doubt with great relish - "the length of the cut". Divorce was "unknown" and, indeed, no interviewee could remember an instance of it. Nevertheless, there was the suggestion that high standards of sexual morality had not always been the case. Referring to "vice and immorality", the Canal Inspector in 1885 announced, "It exists! I have found it to be the case". A quarter of a century later there had, it seems, been a marked improvement; the Seamen's and Boatmen's Friendly Society, in 1911, said "much has been done to elevate the social, moral and spiritual life of our boat people and their children .... Immorality, once the rule, is now the exception". [57]

Boatmen were reputed to have a somewhat cavalier attitude towards private property. Certainly the coal which was the staple traffic of many canals was regarded as "common property" and to some extent this was accepted by the carrying concerns who agreed a certain reduction or "allowance" in load en route for domestic purposes. If more fuel was needed, other craft were legitimate sources in the average boatman's eyes, for "the men trick each other up and down the locks, they trick each other about cargoes and in many other ways". Poaching activities along the cut caused no pangs of conscience and if they became the objects of suspicion, other acquired skills came into play; "telling lies seems to have been one of the boatmen's special fortes". Some commentators confidently attributed the alleged moral degeneration to the "evils of drink" but the divisions of opinion among those who observed the boatmen's society raises certain questions. Among the groups under discussion in this thesis, they were the most closely and continuously scrutinized. It may not, therefore, be that behaviour was once as

described,with some improvement occurring as compared to the mid-Victorian years, but rather that the views expressed tell something of the prejudices and fears of the commentators.[58]

iv) Home and Personal Hygiene

"The big firms, they was always particular about cleanliness" and it was, of course, a primary concern of the Canal Inspectors; "they watched your boat was in good condition, up to standard". Nevertheless, wide variations could occur; "the canal folk are either scrupulously clean or unbelievably squalid". When the Inspector himself spoke of "the pride which every proper boat woman takes in .... her only home" and boatmen themselves made similar claims - "we had a far neater, tidier home" and "inside was always very clean" - it is clear that the former category were in the great majority. The expected norms were handed down over generations as quite young daughters were taught to help in such chores as scrubbing wooden cabin parts, the hatches, steps and so on. Extreme orderliness extended outside the cabin where items such as mops and water cans had their precise place on the roof. Some indication of the "conditions as regards cleanliness" may be gauged from the 54 recorded inspections made in the Banbury district in 1940; only three boats were considered "poor", the rest being either "good" or "fair". "Certainly some were dirty" but families were few enough to be individually identified. The "dirty Finns" and "dirty Hoppers" were noted during the Second World War, while, in 1905, the boat of Albert Tunley was "so filthy as to be quite unfit for human habitation". The condition of boats and the people on them was, in some instances, attributable to the loads carried. On the Paddington refuse boats (see Chapter 9, pp. 258-269), "children were found to be verminous" and the cabins dirty, the result of the "boats .... lying there (i.e. at the dumps) for days together and the most disgusting refuse surrounds them".[59]

The obvious source of water supply was, of course, the canal itself. At certain locations the water was notably clear, at least until the change to diesel engines churned up the mud and left an oily film of pollution on the surface. Summit levels were cleanest,

especially where the canal was fed from reservoirs such as those in the chalk of the Chilterns or where the canal builders had obtained permission to tap nearby springs. Two places on the Birmingham to London route where regularly used springs were handily adjacent to the cut were at Braunston, Northants and at Hillmorton top lock, near Rugby. Clearly it was necessary for boatmen to be discerning in their use of canal water; in Victorian times the Bridgwater Canal was said to be little more than an open sewer and complaints were made about it's "disgusting odours". Clean water was a precious commodity; "you didn't use much .... in case you didn't get to a place to get some more". In most places to get reasonably uncontaminated water, "you'd flick the hand bowl over the surface and then just dip it in". As mains water supplies were laid on to boatyards, public houses and other canal-side installations, mostly during the inter-war period, so boatmen were able to draw "from the public supply". The carefully conserved clean water was stored in traditionally painted cans kept on the cabin roof. Each one was of about four gallons capacity, the number owned depending on family size.[60]

Facilities for boatmen to keep themselves clean were "of the poorest description". Economic pressures did not help, often dictating that "you didn't stop to change your clothes or anything like that". The result of the combination of circumstances was that "a wash is not a daily occurrence". The common practice was to "wash your hands in the canal"; only infrequently, until canal-side mains supplies became more plentiful, could it be justified to draw water from the cans for the purpose. On rare occasions, when time and weather allowed, one elderly boatman recalled "the canal was beautiful - you could see the fish" and it was his pleasure to bathe in it; "I'd take a towel with me and dive in". The women washed in the cabins, heating saucepans of water on the stove but never having a bath, according to one woman; "just a wash down". When women were thus occupied, "you could always tell .... you'd see the blokes ashore doing anything to pass the time". At a very few places public baths were convenient to the canal, as at Brentford and Coleshill, Birmingham, but like the ones build by the British Waterways Board

after the Second World War at Coventry and Bull's Bridge in west London, were only rarely used by the menfolk.[61]

As a result of the activities of the Canal Inspectors, by early in the twentieth century, "cleanliness improved", a verdict applicable to both the boaters personal hygiene and to the cabins in which they lived. Though the industry continued to decline the "improved conditions .... (were) .... well maintained" to the end - with the exception of those incorrigibles who remained identified by their condition.[62]

v) Laundry

Laundry was done out of doors in "large galvanized iron baths" using "a dolly .... a scrubbing board, you know". Loading stops at the end of a journey provided the opportunity to light a fire on the bank to heat the water. One elderly woman referred to a "fire bucket", interestingly using the term familiar to other groups of travellers. Water from the cut was used, at least for heavier, outer clothing which inevitably quickly became badly soiled in the daily round and so required water in quantities which could not be spared from the cans. Under pressure to be away quickly the cleaned laundry was hung about the boat to dry in the breeze en route. Primus stoves were welcomed as saving both time and labour; "when they came about, they was a good thing for us". Where families plied a regular route - and if funds permitted - laundry could be left with the washer-women who lived in canal-side cottages and collected on the return run. After the Second World War, some laundry facilities were provided adjacent to the new bath houses but came too late to change traditional practices.[63]

vi) Toilet Facilities

The total lack of any toilet facilities was frequently commented upon and, after the First World War, it was suggested that local authorities along the line of the cut should be obliged to set up "such sanitary conveniences as may be necessary". Nothing was done, however, and the men "went where they could", either making their way to a suitably concealing hedge armed with a spade or else

adding to the already "disgusting" conditions of some much-frequented stops and wharfsides, which led to complaints from local residents. For the men it was often a case of "over the side", the women withdrawing to the privacy of cabin or engine room where a chamber pot or bucket were kept, these in turn being similarly emptied into the canal. In 1934 it was announced that forty-eight new pairs of boats were to be built, the motor boats with the "provision of sanitary conveniences, taking the form of chemical closets situated in the engine room". These craft are thought not to have materialized; only one or two isolated examples with such facilities being noted after 1945. Conversion of existing boats was rare, such refinements being considered unnecessary by most boatmen and resisted as the new fitments meant encroaching on cargo or sleeping space. British Waterways Board provided some toilet facilities and also 'emptying stations' to be used in conjunction with chemical closets but the few boaters who possessed the latter mostly "just chucked 'em out in the cut - they didn't want to be bothered". Throughout the canal age the vast majority of boatmen's only acquaintance with modern sanitary conveniences was the occasional use of public facilities in towns or whatever was provided by the canal-side public houses.[64]

vii) Food

"Boat people were noted for living well", the procurement of foodstuffs, apart from that which was poached and was considered a legitimate source, being the responsibility of the boat woman. She was expected to take the opportunity to do the bulk of her shopping at the end of a run while the boats were being loaded. It was possible to 'top up' supplies en route at the various canal-side shops which had grown up to cater for the passing trade. Some of the public houses also sold groceries and provisions, one of their specialities being "partly cooked" meats, the practice overcoming problems of keeping meat before refrigeration and, at the same time, providing a quickly prepared meal.[65]

The majority of boatmen claimed that cooking was always done on the stove in the cabin, a coal "allowance" as referred to above

being given summer and winter alike by the carrying company for this purpose (the amount was 5 cwt for the trip from the midlands coalfield to London). One elderly lady, however, recalled what seems to have been regarded as a special treat; "What we used to do if it was really, really hot and we'd got the time, was to tie up a bit early and start a bit of a fire on the bank". Only in two cases was knowledge of menstrual taboos in the preparation of food admitted. "Sometimes there was", according to one informant, while another referred specifically to meat; "My mum used to tell me that you don't want to touch that meat - you'll make it go bad". China was often of 'willow pattern' or a 'wild rose' design, of a coarse quality. Easily the most distinctive pieces owned were the great teapots, of as much as half-gallon capacity, which were kept "always" on the boil. Made of 'Measham ware', a brown-glazed pottery with a flowered decoration, produced in the village of that name adjacent to the Ashby-de-la-Zouch canal, an additional feature was the lid which was fashioned in the shape of a miniature tea-pot. Such pots were handed down within families and became much prized possessions.[66]

All washing up was done in the hand-bowl, "called a dipper", from the practice of 'dipping' it in the canal to fill it. This bowl was also used for food preparation - "peeling the spuds" - and washing the face and hands. Thus the washing-up bowl, beside not being exclusively reserved for that duty, also came into regular contact with water from the cut. Canal water was, apparently, quite often used for washing up, only one interviewee stressing that it was never done in her experience.[67]

viii) Animals

Horses were generally well looked after, "you treated the horse as you treated yourself because he had to do the work for you". Thus boatmen recognized the horse's role in their own economic well-being and they could not fail to be aware of this major item in their domestic budget. Dogs were commonly kept in connection with poaching activities and it was not unknown to keep cats on board in order to deter vermin. At least one family, the Potters,

kept chickens and a cockerel, these, like the dogs and cats, learning to adapt their habits to the exigences of living on a mobile home. All these creatures were kept for some practical purpose, the only ones kept as pets being cage birds whose appeal was clearly derived from their modest space requirements.[68]

Resumé

Industries where "a man could only earn fair money if he had help from members of his family" were once not too unusual. Brickworks and saltworks were examples, while in agricultural work there was "an endless list" of women's jobs. All travellers, therefore, represent a continuation into the twentieth century of once much wider patterns as "the relationships between family, moral order and economy are .... mutual and inseparable". Recognition of this relationship, though tacit, resulted in travellers, most particularly gypsies and showmen, regarding themselves not so much as individuals but rather as members of a distinct group inseparable from their family identity. The essential - and, at times, dominant - economic role of the female was common to all travellers. Equally, the "middle class ideology of domesticity" with it's dependant role for women which, in the decades up to 1939, came to the fore amongst the sedentary population, did not affect them. Gypsy women, however, since the Second World War have experienced a great change in their economic role, while the continued importance of the women's contribution was recognized by many showmen. These two groups tended to matriarchy but not so the canal boatmen, a situation which, according to Paul Thompson, might be linked to the male need for a 'compensating' dominance in an essentially exploitative capitalist industry. The extent of physical violence within gypsy families before the change to the 'essentially male' scrap dealing may be similarly attributed. For all three groups of travellers, the loss of pre-industrial lifestyles and work patterns became (sometimes painfully) apparent when members for one reason or another moved to more conventional employee status and faced factory disciplines, hours and work rates.[69]

The element of supportiveness among those, not necessarily kinfolk, who were dependant on the same economic base or industry was in no way unusual. Perhaps those engaged in mining and fishing are the most frequently cited examples of the recognition of mutual vulnerability, supportiveness providing an insurance against one's own future needs. In the case of travellers, two further aspects need to be stressed; firstly, considerable ingenuity was required to ensure the necessary exchange of information in view of the lifestyle especially when any formal organization within the group was undeveloped and, secondly, the need for mutual supportiveness within the groups was exaggerated in view of the level of rejection all experienced from the sedentary population (see Chapter 3, pp. 38 - 48). [70]

Sexual morality and the very limited freedom allowed the young (see Chapter 10, pp.270 - 289) was perpetuated into adult life. Privacy and space considerations were primary factors in this respect, as they had once been among the majority of the population. Sexual repression was common among the Victorian and Edwardian working classes, later liberality not being uninfluenced by increased personal privacy due to improvements in housing conditions. The homes of most travellers grew in size during the first half of the twentieth century, this factor combining with other social changes such as the growth in the number of marriages to non-travellers, especially since the Second World War, itself linked to widening work and other social experiences during wartime. The common factor of attitudes to sexuality, it is therefore suggested, had much to do with the homes inseparable from the lifestyle rather than common cultural origins. [71]

The idea of all travellers as 'dirty', a prejudice entertained by, probably, a majority of the sedentary population (see also Chapter 3), was reciprocated in the case of the gypsies and showmen and so must be considered as an example of cultural isolation, which, significantly, was not shared by canal boatmen. This, as suggested above, can best be summarized as an 'internalized' concept of cleanliness, by which special regard was had, not only to the food

itself but, by implication, with all items (such as washing-up bowls and tea towels) which came into contact with food, crockery or cutlery. Fear of contamination even extended to contact with members of the sedentary population in the case of crockery and cutlery. Animal contact with 'food related' items was also unacceptable, though the cultural significance of certain creatures (mainly horses) also came into it and again, when customs are considered as evidence of disparate origins, isolate the boatmen from both gypsies and showmen. Various animals were kept by the former at different times but, caged birds apart, only for severely utilitarian reasons without reference to cultural significance.[72]

The outdoor preparation and consumption of food was only normally practiced by gypsies and showmen, until modern developments within the home caused some modification of the practice. Here, however, the different custom among boatmen may be attributable to economic factors, i.e. the need for more continuous travel. The other major aspect of concepts of cleanliness relates to sanitary facilities where the boatmen were again alone in not regarding indoor toilets as generally unacceptable, though on this subject, as with certain other aspects of land-traveller's taboos, those show families who mainly identified with the circus side of the business did not practice them so widely.

The menstrual taboos related to the preparation of food (particularly meat) require special mention as a number of researchers appear to have identified this as a peculiarly gypsy trait. Certainly by the middle of the twentieth century it appears only to have been practised in gypsy and showmen's societies, though as explained above, reliable information was not easy to obtain. But the taboo was still known in rural areas of southern England in the early years of this century, "examples .... (were noted) .... from the Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset peasantry". Another example among the sedentary population in country districts was at the annual ritual of pig killing, to provide salted pork for the winter, when menstrual women were expected to refrain from touching the meat. This more widespread knowledge of the prohibition suggests that it

can no longer be considered evidence of a gypsy origin - and thus becomes less surprising to find practiced by boat women. It's continuation by gypsies and showmen is evidence of cultural isolation which in turn raises questions of whether other rituals (i.e. connected with concepts of cleanliness) are suggestive of a common origin ? Until evidence of these once having had a wider usage is brought to light, however, they would seem to point in this direction. [73]

"Industrial capitalism .... changed .... (the) .... function of the family and the home in the life activities of man and wife. (It) .... shattered completely the traditional state of affairs where the household was the centre and focus of the economic and social roles of it's members"; these observations are particularly pertinent to gypsies and showmen whose lifestyles remained firmly anchored in the family. This is not to say that they experienced no changes; the role of both men and women changed, for example, in the face of wider economic influences, especially among gypsies. What the retention of the economic, as well as social, family unit meant, among other things, even in the 'industrial setting' of the canal boatmen, was that conflicting economic interests between the sexes - "fears of female competition" - were avoided. The home itself, though remaining the 'centre and focus', changed, improvements coming roughly in line with - but several paces behind - those experienced by the settled population. In matters of hygiene and cleanliness even boatmen appear to have enjoyed, with the aid of outside agencies, some improvements in this way. And the above observations on the effects of industrial capitalism also had equal inferences for the retention, through cultural isolation, of those distinctive customs and taboos which continued to identify gypsies and showmen. [74]

CHAPTER TWELVE

LIFE PROGRESSION IV: OLD AGE AND DEATH

Gypsies

i) Old Age

Considerable respect was accorded the elderly both for their knowledge and as a repository of family lore. As already stated, gypsy society knew no formal hierarchical rules but a general deference to age often led to a vaguely recognized body of tribal elders. One or two observers have referred to an extended family's "headman" but it was more usual in a matrilinear society if one elderly person was to stand out as accorded particular veneration for it to be a woman; hence the legendary 'Gypsy Queen'. [1]

The elderly were, of course, largely the recipients of family support (see Chapter 11, pp. 292- 294), often at times of illness especially the "respiratory diseases and ailments" to which the gypsies considered themselves prone. Such nursing usually took place at home as there was great resistance to the use of hospitals for the elderly. Hospitals appear to have been equated, first, with work-houses and, more latterly, with 'homes'. The latter are still seen as a peculiarly 'gorgio' failing, gypsies regarding support of the elderly as a family responsibility. Space considerations required older members of the family to be maintained in their own homes for as long as possible. Ageing parents or other elderly relatives often travelled alongside a younger generation as long as they could but when no longer able to do so, might either decide to stay in one place but only very rarely moved into a son's or daughter's home. If the former option was taken, then adult children of course visited regularly. Preference was given to continuing to travel not only because the lifestyle was considered healthy but because the supportive element of the relationship was not entirely one-sided; grandmothers continued to have a useful child-minding role thus giving younger women greater economic opportunities. [2]

ii) Death

a) Place of Burial

A number of gypsy burials inevitably took place near to regularly frequented stopping places. In the eighteenth century the parish churches of Streatham and Beckenham, south of London, saw gypsy funerals as both were near a popular camp site at Norwood; Winsford hill, on Exmoor, was another example. In 1848, Providence Buckland, aged 10, was buried at Stokenchurch, Bucks where her family stayed "for months together". But that the relatively frequent use of certain burial sites was only because they happened to be contiguous to such camping grounds was proven by the funeral of a gypsy, who happened to have died in another neighbourhood, there being an event worthy of comment. Similar instances were noted in the nineteenth century and details of a few cases since 1900 have survived. Early this century Isaac Herne was thus buried in Gloucestershire and another such funeral took place at Swanbourne, Bucks in 1915. Amos Young and Lurena Herne were buried near where they died in 1934 and 1940 respectively, while two further instances were noted in 1954, by which time some gypsies, having more regular winter stopping places, were beginning to regard these as their 'home bases' for funerals. Clearly many did not consider it necessary to bring spouses together even in more recent times when relatively short distances did not preclude the possibility; Harriet Bowers or Loveridge died at Abingdon, Berks in 1953 and was buried there whereas her husband, in 1936, had died and was buried at Cricklade, Wilts., barely twenty-five miles away. [3]

Legend has it that gypsies once disposed of their own dead; they allegedly "buried the corpse in a wood on a withy bed". Mousehold Heath, near Norwich, is thought to have been one favoured site but at least since the early eighteenth century use of unsanctified ground has been rare indeed. It has been suggested that "when the burial laws came to be enforced" gypsies were pressurized to conform to churchyard burials; by 1822, one gypsy claimed that burials of his kind were invariably in consecrated ground and had long been so. Once the funeral had taken place, "the place of

burial is practically forgotten", according to one authority. Another has said, however, that in more recent times, graves have been more regularly visited. This apparent change may be attributed to the congregation of a number of gypsy graves in certain locations following upon the above-mentioned tendency to regular winter stopping places (see also below).[4]

b) Funeral Customs

Death has, for many years been the major instance of when gypsies regarded Christian rites as important but, as with their wider religious concepts (see Chapter 11, pp. 294 - 296), the event was heavily overlaid with superstitious belief. White was the colour of death, suggestive, according to some commentators, of folk-memories of an Indian origin. It was the time of maximum ritual uncleanliness, greater even than pertained to women at childbirth (see Chapter 9, pp. 220 - 221). Like the latter, it was once thought desirable that death should take place away from the home, the aged being taken outside when the end appeared to be imminent. The awe with which death was regarded ensured that gypsy funerals were never minor events but the biggest of them were both a "political and religious statement", reflecting the sense of identity among the living and the earthly status of the deceased. When a gypsy whose family was numerous and influential died, the funeral "procession was extremely remarkable" in it's length and floral tributes. Among the mourners, priority was given to those most closely related to the person departed and in those families which favoured the setting up of headstones and regular visiting of the grave, these duties naturally also fell to them. Funerals of splendour were long remembered as was the anniversary of the person's death, yet there were also gypsy families who refused, after the funeral, to speak of or even mention the names of the dead.[5]

Late in the nineteenth century reference was made to "the usual gypsy custom of destroying the deceased's effects". Few gypsy customs have more intrigued outsiders than the spectacular destruction by fire of gypsy homes. Some have questioned whether it was in fact part of the mythology surrounding gypsies which the latter were not

averse to encouraging, but several well-authenticated instances have occurred during the twentieth century, even into the post-Second World War period. One of the Boswell clan, speaking in 1913, said, "the custom lives among good Romanichels to this day". But, according to another observer, "with the outbreak of the Great War the number of funeral sacrifices seems to have decreased", though four post-1918 instances were cited including the destruction of the home and possessions of Mrs. Caroline Penfold at Crediton, Devon on 17th April, 1926. Specific examples following the Second World War were the burning of Luke Smith's vardo at Tetbury, Glos., in October, 1947 while, as late as 1953, the caravan of one of the Bowers family was burnt and all his belongings destroyed, even including his horses which were shot, an R.S.P.C.A. representative being present to see it was humanely done. Perhaps very few gypsies ever respected tradition sufficiently or could afford such extravagant customs; the "poorer" ones of the New Forest, for example, usually removed the corpse to a tent on the edge of the camp site and contented themselves with burning that. During the inter-war period it was said, "economic conditions and the great infusion of gorgio blood have done their work". It became more usual to sell off the deceased's belongings - but only to a gorgio; it was still desirable to remove them entirely from gypsy view and, anyway, no 'true romany' would touch them. [6]

All the foregoing customs may be linked to the gypsies' fear of ghosts, for the "settlement and appeasement" of the dead. Just as destruction of belongings discouraged a return to familiar earthly surroundings, so the spirit naturally sought the people and localities with which it was in life acquainted. Travel was, therefore, the best means of avoiding unwelcome visitations; in extreme cases gypsies would "flee as far as possible from the neighbourhood of their dead folk", especially following the death of a child who, it was believed, would persistently seek out it's parents. The variations which occurred in the gypsies' response to death (that is, whether to tend the grave or ignore it and never mention the deceased), like the dissociation from their belongings, whether by fire or sale,

and the emphasis placed upon funeral rituals should not obscure the strong common thread which ran through the various customs, namely the great dread of the departed. Rather, it evolved into a tactical question of either avoiding their spirits or seeking to placate them.[7]

Showmen

i) Old Age

Showmen are "the best people in the world to their old people .... like any true traveller", claimed one interviewee, though one elderly man felt that standards of concern for the aged had declined; "children then .... (i.e. in his youth) .... were better to their parents than they are today". Among many showmen respect for parents has, nevertheless, remained at a high level; "Your mother and father are your governors .... it don't matter how old they are, you do as they tell you". Parental authority, with advancing years, was sometimes more apparent than real - "you let them have the impression they were the boss" - but elders continued to be seen as a repository of wisdom; one showman said of his father, "he could still give you very good advice". Respect for, and a keen sense of responsibility towards, the older generation went hand-in-hand. Support for the ageing was given by the family and "they never put them in homes and left them there". Obviously under the impression that had long been the common practice among the sedentary population, showman after showman emphasized at the interviews "we never put them away" and "that's a thing that's never done".[8]

"When they get old they have to keep travelling, don't they ?" explained an elderly lady, economic necessity and having "nowhere to retire to" meant most showmen "had to keep going till they keels over, as we always say". "You could have one foot in the grave but you'd still got to work" was accepted in a society in which the concept of 'retirement' was foreign', "they kept going as long as they could .... then just died". In fact, though this may have been the lot of many travellers, increasing affluence and improved forms of locomotion have increasingly meant, during this century, that when

parents could no longer be self-supporting, they were able to travel with offspring. At an interim stage the elderly might be given aid with transport while still continuing to run their own stall. But eventually they were taken on the annual round, as dependants, in order to have the aged close by and because they themselves preferred to be on the move as long as possible. "Never heard of nobody leaving their parents behind if they wanted to come", explained one showman, while another had been willing to accept the inconvenience and expense of hauling "grandma" around in her own trailer as his bounden duty. As one family's matriarch put it, "I likes to go around but I don't do nothing now". [9]

The acquisition of regular winter quarters, mainly during the inter-war period (see Chapter 8, pp. 196-199), did,however, enable "one or two" showmen to give up travelling and remain undisturbed. If the summer circuit taken by the younger generation was limited in area then frequent contact with parents was possible. In some instances a number of caravans occupied by older people were grouped together to enable them to give mutual support as required. A site at Ashford, Middx., and another in urban Manchester are known to have been so used at least since the Second World War. Because "the older ones never had the education to cope with all those forms" which, since 1945, have increasingly beset the showman in the pursuit of his travels and yet "you still want to do something when you get old", a number of showmen have joined the society's 'sandscratchers'. That is, they have taken to the seaside fun fairs, which have grown in number in post-war years, as they can then remain independent, in work with which they are familiar, to a greater age as the most physically demanding aspects of the travelling fair are avoided. [10]

ii) Death

a) Place of Burial

At least until the first years of the twentieth century it was the most usual practice to bury showmen where they died. "Poorer showmen, wherever they died, that's where they were buried. It was only the wealthy sort had a family grave", it was explained. The more extensive travels of the circus made interrment more likely

at the place death occurred but the economic interruption posed by a funeral caused one elderly lady to state firmly that if anyone had "the gall" to die in the summer they could hardly expect to be returned to a distant family plot ! Individual examples of 'local burial' were of grandparents interred at Market Drayton, Salop and Weyhill, Hants, both of whom expired while on the summer round. Graves of members of a single family might, therefore, be widespread; close relatives of George Sanger, who died before his show grew to fame, were his father who was buried at Rotherhithe, London, his mother at Houghton-le-Spring, Co. Durham and a young son interred at Peterborough. Distance and cost explained why such far flung sites were neglected; of the Market Drayton grave it was said, "nobody's ever been back there". More recent instances of isolated burials were generally attributed to peculiar circumstances; the young son of one circus family died during the Second World War and so lies in Wolverhampton cemetery. But it was done with regret because of the circumstances of the time, the now elderly mother stressing, "normally we do try to keep us all together". [11]

The trend towards the acquisition of owned winter quarters, (see above) and their use during the summer by a few of the older showmen led to the use of local burial grounds. When perhaps two or three of a family had died and were so buried, than that churchyard or cemetery rapidly came to be regarded as "where the family is buried". Thus, for example, members of the Wall family came to be interred at Petersfield, Hants and those of the Ayres's at Hollybrook cemetery, Southampton - after a kind of 'false start' in burying one or two of the family at Barnstaple, Devon where "several winters" were spent just after the First World War. The connection between winter sites and place of interrment was recognized by showmen; "they are buried in Bristol because that's where they wintered, you see". Sometimes the place chosen was obscure or arrived at by some incidental circumstance. A member of the Chipperfield family retired in his van to a site at Wishford, a small village in Wiltshire, and there died, while one of the Fossett's ceased to travel and bought a farm at Henley-in-Arden, Warwicks; both became their family's regular burial grounds. Many of the Cole family were laid in the

churchyard at Yate, Glos., near where they claim to have originated, while other families in southern England used, as examples, Shoreham and Nutbourne in Sussex, Dorking in Surrey, and Headley and Cove in Hampshire. In some larger towns, the cemeteries catered for more than one family. The above-mentioned Hollybrook cemetery is one instance while two examples in the London area each continue to be used by a number of families; Manor Park for the showmen to the east of the city and Hounslow for those to the west. The social implications of having such places of burial soon became apparent; both these cemeteries have become regular Sunday afternoon meeting places for show families - the social aspects of the now frequent gatherings complimenting the ostensible purpose of going to tend kinsfolk's graves.[12]

Even before 1914, "there was a few of them liked to go back to their own area" and "if we could go back to where we had people buried, we used to take 'em". But this preference among the few was, in the first decade or two of this century, usually only accorded to parents, and on occasions entailed returning the dead over considerable distances. Examples mentioned were journeys from Sussex to Yate, from Hampshire to Hunstanton and Devon to Rotherham. By the nineteen thirties the growth in the numbers of 'family plots' had considerably increased the urge to "fetch 'em back" if death took place away from the winter base. Costs might be high, so determined showmen resorted to self-help in meeting the demands of the growing convention; it was around 1930, so one elderly lady recalled, that her father had brought back the corpse of his "mate" from Southampton to Hounslow on the back of a lorry - "Billy Irving it was .... Dad had summonses for bringing him back himself from the police of three counties".[13]

b) Funeral Customs

The normal practice among showmen was to keep the corpse in the home until the day of the funeral. The coffin was frequently kept open and the person's face uncovered at night while a member of the family kept vigil; "I've seen my mother sit up all night like when Uncle Walter was brought here into the kitchen, all white sheets and candles burning". The funeral, which normally did not take place

"boatmen up to the day they died". Claimed as the oldest active boatman was a grandparent who worked up to his death at the age of ninety-three on the Paddington refuse boats - presumably testimony to the healthfulness of that environment. Though "retirement was a word you never heard of" for many boatmen, if families owned a canal side cottage or one could be obtained at a cheap rent, it became possible. Exceptional instances among those who ceased to travel were grandfathers, about the turn of the century, one of whom became landlord of a public house in Cheshire frequented by boatmen and the other a 'Number One' who had saved enough to retire upon and permanently moored his boat at a point regularly passed by his boater children. The cottages occupied by those fortunate enough to have access to one were in places "known as boatman's villages". On the canal system south of Birmingham, Braunston, Thrupp and Marston were examples while Buckby, Northants was, perhaps, the prime instance with "many red brick cottages" used in retirement. After the Second World War, as the traffic declined and the concept of retirement was encouraged in the newly nationalised industry, more boatmen were provided with accommodation in the form of cottages owned by British Waterways or council houses for which they were encouraged to apply - a possibility never before entertained by boatmen. Even so, some of the elderly resisted giving up travel and the familiar cabin; the change required a greater adaptability than many elderly boatmen welcomed - "it don't half take some getting used to ...." [16]

ii) Death

When a boatman died on his craft, his body was normally taken for burial to the canal-side village which was considered the family's base and at which other elderly relatives probably resided. At one time the corpse was merely wrapped in a sheet; so "they used to bring 'em back on the boats .... slung 'em up to the planks, they did", meaning that the body was suspended, near the fore-end of the boat, from the framework which normally supported the tarpaulin protecting the cargo. When the practice was "no longer allowed", a coffin had to be procured locally and this was placed in the hold of the craft "just back of the mast". The boat was then worked 'fly' along the cut,

on a Saturday (see also Chapter 10, pp. 280-282), was "Victorian .... (in it's) .... splendour". The funeral cortege was invariably lengthy and probably reached it's greatest splendour in the days of steam when it was not unknown for a showman's engine, suitably decorated with black crepe and holly wreaths, to pull his hearse. [14]

"Show people came from miles to go to a funeral" and it was, in fact, almost the only thing for which they were prepared to interrupt their summer travels. A large number always wished to attend the rites because the deceased "being a showman travelling about, so many knew him" and "everyone is related to one another". It was explained by one interviewee, "they always like to show their respects to the dead, showmen do", the visual sign being the large and numerous floral tributes. Showmen also liked to have their respect for the dead properly acknowledged; long lists of those in attendance at funerals and contributors of flowers and wreaths invariably duly appeared in the next issue of the World's Fair. Those who could neither attend nor send tribute published their condolences in the same journal, wherein also appeared "in memoriam", for many years afterwards, sentimental eulogies (often in uneven verse) at each anniversary. After the funeral the property of the deceased might be disposed of "according to how it was left by will" as befitted a member of the organized and more business-like showmen's community. In the great majority of cases, however, the normal practice was "to divide it .... (the dead man's possessions) .... between the family". [15]

Canal Boatmen

i) Old Age

"Quite a lot", indeed probably the majority of canal boatmen continued to work into old age. The numbers of elderly still working their own boats was reflected in the relatively high proportion making up Sister Mary's patients (see Chapter 9, pp.220 - 221) complaining of the "bronchitis .... (which) .... was the name of every disease that came the way of the boaters". Parents and grandparents were remembered who, health and physical strength permitting, remained

that is, it passed non-stop day and night to it's destination, all other craft giving it precedence as a mark of respect. The funeral, as indicated, took place at one of the recognized 'boatmen's villages' already referred to in connection with marriage and retirement customs (see Chapter 10, pp.286 - 287) at which it was said "here they .... (often) .... die and are buried". The funeral itself was a "big do" and was one of the rare occasions when economic considerations did not obtrude and boatmen were prepared to break into their regular travel patterns. [17]

Resumé

The pre-industrial pattern of work was continued into old age by a majority of members of all three traveller groups; retirement, if it occurred at all, did not take place until well past what the sedentary population in the twentieth century came to regard as the normal age for it, only being forced upon travellers by ill-health or physical infirmity. When no longer able to support themselves, help came from the succeeding generation, to the most marked extent in the case of gypsies and showmen. The generally lower level of support given by canal boatmen may be attributed to a combination of factors : most were of 'employee' status rather than involved in forms of inherited family 'self-employment', the boat-home and the element upon which it travelled did not encourage unproductive 'passengers' to be taken along, and this was the group with the most unexceptioned level of poverty. The economic independence of 'self-employed' gypsies and showmen, linked to their relative cultural isolation and only slowly changing sources of income or industry, encouraged the retention of respect for the older members of these groups as founts of wisdom and lore, especially when most were illiterate. The contrast to the larger society has grown during the twentieth century, as in modern commerce and industry the traditional role of the elderly has been undermined by status based upon educational and skill innovations in a rapidly changing environment. Canal boatmen, though individually respected, remained, hierarchically speaking, at a low level in their identifying industry and, when retirement from the boats did occur, became the exception also in that they alone found

moving into houses at all acceptable. This practice, like the tendency evinced by a minority of boatmen to return to shore homes at times of improved trade, may suggest a once-sedentary lifestyle ? [18]

It may be for this same reason that boatmen appear to have comfortably pre-dated both gypsies and showmen in establishing the custom of families regularly using the same burial ground for their dead - although the limited nature of the canal system may also have encouraged the trend. Prior to gypsies and showmen adopting specific places for family internment, a divergence of custom within both groups may have been due, at least in part, to variations in wealth. The earlier trend to regular winter stopping places (see Chapter 8, pp. 196 - 199) explains why showmen generally used those places for funerals, as well as for marriages (see Chapter 10, pp. 280-282), before the majority of gypsies similarly adapted. Both groups, however, attached the same great importance to respect for the dead and so for funeral rites. The failure of showmen to subscribe to the destruction of the deceased person's effects may be explained by reference to the greater level of investment in the equipment which was their livelihood and destined to be inherited within the family. Among gypsies, however, while they remained dependant upon more traditional income sources (see Chapter 7, pp. 145 - 149) the practice did not have such implications for the earning potential of other members of the family. The custom might be readily countenanced only when the items to be destroyed or burned were of relatively small value and, anyway, probably had only a short life-expectancy. The practice became noticeably less common at a later date, reserved only to the most orthodox or those who could afford the gesture. Nor have such rituals ever been attributed to canal boatmen, the latter group also appearing to have no knowledge of the ritual 'uncleanliness' of death or the connection with the colour white. The social aspects of funeral gatherings, common to all travellers, may, on the other hand, be attributed to the common need for opportunities to express their sense of unity and identity.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MID-CENTURY AND AFTER

Gypsies

i) Continuing Trends

In the years since the Second World War the gypsies have seen a quickening of certain trends which had first manifested themselves in the pre-war years. These relate mainly to the closely linked areas of the gypsies' work and stopping places. It has been said that "as Britain .... became more industrialized, so the gypsies have adjusted accordingly"; more accurately, gypsy work perforce adapted to the mass-production methods and 'throw-away' obsolescense which were closely linked to increasing affluence and consumerism. These trends, apparent in the nineteen-thirties, were effectively retarded by the Second World War and it's aftermath and did not begin their full flowering until the decade of the 'fifties. As a result by 1960 it was estimated that over two-thirds of gypsy families in the United Kingdom gained the major part of their income from scrap and waste work. The work required space and was, in essence, an urban activity (see Chapter 7, pp. 146-147); consequently gypsies became more aware, among other things, of the "stratifying effects of towns" as relating to class distinctions, the division of labour and so on - and therefore of their own anomalous or lowly place in that environment. The young were particularly vulnerable to new influences as the close physical proximity of townsfolk tended to broaden social contacts. But their absorbtion of gorgio cultural values and the widening of the young gypsies' horizons was largely attributable to television which became common in the homes of even poorer travellers. The impact of television was all the greater among gypsies as the cinema had previously had little influence on younger children, especially girls, being almost exclusively an amusement for young men. Many older gypsies bemoaned the fact that the 'says' they had learned from their grandparents now aroused little interest in the young. [1]

ii) The Influx of Irish Tinkers

The influx of Irish tinkers after the Second World War may be attributed, as outlined in Chapter 5, pp. 80 - 82 , to English gypsies awakening them to the possibilities of scrap dealing in the larger, more industrialized island when traditional sources of income were affected by mass-produced items entering Irish markets. The number of Irish tinkers entering the United Kingdom was the major new phenomenon affecting the lives of native travellers in the decades following 1945. Most of the new arrivals landed at Liverpool, Holyhead or Stranraer with little more than the possessions they could carry. Initially therefore, apart from the very first to break the new ground, they attached themselves to relatives already here in order to obtain food and shelter. Henceforth they kept together in obtrusively large groups, their poverty attracting much unfavourable comment (see also Chapter 8, pp. 182-184). A few returned to Ireland for a few years in search of seasonal (mainly agricultural) work but the sea-crossing was expensive and the practice generally lapsed after a few summers. Resented by native gypsies for the bad repute they brought on all travellers and for the economic challenge they represented, it was not long before many local authorities singled out the Irish as the least welcome of travellers upon their official sites, expressing a "strong preference" for the more familiar variety. To what extent those of Irish origin swelled the total numbers of travellers believed to live in the United Kingdom cannot be ascertained but their adoption of the custom of hospital births (see Chapter 9, pp. 220-221) almost certainly increased both their numbers and their proportion of the total in view of their previously higher infant mortality rate. Despite the economic opportunities which first attracted them to the United Kingdom, Irish tinkers have remained generally among the poorest of travellers, only a very small percentage - most notably a few families who trade in furniture and antiques - providing the exception and becoming the envy of the average English traveller. [2]

iii) The Problem of Land

The problem of land available to gypsies as stopping places - and the uses they could be put to - which was to become their greatest post-war problem had an early harbinger in the "official ban" placed upon their camping on Epsom Downs for Derby Day in 1948 (see Chapter 6, pp. 138 - 140). The nature of scrap metal dealing, it's unsightliness and the quantities of waste material (useless even to gypsy dealers) with no effective disposal system, was a closely linked aspect of the land problem as local authorities, reflecting the norms of the sedentary population, assumed the separation of work and home. The use of caravans as a leisure facility by house dwellers or as an alternative form of home in view of the general housing shortage, meant further restrictions upon stopping and, therefore, the loss to gypsies of many traditional sites. Nevertheless, it was recognized by central government that gypsies had "a legitimate need for camping sites"; county councils and London boroughs were required to provide suitable ones. Leaving aside the question of the acceptability of such stopping places to the traveller's themselves and the fact that they were inevitably classed as 'residential' and therefore not supposed to be used for sorting scrap (see Chapter 8, pp. 184 - 186), the actual provision of sites was "slow". No local council, whatever it's political complexion, was prepared to face the vote-alienation which every proposed site seemed inevitably to threaten among residents over the contiguous area. [3]

The result was that, in 1965, only an estimated 10% of gypsies were living on official sites. There was a suspicion that local authorities did not regard official camp sites as more than an interim measure; the New Forest R.D.C., one of the first authorities to set up 'compounds' during the Second World War, decided in 1959 to "clear" them. The occupants were to be provided with council houses and "assimilated" into the settled population. Even when recognizing the 'legitimacy' of the gypsies' need for stopping places, officialdom hopefully foresaw that "at the same time the Romany way of life is changing, new occupations and new opportunities are making

it less necessary for gypsies to move about in search of work and many more are now ready to settle down". As gypsies refused to conform to such wishful thinking, they increasingly saw themselves as victims of gorgio authorities who, apparently, were trying to harass them into oblivion. "Since the war .... the county council's have become increasingly officious", armed with powers under new legislation such as the Scrap Metal Dealer's Act, 1964 which required dealers to register with local authorities and so presented particular difficulties to travellers. Gypsies, as a people, "whose traditional and well-organized pattern of existence .... (was) .... being disrupted by the interference of local government executives", responded by becoming more conscious of their peculiar identity and culture and took the first steps towards organizing to protect their interests (see Chapter 6, pp. 138- 140). But whatever the difficulties facing them, gypsies seem to have lost none of their qualities of adaptation and evasion in the twentieth century as they continue to carve out an economic niche for themselves and if the (admittedly unreliable) figures suggesting an increase in the numbers of those who claim, or are attributed, the identity are anything to go by.[4]

Showmen

i) Post-war Boom

As the war drew to it's close, showmen began, early in 1945, to travel more widely and frequently. But, as the Showmen's Guild - more far-seeing than most of it's members - was soon to complain, most showmen thought only in terms of resuming their pre-war circuits, with little consideration of future needs. There was at first, perhaps, little incentive to do so while business remained "very good". Charter and "customary" fairs were again held in line with the "assurance" given by central government; St. Giles' Fair, Oxford, for example was held on it's usual September dates in 1945. In order to help ex-service showmen, the Guild allowed a period of free membership, graduated according to the individual's length of time in the forces. From the administrative point of view there was, of course, "a certain amount of unrest and sorting out to be done"

by the Guild and the lessees or Riding Masters, but by the end of 1946, it was happily stated that "during the past twelve months our industry has settled down to it's pre-war routine as far as fairs are concerned". [5]

With a return to civilian occupation, a war-weary populace sought relaxation and amusement. These were the "halcyon days" of the fair in peacetime. "The crowds were so terrific" showmen recalled at the interviews, but others added ominously "..... for a time". Problems there were even while the boom lasted but they related mainly to supplies and equipment. 'Swag' for prizes on the stalls was hard to come by so the womenfolk resorted to producing their own - rag dolls were cheap and easy to make. More serious was the maintenance and upkeep of machinery; heavy usage going back to the 'Stay-at-home' holidays increasingly took it's toll - but now there was no preference in the allocation of materials in short supply. The Guild did what it could to help in arranging purchases and allocating items desperately needed by showmen but otherwise it could only hope the position would ease "ere long". [6]

Evidence that the boom years did not long survive the Second World War were the "optimistic" hopes expressed for the Easter fairs of 1947. "Money .... (it was foreseen, would be) .... tighter than it was a year or two ago" and "no one .... (should be) .... under the delusion that the public would have the same weight of money to spend on amusements as in former years". By the end of the year the position was "far from satisfactory" and, it was resignedly agreed that for showmen, "the days of easy money are past". Reports were passed to the Showmen's Guild by area secretaries of poor results at fair after fair; at the one at Cockermouth, Cumberland for example, "business was certainly not up to standard". The Guild had foreseen, as early as 1944, what might happen; "we do not want that mad wave of prosperity which followed the last war for a couple of years and which left us with the spectre of want and despair for the next ten years". Fears of such extremes during the years of post-war austerity and after proved unjustified; rather, as one showman expressed it, "business evened out like". The problem,

as demand declined from war-time levels was that "fairgrounds are becoming overcrowded" - not just in the numbers of rides and stalls but also in the numbers of lorries (often army surplus) and larger homes (evidence of the passing boom). "Up and down the country .... (it was complained) .... the number of Riding Masters is increasing", the blame was due "in no small measure .... to newcomers", frequently demobilized men it was alleged, who had exploited the war-time and early post-war situation. But not only was there no slump comparable to that which followed the post-1918 "mad wave", showmen, as a result of the prosperity of the Second World War, were better able to adjust to the 'levelling off' process. The latter forced them to look to the future and this they did by diversify their business interests; the decade of the nineteen-fifties first saw showmen's capital invested in seaside fairgrounds, entertainments such as working men's clubs and (more recently) amusement arcades. [7]

The circus could not recover overnight from it's experience of the Second World War. Unlike the fair, apart from a relatively few, small shows, equipment had been disposed of and human troupes either dispersed or transferred to other venues of show business. Performing animals, except for a few of the domesticated varieties, had been destroyed and obviously could not be quickly replaced or trained. The post-war boom of the circus therefore came later than that of the fairground, it's main focus being the years from 1948 to the early 'fifties. Public demand was there; when Chipperfield's new show arrived in Southampton, in August, 1950, "crowds waited .... to watch the arrival of the elephants". "The circus has come into it's own again", it was said at the time, there being "forty tenting shows" on the road. Many were, of course, small family circuses but some had grown to a considerable size. Among the larger ones were those of the Chipperfields and Bertram Mills, the human element with it's homes resembling "a huge mobile village". As audiences became more demanding, no longer content with the quality of war-time shows and those of the immediately post-1945 years, so it became necessary for proprietors of the larger organizations to make world-wide forays in search of suitable animal and human performers. But,

as had happened before in the history of the circus, it was the smaller, family shows which were better able to survive when the boom passed, the post-war peak clearly over by the mid-nineteen-fifties.[8]

ii) Pressures of the Fifties

Britain's showmen anticipated great things from the Festival of Britain in 1951; it was hoped that the new funfair in Battersea Park would generate a wider revival in their fortunes. And, of course, to showmen it was unthinkable that the celebrations planned for provincial centres should not include their offerings; when it was learned that Swansea did not propose to include a fair in it's programme, complaint was made by the Guild to the local organizers. Though most showmen experienced a reasonably profitable year, no sustained revival occurred. The only lasting gains to the fairground at about this time was where the trading element of certain fairs continued to decline and space was increasingly given over to amusements. Appleby and Barnet fairs were examples, though as many as 620 horses were reported as changing hands at the latter as recently as 1952. At the interviews showmen recalled, "we had some bad spells in the nineteen-fifties". There were still "unmistakable signs that the public was keeping a tighter hold on their purse strings .... the days of carefree spending are past". "The continued fall in the value of money .... (and) .... rise in costs" were blamed, the Guild pointing to armaments costs connected with the Korean War as a principal cause of inflation. The pattern of fluctuating business fortunes persisted throughout the decade and, indeed, the Guild continued to refer to recurring economic problems into the nineteen-sixties. Though the fair continued to be (in the view of the Showmen's Guild) "an inexpensive and easily accessible entertainment" it was noticed that inclement weather - always the bane of showmen - began to affect takings even more severely. In 1954 it had been "disastrous" while two years later came another bad season. Most showmen did not consider that television, generally speaking, had affected them too greatly but, as an alternative entertainment, it may have explained the increasing impact of a wet

evening upon the fair. A more direct effect of television was upon the remaining boxing booths; the appeal of big-name screened bouts, the Guild admitted, resulted in their final demise. [9]

Despite some diversification of showmen's business interests, the problem of overcrowding remained and, indeed, in the eyes of some, got worse; "there was more than ever in the business .... (because) .... not many goes out of it". The fairgrounds were once again increasingly "becoming overcrowded" as the industry failed to expand in line with general population trends and the proportionate increase in the numbers who considered themselves showmen. Pressure was also aggravated by the inability, due to economic conditions, of showmen to live off a small amount of equipment; "the man with one or two stalls yesterday .... (now required) .... three, four, or often more". A typical result was at Nottingham Goose Fair where, for example, "application for space has been so heavy .... that at least two-thirds of .... (them) .... have been disappointed". Towards the end of the nineteen-fifties showmen began, as they had over twenty years before, to leave the profession, the poorer ones with little capital frequently gravitating towards the scrap metal business. Those who could do so moved increasingly to the seaside (though making efforts to retain the image of 'travellers' - see Chapter 8, pp. 192-195). The possibility of opening to the public every day and the elimination of increasing travel costs combined to make 'sandscratching' attractive. [10]

The burgeoning of bureaucracy and a welter of seemingly petty regulations, as foreseen by the Showmen's Guild a decade earlier, blossomed in the 'fifties. "Controls and regulations" at a time the term "state .... (had become) .... a revered word" combined, in the Guild's view, to stifle "enterprise and initiatives". Showmen complained of various requirements which added to their work-load and overheads, of which a small example was the need to fit television suppressors to all electrical equipment. Where major legislation was concerned, the Showmen's Guild remained vigilant and continued it's policy of seeking exemption for it's members (see Chapter 6, pp. 134-136). The provisions of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act, 1960, provides an

excellent example. The 'First Schedule' to the act refers specifically to "Travelling Showmen .... Subject to the provisions of paragraph 13 of this schedule .... (which covers only the conditions for withdrawal of the concession) .... a site licence shall not be required for the use of land as a caravan site by a travelling showman who is a member of an organization of travelling showmen which holds for the time being a certificate granted under this paragraph and who is, at the time, travelling for the purposes of his business or who has taken up winter quarters on land with his equipment for some period falling between the beginning of October in any year and the end of March in the following year". The exemption thus achieved for members (as mentioned in Chapter 6, pp. 134- 136) also adroitly strengthened the Guild's position; as the only recognized and certificated showmen's organization the Act helped to make it almost impossible to pursue the lifestyle and profession without Guild membership. [11]

The summer travel areas of showmen have tended to contract since the early nineteen-fifties, reflecting increased travel costs and the reduced flexibility ensured by the grip of the 'Two Year' rule (see Chapter 6, pp. 132-134). Within the smaller areas, economic pressures required showmen to open to the public wherever possible with the result, "we travel on a Sunday every time now". Though having to make do with poorer fair sites, away from town centres or public streets - "we don't get such good sites as we did years ago", it was complained - high rents posed a problem, so to remain on site without public opening became financially untenable. "Sites for fairgrounds are our very existence" but with high land values and ambitious town centre redevelopment plans the order of the day, corporations were in a strong position. The occasional fair was a low priority to them. "The public's attitude to the fair .... (continued to be) .... very good" some showmen thought; it was "the councils we are disappointed with". In search of short term financial rewards, too many of them "were not looking forward enough to traditions .... of the fair". If fair sites and winter quarters, the two ways on which pressures of land usage affected showmen, led to their loss, showmen asked, "what's the good of your business ?"

The concern generated by this, "our biggest problem", explained the sympathy expressed for gypsies in their not dissimilar plight (see Chapter 6, pp. 138 - 140). [12]

iii) Trends in Fair and Circus

Once the early post-war "scarcity of raw materials and restrictions placed on the home trade" due to the 'export drive' had passed, showmen turned their thoughts to new equipment. The heavily used rides, dating from pre-1939, either needed replacement due to age, or were obsolescent in terms of the tastes of the modern fair-going public. As the boom years became a thing of the past, so showmen had to adapt to changing amusement demands if they were to survive. One of the effects of television was that "it kept the older people in and the younger people out" and with money in the pockets of youth due to full employment, "we've got to cater for the teenagers". "You don't get the older, family people out as much as you used to" with the result there were soon "more machine people about", meaning that more showmen invested in rides offering thrills and excitement with themes emphasizing air, space and speed. Occasionally it was possible to re-vamp old equipment but, in the main, the dominant rides of the nineteen-fifties and after, such as the 'Wall of Death','Meteorite','Paratrooper' and so on, were built new. Of the older equipment, only the 'Dodgems' really retained their popularity; sets of 'Gallopers' disappeared, only a few surviving to benefit from the wave of nostalgia which was as yet two decades away. Similarly, the fairground organs suffered an eclipse in favour of ever more raucous 'pop music'. The modern fairground thus became increasingly associated with the teenager and young adult which inevitably included a delinquent element, in turn threatening to renew old charges of the 'disreputable fair'. There was another aspect to the changing clientele however; as was pointed out at the interviews, most business had once been done late in the evening when the public houses turned out "but you get less drunkenness on the fairground now". [13]

By 1960, the tide of the circus's popularity had once again ebbed. With increased personal mobility there was, as in the case of

the fair, less need for amusement to be taken to the settled populace but, unlike the fair, the circus was by it's nature less able to adapt to cater for the tastes of a certain section of the public. When Bertram Mills circus pulled off the road for the last time in 1967, it was as symbolically the end of an era as had been the breaking up of Lord George Sanger's show over sixty years before. Only a few of the small family circuses survived and there were only six of them in the United Kingdom by the nineteen-seventies. "You've got to have a family run show now", it was explained, for economic reasons. The continuity which remains among old-established circus families was, however, well illustrated by a member of the Paulo family who, when she was interviewed, pointed out her daughter, "she does three acts and Henry - my grandson - plays the organ and he can clown and do the stilts ...." "Life goes in a circle, doesn't it ?" commented an elderly Ring Master who, having observed the increasing separation of the fairground and circus in his youth, claimed in recent years to have found his show increasingly welcomed by the "machine men" with the object of providing a larger and more varied attraction for the public. And, at the time of writing, the proprietors of the largest of the tenting circuses on Britain's roads was actively considering putting rides and stalls 'out front' as a daytime attraction, with the same object in view. [14]

Canal Boatmen

i) Nationalization

Nationalization was, of course, the most significant event to affect the canal boatmen in the immediate post-war years. The actual date of the state take-over of the bulk of the canal system of the United Kingdom was 1st January, 1948 and many boatmen entertained great hopes of a resurgence in the trade by which they lived. Others, however, were less sanguine; they had noticed the readiness with which road vehicles had further eroded their cargoes in the two years since the end of the war, especially during the great 'freeze up' of early 1947, when many boats were icebound for up to fourteen weeks. Then some elderly boatmen foresaw, "we've watched it .... (the canal traffic) .... dying, ... (though) ....

the cut will see us out .... it's finished". To some men such as Steerer Phelps nationalization meant little but the loss of the boats' traditional style of painting (see Chapter 6, pp. 140-141), even though the National Council for Waterways "had stressed the need for a 'national outlook' " on a system which was "cheap and reliable" and could become of "increasing importance .... (to the) .... transport economy". The 'national outlook' also held the prospect of better wages and conditions as negotiated through the National Joint Council, half of whose twelve members were trade union representatives - thus helping to make other changes attendant upon nationalization acceptable. Many of the old and familiar names on the cut disappeared as established carrying firms sold out to British Waterways; "The 'Waterways'.... they got nearly everything", as one elderly boatwoman recalled it. The largest carrier of them all, Fellowes, Moreton & Clayton sold out - immediately prior to nationalization they were still running 107 motor boats and 65 butties. Other well-known names which vanished from the canal about the same time were Samuel Barlow and Harvey & Clayton.[15]

ii) End of an Era

Right to the end of the freight carrying era on the narrow canals, coal remained the principal cargo. In the years following the Second World War it was, for example, still estimated to constitute 95% of all southbound traffic on the Grand Union line to London from the mining districts centred on Coventry and Leicester. In the reverse direction steel, zinc, grain and sugar were among the loads carried. Cargoes elsewhere were such bulk items as timber, bricks and cement, to which the canals remained suited. Some special local traffics survived, an example being the carrying away by water of the products of the Potteries while an instance of a less usual cargo were the loads of salt carried by a 'Number One' from Cheshire to various laundries around Newbury in Berkshire. All, however, suffered from the accumulated effects of neglect of maintenance on the cut; it was estimated that lack of dredging was reducing the loads carried on each boat by around 20%. And once the destination was reached, lacking the facilities often provided for the usurping

lorries, unloading was a slow and laborious task; "if you took a load of coal, you very often had to unload it yourself with a shovel" (see also Chapter 5, pp. 105-111).[16]

The post-nationalization period was "when the 'Number Ones' was driven off" the canal, unable to compete against the monopolizing tendency of British Waterways and themselves regarded as politically unacceptable in the brave new socialist world (see Chapter 7, pp. 176-178). The young women were no longer satisfied with life on the cut, they wanted "cinemas, dancing and all that". The image of life ashore was all the more alluring because of the suddenness with which, during the second half of the war, it was presented to them. The prospect of high wages and shorter hours was equally tempting to male youth and, of course, if they went at a time of full employment there was little prospect of recruiting replacement labour. Certainly, against current wages and work availability elsewhere, to travel from London to Birmingham in sixty-three hours of near-continuous work so that a family, from their joint labour might, as late as 1950, earn between them the equivalent of an hourly rate of 1¾d, could not appear other than unattractive. Despite some attempts to reverse the trend, such as the trade union's allotment of a large part of it's 'house journal' to the advantages of inland water carriage in July, 1952, the boatmen and their families continued to "drift away" (see also Chapter 6, pp. 140-141).[17]

As trade was "drying up" so, it was admitted that the "waterways are little used for .... (commercial) .... navigation". At the same time a growth of pleasure boating on the narrow canals was noted. But the future of the cut as a leisure facility had no connection with the waterborne personnel of the commercial age other than as an absurdly romanticized memory to enhance the appeal of the canal's new image. Though a limited amount of commercial carrying on inland waterways was to continue - coal from the Yorkshire field thus passing down to Goole and Humberside was an example - it was generally the case, by the early nineteen-sixties, that traffic had "gradually faded out"; there was only "the odd coal boat" to be seen. When a way of life gradually declines to the point of extinction, rather than

comes to a more abrupt end, it is impossible to point to a precise date as the 'end of an era'. Nor in a case such as that of the canal boatmen can it be said with confidence at what precise stage their numbers had become so depleted that it was no longer legitimate to speak of them as a recognizable group within the larger society. At some indefinable stage of their decline, they became simply a number of scattered families lacking both the numbers or cohesion to form a distinct community.[18]

Resumé

All travellers had, during the Second World War, enjoyed economic conditions ranging from an unexpected bonanza for certain showmen to the relative, if modest, prosperity of the canal boatmen. These extremes were to be reflected in the fortunes of travellers in the following decades. The continuing boom in the fairgrounds business and that in the circus which, for reasons explained above, came a little later, added further to the showmen's resources to face post-war conditions. Similarly, the growth of scrap dealing was of benefit to the majority of gypsies. After the hiatus of the Second World War and it's immediate aftermath, post-war conditions were, in the main, a development of trends which had already shown themselves before 1939; transport changes, questions of land usage, the growth in restrictions and controls. All of these problems were inter-linked though, of course, not all aspects of them affected equally all groups of travellers. Some developments - most notably the gypsies' involvement with scrap metal dealing - served to exacerbate relations with the sedentary population, while the problem of land values and usage were of sufficient seriousness to showmen as to evince a somewhat uncharacteristic expression of sympathy for gypsies (see also Chapter 8, pp. 196-199). Of completely new phenomena, there was only the influx of Irish tinkers, while the use of mobile homes by the settled population (whether for leisure or as alternative housing) was hardly apparent before 1939.

The survival and prosperity of all types of travellers in the second half of the twentieth century continued to depend on their

resourcefulness and adaptability; added to this was the affects of the breakdown of the various groups isolation from the culture of the majority society. The Second World War had more profound consequences in this respect than the earlier conflict and then came the greater impact of the introduction of that culture's values in the home via the medium of television. By the time the latter had become established, the families of canal boatmen had almost all disappeared from the cut. As a mainly employee group they, of course, had relatively little control over their industry's fortunes, but it was also partly due to the breakdown of the cultural isolation of their society that the young showed so little resistance to the final demise of the lifestyle. Showmen, on the other hand, were probably least affected by the cultural incursions of the television set. As purveyors of a leisure activity they, of course, worked when the majority were at play, their own relaxation perforce occurring at times of the day less prone to it's influence. Thus, it may be argued, showmen continued the more isolated of the remaining traveller groups. Nevertheless, as indicated, gypsies and showmen have managed to retain their old skills of resourcefulness and adaptation as shown by the extent of 'scrap' work and the updating of the fair to cater for a more youthful clientele. The apparent success of both gypsies and showmen in manoeuvring within an environment ever more regimented and restricted by petty officialdom has ensured the continuance of the sedentary population's ambivalence of attitude towards travellers.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONCLUSION

The Non-traveller Influence

The inclusion of two groups of travellers who were popularly identified by their profession or industry - that is, showmen and canal boatmen- under the generic title of 'gypsy' was justified by the settled population on the grounds of the similarly mobile life-style and the diminutive,highly decorated homes common to all three groups at the dawn of the twentieth century. Satisfied with the conclusion, there was little or no reason to look more deeply on the part of either private citizen or public official, hence the lack of reliable statistical evidence as to numbers even though the experiences of the groups over the period covered by this thesis varied from an apparent 100% increase among gypsies to the undoubted elimination of traditional canal boat families.

The attitude of non-traveller to traveller, at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, has been both subjective and ambivalent, a state of affairs in which gypsies, at least, have been guilty of collusion when they perceived it to be to their advantage. At a time of industrialization, gypsies were well placed to represent a supposed rural ideal to a population smarting under the new factory disciplines, 'wage slavery' and the conflicting interests of employer and employee. The new role of travellers was fortuitously enhanced by the simultaneous widespread adoption of the brightly painted vardo. The need for the romanticized image has in no way diminished in this century, it being popularly but erroneously supposed that travellers remain in some way immune from the economic, social and political pressures which beset the majority. [1]

Subjective opinion was, however, usually less favourable towards travellers; indeed, soon after the first appearance of gypsies in Britain, over five hundred years ago, hostility became apparent. Fear and mistrust of the strangers then, as now, led the

local populace to "harass them from place to place". Many were the unsubstantiated sins heaped upon the heads of gypsies over the years, resulting in the mutual rejection of traveller and non-traveller. One consequence has been the continued relative isolation of gypsies and showmen (the surviving traveller groups) into the second half of the twentieth century. And some recent developments, such as the gypsy involvement in scrap metal dealing, has done nothing to reduce the animosity. Reflecting the confident prejudices of the majority, over many years various governments passed legislation, first in the form of punitive measures against gypsies. Late in the nineteenth century these tended to be replaced by philanthropic measures (often misguided), while in this century travellers have more often been caught up in legislation enacted for the (alleged) benefit of the majority, sedentary population, which has served to highlight the increased incompatibility of the travelling and non-travelling lifestyles. From the traveller's point of view it was fortunate that much legislation, as it affected them, remained a 'dead letter'. Nevertheless, the ambivalence of the non-travellers attitude continued to surface, even in quite recent official reports, an example in 1971 proclaiming the desire to encourage "those aspects of the traveller's life which are worth preserving". [2]

It is this duality in the non-traveller's subjective vision of travellers, often contradictory yet existing side-by-side which has done much to confuse relationships, not only between the sedentary population and travellers but also amongst groups of travellers themselves.

Common Factors

All groups of travellers were distinguished by the lack of separation of home and work, the latter being of a 'family' nature. This does not mean that the roles of the family members was indistinguishable but rather that the work done and, therefore, economic contribution of the various members - over two and sometimes three generations - was largely complimentary. The work was, in these respects of a 'pre-industrial' nature and also in being spread

over many hours of the day, shorter bursts of activity often alternating with periods of relative languor. The economic inter-dependence of traveller families and the non-separation of home and work contributed to the integration and stability of traveller societies - the lack of divorce, strict sexual codes (also linked to size of the home) and the contributory economic role of children being examples. All traveller groups, as they existed at the beginning of the nineteen-hundreds , owed something to the economic, social and political developments of the preceding century. The groups were similarly to be influenced, to varying extents, by the same forces in the ensuing decades. Yet while they remained as families of travellers, the groups retained the essential characteristics regarding their family and work dynamics. Only during the two World Wars did travellers frequently, perforce, abandon these precepts - these being the times, of course, when social barriers and the isolation of communities were breached for the sedentary majority.

The positive economic role of even quite young children conditioned the traveller's attitude to education in general and school attendance in particular. To enable children to take their economic place as soon as possible, education for travellers meant absorbing that which was necessary to the lifestyle's requirements. Such a concept of education, though narrow, was thorough within it's limits. The result was that school-attendance was generally short in span of years and highly irregular while it lasted; it was often seasonal and almost always subject to the priority of work demands. As such education as was thought necessary took place in the traveller's 'home-and-work' environment, the family continued as the major socializing and educational experience of the young traveller. Further consequences were the limited range of social contacts, the early maturation of children and close surveillance of their development right up to adulthood when marriage threatened the balance of the family's labour force and economy. The low priority accorded school attendance was, for similar reasons, not unusual in agricultural districts in the early years of this century. Where family work also survived in certain industries, such as brick-making,

for example, the economic role of both adults and children was here, too, part of "the balance in the family between able-bodied members and dependants". [3]

It has been said that the domination of a community by a single industry tended to "produce a common bond which .... made the inhabitants inward looking"; the lifestyle of each group of travellers seems to have had much the same effect though in their case the sense of community did not carry it's usual implication of a geographical location. The "essential unity" of each group of travellers had, therefore, to be reinforced by special mechanisms of contact and support in view of the special difficulties attendant upon the element of travel - though normally undertaken and limited by economic considerations - and the general inability or unwillingness to make contact with the settled population and it's services. The need for mutual support occurred mainly at times of illness or in old age. And in order to insure against these or other eventualities, all traveller groups, presaging the trend among the increasingly 'scattered' families of the modern sedentary society, made much of such occasions as weddings or funerals in order to recognize and reinforce the mutual sense of identity - though elopement was a once frequent variant among poorer land travellers while, in the case of funerals, an exaggerated fear of the dead may be linked to the often remote and lonely aspects of most traveller's lives. Travellers knowledge of their isolation, in the social sense, from the majority of the populace served not only to reinforce their sense of identity and need of mutual support but also tended to make travellers more conscious of their membership of the group, as against a sense of their own individuality. The knowledge of social isolation, as among "inward looking" communities of the sedentary population, led to a 'closing of ranks' against outsiders; the sense of unity tending to replace more conventional socio-economic class consciousness. [4]

Most of the above characteristics exhibited by all three groups of travellers can be attributed to the peculiarities of the lifestyle or were, at some time in the past, shared by groups within the majority, sedentary society. But while practices such as shared

family occupations and erratic school attendance became less common as the twentieth century progressed, they remained the norm among travellers. Though, arguably, inseparable from other aspects of the lifestyle, their continuance was most likely only among those whose activities were on the fringe of the wider economy - that is, exploiting gaps in it, providing occasional amusements or working in an obsolescent industry. The apparent unity of the three groups of travellers was largely due, therefore, to their failure to advance in step - if at all - with the changing norms of the majority and not with any consideration of their history, culture or pedigree.

Gypsies v. Showmen

i) Similarities

Both gypsies and showmen placed considerable emphasis upon their own independence and resourcefulness; these qualities they saw as evidence of their superiority over gorgios and flatties. In practice they meant family self-employment and an adaptability in recognizing and exploiting earning opportunities; the latter on either a seasonal basis or over longer periods of time. Varied income sources on a seasonal basis was, again, once not uncommon, notably in rural areas, but became less frequent in the twentieth century especially when coupled with a more or less continual willingness to adapt to changing conditions and an emphasis upon a family form of self employment. One consequence was the gypsies' and showmen's distaste for the controls of the settled population's authorities which were seen as limiting to their economic, as well as personal, freedom. Despite their adaptability, proven income sources were kept over long periods; by the early nineteen-hundreds horse-dealing and peg-making, for example, were already long-established. That the 'alternative' winter jobs of showmen were so often those practiced by gypsies all the year round inevitably raises the possibility that summer fairground amusements were, at least to some travellers, originally merely another alternative but a type which, because of it's earning potential, burgeoned to become their dominant and identifying work - then in winter, of necessity, older sources

came into their own again. Such a theory becomes increasingly acceptable when it is recalled that simple fairground stalls and games were often home-made and cheap to build, therefore a move towards fairground amusements was well within the scope of a low-capital group such as gypsies. [5]

Gypsies and showmen were both inclined to claim a 'pure' pedigree in order to prove their standing amongst travellers; by mutual agreement considerable status was accorded those who possessed certain surnames or, in the case of showmen, could prove a number of generations 'in the business'. Where certain traveller families, previously of no special rank, have acquired - by their society's standards - considerable wealth, itself a phenomenon which did not often pre-date the twentieth century by more than a decade or two, their social place has also risen. But just as white collar clerks, for example, continued to see manual workers as "social inferiors" despite their sometimes overtaking them in affluence, so poorer gypsies and showmen (particularly those associated with the declining circus side of the business) clung to the past basis of status, the pedigree. Whatever the basis, however, it was essential, if one wished to retain recognition or regard in the gypsies' and showmen's societies, to remain a traveller. To cease entirely to travel (except due to age and infirmity) was, both literally and figuratively, to cease to be a 'traveller'. [6]

One of the most significant areas of common cultural ground shared by gypsies and showmen undoubtedly was - and still is - their concept of 'inner cleanliness' and various customs and taboos associated with it. From it also derives much of the rejection of house-dwellers, regarded as being unclean in their habits. Fear of contamination made various common practices explicable, such as household utensils for specific duties, an unwillingness to share crockery or cutlery with non-travellers and so on. By extension various species of animals were acceptable according to the traveller's interpretation of their habits. Particular incidents in the life cycle were also regarded as unclean, most notably at times of birth and death. Women were ritually unclean for a time after giving birth

and, closely allied to this, were subject to certain taboos regarding food when menstrual. There is some evidence that similar menstrual taboos were once widely practiced among the rural population and, indeed, it is possible that travellers other cultural concepts (regarding cleanliness, for example) were once more generally known. However, until evidence is forthcoming they must be regarded as peculiar to the majority of gypsies and showmen, among whom they retain their importance. The taboos associated with women also rapidly became limited to gypsies and showmen during the earlier years of this century. The other major item of cleanliness upon which gypsies and showmen agreed was the unacceptability of any variety of indoor water closet, even when modern and more hygienic systems of waste disposal were introduced and space considerations became less pressing, the conviction remained widespread that natural functions were properly performed at some distance from the home.

Other factors tend to suggest a close affinity between gypsies and showmen, not least of which was the social organization of both groups tending towards matriarchy when the host society has generally been patriarchal. Both groups evinced a certain pride in their kind, the natural corollary of which was a sometimes ill-concealed contempt for the sedentary population. Inter-marriage with members of the latter group was therefore frowned upon and, when it did occur, was effectively concealed by a refusal to acknowledge the concept of the children as 'half caste', thus maintaining an appearance of unsullied continuity of their own kind. Many of the showmen interviewed admitted a knowledge of gypsy customs and the Romany language but undoubtedly of first importance was the insistence of a significant minority of their own, and their fellow showmen's, gypsy origins.

ii) Differences

Though many cultural affinities continued to exist between gypsies and showmen throughout the first half of the twentieth century, certain differences must also be noted. Showmen do not appear to have any folk-recollection of the practice of outdoor births, for example, though regarding the mother as ritually unclean

and, therefore, sharing the gypsy appreciation of gorgio hospitals for the purpose. Pressures of the showmen's more demanding travel itinerary or the earlier adoption of (marginally) more commodious wheeled homes might provide an explanation. At the opposite end of the life cycle, the destruction of the deceased person's possessions (usually by fire and already an extremely rare practice among gypsies by early in this century) was, as far as can be traced, never known to showmen. This and the frequently longer courtships than were usual for gypsies may be explained by the showmen's tendency to a greater amount of material possessions, necessary to set up home and earn a living. Setting up in business was thus more difficult while the later destruction of such assets would appear profligate; a clear example of the inter-relationship of cultural and economic factors. Economic interests also explained the changing role of the female in gypsy society and the showmen's appreciation, especially in the years since the Second World War, of a greater level of formal education - neither of which changes were experienced by the other group.

Of considerable interest in view of the sedentary majority's identification of showmen as gypsies were the number of instances where developments in travel patterns, motive power and the home itself were first apparent in the showmen's society. The trend to regular winter stopping places can be attributed to the increasing bulk of showmen's equipment, gypsies only following suit - but rarely owning their winter quarters - as restrictions upon the freedom of where they might stop, itself due to land shortages and values, increased. The showmen's adoption of more modern forms of motive power - the transition from horse to steam and then the internal combustion engine - was evidence of the earlier impact of industrial developments and methods upon them. The nature of gypsies' work and their later general abandonment of horse power meant they had no experience of the showmen's intermediate stage of the steam traction engine. But it was in the near universal use of the vardo - the traditional Romany caravan of popular mythology - by both gypsies and showmen at the beginning of the period upon which this thesis concentrates which, more than any other single factor, made the

latter group inseparable from the former in the eyes of the public. Yet the available evidence suggests that the wheeled home was known to showmen at least half a century before it was widely adopted by gypsies.

The major focus of resistance to a gypsy identity for showmen, for almost a century, has been the Showmen's Guild. This body has insisted upon a clear distinction between the two societies, despite the admission of no less a person than George Sanger, one of the Guild's founding fathers, that gypsies were much in evidence at fairs and, moreover, sometimes involved in the leisure and amusement aspects of them; he mentions fortune tellers, varieties of games and "very large drinking and dancing booths". The Showmen's Guild was originally formed to resist proposed legislation aimed primarily at gypsies and what became it's 'official line' on the subject of identity continued to prove a useful device for defeating subsequent attempts at legislation or for manoeuvre to the showmen's advantage. The problem is to decide if the insistance on a separate identity for showmen, by the Guild and it's members, was a matter of conviction or merely a useful ploy ? [7]

The founders and early members of the Guild were the proprietors of large circuses or fairground men already the well-to-do owners of the new machinery. They were obviously capable of organization and administration, disciplines rare among gypsies who were also unlikely, at that time, to have achieved a prominent position in either branch of the showmen's world. As the Showmen's Guild grew in power, it's policies almost certainly influenced many of it's members' self-perception, giving them, in effect, a choice of the gypsy or showman identity. As the Guild grew, granting admission to poorer members of the fraternity, it did not follow that only that element continued to be more likely to have gypsy connections; inter-marriage and varying family fortunes meant that by mid-twentieth century a Riding Master was as likely to be so related as one of his stall-holders.

The circus branch of the showman's business, despite some fluctuations, has suffered, overall, a notable decline from it's

late-Victorian peak of popularity. Such was the demand, many of the bigger ones were then able to operate largely independently of the fairground circuits. No clear distinction has ever been possible, however, between the two sides of the showmen's business; some circuses were to be seen regularly at fairs, small booths had a ring inserted to enhance popular appeal and families from time to time transferred their interests between the two - and the now defunct menageries fell clearly under neither heading. Also notable was the relative paucity of gypsy surnames among Victorian circus families and the tendency, at the interviews, of people with strong circus backgrounds to practice less widely or have less knowledge of gypsy-associated cultural interpretations and taboos. It may therefore be argued that as well as the growth in numbers joining the Showmen's Guild possibly increasing those with gypsy connections, so the decline of the circus also led to a proportionate decrease in the representation of that element.

The Isolation of Canal Boatmen

Boatmen stand out as the traveller group for whom employee status was the norm, self-employed boatmen,the 'Number Ones', always being a minority. Employee status was generally despised by other travellers and was widely tolerated by them only under the special circumstances of war time. Unlike showmen, who were also identified by their calling, boatmen were effectively tied to a single source of income,though their failure to show the resourcefulness and adaptability to changing economic pressures was probably equally due to the inflexibility of the inland waterway system as to their employee status. They were certainly not helped, however, by the lack of sympathy evinced for their industry by some (i.e. railway) canal owners, trade unions or, when they were near extinction as a group, state proprietorship.

Boatmen seemed, at the interviews, to have had no memories of their families on the cut going back more than, at most, three or four generations - in contrast to the often extravagant claims of land travellers. This is broadly in line with the theory that boatmen's families were first taken to live aboard as they became

impoverished by railway competition, from about eighteen-forty onwards. The readiness with which many boatmen reverted to shore homes for their families on the relatively few occasions trade conditions permitted the expense and the lack of a 'travel culture' when finally forced off the cut both seem to suggest that nomadism had no long history among boatmen. Paradoxically, however, being tied to one income source which had less in the way of seasonal variations, while living aboard boatmen's families were the most continually mobile of all travellers. Of importance to the question of a possible gypsy identity, as popularly based upon the similarity of a narrowboat cabin to a vardo, is the suggestion that the period when the former were adopted as homes marginally pre-dated the gypsies' move to the latter.

Boatmen also appeared to have no knowledge of the cultural values which distinguished both gypsies and showmen in spheres other than employment and travel; the concept of inner-cleanliness, with it's fear of contamination, and the times of ritual uncleanliness, with the exception of some awareness of menstrual taboos (which it is suggested only became a distinguishing feature of land travellers in the twentieth century) were foreign to boatmen. The economic environment in which they operated was, of course, a factor in the boatmen's practices and values but cannot be held entirely responsible for the absence of a wider movement to hospital births. Boatmen, perhaps due to a more recent familiarity with the sedentary population's practices, appear to have been the first traveller group to favour regular centres for the rites of marriage and burial. They were also orthodox in their adherence to 'white' and Anglican weddings; elopement, despite poverty, was unknown. The practice of parting with children - their informal adoption as 'mates' on other craft - which would have been anathema to most gypsies and showmen may, however, be attributed to the inflexibility of the unit of earning capacity, the narrowboat.

A closer relationship to landsmen than other traveller groups was suggested by the patriarchal nature of the boatmen's society; the male head of the family was the recognized 'Number One'

or captain. Boatmen were also very well aware of the lowly status accorded them in the sedentary population's class structure, in contrast to gypsies and showmen who tended to be outside it. Boatmen, alone among travellers, in consequence, showed none of the panache or pride in their kind which the others sometimes displayed. Partly no doubt because theirs was a dying industry, almost no inter-marriage took place with the settled population but as a result of the foregoing there was little rejection of the notion on the part of this group of travellers themselves.

The condition of this isolated and depressed (mainly) employee society was the focus of attention, at various times, of individual and organized philanthropy. This led to more or less continuous scrutiny by publically appointed officials of a kind to which other travellers have never been subjected; significantly, though frequently evaded, this manifestation of a benevolent bureaucracy was accepted or even, on occasions, welcomed in a way quite at variance with the gypsies and showmen's traditional view of such, as gorgio - flattie harrassment.

The canal boatmen's own view of the idea of a gypsy identity was unequivocal; denials were strong and consistent. The canals were always well removed from the gypsies' usual sphere of activities; it is difficult to see what might have attracted them to the role of employee in the industry in the first place and, during the period when family-worked boats plied the canals, social intercourse between gypsies and boatmen was virtually unknown. And the boatmen's own verdict is supported by the low incidence of gypsy surnames to be found on the cut.

A Question of Identity?

In attempting to establish whether the gypsy appellation can be legitimately bestowed upon showmen and canal boatmen the lack of an entirely satisfactory definition of the former group presents something of an obstacle; hence the attempt to distinguish between the features common to all travellers - that is, where comparable circumstances begat similar developments - and those, often cultural

peculiarities as practiced within living memory, which tended to bind together or separate one traveller group from another.

i) Showmen

Showmen revealed many cultural affinities to gypsies as well as, of course, being close to them in their one-time common attendance at fairs, types of work, homes and so on. The question remains as to the possibility of similar cultural values, such as concepts of hygiene, ritual taboos, importance of travel per se and so on, being adopted by showmen solely as a result of the frequent close physical proximity to gypsies at fairs ? It seems unlikely that such tenaciously held values were transmitted entirely in this way, while it may further be argued that the nearness of prospective marriage partners to whom the rigours of the lifestyle and the mutually held customs and value systems were known and acceptable, made unions between the two groups likely. To these arguments must be added the self-ascription of that minority of showmen referred to above, who claimed to be of gypsy descent. Though frequent inter-marriage between show families and the widespread adoption of the above customs and values makes quantification impossible, the conclusion seems inescapable that a significant proportion - and, over the first half of the twentieth century, a probably increasing proportion - of Britain's showmen were of gypsy origin.

ii) Canal Boatmen

In many ways the boatmen provide a simpler case for decision as to the likelihood of a gypsy identity. Having no reason for regular close physical proximity to gypsy families, presenting no customs or practices in common (other than those attributable to not dissimilar circumstances), exhibiting nothing identifiable as 'gypsy' in their culture and values and, finally, having a unanimity of opinion on the subject amongst themselves, there can be no justification for referring to canal boatmen as gypsies. Though maintaining until the middle of the twentieth century work patterns of a pre-industrial nature, this group of travellers should not be seen as having preserved those patterns into the industrial age but,

rather, from the dating of the most acceptable theory regarding the move of these families to the nomadic lifestyle, as a reversion to earlier practices - canal boatmen are, therefore, best seen as an anachronistic product of a later stage of industrialization.

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A P P E N D I X 1

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Where interviews were spread over more than one day, the date of the first recorded session is given.

i) Showmen

NO.	DATE	NAME	AGE[1]	PLACE
1	3-12-85	Mr. J. Beach	75	Ashford, Middx.
2	3-12-85	Mrs. R. Rawlings	58	Ashford, Middx.
3	11-12-85	Mrs. L. Hyatt	87	Ashford, Middx.
4	8-1- 86	Mrs. L. Ayres	92	Netley Marsh, Hants
5	14-1- 86	Mr. J. Chipperfield	73	Southampton
6	21-1- 86	Mr. J. Graham	73	Southampton
7	22-1- 86	Mr. J. Butlin	73	Southampton
8	30-1- 86	Mr. F. Bartlett	88	Poole, Dorset
9	4-2- 86	Mr. R. Cothard	85	Steyning, Sussex
10	6-2- 86	Mr. H. Castle	77	Southampton
11	15-2- 86	Mr. C. Castle	72	Shoreham-by-Sea, Sx.
12	17-2- 86	Mrs. E. McKeowan	88	Andover, Hants
13	19-2- 86	Mrs. A. Traylen	76	Feltham, Middx.
14	20-2- 86	Mr. K. MacManus	61	Ascot, Berks
15	3-3- 86	Mrs. J. Austen	N/K[55]	Cricklade, Wilts
16	3-3- 86	Mr. C. Cole	54	Southampton
17	6-3- 86	Mrs. M. Gratton	63	Clacton, Essex
18	7-3- 86	Mrs. C. Marshall Hill	66	Feltham, Middx.
19	13-3- 86	Mr. J. Wall	68	Hook, Hants
20	14-3- 86	Mr. W. Cole	70	Chichester, Sussex
21	18-3- 86	Mrs. E. Simmonds	70	Exeter, Devon
22	18-3- 86	Mr. J. Brewer	66	Exeter, Devon
23	19-3- 86	Mrs. S De Vey	81	Collumpton, Devon
24	20-3- 86	M/S R. & C. De Vey	N/K[60]	Bristol
25	16-5- 86	Mr. P. Collins	52	Barry, S. Wales
26	5-9- 86	Mr. P. Cordwell	N/K[55]	Southampton
27	8-9- 86	Mrs. V. Sandow	64	Boston, Lincs.
28	21-1- 87	Mrs. A. Morley	71	New Mills, Derbyshire

29	22-1-87	Mr. R. Scott	56	Glossop, Derbyshire
30	23-1-87	Mr. W. Wallis	69	Rochdale, Lancs
31	25-2-87	Mr. Winnall White	78	Manchester
32	26-2-87	Mr. Tipley White	75	Manchester
33	27-2-87	Mr. H. J. Wallis	71	Manchester
34	28-2-87	Mr. J. Mulhearn	55	Hyde, Cheshire

ii) Canal Boatmen

1	5/76-6/76	Mr. J. Skinner	N/K[75]	Kidlington, Oxford [2]
2	5/76-6/76	Mr. J. Gould	N/K[75]	Newbury, Berks [2]
3	5/76-6/76	Mrs. R. Beacham	N/K[30]	Thrupp, Oxford [2]
4	30-4-86	Sir John Knill, Bt.	73	Bathampton, Bath [3]
5	20-5-86	Mrs. H. Bunn	77	Braunston, Northants
6	20-5-86	Mr. A. Bodley	64	Braunston, Northants
7	27-5-86	Mrs. R. E. Whitlock	69	Braunston, Northants
8	27-5-86	Mr. R. W. Humphris	78	Braunston, Northants
9	27-5-86	Mrs. S. Ward	90	Braunston, Northants
10	27-5-86	Mrs. L. Merchant	82	Braunston, Northants

1 - Age at date of interview or 'N/K' if not known. [] estimates

2 - Interviews conducted for the thesis written at Ruskin College, Oxford.

3 - This informant, obliged for health reasons to take open air work, ran his own narrowboat on the canals for some years after the Second World War. Obviously not a member of the traditional canal community, this interviewee's observations made him too valuable a source to ignore.

The following boatmen and women were interviewed for the B.B.C. Radio Stoke series of programmes entitled On the Cut :-

T. Almond, A. Atkins, T. Atkins, B. Bailey, L. Beardmore, A. Best, J. Blunn, R. Booth, J. Bridge, A. Brooks, B. Brown, A. Burnett, R. Burnett, J. Cassidy, G. Chadwick, B. Clark, H. Clark, T. Clark, G. Curran, D. Dainty, F. Fielding, P. Garnett, H. Gee, G. Gilbert, H. Grantham, W. Green, W. A. Grimes, J. Higgs, E. Hodgkins, A. Hollingshead, E. Hone, N. James, N. Johnson, R. Johnson, J. Kent, H. Lupton, M. Lupton, G. Marlow, J. Meredith, P. Mew, J. Monk, B. Morris, D. Morris, F. Parker, L. Platt, B. Robinson, J. Robinson, J. Safe, M. Safe, J. W. Scott, B. Sutton, B. Talbot, A. Taylor, W. Taylor, T. Williams, J. Wilson, G. Wood, M. Wood, K. Wrigley.

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A P P E N D I X 2

'CHECK LIST' FOR USE AT INTERVIEWS

Personal Details

Name :

Age :

Place of Birth :

Siblings (number & sex) :

Marriage (date) :

Maiden name (if applic.) :

Number of children & sex :

i) Childhood and background

Early home life - parents - their work - how many generations in business - family origins - 'outsider' forebears - your education - work as a child - what done - when start - how learn ?

ii) Courtship

How meet - when meet - length and conduct of courtship - marriage - where & when take place - reasons - spouse's family background as above ?

iii) Work

How set up after marriage - who & how financed - how developed - later equipment / boat operated - how decisions made where & when to travel - man's jobs - women's job - winter work - length of season.

iv) Economic Background

Good times - bad times - reasons - First World War - recollections - Second World War - work available - rationing - 'black out' - 'call up' - who & how many in family ?

v) Domestic

How set up home after marriage - who & how financed - description of homes - childhood to adult changes - water supplies

- personal cleanliness - toilet - meals - preparation - consumption - washing up - laundry ?

vi) Parenthood

Children - where born - how long travel stopped - effect on itinerary - coping with young when travelling - when mother working - where children sleep - sexual segregation - their education - children's work - what done - when start - how learn ?

vii) Family

How keep in touch - when travelling - how often - urgent messages / contacts - comparison over generations.

viii) Retirement

When retire - give up travelling - comparison over generations - death - funerals - where take place - reasons - funeral customs ?

N.B. The same checklist was used for showmen and boatmen though it was appreciated that certain items listed would not be equally applicable, if at all.

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2 D. Mayall, Itinerant Minorities in England and Wales (1981) pp.15-16.

3 R. D. Sexton, The Last of the Narrowboatmen, 1914-1960 (1977)

4 D. Mayall, (1981); G. K. Behlmer "The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England" in Victorian Studies, Vol. 28, No. 2, Winter, 1985.

5 G. Sanger, Seventy Years a Showman (1910); J. Lukens, The Sanger Story (1956); J. Chipperfield, My Wild Life (1975); R. Croft-Cooke, The Circus Has No Home (1950); D. Dallas, The Travelling People (1971).

6 C. Hadfield, British Canals (1950); L. T. C. Rolt, The Inland Waterways of England (1950); E. Temple Thurston, The 'Flower of Gloster' (1911); C. J. Aubertin, A Caravan Afloat (1913); E. Smith, Maiden's Trip (1948); T. Wilkinson, Hold on a Minute (1950).

7 H. Hanson, The Canal Boatmen, 1760 - 1914, (1975)

8 T. Acton (1974) p.3; Gypsies and Other Travellers (H.M.S.O., 1967).

9 Canal Boats Act, 1884 (H.M.S.O., 1885)

10 Arthur Wood, B.B.C. Radio Stoke in a letter to the writer dated 21-1-86; A. Wood, On the Cut : No. 1 : Homes on Boats, interview with a boatman, B.B.C. Radio Stoke, 1985.

11 P. Thompson, The Voice of the Past - Oral History (1978), p.22; T. Lummis Occupation and Society - The East Anglian Fishermen, 1880-1914 (1982), p.78

12 P. Thompson (1978) pp.165-170; pp.243-252; T. Lummis (1982) p.198.

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2 E. Harvey, "Wartime Work of the Gypsies" in Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (Third Series, Vol. xxi, Pts 3 and 4, July - Oct, 1942) p.81; Gypsies and Other Travellers (H.M.S.O., 1967) p.7; Accommodation for Gypsies (H.M.S.O., 1977) p.8.

3 The 1917 figure was originally quoted in Tinkers in Scotland (H.M.S.O., 1918), the 1935 figure in Vagrancy in Scotland (H.M.S.O., 1936) and the 1956 and 1961 figures derive from Church of Scotland estimates - all as given in Scotland's Travelling People (H.M.S.O., 1971) p.19; Vagrancy in Scotland (H.M.S.O., 1936) pp. 40-41.

4 Gypsies and Other Travellers (H.M.S.O., 1967) p.47.

5 The Education of Travellers Children (H.M.S.O., 1985) pp. 1-2; Living in a Caravan (H.M.S.O., 1967) p.5; Gypsies and Other Travellers (H.M.S.O., 1967) p.7.

6 T. Murphy, History of the Showmen's Guild (1948) p.174; Showmen's Guild Yearbook for 1902, pp. 18-20; for 1912, p.97; for 1937, p.105; Mr. J. Waugh, interview, 11-11-86.

7 S. G. Yearbook for 1947, p.105; for 1957, p.80; for 1960, p.105.

8 Sir G. Tyrwhitt-Drake, The English Circus and Fair Ground (1946) p.196; I. Stansmore, English Fairs (1975) p.9; Mr. J. Waugh, 11-11-86; R. Croft-Cooke, The Circus Has No Home (1950) p.137.

9 Mr. J. Butlin, interview, 22-1-86; Mrs. E. Simmonds, interview, 18-3-86; Mrs. M. Gratton, interview, 6-3-86;

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Mrs. C. Marshall-Hill, interview, 7-3-86; Mr. P. Collins, interview, 16-5-86.

10 H. Hanson, The Canal Boatmen, 1760-1914, (1975) App.iv (Note: the figures for each census are presented differently; Hanson says those for 1911 cannot be extracted from the figures in the census) p.160; Child's Guardian (N.S.P.C.C., Vol.40, Oct. 1930) p.75; The Times, London, 30-9-30; Annual Report for 1935 (N.S.P.C.C., London) p.10.

11 Report of the Board of Education for 1899-1900 (H.M.S.O., 1900) p.16; for 1909-10, p.54; for 1918-19, p.26; for 1926-27, p.21; for 1932, p.21; for 1936, p.19; Report of the Committee on 'Living in' on Canal Boats (H.M.S.O., 1921) p.8.

12 Canal Inspectors Report, Min. of Health, 1920-21, Pt. 1 (H.M.S.O., 1921) p.91; Child's Guardian (Vol. 30, Dec. 1920) p.92; Record (T.G.W.U., London, Vol. iv, No. 48, July, 1925), p.285.

13 Canal Inspectors Report for 1899-1900, p.cxli; for 1903-04 p. clxiii; for 1909-10, pt II (b) appendix p.82; Report of the Committee on 'Living in' on Canal Boats (1921) p.10; The Waterman (London, Oct. 1910) p.209; A. Wood, On the Cut: No. 3 : Carrying Cargoes, interview with a boatman (B.B.C. 1985).

14 C. Hadfield, British Canals (1950), p.74; Canal Inspectors Report, for 1904-05, appendix p.301; for 1920-21, pt 1, p.56; for 1930-31, p.274.

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1 J. Okeley, "Gypsy Travellers in Southern England" in Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers, ed. F. Rehfisch (1975) p.60; Gypsies and Other Travellers (H.M.S.O., 1967) p.2; T. Acton, Gypsy Politics and Social Change (1974), p.4; J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies (1816) pp.132-3; pp.148-9; p.192; J. Okeley, The Traveller Gypsies (1983) p.2.

2 Gypsies and Other Travellers (1967) p.2; J. Okeley (1975) p.59; G. Hall, "Preface to the Heron Pedigree", Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, New Series, Vol. vii, No.2, 1913-14, p.81; J. Hoyland (1816), p.246.

3 J. P. Clebert, The Gypsies (1963) p.203; J. Okeley (1975) pp.60-61; A. & F. Rehfisch, "Scottish Travellers and Tinkers" in Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travellers, ed. F. Rehfisch (1975) p.271; B. Adams & others, Gypsies and Government Policy in England (1975) p.40.

4 Mr. J. Chipperfield, interview, 14-1-86; J. Chipperfield, My Wild Life (1975) p.9; p.49; J. Purchase, interviewed by World's Fair, Sat. 3-8-46, p.1; Sir G. Tyrwhitt-Drake The English Circus and Fairground (1946) p.92; Mrs. J. Austen, interview, 3-3-86; Mrs. V. Sandow, interview, 8-9-86; Mrs. C.MacManus, interview, 20-2-86; Mr. F. Bartlett, interview, 30-1-86; Mr. C. Cole, interview, 3-3-86.

5 Mrs. A. Traylen, Snr. interview, 19-2-86; Mr. J. Beach, interview, 3-12-85; Mrs. L. Hyatt, interview, 11-12-85; R. Croft-Cooke and P. Cotes, Circus, A World History (1976) p.99; Mrs. J. Austen, 3-3-86.

6 Mrs. L. Hyatt, 11-12-85; Mr. C. Castle, interview, 15-2-86; Mrs. L. Ayres, interview, 8-1-86; Mr. J. Beach, 3-12-85; Mrs. E. McKeowan, interview, 17-2-86; Mr. R. Scott, interview, 22-1-87; Mrs. E. Simmonds, interview, 18-3-86; Mr. R. Cothard, interview, 4-2-86; Mrs. A. Traylen, Snr. 19-2-86; Mrs. J. Austen, 3-3-86; Mr. J. Butlin, interview, 22-1-86;

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Mrs. M. Gratton, interview, 21-1-86; Mr. J. Gratton, 6-3-86.

7 I. Stansmore, English Fairs (1975) p.19.

8 T. Murphy, History of the Showmen's Guild (1948) p.4; pp.8-10; G. Sanger, Seventy Years a Showman (1910) preface p.6; p.33.

9 Mrs. S. De Vey interview, 19-3-86; Mrs. A. Traylen, Snr; 19-2-86; Mr. R. Cothard, 4-2-86 (unfortunately in a private letter to the writer, dated 11-2-86, the Archivist of the College was unable to confirm the story).

10 Mrs. L. Hyatt, 11-12-85; Mr. J. Beach, 3-12-85; Mr. J. Graham interview, 21-1-86; Mr. T. White, interview, 26-2-87; Mr. H. Castle, interview, 6-2-86; Mrs. E. Simmonds, 18-3-86; R. Croft-Cooke, The Circus Has No Home (1950) p.65; p.111; Mrs. V. Sandow, 8-9-86.

11 Mr. J. Chipperfield, 14-1-86; Mr. R. DeVey, interview, 20-3-86; Mr. K.MacManus, 20-2-86.

12 Mrs. J. Austen, 3-3-86; W. Cole, interview, 14-3-86; Mr. W. Wallis, interview, 23-1-87; Mr. F. Bartlett, 30-1-86; Mr. C. Cole, 3-3-86; Mr. J. Wall, interview, 13-3-86.

13 P. Verney, Here Comes the Circus (1948) p.19; Mr. J. Beach, 3-12-85; Mrs. J. Butlin, 22-1-86; F. C. Roope, Come to the Fair (1961) p.89; J. Chipperfield (1975) pp. 30-31; D. Dallas, The Travelling People (1975) p.126; Mr. P. Cordwell, interview, 5-9-86; Showmen's Guild Yearbook for 1915, p.12; for 1918, p.14; for 1938, p.12.

14 Mr. J. Chipperfield, 14-1-86; Mrs. J. Castle, interview, 8-1-86; Mrs. C.MacManus, 20-2-86; Sir G. Tyrwhitt-Drake (1946) pp. 90-96.

15 Mrs. A. Morley, interview, 21-1-87; Mr. J. Butlin, 22-1-86; Mrs. A. Traylen, Snr. 19-2-86; F. C. Roope (1961), p.89; Mr. K.MacManus, 20-2-86; Mrs. J. Austen, 3-3-86; Sir R. Fossett,

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Spangles and Sawdust (undated) p.5; Mr. J. Brewer, interview, 18-3-86; Mrs. C. Marshall-Hill, interview, 7-3-86.

16 Mrs. J. Austen, 3-3-86; Mrs. V. Sandow, 8-9-86; Mr. J. Graham, 21-1-86; R. Croft-Cooke and P. Cotes (1976) p.172; J. Lukens, The Sanger Story, (1956) p.156.

17 Mr. K. MacManus, 20-2-86; Mrs. E. Simmonds, 18-3-86; World's Fair, Sat. 5-1-29, p.7; Mr. J. Mulhearn, interview 27-2-87.

18 H. Hanson, The Canal Boatmen, 1760 - 1914, (1975) p.1; p.12; T. Wilkinson, Hold on a Minute (1965) p.106; C. Hadfield, British Canals (1950) p.73; A. Redford, Labour Migration in England, 1800-50, (1964) p.vii; L.T.C. Rolt, The Inland Waterways of England (1950) p.176.

19 H. Hanson (1975) p.40 quoting "Wm. Ward, Canal Trader in 1841"; Annual Report, N.S.P.C.C., 1910, Ref. CG 1910/70; T. Wilkinson (1965) p.97; Mr. R. Humphris , interview, 27-5-86; Mr. A. Bodley, interview, 20-5-86; Mrs. H. Bunn, interview, 20-5-86; Mrs. S. Ward, interview, 27-5-86; A. Wood, On the Cut: No. 3: Carrying Cargoes, interview with a boatman, (B.B.C. 1985).

20 D. Sibley, Outsiders in Urban Societies (1981) p.99; Min. of Housing & Local Gov. circular, Ref. 6/62 dated 8-2-62 to all Local Authorities in England and Wales; H. H. Malleson, Napoleon Boswell: Tales of the Tents (1913) Introduction by Lady Grosvenor, p.vi.

21 Gypsies and Other Travellers (1967) p.3; E. Harvey, "Wartime Work of the Gypsies", J.G.L.S., Third Series, Vol. xxi, Nos. 3 & 4, July - Oct., 1942, p.82; J. Okeley (1975) p.61

22 B. Adams (1975) p.35; Accommodation for Gypsies (H.M.S.O., 1977) p.2; Gypsies and Other Travellers (1967) p.2; H. H. Malleson (1913) p.22; Living in a Caravan (H.M.S.O. 1967) p.5; Mrs. M. Gratton, 6-3-86.

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23 Mrs. S. DeVey, 19-3-86; I. Starsmore (1975) p.125; Mr. K. MacManus, 20-2-86; Mrs. J. Castle, 8-1-86; Mrs. C. Marshall Hill, 7-3-86; G. Sanger (1910) pp.125-6; S.G. Yearbook for 1922, p.25; World's Fair, Sat. 16-3-29, p.12.

24 Mr. K. MacManus, 20-2-86; Mr. J. Mulhearn, 27-2-87; Mrs. C. Marshall-Hill, 7-3-86; Mr. R. DeVey, 18-3-86; Mr. P. Cordwell, 5-9-86; Mr. H. Castle, interview, 6-2-86; Mr. J. Wall, 13-3-86; Mrs. C. Marshall-Hill, 7-3-86.

25 Mrs. M. Gratton, 6-3-86.

26 S.G. Yearbook for 1918, p.43; T. Murphy, (1948) p.24; Parliamentary Papers, House of Lords, 1909, evidence of Rev. T. Horne, (H.M.S.O., 1910) Vol. x, p.280.

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28 Mr. W. Cole, 14-3-86; Mr. C. DeVey, interview, 20-3-86; Mrs. C. Marshall Hill, 7-3-86; Mrs. M. Gratton, 6-3-86; S. G. Boswell, The Book of Boswell (1970) p.64; Mr. J. Wall, 13-3-86.

29 Mr. C. Castle, 15-2-86; Mr. R. Cothard, 4-2-86; Mrs. M. Gratton, 6-3-86; Mrs. C. Marshall Hill, 7-3-86; Mrs. A. Morley, 21-1-87.

30 Mr. C. DeVey, 20-3-86; Mr. J. Wall, 13-3-86; S. G. Boswell (1970) p.24; p.35.

31 Mrs. C. Marshall Hill, 7-3-86; Mr. J. Gratton, 6-3-86; A. & F. Rehfisch, (1975) p.220; R. Croft-Cooke (1950) p.37; p.204; Mr. C. DeVey, 18-3-86.

32 Mr. C. Castle, 15-2-86; S. G. Boswell (1970) p.64; World's Fair, Sat. 28-11-70, p.26.

33 Mr. J. Skinner, interviews, May/June, 1976; Mrs. H. Bunn, 20-5-86; Sir J. Knill, 29-4-86; A. Wood, On the Cut:

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34 H. Hanson (1975) p.3; J. Hoyland (1916) p.185; C. J. Aubertin, A Caravan Afloat (1915) p.95; G. Borrow, The Romany Rye (1857) p.102; E. Smith, Maiden's Trip (1948) p.5; L.T.C. Rolt (1950) p.186.

35 T. Wilkinson (1965) p.145; p.162; E. Smith (1948) p.160; Last of the Water Gypsies (N.S.P.C.C., 1963 (Ref. NC/138))

36 J. P. Clebert (1963) p.80.

37 The list has been compiled from the following major sources, but reference to various names is incidentally made in almost all the works included in the bibliography; J. Hoyland (1816) pp. 94, 105, 151, 165, 185; G. Sanger (1910) p.107; B. Vesey-Fitzgerald, Gypsies of Britain (1944) pp. 51, 53, 64; Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (various)

38 J. Hoyland (1816) p.87; p.110; B. Vesey-Fitzgerald (1944) p.53; p.106.

39 J. Hoyland (1816) pp. 94-95; p.105; p.165; p.185; A. MacFarlane "English Gypsies in 1947", J.G.L.S. 'Third Series', Vol. xxvii, pts. 1 & 2, 1948, p.35.

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41 R. Croft-Cooke and P. Cotes (1976) p.94; p.137; p.142; G. Sanger (1910) p.45; p.114; M. Willson-Disher, Fairs, Circuses and Music-Halls (1942) p.33; Sir G. Tyrwhitt-Drake (1946) p.173.

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44 Illustrated London News, report 10-10-1874, p.1.

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