

Tracing Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Ancestors at Surrey History Centre



- *Surrey Advertiser*, 1864 to date (Southwest Surrey Guildford/Godalming area)
- *Surrey Comet*, 1854-1981 (Kingston area)

Not all newspapers are indexed which can mean a lengthy search but cuttings do exist as part of other archive collections; for example, the *West Surrey Times* for 18 Oct 1884 reports 'The death in a caravan' of hawker John Matthews, who was buried at Guildford Cemetery with 40 or 50 relatives in attendance (SHC ref.5400/2/1).

Online newspaper sources such as *The Times* <http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/archive/> and 'British Newspapers 1800-1900' <http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/> are also worth searching.



Illustrations

Surrey History Centre holds a vast collection of photographs, postcards and illustrations, many of which can be searched online, including:

- Photographs taken for the Photographic Survey and Record of Surrey (Ref. 7828) in the early part of the twentieth century include fairs at Bletchingley and Haslemere (Clay Hill).
- Postcard albums (arranged by town), also include images of Bletchingley, Merstham and Mitcham fairs, Gypsies at Cobham and Godstone, and Rodney 'Gypsy' Smith's evangelical mission at Guildford, 1907.
- Other illustrations include photographs and prints of the Epsom Derby and Epsom Downs and Travellers on the heath at Thursley.

- It is also worth searching our Archives Index for archive collections that may also include photographs.

Archive sources

Census returns

We hold copies of the Surrey census returns 1841-1901, with the 1911 census available online through www.findmypast.co.uk Many Travelling families were excluded from the 1841 census because enumerators were instructed only to record persons living in dwellings. Later returns can also cause problems; for example the 1901 census for Ash shows the Green, Ayres, Lee and Brazill families listed together in one group at the end of the census, not as the enumerator would normally have recorded them. They are all described as 'hawkers' with 'birthplace unknown in most cases'.

Parish registers

Surrey's parish registers are littered with Traveller references, although they are not always defined as such. Gypsy marriages were often strictly private affairs with evidence existing for only about a third of these, whereas baptisms are more common. Treatment of Travellers varied greatly from parish to parish. Some clergy refused to bury Gypsies (or the expense was too much for the family), hence the occurrence of wayside burials.



Poor law records

References to Travellers being moved from one parish to another can be found among the records of the parish overseers. Travellers would rather spend a night in an open field than in the workhouse but in hard times some did turn to the workhouse for temporary relief.

The Poor Law Union application and report books for Epsom, Godstone and Chertsey Unions list Travellers and are fully indexed; the latter are available online.

Electoral registers

Electoral registers record all those eligible to vote from 1832 onwards but until universal enfranchisement in 1918 (adult men) and 1928 (adult women), many people were not eligible. Travelling life would have excluded Travellers from appearing in these registers but as more families settled they did begin to register. The Ash electoral register for 1939 for example, lists occupants of caravans in Government Road and the Quadrant, including the Carey, Bath, Jones, Ayres and Perfect families (Ref.CC802/56/4).

The Philip Bradley Fairground Collection



Fairground enthusiast Philip Bradley (1920-1999) spent his life compiling a photographic record of every fair he visited from 1936 until his death. Highly regarded by fairground people his vast collection of notebooks and photographs provides an invaluable history of twentieth century fairgrounds (Ref.6790). We also hold copies of The

Fairground Society publication *Platform*, dedicated to the history of Britain's showmen.

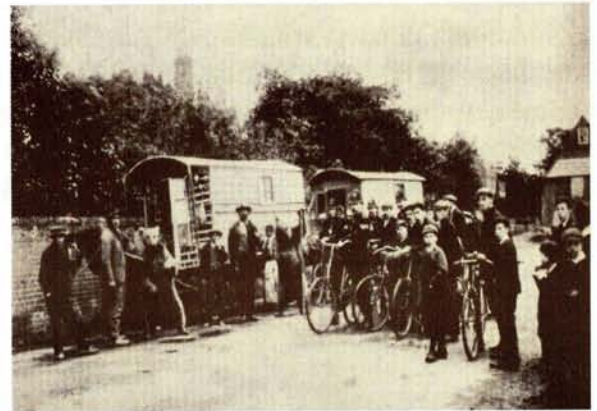
Military records

Contrary to popular myth, Travelling men served in all the armed forces, particularly in the First and Second World Wars. Women served as auxiliary nurses and in the ATS, Land Army and munitions. We hold the records of the Surrey regiments - see our leaflet 'Sources for military history at Surrey History Centre' for further details on tracing military ancestors.

Crime, punishment & legal records

References to Travellers in legal sources includes:

- Letters from Elizabeth I's Privy Council to Sir William More of Loseley in 1569 order the arrest of 'Egyptians' (Ref. 6279/11/52 & LM/COR/3/561).



- From c.1700 to 1850, the court of Quarter Sessions dealt with both minor offences, such as assault, fraud and petty larceny and more serious crimes (Ref.QS/-). Records for the whole judicial process from arrest to sentencing can be traced and cases were often reported in local newspapers.
- Vagrancy hearings were held at Quarter Sessions, including the case of several persons found living in tents in Lingfield in 1811, selling pins and ballads and claiming to be Travellers (QS2/6/1811/Mids/63-67).
- Some Badger (itinerant corn dealer or food seller), pedlar and hawkers licenses also survive in the archive.
- From the nineteenth century court business was reported in local newspapers so these are worth checking. For example *Bell's Weekly Messenger* for 17 Oct 1803 describes the prosecution of 'female Norwood gipsies' for fortune-telling brought by the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality (Ref.G52/12/5).

Tracing Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Ancestors at Surrey History Centre



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL



School records

We hold records of many Surrey schools including admission registers, log books and punishment books. Travelling life did not always allow for regular schooling but as families settled the children were encouraged to attend. Surrey Education Committee opened 'the first school for gypsies' at Hurtwood, near Shere, in 1926.

Later that year, the committee reported that in just 4 months the school had been a resounding success, with 70 children and 59 adults attending morning, afternoon and evening classes, with no truants. As a result of the school's popularity, the encampments which had been dispersed around the area became concentrated around the school. Some records survive (see SHC Ref.2570) but unfortunately no admission registers for the school have been traced. The traditions of travelling work often still applied regardless of school attendance and records for Walsh Memorial School, Ash, record children hop-picking in the 1870s (Refs.Z/562/4 and CC1181).

Oral history & film

Oral history is of huge significance within the Traveller community. A collection of oral history interviews provides a fascinating insight into the life and customs of Surrey's Travelling community (Ref.8368/-). The DVD *Travellers Tales*, available here, is a series of digital stories celebrating the culture and contributions of Surrey's 10,000 strong Gypsy and Traveller community.

Other collections

Collections deposited by Romany, Gypsy, Traveller and Fairground families or their descendants include family trees, photographs and family documents. For example:

- Ref.Z/561 relates to the Manning family of Showmen and their links to the Taylor and Smith families, whilst Ref.Z/562 is a collection of Traveller material relating to Ash.
- Folk song collector Lucy Broadwood's papers refer to the Gypsy Lore Society and her collecting Gypsy songs, music and legend, 1907-1911, featuring songs from 'wild gypsy tramps by the name of Goby' (Ref.2185/LEB/1/564-575).
- Papers relating to William Hannaway Rowe, known as Sequah, a travelling showman who frequented Mitcham Fair (Ref.4414/5/1).

Useful online resources

There are dozens of genealogy websites and online sources but some of the most useful for travelling ancestors are listed below:

Romany & Traveller Family History Society <http://www.rtfhs.org.uk/>

Gypsy, Roma Traveller History Month – publishes the magazine *Traveller Times* and promotes the annual event with both current and historical information about the Travelling community <http://www.grthm.co.uk/>

Terence Lee's *A-Z of Gypsy Genealogies* is hosted on the Romany Genes website and contains many Surrey travelling families: <http://www.romanygenes2.webeden.co.uk>



Leicestershire Record Office's Gypsy & Traveller index is an alphabetical list of names from their archive collections:

http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/community/recordoffice/recordoffice_resources/record_office_gypsy_and_travellers.htm

UK Romani Mailing List (a mailing list for anyone with a genealogical interest in Gypsies in the United Kingdom):

<http://lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com/index/intl/UK/UK-ROMANI.html>

The Living Album – Hampshire's Gypsy Heritage:
<http://www.hants.gov.uk/rh/gypsy/index.html>

Journey Folki, full of practical tips for carrying out Gypsy Traveller research:

<http://www.journeyfolki.org.uk/HistoryCulture/GypsyGenealogy/tabid/682/Default.aspx>

Romany Road features the cultural history of all Travelling communities, including reminiscences:

<http://www.romanyroad.co.uk/>

Major Gypsy Traveller collections or heritage held elsewhere

Gypsy Lore Society Collection

Head of Special Collections & Archives
Sydney Jones Library, The University of Liverpool,
PO Box 123, Liverpool L69 3DA
Tel: 0151 794 2696

<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/colldescs/gypsy/index.html>

The National Fairground Archive

National Fairground Archive, Western Bank Library,
University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10
2TN

Tel: 01142 227231

<http://www.nfa.dept.shef.ac.uk/>

Gordon Boswell Romany Museum

Clay Lake, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE12 6BL

Tel: 01775 710599

<http://www.boswell-romany-museum.com/>

The Robert Dawson Romany Collection

The Museum of English Rural Life

University of Reading

Redlands Road

Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5EX

Tel: 0118 378 8660

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/>

The South East Romany Museum (open by appointment only)

Howland Road, Marden, Kent TN12 9DH

Tel: 01622 831681B

The Romany Collection

Brotherton Library

Leeds University Library

Woodhouse Lane

Leeds

West Yorkshire LS2 9JT

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library/spcoll/spprint/26600.htm>

For further information and advice contact:

Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road,
Woking, Surrey GU21 6ND

Tel: 01483 518737

E-Mail: shs@surreycc.gov.uk

website: www.surreycc.gov.uk/surreyhistorycentre

Opening Hours:



Monday	CLOSED
Tuesday	9.30-5.00
Wednesday	10.15-5.00
Thursday	9.30-7.30
Friday	9.30-5.00
Saturday	9.30-4.00