Hampshire's Gypsy Rehabilitation Centres: Welfare and Assimilation in Mid-20th Century Britain

by Jim Hinks and Becky Taylor

INTRODUCTION

> . . . the Romani was never intended for a sedentary life, even a sedentary life in the open. . . and is at his best when nomad. Modern civilization, of course, was not designed for such people, who are essentially a very small minority. One can understand – but hardly approve – the tendency to regard them as a social anachronism and the meticulous desire to make them live like other people. They throw the machinery of administration out of gear. Is this machinery adaptable enough to allow the Gypsies to survive, or will they be crushed into abandoning their traditional way of life?[1]

Early in December 1963, the Hampshire County Council official David Pumfret attended a meeting of the newly formed residents' association of the village of North Baddesley on the outskirts of Southampton. The North Baddesley Residents' Association had been formed in a flurry of concern over the council's decision to site a 'Gypsy rehabilitation centre' in Rowhams, just outside the village boundary. In a scene that has been repeated many times since, Pumfret was forced to defend Hampshire County Council's plans in the face of villagers' imaginings of disorder, littering, crime and falling property prices. That residents were upset at the thought of Gypsies being housed in the village is perhaps no surprise. Perhaps more surprising was Pumfret's response. The archives of later twentieth-century Britain are littered with accounts of councils backing down over plans for a proposed Gypsy Traveller site in the face of local wrath. But Pumfret stood his ground, telling the meeting, 'it's going to be in a parish somewhere and the feeling of the neighbourhood is going to make a tremendous difference. . . If one treats people as outcasts, they will behave as outcasts'.[2] And while it may be tempting to see Pumfret as a rare humane voice at a time when the lifestyles of travelling people were under profound threat, this should be resisted: in nearly the same breath, Pumfret declared that 'unless the gypsies are helped it is virtually impossible to get [them] into a *civilised way of life*'.[3]

What can Pumfret's words, and indeed Hampshire's aspiration to settle Gypsies in North Baddesley, tell us, not only about the position of Britain's

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Gypsies and Travellers in the post-war decades but also about the wider resonances of such interventions?[4] Historical work to date on Britain's hereditary nomadic populations in this period is slight, but has suggested that where the welfare state and education were deployed towards Gypsies and Travellers before the early 1970s, they tended to be punitive rather than enabling.[5] Here we seek to add depth and nuance to this account by looking at one 'rehabilitation' scheme in depth, while at the same time arguing for the importance of locating initiatives towards Gypsies and Travellers in a larger frame. We set their treatment alongside that of other 'problem' groups in this period – 'juvenile delinquents', 'problem families' and 'immigrants' – to think through what their experiences can tell us more broadly about the ambitions of the state towards its marginal populations at the high point of the welfare state.

The period between the establishment of the post-war welfare state and the 'rediscovery of poverty' heralded by the publication of Abel-Smith and Townsend's *The Poor and the Poorest* in 1965 has been depicted as the high-water mark of the 'problem family'.[6] Both 'problem families' and their younger relative, the 'juvenile delinquent', have received a good deal of historical attention, individually and as part of wider histories of the development of social work and policies directed towards Britain's youth. Together these histories have shown how frequently the 'problem family' became collapsed into the 'problem mother', whose fecklessness and inability/unwillingness to manage the persistent difficulties involved in living in poverty could all too easily become manifest in the problematic behaviour of her household.[7] But it did not stop there: ideas of intergenerational transmission led to fears that the child of today's problem family would become the juvenile delinquent of tomorrow, and in due course, parent to their own problem family.[8]

In his 2006 study *Underclass: A History of the Excluded since 1880*, John Welshman traced the continuities of conceptualizations of the 'underclass' that stretched from the late nineteenth century to the work of the Family Service Units during the second world war to the problem family of the post-war years. His analysis of the Units' case work approach, and that of other early pioneers in professional social work, shows how they were suffused with repackaged ideas from the Eugenics Society, which were given a fresh currency through the Beveridge Report. This report set out a vision of the state that would, via the expertise of social workers, health visitors and medical professionals, help those who 'for reasons other than old age, accident, illness or pregnancy required additional help'.[9] But it was never quite clear where assistance might end and active interference into particular behaviours or attitudes might begin. How would the state deal with those who resolutely refused to take advantage of the benefits being offered to them by the welfare state's new civil contract?[10] Gypsies and Travellers – living variously in bow-tents, waggons, trailers or huts, possibly trading in scrap metal from an unlicensed pitch by a roadside and refusing to send their children to school, at a time when endemic poverty and joblessness were seen to have been ameliorated by the welfare state – were potentially the most problematic of problem families, ripe for state intervention.

Underpinning the efforts of social workers and 'home advisers' working with problem families was a belief that redemptive state intervention could, and indeed would, result in their ultimate reform and rehabilitation. Although the attitudes of welfare officials at this historical moment have rightly been described as paternalistic, this should not allow us to lose sight of the fact that this was a time that was also, at core, both progressive and optimistic: progressive in that interventions were often constructed with an understanding of the wider structural problems that shaped individual behaviour, not least poverty and poor housing;[11] and optimistic in that policies were enacted with a belief that change was always possible. Indeed, in his references to the need for state action to 'help' Gypsies move towards a 'civilised way of life', we can see this blend of attitudes in Pumfret's words to the villagers of North Baddesley.

But Pumfret's use of the word 'civilized' also pushes us to think about a second strand to this history. Britain's policies toward deviant and minority populations in this period were profoundly conservative, heavily embedded in normative assumptions of the stable nuclear family, settled waged employment and a certain sort of Britishness.[12] Along with programmes to train women in good housekeeping and 'regular habits', we find an emphasis on the importance for new arrivals to the UK and minority groups of 'fitting in'. This advice was underpinned by implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumptions about the desired goal of promoting such behaviour: assimilation into 'the British way of life'. As civil servant Evelyn Sharp observed in 1953, 'local authorities have suggested to us that there is room for directed instructions to intending immigrants on the basis of when in Rome do as the Romans do'.[13] Barbara Bush's work on the London Family Welfare Association has demonstrated, for example, how it ran a 'Project for the Welfare of Coloured People' targeting West Indian families, aiming to ameliorate the problems caused by the 'large influx of coloured people' and to promote assimilation.[14] More generally, historians have pointed out that the way in which assimilation was conceived was not only grounded in a very particular view of British identity – one depicted as moderate, fair, apolitical, consensual, free of class conflict and of any regional or local variation – but was also very successful in positioning those who pushed against these values as 'trouble-makers' in need of more assertive intervention.[15] This close relationship between ideas of Britishness and social conformity can, we argue, be extended to include Gypsies and Travellers, offering an approach to historical research into Britain's hereditary nomadic populations that both places them within a specific time and place and acknowledges the persistence of their complex and often vexed relationship with the sedentary population and wider cultural forces.[16]

Paying attention to the historic moment in which the Hampshire scheme was developed, and eventually folded, is important. As we show in the first section of this article, Gypsies' and Travellers' mobile form of life faced multiple pressures just at a time when the state was most inclined towards active intervention. But if in Hampshire these tendencies came together, by the early 1970s times were changing. Progressive anti-poverty campaigns were one part of a bigger groundswell of 1960s activism challenging conservative, paternalist approaches to

welfare, while at the same time anti-racist and Black power movements were exposing and fighting racialized hierarchies.[17] Gypsies and Travellers were not isolated from these developments. Not only did 'Gypsy power' activism emerge to resist evictions, highlight racialized harassment and develop the momentum that led to the passing of the 1968 Caravan Sites Act, but we find Gypsies and Travellers, in their everyday lives, evading or actively pushing back against assimilatory measures. Here, then, we use the case of North Baddesley to illuminate the fragility of Hampshire's scheme as a project of assimilation and the agency of the Gypsies themselves in responding to it, setting this within the broader picture of the shift in politics around 'race' in late 1960s Britain.

LEGISLATION, WELFARE AND 1960s BRITAIN

Discriminatory legislation aimed at Gypsies was of course not new in the post-war period, but two Acts of Parliament enacted within twelve months placed pressure on travelling lifestyles. The 1959 Highways Act made it more difficult for Gypsies and Travellers to pitch at the side of the road and gave local authorities powers to remove encampments. The following year the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 further restricted Gypsies and Travellers by introducing licensing requirements for those living on long-term sites and private plots of land. These restrictions, along with growing pressure on peri-urban land as councils built to resolve post-war housing shortages, and the arrival of increasing numbers of Irish Travellers fleeing their own government's repressive legislation, made the 1960s a challenging decade for Gypsies and Travellers.[18]

Accompanied by broader shifts towards an increasingly urbanized, mechanized, and motorized society, such developments ensured that the broader sweep of mid-twentieth-century change did not leave Gypsy and Travelling communities untouched.[19] Nor were they lost on the Assistant Chief Constable Broomfield of Hampshire police, who in 1959 noted that seasonal work opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers were beginning to dry up. Even though there was still harvesting work to be found, 'the introduction of hop picking machines [meant] these numbers were much reduced'.[20] But while traditional rural occupations were receding, Broomfield also drew attention to one of the opportunities that the booming consumer culture of post-war Britain opened up for Gypsies and Travellers: the collection and processing of scrap metal, meaning, for example, that two Gypsies in Winchester were occupied full time in the scrap metal trade.[21] Scrap metal as a growth area was, though, a double-edged sword: while providing new economic opportunities, the necessarily noisy, dirty, messy and highly visible character of scrap metal dealing and its associated trades exposed settled communities to the harsh workaday realities of Gypsy and Traveller existence in post-war Britain. These Gypsies did not resemble the romanticized image of the Gypsy in a horse-drawn *vardo*; they travelled in a flat-bedded lorry loaded with unsightly scrap metal, with a modern caravan in tow, parked on the roadside for want of anywhere else to go. A glance at local newspapers of the late 1950s and early 1960s reveals a raft of complaints from locals objecting to the arrival and the prolonged stay of Gypsies and Travellers in their

neighbourhood. '[T]he gypsies have taken possession of this end of Baddesley', according to a local newspaper in 1963; 'whether the police are frightened or don't want people in their police station who are absolutely lousy and stinking to high heaven, I don't know'.[22]

As Acton and Taylor have both noted, all these pressures came together. First, Gypsies and Travellers themselves, being increasingly motorized, responded to the shortage of stopping places by remaining on available sites longer and travelling further for work. Second, some councils responded locally by upping the level of harassment against them to try to force them to move on. Third, other councils started to explore alternative longer-term strategies involving either council-owned sites, or, more often, some form of 'simplified' housing or settlement scheme.[23] Here Hampshire had already proved itself something of a pioneer. Along with a mobile population who might winter in sites and yards across the county, it had a long-standing Gypsy population in the New Forest, who in 1926 had been rounded into compounds where they were permitted to stay but could not erect permanent dwellings. The 1947 Report of the New Forest Committee of the Forestry Commission recommended a comprehensive rehousing scheme to remove them from what was now deemed slum accommodation. Consequently, over a number of years residents were cleared from the forest, moved initially to 'simplified housing' in camps, and from there dispersed across the local authority's council estates.[24]

Despite the changes brought by post-war life, the assumptions that mediated the state and wider society's attitudes towards Gypsies and Travellers remained embedded within long-held stereotypes that positioned 'true Romany Gypsies' against a racially mixed, socially-failing vagrant underclass. An internal report produced in 1961 for Hampshire county council claimed that 'the Gypsy' in 'the sense of a nomadic tribal people of foreign origin, has little meaning today', and that far from being a homogenous ethnic group with their own cultural traditions, 'the old Romany stock is diluted and there has been an infiltration of the "poor white".'[25] At a stroke, by locating the 'real Romany' solely in an imagined romanticized 'other', this assertion allowed the report's authors to deny flesh-and-blood Gypsies and Travellers their distinctive heritage, whilst insisting that they were not dismantling the centuries-old traditions of the noble Romany. Rather they were attempting to solve the problems caused by a particularly troublesome and recalcitrant underclass who were 'a strain on the welfare state'.[26]

The mobilization of these stereotypes didn't stop at the pages in the report; Hampshire County Council in the early 1960s continued to draw on these arbitrary and artificial distinctions amongst Gypsies to justify its emerging policies. Thus its county clerk, Mr Wheatley, claimed that while 'those living in Hampshire are Gypsy-type persons including "diddekais" [*sic*] and other "travellers", the true Romany gypsy with their racial characteristics and disciplines is rarely found in Hampshire'. His mobilization of the idea of the 'Gypsy-type person' – presumably caravan dwelling, but no longer fully nomadic, or exhibiting any of the arbitrary markers of ethnic identity such as being horse-drawn or pursuing rural crafts – was telling.[27] With a clear conscience Hampshire could believe it was not in

contravention of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's circular issued early the following year. This reminded local councils that 'true gypsies or romanies have the right to follow their traditional way of life and they have a legitimate need of camping sites'.[28]

The report's assimilatory ambitions were clear. Despite the example of a pioneering scheme by Kent county council that provided hard standing and piped water for mobile families on agreed sites, and despite calls from some of its own rural parish councils for similar infrastructure, Hampshire county council remained implacably opposed to providing caravan sites. Instead throughout the 1960s Hampshire's officials insisted that the 'problem' of travelling families could only be solved by actively incorporating them into the wider population.[29] This thinking was underpinned by the assumption that Gypsies were not an ethnic group, or even a people whose lifestyle made them different from the sedentary population: 'Gypsy' was shorthand for a particular kind of 'problem family' who needed to be incorporated as worker-citizens into the welfare state. Hampshire's ambitions were therefore wholly consistent with the values of the post-war world: as the report's concluding statement put it, 'the dilemma of this minority calls for care and alignment with the established principles of our progressive civilisation'.[30] Hampshire's Clerk fleshed out this position when he claimed his council's plans sought to fulfil its duties under Section 21 of the National Assistance Act.[31] Rather than providing mobile families with authorized camping sites, he had something far more interventionist in mind here: the 'abolition of an extreme form of rural slum' such as had been found in the New Forest hutted camps before they were cleared, and persisted in the unlicensed encampments which he saw as blighting the county. The council's duty was nothing less than to 'break the families and, particularly, the children from their semi-nomadic mode of life'.[32]

Hampshire's ultimate aim might have been to disperse, and so 'disappear', Gypsy families into council housing, but it accepted that any 'sudden change from a primitive campsite to a council house' risked failure.[33] Here we see a tension between aspirations to 'civilize' Gypsy residents and the authors' concerns over their ability to properly live in housing, for, as they put it, few if any of Hampshire's Gypsy population had reached 'a standard of decent living that would justify expensive housing'.[34] Providing huts rather than conventional housing could then serve as a proving ground for them to learn the skills and behaviours that would allow them, once they moved into a council house, to avoid antagonizing their new neighbours 'with their neat and orderly lives'.[35] One district councillor suggested that as simplified dwellings were 'so subject to damage that it is hopeless to put sub-standard families in them' it would be best to have them '[so] constructed as to be impervious to attack and in particular should contain nothing worth burning'.[36]

This, then, was the rationale behind Hampshire's decision to develop its scheme for 'alternative accommodation' for the county's Gypsies.[37] Echoing the early years of the New Forest resettlement programme, it would consist of simplified wooden temporary dwellings, backed up by close supervision, that

would serve as a stepping point between caravan-dwelling and council housing.[38] Distancing their own plans from, for example, the enforced settlement of Roma and Sinti by German municipalities in the inter-war years, the architects of the Hampshire scheme aimed to emphasize its voluntary element, claiming their focus was on exploring 'the extent to which families might desire a settled home with the basic requirements for a civilised existence, regular employment and educational opportunities'.[39] And indeed we should not assume that the proposals were entirely unwelcome to Hampshire's mobile Gypsy population. Given the increasing pressures they were facing – the growing shortage of sites, legislative restrictions on wayside stopping, increased animosity from the majority population – it is unsurprising that a number of families were willing to participate in the scheme. For many the idea of non-standard accommodation was more welcome than not: 109 out of the total of 189 families surveyed said they preferred simplified housing to standard council accommodation.[40] As the report authors rationalized, some parents who were struggling to sustain their mobile life were realizing 'perhaps with unconscious intelligence, that their way of life is closing in and that for their children there is no other alternative future'.[41]

BUILDING JERUSALEM: THE HAMPSHIRE SCHEME

> . . . each camp [will] be separated into two sections, one for those families genuinely seeking a better way of life who can be taught the basic requirements of living in decent surroundings, and the other section for those who live by their wits. . . in the hope that they may be induced eventually to take up more regular employment. . . If proper training in the care and management of a council house is to be given, each dwelling will need to have a water supply, sanitation, a WC and a bath, proper cooking facilities and separate sleeping quarters for the parents and both sexes of children.[42]

The eventual scheme adopted by the county council was in fact far more ambitious in its scope than that set out in the original 1961 report; it sought to deliver nothing less than an extensive programme of 'rehabilitation' that would reintegrate Gypsies and Travellers into mainstream society, rendering them indistinguishable from the wider population.[43] In November 1963, the county council authorized four similarly-modelled 'rehabilitation centres' across the county. The first three were located at Thorney Hill, Rowhams and Yateley, all chosen for their proximity to existing Gypsy sites, with tentative plans to establish a fourth at a former military detention site at Headley Down. Despite sometimes fierce local opposition – such as we witnessed at North Baddesley – by September of the following year Thorney Hill was operational and Rowhams was near completion. Instead of hutted accommodation, three of the four camps used redundant prefabricated homes sourced from other councils, a distinct improvement on the basic wooden huts proposed in the parish council report. This came at a price: £70,000 in capital costs for the first three rehabilitation centres, with annual running costs of £5,000.[44] Alongside twelve prefabricated bungalows, the sites included garden sheds, fuel bunkers, garages, a workshop and a permanent staff of two (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. View of the prefabs at Rownhams Lane, North Baddesley Rehabilitation Centre. Courtesy of Hampshire County Archives.

The infrastructure was only one thread in the scheme: housing would be nothing without the intensive supervision and training of the residents. At the centre of each site was a 'community hall' where the two residential staff members could deliver a range of 'training classes' on topics including cookery, dressmaking, needlework and the use of electricity; it was also used for 'baby clinics, Sunday schools, youth clubs and other social and recreational activities'.[45] The high staffing ratio was justified by the scheme's architects, who claimed that those entering the scheme had no experience with 'the use of toilet facilities and the use of cookers and electricity'. Only once a family had managed to satisfy the camp's residential wardens that they could perform a range of behaviours and tasks within and beyond the home were they able to progress to apply for a general council tenancy alongside Hampshire's general population.

The role of the on-site wardens is worth considering in more depth, as their written reports were crucial in allowing residents to take up a full council tenancy. The sites had provision for a male warden and a female social worker, with their roles strictly delineated by gender:

> the duties of the warden include the upkeep of the buildings and the grounds, the maintenance of discipline, the employment of the men and school-leavers and administrative duties more generally. The social worker is more directly concerned with the with the domestic standards of the women and the care and well-being of the children.[46]

Further, the warden was expected to 'maintain order and control… and prevent unauthorised squatters becoming established', while the social worker was to focus on 'rehabilitation work with the families themselves in their new homes'. As those planning the scheme made clear, it was the fact of their gender, as much as their employment background, that was assumed to fit them for their tasks: 'the best sort of staff for this job would be a husband with police or military background and wife with welfare or nursing experience'.[47] Their respective roles reflected normative gendered assumptions and the idea of the nuclear family composed of a wage-labourer husband and an economically inactive wife, for whom the physical, moral, and emotional wellbeing of the family was paramount. Their joint task was to pass on these values and expectations to the residents who brought with them a very different idea of family; one in which a husband-wife-children unit was nested within an extensive kin network, where labour, earnings and resources were pooled, and which formed the core of each travelling group.

As Selina Todd has shown, professional training and accreditation came comparatively late to social work, and in the post-war years the majority of those working in the field were untrained. In many cases welfare agencies were actively hostile to the notion of trained professionals, believing instead that the unqualified welfare worker's experience as a housewife or as a 'local' was sufficient to justify her authority and ability to introduce her clients to normative patterns of behaviour.[48] Hampshire's reluctance to employ professional and newly-trained social workers, who might have brought insights from sociology or the psy-sciences to their work, and its decision instead to employ generalists with no directly relevant experience, is significant. Like John Welshman, we can trace the lineage of Hampshire's scheme backwards. It was little different to that envisaged by, for example, Norwich's Medical Officer of Health in the 1940s for the city's problem families; and before that to the use of contained and supervised physical spaces for rehabilitation purposes that had been standard fare for welfare reformists since the late nineteenth century.[49] But as we shall see below, even as this scheme was being constructed, the assumptions on which it was run were being challenged; not only by the emerging force of professional social workers, but also more generally by a younger generation of activists who were seeking to create a new and less conservative Britain, where conformity and assimilation would be replaced by diversity, anti-racism and progressive values.[50]

This, though, was in the future. The mid-1960s saw instead Hampshire's Gypsy families being moved onto the sites, receiving 'training' and being led on a path that was intended to end in successful relocation to a council house. In May 1968, Bryan Long of the county's welfare department produced a report charting the progress of the scheme, 'Rehabilitation of Gypsies', which – aided by the enthusiastic co-operation of the Gypsies themselves – he depicted as highly successful. As he put it in his introduction, they had become 'tired of being treated as a minority outcast group, objected to being branded "gypsies" because of the attendant stigma and were very keen to reap the benefits of proper housing, education and social acceptance'.[51] Even so, within the same paragraph he tacitly acknowledged that the choice presented to travelling communities was

increasingly limited, and he quoted one resident who flatly stated their main motivation for joining the scheme was that they had been 'tired of being harassed from one authorised site to another'. Another, perhaps cynically, noted how the rent they paid to the rehabilitation centre was roughly equal to the fines levied against him for camping on unauthorized sites.[52] Neither of these responses suggests a passionate attachment to the idea of being 'rehabilitated'; they speak rather of a deeply constrained agency, and of strategic decision-making.

If the report offers little depth of insight into the site residents' actual motivations and experiences of 'rehabilitation', it is by contrast highly illuminating when it comes to what the organizers of the scheme considered a 'reformed' Gypsy looked like. This was first, and perhaps unsurprisingly, highly gendered. For women, the scheme entailed exposing their domestic routines and standards to scrutiny, while also requiring them to submit to instruction on the use of household appliances, cookery, needlework and dressmaking. The programme also involved close inspection of their children, most specifically through ensuring they attended medical examination at clinics held at the centres.[53] This level of domestic supervision would have been familiar to mothers of 'problem' and New Commonwealth families, who similarly had to endure sometimes daily inspections of their homes and close questioning about their habits.[54]

Of the eleven families who, at the time of the report, had moved from the centres into council housing, five were selected as exemplars for the report. For these families, there was a clear sense that the 'investment' made in the women's domestic training had paid off: Mrs K, for example, was singled out for having taken 'great pride in her home and with expert advice from the resident social worker was encouraged towards a high domestic standard'.[55] Likewise Mrs C came in for praise, having 'reaped the full benefit of the modern conveniences of the new home, which was always maintained in a satisfactory manner'.[56] By contrast Mrs T's levels of cleanliness left 'something to be desired', but even she was seen to have 'improved considerably since the family was first admitted'. Yet this was also the case in which the author took in some ways most pride, contrasting their present state to that on first arrival, when the whole family had been 'indescribably filthy, illiterate and inarticulate and scorned by other gypsy families that travelled with them'.[57] Their gradual change was ascribed to their increasing level of 'social maturity' and their growing awareness of the 'benefits of the settled way of life'.[58]

Expectations for Gypsy men were similarly clear-cut, but for them the key to shedding the vestiges of their former life was entering the world of conventional employment as a wage-labourer. Judith Okley's fieldwork in the early 1970s made it clear how self-employment was central to Gypsy and Traveller work identities, and the scheme's planners similarly understood that regular waged work would be essential to breaking down connections with their old way of life.[59] Consequently they invested considerable importance and resources into finding the centres' male residents steady employment. It was, however, an uphill battle, and more difficult than training the women to use electrical appliances: after four years only roughly half of the men had 'regular orthodox

employment'.[60] Demonstrating that it was not about men earning a living independent of welfare support – as it was for the wider population – the centre wardens actively prevented the men from being self-employed in fields where Gypsies and Travellers had previously made a living. For example, the report emphasized that no space was provided at the centres for 'unacceptable forms of self-employment' including metal dealing or vehicle scrappage.[61] In fact, any form of self-employment was suspect. Although Mr and Mrs H were 'model tenants on the council's estate', Mr H's failure to settle to a life in 'conventional employment' remained a mark against him. The report was keen to emphasize that he no longer continued scrap dealing, yet his return to his previous work as a self-employed landscape gardener was seen as a retrogressive step.[62] Landscape gardening might have been less of an active marker of 'Gypsyness', but with its self-employment, mobility and irregular earnings, it was nevertheless an occupation that carried all the hallmarks of traditional Gypsy enterprise.

While much was made publicly of the scheme's success in moving adult male residents into wage-labour and thence to participation in mainstream society, in private correspondence Hampshire's county clerk was more candid. In one letter to a researcher interested in finding out more about the scheme he admitted that 'efforts have been made to keep the men in employment, but this [was] mostly on short term contract work, which is unstable and often unavailable after periods of illness'.[63] The men's failure to fully embrace the world of wage-labour looks therefore less like a desire to cling to old habits or an inherent lack of discipline, and more of a rational response to an economic market place that offered them little but seasonal and insecure opportunities as agricultural and building-site labourers. Not only were the newly rehabilitated placed in unattractive roles; they were actively thwarted from making a living in sectors where they were skilled, and to which they could bring contacts and experience.

It is clear that for Long and the other architects of the rehabilitation camps, success was couched in terms of an ability to shake off all visible aspects of Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles and perform an acceptable version of a British – or at least a British working-class – identity. This was not unique; it can be located within wider state policies around race relations and assimilation up to the mid-1960s. However, for Gypsies and Travellers, unlike New Commonwealth migrants, the possibility hovered that they could lose their taint of 'otherness' simply by changing their behaviour. This attitude was particularly noticeable in discussions over the progress of the children as they went through the education system. Here the emphasis was not on their academic attainment, but rather on the extent to which they were able to 'pass' as members of sedentary community.[64] The report noted how children from one group of families were no longer 'recognised from the other children in the school' while another 'no longer [carried] the stigma of being called gypsies in the classroom'.[65] The success or failure of the rehabilitation process was thus wholly dependent on the willingness of those on the receiving end to assimilate into the ways and values of mainstream society, with any markers of 'Gypsyness' – dress, occupation, family structure or dwelling – left behind. Illustrating the report was a selection of black and white photographs, the

most arresting of which showed Mr S., a 'traditional New Forest gypsy', burning his former home, a motor-drawn modern caravan (Fig. 2). It is unclear whether the reader or the writer of the report would be aware of the tradition of Romany Gypsies burning horse-drawn *vardos* as part of funeral rites, but nevertheless it remains an astonishingly powerful image, rich with the symbolism of obliterating an entire way of life.[66]

Fig. 2. 'Mr S' setting his trailer alight upon having become 'rehabilitated'. Courtesy Hampshire County Archives.

During their short lifespan Hampshire's rehabilitation centres attracted national attention; it is clear that Hampshire saw itself as a pioneer in 'Gypsy rehabilitation', and sought to influence policy on a national level. Its clerk corresponded with his counterparts in other counties with a similar 'Gypsy problem',[67] and with the Labour MP for Erith and Crayford in Kent, Norman Dodds, who was an active campaigner for Gypsies and Travellers.[68] Dodds offered praise for the scheme and argued that the plans could be used as a model for other counties, expressing his intention to take the idea to the prime minister, the minister for Housing and Local Government, the minister of Education and Science, and the clerk of Kent County Council.[69] Hampshire's rehabilitation scheme also garnered coverage in the *Times Education Supplement*. Its editorial 'The End of Gypsies' imagined that within a generation the only trace left of their culture would be 'a number of families in the Southampton suburbs who will be darker than most', but otherwise unremarkable and indistinguishable from their neighbours, leaving 'our small island a little tidier and quite a lot duller'.[70] We find similar ambivalence in another article in the

same issue, which focussed on the Hampshire scheme specifically, depicting it as sitting at the vanguard of change, and noting that when the 'rehabilitated Gypsies' were allocated council houses, 'the council deliberately separate them, and do not put them in areas where they jar on the nerves of respectable white collar workers'.[71] There was honesty in other parts of the article too. In a few, possibly unintentionally brutal words, it summed up the rehabilitation scheme's role: whereas the County Council's welfare department claimed they were there to equip Gypsies and Travellers for their shift to bricks and mortar, the purpose of the centres (so the writer put it) was to teach them 'how to look less like Gypsies'.[72]

ERNEST SMITH'S PONY AND THE SLOW DEATH OF ASSIMILATION

By the late 1960s, it was clear that the rehabilitation scheme had not lived up to the council's original vision, even though in 1968 a fifth centre, Longmeadow, near Andover, was opened. When planning permission had been granted for the original sites, it had been done on the understanding that all buildings would be removed from the sites by the end of 1970 and the rehabilitation scheme, successful and hence now superfluous, would be wound up. But by 1968 there were still over fifty mobile Gypsy families in Hampshire who had resisted the process of rehabilitation and assimilation.[73] Worse, the sites had proved magnets for other still-mobile families who had relatives living on them, and who sought to remain close by on unauthorized stopping-places. Constrained though the agency of the residents might have been, it is clear that some sought to use the camps to the fullest effect, in essence treating them as long-term stopping places to support both themselves and their wider families.

The Longmeadow site was causing council officials the greatest concern. The last of the rehabilitation sites to be constructed, Longmeadow differed from the earlier sites in that the accommodation consisted of hard standing for caravans and a pre-existing cottage.[74] The fact that the families continued to live in their trailers was, claimed Hampshire's welfare office, Bryan Long, problematic:

> during the six months life of this site it has become increasingly apparent that some of the families are unwilling to accept the full implications of the scheme, and unlike the many other gypsy families in Hampshire are not yet ready to abandon their wandering way of life.[75]

Indeed, Long noted, two families who had moved onto the site actually only wanted to use it as a transit site. But of particular concern to officials was the extended Smith family, who were living at Longmeadow but who had also been intermittently housed in Andover. Albert Smith and his family had not returned to the road full time, but during the winter of 1969-1970 they had travelled in search of employment, leaving their council house vacant for number of months and losing their council tenancy in the process. Long's attitude to their actions was punitive, arguing that Andover district council should not grant the Smiths a new tenancy 'until they are satisfied that there is a chance that the gypsy families are

prepared to relinquish their present way of life. . . it may be that they will take the view that the only way to induce a change of heart in the gypsy families is by bitter experience'.[76] The Smiths were just one of a growing number of cases where the families had seemed to accept 'rehabilitation' only to regress: in 1970 Long reported that the Johnson family had left their council house and resumed living in a caravan near Cambridge.[77] While the Johnsons' desire to return to travelling was accepted by the council with a degree of resignation, it provoked worries about the efficacy of the scheme and its original aims.

Renewed mobility was one cause for concern. Retaining, or reclaiming, other cultural markers of 'Gypsyness' was another. And here the case of Ernest Smith and his desire to keep a pony is illuminating. Ernest Smith had been a Longmeadow resident, and had been given a council tenancy by Andover district council in October 1968. Despite having completed his period of 'rehabilitation' one aspect of Ernest Smith's lifestyle continued to aggravate council officials. As J. Ashmead, the rehabilitation scheme's principal, explained to Andover's town clerk, 'as a heritage of his former way of life, Mr Smith continues to keep a pony'. Ernest Smith's pony, we should note, was not being kept at or near his home, and he had even offered to rent some disused land from the council on which to graze it. Even so Ashmead made it clear that he wanted the council to 'persuade Mr Smith to sell this pony and conform in every sense now that he is living on a council estate within the community'.[78] However, as with the rationale behind providing simplified housing, Ashmead accepted that the path to full rehabilitation was a long one: 'I do not ever think that we expected that these former gypsy families would turn into respectable conforming citizens overnight and I think that for the time being it would be helpful if for the time being Mr Smith could keep his pony'.[79] The council disagreed. Smith's pony had already occupied Andover's Housing Committee and its Parks and Property Committee's attention: they had claimed that it was a danger to local children, and that if Ernest Smith wished to keep his tenancy he had to let the pony go.[80]

The pony had touched a nerve. A pony, to state the obvious, was not a horse.[81] A horse, in the 'dehorsified' world of late twentieth-century Britain, conferred status and spoke of the privileged worlds of racing and showing and hunting.[82] A pony, unless kept for a child who was going to progress to a horse, was a work-aday animal, traditionally bred for labour and hardiness, and was smaller and so cheaper to keep than a horse, all qualities that made them valuable to Gypsies and Travellers. We don't know what the pony looked like, but can imagine it as a skewbald or piebald – these two colourings being most favoured by British Gypsies and Travellers, who prize their unique and decorative markings – rather than the chestnuts or bays beloved of the elite horsey worlds. In short, the only status Ernest Smith's pony would confer on him was that of 'Gypsy'.

In correspondence between the various officials Mr Smith was repeatedly described as a 'former Gypsy'.[83] This phrase encapsulated an attitude, held by Ashmead from the rehabilitation scheme and the council employees alike, that Gypsyhood was something that was – and should be – cast off upon entering council housing. Ernest Smith's pony served as a four-legged reminder that he

had not fully renounced his previous life; his desire to keep his pony was indicative both of his personal failings and his lingering Gypsyness. These contradictions seem to have proved too much for Mr Smith, and by 1973 he and his wife and child were again living on an unauthorized encampment.[84]

Ernest Smith, the Johnson family and the Smith family were not the only ones to push back against the assimilationist assumptions of the Hampshire scheme. As the 1960s drew to a close, Hampshire's attitudes were under attack on multiple fronts. The growth of Black radicalism in the period 1967–1972 saw sustained criticism of the notion of integration;[85] the same years saw the Women's Liberation Movement devoting attention to the patriarchal state's role in sustaining structural gender inequalities;[86] while the Labour government itself explicitly began espousing the idea of integration, 'not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' By the early 1970s both the possibility and desirability of assimilation were increasingly at odds with the general tone of 'race relations' and the position of anti-racist groups generally, as well as with assertions of ethnic identity being specifically articulated by the Gypsy Council and other civil rights groups.[87]

For Britain's Gypsy and Traveller populations were not isolated from these changes. From its formation in 1966, the Gypsy Council deployed techniques from the civil rights and counter-cultural movements (holding meetings in pubs that sought to ban Gypsies and Travellers;[88] actively resisting evictions; establishing mobile schools furnished with culturally appropriate teaching materials) to put Gypsies' and Travellers' rights, and right to live in a modern Britain, on the map.[89] They were partially successful: the 1968 Caravan Sites Act required local authorities to 'provide adequate accommodation for gipsies residing in or resorting to their area'. This latter requirement, to provide pitches to families 'resorting to' an area, as well as those already living in it, was an acknowledgement, albeit reluctant, that nomadism was an ongoing feature of Gypsy and Traveller life in modern Britain. In subsequent debates by Gypsy Council activists and others over the extent of the Act's many deficiencies,[90] one central significance has often been lost. For the first time in history the British state not only legislated for the existence of official sites for Gypsies and Travellers, but also went on to provide centrally-allocated funds for their construction. In law, if not in fact, this was state-sanctioned nomadism. And by implication the 1968 Act made clear that explicit settlement/assimilation schemes such as Hampshire's were a thing of the past. Rather than mandating 'rehabilitation' followed by a move into council housing, local authorities were now expected to provide caravan sites for Gypsies and Travellers in perpetuity.

Hampshire county council was aware that its policy was out of step with the emerging attitudes of the late 1960s. As early as 1967 an internal memo had suggested that publicity for its rehabilitation scheme should be toned down so as 'not to attract the attention of the National Council for Civil Liberties to our views… which apparently conflict with some of the principles held by the National Council for Civil Liberties and also by the Gypsy Council'.[91] Its

attempts to 'civilize' Gypsies and Travellers out of existence had fallen out of favour, but the council was reluctant to change course. In 1970, as the 1968 Act was due to come into effect – and as the Smith family and the Johnsons had decided to return to a mobile way of life – Hampshire's clerk, A. H. M. Smythe, declared that the county council had 'no intention of providing caravan sites for itinerant gypsies, which would completely negate the whole purpose of the rehabilitation centres'.[92]

CONCLUSION

Local government in Hampshire devoted significant sums of money and political capital to 'solving' the Gypsy 'problem' in the 1960s, at a time when there was little to compel them to take such action and when other councils frequently contented themselves with moving Gypsies and Travellers beyond the country boundaries. Displaying remarkable unity of action across all levels of local government, officials sought to use the tools of the welfare state to absorb its Gypsies into the local population. Gypsies and Travellers were expected to don the trappings of working-class living and eschew all previous traces of their heritage. In short, this was 'progress' through assimilation.

The years 1958–1962, when this scheme was developed, were arguably the zenith of the assimilatory and universalist impulses of the post-war state, which sought to include the whole of Britain's population in its reach, whether they wanted it or not. However, the scheme was clearly grounded in a paternalist vision which looked firmly backwards to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Denying their ethnicity any legitimacy, and viewing their lifestyles – particularly their mobility – as expressions of deviance, Hampshire subjected Gypsy families to a programme of intense scrutiny and surveillance which they hoped would see them absorbed into Hampshire's broader working-class population of wage-labourers and council tenants. In this respect Gypsies were seen as little different to Britain's problem families, and so the tools used to work for their 'rehabilitation' were strikingly similar, including close supervision of households and of the activities of mothers in particular. Assessments of the scheme's success also illustrated the relative poverty of ambition for the sites' former residents, which did not stretch further than intermittent wage labour and an expectation that they be no more troublesome as tenants than the council's existing problem tenants. At best, assimilated Gypsies might aspire to become members of the unskilled working class.

But there was another side to the story, perhaps less easily accessible through the archival sources, but nonetheless still present and visible. We find it in the pragmatic explanations given by residents for participating in the scheme; we find it in the records of families who moved into houses only to go back on the road; we find it in the presence of still-mobile relatives around the sites and in site residents' continued use of caravans as their primary home; and finally we find it in Ernest Smith's pony. All of these were examples of the agency – constrained agency, but agency all the same – of Hampshire's Gypsies. It speaks of a

determination to maintain a mobile lifestyle, but also of a desire to retain markers of their culture and heritage in an increasingly hostile world.

As we have seen, Hampshire's perseverance with its scheme into the 1970s put it out of step with a national mood that was increasingly receptive to counter-cultural challenges to established ways of thinking. For Gypsies and Traveller these changing attitudes became expressed in the 1968 Caravan Sites Act, and by an assertive Gypsy activism that was expressed through specific initiatives – such as mobile schools – and in the emerging political presence right across Europe of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. In this way we can see the shift from 'rehabilitation' to the type of sites provided under the 1968 Act, which accepted, although grudgingly, that Gypsies and Travellers might maintain their mobile way of life (albeit in a more constrained form), as sitting more broadly within the shift from assimilation to looser formers of integration, and as looking ahead to the multiculturalism of the 1980s. Hampshire's scheme represented the thinking and solutions of a particular era; the shift towards designated council sites after 1970 both reflected a less directive approach to solving social problems, and a pragmatic recognition of the limited extent of state influence in reshaping people's lives. But this did not happen 'naturally'. Rather it was the product of the agency of the Gypsies targeted by the scheme, who often undermined it at its very source, as well as the deliberate and often fierce contestation of received wisdom and practices by a loose coalition of activists and reformers.[93]

Hampshire's rehabilitation centres may be a footnote in the history of Gypsies and Travellers in modern Britain, but their ramifications echo far beyond their place and time. A persistent theme running through the historiography of Gypsies and Travellers is the degree to which they can be incorporated into mainstream histories. Here we have sought to show that, rather than being separate from the streams of modern history, the experiences of Gypsies and Travellers can be set firmly within its flow. In attempts to use the tools of the welfare state to shape their behaviour; in the resistance and agency of the families involved; in the gradual move towards a less directive, more culturally sympathetic responses to their presence; and in the assertive campaigning that helped to force these changes, we can trace connections between apparently disparate groups. Gypsies and Travellers, so-called 'problem families' within the white working class, and the recently arrived populations from the New Commonwealth. All were simultaneously users, critics and challengers of Britain's top-down welfare state.

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