Calling Out the Catalogue: Romani Singers in an Archive of English Folk Song

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Abstract

The implicit and explicit silencing of Romani and Traveller voices in museum and archive collections, and in the wider narrative of British history, has been increasingly recognised over the last decade (Matthews 2015). In the pursuit of decolonising museums and archives, however, institutional recognition of the significant contributions of Romani and Traveller peoples to the traditional music heritage of the UK and Ireland has largely been absent.

Throughout the 20th century and increasingly since the 1960s, folk song collectors around the British Isles have turned to Romani Gypsies and Travellers in search of traditional songs and music. Hamish Henderson, Ewan MacColl, and Peggy Seeger, amongst others, admired Romani and Traveller singers for preserving what collectors perceived to be native song traditions. Recordings of Romani Gypsies and Travellers held in national and regional sound archives have had a lasting impact on folk repertoires in the UK and Ireland. However, when such recordings are incorporated into specialist collections, the ethnicity of the singers is seldom highlighted. As the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the singers are rarely acknowledged in the catalogues, and are searchable only with specialist knowledge, their songs are implicitly added to the canon of English, Scottish, or Irish folk music. The songs are thus co-opted, not to tell Romani Gypsy and Traveller stories and history, but those of a majority population.

This article addresses specific issues pertaining to an English archive collection held at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library in Cecil Sharp House, London. Recognising the precariousness of funding that many specialist collections face, we do not simply critique a lack of progress regarding representation. Instead, we outline how archivists, cultural events organisers, universities, and Romani and Traveller communities, might collaborate to connect archival collections with various publics in England today.

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Introduction

The implicit and explicit silencing of Romani and Traveller voices in museum and archive collections and in the wider narrative of British history has been increasingly recognised over the last decade (Matthews 2015). In the pursuit of decolonising museums and archives, however, institutional recognition of the significant contributions of Romani and Traveller peoples to the traditional music heritage of the UK and Ireland has largely been absent.

Throughout the 20th century and increasingly since the 1960s, folk song collectors around the British Isles have turned to Romani Gypsies and Travellers in search of traditional songs and music. Hamish Henderson, Ewan MacColl, and Peggy Seeger, amongst others, admired Romani and Traveller singers for preserving what collectors perceived to be native song traditions. Recordings of Romani Gypsies and Travellers held in national and regional sound archives have had a lasting impact on folk repertoires in the UK and Ireland. However, ethnicity has seldom been highlighted when incorporating such recordings into specialist collections, leading to a widespread lack of recognition of the importance of Romani and Traveller contributions. As the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the singers are rarely acknowledged in the catalogues, and are searchable only with specialist knowledge, their songs are implicitly added to the canon of English, Scottish, or Irish folk music. The songs are thus co-opted, not to tell Romani Gypsy and Traveller stories and history, but those of a majority population.

This article focuses on the politics of representations of Romani music in English cultural narratives, and addresses specific issues pertaining to an English archive collection held at the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (VWML) in Cecil Sharp House, London. Recognising the precariousness of funding that many specialist collections face, we do not simply critique a lack of progress regarding representation. Instead we outline how, via a small impact-oriented pilot project led by an academic of Romani heritage (Marsh), we have brought together Romani and Traveller communities with archivists, cultural events organisers, and universities to begin to connect archival collections with various publics in England today. In this article we do not analyse the impact of this pilot project, which is in its early stages. Rather, acknowledging the importance of these collections for both Romani and non-Romani communities, we offer some preliminary reflections on the pilot project, and argue that even small-scale interventions may have the potential to help increase access to and understanding of a shared musical heritage in Britain.

The article has four sections. First, we explore how the trope of ‘Gypsy music,’ as represented in festivals, films, and the mainstream media, can perpetuate exotic and romanticised stereotypes that influence common ideas about who ‘true Gypsies’ are. Second, we focus on the work of song collectors, and how the process of creating music archives rendered Romani contributions to English folk music repertoires invisible. Third, we outline issues around the VWML archival collections in particular. Finally, we discuss how we have sought to address these issues, stereotypes and silences

through our ongoing pilot collaborative project, "Gypsy and Traveller Voices in Music Archives."[1]

A Note on the UK Context

In the UK, the official term Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) is used to refer to a range of ethnicities grouped together in policy discourses because they are seen to face "similar challenges" which the government attributes to "nomadic ways of life" (GOV.UK n.d.). While it is beyond the scope of this article to engage in a more detailed critique of this terminology, we wish to raise three issues with it before clarifying our own use of the terms 'Romani Gypsy' and 'Traveller.' First, the term 'GRT' homogenises what are in fact highly diverse groups of people, and furthermore it overlooks intersecting aspects of identity such as socio-economic status, disability, and gender. As Danvers and Hinton-Smith (2024: 519) point out, 'GRT,' like the 'BAME' (Black and Minority Ethnic) acronym, serves to prioritise "analytical convenience over nuanced representation" and is used in government discourses as "data shorthand." Second, the official association between 'GRT' peoples and "nomadic ways of life" constructs and reinforces erroneous ideas about physical mobility. Although many Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people see mobility as an important part of their ethnic identity, they understand this not exclusively as physical movement but in terms of cultural nomadism, freedom, and autonomy (Myers 2018). As James and Southern (2019) argue, government planning policy, underpinned by a "sedentarist binary" logic that views GRT's supposed physical mobility as deviant, results in legislation that criminalises movement and aims to assimilate GRT people, largely by reducing the provision of culturally appropriate and adequate accommodation. Third, we recognise that the term 'Gypsy' is a contentious one, widely seen in Europe and the Americas as pejorative since it is not self-ascribed, but is based on misconceptions about the supposed "Egyptian" (Trumpener 1992: 847) origins of diverse post-diasporic groupings. However, some – particularly English and Welsh Romanies – have reclaimed the term and today use it, with a capital 'G' as a marker of identity (Matthews 2021: 60).[2]

In the UK context, the term 'Roma' today refers to diverse Romani groups who have immigrated in recent decades from Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the accession of new European Union member states in 2004 (Grill 2012; Patel et al. 2023). The term 'Romanies,' or 'Romani Gypsies,' refers to the descendants of Romani peoples believed to have originally migrated from north-west India to Europe in the Middle Ages, and first recorded in England in 1514 (Matthews 2021: 60). Finally, the term 'Travellers' is used to describe Scottish and Irish groups who claim an

[1] "Gypsy and Traveller Voices in Music Archives" was funded by the University of East Anglia's AHRC Impact Acceleration Account. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is UK's main governmental funding body for research in the arts and humanities.

[2] See also the "Is it okay to say 'Gypsy'?" section in the "Frequently Asked Questions" of UK organisation Friends, Families and Travellers (n.d.).

Indigenous heritage "tied to experiences of dispossession as a result of English colonial practices" (Taylor and Hinks 2021: 3). It should be noted that these ethnic groups have their own endonyms, including Pavee (Ireland), Nawken (Scotland), Kale (Wales), and Romanichal (England). The song collectors we cite have frequently used the terms 'Gypsy' and 'Traveller,' and even 'Gypsy-Traveller,' interchangeably. In this article, we use the terms 'Romani' or 'Romani Gypsy' with reference to Romanichal and Kale groups, and 'Traveller' with reference to Pavee and Nawken groups.[3]

'Gypsy Music' and the Politics of Representation

Excluded from mainstream histories, Romanies and Travellers are usually written about or otherwise represented by authors and authorities who are "external or hostile to their experience" (Cressy 2016: 47). In popular culture, political rhetoric, and populist media discourses, Britain's Romani and Traveller populations are primarily depicted as "romantic outsiders," or as "out of control, uncivilised, amoral and above all in need of control and containment" (Holdsworth 2020: 126). The trope of 'Gypsy music' perpetuates and reinforces such cultural imaginaries within the UK.

While the routine vilification of Romani and Traveller people is "active and overt" (Taylor and Hinks 2021: 1), music is "one of the few arenas for positive articulation of a public identity" (Silverman 2012: 241) for Romani and Traveller peoples. However, most modern representations of Romani and Traveller music in film and world music festivals are generated by marketers and producers who draw on exotic stereotypes of the 'Gypsy' figure (Silverman 2007: 341). The exoticisation of Romani identity has a long history in England. In the 19th century, as the country underwent rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, English poets such as Matthew Arnold and William Wordsworth used the figure of the 'Gypsy' as a "an alter ego free from the shackles of the daily grind and from the modern world of getting, spending, working, and obeying the law" (Nord 2006: 13). Like the colonised subject, the 'Gypsy' became associated with "a rhetoric of primitive desires, lawlessness, mystery, cunning, sexual excess, godlessness, and savagery," but also with "freedom from the repressions" (ibid.: 3) of Western civilisation. In 19th century literature and poetry, this imagined 'Gypsy' figure, representing something to be both feared and desired, both a threat to civilisation and a symbol of freedom from social norms, became conflated with living Romani and Traveller peoples (Trumpener 1992: 849).

In Britain, one of the most prominent and influential contributors to this fantasy, George Borrow (1803–1881), invented the persona of the 'Romany Rye,' defined by Nord (2006: 71) as "the gentleman or scholar-gypsy who devoted himself to the preservation of Gypsy lore and abandoned – even for a brief time – settled English life for a nomadic

[3] For histories of Romani and Traveller presence in the UK and Ireland, see Mayall (2004), Taylor (2014) and Cressy (2016).

sojourn among the peripatetic Gypsies." Borrow, like other non-Romani 'scholar-gypsies,' believed his own understanding of 'Gypsy life' to be superior to that of Romani populations, and defined 'authenticity' according to criteria he himself devised relating to perceived "purity of language and bloodline" (Matthews 2021: 60). Unlike his contemporaries, who viewed English Romani singing styles as lacking in form, metre, rhyme, and tune, as we discuss in the next section, Borrow took a positive view of Anglo-Romani songs (H. Marsh forthcoming). Yet in *Romano Lavo-Lil: Word Book of the Romany; or, English Gypsy Language* (1874), Borrow included twenty English Romani poems and songs which were mostly either his own creations or "heavily reworked in order to satisfy a more conventional literary taste" (Coughlan 2001: 87). Borrow thus seems to have believed that his own 'Anglo-Romani' verse could "make good" the perceived "shortfalls" (ibid: 75) and deficits in the songs he claimed to have documented from Romanies.

Over a century later, in popular publications non-Romanies continue to judge the singing styles and music of English Romanies using their own criteria and find them lacking. For example, the 1999 edition of *The Rough Guide to World Music: Volume One*, co-edited by Simon Broughton,[4] includes a chapter entitled "Gypsy Music: Kings and Queens of the Road" (Broughton, Ellingham, and Trillo 1999: 146–158). With sections dedicated to Rajasthan music roots, Balkan and Eastern European countries, and to Spain, France, and Catalonia, the chapter lists 38 entries in its discography (ibid: 155–158). Representing the UK is one compilation, *My Father's the King of the Gypsies: Music of English and Welsh Travellers and Gypsies* (Engle and Hall 1998). With material described by the editors as "mainly unaccompanied songs, plus melodeon and stepdance tunes," the anthology is virtually dismissed in two sentences: "Most of the repertoire is not specifically Gypsy. And it's not easy listening" (Broughton, Ellingham, and Trillo 1999: 158).

We return to questions around repertoires and aesthetics in the next section, but argue here that such a comment, in what is marketed as "the world music bible" (*Songlines* 2018) and a work "of lunatic scholarship,"[5] indicates that popular interpretations of English and British 'Gypsy music' continue to compare it unfavourably with other musical forms with which the non-Romani is more familiar, and evaluate it according to externally imposed ideas about 'authenticity.' Non-Romanies, drawing on stereotypical generalisations, believe they know what 'Gypsy music' sounds like (Silverman 2007: 335). In the early 21st century, these expectations were influenced by Balkan and Eastern European music styles popularised in the French film *Latcho Drom* (directed by Tony Gatlif, 1993)[6] and in Bosnian-born Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica's films *Time*

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[4] Broughton is editor-in-chief of the popular and well-respected British magazine *Songlines*.

[5] Marketing blurb attributed to BBC Radio's Andy Kershaw, from the front cover of the 1999 edition of *World Music: The Rough Guide. Volume One*, (Broughton, Ellingham, and Trillo 1999).

[6] Although Gatlif has Romani heritage, *Latcho Drom* has been criticised for reinforcing stereotypes of the 'musical Gypsy' and thereby restricting Roma access to other professions and lifestyles. Dobreva (2007: 144) provides evidence for this perception, citing city authorities in Sofia, Bulgaria, who "complain about the ethnic group's inability to lead a normal life, and insist that they are good only for singing and dancing."

of the Gypsies (1988), *Underground* (1995), and *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998). These films started a "veritable craze" (Silverman 2007: 339) in the European world music scene, helping to create a marketing category of 'Gypsy music' (Silverman 2012: 244). As Silverman (2007: 339) argues, *Latcho Drom* in particular perpetuates essentialist notions that all Romani people are "'natural' musicians," that they form "a bounded, unified ethnic group," and "that there was a linear path of Romani migration from India to Western Europe." These notions established a model for the performance of 'Gypsy music' at world music festivals, which often conflicted with local Romani and Traveller cultural identities. The 'British Gypsy Festival' held at the Barbican Centre in London in 2000, for example, had an "uneasy" relationship with local Romani and Traveller populations, as English Romani activist and journalist Jake Bowers commented at the time:

> Call me a purist, but surely a Gypsy festival should predominantly feature Gypsies, especially those from the country hosting the event. . . . The trap [the organisers] fell into was one of exoticism where "real" Gypsies belong to some other place and time. They didn't consult any British Traveler organizations during the planning but used a world music consultant who wouldn't recognize a genuine Traveler if one slapped him with a hedgehog.[7] Musicians in the here and now were turned down in favor of people whose dress and music represented the there and then. Turks in tuxedos and Rajasthanis in turbans are a world apart from the average British Gypsy site. (Bowers, cited in Silverman 2012: 245)[8]

'Gypsy music' as popularised at such festivals appears to have influenced ideas about what 'real' Romanies and Travellers sound like, wherever they live. In the UK, Channel Four's *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* series, viewed by audiences of up to 8–9 million between 2010 and 2015, framed "the Traveller way of life" as one "of ancient traditions and simple tastes," until "their world collided with the 21st century" (Tremlett 2014: 322), thus positioning local Romani and Traveller communities as homogenous, static, pre-modern 'others.' The soundtrack for this series, by British composer Ian Livingstone (2012), draws heavily on Balkan and Eastern European influences rather than English, Scottish, or Irish styles. Though Romani and Traveller populations themselves may choose to assume the 'Gypsy music' stereotype when it suits them, particularly for economic reasons (Marković 2015; Tarr 2004: 5), the effect of exotic and romantic stereotypes can be damaging when these "obliterate" (Sonneman 1999: 132) the non-Romani's ability to recognise Romani and Traveller history and contemporary struggles for human rights. Policy-makers and politicians are certainly not immune to these stereotypes, and may conflate Romani Gypsies with Travellers while associating both with "nomadic ways of life" and popular romantic ideas about innate musicality. These assumptions matter,

[7] The hedgehog holds special significance in Romani culture, both for medicinal purposes and as an occasional source of food. See French (2010).

[8] Since the 1940s, Gypsies and Travellers, and their allies, have advocated for public policies to oblige local councils to provide sites for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. These sites remain inadequate in quantity and quality; see Carlsen Häggrot (2021).

because they are drawn upon to justify planning policies aimed at assimilation or exclusion. In June 2015, for example, the Conservative Member of Parliament Philip Hollobone stated during a London House of Commons debate that “Gypsies and Travellers” were causing “great problems”[9] for his constituents in the town of Kettering, “not only when Travellers travel, but when they decide not to be Travellers anymore and to settle” (quoted in UK Parliament 2015: 139WH).[10] Clearly overlooking the fact that local Romani and Traveller residents are also his constituents, Hollobone went on to argue:

> The romantic notion of Gypsies wandering through the countryside, entertaining people as they go, is a myth from long ago, because many of these supposed Travellers are self-declared Travellers; they are not from any kind of Gypsy heritage at all. (ibid.: 141WH)[11]

The “romantic notion” Hollobone refers to is indeed a myth. But it is a myth projected onto Romanies and Travellers by outsiders who, like Hollobone, show little awareness of the history and experiences of the ethnic minorities they make judgements about. Popular romantic notions of the ‘Gypsy’ figure lead non-Romanies to believe that they can recognise ‘authenticity,’ and distinguish between “real Gypsies” and “hangers on” (Holloway 2005; Toyn and Schofield 2022). Prejudice, discrimination and hatred towards Romanies and Travellers can therefore be freely expressed, and even justified, because these groups, who do not fit in with romantic notions of “Gypsies wandering through the countryside, entertaining people as they go,” are dismissed as “not from any kind of Gypsy heritage at all.”

In popular culture, representations of ‘real Gypsies’ as innately musical reinforce such ideas about who can be dismissed as not having ‘Gypsy’ heritage. For example, in “René of the Gypsies,” an episode of the highly popular BBC sitcom *’Allo ’Allo!*,[12] one of the lead characters, Edith, visits a ‘Gypsy camp.’ Told there by a fortune teller that she may be the lost ‘Gypsy Queen’ Romana, she is asked to sing. Upon hearing her awful singing, the fortune teller asks her to stop, exclaiming: “That’s enough! You are not

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[9] The problems Hollobone refers to range from alleged fly-tipping to hare coursing and theft, defecating in gateways, and the closing down of the local school due to non-Traveller and non-Romani parents withdrawing their children to send them to other schools. These stereotypes of deviance and criminality are commonly recycled in the populist media, which frequently demonise Gypsies and Travellers. See Okely (2014); see also Doherty (2016, 2024) and Gohil (2024).

[10] During this debate, Hollobone thus demonstrates a “sedentarist binary” (James and Southern 2019) logic. Starting from the apparent assumption that Gypsies and Travellers are physically nomadic, he argues that many, on a “self-declared basis,” use their “nomenclature as Travellers to get special privileges in the planning system” (quoted in UK Parliament 2015: 141WH) and settle on permanent sites, where they engage in deviant behaviours. Those who seek to settle are, according to Hollobone, not ‘real’ Gypsies or Travellers but are using this ethnic claim to abuse and cheat the system.

[11] This quote has also been discussed briefly in H. Marsh (2016).

[12] *’Allo ’Allo!* is a British sitcom television series, created by David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd, which was broadcast from 1982–1992. “René of the Gypsies,” episode ten of series seven, was broadcast on 9 March 1991.

Romana!" Such representations, repeated and recycled in popular culture, depict musicality as a criterion of ethnic authenticity.

Stereotypes of 'Gypsy musicality' matter, because they can perpetuate romantic notions about how 'real Gypsies' should sound, and therefore who can be dismissed as 'fake.' On 21 May 2016, a rally was held in Parliament Square, London, to protest against the introduction of harsher government Planning Policy for Traveller Sites in the UK. In a speech at this event, Romani activist Lisa Smith denounced the ways in which "the construction of our identity" depends on romantic or denigrating stereotypes which affect "how policy makers develop policy for us in accommodation, health, education . . . the government is flawed in its perceptions of Gypsy and Travellers, and they are relying on outdated stereotypes" (cited in H. Marsh 2016). The trope of 'Gypsy music,' as performed in world music festivals and popular films, perpetuates and reinforces such stereotypes. If the music and singing styles of local Romani and Traveller populations do not match "criteria of authenticity determined in advance by people who claim to know about but do not share that heritage" (Matthews 2019: 80), their own heritage becomes invisible, and they are excluded from narratives of British history.

English Song Collectors and Song Archives: The Invisibility of Romani Voices

Despite being part of the British population since the 16th century, the music history of Romanies in England is only scantly documented. Rarely mentioned in official documents, their presence and roles in shaping the nation's music heritage can be traced through more informal sources which demonstrate a continuous interaction and exchange of music and dance between Romanies and non-Romanies over many centuries. Using newspapers and court documents, Chandler (2007, 2011) has demonstrated how Romani musicians were key parts of the rural cultural economy in the 18th and 19th centuries and integral to the cultural activities of non-Romanies in England. The role of Romani itinerant musicians as entertainers at important events across the population is not restricted to England but a recurring reference in music histories of Europe (Silverman 2012). In the context of English folk music scholarship, however, the primary concern with Romani people has not been as professional musicians but as supposed carriers of a repertoire of English-language folk song.

Scholars associated with the Gypsy Lore Society[13] and their contemporaries were primarily interested in songs as a vehicle to study the Romani language (see, e.g., Leland, Palmer, and Tuckey 1875), and rather dismissive of the quality of British Roma-

[13] The Gypsy Lore Society and its associated journal was founded in Britain in 1888 with the aim of bringing together people interested in collecting and storing examples of a Romani language and culture they believed was degenerating or dying out (Matthews 2021: 60). The Society, now based in the USA, has been influential in establishing Romani Studies as an academic field but has also been heavily critiqued for its failure to thoroughly address its racist past (Acton 2016; Selling 2018).

nies' songs. Charles Leland, later one of the co-founders of the Gypsy Lore Society, describes their songs and singing as "without form and void, wanting in metre and rhyme and chanted to what only a very impressible disciple of Suggestive Arts could recognise as a tune" (ibid.: v). Writers with more explicit interest in Romani music, including their English-language songs, such as song collector and journalist Laura Smith (1889a), still found the repertoire of little aesthetic value.[14] In an article from 1889 she writes, "[t]here are some very spirited English gypsy [sic] choruses, known as 'tinklers' [sic] songs and one or two good specimens of drinkers' chants; but, we must not expect to find any degree of beauty in the gypsy [sic] music of the English tribes" (Smith 1889b: 126).[15] It was not until the turn of the century and the increasing interest in folk songs as a feature of English nationalism among music scholars and folklorists that the English language repertoires of Romani Gypsies began to be seen as more than a curiosity (Roud 2017). Cecil Sharp, arguably the most knowledgeable song collector of the Edwardian era (1901–1914), was one of several who wrote about his fascination with Romani singers. In a letter to his wife, Sharp mentions his first encounter with singer Betsy Holland (1880–1960):

> Talk of folk singing! It was the finest and most characteristic bit of singing I had ever heard. Fiendishly difficult to take down, both words and music but we eventually managed it! I cannot give you any idea what it was like but it was one of the most wonderful adventures I have ever had. (Sharp 1907)

Although Sharp did not actively seek out Romani singers, it was clear from his correspondence that he valued their singing, and in addition to Holland he collected songs from a number of named and unnamed singers (Staelens 2011; Dow 2021). Not only did Sharp note down their songs but in 1908 he used a phonograph to record Romani singer Priscilla Cooper (1865–?; see Figure 1).[16] Considering the difficulties of using portable recording technology at the time, and that Sharp mostly travelled by bicycle while collecting, the recording is a testament to Sharp's appreciation (King 2015: 138).

In addition to Sharp, several influential folk song scholars, including the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams and Lucy Broadwood, took an interest in the song repertoires of Romanies (Roud 2017: 645; Dow 2021). Together with folklorist Ella Leather, Vaughan Williams visited and collected songs and music from Romani singers in Herefordshire,

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[14] Although Smith showed interest in the song repertoire of English Romanies, she was not an advocate for Romani people and her writing demonstrates some harsh views on their rights and place in the UK (Williams 2022).

[15] 'Tinkler,' or Tinker refers to itinerant metalworkers many of whom were Romani, Irish, or Scottish Travellers. Although used as an identity marker by some Irish and Scottish Travellers, in particular, it is now widely considered a racial slur (Reith 2008).

[16] Cooper's year of birth is based on census records from 1901 and 1911 located by David Sutcliffe's Cecil Sharp's People project (Sutcliffe n.d.). Staelens (2011), however, gives Cooper's year of birth as 1873.

Figure 1. Priscilla Cooper photographed by Cecil Sharp in 1908, most likely in Devon (courtesy of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library).

some of which they later published in piano arrangements (Vaughan Williams and Leather 1920). The composer's fascination with Romani singers remained throughout his life and inspired some of his famous compositions drawing on English pastoral themes (Savage 2002). One of few song collectors of this period to actually spend considerable time with their Romani informants was Alice Gillington, who published several collections of songs and dances collected from English Romanies (Yates and Roud 2006).

Most of these Edwardian collectors saw the English-language repertoire as part of a non-Romani heritage which had simply been picked up by the singers from the majority English population rather than an integral part of an English Romani culture itself. For example, noting the similarities in the music repertoires of Romanies and the majority population, Leather (1925: 64) writes:

> The Gypsies sing English folk-songs and carols, and play traditional dance tunes, in no way distinguishable from those collected from English folk, or house dwellers, as the Gypsy would say. They borrow their music, as they do their religion, from the country of their adoption.

Such notions of Romani people as preserving, or at times corrupting, perceived national music traditions rather than having their own music culture, is not exclusive to Britain but a common trope across Europe (Silverman 2012). Romanies and Travellers were in the minority of singers documented by this generation of folk song collectors, but the notion of them as sustaining a diminishing repertoire of English folk song remained, and the 1960s folk revival saw a renewed interest in Romani and Traveller singers among both researchers and the English folk scene. In a scoping review of 31 books, articles and commercial recordings featuring Romani music in England, published

from 1962 until 2022, we found that the idea of Romanies as custodians or carriers of an English rather than Romani heritage has remained a persistent discourse.[17] Yet there is little consistency across these sources, as we discuss below with reference to a few influential writers and publications.

In 1962 the music label Topics Records released what was possibly the first album dedicated to folk singers from English Romani backgrounds, *The Roving Journey Man: The Willett Family*, featuring "English folk song sung in the traditional style by this gipsy [sic] family" (Lloyd, Stubbs, and Carter [1962] 2012). The detailed liner notes introduce the singers and their families, but focus largely on the songs themselves, with the implication that these are part of an English rather than Romani music heritage:

> One thing is sure, none of the items on this record are peculiar to travelling people; . . . all these songs are from the musical storehouse of the country population in general. It does happen that travelling folk are unusually diligent conservers of folk songs, but the extent of their creation of texts or tunes seems to be small, and specific musical traits do not show themselves clearly. (Lloyd, Stubbs, and Carter [1962] 2012)

In many ways these liner notes take a similar standpoint as Ella Leather did 40 years earlier: that is a rejection of Romani and Traveller creativity and a positioning of the singers as vessels of an English music heritage. The Willetts' own descriptions of their songs and singing is largely absent in the production, and a later reissue of some of the Willett family recordings suggests that the family was uneasy with the attention the Topic recording might give them. Due to fear of harassment, none of the Willett family wanted their photograph to be included on the Topic album sleeve, which instead features a photo of three trees representing the singers (Stradling 2013).[18] Indeed, the prejudice experienced by Romanies and Travellers in Britain was being increasingly recognised in publications during the 1960s and 70s. Mike Yates (1975, 2006), who recorded Romani and Traveller singers over several decades, often commented on the prejudice facing his informants, and Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker took a more explicitly activist approach in their radio ballad *The Travelling People*. Drawing on extensive interviews with Romani and Traveller people, the radio ballad first broadcast in April 1964 on the BBC and its subsequent album release put the spotlight on the racism facing these communities (MacColl, Parker, and Seeger 1969). It also introduced Romani and Traveller singers and a repertoire of songs, mostly composed by MacColl,

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[17] This scoping review was not systematic but looked at a sample of publications which all referenced Romani music in England, most of them clearly aimed at readers and listeners involved in the English folk scene. The review looked for indications of direct involvement from Romani individuals in the creation and curation of the publications as well as the discourse around Romani singers' English-language song repertoires. The sample included eight books, five journal and magazine articles, and 18 audio productions, most with extensive liner notes.

[18] The Willett family did collaborate more closely with the now defunct record label Forest Tracks and gave permission for pictures of the singers to be printed in a 2013 album featuring Ken Stubbs' recordings of the family (P. Marsh 2013).

to a wider audience.[19] The interviews which laid the groundwork of their radio ballad became the foundation of two influential books about English and Scottish Romani and Traveller songs and culture (MacColl and Seeger [1977] 2016, 1986). Regardless of their good intentions and long-standing relationships with many of the singers they recorded, MacColl and Seeger's books nevertheless reiterated some of the problematic discourses surrounding Romani and Traveller culture in the British Isles. They suggested that the songs sung by their informants belonged to the non-Romani ('gorgio') population, and had simply passed into the hands of Romani singers after being discarded by them:

> The fact that the greater part of this traditional repertory was made originally by gorgios is unimportant, since the gorgios have, on the whole, abandoned it. As with the scrap cars, obsolete sewing machines and old radios which litter their sites, the Travellers have taken whatever was retrievable of that abandoned repertory and made it their own. (MacColl and Seeger [1977] 2016: 15)

The problematic notion that Romanies live off the scraps of society shines through both in their description of Traveller sites and in their stance on the origins of the songs. This is especially notable as MacColl and Seeger themselves mention that their informants regarded the songs as having originated with their community, a stance which they found hard to accept:

> It is interesting to note that all our English singers held the view that the songs they sang had actually *originated* among Travellers. When it was pointed out to [English Traveller singer] Nelson Ridley that non-Travellers also sang them, he said: "Not the old songs, the real old songs. They just sing these modern things." (ibid.; emphasis in original)

The authors do not belittle the importance of these songs for their informants, but assurance of the songs' connections to their community's heritage and history is presented more as a curiosity than as a valid position worthy of further discussion. Whether or not it is possible to argue for a true 'origin' of a shared body of orally transmitted songs, there seems little doubt that MacColl and Seeger retained the notion that their informants were primarily custodians of songs which were really part of an English or Scottish heritage.

The division between what are considered English (or British) vs Romani or Traveller songs is also evident in Peter Kennedy's substantial book *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland*, first published in 1975. His chapter "Songs of the Travelling People" is nestled at the end of the book and not incorporated into the other chapters on the ethnic groups

[19] Although the majority of musicians and singers performing in the radio ballad were not from Romani or Traveller heritage backgrounds, the cast included Scottish Traveller Belle Stewart and her distant relative Jane Urquhart (née Stewart). In addition to the core cast, the radio ballad features field recordings of Romani Caroline Hughes singing, and all songs were interspersed with short interviews with Romani and Traveller people. The interviewees include Romani Minty Smith whose family members have since featured on several influential albums of English folk song (Le Bas 2014; Cox 2008; Yates and Engle 1977).

and languages of the British Isles. The chapter largely focuses on songs which contain Romani words or slang, and songs specifically concerned with Traveller culture and life. Notably, there are numerous contributions from Romani and Traveller singers in other chapters of the book, although here they are not listed as Traveller songs. Following the same pattern as Leather, and MacColl and Seeger, Kennedy suggests that the repertoires of the Travelling people are primarily made up of songs they picked up from the majority population, stating that, “Generally speaking they will not make up their own songs and tunes and will concentrate on whatever is most popular in the areas in which they travel” ([1975] 1984: 747).[20]

It is true that the Romani singers recorded by song collectors in the 20th century largely sang songs in English and shared a repertoire with many singers from the non-Romani population. Considering that Romani and non-Romani people in England have worked together and lived alongside one another for centuries, however, it would be extraordinary if they did not share a repertoire. The exclusion of Romani music heritage as an equal partner of a shared English (and British) music heritage is reflected in Matthews’ description of the Romani “absent presence” in the narrative of British history: “Romani communities have shared work, leisure, and other relationships with non-Romani people in Britain since the sixteenth century, and yet their voices are usually a ringing absence when ‘Britishness’ in all its plural complexity is described” (Matthews 2015: 81). Similarly, the “plural complexity” of folk song in England has not allowed space for Romani voices other than as vessels for an ostensibly English heritage. It should be noted that there are song collectors who have not subscribed to this discourse but largely treated the folk song repertoire as part of a shared heritage, notably Nick Dow (2021, 2023) and Mike Yates (2006). However, the pervasive nature of this discourse around ownership, or lack thereof, continues to have a real impact on the visibility of Romanies in the traditional music heritage of England. This is particularly notable in how these singers and songs are represented in archive collections of folk songs.

The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library Archive: The Invisibility of Ethnicity

The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library is England’s national library and archive of folk music and dance, a unique resource and essential first port of call for anyone interested in researching these areas. It is part of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), based in Cecil Sharp House in Camden, London. The EFDSS was founded in

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[20] There are suggestions that Kennedy was not the sole author of this chapter of his book. Denise Stanley (1989) states that the chapter was written by John Brune, who is one of eight people credited with assisting in writing “introductory and background notes” for the book’s sections. However, there is no indication in Kennedy’s acknowledgements to what chapters or sections Brune assisted with ([1975] 1984: viii). From entries in the Vaughan William’s Memorial Library catalogue, we know that Brune recorded Romani and Scottish Traveller singers and it is likely that he did contribute to this chapter in one way or another.

1932 upon the merger of the English Folk Dance Society and the Folk-Song Society. The library predates the merger by two years, and began with Cecil Sharp's book collection, which found a home there upon construction of the present building in 1930. The holdings of the library grew with subsequent donations, bequests and purchases, and it was given its present name in 1958 on the death of composer and song collector Ralph Vaughan Williams. He was the first, and serving, president of the EFDSS, and was actively involved in raising funds for the library's future at the time of his passing (National Folk Music Fund 1958).

The VWML has continued to expand, and is now a multimedia library of distinction, containing books, pamphlets, periodicals, press cuttings, broadsides, paintings, photographs, slides, artefacts, records, reel-to-reel tapes, phonograph cylinders, videos, cine films, compact discs, audio cassettes, and more. It holds original papers of many prominent first and second folk revivalists, from Lucy Broadwood and George Butterworth to Ken Stubbs and Patrick Shuldham Shaw, and continues to add collections to its archives in the present. It also stays on the pulse of new publishing on folk, adding new books and journal issues to its shelves as they are published.

EFDSS today, while it retains its mission to preserve the heritage of folk song and dance in England, is a very different organisation to that of 1932, sitting in the multicultural landscape of modern Britain. Most of the early folk song collectors proceeded with a tacit acceptance of what 'English' meant, and what kinds of songs, collected from what kind of people, fitted this model. EFDSS now recognises the fact that the ethnic minority groups present in England at the turn of the 19th and 20th-centuries are little represented in the corpus of 'traditional English folk song,' and seeks through various initiatives to right that oversight (e.g. Morrison 2023). In the case of Britons of colour, there is almost nothing in the VWML archives to work with; English collectors simply did not turn in that direction. The case of the Romani Gypsy and Traveller communities is rather different; they are there in the archives, but are hidden in plain sight.

As we have seen, many of the key song collectors of the first revival mined the musical riches of the Romani and Traveller communities. We frequently know the ethnic background of these singers thanks to their descriptions of them, often (richly, in the case of Cecil Sharp) accompanied by evocative photographs. The VWML holds the archives of many such song collectors (either complete or in part), including Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Ella Mary Leather, and Lucy Broadwood, and its archive catalogues and indexes allow users to view scans of the songs they sang as notated by these collectors. There are early recordings too, digitised from wax cylinders, which open a window onto the lives of the community members themselves, indistinct as their voices often are through the inevitable crackles of age. However, such records are all but impossible to find without prior knowledge and some determination.

The primary reason for their undiscoverability lies in the fact that there is no field in the archive's catalogue entries which records the ethnicity of the singer. The interested newcomer to the site might realistically be expected to search for 'Gypsy,' 'Romani,' 'Traveller,' or some variation on that theme, but without this field, the search is futile. Indeed, a search for 'Gypsy' would result in 856 results, all of which are for songs

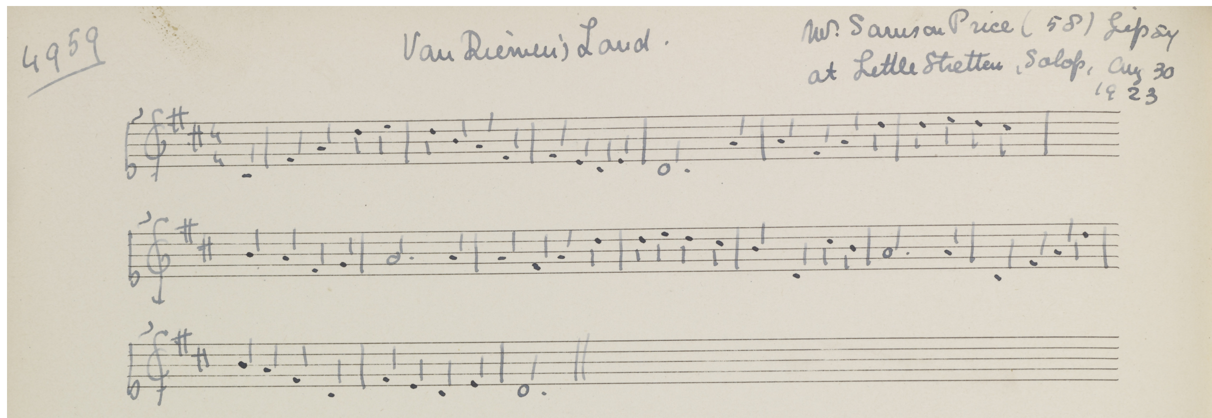

Figure 2. Cecil Sharp's transcription of the song "Van Diemen's Land" from Romani singer Samson Price at Little Stretton, Shropshire, in 1923. Note the word 'Gipsy' (sic) in the top right-hand corner (by kind permission of the Master, Fellows, and Scholars of Clare College, Cambridge).

with the word 'Gypsy' in the title or first line; none of these records appear in the search results owing to the background of the performer. The VWML's library (as opposed to archive) catalogue does not share this problem because it has an inbuilt thesaurus of subject headings, based on the widely used schema of the USA's Library of Congress but adapted for local use. Why the difference?

There is a temptation to follow the pattern of so much folksong discourse and blame the collectors; this is not entirely fair in our context, but they are at least partially responsible. A catalogue can only describe ethnicity if this is recorded in the item being described. In a library catalogue, more often than not 'ethnicity' would be included as most items in the catalogue are publications rather than manuscripts. Publishers are infinitely more fastidious in recording the pertinent information the librarian needs to apply subject headings which capture the important features of the item, be it a sound recording, a book, or a periodical. An item which has gone through the gamut of editorial processes is a very different proposition from a scrap of paper on which a folksong collector has hurriedly scribbled a song down 'in the field,' however. If the collector does not tell us on the scrap of paper that the singer is from a particular demographic, there will be nothing on the archive record which tells us that they are. There are instances in which collectors note that the singer is 'a Gypsy,' but it is very far from universal (see Figure 2).

In the case of the VWML, there are further layers of reasoning for the lack of ethnicity descriptors. These lie in the history of the catalogue and its somewhat unusual context. Before the computer age, it was common for archive catalogues to be supported by indexes, usually on cards, which recorded persons, places, and subjects. When archives started to move online, these morphed into name and place authorities and subject thesaurus terms which could be linked to catalogue records. As we have seen, the VWML developed primarily as a library based on the book collection of one individual and without an archive. There were therefore no index cards and no person, place, or subject indexes existed. When archive collections were gradually left to the library,

items were treated in the same manner as library materials, and indexed for songs and dance tunes, ignoring the traditional archival categories.

There have been changes, and many of these came with the "Full English" project. This pioneering initiative, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, began in 2012 and saw the VWML work with several partner institutions to create an online catalogue of 19 key folk music, dance, and song manuscript collections, offering free access to around 80,000 items (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library 2012). At this time, name and place authority files were added so that users could search for people, whether collectors or singers, and locations in which songs, dances, or tunes were collected. However, a subject thesaurus was not added, and there is still no way of searching for the ethnicity or cultural background of a performer. The library and archive staff recognise the ideal that adding a thesaurus would constitute, but without extra personnel, money, and a lot of time, there is little chance of making it a reality in the near future. The only way to find recordings of Romani and Traveller singers is to know some names before you start, which requires further research using the library catalogue, or knowing someone who can tell you. Folksong enthusiasts and academics may have the required agency; the casual searcher, the educator or artist looking for new material remains none the wiser. Romani and Traveller singers shaped the repertoire of folksong in England to a significant degree, but you would never know it from the online archives of the country's national specialist collection.

Thus, whether we are comfortable with it or not, librarians and archivists in our context remain gatekeepers, even in an institution which is acutely aware of its mission to make "the thousands of songs, dances, tunes and customs that were noted down mainly from the mouths of the rural working classes" available again "to the communities which carried them through the centuries" (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library n.d.). As meLê yamomo has put it, "the abilities to archive and to access the archive are positions of privilege and hegemony," privileges which "become invisible and imperceptible to those who are in positions of power" (yamomo and Titus 2021: 42). It is probable that all information professionals have at some time failed to realise their inherent status in the hierarchy of knowledge production, and a growing awareness of such issues has led many to seek ways of redressing the balance. How might this be achieved? In the words of Megan Ward and Adrian S. Wisnicki (2019: 200), "postcolonial digital archives have tended toward an ethos of repair, wherein scholars using theoretically informed digital tools and platforms attempt to redress the harm of imperialism and colonialism," but there is a sense in which archivists cannot win, for is it realistic or desirable for the gatekeeper to turn on their own barricade? Barbara Titus, curator of the Jaap Kunst Sound Collection at the University of Amsterdam, has spoken of her aim to "reinscribe" in history the voices of the collection's unheralded actors, but also of a failure to achieve this as she and the archive's creators are "still the main protagonists of the narrative" (yamomo and Titus 2021: 62). She asks whether she is the right person to begin the "process of recovering these voices" (ibid.). It is equally a question for the staff of the VWML, and is the reason for our faith in a project which would centre the voices of the communities it attempted to release from the archival shadows.

"Gypsy and Traveller Voices in Music Archives"

Project Inception

The issues around representation, discourses, and access to archive materials that we have examined in previous sections led us to think about how we, as academics, educators, and information professionals, can contribute to positive change which does not reiterate but rather subverts the implicit silencing of Romani and Traveller voices in music archives. In the summer of 2022, Marsh and Wettermark were both involved in "Access Folk," a research project at the University of Sheffield which aims to diversify participation in folk singing.[21] Having met through this project, they began to discuss the relationship between the English folk scene and Romani and Traveller communities. Finding a great deal of common ground and potential to develop a project to begin to address some of the issues inherent in this relationship, Wettermark contacted the director of the VWML, Tiffany Hore, to discuss a collaboration leading to the start of the Gypsy and Traveller Voices in Music Archives project.

Our individual positionality and reasons to get involved are significant for the project. Although originally from Sweden, Wettermark has been involved in the English folk scene over many years, both as a musician and educator and former education manager with the English Folk Dance and Song Society. His research focuses on issues of diversity and participation in the folk scene (Hield et al. 2024), and since his early involvement with folk music in England, he has found the lack of reflection on the role of Romani singers in the song repertoire disconcerting.

Hore has been the Director of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library since 2020, and knew Wettermark from his time working in the organisation. The VWML under her directorship has been proactive in tackling the colonialist legacies of its classification and cataloguing practices, working with people of colour to revise its library catalogue subject headings and classification. During the 150th anniversary year of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Hore became more aware of the Romani and Traveller singers from whom he, and other collectors, recorded songs.

As an interdisciplinary academic from an English Romani background, Marsh uses participatory, arts-based research methods to bring the voices of conflict- and disaster-affected peoples, including Latin America's Romani populations (Marsh and Acuña Cabanzo 2024), into policy debates. For over 15 years she has collaborated with government and non-government organisations in England to support young people from Romani and Traveller backgrounds to claim spaces in Higher Education. We include these details to highlight what Wright et al. (2012: 45) call the "'behind-the-scenes' emotional work of preparing for research, building relationships and rapport with others, thinking, conversing, and representing" which is "typically removed from conventional

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[21] Marsh as an Advisory Board Member, and Wettermark as Research Associate. "Access Folk" is a UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship project led by Professor Fay Hield.

academic accounts." The planning of robust and feasible impact work with communities, we argue, best emerges from strong and sincere relationships of trust and solidarity, though such relationships do not develop organically within the usual timeframe of academic research funding calls.

Project Development

Drawing on our various personal encounters with Romani and Traveller representation in public narratives, the folk scene and music archives, together we identified the need for a digital and printable resource that would render the Romani and Traveller collections in the VWML more accessible, particularly for Romani and Traveller people seeking engagement with their intangible cultural heritage. We also recognised the widespread lack of knowledge and understanding of the roles of these communities in the folk music heritage of England and aimed to promote knowledge exchange between Romanies and Travellers, national music archivists, librarians, and diverse publics. Planning for a small-scale pilot project focused on Knowledge Exchange and impact rather than purely research allowed us to apply for Arts and Humanities Research Council funding held by the University of East Anglia Impact Acceleration Account, which we secured in late autumn 2022.

From the outset, we sought to disrupt the traditional production of knowledge about 'Gypsy music,' which has largely reflected the perspectives and judgements of outsiders. We wanted our project resource not only to be aimed at Romani and Traveller communities, but to be co-written and co-designed with community members, and we therefore sought Romani and Traveller involvement and input via focus groups throughout the project's duration.

In February 2023, we conducted an open recruitment for a paid project associate with significant lived experience and/or community connections, which we advertised via the VWML website, *Travellers' Times*, and relevant personal and professional networks. We had significant interest from both Romani and Traveller and non-Romani applicants, and after shortlisting and interviewing candidates we commissioned Romani academic and poet Dr Joanne Clement to develop the resource together with us. Following a series of team meetings and ongoing discussion, in early June 2023 a first draft of the resource was presented to a small focus group composed of people of Romani or Traveller heritage with the aim of checking whether the final product would be relevant and meaningful. The draft resource was revised in light of comments received at this stage regarding the amount of text, positioning and number of photographs, and ease of use.

Project Presentation and Initial Responses

As the resource is aimed not at music specialists but community members, the project associate decided to highlight some of the striking photographs of Romani and Traveller singers and musicians whose songs were documented in the early 20th century. This

Figure 3. Romani Gypsy Lucy Carter (1830–1912) photographed in Tintinhull, Somerset by Cecil Sharp in 1906 (courtesy of Vaughan Williams Memorial Library).

approach brought the individuals and their backgrounds to the fore, positioning them as important actors within the UK's folk music heritage. To include both older transcripts and later recordings of singers, the resource is organised around themes rather than individual repertoires. For example, on the theme of love, Lucy Carter's love song "Black as Sloe" (see Figures 3 and 4), transcribed from her singing by Cecil Sharp in 1906 appears next to a 1960s recording of Caroline Hughes singing a version of "Blue Eyed Lover." Using QR codes to connect the printed resource to the online archive, we wanted to bring the readers straight from the page to the digitised recordings and the handwritten manuscripts. In total the resource introduces 18 Romani and Traveller singers and musicians, most with direct links to original manuscripts and audio recordings accessible through the VWML catalogue.[22]

In July 2023, we presented a small exhibition based on the resource at Strumpshaw Tree Fair, a two-day arts, crafts, and heritage fair held in Strumpshaw, Norfolk. Although the public attending this cultural event had a clear interest in heritage, music,

[22] An inventory of sound recordings in the VWML archive catalogue initiated by Wettermark and Hore in the summer of 2023 identified 81 named Romani, Irish and Scottish Traveller singers and musicians, the majority of whom had no indication of their heritage in the catalogue entries themselves. The inventory only looked at audio recordings, most of which were done in the 1950s to 1980s, and did not include most of the individuals whose songs were documented in books and manuscript by Edwardian and Victorian song collectors.

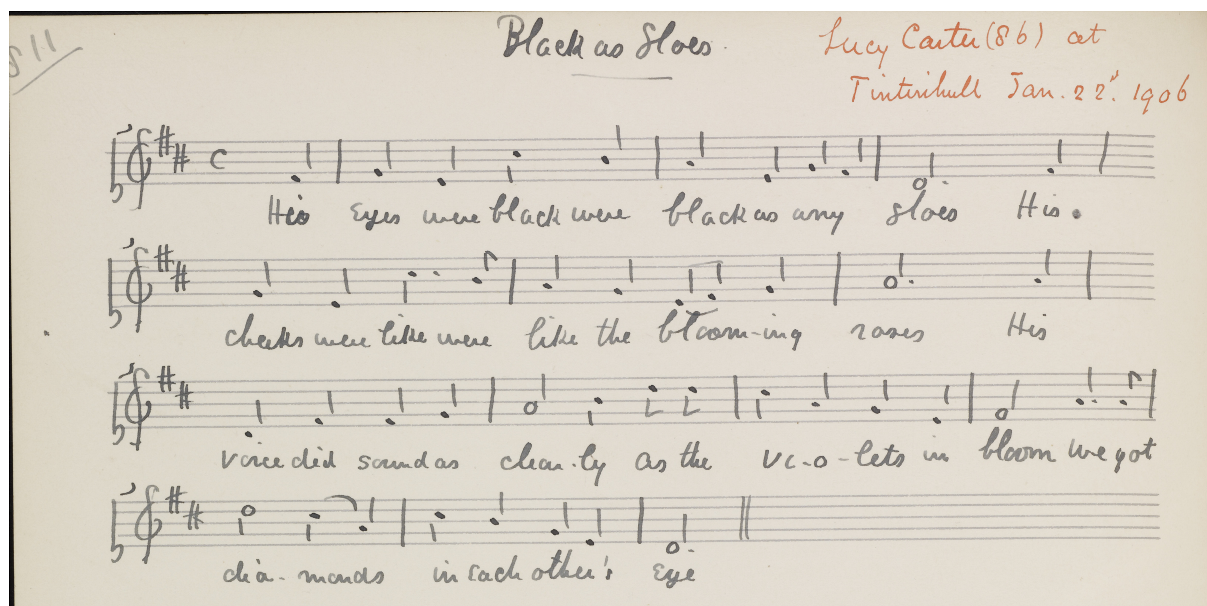

Figure 4. A transcription of one of Lucy Carter's songs, "Black as Sloes" (by kind permission of the Master, Fellows, and Scholars of Clare College, Cambridge).

and the arts, it was evident from our conversations with visitors over the two days, and from the written feedback we collected, that most were completely unaware of the contributions of Romanies and Travellers to the folk song repertoire in England. Even self-declared folk heritage aficionados indicated a lack of awareness of Romani and Traveller contributions, as their written comments indicated:

> I know of Gypsy and Traveller storytellers and history but little of the old songs and who sang them and where . . .. Will definitely delve further into the archives. Such a rich heritage that needs to be celebrated (member of the public, 15 July 2023).
>
> I know lots of the songs as I am immersed in traditional singing. Great learning new information about the history and identity of the individual singers whose histories/identity was often excluded by song collectors . . . this area of research needs to be promoted much more (member of the public, 15 July 2023).
>
> Thank you for bringing these [recordings] to light. I didn't know this existed and . . . would love to listen to more of these songs (member of the public, 16 July 2023).
>
> I wasn't aware of the . . . [G]ypsy recordings. I'm interested to learn more. I had no idea that these archives existed . . . I shall enjoy my journey listening to the songs (member of the public, 16 July 2023).

On two occasions, visitors talked about their own Romani heritage, and indicated that the 'Gypsy and Traveller Voices' resource created a new opportunity for them to connect with that heritage.

In August 2023, we presented the final resource which we called *Singers and Songs: Gypsy and Traveller Voices* (Vaughan Williams Memorial Library 2023),[23] to our focus group,[24] who were positive about the representation of their heritage in the new materials. The participants emphasised the pride the resource made them feel in their ethnic identity, and also the ways in which it could stimulate intergenerational dialogue, with the potential to interest younger Romani and Traveller people in learning more about their cultural heritage. A potential barrier our focus group identified concerned literacy amongst some older Romani and Traveller communities, who, it was felt, may not find extensive text accessible. In response to this feedback, the project team has secured follow-on funding from the University of East Anglia's AHRC Impact Acceleration Account to create a short film in collaboration with Romani-led Patrin Films.[25] It is anticipated that the resource and the film together have the potential to raise awareness of Romani and Traveller contributions to English folk music, traditions and repertoires, and render them more visible. While we are in the early stages of our project, we hope that by countering negative and exotic stereotypes of 'Gypsy Music' our collaboration can change public perceptions of Romani and Traveller groups and their contributions to English music heritage.

Conclusion

In this article, we have defined what we believe to be significant problems concerning predominant ideas about what 'Gypsy music' is, and the lack of visibility of Romani Gypsy and Traveller singers in English music archives. We have set out the motivations underlying our collaboration on the 'Romani Gypsy and Traveller Voices in Music Archives' ongoing impact project work. By creating opportunities to more easily access and learn about a cultural heritage that is widely romanticised, denigrated, or ignored in narratives of Britishness, we aim to achieve three broad objectives. First, by raising awareness of the positive contributions that Romanies and Travellers have made to English (British and Irish) folk repertoires and styles, we hope to create new opportunities for the positive articulation of ethnic identity. Second, we hope to open up spaces within which Romanies and Travellers can shape their own representation in public arenas. Third, by using music archives to tell new stories, we hope to enable knowledge exchange between folk music institutions and Romani and Traveller communities.

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[23] *Singers and Songs: Gypsy and Traveller Voices* is available for free download: https://www.efdss.org/images/present/Docs/Library/Gypsy-Traveller-Voices-PDF.pdf

[24] For ethical reasons and to encourage freedom of expression, we decided not to record the focus group discussions but made notes of comments made by participants. Formal focus groups consisting of four Romani/Traveller collaborators were held twice during the project duration, and informal chats took place between the project team and focus group collaborators on an ad hoc basis.

[25] Patrin Films is a collective of Romani filmmakers. See Patrin Films (n.d.).

At a time of national and cultural recalibration after Brexit, and ongoing discussion around decolonisation and the United Kingdom's imperial legacies, we argue that the time is ripe to rethink notions of a singular 'English' (or wider British) folk song heritage and instead embrace the notion of a shared heritage. That is, a heritage that includes the multitude of Romani and Traveller voices which have sustained and contributed to the song repertoires over hundreds of years, and which is as much English as it is Romani.

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