Portraying Irish Travellers

Portraying Irish Travellers: Histories and Representations

Edited by

Ciara Bhreatnach and Aoife Bhreatnach



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Dedication

I ndíl chuimhne saothar Nioclás Breatnach

agus Tom Walsh, ar dheis Dé go raibh siad.

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INTRODUCTION

As E.H. Carr pointed out in 1960, a 'mere fact about the past' is not the same as 'a fact of history'. He described how a past event could be retrieved by a historian, whose citation would propose it for 'membership of the select club of historical facts'. Carr further argued that before it could become a full member, it would have to journey from the footnotes to the main text. Of course, many facts about the past are never 'gallantly rescued' by historians or anyone else.[1] Indeed, it took the determined efforts of ideologically committed academics to research and recover the histories of women and marginalised, powerless peoples. The nature of the historical profession is such that the pioneering work of an individual can establish a research area, as the landmark work of E.P. Thompson did for the history of social class. But as Carr points out, one citation by one historian is not sufficient; others must also judge that a 'fact about the past' is also a 'fact of history'. In stark contrast with the numerous books on class that Thompson inspired, David Mayall's historical research on Gypsies has been notable for its lack of successors.[2] Since not all 'facts about the past' are admitted to the formal, professional world of 'facts of history', the dearth of such facts about Irish Travellers is neither unique nor particularly surprising. However, the process of transforming the existence and past lives of Irish Travellers into a 'fact of history' has been slowly and sporadically underway for over ten years.

The landmark volume edited by May McCann, Séamas Ó Síocháin and Joseph Ruane *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity* (Belfast, 1996) was the first interdisciplinary academic work to analyse Travellers as a distinct group within Irish society. Since then, Bryan Fanning's case study of the historical perception of Travellers in Ennis, County Clare, and Jane Helleiner's exhaustive analysis of Galway City have contributed to a greater awareness of how important the

[1] E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (2nd ed., edited by R.W. Davies, London, 1990), p 12.
[2] David Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Society* (Cambridge, 1988), *English Gypsies and State Policies* (Hertfordshire, 1995), *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000: from Moon-Men to the Ethnic Romany* (London, 2003).

historical context is in evaluating Traveller-settled relations.[3] These authors and others, such as Steve Garner, have also used theoretical explanations to understand how and why Travellers were excluded from mainstream Irish society.[4] Many works have examined Traveller-settled relations in the context of racism.[5] Yet historians have been reluctant to engage with work by sociologists and anthropologists on the status accorded to Travellers. It is other disciplines that have been to the fore in presenting Irish Travellers as historical fact. As the title indicates, this volume will deliberately continue the interdisciplinary focus that distinguished previous work on Travellers. Similar to the authors in McCann, Ó Síocháin and Ruane the contributors to this book come from a wide range of disciplines from history, to anthropology to socio-linguistics. Indeed three of the authors here contributed to McCann *et al*'s volume. All the following essays have at their heart a portrayal of Travellers by those on the outside, the majority settled population. Only Michael McDonagh's contribution is from an insider perspective, where an activist, who strives to teach Travellers and settled people alike how to manage cultural difference, explains how representative strategies work on the ground. Yet, what is unspoken in our title is the focus on settled people, called 'country people' by Travellers.

How settled writers imagined Travellers in their texts is examined by Paul Delaney in his chapter on the work of James Stephens. Stephens was one of many Irish writers who drew on a generic Traveller figure that was typically associated with violence, promiscuity, drunkneness, theft, poverty, cunning, lawlessness, and loquaciousness. Aspects of this stereotype were present in Stephens' novels *The Demi-Gods* (1914) and *The Crock of Gold* (1912) but the privileged perspective accorded the Traveller characters ensured a complex engagement with the traditional 'tinker' figure. A central argument of Delaney's contribution is that representations of Travellers in the work of settled authors cannot be assumed to be 'inherently reductive and racist' even when the author makes use of unsavoury aspects a 'tinker' stereotype. While Stephens' Travellers are universally and desperately poor, this must be read in the context of his critique of 'prudence and possession', a theme that linked many of his works. Placing the Travellers on the side of the angels in *The Demi-Gods* produced an irreverent novel with a 'serious edge', where a sometimes generic

[3] Bryan Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester, 2002), Jane Helleiner, *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2000).
[4] Stephen Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience*, (London, 2004).
[5] Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh (eds), *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland* (Belfast, 2002), Ronnie Fay, 'Health and Racism: A Traveller Perspective', in Fintan Farrell and Philip Watt (eds), *Responding to Racism in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 99-114.

Traveller figure offered a profound critique of capitalism. Genre and authorial intention are never neglected in Delaney's analysis, especially when he draws attention to the ability, however limited, of Stephens to consciously construct the Traveller characters in his texts. Stephens sought to reimagine the Traveller figure but the dangers of engaging with a powerful 'established discursive system' emerge from Delaney's dissection of Stephens' multi-faceted representations. What made Stephens' task difficult was not just his distance from actual, real Travellers but the complexity of the 'discourse on nomadism' that he attempted to undermine.

The wondorous Traveller figure in Stephens' texts is echoed in Julie Brazil's analysis of the occasionally fantastical depictions of nomads in the early work of Jack B Yeats (1871-1957). Yeats drew both English Gypsies and Irish Travellers, but his work is distinct from that of other artists, such as Augustus John, who were also fascinated by nomadic people. Unlike John, Yeats represented Travellers and Gypsies as individual figures, rather than in family groupings surrounded by tents or caravans. The absence of other figures in the most dramatic works cited by Brazil – *A Tinker* and *The Tinker's Curse* (1905) – portrayed the Traveller man as alienated and dislocated from society. The gendered representation of Travellers is a crucial element of Brazil's chapter, as women and men identified by Yeats as 'tinkers' were depicted in starkly different ways. Combining literary studies, the development of the artist and historical context, Brazil has developed a methodology capable of analysing visual representations of a marginalised group. Her innovation is all the more welcome because visual material has not been fully exploited by scholars of Ireland. The potential value of visual sources for those studying the marginal and voiceless is also evident. The neglect of the visual arts in favour of the literary is unsustainable, and Brazil's contribution complements Delaney's analysis of the literary strategies of representation.

Turning to conventional historical sources, the very nature of a document determined how Travellers were recorded and represented as Ciara Breathnach makes clear in her chapter. An awareness of the record-making process is essential for anyone wishing to understand how the history of Travellers can be written. Breathnach outlines the structural considerations that determined how and why information on marginal people was transcribed by those who created the documentary record. Although Travellers might be found in records that detail the lives of the peripatetic people of Ireland, the attention of Poor Law guardians and police were overwhelmingly focused on the individual vagrant rather than the family group. As Breathnach demonstrates, the political concerns with land and possession determined how records were written, largely

excluding the landless, and Travellers in particular. However, Breathnach cautions against despair, stressing that a lack of historiography does not signify a complete absence of historical material. Since documentary sources for Irish social history are notoriously patchy, often surviving in abundance in some local areas, Breathnach advocates local history studies to exploit the available resources. The difficulties may seem insuperable, but scholars of women who initially faced similar difficulties have produced outstanding works of history.

To circumvent the inconsistency of official papers on Travellers, Aoife Bhreatnach has turned to alternative source material, chiefly the records of the Irish Folklore Commission and local newspapers. These records have yielded rich results on the texture of Irish social life, details that are rarely preserved in official documents. By analysing the information that settled rural dwellers provided on their relationship with Travellers, a greater understanding of how personal encounters were structured by historical and cultural context emerges. Face-to-face contact on the doorstep was determined by the utililty of goods offered for sale, popular attitudes to alms-giving and by national economic developments. Similarly, the fair day was an occasion whose significance was both intensely local and reflective of general cultural context. The great summer festival of Cahirmee Horse Fair was an occasion for Travellers to demonstrate the enduring success of their material culture. The manner in which one local newspaper portrayed Travellers on a fair day is described in detail here. The consequences for Traveller-settled relations when fairs were undermined by agricultural modernisation, and once welfare superseded charity, are analysed.

The themes of charity and welfare also emerge strongly in Michael McDonagh's contribution on the history of the Navan Traveller Workshop. McDonagh tells how well-intentioned charity dominated the early days of the organisation, when it was called St Jude's Committee for Travellers, but that socially radical Catholic thought transformed the nature of social work in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, attitudes towards Travellers among those concerned with their exclusion from the basic entitlements of society – running water, accommodation – shifted as Travellers themselves became involved in the organisation that was established to help them. McDonagh's own part in this story and the particular history of the Navan committee is frankly told in his chapter, which is as much a history of social work as it is an account of Traveller-settled relations in Navan. The significance of Travellers in developing the welfare agenda in twentieth-century Ireland emerges strongly from his account.

Sinéad Ní Shúinéar's chapter continues the theme of dialogue between Travellers and settled people, but focussing specifically on the nature of

communication between a researcher and the research subject. In the course of research, the Traveller informant is being asked by a representative of a powerful, and often hostile, majority for information, which may be vital to the group's protection. As refusal or confrontation would be counterproductive, informants engage in a range of strategies to placate the researcher without compromising their own interests. Ní Shúinéar believes that such strategies always operate where the researcher and researched embody a power differential. Her work also addresses how history is understood and negotiated in conversation between Travellers and an academic researcher. Travellers' very concept of history – which aspects of the past are worth remembering, how they are transmitted and their perceived relevance to the present – diverge significantly from standard academic definitions. From a typical researcher perspective, 'essential' issues are deemed irrelevant, and ignored, while 'irrelevant' ones are seen as central. Overcoming her own preconceptions and frustrated expectations in this regard has led her to understand that all history is a cultural construct. The cultural significance of kinship for Travellers emerges from Ní Shúinéar's research as the group's most potent expression of how the past that is felt to shape the present. How and why Travellers express Traveller history is clearly a complex process, deserving subtle and sensitive research.

Alice Binchy's chapter also discusses the nature of expression and the role of history. Her analysis of Shelta, the Traveller language, examines how settled observers have commented on its existence. Once again, the problems of differentiating nomads and vagrants in the historical record, emerges. This historical confusion has clearly formed perceptions of Shelta as either a language or an argot. As Binchy points out, linguistic elements alone do not determine how languages are categorised. Yet, in order to better understand the process of language formation, Shelta's lack of an independent grammar structure should be examined. Binchy's thesis that nomadism has formed the very nature of Traveller language demonstrates the importance of movement and mobility in Traveller history.

History runs through all the contributions to this volume, although some historians may still contest its validity as 'real' history. Yet the very diversity of disciplines studying Travellers and their past demonstrates that this group must finally be accorded the status of a 'fact of history'. Strangely, even when Travellers clearly exist as a distinct group in today's society, there continues to be resistance to acknowledging their historical presence. Jim MacLaughlin's book title, *Irish Travellers: Whose Country? Whose History? (Cork, 1995)*, succinctly expressed why this denial of history is politically potent. But, as this volume shows, in literature, art, documents and oral narrative Travellers were

recorded. Since their presence was inscribed by members of the majority settled population, it makes recovering their history more difficult, but certainly not impossible. It may primarily be a history of representations and portrayals, but it will illuminate settled and Traveller history alike. That Travellers' understanding of their own history may not accord with a linear, conventional verifiable narrative does not imply that they lack a sense of historical consciousness, or have no history. Echoing Carr, Ní Shúinéar points out that the written history of settled society is also reimagined. All facts of history are fluid, as academic and popular fashions seek new information from historical events. New research is redressing the neglect of Travellers by historians, but other disciplines continue to offer substantial contributions on the relationship between history and Travellers.[6]

[6] Aoife Bhreatnach, *Becoming Conspicuous: Irish Travellers, society and the State*, 1922-70, (Dublin, 2006)

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The editors would like to acknowledge the role Dr Bernadette Whelan and Dr John Logan played in bringing this volume into fruition. Some of the essays are based on papers delivered at the Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded 'Sources and representations' symposium hosted by the Department of History, University of Limerick, in May 2005. Two of the contributions – from Aoife Bhreatnach and Sinéad Ní Shúinéar – emerge from research funded by post-doctoral fellowships from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. On behalf of our contributors we would also like to express our gratitude to staff at the various institutions, which facilitated research for this work. We would also like to thank Dr Andy Nercessian and Amanda Millar at Cambridge Scholars Press for their assistance. Our colleagues at the history departments of the University of Limerick and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth deserve mention. Finally, we would both like to acknowledge the endless support of our families and friends.

Ciara Breathnach and Aoife Bhreatnach

CHAPTER ONE

FAIR DAYS AND DOORSTEPS: ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN TRAVELLERS AND SETTLED PEOPLE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRELAND

AOIFE BHREATNACH[1]

Some settled people continue to bemoan the demise of a 'traditional' Traveller way of life, where 'tinkers', as tinsmiths, were valued members of rural society, respected for their useful craft skills. The idea of a rural past, free from historical cleavages between settled and nomadic groups is so powerful that local politicians in 1995 wrote that it had vanished only in the previous thirty years.[2] Yet the Commission on Itinerancy in 1963 also described Travellers as victims of economic change that had only recently ended the market for tinware and craft skills.[3] Following the economic modernisation of the 1950s, 'tinker' lost its occupational connotations and the nomadic family in Ireland became a social problem, the 'itinerant'. The belief that Travellers, and their relationships with settled people, were defined by the adult male tinsmith, remains pervasive. An anthropologist, George Gmelch was responsible for bringing the popular belief that Travellers were useful as 'tinkers' but obsolete as 'itinerants' into the formal academic sphere.[4] A formerly harmonious relationship based on the prowess and utility of the tinsmith has provided the historical background to many discussions on the status of Travellers in contemporary Irish society. Yet advocacy groups are to the fore in explaining that the Traveller economy is

[1] The author acknowledges the support of an Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences Post-Doctoral Fellowship. Thanks to Sinéad Ní Shúinéar for her comments on the first and last draft of this chapter.

[2] *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Dublin, 1995), pp 289-90.

[3] *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin, 1963), p. 72, 113.

[4] George Gmelch, *The Irish Tinkers: the Urbanization of an Itinerant People* (2nd ed., Illinois, 1985), pp 42-53.

characterised by flexible self-employment, while Judith Okely effectively demolished Gmelch's argument about occupational obsolescence following shifts in the rural economy.[5] But the past relationship in rural Ireland between Travellers and settled people remains elusive. The characteristics of the historical Traveller economy – tinsmithing, horse-dealing, trading and begging – merit serious analysis, as do the cultural contexts in which the minority encountered the majority settled population. Only by examining the cultural and social mores that governed rural life before World War II can a greater understanding of Traveller-settled relations be reached.

This chapter will examine tinsmithing in relation to other Traveller occupations, particularly focusing on the role of women and children who called to houses selling and begging. How they were received depended on a number of factors, particularly popular religiosity, the extent of subsistence farming, and attitudes to charity and welfare. How and why Travellers were distinguished from other individuals who travelled from house to house seeking alms will be discussed. Moving from the doorstep and country kitchen to a town's main street, the second half of the chapter will analyse the role that fairs, especially the summer festivals of Puck and Cahirmee, played in forming and consolidating Traveller settled relations. The divergent nature of social distance expressed in public and private settings will be explored; the differing status accorded the lone vagrant and the Traveller family will emerge. Since Gmelch rightly expressed a profound official and popular concern with utility, the meaning of exchanges of goods and services in rural Ireland will be addressed.

Encounters with Travellers are described in the records of the Irish Folklore Commission, a source that is used extensively in this chapter. This national folklore collection has been neglected by historians, in contrast to the recently released witness statements in the Bureau of Military History, the contents of which have been scrutinised for insights into political revolution in twentieth-century Ireland.[6] The folklore collection has been ignored not only because Irish historians are wary of non-traditional sources, but because political history continues to dominate the profession. Yet even political events of national importance can be researched in this collection, as Guy Beiner's forthcoming

[5] Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Travellers ... their life and times* (Navan, 1992), p. 6; Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 50

[6] See for example, Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921* (Oxford, 2005), Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004).

book on the rebellion of 1798 will demonstrate.[7] The sources for social history are not so abundant that the folklore collection can be ignored, especially since Travellers are but a marginal presence in conventional source material. Two sections of the collection, the Schools Collection from 1937-8 and the Tinker Questionnaire from 1952, contain much significant material, particularly on the economic contacts between Travellers and settled people.[8] As Travellers themselves do not relate their side of the story, the perspective explored here is that of the sedentary, housed population. The mainstays of the Traveller economy were hawking and begging, activities that were the responsibilities of women and children.[9] Opinions of the settled people on begging vary in the sources from hostile to sympathetic, with many expressing no opinion on the practice. Mac Gréine wrote 'they are very persistent, and present such a doleful appearance that the country people usually give them something to get rid of them'.[10] If the proceeds of begging did not suit their requirements, they discarded these immediately 'generally a short distance from the house at which they received them'.[11] This practice would not have endeared them to alms givers, but beggars on foot could not carry large loads. A beggar could hardly refuse any charity offered, even if it did not match his/her needs. The relationship between beggar and alms giver was a complex one and shaped popular opinion of Travellers. Begging and selling could 'torment the housekeepers'[12] and assertive behaviour by Travellers may have challenged perceptions of 'charity cases'.

> The country people never regarded tinkers as objects of charity as they did the poor old beggar-men and women of the old workhouse days. These poor creatures *begged*. The tinkers just *demanded* and God help anyone who left one of them leave the door empty handed. This obtains in the case of the tinkers up to the present day. They wish all kinds of ill-luck to the house and to the crops and to the cattle if they are refused their demands and people are sometimes afraid of their curses.[13]

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[7] Guy Beiner, *Remembering "The Year of the French": Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (forthcoming, Wisconsin, 2006).

[8] I am grateful to the Head of Department, Department of Irish Folklore, University College Dublin, for permission to reproduce extracts from the Irish Folklore Collection.

[9] Although men manufactured the tinware, they did not sell the goods.

[10] Pádraig Mac Gréine, 'Irish Tinkers or "Travellers": some notes on their manners and customs, and their secret language or "cant"', in *Béaloideas*, iii, no. 2 (1931), p. 172.

[11] Ibid.

[12] [IFC = Irish Folklore Collection Main Manuscript Collection] IFC, 1255, p. 85, UCD.

[13] IFC, 1255, p. 108, UCD.

On the other hand, another respondent to the 1952 questionnaire noted that 'in the very act of begging they set up a feeling of superiority in the minds of those they beg from'.[14] These two excerpts demonstrate contrasting views of the relationship between beggar and alms giver. For Travellers seeking food, clothing or money in order to survive, resorting to curses and petitions was essential and, given their relatively powerless position, understandable. Moreover, that their curses were not taken too seriously is suggested by the saying 'its not worth a tinker's curse'. Prayers and blessings were companions of curses. Nan O'Donoghue knocked on the door of a house with the words '"God save everybody in", saying "I'll say three Hail Mary's for you ma'am if you make us a cup of tea"'. [15] She felt that householders in the West of Ireland wouldn't give to Travellers unless God was mentioned.[16] In Nan Joyce's and Nan O'Donoghue's autobiographies, their dislike of begging is clear. Nan Joyce commented that 'Travellers begging had to make themselves all miserable-looking before they'd be given anything but when you were selling something it was different, you felt better'.[17] But begging was essential in the struggle for survival, as Julia Quinn recalled.

> Then we would start begging off the houses, a grain of flour and anything the woman would give us. A bit of meat, spuds or cabbage, lock of onions, tea or sugar or a bit of butter; we would get a bit in every house. We had to do it, we all begged with the black shawls, the children in our arms, breast-feeding them … The times were too hard; it was all begging.[18]

Although men made tinware, it was women and children going from house to house who sold the goods. But many Travellers also hawked handicrafts such as artificial flowers.[19] Small items were peddled in rural Cork, 'brooches, hair-grips, tie-pins, beads, laces and pictures'. There was a ready market for these goods among remote rural households. A basket of 'swag' would contain many small items, 'little pictures, hair combs, strainers, scissors, needles, thread, nearly everything you could mention … shoe laces, polish'.[20] Hawking and begging often occurred simultaneously: once a discussion over selling had concluded, requests could be made for alms.

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[14] IFC 1255, p. 173, UCD.
[15] Sharon Gmelch, *Nan the Life of an Irish Travelling Woman* (London, 1987), p. 87.
[16] Ibid., p. 130.
[17] Nan Joyce and Anna Farmar, *Traveller an autobiography* (Dublin, 1986), p. 33.
[18] Navan Travellers Heritage Teamwork, *Now and Then* (Navan, 1996), p. 6.
[19] Joyce and Farmar, *Traveller*, p. 31.
[20] Gmelch, *Nan,* p .100.

Yet it would be wrong to examine begging and hawking solely from a perspective of Traveller-settled relations, since non-Traveller men (and occasionally women) also travelled Irish roads, seeking alms and hawking small goods. Distinguishing between peddling and begging could be difficult since, as a prominent politician, James Dillon, pointed out in Dáil Éireann in 1938, selling door-to-door was used to circumvent legislation that outlawed begging. Speaking of his 'old friends', Dillon said that

> … they circumnavigate the regulations prohibiting their activities by selling studs or bootlaces or something of that kind, so that if a Civic Guard came on the scene you can grab a pair of bootlaces and protest that you were engaged in a commercial transaction; that there was no eleemosynary element in operation at all.[21]

The begging vagrant had long concerned administrators of the poor law, as Ciara Breathnach's contribution to this volume illustrates. Niall Ó Ciosáin has demonstrated that popular attitudes towards begging before the advent of the Poor Law were complex, with categories akin to the deserving and undeserving poor evident in the application of 'boccough' (from the Irish 'bacach' meaning lame) to those pretending to be disfigured or disabled.[22] In spite of persistent government attempts to control vagrancy, a 1925 Garda count proves that 'no fixed abode' included individuals as well as Traveller families.[23] From the Schools Collection gathered by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1937-38, it is clear that Travellers were not alone in using nomadism to maximise subsistence living opportunities. As information was sought under the heading 'an lucht siúil' (literally, the walking people), this source should not be taken as a comprehensive survey of Travellers alone, who were often, though not exclusively, identified as 'na tincéirí' (the tinkers).[24] The interpretation of 'an lucht siúil' as beggars or Travellers varied from school to school but most respondents chose to discuss the vagrant homeless. Children's accounts from late 1930s County Cork are peopled with colourful, often tragicomic local

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[21] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, lxx, 135 (2 Feb. 1938).

[22] Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Boccoughs and God's Poor: Deserving and Undeserving Poor in Irish Popular Culture' in Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1998), pp 93-9.

[23] *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, Including the Insane Poor* (Dublin, 1927), p. 17.

[24] The ambiguous application of labels given to nomads and vagrants is explored by David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000: From Egipcyans and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (London and New York, 2004), pp 54-83 and Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems and Anne-marie Cottaar (eds), *Gypsies and other Itinerant Groups: a socio-historical approach* (London, 1998).

characters 'Paddy Wheel About'[25], 'Dan the fiddler'[26] and 'Jerry the Quality'.[27] In the Schools Collection there were three distinct categories of vagrant: those who sought lodgings; those who sought alms and those who sold items or a skill. These wanderers were separate from and in addition to Travellers.

Male tramps seeking lodgings travelled a regular circuit, staying with the same families for a night at a time, before moving on to the next household on their route. Many were not wholly sane, some were ex-soldiers[28] or former inmates of Industrial Schools.[29] What is striking about these individuals is that although sometimes unconventional and occasionally of questionable sanity, they were written of with considerable affection and sympathy by the school children. They were a part of the local population; their dress, habits and family history were well known. Women were increasingly rare visitors and one woman said 'Travelling women often came around but [now] no women come except gypsy and tinker women'.[30] This mostly male vagrant population was integrated into the local community and though they lived on charity, this was not openly acknowledged.

> These men do not ask for alms. They usually call at dinner time or at tea time. We invite them to join us and they regale us with stories of their adventures while the meal is in progress. They give us news of our friends in Kilkenny, Waterford or Limerick.[31]

Though they did not seek assistance, these men were offered shelter and food. In exchange they told stories, brought news, sang songs or played an instrument.

> The tramps that travel singly look for lodging. They bring news from other places. They generally sleep in an out house or fix a bed for themselves in the kitchen. The people of the house give them their meals.[32]

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[25] 'Paddy Wheel About' lived in the neighbourhood of Kinsale for 30 years. After his death, local people came to believe that he was Colonel John Hawkes, an ex-soldier who, in the course of his military career, had reputedly led the desecration of a Roman Catholic Church, [IFC S = Irish Folklore Collection Schools Manuscript Collection] IFC S 320, pp 76-78, UCD.
[26] IFC S, 288, p. 325, UCD.
[27] IFC S, 289, p. 261, UCD.
[28] For instance, Johnnie Walker, who lost a hand in battle IFC S, MS 279, p. 65; John Collins, IFC S, 279, p. 230, UCD.
[29] IFC S, 288, p. 327, UCD.
[30] IFC S, 289, p. 259, UCD.
[31] IFC S, 337, p. 92, UCD.
[32] IFC S, 343, p. 33, UCD.

> They often bring news from distant parts. The old people used to gather around them as there was hardly any newspaper at that time.[33]
>
> They used come round at certain times and bring all the news with them, they were known by 'nicknames' such as 'Straight Road', 'Black Bess', 'Mary from Cork' etc. Some of the men could fiddle beautifully and sing 'come-all-ye' songs.[34]

This was a legitimate currency in a society where entertainment was largely self-made and any diversion from routine gossip welcomed. Séamus Ó Duilearga, who was head of the Irish Folklore Commission established in 1935, pointed to the importance of wandering individuals in the circulation of traditional tales and songs.[35] But a confusion has arisen where descriptions of wandering men and women has been taken to mean Travellers, even though family mobility distinguishes Travellers from those officially labelled as vagrants. A classic illustration of this is in Clodagh Brennan Harvey's work on the English language narrative tradition in Ireland, when she describes Travellers as 'foremost among these nomads' who contributed to the evolution of story-telling in English. The first example Brennan Harvey cites is of a lone adult male, who drew listeners from across the district to the house where he was staying for a period of time.[36] Yet in the second example given, the setting and nature of the encounter were markedly different. A County Clare man spoke of listening to 'a travelling man' who told stories, but tellingly, the man was accompanied by his family. Also, the stories were not recounted in the kitchen of a farmhouse but around the campfire at the side of the road.[37] Some distinction should therefore be made between a single man or woman seeking shelter and a Traveller family, who possessed their own accommodation. Being independent of house-dwellers for shelter, Travellers were accordingly more distant from the family kitchen and fireplace than individuals who sought lodgings. This partly explains why the most memorable portraits of individuals in the Schools Collection were those of homeless men who were familiar figures in a locality, while 'tinkers' were more distant from the respondents.

Popular attitudes to begging and alms-giving emerged particularly strongly from the Schools Collection. A folklore trope categorised as 'Hospitality Blessed', expressed a popular religious culture that praised unstinting generosity offered

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[33] IFC S, 343, p. 388, UCD.
[34] IFC S, 304, p. 18, UCD.
[35] Cited in Clodagh Brennan Harvey, *Contemporary Irish Traditional Narrative: the English Language Tradition* (Berkeley, 1992), p. 9.
[36] Ibid., p. 10.
[37] Ibid., pp 10-11.

to a nameless, unknown wanderer, who was later revealed to be the Mother of God or Christ himself.[38] Men and women seeking alms worked in this popular Christian tradition, returning charity with prayers and blessings for the giver and his/her family: 'He began his prayers and petitions before reaching the house and continued them for some time after entering the kitchen, in a continuous stream of words'.[39] A beggar would receive alms with blessings such as 'May God spare your health', or 'May God increase your store''. [40] The (long) ending of a petition used by a Mrs O'Donoghue from Macroom was recalled by one informant:

> Ná fhaghad-sa bás go deo go mbéarfaidh mé solas na Nodlag liom! Go saoraidh Dia ó bás i ndorchacht na h-oíche sinn! Go dtugaidh Dia grásta na foidhne daoibh-se is domhsa chun trioblóidí an tsaoghail seo imochar go fulangach foidhneac, agus beannacht Dé le h-anmann na marbh agus le nbhúr n-anam féin ar uair bhúr mbáis![41]
>
> May you not die at all until I return with the light of Christmas! May God save us from death in the darkness of the night! May God give the grace of patience to you all and to me to carry patiently and passively the troubles of life and God's blessings be with the souls of the dead and your own souls on the hour of your death!

The supernatural consequences for refusing hospitality could be dramatic, as in the folklore category of the 'Greedy Peasant Woman', which told of generosity rewarded and meanness punished.[42] One child recounted a local story in which a beggar woman refused lodgings brought a plague of rats upon a family that ended only when she was granted £10 and lodgings for the rest of her life.[43] When Traveller women cursed or blessed householders, they appealed to a powerful popular tradition that was also inhabited by homeless men and women. Despite the overwhelmingly positive depiction of tramps in this source, not everyone was welcoming; 'some people like to see them coming but others have no welcome for them'.[44] The authorities were not necessarily sympathetic to the plight of vagrants; in 1925, the persistent begging of a 'deaf, dumb imbecile' in Clonakilty County Cork was suppressed by Gardaí.[45]

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[38] See S. Ó Suilleabháin and R. T. H Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale* (Helsinki, 1967), number 750, p. 147.
[39] IFC S 326, p. 90, UCD.
[40] IFC S 337, p. 93, UCD.
[41] IFC S 326, p. 31, UCD.
[42] Ó Suilleabháin and Christiansen, *Types of the Irish Folktale*, number 751, p. 147.
[43] IFC S 343, p. 407, UCD.
[44] IFC S 343, p. 33, UCD.
[45] Superintendent M. Troy to Chief Superintendent, 28 Aug. 1925, (NAI DJ H207/4).

Although Irish legislation had outlawed begging since 1542, the spirit of the law had apparently made little impression on popular generosity. Individual alms-giving continued in the mid-twentieth century, although it was believed to be declining in 1938.[46] It seems that reform, rather than prohibition changed attitudes to begging. If the term 'travelling people', as one respondent insisted, was applied only 'to a fast diminishing number of old and infirm people', then benefits for the elderly would have affected their living standards.[47] The state pension, which lifted the elderly out of abject poverty, was twice cited as a reason for the decline in the number of individuals seeking alms.[48] The numbers of Irish elderly availing of the pension after its introduction in 1908 was considerably more than expected and, as Cormac Ó Grada has shown, the payment made a substantial difference to living standards.[49] Mel Cousins has demonstrated that the 1930s saw an increase in the numbers eligible for welfare benefits,[50] even if the payments remained small. Provision for the unemployed was meagre until 1938, when the benefits improved.[51] As state subsistence was seen to improve, tax and rate payers may have felt that individual alms giving was no longer needed. Under these circumstances, tolerance for begging may have declined. More important than government regulation in ending alms was development in the rural economy that can be classified as 'modernisation'. The growth of the rural bus service and motorisation has been blamed for ending the market for Traveller hawkers[52] but the increased monetarisation of the rural economy had other effects also. Until after World War II, potatoes, vegetables, eggs, dairy products and meat were produced in many rural households. When every household produced a small food surplus, there was ample available for Travellers who called to the door. As farmers specialised and concentrated on commercial production, they ceased to produce their own food.[53] Farming households bought food in market towns, replacing farm produce with goods from the grocery shop. There was no longer a potato pit in the back garden, or a

[46] IFC S 276, p. 101; IFC S 276, p. 102; IFC S 289, p. 259, UCD.
[47] IFC S 347, p. 443, UCD.
[48] IFC S 347, p. 441; IFC S 276, p. 101, UCD.
[49] Cormac Ó Grada, '"The Greatest Blessing of all": the Old Age Pension in Ireland' *Past and Present*, no. 175, 1 (2002), pp 124-61.
[50] Mel Cousins, *The Birth of Social Welfare in Ireland 1922-1952* (Dublin, 2003), pp 205-7.
[51] Section 4 of the Unemployment Assistance (Ammendment) Act, 1938/2 [Éire] (20 Jan. 1938) increased benefit rates.
[52] Kevin C. Kearns, 'Irish Tinkers: an itinerant population in transition', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 67, 4 (1977), p. 540.
[53] George Gmelch also cited the end of subsistence farming as an important change in the lives of Travellers, Gmelch, *Irish Tinkers,* p. 45.

side of bacon hanging from the rafters to share with men or women seeking aid, which had been formerly dispensed as food. Developments in the rural economy did not affect all areas of the country equally[54] and Travellers may not have been immediately and dramatically worse off. But the extension of the welfare system was closely followed by the end of subsistence farming, and such apparently unrelated changes had a cumulative effect on the position of Travellers.

As the circumstances of Traveller-settled encounters on the doorstep were transformed in the 1940s and 1950s, so too was the interaction between the two groups on the fair day, a central social and economic event. From weekly or monthly markets in towns and villages to the great annual fairs, it was by these gatherings rather than the calendar that the rural community measured time.[55] At such gatherings, people of all classes and origins met and mingled; wealthy farmers and dealers rubbed shoulders with beggars, ballad singers, fiddlers, pedlars, and gamesters. Historically, fairs such as the infamous Donnybrook fair were occasions for lawlessness and bloodshed.[56] A great seasonal gathering of people from near and far was license for a 'moral holiday' which was cathartic and often linked to fertility magic.[57] By the twentieth century, the debauchery observed in earlier centuries had ended but ritualistic elements survived. The anthropologists Arensberg and Kimball observed the 'elaborately conventional'[58] economic aspects of fairs in County Clare that were expressed in the relationship between the small farmer and the cattle dealer. Fair days were significant events in the lives of Irish people, urban and rural, but were especially important for determining attitudes to the minority, nomadic population. The formal records relating to fairs may be limited to charters and tolls but newspaper accounts provide important insights into these gatherings. Such descriptions are particularly important in discerning how Travellers were perceived in a fair setting.

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[54] In considering change in rural Ireland, regional disparities must not be forgotten. For example, 'By 1975 almost every farmer over 5 acres in Wexford had a tractor while at the other end of the scale less than 25% of farms in Mayo had made the transition', Tim O'Neill, 'Tools and Things: Machinery on Irish Farms', in Alan Gailey and Daithí Ó hÓgáin (eds), *Gold under the Furze: Studies in Folk Tradition Presented to Caoimhín Danachair* (Dublin, 1982), p. 101.
[55] E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways* (London, 1989), p. 260.
[56] Ibid., p. 263.
[57] Ibid., p. 256.
[58] Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp 288.

Travellers congregated in large numbers at the edge of the town hosting a fair. One Cork man commented that Travellers 'never fail to make the days more interesting for their presence'.[59] For a number of days, Travellers and settled people traded and drank together in a confined space. Such gatherings demonstrated the enduring success of Traveller's lifestyle as well as the coherence of their material culture. While Travellers attended all fairs, they featured prominently at the famous horse fairs of Ballinasloe, Puck, Cahirmee and Spancil Hill. Horse fairs, which were not as frequent as weekly or monthly cattle fairs, were held in the spring and summer, and often lasted a number of days. These events were what Patrick O'Connor has described as a 'pleasure fair', where entertainment was as important as trading.[60] Also, the prestige attached to the horse gave such annual events an additional *frisson*. The most expensive animal on a farm, Arensberg and Kimball noted that the horse was the 'the special care and interest of the adult man'.[61] While Arensberg and Kimball described the cattle fair as a 'great testing ground for male prowess, skill, and intelligence' their observations could equally apply the specific arena of the horse fair.[62] Since buying and selling horses successfully is a prized skill, and the potential for loss or profit on horseflesh is significant, the great fairs of Cahirmee and Ballinasloe offered men a public forum in which to test their wits. The combination of masculine display, large amounts of money and summer festivities made for a heady combination. By examining one County Cork celebration of the horse, Cahirmee fair, a sense of how Travellers were perceived in a fair-day environment can be appreciated.

Held in the town of Buttevant for two days each July, the Cahirmee fair was a long established summer festival.[63] The large numbers of Travellers who gathered in Buttevant were viewed with ambivalence by settled observers who betrayed their unease by describing an 'invading army'[64] and 'the great nomad army'.[65] As Cahirmee fair approached in 1930, a journalist described the countryside as 'infested with roving bands of humble horse dealers, gipsy vans

[59] IFC 1255, p. 89, UCD.
[60] Patrick J. O'Connor, *Fairs and Markets of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (Newcastle West, 2003), p. 87.
[61] Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, p. 282.
[62] Ibid., p. 289.
[63] See Denis A. Cronin, 'The great horse-fair of Cahirmee County Cork' in Denis A. Cronin, Jim Gilligan and Karina Holton (eds), *Irish Fairs and Markets: studies in local history* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 124-42
[64] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 17 Aug. 1935.
[65] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 16 Aug. 1930.

and encampments'.[66] However, their presence also provoked poetic description and nostalgia for times past, which Travellers were seen to embody. In 1955, Cahirmee had 'lost none of its ancient and "old world" glamour for the "travelling people" of Munster' whose 'gaily bedecked caravans' and piebald ponies converged on the town.[67] The colour and spectacle of Travellers' camps hinted at the gay abandon of an approaching holiday. So important were Travellers to the fair that the centrepiece of Cahirmee from 1949 to 1958 was the caravan parade. This competition for the most colourful, ornate caravan was organised by the fair committee and eagerly contested by Travellers. The parade was part of a carnival that was designed to revive a somewhat flagging fair in 1948, when the festivities and good advertising helped to reverse the decline of previous years.[68] The 'gay garlanded magnificence, the beribboned horses, the decorated caravans'[69] offered an irresistible opportunity to newspaper correspondents to romanticise Travellers. Indeed, the parade organisers capitalised upon the resemblance to the gay Gypsy presented by ornate Traveller caravans by renaming the event the 'National Romany Caravan Parade'[70] in 1955. According to the *Kerryman* reporter, 'gaily attired Romany youths' took part, yet the prizes were not won by foreign Gypsies but by Sheridans from Cork, Rathkeale and Limerick respectively.[71] For observers and the carnival organisers, Traveller material culture dovetailed with literary allusions to exotic Gypsies. Whether there were Romanies at Buttevant was irrelevant – their exotic presence was assured by perceptions of settled people of the appropriate appearance of Gypsies and Travellers. In 1954, the parade was described as bringing 'a breath of the romance of bohemian life' to the town.[72] A year later, the caravan parade attracted 21 caravans and more than 7,000 spectators. It was an event 'unique and strikingly impressive in all its richness of gay, brilliant, carefree nomadic life'. The *Kerryman* correspondent lauded the parade as 'a presence of the way of life that has kept Cahirmee of the Horses as, perhaps, the last surviving institute of times that are gone but can never be forgotten'. Remarkably, the task of maintaining tradition was laid firmly on the shoulders of 'the travelling folk and the horse-dealing people of Munster'.[73]

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[66] *Cork Examiner,* 14 July 1930.
[67] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 9 July 1955.
[68] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 3 July and 17 July 1948.
[69] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 8 July 1950.
[70] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 9 July 1955.
[71] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 26 July 1953.
[72] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 10 July 1954.
[73] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 23 July 1955.

While Travellers were exoticised in descriptions of Cahirmee, it must be noted that the fair itself was praised in a hyperbolic manner. The *Kerryman* wrote of Cahirmee: 'It was a word that brought a breath of romance to the workaday world in which we lived. Entwined in every letter of it was an atmosphere that gave forth the exotic scents of the Orient, and the clink of Russian spurs and the rattle of French sabres'.[74] The glorious past when Cahirmee drew buyers from across Europe was often invoked in newspaper reports. Such was the success of caravan parade that the organising committee for County Kerry's Puck Fair imitated the Cork tourist attraction in 1955.[75] The unique nature of Cahirmee's caravan parade was justly celebrated in the local newspaper, because even Appleby fair in Cumbria, a great English horse fair that was inextricably associated with Gypsies, did not place an official celebration of nomad material culture at its heart.[76] That the parade in 1955 was organised by Muintir na Tíre, a self-help organisation dedicated to improving local areas, and the Gaelic Athletic Association, an organisation that championed sporting nationalism, makes it all the more remarkable.[77] These two bodies were representative of the nationalist bourgeois Ireland that MacLaughlin has claimed excluded and stigmatised Travellers, yet in the context of Cahirmee fair, such groups promoted Traveller material culture as distinctive and glamorous.[78] The parade was evidently popular, and became a centrepiece of the rejuvenated, post-war fair.

The allusions to exotic, oriental Romanies dominated newspaper coverage of Travellers at Cahirmee in July, but romance did not entirely obscure Traveller's Irishness, which was alluded to in references to red-haired tinkers. The 'ginger-headed travelling men' and 'the red women of the clans' who congregated at Cahirmee were observed a month later at Puck Fair in Killorglan; the 'red heads of the tinkers' appear to have been intimately associated with summer fairs.[79] In popular tradition, those with red hair were believed to have fiery, ungovernable tempers and Travellers' behaviour at fairs apparently confirmed this belief. Travellers were known for fighting on a fair day, but this did not worry settled

[74] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 11 July 1953.
[75] *Kerryman,* (Kerry ed.), 6 Aug. 1955.
[76] For more see the Gypsy Collections at the University of Liverpool, (*http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/gypsy/appleby.htm*) (13 Apr. 2006).
[77] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 23 July 1955.
[78] Jim MacLaughlin, 'The political geography of anti-Traveller racism in Ireland: the politics of exclusion and the geography of closure' *Political Geography* xvii, no. 4 (1998), pp 442-3.
[79] *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 9 July 1960; *Kerryman* (Cork ed.), 15 July 1961; *Kerryman,* 13 Aug. 1960.

people, who did not participate. A respondent to the Irish Folklore Commission's 1952 questionnaire wrote that 'The tinkers' free fights was a particular feature of the fair and one of the most spectacular.'[80] It was a keenly watched 'blood sport' for those who did not take part.[81] The readiness with which fights were apparently forgotten was noted by settled people, who used the phrase 'like the tinkers' of people who quarrelled frequently but remained friends.[82] Of course, Travellers were not the only people who fought at fairs; O'Connor noted 'Routinely too, fair day had a court sequel.'[83] On a fair day, fights were as much part of the occasion as a carefully organised and staged caravan parade. The spectacle provided by wild, exotic nomads was a central part of the great summer horse fair. Spectacle permitted admiration but maintained distance; it acknowledged difference while containing it as harmless entertainment.

For Travellers, the summer fairs were social and economic highlights of their calendar. Families that were thinly scattered across the country might only meet at such occasions while lucrative trading, dealing and begging opportunities were manifold at a great fair. Yet observers had little interest in what these gatherings meant to Travellers, preferring to describe the pageant of colour and carefree abandon that their appearance presented. Within the fair setting Travellers were rendered picturesque by settled people. Spectacular occasions such as fairs and fights gave ample opportunity for observation but little for participation. It is significant that even at a communal event where people were gathered in great numbers in one place, social distance was carefully maintained. The contact between settled people and Travellers was confined to limited occasions and, even then, was superficial. The conclusions drawn from these encounters were determined by settled values that were not static, as was the case in attitudes towards street violence. Michael Houlihan said of Traveller fights at Puck, 'Before opinions changed it was something of a sideshow at the fair, which drew, rather than scattered crowds.'[84] Unfortunately, it is not clear when this shift in opinion happened. Male prowess in Traveller society was often demonstrated in fights that were designed for internal and external consumption. Internally, the free fight was an obvious substitute for a state legal system that was largely inaccessible to illiterate and nomadic people. Externally, such fights demonstrated the ferocity of a group who were politically and socially marginal. The object could have been to warn settled people from

[80] IFC 1255, p. 141, UCD.
[81] John Healy, *The Death of an Irish Town* (Cork, 1968), p. 19.
[82] IFC S 351, p. 208, UCD.
[83] O'Connor, *Fairs and markets*, p. 129.
[84] Micheal Houlihan, *Puck Fair: History and Traditions* (Limerick, 1999), p. 52.

interfering with Travellers – an effect that was achieved, as John Healy's observation that 'spectators' retreated watching 'in fascination and fear', illustrates.[85] Trading was another aspect of masculinity displayed at the fair, where Traveller men were acknowledged experts in horseflesh. This expertise brought prestige in the world of horses, where the ability to judge horses was a talent few could claim to possess. The role of the 'tangler', who helped to secure a deal between buyer and seller, was often adopted by Travellers. In the traditional methods of reaching a deal, Travellers earned 'luck money' and acted as mediators between settled people whose interests were antagonistic in a commercial arena. Tanglers were part of fair convention, giving Traveller men an opportunity to play a role in a formal ritual central to the commercial gathering.[86]

Yet the fairs that were the lifeblood of Irish rural life suffered a significant blow after World War II when agricultural life changed dramatically. Horses were replaced by tractors so appreciation of Traveller equine knowledge was diminished. Cattle and sheep marts were constructed on the edge of towns, making traditional street fairs redundant. These developments took place suddenly 'without anybody realising what a difference it would make'.[87] Even as Cahirmee was refashioned as a pleasure fair with a 'carnival' organised to attract visitors, livestock fairs across Ireland began to decline. Yet Travellers continued to adhere to an obsolete calendar of fairs, visiting towns because of old associations. Nioclás Breatnach recalled Travellers from Tipperary visiting Dungarvan in County Waterford even after the horse fair that had originally drawn them had been discontinued.[88] The decline in these regular, formulaic often ritualistic gatherings, ended a social forum where Travellers and settled people gathered together in large numbers. The fairs had provided an important opportunity for Travellers to display their knowledge of horses, as well as flaunt their material culture or wealth. In a fair milieu, Travellers were accorded a certain respect and role, with Cahirmee's caravan parade an example of overt celebration. Once fairs ceased to occupy a central economic and social role in

[85] Healy, *The Death of an Irish Town*, p. 19.
[86] A Traveller man was described as a 'tangler from Rathkeale', Kerryman (Cork ed.) 8 July 1950. For more on the role of tanglers see Arensberg and Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, p. 291 and Patrick Logan, *Fair Day: the story of Irish fairs and markets* (Belfast, 1986), pp 98-100.
[87] Logan, *Fair Day*, p. 101.
[88] Interview with Nioclás Breatnach, Glanmire, County Cork (29 Dec. 2001). Breatnach worked for the Irish Folklore Commission as a full-time collector in the Ring Gaeltacht, County Waterford, see Nioclás Breatnach, *Ar Bóthar Dom* (Rinn Ó gCuanach, 1998), p. 40.

Irish life, encounters between Travellers and settled people were more limited. But Travellers continued to visit market towns, visits that became an intrusive nuisance without the structural justification of a fair.

The two contexts for Traveller-settled relations examined here – the doorstep and the fair – altered after World War II. Yet it would be a mistake to see a stark contrast between harmonious relations in the 1930s and strained interactions in the 1950s, for Travellers had always been set apart from house-dwellers. The distinction between individual homeless men and Travellers has been almost wilfully misunderstood by observers anxious to portray an idealised rural society free from social distinctions. But Travellers were never social intimates of house dwellers in the way wandering individuals who slept by the fire sometimes were. Long before attitudes to charity and alms-giving began to shift, opportunities for personal contact between Travellers and settled people were restricted. But the loss of the fair day was, in the long term, more serious for Traveller-settled relations because of the complexity of the interactions at such gatherings. Once the fair setting was eliminated, Traveller-settled relations were increasingly confined to the doorstep, where begging became an oddity as welfare support grew. Individual contacts made through begging were on a notably less equal footing than encounters in the context of horse dealing. Seeking alms placed Travellers in a certain position, where pleading rather than dealing characterised their encounters with the housed population. As subsistence farming also declined, tolerance for begging faded. More or less simultaneously, tinsmithing lost its economic value but this development alone cannot explain the transformation of Traveller-settled relations. If fairs had endured even after tinkering had ended, begging may not have come to characterise the Traveller-settled encounter. Once opportunities for the two groups to meet were confined to the doorstep, perceptions of Travellers shifted, and became increasingly determined by a belief in their inevitable poverty and deprivation. The social distance between the two groups that separate accommodation allowed subsequently became an unbridgeable gulf between the caravan and the kitchen.