

Travellers in prison news

Newsletter of the Irish
Chaplaincy in Britain's
Traveller Project

Issue 6
March 2013



It's been a busy few months for the staff of the Traveller project; we've visited Pentonville, Thameside and Stafford prisons among others. We've also released a series of books for adult Travellers learning to read.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter and hope you'll get in touch with poems, letters, stories or pictures for the next issue in June. As always the best contribution will win a prize!

Contributions can be sent to:

*The Traveller Project, Irish
Chaplaincy in Britain, 50-
52 Camden Square, London,
NW19XB*

Prison and Probation staff can also download resources from our website here:

bit.ly/XCUhAc

Or email us at:

Travellers@irishchaplaincy.org.uk

Travellers in Prison News is produced thanks to the generous support of the Barrow Cadbury Trust



HAPPY ST PATRICK'S DAY

Welcome to the SIXTH edition of Travellers in Prison News. On the 17th of March we celebrate St Patrick's day, the patron saint of Ireland and an icon for Irish people all over the world. Fr Gerry takes us back to discover the man behind the

legends. We've got poetry and letters from Traveller prisoners and are pleased to announce Chris Foley as the winner of our call out for contributions.

There is sad news with the passing of Pecker Dunne, but cause for hope with talented young Travellers like Kelly McDonagh making her mark in the world.

The work of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain is funded in part by grants from the Government of Ireland, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, and the support of many generous friends.



KELLY MCDONAGH MONGAN

The long tradition of talented Traveller musicians is still flourishing, in the form of eighteen year old Kelly McDonagh Mongan. Kelly is a contestant on The Voice of Ireland, a successful talent show. Her version of Whitney Houston's I Have Nothing was enough to see her soaring through the auditions into the second round, and it is clear that she will go far.

Kelly is originally from Fermoy, in Cork, and has recently married her husband Bernie. She hopes to set an example to other Traveller girls, inspiring them to follow their dreams. She has also recently announced that she is pregnant, and expecting her first child towards the end of April although she is adamant this won't affect her chances of success.

Kelly has spoken of the pride she feels coming from a Traveller background, and has fond memories of growing up as part of the Travelling lifestyle. She is determined not to lose the aspects of her heritage which make her unique, saying

"I entered The Voice as a Traveller girl and I'm proud of who I am."

We wish Kelly the best of luck, and hope that she goes far in the competition

PECKER DUNNE OBITUARY



The heritage of Irish traditional music owes a lot to the contributions of Irish Travellers, something we have recently celebrated through the launch of our postcard and poster campaign. The Fureys, the Dorans, the Rainey: these names evoke powerful memories for those who grew up with traditional music. At the end of last year, the Travelling community experienced a sad loss with the passing of Patrick 'Pecker' Dunne; one of the great legends in Irish traditional music.

Pecker Dunne was born in Co. Mayo in 1933 and developed his love of music early on, learning the fiddle from the age of seven, busking from nine and mastering the banjo by twelve. He left home in his teens, starting his career as a travelling musician, singer and story-teller, a career which lasted until his passing on the 19th December 2012, aged 79.

Dunne's work was steeped in traditions he inherited from the Traveller community, and he was a powerful voice for equality. The lyrics of songs such as Tinkers Lullaby and Last of the Travelling People highlighted the discrimination and prejudice faced by Travellers in Ireland. He was incredibly knowledgeable about Traveller lore and its influence is clear in his music. He also felt strong connections with other migrant peoples, such as the Romany.

He first came to the attention of the musical community by busking at GAA matches and county fairs around Ireland. As he gained fame, his music took him to England, France, Australia and New York, where he performed with the Dubliners. Despite this, Pecker never established a lucrative career and released only one album, Introducing the Pecker Dunne in 1976. His close friend Shay Healy explained "the reason why he didn't want to become a star in the Sixties was because he couldn't take the pressure of having to be in a certain place at a certain time, all the time. He was born in a caravan and he had a need for the Traveller's freedom of the road".

For the last twenty-three years of his life, Pecker Dunne settled in Kilimir, in West Clare; previously he had spent ten happy years in Skibbereen, Cork, where he is fondly remembered by those who knew him. He is survived by his wife and four children and will be sorely missed by many.



FANNING THE FLAMES OF HATRED

A large family of Irish Travellers in Ballyshannon, Donegal, have been left devastated after the house they were due to move in to was burnt to the ground in an arson attack. It is believed the attack was motivated by anti-Traveller racism.

The Ward family had been looking forward to moving to their new home, as the family had outgrown their three bedroom house in the town. However some residents in the upmarket Parkhill area where their new home was located were unhappy about Travellers moving into the area.

Before the fire, local Fianna Fail councillor Sean McEniff had made openly racist comments about Travellers, telling a radio host he believed Travellers should not be given houses in the area and that instead;

“there should be an isolated community of them some place... keep them all together.”

McEniff’s comments were met with

protests and condemnation, and he has been blamed for fanning the flames of hatred which resulted in the arson attack.

Donegal Dail Deputy Thomas Pringle says that while councillors Sean McEniff and Eugene Dolan did not light the match which destroyed the home, their comments,

“fuelled an unjust hatred amongst a minority and they now have to take responsibility for their actions and comments in relation to the Travelling community.”

Jimmy Ward, the father of the family whose new home was burnt down has said his family are devastated, not only by the fire, but by the level of hostility being directed at them.

“There was a lot of respect for us in the town for so long” Mr Ward said, “I don’t know how it ended up like this”

“We are torn apart here... It’s been very hard to deal with all the mayhem caused. We’ve done nothing wrong.”

Despite all the furore, Mr Ward told Ocean FM the family does not want to leave the area.

“We’re part of this community. My father went down through the town in a hearse when he died and I’ll be going down too. This is our country. Ballyshannon is our home town.

“Even after all this, we’re still here. When all the blarney and all the fuss in the papers and the radios is over, we’ll still be here on the corner in our three-bedroom house.”

“We’ve always experienced discrimination, being Travelling people. It’s a racist society

but we’re getting there.”

BLACK BUTTERFLIES



An art exhibition exploring and celebrating Gypsy and Irish Traveller was recently held in York. The art was created by four Gypsy and Traveller British artists; husband and wife Damien and Delaine Le Bas; their son Damian James Le Bas; and Daniel Baker, a Romani Gypsy from Kent.



The ‘Black Butterflies’ exhibition hopes to challenge popular ideas about Gypsy identity, and stimulate new conversations, through the use of traditional Gypsy and Traveller images and modern artistic techniques.



TRAVELLER REPS SPEAK UP

This month we have received many very positive letters from Travellers in prison telling us about the successes they have had in setting up Gypsy and Traveller groups in different prisons. It's always good to know that groups are being established, and even better to hear that they are bringing about positive results. The work of Traveller representatives and Traveller meetings is so important, because it allows the voices of Gypsies and Travellers to be heard as a force for change.

The letter sent by Billy O'Driscoll, the Traveller representative at HMP Gartree is a brilliant example of this. He writes:

"I go around the prison and talk to Travellers about W3 and how to register if not already. Also, I agree that many staff are unaware of what W3 is and this is something I will be raising at our next meeting at the end of this month. What I would like to say about Gartree is we are making changes slowly and the governors and diversity are more than willing to look into any ideas that get put forward...I feel any changes made now will benefit so many in the future and that makes it all worth while for me, and I enjoy doing what I do and helping others."

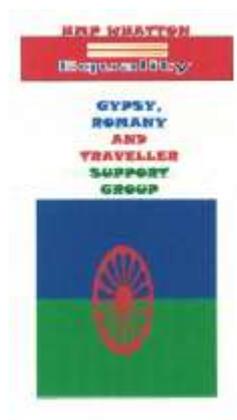
We also heard from Chris Foley, one of three Traveller reps at HMP Whatton. Chris writes:

"Since coming to Whatton I have helped start a Gypsy Romany Traveller Support Group which has now been running for almost four months. In that time, we have held monthly meetings for all GRT men. And recently we held a GRT Awareness Event here with over sixty men attending

and also the No 1 governor. We had stalls depicting GRT life, poetry, model caravans, features on famous GRT people as well as lots of info on Appleby Horse Fair. The prison also supplied food and drink for the occasion. Everyone who attended said that it was really good and importantly, very informative.

I have sent you a leaflet that I designed that we give to all new GRT men here at Whatton. Our aim is to give help and support and to generally just be there for GRT men who are finding prison a little difficult. The leaflet has been approved by the No 1 Governor. I hope too that you like it."

The efforts of Traveller representatives in setting up groups like this, organising events and providing support for those who are struggling, are crucial. These efforts will all help to make Travellers in prison a community which can no longer be ignored. Credit must also be given to the staff of prisons like HMP Whatton and Gartree for setting an example of good practice in working with Gypsy and Traveller prisoners.



READERS CONTRIBUTIONS

Travellers

T is for the trailer, the caravan, MY home.

R is for the roads, this country I roam

A is for the anger, the hate that I see

V is for the valour, the brave that I be

E is for the education, the history that I crave

L is for the love, MY family I gave

L is for the laborious, the restrain that we fight

E is for emancipate, be free, OUR right

R is for MY race, MY people, MY clan

S is for the same, like you; a man

Chris A. Foley – HMP Whatton

A big thank you to Chris for that inspiring poem; the winner of our call out for call out for contributions in the last issue of TIPN. Watch out for your prize in the post Chris!

A Traveller Man

My name is Dan
The Traveller man
I live in a comfy
Blue-bird caravan
Beautiful lass
Sitting beside me on the grass
Next to the fire
It makes me feel like a squire

Brand new car
 Always being pulled over
 Because I don't look
 Very much older
 Police won't believe it's mine
 They assume it's from some crime
 When I hear the blue-bell
 I know someone
 Has been on the phone-line
 My name is Dan
 The Traveller man
 My life I just mentioned
 But still I'm not entitled
 To a state pension

William F McDonagh – HMP Camp Hill

THE STRANGE CASE OF THE GYPSY BOY

A very strange thing happened when we were preparing this issue of TIPN, we received a poem called 'Gypsy Boy'... from four different prisoners in four different prisons! It must be a popular poem but does anyone know the origin of the poem?

Here it is, with thanks to all who sent it in:

A Gypsy Boy

A Gypsy boy came home one day,
 To find his true love had gone away,
 When he asked the reason why...
 This is what she did reply...
 "because you chose a life of crime...
 Gypsy boy... do your time.
 If you had chose an honest life
 I would have gladly been your wife"
 So off he went with his head in his hands,
 He loved her so much; she didn't understand,

The pain he felt he could not bare,
 But the one he loved, she did not care.
 In his jail cell they found him dead,
 and in his hand ..a note that read...
 "Dig my grave and dig it deep,
 Place red roses at my feet
 Upon my chest a turtle Dove..
 to show the world I died for love"
 So all you Gypsy girls bare in mind,
 A good Gypsy boy maybe hard to find,
 So, when you you find one
 Love him true,
 Because, this Gypsy boy
 Would die for you.

TRAVELLER READING BOOKS

The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain is producing a series of books, to provide interesting reading materials to Gypsy and Traveller adult learners.

The first two books have now been printed and are available, free of charge, to prison Libraries and to Gypsy and Traveller prisoners on the Shannon Trust reading programme.

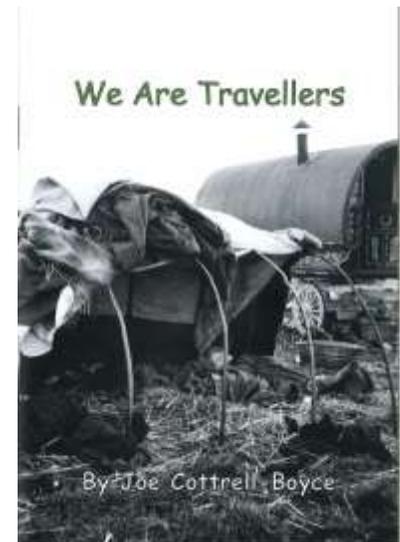


We were pleased to have the support of the Shannon Trust when producing the books, and foresee them being a

useful resource for Travellers progressing with their reading programme.

The first book, 'A Travellers Home' was written by Conn MacGabhann and illustrated by Niamh Merc. It tells the story of John; a Dublin Traveller and wannabe cowboy.

The second book 'We Are Travellers' was written by Joe Cottrell-Boyce, and is a factual introduction to the history and culture of English Gypsies and Irish Travellers.



For copies of the books just get in touch!

TOE BY TOE SURVEY

Talking to Traveller groups around the country we've found that the Shannon Trust Reading Plan (a.k.a. Toe-by-Toe) is very popular with Gypsies and Travellers.

Toe-by-Toe teaches prisoners how to read with the help of a mentor, outside the classroom. Many men and women have learnt to read for the first time in prison using Toe-by-Toe.

We'd like to find out how many of our readers are doing Toe-by-Toe now, have done it in the past, or are Toe-by-Toe mentors helping others.

So let us know!

Please write to us at The Traveller Project, ICB, London Irish Centre, 50 – 52 Camden Square, London, NW1 9XB, and tell us about your experience of Toe-by-Toe.

If you are a member of staff facilitating a Traveller group you could also do your own quick survey and email the results to Travellers@irishchaplaincy.org.uk

This will help both us and Shannon Trust to reach more Traveller prisoners who want to learn to read.

TELL SOMEONE!

The Irish Traveller movement in Britain (ITMB), have launched a new DVD highlighting rising levels of mental health problems in the Traveller community.

The film, 'Tell Someone', targets both the Travelling community and at professionals who may not understand the issues involved.

'The whole idea about "Tell Someone", says Yvonne McNamara of the ITMB 'is basically to get people talking, and break the silence.'

'Once you tell someone – you know, an old Irish expression is "a problem

shared is a problem halved " and that, really, is what the whole thing is all about.'

'Like most communities, there's a huge taboo within the Traveller community about discussing anything around mental health. They would often refer to the issue of mental health as "their nerves", which is very much a west of Ireland thing as well.'

'There's a very big stigma attached to mental health,' she said.

Noticing that there was very little help being provided to the community, the issue was discussed with the advisory group and Thomas McCann from the Traveller counselling service in Dublin.

The problems are intensified for the Traveller community, Mac Namara says, because of difficult living conditions. There's a national shortage of accommodation, poor location of halting sites, and a feeling of displacement among Travellers recently settled in bricks-and-mortar accommodation.

'It's basically where they are as a community at the moment ... there's a lot of suffering in silence going on.'

'We're almost forcing a community to assimilate and live as the settled community live,' she said.

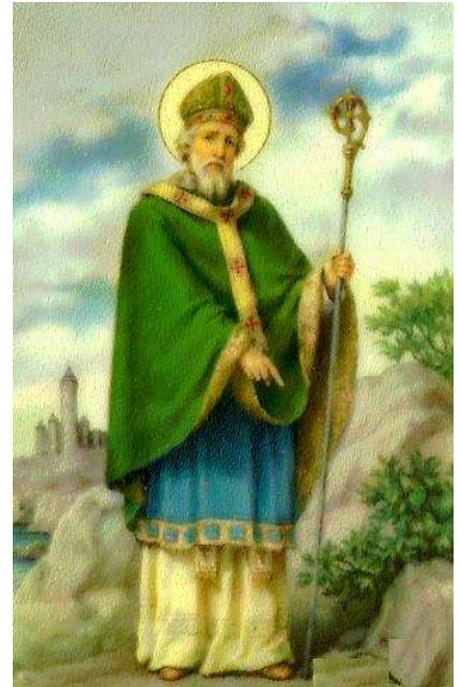
If any prison staff would like copies of the DVD, get in touch with ITMB:

*Irish Travellers Movement in Britain
The Resource Centre
356 Holloway Road
London*

N7 6PA

Tel: 020 7607 2002

ST PATRICK'S DAY



St Patrick's Day is a time for celebrating Irishness around the world. Fr Gerry introduces us to the man behind the legend...

Searching through one's family tree can be an exhilarating and sometimes frightening experience, but it is nearly always fascinating. Around the time of St Patrick's Day we look at the family tree of our faith. We cast our eyes back as far as we can go and arrive at the name of a young man, perhaps as young as sixteen, who has shaped the very identity of our country and been a central figure in bringing the message of Jesus Christ to our people.

St Patrick is the focus of many legends. But we need to go behind the legends and myths to find the real man; and when we do we find a real flesh and

blood man who struggled in his life and suffered great hardships. We are all familiar with the broad details of his life. He was born in Britain in 385 and brought up in a comfortable Christian family. His father had been a government official of some kind and his grandfather had been a priest. However, he was captured and brought to Ireland as a slave where he worked on the hills of County Antrim tending sheep. He escaped back to Britain, and then to France where he studied for the priesthood. While there he heard a voice inviting him to return to Ireland: "Come and walk among us once again."

But Patrick's work in bringing Christianity to Ireland was not easy. Apart from the trouble he had with the various kings and chieftains, there were the Druids who hated him and even tried to kill him. However, Patrick persevered in his endeavours and before long churches, monasteries and schools began to spring up all over the country which were later to give Ireland fame as the "land of saints and scholars". Patrick's most famous writing, his Confession, is a defence of his life and work and provides a fascinating insight into the mind of the great saint especially in relation to prayer, perseverance and the protection of the defenceless.

There are many aspects of Patrick's life which speak directly to us today. Because of his own experience as an exile and emigrant, he stands with emigrants and exiles everywhere, those who in recent years have come to live in Ireland as well as those who have travelled abroad to build a future elsewhere. Indeed there are few saints from so far back in time with whom we

can identify so well when it comes to the problems faced by emigrants, exiles, and Travellers.

So this St Patrick's Day when hundreds of thousands of people flock out onto the streets all over the world to celebrate "Irishness" in its many aspects, we should take pride in the faith Patrick gave us, thank God for this great Apostle and ask his intercession for ourselves and Irish people everywhere.

Fr Gerry McFlynn, Irish Chaplaincy in Britain

SPORT NEWS

TYSON FURY



Boxing fans have been denied the chance to witness what was set to be the biggest domestic fight of the year so far. Until recently, it was expected that Traveller boxer Tyson Fury would take on Liverpoolian heavyweight David Price, but it seems that Fury's plans have taken a different turn. Price currently holds the British Boxing Board of Control's British heavyweight

title, as well as the Commonwealth heavyweight title. There was great excitement and anticipation in the run up to the meeting between the two, which would have seen Fury fighting for the British heavyweight title, and many are saddened by his decision to pull out.

However, Fury's promoter, Nick Hennessy, after informing the BBBofC that Fury would not be taking part in this fight, stated their decision to take his intentions of glory across the Atlantic to America. Fury's trainer boldly stated, "We are going to conquer the United States and it looks like we will fight Steve Cunningham next, then the winner of Chris Arreola v Bermane Stiverne or Jonathan Banks. The aim right now is to get to the number one ranking and then win the world heavyweight title."

He will make his debut in America on the 20th April.

This decision has left many fans of British boxing disappointed, especially those who see this as a fight which needs to happen. Price's promoter, Frank Maloney, described it as "a fight boxing needs". Some critics have argued that the motivations behind Fury's camp's decision show a deeper problem with the sport. This is the idea that a single defeat might ruin a career and prevent a shot at a greater title. This fear, many feel, is depriving fans of some of the best fights between matched players, lessening the uncertainty and excitement of the sport.

Doubting a fighter's chances of a world title based on one failure is foolish, and there have been countless examples of knock-outs leading to far greater successes: Lennox Lewis, Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier, Joe Louis and Mike Tyson to name a few. Surrounded by champions like this, Fury should be confident in his ability to come back harder and stronger even faced with the possibility of a defeat. Hopefully, the decision to focus his efforts on success in the USA will present Fury with his long-awaited shot at the world heavyweight title.

TRAVELLER FOOTBALL STARS



Southend United striker and Welsh international **Freddy Eastwood** (above) is currently the only high-profile member of the Gypsy community playing football in the UK.

Eastwood is proud of his heritage, explaining: "My background has helped me in my career, because we're strong people, very close, and even now I'm living in Coventry, my family are at every game"

Sadly, Eastwood has had to put up

with abuse throughout his career. "I do get picked out. I've never hidden who I am or where I come from, and because of that I get a lot of stick from other fans. I get 'pikey' shouted at me. Or I get 'Gypsy' or 'Gypso'."

But though the Wales international may be on his own for the time being, history shows that there have been many players from Travelling backgrounds.



Raby Howell (above), who played for Sheffield United and Liverpool in the 1890s is thought to be the only full-blooded Romany to have played for England. He earned two caps for his country between 1895 and 1898.

Elsewhere in Europe, Dragoslav Sekularac was a key player for Yugoslavia in the 1958 and 1962 World Cups. He was born into the Vasojevici Gypsy community in northern Montenegro.

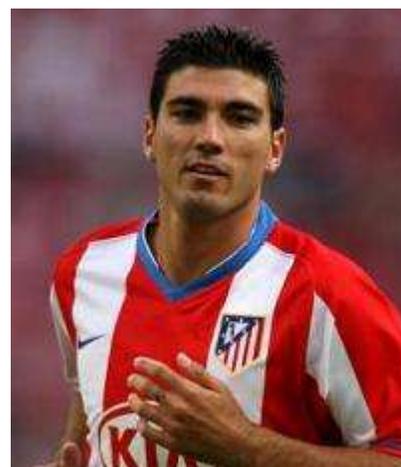
Romanian forward Marius Lacatus, who represented his country in two World Cups, and the Yugoslavian defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, who had a long and illustrious career including spells with Lazio, Inter Milan and

Roma, also both hail from a Gypsy background.

Sinisa (below) who has said he is 'proud of being a Gypsy' went on to become the manager of Serbian national team.



Then there is **Jose Antonio Reyes**, (below) formerly of Arsenal, and currently playing for Spanish side Sevilla, who was born into a Gypsy 'Gitano' family in Utrera, a small town south-east of Seville in Spain.



Hopefully, the next generation of talent in this country will see more sporting icons and role models from Gypsy and Traveller communities.