

Travellers in prison news

Newsletter of the Irish
Chaplaincy in Britain's
Traveller Project

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A BUSY FEW MONTHS!

Welcome to the latest edition of Travellers in Prison News (TIPN). The Traveller Project has been busy over the Summer especially during Gypsy Traveller History Month. In June we attended Traveller events in The Mount, Albany, Camp Hill, Bullingdon, Highdown, Grendon and Onley. In each prison we enjoyed a wide variety of celebrations including music, poetry, drama, debate and visual displays, often topped-off with Gypsy and Traveller cuisine. And from many of the prisons we couldn't visit, we were delighted to hear how they were celebrating History Month and the plans to continue with events throughout the year.

The celebration of History Month has encouraged many Travellers to think about their history and write to us about their own families and so we've included some of these personal Traveller histories in this TIPN. These family stories are powerful reminders of the great contribution that Travellers and Gypsies have made to society in the past and what is possible in the future.

We're thrilled to hear that more Travellers than ever before are taking leadership roles within prisons as Traveller Diversity Reps and as Toe by Toe Mentors. We're confident that this leadership experience will benefit the whole community when Travellers return home and in the words of one contributor, Catherine, becoming 'the voice that's heard.'

Catherine's words remind prisons and just

as importantly, Traveller prisoners of their duties:

'Every prison needs a Traveller rep; someone needs to step up to the mark and have our voices heard.'

Finally, as always please send in any contributions, letters, poems, drawings, stories, etc. for inclusion in the next edition of TIPN.

TRAVELLER CHAMPION!

The London 2012 Olympics were a site of triumph for Ireland as a whole, and the Travelling community in particular; thanks to 23 year old Mullingar bantam weight John Joe Nevin.

Nevin secured a silver medal in the men's bantamweight, after narrowly losing to British boxer Luke Campbell in the final. The British fighter - a family friend of Nevin's - edged a 14 - 11 victory despite Nevin winning the second round. Both fighters gave it their best and the fight ended on a positive note with a respectful embrace between the two stars. Nevin had some spectacular victories in the course of his Olympic journey; perhaps most notable his win in the semi-finals against the reigning bantamweight world champion, Cuban Lázaro Álvarez. The 19-14 result in this fight secured him the place in the final. Nevin won all three rounds against the Cuban, and gave

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 by the support of many generous Friends.

one of the best performances of his career, displaying an elegant and joyful style topped off by his now trademark 'Mullingar Shuffle'.

Nevin has been greeted by an outpouring of pride for his achievements in London, not only from his family but from the whole community - President Michael Higgins commented that "John Joe has touched all of us this week with his positive attitude, remarkable skill and great courage in the ring." Higgins described the outcome of the final as "a wonderful result for John Joe, his family and friends - and all those around the country and elsewhere, who have enjoyed his success and sublime boxing skills". The match was watched by thousands back in Mullingar, with crowds of up to seven thousand flocking onto the street to watch. The town joyfully celebrated the silver medal, and since his return Nevin has been caught up in a whirlwind of local events. He has visited a children's hospital and made a trip to his boxing club in Cavan; at both venues he has been greeted with crowds of fans desperate to meet the champion. He has rapidly become a hero for many young Irish hopefuls, who wish to follow in his footsteps to athletic greatness.

Nevin and his silver medal also made an emotional visit to the graveside of his grandparents and cousin in the week following his victory. Both his grandparents and his cousin have influenced his life and boxing career significantly, and he often spends time praying at the graves of his grandparents before a fight. His cousin, David Nevin was a close friend to John Joe, and was also a talented boxer and sparring partner to the silver medallist. He was meant to accompany John Joe to London this summer, but sadly passed away last February. Speaking of

his achievements, John Joe said that his cousin had predicted that he would go to the top and bring back a medal, highlighting the huge amounts of support that Nevin has from his family.

John Joe displays the control and discipline required to get to the highest level the sport, qualities which we can see in the many other young Travellers currently excelling in the ring. Many of the rising stars of Irish boxing come from the Traveller community - Joe Ward, who just lost out on qualifying for the 2012 Olympics; Michael McDonagh, who at eighteen is already a twice national senior lightweight champion; and John Joe Joyce, who represented Ireland at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

John Joe Nevin has said that he hopes the enduring legacy of his performance in the 2012 Olympics will be closer and better relationships between Travellers and the settled community. He has spoken about how he wishes to work to improve the relationship between settled and Traveller people in his hometown of Mullingar, especially by getting more young people involved in sport.

[THE GUITAR AND THE OPEN SKY](#)

By TJ Mackenzie

The Gypsy philosophy is to live. Nothing else matters. We learn to enjoy every minute of the day. We don't become clots, the way say the Gorjios, get up at eight, work till five, watch television till ten, go to bed, get up at eight, back to work till five. Their clocks is what they serve, the Gorjios, they're automatons; well our people, we don't behave like that. We get up when we feel like it, we eat and drink when we're hungry and when we're thirsty and we do what we want. We work to

live rather than live to work.

When Travellers end up in prison they find it very hard to cope with being told what to do, what you can't do, it's all rules and a routine one has to try and get used to. I have gotten used to these routines now, it was difficult at first but one has to fit in and get on with it, I guess. I had no help with this however, I just went along with the rest of the crew and that was that.

I have always wanted to achieve the art of playing the guitar because I love the sound of the instrument. I often visualise myself sitting under a large, spreading oak tree out in the country where there is only the sound of wild birds as they soar above me or chatter happily in the branches over my head. The ripple of the water rushing by in the wide rivers would accompany my music, perhaps with the odd aeroplane flying by as backing.

You can pick up lovely effects by just sitting quietly and listening to the gentle, natural noise of Mother Nature joining in with her song, then one can tune into the sound if you have a musical instrument. My musical instrument would be a guitar; I always wanted to learn.

I live with my dreams and imagine that I can play and have wonderful thoughts of being out in the wild with nature where everywhere it is so quiet and peaceful and all there is to hear are the wild birds, the odd badger, foxes, rabbits and deer. This really gives me some freedom with my prison cell where I have been for almost 23 years.

[A TRUE GYPSY STORY](#)

By Bryan Stanford

Over 400 years ago some Romany Gypsies were camping outside a town



'The Travellers' Life as it Once Was' by Sean Doyle

called Newmarket in the county of Suffolk, England. They would earn money by collecting scrap, selling pegs and lucky charms, or reading palms (fortune telling). The non-Gypsies, known as 'Gorjers', would in a lot of areas look down on the Gypsy people and would often call the gypsies liars, cheats and even thieves.

One day a young Gypsy boy about ten years old was asked by a farmer if he would watch his sheep. The Gypsy boy was so pleased to be asked and to be trusted to do such a job, so he accepted.

However, when the Gypsy boy went to count the sheep at the end of the day he found to his surprise one was missing. He looked behind the hedges, the trees and in the dikes but he could not find that one missing sheep. Had he got up too early in the morning and fallen asleep during the day or had someone distracted him? He knew that the Gorjers would call him a thief, a cheat and a liar. Being so frightened at his tender age he panicked, got a rope and hanged himself.

His family who had been waiting for

him went out to see why he had not returned home and upon finding him and looking at the circumstances quickly realised what must have happened. Being very superstitious in those days, they buried him at the road side. His grave can easily be found, even though there is no headstone, and lies some three miles out of Newmarket on the Thetford Road.

Over the years that followed, Romany Gypsies, Travellers and even Gorjers from all over the world have paid their respects to the young Gypsy boy who became known as the Gypsy Martyr.

[LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION](#)

Gypsy and Traveller communities are some of the most excluded and disadvantaged groups in the UK. We have a long way to go before we can achieve equal treatment for Gypsies and Travellers in this country. The fight for rights and justice for Travellers can't be won without leaders coming forward from the Travelling community. In this issue we've compiled a list of inspiring books which you might want to ask for from the prison library, which give examples of how other communities

around the world have fought for their rights:

Martin Luther King: A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr (1986)

"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

Perhaps the most important figure of the Civil Rights movement, King fought racial inequality in 1960's American through nonviolent action.

Saul Alinsky: Rules for Radicals (1971)

"Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict."

Born in Chicago in 1909 Saul Alinsky was a pioneer of community organisation and the 'Alinsky ideology' of mass organisation for power. His work in organizing the poor to fight for their rights as citizens has been internationally recognized.

Fr. Oscar Romero: The Violence of Love (1988)

"The Church must suffer for speaking the truth, for pointing out sin, for uprooting sin. No one wants to have a sore spot touched, and therefore a society with so many sores twitches when someone has the courage to touch it and say: "You have to treat that. You have to get rid of that. Believe in Christ. Be converted."

A bishop of the Catholic Church in El Salvador, Oscar Romero spoke out against the human rights abuses of his country's military rulers. He was

assassinated while saying Mass in 1980.

Steve Biko: I Write What I Like: A Selection of Writings (1978)

“The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

A student leader, Biko became a key figure in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Since his murder at the hands of apartheid-era police, he has been hailed as a martyr of the struggle for racial-equality in his country.

If you're looking for some inspiration go along to the prison library to borrow or request these books!

LOSING OUR WAY

By Tony Cawley



Some of my family, the Cawleys, Wards, Dohertys, Maughans and McCarthys still to this day live all over Kent. For over a hundred years our families worked the farmers fields in the summer months, as did the English Gypsies who picked the hops for the big beer companies across the whole of Kent in the summer months. We were all pushed aside as machinery came about. No need for Gypsies or Travellers now they had the machines to do the work our families did for hundreds of years.

The English Gypsies must not be forgotten about as they were treated the same way as the Irish Travellers. Over the years I loved talking and listening to the English Gypsies and Travellers talk about their history. Parts were funny and parts were sad to hear. It is no wonder the young Gypsy and Travellers have turned to crime to make a living. Not all have gone this way, but when one meets young Travellers in prison a lot of them have turned to crime because they could not get work to feed their families.

What I have noticed in the last 15 years is the number of young Travellers who have turned to class-A drugs. It is a cancer that spread across Irish and English caravan sites. The use of drugs in my day was a thing outsiders did; now it has become the norm. This cancer must be brought to the attention of the older members of the community, so they see what their sons and daughters are up to with drugs when they come to prison. It must be stopped.

I only wish I had the answer to this problem that has attacked our community and way of life.



Pictures by Michael King

EVERY PRISON NEEDS A TRAVELLER REP

By Catherine Dineen

I am the Traveller rep at Downview. Myself and an English Traveller Amy work together to make Downview more aware of us Travellers and of our needs. We strive to make this prison somewhat easier for ourselves and the girls that come after us. We want things set in stone so that there will always be a Traveller rep at Downview. Things are moving slowly but governors and officers are all on board to make these changes.

Being a Traveller rep I can stand up in a meeting with governors etc. and be the voice that's heard for my girls. Any time Traveller women land up here I'm straight over to reception to meet them and help with whatever they need and let them know they're not on their own. Being a Traveller woman in prison is difficult. We aren't like country people ad there is a lot of prejudice against us.

I promote education more than anything else. I've started my Toe by Toe mentor training and the other Traveller girls are more than willing to work with me once I get the go ahead. So that is big progress. The education people in the prison are also working with me, to see how they can change how they teach, giving shorter lessons in English and maths so it isn't so daunting. Whatever helps to get Traveller girls into education these people are willing to work with me and try.

Myself and Amy are getting posters put up around the jail, pictures of ourselves and what we're about, for the simple reason that there's Travellers in prison that don't declare their ethnic background in fear of getting a harder life. These posters will let Traveller

girls know we are here. We stand together and are counted.

Ever since myself and Amy started our work as Traveller reps, there's been a sense of pride amongst us girls. We always stick together in prison but going the right way about things and being recognised within the prison has made us stronger. Every prison needs a Traveller rep; someone needs to step up to the mark and have our voices heard.

DR PETER SMITH LAUNCHES POSTCARD SERIES

Dr Peter Smith, an academic at the University of Ulster and formerly professor at the universities of Notre Dame, Oslo and Toronto pictured at the launch of The Irish Chaplaincy's *Traveller Musician Postcards Series*.



Dr Smith commented, 'When you look at the list of Traveller musicians it is simply amazing. They represent over fifty percent of Ireland's greatest musicians. Your series is a timely reminder of the cultural wealth of Irish Travellers and their unique contribution to Irish life.'

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

An eighteen year old English Gypsy from Towyn, near Rhyl in North Wales has achieved two A*s and a B in her A-Levels and won a place to study English Literature at Trinity College,

Oxford. Shelby Holmes' family work in the travelling fair business and Shelby has been travelling for most of her life. Despite taking time off school to help with her family's business, Shelby always ensured that she took as much school work with her as possible, and with the support of her family and teachers, it's clear that her dedication and hard work paid off.

Shelby is one of the first people from the Travelling community to win a place at the highly competitive university; a huge achievement. Shelby's mother, Kim, left school at the age of ten, to travel with her family to work, and is naturally very proud of her daughter's achievements. "To get someone into university is major, and to get to Oxford is breath-taking."

Joseph Jones, a spokesman for the National Gypsy Council also expressed his pride at Shelby's success, saying that despite Gypsies and Travellers still being at the bottom of many academic tables, more and more are pursuing higher education. "We have a number of Gypsy and Traveller academics, but there needs to be more." Hopefully, next year the number of young people from Travelling backgrounds heading to university will continue to rise, and success stories such as Shelby's can be seen again and again!

GYPSY GIRL

By Terry Smith

Come along my little Gypsy girl
Come along with me I pray.
A stealing horses we shall go,
Over the hills and far away.

Before your mother and your aunt,
I'll down upon my knee
And beg that they give me their little girl
To be my remedy.

So come along my little Gypsy girl

Come along with me I pray.
Stealing horses we shall go,
Over the hills and far away.

INSIDE TIME – TRAVELLER COVERAGE

In the July issue of 'Inside Time', the Traveller Project's Joe Cottrell-Boyce had an article published, entitled 'Travellers Count'. It highlighted the plight of Gypsies and Travellers in prison, and talked about the Toe-by-Toe literacy programme. In the August issue of 'Inside Time', Arthur McDonagh from HMP Manchester replied and his response was published:

Dear Editor

I read your July issue with great interest, especially the article 'Travellers Count'. I am from the Travelling community and I'd like to thank you for this article. It is good to know that someone is finally listening to us; we are normally banged up and ignored. I and my family were on that television programme 'Big Fat Gypsy Weddings', my child was the one who couldn't get into Strangeways for her communion and Father's Day. They could have let my wife and child in but I think they wouldn't because I'm a Traveller and there was a bit of jealousy from them because we were on the telly. In that situation I just had to let it go in order to avoid reprisals from the system.

Most of us cannot read or write and do not know who to turn to. I made it my job to learn to read and write in prison. So, to all our boys, come on, use Toe-by-Toe and learn to read and write - then you won't have to ask people to read your letters and you can write your own.

Arthur McDonagh

MY FATHER: GYPSY, AIRMAN,

FRIEND



By Bryan Stanford

In the early part of the Twentieth Century, Harry Percival Staniforth, (known as Percy) changed his name to Stanford and decided with a group of Gypsies to leave the shores of England and set sail for Canada in search of a better life. It was April 1914. Two years later Percy married at St Paul's Rectory, Chatsworth, Grey County, Ontario. Their joy was shortlived, overwhelmed by the sadness at the death of their first child, Isabel, born on 7th February 1917. But later, Jessie and then Harry were born to the couple.

Percy had a smallholding for agricultural purposes. Cultivating the land proved to be exhausting. Hard times were inevitable but they always managed to make ends meet. Working the land meant that help was a necessity and so, at times, for Jessie and Harry school came second.

But education was seen as very important to the family. Both Jessie and Harry learnt to read at a very early age. Harry became a book worm, specifically French which he read and spoke casually. Harry's ambition was to go to university to study to be an electrical engineer. So to achieve this he went on to further education,

graduating in 1941, having also excelled at sports.

When the Second World War was declared by Nazi Germany (1939) it was not until 1941 that Harry had the opportunity and without hesitation volunteered for the Royal Canadian Air Force. It seemed so ironic that so many Romany Gypsies not only in Canada but also England joined the forces to fight and defend the very country that had persecuted them for hundreds of years. They fought alongside non-Gypsies without any animosity.

Having reached the rank of sergeant Harry was described by his commanders as a 'great inspiration to his men.' He was mentioned in despatches (London Gazette, 1/1/45) and awarded the Defence Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp, War Medal, and the Oak Leaf Emblem.

At the end of the war in Europe, Harry married the love of his life on 17th May 1945 at the Registrars Office, Darlington, Durham, England. And as much as they loved their life in Canada it was decided they would live in England. Harry became the proud father of seven children, five sons and two daughters. He doted on them.

In 1977, Harry was taken to hospital. It was Friday 3rd June 1977, just after his daughter Patricia had arrived and had a long night by her dad's bedside (along with the rest of the family), he sadly passed away. It seemed as if God had kept Harry with us so he could see Patricia.

I will always remember the last words he spoke to me: 'Bryan don't forget our name was changed from Staniforth to Stanford.' That was so important to him. I am his third son, the fourth child of seven. He was not just my dad, he

was also my best friend.

Cherished memories of a proud Romany Family.

TRAVELLER SOLDIERS:

COURAGE UNDER FIRE



One day in the life of Christopher "Jackdaw" Joyce always lived strong in his memory. The Westmeath Traveller served in the British Army fighting the Nazis during the Second World War. He survived to tell the tale but it was the gripping events of one day in Italy in September 1943 that stood out more than the others.

Displaying extreme "gallantry in the field" during the dangerous landing on the Italian beaches, Joyce was awarded the prestigious Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) by the military top brass. The gallantry displayed by Joyce that early morning sounds like a scene from a Hollywood blockbuster.

It began at 3am on 9th September 1943, Jackdaw sprang ashore the Salerno beach in Italy with the rest of 79 Company under intense German bombardment. German resistance was extremely stiff - firing their guns down upon the members of the Royal Pioneer Corps - terrible casualties were suffered. However, Private Joyce reached the beachfront unharmed, as one of the decisive battles in the Allied Invasion of Italy raged around him.

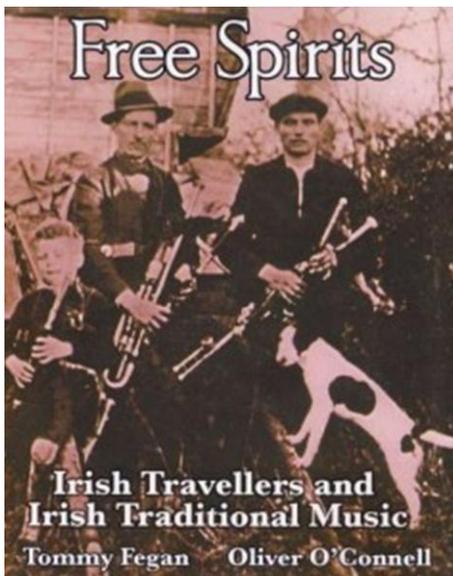
There is a breathless description of Private Joyce's actions, by his

commanding officer, in the original copy of the official DCM recommendation:

Joyce “spotted a machine gun post” and “without waiting for instructions he dashed forward, entered the post ... and at the point of the bayonet captured the gun and its crew of four gunners.” “Throughout the rest of the day he engaged in the extremely important defence on Amber beach under continuous mortar fire. This soldier continuously set a fine example of energy and courage which was of immense value to the others engaged in this work.”

Christopher Joyce was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for the courage he displayed on this day.

[FREE SPIRITS: BOOK REVIEW](#)



Free Spirits: Irish Travellers and Irish Traditional Music by Tommy Fegan and Oliver O'Connell has recently been published to great acclaim.

This book chronicles the life and times and the influences of the famous Irish

Travelling families on Irish Life over many decades, the Blind Dunnes, the world famous Fureys, the legendary Dorans and Keenan family and the Doherty and Rainey families in Donegal and Galway.

The publication contains, 150 photographs, some never seen before, 50,000 words and transcriptions of tunes- including many with regulator accompaniment- never before published. A special highlight is the handwritten manuscripts from Ted Furey, donated by Finbar to The Irish Folklore Commission, UCD, and published here for the first time.

Uilleann piping is currently enjoying worldwide popularity due in no small part to the influence of Finbar Furey, Mickey Dunne and Paddy Keenan.

The Traveller style of piping, free flowing and vibrant is now being copied and fostered by new generations of settled and Traveller musicians alike, and is a testimony to the magical influence of Johnny Doran, his brother Felix and their extended English based families.

[CONTACTS](#)

Details of other Gypsy and Traveller organisations:

Friends, Families and Travellers

Community Base
113 Queens Road
Brighton, E. Sussex, BN1 3XG
Tel: 01273 234 777
fft@Gypsy-traveller.org

The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain

The Resource Centre
356 Holloway Road
London, N7 6PA
Tel: 020 7607 2002
info@irishtraveller.org.uk

Roma Support Group

P.O. BOX 23610
Lodon, E7 0XB
Tel: 020 7511 5721
advice@romasupportgroup.org.uk

Pavee Point Travellers' Centre

46 North Great Charles Street
Dublin 1
Co. Dublin
Ireland
Tel: (+353) (0) (1) 8780255
info@pavee.ie

Gypsy Council

Tel: 07963 56 59 52
info@Gypsy-association.com

National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

Unit 3
Molyneux Business Park
Whitworth Road, Matlock, DE4 2HJ
Tel: 01629 732744
info@nationalgypsytravellerfederation.org

W3

That's all for this issue but we'll close with our usual reminder about 'W3'.

W3 is the monitoring code for Gypsies and Travellers on the P-Nomis system. Monitoring the number of Gypsies and Travellers in prison will mean more can be done to address the specific needs of this group, for example around literacy and resettlement. Being counted means that you count. If you'd like to change your declared ethnicity to Gypsy or Traveller then speak to your offender manager or put in an application. If you have any problems with this or any other issue you can always get in touch with us:

Traveller Project, Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, 50- 52 Camden Square, London, NW1 9XB

Travellers Your Community...



“WANTS
YOU”
Become a Toe by Toe Mentor!

