

The Caravan of Deplorables: Perspectives on Romani Anglophobia in Late Modern Britain

By

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## Abstract

Scholars researching Britain from the 1880s to the First World War have often failed to portray a diverse range of British attitudes towards the period's state-sanctioned efforts to assimilate the Romani people. In most academic works, British voices that called for the elimination of Romani culture drown out those that were opposed to their assimilation into sedentary industrial wage-labour and formal education. They also mostly engage in only a surface analysis of the relationships between perspectives on the Romani and the great shifts occurring in British society. This thesis reveals a greater complexity of viewpoints within British society over issues of Romani assimilation that were increasingly fueled by the age's rapid social and technological change. Poets, journalists, evangelical reformers, romantic gypsologists and progressive politicians were some of the groups in Britain whose projections of fears and desires upon the Romani created an unintended referendum on the quickening forces of modernity.

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## **Dedication**

For their inspiration, this thesis is dedicated to Turning Point USA's Candace Owens and Cuban-American comedian and convicted felon, Joey "Coco" Diaz.

Chapter One:  
Introduction

Once you begin to plan the Gypsy life you have murdered the Gypsies. Planning and Gypsies are anathema to each other. The Gypsy's place in the post-war world is secure. He only has to go on being what he is—a true Gypsy...Don't let us break faith with all of those fine young Romanies who have died so that their people can still be free to roam the byways of the world. In short—don't try to control Gypsies!<sup>1</sup>

- Eustice Guillan Hopper, 1945

As one of the most plainly stated repudiations of state-sanctioned Romani assimilation efforts ever recorded, English occultist and life-long traveler Eustice Guillan Hopper's association between Romani integration and forms of death reads as a crude regurgitation of sentiments already present in British society for over century. Slightly more eloquent were the earlier words of English philanthropist Sir Samuel Roberts who identified the Romani as “distinguished by an untamable love of liberty, and an unconquerable spirit of independence.”<sup>2</sup> The hundred years between the writings of Roberts and Hopper produced a number of similar exaltations by poets, journalists, politicians and a new class of “gypsiologists” throughout Europe who sought refuge from the positivism associated with Britain's rapid social and technological changes in their romanticized visions of Romani primitivism. They did so amidst a rise in popularity of the occult, the importance of dreams and the subconscious, drug use and new artistic movements that challenged tradition and enlightenment rationality while expressing fears over the mental illnesses and moral decay they associated with modernity. The seemingly benevolent intentions of those who projected their concepts of freedom upon the Romani were juxtaposed with more negative assessments that also extended across the spectrum of Victorian

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<sup>1</sup> Guillan Hopper, “The Gypsies of To-morrow,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, vol. 24 (January 1945): 96.

<sup>2</sup> David Cressy, “Evangelical ethnographers and English Gypsies from the 1790s to the 1830s,” *Romani Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2016): 71.

class hierarchy. For example, the chaplain of Britain's circus and show worker's union attempted to distance his clergy from a Romani people he considered "degenerate and ill-conditioned."<sup>3</sup> Primitive Methodist evangelical reformer George Smith of Coalville, the driving force behind proposed Romani assimilation legislation in the 1880s known as the Movable Dwellings Bill, frequently compared them to animals, described their cultural practices as "satanic" and detailed what he viewed as nothing more than their "miserable" occupations of "lying, cheating, robbing and murder."<sup>4</sup> The local authorities charged with enforcing prior existing legislation also intended to curb traditional Romani practices were equally unforgiving. An 1839 report commissioned for the establishment of a new constabulary force in England and Wales had denounced what it considered crimes particular to the Romani including fortune telling and money counterfeiting. It described them as "the worst of thieves...they have no religion; are heavy cursers; go in families; never marry...they play cards and drink on Sundays."<sup>5</sup> This perspective had changed little by the 1906 publication of a British adaption of University of Prague criminologist Hans Gross's *Criminal Investigation: A Popular Handbook for Magistrates, Police Officers and Lawyers*. Summarizing the Romani's status in Edwardian Britain, the handbook stated, "All that is bad, valueless, or deceitful has the epithet 'gipsy' e.g., brass = gipsy gold. Fish full of bones = gipsy carp. Wild grapes which no one can eat = gipsy grapes. Bad wine = gipsy wine, etc...it is by injuring and destroying that he lives out his wretched life."<sup>6</sup> It may be argued that all human relationships, ranging from the societal to those

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas William Thompson, "Affairs of Egypt, 1909," *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, vol. 5 (1 January 1911): 117.

<sup>4</sup> George Smith. *I've Been A Gipsying: or Rambles Among Our Gipsies and Their Children In Their Tents and Vans* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1883), 31.; George Smith, *Gipsy Life: being an account of our gipsies and their children* (London: Houghton & CO., 1880): 254.

<sup>5</sup> C.J. Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1887), 506.

<sup>6</sup> John Adam and John Collyer Adam, *Criminal Investigation: A Practical Handbook for Magistrates, Police Officers, and Lawyers* (Madras: G. Ramasawmy Chetty & Co., 1906), 378.

most intimate in nature, involve degrees of projection of a group or individual's personal fears and desires upon another. To varying degrees, people often create the images they need to see in others independent of their actual personalities, behaviors or culture. However, this thesis focuses directly on conscious and unconscious British anxieties over modernity's increasingly rapid social and technological changes as revealed in debates over the specific issue of Romani assimilation.

The reality of the British Romani experience in the long nineteenth century was likely at odds with both the idealized depictions presented by Roberts and Hopper as well as the aforementioned condemnations from church and law enforcement. Characterizations of a people temporally arrested and spatially adrift dissipate under scrutiny. Evidence instead suggests rigid family structures and cultural traditions, close adherence to annual schedules of seasonal employments, deep integration with the non-Romani British economy and a unique form of domestic efficiency necessitated by the travelling lifestyle. English professor Janet Lyon felt that, broadly speaking, "The 'Gypsy' is in most usages a figure of the European imagination bearing little resemblance to—indeed, often obscuring—the historical lives and material conditions of the Romanichal, Rom, Lovari, Kalderash, Sinti, Coppersmith, and Gitano peoples of Europe."<sup>7</sup> As Lyon identified, research into Romani cultural practices in the period indicates they were neither anathema to planning nor able to "roam free" as Hopper later claimed. Additionally, the Romani's cognizance of mainstream British culture and their multitude of skill sets challenge the assumptions of some recent historians and period commentators. As do examples of the economic resourcefulness that was required for survival as a social element viewed as wildly heterodox by even their sympathizers which deflate accusations of relative deplorability and more specifically, in the parlance of twenty-first century progressive reformers,

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<sup>7</sup> Janet Lyon, "Gadze Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 11, no. 3 (September 2004): 518.

Anglophobia. This thesis also agrees with historian Brigid O’Keefe’s identification of a similar phenomenon of projection and attempted assimilation that took place in Russia in the period as “underappreciated” in its ability to offer insight into current twenty-first century assimilation efforts involving the Romani and other historically unconventional communities in the Western world.<sup>8</sup> The period’s relevance to twenty-first century assimilation issues is further acknowledged at the conclusion of this thesis.

This thesis will reveal that British debates over the fate of their Romani population from the late nineteenth century to the start of the First World War acted as an unintended referendum on the merits, or lack thereof, of the quickening forces of modernity. It will argue that some members of British society unknowingly treated the Romani as a blank canvas upon which to project a form of collective “id” expressing fears that were arguably justified by the subsequent roles that growing state power, industrialization and new technology played in the mass deaths of two world wars, the Holodomor and the Holocaust. Whether a perspective rendered the Romani charmingly pre-Modern and not requiring of intervention or deplorably Anglophobic to the point of necessitating legislative social engineering, the following investigation into British thoughts on their assimilation reveals valuable insights into the Victorian psyche in a time of large-scale socio-political transformation.

This sources of investigation for this thesis were wide ranging and included newspapers and popular magazines like *The Times*, *The Lancet*, *The Sunday at home magazine* and *Notes and Queries*, observational monographs by evangelical missionaries like John Hoyland, James Crabb and George Smith, period journals like that which was published by The Gypsy Lore Society, Hansard Parliamentary debates over proposed Romani assimilation legislation and some

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<sup>8</sup> Brigid O’Keefe, “Gypsies as a litmus test for rational, tolerant rule: Fin-de-siecle Russian ethnographers confront the comparative history of Roma in Europe,” *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, vol. 38, iss. 2 (6 June 2013): 127.

first-hand accounts by Romani authors like Silvester Boswell. This chapter will briefly examine the post-World War II historiography on the subject of British perspectives of Romani assimilation from the Victoria era to the First World War and discuss how this thesis contributes to the wider scholarship on the subject. This type of evaluation is particularly relevant for a exceedingly illiterate people whose culture left little means of preserving its own history and few first hand recordings of their experiences.

The very concept of a Romani history existing at all was often called into question by both outsiders and the Romani themselves. Considered the model for later gypsiologists, early nineteenth century linguist and ethnographer George Borrow wrote in 1843 that the Romani “have no history, they do not even know the name of their original country, and the only tradition which they possess, that of their Egyptian origin, is a false one, whether invented by themselves or others.”<sup>9</sup> Borrow’s contemporaries, fellow ethnographers A. Shile of Russia and Robert Knox of Scotland, also felt that “the Roma neither knew nor cared for their history” and that “their ancient history is utterly unknown.”<sup>10</sup> Late-century American-born British folklorist Charles Godfrey Leland felt that, in any case, the Romani were “not attractive from the outside to those who have no love for quaint scholarship, odd humours, and race fancies.”<sup>11</sup> In the 1940s, British naturalist Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald had quoted a Romani named Charlie Smith as having allegedly stated, “Where we comes from the dear Lord only knows and He’s too high and mighty to tell the likes of us.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> George Borrow, *The Zincali: or, an Account of the Gypsies of Spain: Vol. I*, Third Edition (London: George Woodfall and Son, 1843): 152.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850), 103.; O’Keeffe, “Gypsies as a litmus test,” 113.

<sup>11</sup> Charles G. Leland, *The English Gypsies and Their Language* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969. Originally published London: Trübner & Co., 1874), 153.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Gypsies of Britain: An Introduction to Their History* (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1944), 1.

An important point of departure for a discussion of recent scholarship is David Mayall's penultimate 1988 monograph entitled *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society* based on his 1981 Phd. thesis. Though it offers a comprehensive retrospective on British Romani life in the period, it also presents competing narratives on the nature of their relationship to the greater society. Mayall first identified Romani contributions to the British economy and social life as a basis for a "special relationship with the rural community" which he felt materialized in a "qualified tolerance accorded the Gypsy-travellers..."<sup>13</sup> However, his same book contains a conflicting message on how "the plethora of impressions constructed around the Gypsies, whether as mere stereotypes or as an alien race, gave rise to a variety of cultural and racial stereotypes that hindered the practical expression of sentiments or responses other than those of suspicion and general antipathy."<sup>14</sup> In fact, Mayall's 1988 highlighting of some form of positive interaction between the Romani and at least rural British society represents the near entirety of such claims in twentieth and twenty-first century academic scholarship. His inability to directly reconcile how these competing viewpoints co-existed in the period begs the deeper discussion attempted in this thesis.

As stated, subsequent investigations into the nature of period perspectives on Romani assimilation remained limited in their acknowledgement of non-persecutory attitudes. In 1997, Irish sociologist Robbie McVeigh ignored instances of Romani integration and instead focused on the societal pressures influencing those who sought to curtail their lifestyle. McVeigh outlined the inevitable squeeze faced by non-sedentary peoples throughout Europe as the nation state further consolidated its power, writing, "The continued existence of nomads and vagrants was a key symbol of the unfinished project of modernity and the evidence of the survival of

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<sup>13</sup> David Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth-century society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 181.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

unwanted elements of the pre-modern.”<sup>15</sup> In 2004, Janet Lyon also situated the Victorian and Edwardian British Romani lifestyle as both “materially and symbolically” distanced from new British definitions of civilization and that, as a people, they “exceeded the empirical categories through which England took stock of itself as a modern nation-state.”<sup>16</sup> Though she ignored the diversity of period perspectives, Lyon did at least somewhat acknowledge the Romani’s role as keepers of the romantic projections of a select number of gypsiologists. She wrote how, in a changing society, “the valorized English traits of taciturnity, physical vigor, and self-sufficiency could all be recuperated in the mythical and conveniently available figure of the ‘Gypsy.’”<sup>17</sup> In 2008, historian Becky Taylor discussed the unresolved nature of the issues discussed by McVeigh and Lyon whereby “Society neither removed Travellers from the British social map, successfully assimilated them, nor came to terms with the continuing vitality of nomadism in the modern world.”<sup>18</sup> Virtually all scholars of Romani history from the Victorian era to the First World War have diminished the value of the multitude of anti-assimilation perspectives in the period while ascribing much greater importance to issues of alleged Romani persecution. Even the “valorized English traits” acknowledged by Janet Lyon reflect in her view the limited perception of a select few romantic authors and are otherwise questionable in their expression of an altogether positive relationship. But what of similar projections by non-gypsiologists including journalists, politicians, landed gentry or the British masses? The focus of most research has remained almost entirely on the Romani as outsiders with little attempt to view their role as an integrated people within British society. This thesis explores a broader range of

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<sup>15</sup> Robbie McVeigh, “Theorising sedentarism: the roots of anti-nomadism,” in *Gypsy Politics and Traveller identity*, ed. Thomas Acton (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Lyon, “Gadze Modernism,” 522.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 520.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, “Travellers in Britain,” 596.

reactions that reveals unexpected alignments and oppositions to the Romani as both a legitimate segment of the working classes and a perpetual remainder in the equation of the modernity.

Chapter Two:  
Romani in British Society to the Late Nineteenth Century

Identity

A clear understanding of Romani identity, not present even amongst many academics, benefits a discussion of perspectives on assimilation. It is particularly prescient for a people whose origins were for centuries shrouded in mystery and remain so today in many circles. Becky Taylor described the difficulties of attempting to haphazardly define Romani identity both in the Victorian era and in present day:

They were dealt with under a variety of headings, including Gypsy, Tinker, movable van-or tent-dweller, vagrant or itinerant... To construct even the recent history of Travellers is to synthesize an account from newspaper clippings, oral history, government documents, the writings of gypsiologists, sanitary officials and school inspectors.<sup>1</sup>

Increasing the difficulty for outsiders attempting to construct a Romani identity is Romani culture at present having evolved to include a wide range of peoples and practices, often regional in their expression and occasionally in conflict with each other, spread throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas. This paper nevertheless attempts to establish some basic pillars of historical background upon which may lay a deeper discussion of perspectives on British assimilation efforts.

Hundreds of years before linguistic analysis and DNA testing suggested an ancestral linkage with the medieval inhabitants of what is now Pakistan and northwest India, a multitude of terms of identification were applied to the Romani following their arrival in southeastern Europe during the latter days of the Byzantine Empire. These included Kalé in Scandinavia (referencing their dark skin), le bohémien in France (which conjectured an origin in Czech-speaking lands), Zingarri in Iran and Turkey, Tsyganskiy in Russia, Cygański in Poland,

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<sup>1</sup> Becky Taylor, "Travellers in Britain," 578.

Zigeuner in Germany and Zincali in some regions of Spain. The five lattermost names were likely derived from Sigynnae, Atsegane or Atsinganoi which in previous centuries had been used to describe alleged groups of ancient and medieval eastern Mediterranean suspected nomads whose legends as traders, magicians and entertainers extend as far back as Herodotus. The words likely evolved into blanket terms used by authorities to identify any new or unknown group of travelers in the region before being misapplied to the Romani upon their arrival.

Along with new labels derived from European perceptions of their origins came a variety of new stories that sought to explain their strange and sudden appearance on the continent. This included casting the Romani as a lost tribe of Israel, a previously unknown form of indigenous European, Turkish spies, East Africans, descendants of the mythical lost city of Atlantis, and even extraterrestrials who had descended from the Moon. More popular in English-speaking lands was the determination of Egypt as the place of Romani origin. From legal documents to poetry, the shortened slang “Gypsies” became the common term of usage throughout Britain, the Americas and some select regions of Europe, including parts of Spain, where the term Gitano was popularized.

The origin of the Romani’s Egyptian identity in Britain is not entirely clear. It may have emerged out of a broader cultural reference point or perhaps what Edward Said later highlighted with Egypt as “the theatre of effective Western knowledge about the Orient.”<sup>2</sup> It may also reflect Early Modern European interpretations of descriptions of ancient Egyptians from Biblical texts. This was later the case with early nineteenth century philanthropist Sir Samuel Roberts who claimed to have uncovered the Romani’s Egyptian origin in the prophecy of EZEKIEL 29:12 which stated, “I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 43.

countries.”<sup>3</sup> It may also have been an identity propagated by the Romani themselves as part of their widely documented origin story which cast them as either ancient Christian pilgrims or modern refugees hailing from the mythical land of “Little Egypt.” Though they were alleged to have referenced an Egyptian origin throughout Europe, in most regions their aforementioned association with ancient Mediterranean nomads superseded their own claims in the eyes of authorities.

The process that led to the Romani’s use of the term Little Egypt to demarcate their origin is difficult to reconstruct. Some evidence suggests that as a place name it may have already been in use by medieval Europeans as a description of several possible areas from the Peloponnese to India.<sup>4</sup> French sociologist and pro-Romani activist Jean-Pierre Liegeois also uncovered the term “Little Egypt” as occasionally used by some Europeans to describe the entire region of the Eastern Mediterranean based on interpretations of Turkish language sources that named it as such for its agricultural fertility.<sup>5</sup> A more specific reference that may have found its way into the discourse of early Romani contact lies in the 1495 writings of the German Count Palatine, Alexander of Zweibrücken. Upon his arrival in the central Greek city of Modon following his return from crusade in the Holy Land, Alexander encountered a “hill called Gype, with about 200 huts and that some people call this hill and its appurtenance little Egypt.”<sup>6</sup> His story was partially corroborated by a fellow fifteenth century traveler and pilgrim named Arnold von Harff of Köln who recorded his own observance of a possible nomadic settlement at

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<sup>3</sup> Cressy, “Evangelical ethnographers,” 71.

<sup>4</sup> John Morgan, “‘Counterfeit Egyptians’: The construction and implementation of a criminal identity in early modern Europe,” *Romani Studies* vol. 26, no. 2 (2016): 106.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Pierre Liegeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1986), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Stephane Laederich, “Rromanes and Rroma History,” in *Jenische, Sintî und Roman in der Schweiz*, ed. Helena Kanyar Becker (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 2003), 157.

Modon.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Modon's Venetian colonists in the period were documented as referring to the region as Little Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Twentieth century Russian-American historian and linguist Leo Wiener suspected the people observed by Alexander, von Harff and others to have indeed been Romani originally from India.<sup>9</sup> Wiener also claimed that as far back as the fourteenth century, Italian travelers had encountered Romani in the region whom they described as "hermits (*Romiti*) doing penance for their sins," baring a striking similarity to the common Romani origin story that would spread throughout Europe.<sup>10</sup>

The most common forms of the original Romani origin story told throughout Europe describe them as either suffering penance for the ancient sin of having forged the nails for Christ's crucifixion or for having denied shelter to the Holy Family during their persecution by authorities. One of many variations tells of Romani blacksmiths having unknowingly forged a fourth nail meant to be driven through the heart of Christ before refusing to deliver it to the Romans. As a result, they are eternally driven from place to place by authorities determined to retrieve the nail.<sup>11</sup> Whether the area of Modon, a possible rest-stop for successive waves of Romani entering Europe from the Middle East, was referred to as Little Egypt prior to their arrival or it was later renamed as such based on their presence and self-invented origin story is unknown. Whatever the case, the story of Egyptian origin was likely forged at points of European contact like Modon with the goal of acquiring charity from Europeans.

The story proved effective in this regard until at least the second half of the fifteenth century. However, their status as pilgrims eligible to receive alms was soon rescinded by

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-158.

<sup>8</sup> Liegeois, *Gypsies*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Leo Wiener, "Gypsies as Fortune-Tellers and as Blacksmiths," *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 23 (January 1909): 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Silvester Gordon Boswell, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, ed. John Seymour (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1970), 181.

churches and governments who offered new assessments of the Romani's ignorance of Christianity. A summary of their relationship to outside religions by the editor of Romani author Silvester Gordon Boswell's autobiography, John Seymour, perhaps offers a clue as to the religion of the Early Modern migrants:

The Gypsies have always adopted, nominally, the religion of the host country that they happen to be in; thus we have Shia Muslim Gypsies in Persia, Sunnis in Iraq, Orthodox Christians in Greece, Catholics in southern Europe and Anglicans in England. For the most part this religion is the thinnest of veneers, and the Gypsy is true to a set of animistic beliefs which he has brought with him.<sup>12</sup>

Worth noting is the lack of any explicit references in Romani folklore to Hinduism, Buddhism or other regional Indian belief systems, with the exception of some sanitary practices including those related to female menstruation, that would have been culturally influential at the time of their medieval departure. Instead, the fragmented and shamanistic "animism" described by Seymour may evidence what linguist and professor of Romani Studies Dr. Ian Hancock, himself of British Romani descent, often suggested was the result of their pre-migratory status in Indian society. Hancock considered the first of possibly three waves of Romani migrants to have initially gained entry into the Middle East as servants for armies fighting both for and against Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni during his several attempted invasions of India beginning in 1001. This may have indicated their membership in one of India's lower-castes and a possible adherence to pre-Vedic forms of local shamanistic cults later visible in Romani spells, magic and spiritual conceptions.

Most scholars agree on the fifteenth century as the period in which the Romani first landed in the British Isles, sometime after their recorded arrival in German speaking lands in 1417. The first documentation of Romani in Britain may be found in Scotland by way of an

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 181-182.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1505 item suggesting a meeting between King James IV and a group of Egyptians.<sup>13</sup> This was followed by a 1506 letter of settlement recommendation by James to King John of Denmark “in favour of Anthony Gawin, Earl of Little Egypt,” as a means of facilitating his family’s passage to Scandinavia.<sup>14</sup> The first possible mention of Romani in England comes via Sir Thomas More’s personal recollection of an inquiry into the mysterious 1514 death of Richard Hunne; an English merchant who died awaiting trial for heresy after a dispute with a priest over his young son’s funeral service. Detailed by More was a discussion at court of an alleged fortune teller for whom a court servant felt capable of determining the cause of Hunne’s death. He allegedly suggested to More and others that, “were she with you, she would tell you wonders...if a thing had been stolen, she would have told who had it. And therefore I think she could as well tell who killed Hunne, as who stole a horse....an Egyptian, and she was lodged here at Lambeth, but she is gone over sea now.”<sup>15</sup> In terms of the first large-scale migration of continental Romani into the British Isles, author Samuel Reid’s 1612 work *Art of Juggling* assigned the year 1528, likely influenced by authorities’ recent expulsion efforts in the surrounding European kingdoms.<sup>16</sup>

A point of frustration for British authorities since the Romani’s arrival and particularly pronounced in the long nineteenth century was their inability to determine the size and exact ethnic composition of their population. The number of Romani travelers or travelers of some degree of Romani descent practicing traditional forms of Romani culture diverge wildly and virtually any information on the subject appears unreliable. George Behlmer cited both William

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Pitcairn, *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland: Vol. III.—Part II. 1615-1624* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1833), 592.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas More, “Dialogue Concerning Tyndale: BK. 3. CH. 15-16.” *The Dialogue Concerning Heresies, 1529*. The Center for Thomas More Studies. <http://www.thomasmorestudies.org/library.html> (Accessed 25 February 2018)

<sup>16</sup> Henry T. Crofton, “Early Annals of the Gypsies in England,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 1, iss. 1 (July 1888), 8.

Corbett's 1826 estimation of 30,000 British Romani and The Salvation Army's 1909 survey of 60,000 general "tramps and beggars" in England as providing clues.<sup>17</sup> However, the president of Britain's Local Government Board, Charles Ritchie, referenced an April 1881 national census which claimed "the number of persons enumerated as sleeping in caravans and tents, and in the open air...was as follows:—Males, 4,668; females, 3,901—making a total of 8,569."<sup>18</sup> One of the main difficulties in the period for determining the size of the Romani population stemmed from authorities' inability to legally separate multiple categories of travelers which was further complicated by their alleged intermarriages with non-Romani. Lord James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil, 4th Marquess of Salisbury, considered in 1911 that the problems associated with Romani encampments had been "greatly exaggerated" due to outsiders confusing them with "ordinary tramps."<sup>19</sup> Salisbury's clear delineation was reflective of other popular perceptions that thought Romani culture did not allow for marriage to non-Romani's and that any who attempted to do so faced exile from their community. This view was disputed by a park ranger at Epping Forest in the 1880s who claimed that clans of ethnic Romani had become integrated with non-Romani vagrant criminals to a degree that made it difficult for police to differentiate between them.<sup>20</sup> In 1883, prominent Victorian publisher Alexander Hay Japp also felt that, "To speak of a fair-haired, blue-eyed gypsy seems almost a contradiction in terms, and yet it is quite a correct description of a large section of gypsydom in England and elsewhere, and well known to those who closely study the subject."<sup>21</sup> A 1912 article entitled "Description of Scottish Tinkers Fifty Years Ago" agreed that "Some of them have all the characteristics of the genuine

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<sup>17</sup> Behlmer, "The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England," 233.

<sup>18</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, "Questions: Movable Dwellings," 8 August 1889.

<sup>19</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]," 22 February 1911.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *I've Been A Gipsying*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Alex H. Japp, "The Gypsies as Seen By Friendly Eyes," *Gentleman's Magazine* vol. 255, iss. 1836 (December 1883): 579.

gipsy—viz., very brown complexions, dark hair and eyes; while others have fair complexions, with red hair and blue eyes, indicative of a Saxon or Gothic origin.”<sup>22</sup> As did *Notes and Queries* contributor John E. Cussans who felt that there was ample evidence for Romani ethnic integration both in England and throughout Europe.<sup>23</sup> David Mayall felt his research confirmed these earlier reports of ethno-cultural integration based on what he concluded was significant “intermixing between Egyptians and native ‘loyterers’, outcasts, highwaymen, smugglers, vagabonds, tinkers, pot-hawkers and umbrella-menders from 1612 on.”<sup>24</sup> Despite the aforementioned contradictions, Lord Salisbury’s view of the Romani as an entirely separate ethno-cultural element remained prevalent in many social circles. Evidence of such may be found in an 1895 Scottish Committee report on “Habitual offenders, Vagrants, Beggars, Inebriates and Juvenile Delinquents” that attempted to dissociate the Romani from other groups based on the more significant role that family units were perceived as playing in their culture.<sup>25</sup> However, the abilities of British authorities to clearly separate Romani from non-Romani remained limited and has arguably only increased in difficulty. A May 2018 UK House of Commons briefing paper entitled *Gypsies and Travellers* states, “The term ‘Gypsies and Travellers’ is difficult to define as it does not constitute a single, homogenous group, but encompasses a range of groups with different histories, cultures and beliefs...”<sup>26</sup> This thesis uses the term Romani to refer to the semi-distinct British “Gypsy” class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that appeared to have maintained observable degrees of traditional occupations, language and Indian ethnicity despite centuries of European influence.

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<sup>22</sup> David MacRitchie, “A Description of Scottish Tinkers Fifty Years Ago,” *Royal College of Surgeons of England, Romanitshels’, Didakais’, and Folk-Lore Gazette*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1912): 34.

<sup>23</sup> John E. Cussans, “May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1869,” *Notes and Queries* ser. 4, vol. 3 (January to June 1869): 461.

<sup>24</sup> David Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, 88.

<sup>25</sup> Behlmer, “The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England,” 234.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah Cromarty, *Gypsies and Travellers*, House of Commons Library (8 May 2018), 4.

## Law

In order to contextualize late nineteenth and early twentieth century British perspectives on Romani assimilation in the areas of education, employment and travelling, the laws that had previously attempted to direct the Romani towards a Christianized, sedentary lifestyle of regular wage labour require a brief restating. One of the earliest indications for Romani legal status in Britain may be found in a letter dated February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1540 that referenced Scottish King James V's granting of special privileges to "Johnne Faw, Lord and Erle of Little Egypt," based on Faw's status as the alleged chief of a foreign clan of Christian pilgrims.<sup>27</sup> These privileges included a separate Romani legal system that allowed for the self-resolution of internal Romani conflicts and the allowance for some Romani influence in jury selection for offences committed by Scots against the Romani.<sup>28</sup> Like the giving of alms, the granting of special legal status to Christian pilgrims was seen as a required act of piety in the period throughout Europe. Yet, for the Romani, an equally common occurrence is evidenced by the short-term nature of James' benevolence. He requested their eviction from Scotland the following year after authorities had rendered them faux Christians and Egyptian heathens. The following decades saw official anti-Romani measures in Scotland that called for their removal as rogues and vagabonds under penalty of death for those who remained, repeating the pattern found throughout Europe of acceptance followed by attempted expulsion that had preceded their arrival on the island in large numbers.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pitcairn, *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland*, 592-93.; William E.A. Axon, *Laws Relating to Gypsies In Legal Lore: Curiosities of Law and Lawyers*, ed. William Andrews (London: William Andrews & Co., 1897), 169.

<sup>28</sup> Axon, *Laws Relating to Gypsies In Legal Lore*, 169.

<sup>29</sup> Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging*, 505.

A similar pattern was repeated in England during Henry VIII's reign. In 1531, he chose to revive a set of general vagrancy laws formulated two centuries prior under Edward I. Henry's "An acte concernyng Egypseyans" specifically referenced the perceived threat of the "outlandysse" Romani as a "People callygne themselves Egyptians" with specific complaints regarding frauds and deceptions, primarily fortune telling or "Palmestre," as a form of outright theft.<sup>30</sup> The act prohibited their entrance into his kingdom and proclaimed that from then on, any Romani found in England were to be banished after a period of fifteen days following their capture, imprisonment and forfeiture of stolen property.<sup>31</sup> It also specified that any Romani in the realm who plead not guilty to charges of murder or robbery would face an entirely English jury, a reversal of an earlier act passed under Henry VI that allowed for influence by the accused into jury composition for foreigners facing trial.<sup>32</sup> Henry later amended the law by setting a fine of £40 for any English citizen found to be aiding the importation of "Gypeyans."<sup>33</sup> Despite some limited deportations, Henry's act proved ineffective due to confusion by local authorities who struggled to reconcile its provisions against existing laws that did not allow for the direct criminalization of people's foreign origins or ethnic identity.<sup>34</sup>

In 1554, a second "Egyptian" act was signed into law by Queen Mary I. Unlike Henry's act whose language singled out identity, Mary's "An Acte for the punishement of certayne Persons calling themselves Egipcians" targeted behavior and non-sedentary economic activity exclusively. It treated the Romani economy with suspicion, weary of their "using no crafte or feate of marchaundises for to lyve by" and feared their engagement in "olde accustomed

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<sup>30</sup> "Chapter X. An Act concnyng Egypseyans," *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. III (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1817. Reprinted in 1963), 327.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Axon, *Laws Relating to Gypsies In Legal Lore*, 170.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

develishe and noughty practices,” namely fortune telling.<sup>35</sup> The act further declared that any Romani found in England or Wales who did not depart within sixteen days would be rendered a felon and face, without the benefit of clergy, “Deathe, losse of Landes and Goodes.”<sup>36</sup> In an early attempt at Romani assimilation, the 1554 act prescribed no punishments for those who chose to “leave that noughtye idle and ungodly lyef and company, and be placed in the service of some honest and able Inhabitante or Inhabitanter within this Realm, or that shall honestlye exercise himself in some lawfull worck or occupacon.”<sup>37</sup> Despite some evidence of limited deportations and executions as was the case under Henry VIII, the application of Mary’s act remained unevenly applied with many Romani continuing to travel largely unencumbered throughout Britain with little evidence of sedentary servitude.

Elizabeth I’s 1563 “An Acte for the Punishment of Vagabondes calling themselves Egyprians” renewed the 1554 act’s commitment to altering Romani behavior though to little affect. It also contained wording that made it illegal for non-Romani English citizens to become a member of a Romani family.<sup>38</sup> English journalist and antiquary William E.A. Axon suggested in 1897 that, rather than issues concerning ethnic mixing or cultural deterioration, Elizabeth was chiefly worried over the potential for Catholic missionary priests concealing themselves inside of a Romani family in order to sneak into England.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the act eliminated the term “certayne Persons” and instead proclaimed that Mary’s previous act should apply not just to ethnic Romani but also to non-Romani native-born English found associating with Romani or “transforming or disguising themselves in their Apparll or in a certayne contrefaite Speache or

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<sup>35</sup> “An Acte for the punishment of certayne Persons calling themselves Egyprians,” *The Statutes of the Realm*, vol. IV, (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1819. Reprinted 1963), 242.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Axon, *Laws Relating to Gypsies In Legal Lore*, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 171.; Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy*, 490.

Behavior.”<sup>40</sup> The act stipulated that anyone deemed an “Egiptian” by authorities and who chose to remain so for the course of one month would have committed a felony fully subject to the punishments of Mary’s earlier law.<sup>41</sup> However, exceptions were again made for anyone willing to “put him or themselves to some honest Service, or exercise some lafull Woorck Trade or Occupacon, and utterly forsake the said idle and false Trade Conversacon and Behavior of the said counterfaite or disguised Vagabondes, commonly called or calling themselves Egiptians.”<sup>42</sup>

Both Mary and Elizabeth’s acts appear to have represented both the frustrations of authorities over their inabilities to distinguish different classes of vagrants as well as the decreased importance of ethnicity in favor of behavior as it related to citizens’ relationships to the growing state. Romani historian John Morgan felt that Elizabeth’s act evidenced England’s unease over the more independent and mobile wage labour force that had resulted from both feudalism’s decline and the rapid doubling of the English population from two to four million by 1600.<sup>43</sup>

Lending credence to this theory was British Labour historian Derek Fraser who wrote, “Whenever economic conditions prevailed which encouraged men to wander the country in search of employment, the late medieval and early modern English state sought to restrict this mobility for fear of its social consequences.”<sup>44</sup> This phenomenon was repeated during industrialization and its influence on an even more significant British exodus from traditional agriculture, contributing to renewed calls for Romani assimilation in the late nineteenth century. Like previous attempts at anti-Romani laws, enforcement of Elizabeth’s act was based on local discretion and as John Morgan pointed out, “The choice to prosecute some people as vagrants

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<sup>40</sup> “An Acte for the punishment of Vagabondes callyng themselves Egiptians,” 448.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 449.

<sup>43</sup> Morgan, “Counterfeit Egyptians,” 115-116.

<sup>44</sup> Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (London: MacMillan Education Ltd. 1973. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1984), 31.

and others as ‘Egyptians’ ultimately came down to the individual, local agents of the law.’<sup>45</sup>

Though enforcement of any of the three acts remained difficult, with anyone charged having the ability to renounce their past vagrancy while pledging future assimilation in order to escape fines, deportation or execution, one 1895 article described thirteen Romani executed by hanging shortly before the restoration of Charles II, though the specific circumstances are not known.<sup>46</sup>

The laws targeting the Romani and other socially undesirable travelers that were issued under Henry, Mary and Elizabeth were later eclipsed (though not officially repealed until 1783) by two new Vagrancy Acts under George II in 1740 and 1744 that sought to synthesize all previous legislation. The 1744 act grouped the Romani together with others identified as rogues and vagabonds including beggars, those unlawfully fleeing marriage, those considered able to work but living idle without employment, those unable to take care of themselves for various health reasons and those engaging in unauthorized public entertainments. The act requested they be apprehended by a justice of the peace and sentenced to a month of hard labour in a house of corrections.<sup>47</sup> Despite the act no longer being named after “Egyptians” as per previous laws, it continued to make direct reference to the Romani lifestyle. However, their Egyptian identity and propensity for magic and prophecy were now considered a complete falsehood. The 1744 Act instead described them as:

...persons pretending to be gypsies, or wandering in the habit or form of Egyptians, or pretending to have skill in physiognomy, palmistry, or the like crafty science, or pretending to tell fortunes, or using any subtle craft to deceive and impose on any of his Majesty’s subjects, or playing or betting at any unlawful games or plays.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Morgan, “Counterfeit Egyptians,” 123.

<sup>46</sup> “Gypsies,” *The Justice of the Peace*, ed. Alexander MacMorran, Sydney George Lushington and W.W. MacKenzie, vol. LIX (London: Richard Shaw Bond, 1895), 787.

<sup>47</sup> “An act to amend and make more effectual the laws relating to rogues, vagaonds, and other idle and disorderly persons, and to houses of correction,” *Statutes at Large, From The 15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Year of King George II*, vol. XVIII (Cambridge: Joseph Bentham, 1765), 145-146.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

These acts both broadened and specified the definitions of vagrancy but eliminated the death penalty in favor of hard labour and corporal punishment. Despite new sanctions against law enforcement that punished those refusing to enforce the act, the lack of resources afforded them saw the 1744 effort again rarely applied to Romani before it was finally eclipsed under George IV, along with all earlier acts, leaving only a single remaining Vagrancy Act in 1824.<sup>49</sup>

The 1824 “An Act for the Punishment of idle and disorderly Persons, and Rogues and Vagabonds, in that Part of *Great Britain* called *England*” emphasized an adherence to settlement in a home “Parish, Township, or Place” which would then be responsible for punishing those able to “work” but not willing to do so, as determined by local authorities. Like the earlier effort under George II, the 1824 act referenced many vagrants who were considered idle and disorderly from beggars and unlicensed peddlers to prostitutes and thieves while maintaining the earlier punishment of hard labour and enhancing the powers of justices of the peace to enter tents and homes provided they obtained a warrant from a local magistrate.<sup>50</sup> Unlike all previous acts, however, there was no longer any direct reference to “Egyptians” or “Gypsies” contained therein. Instead, it identified “every Person pretending or professing to tell Fortunes, or using any subtle Craft, Means, or Device, by Palmistry or otherwise, to deceive and impose on any of His Majesty’s Subjects.”<sup>51</sup> Despite the granting of new powers to law enforcement, George Behlmer later discussed the difficulties of local magistrates in enforcing the act as, in order for charges to stay, they were required to demonstrate that a vagrant simultaneously possessed insufficient shelter, no employment or means of support and no documented identification. If

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<sup>49</sup> “Appendix XXXIV: Gypsies (Memorandum prepared by the Home Office),” *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy* vol. I (London: Wyman & Sons, 1906), 167.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433000255830;view=1up;seq=9>

<sup>50</sup> “Vagrancy Act 1824: 1824 CHAPTER 84 5 Geo 4,” *The National Archives*, 698.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 699.

they were unable to prove all three simultaneously, the vagrant could not be prosecuted.<sup>52</sup> Yet, perhaps naïvely, the act was greeted favorably in many circles, with one anonymous commentator, referring to themselves as “A Barrister,” feeling that most English citizens supported its potential to increase the policing of vagrants as “a full and perfect assurance of safety to their property, their characters, their liberty, and their lives.”<sup>53</sup> However, “A Barrister” asked for caution over the act’s effectiveness when he described the weaknesses of police in Britain as compared to the continent:

We are almost as far behind in the knowledge of police, considered as a science, as though we had for the first time turned our attention to the properties of steam, when the engine had been at work for years in every other part of Europe.<sup>54</sup>

Barrister’s words were an acknowledgment of the past inabilities of state and local authorities to enforce a sedentary, wage labour culture upon the Romani and proved prophetic of later efforts beginning in the 1880s. The earlier remaining “Egyptian” laws that had received little enforcement by the nineteenth century were officially overturned by the Revision Act of 1863.<sup>55</sup> That same year, any lingering legislation that prescribed capital punishment for vagrancy was finally abolished entirely and there was no longer any basis of illegality to simply be or associate with a “Gypsy” in Britain.<sup>56</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, legislative pressures continued to mount against the Romani despite the aforementioned difficulties of enforcement. A series of mid-century enclosure acts significantly reduced the common land made legally available for Romani encampments.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Section 72 of the 1835 Highway Act added newly specified

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<sup>52</sup> Behlmer, “The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England,” 232.

<sup>53</sup> A Barrister, *The Vagrant Act, in relation to the Liberty of the Subject* (London: John Murray, 1824), 49.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Axon, *Laws Relating to Gypsies In Legal Lore*, 174.

<sup>56</sup> “Appendix XXXIV: Gipsies,” 167.

<sup>57</sup> Behlmer, “The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England,” 239.

restrictions on the damaging of or camping on or near roads and walkways.<sup>58</sup> Unlike the 1824 Vagrancy Act, the Highway Act saw a revival of the word “gipsy” used in reference to the denial of the right to “pitch any Tent, Booth, Stall, or Stand, or encamp upon any Part of the Highway.”<sup>59</sup> Remaining along with the Vagrancy Act, Highway Act and the new 1876 Commons Act that sought to limit encampments on public land were a series of Hawkers and Peddlers Acts enacted between 1810 and 1888 requiring licenses for itinerant professions at a cost of £2. However, one’s ability to produce an itinerant business license, either real or forged, when threatened with charges often prevented their enforcement.<sup>60</sup> The progressively multilayered latticework of legislation intended to inhibit and ultimately exterminate non-sedentary lifestyles of all kinds proved more successful with Britain’s non-Romani homeless and traveler populations, who often found themselves in newly built workhouses, but was mostly ineffectual against resourceful Romani adaptations of avoidance. The Romani’s ability to circumvent vagrancy legislation would again become a major point of issue during debates over the Romani-specific legislation that began in the 1880s discussed further in chapter three of this thesis.

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<sup>58</sup> “Highway Act 1835,” *The National Archives*, 396.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers*, 147.

## Culture

Referenced in the introduction to this thesis were the range of perspectives on the Romani people and lifestyle from the Victorian era to the First World War. Documented are instances of journalists, politicians and others expressing disdain for what they perceived as Romani culture. However, many other recorded period perspectives reveal a more complex relationship. This was particularly evident within Europe's artistic class. Eighteenth century English poet John Langhorne's *The Country Justice* asserts, "The gipsy race my pity rarely move; Yet their strong thirst of Liberty I love."<sup>61</sup> Langhorne's brand of selective appreciation of Romani culture appeared even more frequently during the following century. A typical example may be found in an 1885 travel narrative entitled *England As Seen by An American Banker* which claimed to observe Romani "ignorance and filth" but still praised their vitality, natural beauty and "fantastical" wedding ceremonies.<sup>62</sup> Even more than the paranormal oddity that were Romani fortune telling booths, which remained a popular entertainment amongst the British masses beyond the First World War, was the increasingly common placement of the Romani as a background feature of rural Britain by painters and nature authors whose emotional counterpoints to Enlightenment rationalism served as elegies to England's past. Author Richard Jefferies illustrated this trend in 1899, stating of the Romani, "He was born on the earth in the tent, and he has lived like a species of human wild animal ever since."<sup>63</sup> The rise of walking clubs and recreational camping amongst the upper classes saw the potential for a chance encounter with a Romani family as an increasingly popular attraction for what were considered

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<sup>61</sup> John Langhorne, *The British Poets. Including Translations. In One Hundred Volumes. LXV. Langhorne. The Poems of John Langhorne* (Chiswick: C. Whittingham, 1822), 120.

<sup>62</sup> Claudius Buchanan Patten, *England: As Seen By An American Banker, notes of a pedestrian tour* (Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1885), 17-18, 73.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Field and Hedgerow, being the last essays of Richard Jefferies, collected by his widow* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 161.

more adventurous journeyers.<sup>64</sup> Also trending in the period was the act of having oneself photographed in “Gypsy” motifs; a popular lark amongst Britain’s upper classes; though by the 1890s most actual Romani dress more often resembled that worn by the sedentary classes of mainstream Britain.<sup>65</sup> The sentiments that separated aspects of the Romani lifestyle and suited them to the needs of the observer reached as high as Parliament. In 1908, Lord William Hugh Clifford, 10<sup>th</sup> Baron of Chudleigh, openly supported reform legislation designed to end the traditional Romani lifestyle but still heralded them as “free from the interference of the socialistic world.”<sup>66</sup> Another leading proponent of reform was Lord Thomas Cecil Farrer, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Farrer, who that same year expressed his empathy towards the Romani as a unique class of scavengers, stating, “We all have some sympathy for the picker-up of unconsidered trifles.”<sup>67</sup> The lack of Romani involvement in “friendly societies” or Britain’s increasingly militant trade and workers’ unions raised their reputation amongst some politicians who recast them as half-civilized independents whose role as background features of an eroding rural British landscape was increasing in charm.

The Romani’s status amongst scholars was also elevated by the eighteenth century discovery of their language’s Indian roots. The new popularity of Sanskrit as a potential window into the culture of Europe’s semi-mythical “Aryan” ancestors ascribed new importance to the study of a Romani people previously seen by most as existing outside the interests of academic investigation. As a result, a strong counter-narrative began to form within the ranks of a select group of gypsiologists that ascribed new value to their culture with a specific focus on their

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<sup>64</sup> Burke, “Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Sources,” 59.

<sup>65</sup> E. Brewer, “Gipsy Encampments in the Heart of London,” *The Sunday at home: a family magazine for Sabbath reading* (January 1896), 114.

<sup>66</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, *Debates*, “Movable Dwellings Bill: Second Reading,” 24 May 1909.; United Kingdom, House of Lords, *Debates*, “Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]: Second Reading,” 1 April 1908.

<sup>67</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.],” 1 April 1908.

origins and ethnic composition. Mid-Victorian English author and linguist George Borrow was later credited as the first such gypsologist or Romany Rye, a term of distinction roughly translating to “gentleman” in English, to study the Romani language and record all manner of their customs following prolonged interactions. English professor Deborah Epstein Nord described in 2006 how “Borrow’s work, largely forgotten today, enjoyed a revival at the turn of the twentieth century, when he was recast as a figure dear to cultural conservatives nostalgic for a prelapsarian and preindustrial England.”<sup>68</sup> Along with Mathew Arnold’s 1853 poem *The Scholar Gypsy* about a seventeenth century Oxford drop-out who joins a band of vagrants, Borrow’s mid-century, semi-fictional narratives *Lavengro*, *The Romany Rye* and *Romano Lavolil* popularized the use of the Romani people as a medium for questioning mainstream British conventions. He did so in a form not unlike that used by the ancient Roman historian Tacitus who employed descriptions of Germanic tribes as a means of discussing Roman civilization’s moral decay. Deborah Nord also felt that, “In mid-nineteenth century England, Borrow believed, the distinctiveness and specificity of Gypsy culture, like that of Jews and Quakers, confronted the danger of assimilation.”<sup>69</sup> Alexander Hay Japp described how, for the first time in European scholarship, Borrow “was able to deal with gypsies on an equal footing, and to open such eye-holes into their life and ways that the reading world looked up in amazement, rubbed its eyes, and confessed that these gypsies really were human and worth some passing attention...”<sup>70</sup> The popularity of Arnold’s poem and Borrow’s monographs inspired emerging American gypsologist Charles Godfrey Leland whose 1873 works *The English Gypsies and their Language*, followed by *The Gypsies* and *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling* made use of

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<sup>68</sup> Nord, *Gypsies & the British Imagination*, 72 .

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 71

<sup>70</sup> Japp, “The Gypsies as Seen By Friendly Eyes,” 578.

Borrow's format of investigation which included examples of language, folklore, genealogy, history, personal experiences and general cultural observations.

With Borrow having passed away in 1881, Leland, along with Scottish folklorist David MacRitchie and English gypsiologist Francis Hinde Groome, whose entry on "Gipsies" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* had garnered him international attention, formed Europe's first *Gypsy Lore Society*. Its publication, *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, initially sponsored by linguist John Sampson and edited into the post-World War II era by Dora Esther Yates, was published out of Edinburgh and later Liverpool where the Society was initially founded. Deborah Nord later stated of the Society's emergence in Liverpool that it was "no accident...with its urban intensity and its proximity to sparsely settled countryside" which offered a clear juxtaposition of the new industrial Britain next to the longed-for rural existence that most gypsiologists gloriously projected upon the Romani people.<sup>71</sup> In 2005, literary historian Mary Burke considered the Society's new elevation of the Romani as having redefined them as "a kind of mysterious inverted aristocracy intrinsically opposed to sedentary norms."<sup>72</sup> The *Journal* contained the latest in Romani news and investigations into language, culture and history from Britain and across Europe. The Society itself was a mostly closed affair with only two hundred dues paying members at its peak and a *Journal* not made available for public circulation. Thomas Acton, credited in 1998 as the first professor of Romani studies in Britain, would later refer to them as simply "a small group of eccentric scholars."<sup>73</sup> Historian Becky Taylor considered the Society's view of the Romani to be not unlike that of most European scholars regarding outside cultures, particularly those studied in the European colonies. Taylor

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<sup>71</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies & the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 128.

<sup>72</sup> Mary Burke, "Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Sources for Bram Stoker's Gypsies," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, vol. 18, no. 1: 59.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Acton, *Gypsy politics and social change* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974), 109.

described how members “carried out their work almost exclusively with the aim of recording the final and dying days of Europe’s Gypsies.”<sup>74</sup> A brief rival to the Gypsy Lore Society, The Gypsy and Folklore Club, was later established in London in 1911. Unlike the Society who remained aloof from most political debates, the Club openly expressed its intentions to campaign for Romani rights legislation and publically advance their status within mainstream British society. Though the Club leased a property with which to base the operations of its ninety-three members, produced a lecture series and published a journal that ran for three years, the specifics of their plans were never clearly articulated and no campaigns were launched prior to the Club’s quick demise in 1914.<sup>75</sup> It did, however, clearly share many of the previously discussed romantic sentiments evident in statements like those by Club member R.A. Scott MacFie who wrote of the Romani, “[I]n spite of their reputation, they are as superior in honesty to the lower classes of our native population as they are in morality and cleanliness.”<sup>76</sup> Legal disputes regarding the publishing of copyrighted material from the *Journal* and other sources and accusations of defamation and libel characterized the rivalry between the Society and the short lived Club. Following the Club’s demise, co-founder William Townley Searle later suggested increased advocacy for pro-Romani legislative protections of the kind that would not actually be seen until the late twentieth century. Searle was alleged to have stated, “Had such protection occurred in the 1910s, than the position of Romanies in Britain today might have been very different.”<sup>77</sup> An editorial in a 1912 edition of the Club’s journal that attempted to advocate for such actions, stated, “If only legislation could be made with the protection of the Gypsy as its

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<sup>74</sup> Becky Taylor, “Travellers in Britain: a minority and the state,” *Historical Research*, vol. 77, iss. 98 (November 2004): 577.

<sup>75</sup> Ken Lee, “Belated Travelling Theory, Contemporary Wild Praxis: A Romani Perspective on the Practical Politics of the Open End,” in *The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter-Images of ‘Gypsies’/Romanies in European Cultures*, ed. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 42.

<sup>76</sup> MacFie, “The Gypsies: an Outline Sketch,” 45-46.

<sup>77</sup> Lee, “Belated Travelling Theory,” 47.

object a great thing would certainly be achieved...make Bye-laws which would do justice to the nomad and even treat him with charity.”<sup>78</sup> While the romanticism of the Gypsy Lore Society slowly dissipated throughout Western culture, the activism of the Gypsy and Folklore Club would be realized in the efforts of the twenty-first century Romani rights advocates referred to in the conclusion of this thesis.

It is difficult to remove the Society’s views of the Romani from the broader British perspectives on colonized peoples at the height of the Empire whose savagery they were often equated with by those on all sides. With the exception of some conceptions of primitive moral nobility first explored by Tacitus in his use of Germanic tribes to highlight Roman moral decay, the depictions of colonized cultures presented by many churches and governmental authorities were mostly at odds with the Gypsy Lore Society’s gloriously recasting of the Romani as superior in many respects. Society member and *Journal* author Walter M. Gallichan illustrated this view in 1907, writing, “Red Indians and Maoris have not improved under the conditions imposed upon them by alien and more powerful races, but on the contrary; for subject people, as a rule, suffer physically, and in many cases morally, by the imposition of ‘civilized’ customs.”<sup>79</sup> *Journal* contributor Arthur Symons juxtaposed his observations of the Romani as “nearer to the animals than any race known to us in Europe” with his declaration that “They stand for the will for freedom...His is the only free race, and the tyranny of law and progress would suppress his liberty.”<sup>80</sup> Yet, the Society was not alone in their romantic take on the Romani. Across the Atlantic, observer of American Romani, journalist Riley M. Fletcher Berry, wrote in 1910 of a local Romani woman with whom he had interacted, lecturing his readers, “She is naturally your

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<sup>78</sup> “Editorial,” *Royal College of Surgeons of England, Romanitshels’, Didakais’, and Folk-Lore Gazatte* vol. 1, no. 2, (1912): 36.

<sup>79</sup> Walter M. Gallichan, “The State Versus The Gypsy,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 1 (1 January 1907), 357.

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Symons, “In Praise of Gypsies,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* Vol. 1 (January 1, 1907): 296.

superior, for you are the product of a complex civilization; the Gipsy is the child of a pure, primitive race.”<sup>81</sup> George Behlmer earlier identified this trend, writing, “For unlike ethnologists, anthropologists, and folklorists who filled journals devoted to their new specialties in the 1860s and 1870s, the Gypsiologists were less concerned with constructing a science of human society than with the promoting study of one ‘primitive’ people.”<sup>82</sup> They did so much to the consternation of later scholars like Behlmer and Deborah Nord who would have preferred the intended social activism of the short-lived Gypsy and Folklore Club.<sup>83</sup> David Mayall also criticized the Society as having culturally enslaved the Romani in the “shackles of Victorian racial thought” while handing down “as their main legacy a picture of the racial Gypsy” as a mere effort to project their own British concepts of “freedom.”<sup>84</sup> Later scholars like Behlmer, Nord and Mayall offer little to no respect for the form of sympathy afforded the Romani by the new class of gypsiologists.

Though political activism either by or on behalf of the Romani in Britain was virtually non-existent until after the First World War, politicians were not immune from the kind of romantic associations frequently made by the Gypsy Lore Society. Some like longtime Liberal Party fixture Lord Edward Marjoribanks, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Tweedmouth and Earl of Crewe, felt that some of the more envious Britons only desired to eradicate the Romani out of jealousy over their lifestyle.<sup>85</sup> Marjoribanks also asked that Romani living standards be compared to those inhabiting city slums rather than the more middle-class residents of larger homes in order to

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<sup>81</sup> Riley M. Fletcher Berry, “The American Gypsy,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* vol. 80 (May to October 1910), 620.

<sup>82</sup> George K. Behlmer, “The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England,” *Victorian Studies*, 28, 2 (Winter 1985): 243.

<sup>83</sup> Nord, *Gypsies & the British Imagination*, 122.

<sup>84</sup> David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000: From Egipcians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (London: Routledge, 2004), 204.

<sup>85</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.] Second Reading,” 1 April 1908.

better appreciate Romani health and vigour.<sup>86</sup> A 1944 *Journal* article entitled “Was Mr. Gladstone a Romany Rye?” cites the remains of the former Prime Minister’s personal library as containing at least nine books on the Romani published in England and throughout Europe.<sup>87</sup> The article’s author, Society member H. Gordon Ward, felt that “It would be difficult to deny Mr. Gladstone’s claim to be a Romany Rye, especially if his well-known philanthropy be taken into consideration.”<sup>88</sup> This may represent some confusion by Ward given that Gladstone’s donations were likely to the travelling ministry of George Smith of Coalville whose stated goal was to promote legislation that would effectively end traditional Romani culture; actions strongly opposed by the Society and its actual “Romany’s Ryes.”

Accounts of the Romani’s broader relationship with the British general public often involve a great deal of conjecture. Questionable accounts by a select number of politically motivated anti-Romani campaigners detailing spontaneous uprisings by local militia’s attempting to force Romani encampments off of private estates and common land occasionally spring up amidst a breadth of other literature indicating the more constructive results of centuries’ old social and economic integrations. David Mayall claimed to have found that “[P]opular antipathy to the gypsies was such that there was never a shortage of people willing to bring the question of their presence in a particular district to the attention of the local council.”<sup>89</sup> He described the “intolerance, antipathy and opposition” from “police, magistrates, landowners and local residents” and considered their relationship to the rural economy as never “anything other than

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> H. Gordon Ward, “Was Mr. Gladstone a Romany Rye?” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 23 (January 1944): 63.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> David Mayall, “Itinerant Minorities in England and Wales in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Study of Gypsies, Tinkers, Hawkers and Other Travellers,” (Phd. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1981), 413.

one of functional necessity and tolerance, and certainly not one of positive acceptance.”<sup>90</sup> Earlier clues like Henry VIII’s fining of those found importing Romani or Elizabeth I’s outlawing of Romani marriage to non-Romani suggest a different relationship to the British public; as does their prolonged existence in Europe itself despite centuries of anti-Romani legislation which may imply a lack of public will for their elimination. For these reasons it is worth consulting a couple of earlier examples from the eighteenth century that may challenge Mayall’s claims.

The 1740 funeral of famed fortune telling “Gipsy Queen” Margaret Finch of Norwood marked the end of her long run of success which led to her owning her own home, a rarity for British Romani even in the twenty-first century.<sup>91</sup> She was thought to be 109 years old upon her death and her funeral received a proper sermon, was “attended by two mourning coaches” and “attracted numerous visitors.”<sup>92</sup> Despite opposition from local churches, local businesses were alleged to have paid for her funeral out of gratitude for the crowds she drew, particularly on Sunday’s.<sup>93</sup> Of Finch’s popularity James Caulfield wrote in 1820 that “Norwood, and the roads leading to it, on a fine Sunday, resembled a scene at a fair; and, with great difficulty only, could a seat or a mug of beer be obtained, at the place generally called Gipsy-house.”<sup>94</sup> A later 1874 rebuke of the kind of public acceptance granted Finch and her fortune telling practice in *The Leisure Hour* offers some insight into the possible disregard of societal conventions exhibited by her customers:

This credulity is not confined to the poor and illiterate, who listen to vulgar tramps and gipsies. Crowds of ‘fashionable people,’ in what is called ‘good society,’ encourage the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 415, 449-450.

<sup>91</sup> Daniel Lysons, *The Environs of London: being an historical account of the towns, villages, hamlets, within twelve miles of that capital interspersed with biographical anecdotes, Vol. 4* (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1792), 301-302.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>93</sup> James Caulfield, *Portraits, Memoirs, and Characters of Remarkable Persons, from the Revolution in 1688 to the End of the Reign of George II: Collected from the Most Authentic Accounts Extant* (London: T.H. Whiteley, 1820), 247.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 248

imposture of spiritualists and other rogues, who, by means of previous inquiries, and cunning artifices, obtain information sufficient to give colour to some of their predictions, and thus sustain the credulity of other dupes from whose folly they gain their disreputable living.<sup>95</sup>

Finch's customers appeared disinterested in the denunciations of fortune telling by authorities and media and instead evidence a more positive relationship between at least some Romani and the British masses that is often ignored by researchers.

The 1753 temporary disappearance of eighteen-year-old London maidservant Elizabeth Canning may have also revealed some unexamined public attitudes. W.G. Watters wrote in 1897 of "[T]he case of Elizabeth Canning, and the madness which seized the public mind and divided the town for months, into the two opposing parties of 'Canningites' and 'Gipsyites.'"<sup>96</sup> Missing for several weeks, Canning claimed to have been abducted and held captive by a Romani mother named Mary Squires, and her son, before later escaping. The Romani mother and another woman who owned the home she claimed to have been held captive in were initially convicted, with Squires facing the death penalty, but all soon had their convictions overturned upon further investigation. Canning herself was soon after convicted of perjury and sentenced to jail followed by transportation to North America for seven years. Who the "Gipsyites" described by Watters were exactly is unknown but their existence in support of an otherwise defenseless elderly Romani woman accused of kidnapping is striking. As is some wording contained in the previously mentioned 1744 Vagrancy act which decried "the reception too often met with in villages and places where [Romani] are permitted to lodge in houses, barns or other outhouses of

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<sup>95</sup> "How Gypsies are Sometimes True Fortune-Tellers," *The Leisure Hour: a family journal of instruction and recreation*, ed. James Macauley. iss. 1178 (25 July 1874): 474.

<sup>96</sup> W.G. Waters, "Elizabeth Canning, *Imposter (1734-1773)*," in *Lives of Twelve Bad Women: Illustrations and Reviews of Feminine Turpitude set forth by Impartial Hands*, ed. Arthur Vincent (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), 206.

buildings...”<sup>97</sup> The popularity of Finch, the supportive “Gipsyites” of the Canning trial, the perceived necessity of separation provided by Henry and Elizabeth’s acts, the frustrations expressed by the authors of the 1744 Vagrancy Act over British citizens supplying Romani with shelter and the Romani’s overall ability remain in Britain after centuries of legislation designed to exterminate their culture all indicated an underlying relationship to the British public more complex than the one presented by later researchers.

Discussed in the next chapter will be George Smith of Coalville, the individual considered today and in his own time as the driving force behind Romani assimilation legislation beginning in the 1880s. Virtually all of Smith’s goals were in stated opposition to the anti-interventionist sentiments of his gypsiologist contemporaries. Society Member Arthur Symons condemned philanthropists like Smith, though he did not name him directly, and other charity organizations like the New Forest Good Samaritan Society whose efforts to assimilate the Romani he felt represented the same counterproductive legislative hostility that harkened back to the Egyptian Act of Henry VIII.<sup>98</sup> Walter Gallichan’s 1907 *Journal* article entitled “The State *Versus* The Gypsy” also referred to what he saw as the renewed legislative “crusade” against Romani and other travelers as “medieval...ludicrous and futile.”<sup>99</sup> Gallichan feared attempts “to change their whole system of living, to cage these freedom-loving children, and to deteriorate the race through the foisting of modes of existence unnatural to them.”<sup>100</sup> Interesting, however, was the fact that neither the gypsiologists nor Smith directly acknowledged each other’s activities nor even mentioned each other by name in recorded media. The only interaction uncovered in the research for this thesis was an odd letter allegedly authored and signed by six Romani members

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<sup>97</sup> “An act to amend and make make more effectual the laws...,” 145-146.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>99</sup> Gallichan, “The State *Versus* The Gypsy,” 350.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

of the Lee family dated November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1888 and published in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (though possibly written and submitted to the *Journal* by Smith himself). The letter refers to Smith's purchase from them of a family heirloom described as a "small symbolic and mystical copper and brass box...engraved and dated one thousand one hundred and ninety-seven...as a token of goodwill for his long efforts to improve our condition and educate our children, and also for the many kindnesses received from him."<sup>101</sup> Published five years into a campaign that saw regular introductions of Smith's Movable Dwellings Bill into the House of Commons, it is unlikely that the editors of the *Journal* would have been unfamiliar with Smith nor entirely trusting of the contents of the letter. Its strange publication nevertheless offers a brief glimpse into Smith's assimilation efforts and the Society's at times risky endeavor of legitimizing opposing viewpoints in an effort to collect information.

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<sup>101</sup> "REVIEWS: NOTES AND QUÉRIES: ? A Gypsy Heirloom," *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 1, iss. 3 (January 1889): 176.

Chapter Three:  
Assimilation

The nineteenth century saw the British state's role grow far beyond its historic responsibilities of foreign diplomacy, national defense and criminal justice. It extended itself further into domestic affairs with new concerns over its citizens' safety, financial security, health and education. The new authority invested in national government administration and bureaucracy grew at the sacrifice of local Church parishes and court districts who forfeited much of their jurisdiction after 1889.<sup>1</sup> Lord Salisbury biographer Michael Bentley attempted to identify the push by Victorian progressives to grow the reach of the state, stating that “[p]artly it owed something to the expansion of population, to urbanization and the need to control what happened to the urban race in its unknown, hazardous or immoral environment.”<sup>2</sup> He also felt that the new push for national programs and regulation “allowed the state of authority that would have troubled mid-Victorian writers.”<sup>3</sup> The expansion of voting rights following the 1885 Redistribution Act focused concerns on urban districts as it related to worker's rights, education and sanitary provisions with both Liberals and Conservatives seeking to lure new voters. Along with rapid technological advancements in travel, communications and manufacturing (including the emergence of steel which negatively impacted Romani iron smiths), this assertiveness quickened and accentuated the omnipresent conflicts between urban, rural, settled and mobile cultures that had existed globally since ancient times and became particularly pronounced in

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Second Edition (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

England since at least the seventeenth century. For Romani who were cautious of or lacking in the ability to partake in the new society, the changing conditions resulted in intensified forms of resistance that proved surprisingly familiar. New debates over this resistance and the Romani's place in the new world offered a multitude of projections upon the Romani that revealed a British culture itself wrestling with the costs and benefits of modernity.

One widely known Romani missionary in England in the early nineteenth century was John Hoyland who offered many strategies with which to settle the Romani and better assimilate them into British culture. He hoped to “enable the rising generation to correct the errors of Gypsy habits” but lamented their lack of access to Christian education and other reforming “advantages” that he felt had been afforded North American First Nations since the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Attempts of the kind suggested by Hoyland that involved regular church attendance, children in classrooms and formal instruction on how to abandon travelling and engage in sedentary lifestyles garnered limited results. While Hoyland's writings stress the moral benefits of sedentary life, his failures were reproduced by some mid-century European states more concerned with maximizing the productive value of their Romani populations. Simultaneously, though more grandiose than the travelling missions of Britain's evangelicals, was Tsarist Russia's Interior Ministry's attempt at a forced Romani farming settlement in Bessarabia complete with newly advanced agricultural equipment, modern homes and taxes. However, shortly after its inception in 1843 the Ministry abandoned the project after inhabitants, primarily Romani families recently released from Siberian prisons, were either unable or refused to adapt and were instead dispersed back into the population as travelers.<sup>5</sup> A decade prior, similar

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<sup>4</sup> John Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits & Present State of The Gypsies* (London: Barton, Harvey & Co.; W. Phillips; and W. Dartson, Jun., 1816), 162.

<sup>5</sup> Ilona Klímová-Alexander, “Development and institutionalization of Romani representation and administration. Part 2: Beginnings of modern institutionalization (nineteenth century—World War II),” 32, 2 (2005): 614.

farming colonies had been attempted in Wurttemberg and Prussia with the same results. Despite many individual examples of Romani caught in German bureaucratic confusion after 1870, the inability of Prussian national authorities to form a unified policy with the states of the new German Empire only caused non-sedentary Romani to be continuously driven from region to region by local authorities. Though never actually attempted, the same degree of state intervention into British Romani life would emerge as provisions contained in the movable dwellings legislation discussed in this chapter.

Along with Hoyland and others like fellow evangelical reformer James Crabb and wealthy philanthropist Sir Samuel Roberts, by the early nineteenth century regular British citizens also began to offer their views on the future of the Romani. E.O. Winstedt uncovered an anonymous English citizen's July 1778 letter in the *Public Advertiser* that requested the initiation by authorities of the kind of wide-sweeping reforms involving education and settlement later championed by Hoyland and actually attempted in Tsarist Russia and Imperial Germany.<sup>6</sup> A more serious inquiry into whether or not such reforms were possible is evidenced by an 1810 letter in *The Christian Observer* by a writer known as "J.P." who claimed to have first considered the subject in 1801.<sup>7</sup> However, J.P. admonished that his personal investigation had rendered the task too difficult for most missionaries due to the nature of the Romani lifestyle and its organization into kin-based clans that made it difficult to form large congregations.<sup>8</sup> Not willing to abandon efforts entirely, however, he felt that "were encouragement given to them, the Gypsies would be inclined to live in towns and villages, like other people; and would, in another

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<sup>6</sup> E.O. Winstedt, "Notes and Queries: Gypsy 'Civilization,'" *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 2 (January 1908), 92.

<sup>7</sup> J.P., "To the Editor of the *Christian Observer*," *The Christian Observer* vol. 9 (London: Ellerton and Henderson, 1811): 278.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

generation or two, become civilized.”<sup>9</sup> A century later, however, evidence of any progress towards this prescription for reform was minimal. The 1903 publication entitled *The New Forest: Its Tradition, Inhabitants and Customs* mentioned the contemporary “Gypsy Mission” of a Rev. W. Bullen and his wife. Rather than the “encouragement” predicted by J.P. successfully assimilating the Romani into mainstream British society, Bullen struggled to merely “tend the sick, supply the most wretchedly poor with all the comforts that they have the power to give, hold services in the different camps” and “instruct the children.”<sup>10</sup> Though the scattered efforts of individual missionaries concerned with moral salvation seemed like the only available answer to the problem of Romani assimilation for even some private citizens, their effectiveness proved difficult with most observations painting the Romani as unchanged from their centuries-old habits and offered only a few anecdotes of settlement and religious conversion.

As the turn of the twentieth century came and went, perspectives on Romani assimilation gained new urgency despite the fundamentals of the issue itself having changed little over the centuries. Speaking in the House of Lords in 1908, the Archbishop of Canterbury referred to the question of Romani assimilation as “an exceedingly baffling and difficult one” but also felt that “the evil is increasing” with more outdoor dwellers and vagrants than in previous years.<sup>11</sup> Under the auspices of the growing British state, the possibility of a legislative reform movement had gained a new sense of exigency for those pushing for assimilation. Within the century of contemplation dividing the previously mentioned proposals of “J.P.” and the exasperation of the Archbishop, came the most significant effort to target and eliminate the traditional Romani lifestyle in Britain’s history: the ill-fated Movable Dwellings Bill first introduced to Parliament

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>10</sup> Rose C. De Crespigny and Horace Hutchinson, *The New Forest: Its Traditions, Inhabitants and Customs* (London: John Murray, 1903), 96.

<sup>11</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.],” 1 April 1908.

in the 1885. It proposed several new regulations for tents, vans and encampments including new sanitation codes, maximum capacity limits, separate sleeping arrangements for adults of different sexes, annual registration fees, mandatory school attendance for children, restrictions on child labour, and authority granted to new agencies under a complex agreement between local inspectors, the Local Government Board, the Education Department and Parliament itself.<sup>12</sup> Bill proponents like Lord Clifford of Chudleigh sympathized with the Romani but felt the time had come to eliminate a culture that had no place in the modern world. During a debate on the Bill, Clifford stated:

I have in the course of my connection with this Bill received a large number of letters and appeals from admirers of the wild and free life of the gipsy, in favor of preserving his freedom. But I am afraid they overlook the fact that the habits of the gipsy are not altogether suited to the refined and elaborately regulated state of community life in which we live.<sup>13</sup>

Though the bill ultimately failed to become law, the perspectives revealed through debates over its provisions related to education, employment and travelling revealed deep insight into how Britain viewed the Romani's place in a changing society.

As mentioned, the driving force behind the Movable Dwellings Bill was a single evangelical reformer who referred to himself as George Smith of Coalville. In various contexts he claimed to have both love and hate for the Romani like few individuals have before or since. He was born February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1831 at Clayhills in Staffordshire to a strict, religious father who labored as a manufacturer in the brick and tile industry.<sup>14</sup> From the age of three until he was seven, Smith received instruction at a private Dame school from Primitive Methodist teacher Betty Wedgewood before joining his father in the brickfields; an occupation for which Smith

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, *I've Been A Gipsying*, 241-242.

<sup>13</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]," 22 February 1911.

<sup>14</sup> "George Smith, of Coalville," *The Sunday at home: a family magazine for Sabbath reading* (16 August 1878): 519.

would later be credited with the invention of the first ornamental bricks.<sup>15</sup> Primitive Methodism was a Protestant movement known for its promotion of temperance that had gained traction in the century amongst segments of the lower classes who felt their struggles as industrial workers had been largely ignored by the Church of England. Smith later founded his own religious schools while continuing to labour in and eventually manage brickyards throughout England in order to fund his reform campaigns that sought increased health and safety regulations for workers. He often drew the ire of locals accustomed to income from children and women. English historian Courtney Dainton pointed how, unlike most progressive reformers of the late-Victoria era who were wealthy and “almost without exception...came from the upper classes,” Smith was the only one of note whose philosophy was rooted in his own impoverishment.<sup>16</sup> In classic progressivist fashion, Smith regularly lamented the wealthy’s infatuation with material success and, for the poor, the equally abhorrent distractions of frivolous amusements which he felt drew them away from religious life.<sup>17</sup> His appointment as manager of the Whitwick Colliery Company in Coalville in Leicestershire in 1859 saw him adopt the title of “George Smith of Coalville,” as a proud expression of his working-class heritage. In an earlier October 1882 letter to the *Morning Post*, Smith had outlined how his proposed Romani legislation “would improve their condition, without interfering with their liberty to any amount worth naming.”<sup>18</sup> Though he has received little attention in the twenty-first century, a recent biographical article on Smith was authored by environmental health professional Susan Lammin in *Pioneers of Public Health*. After highlighting his successes in reforming labour conditions in brickyards and on canal boats, particularly for children, Lammin virtually ignored Smith’s work with the Romani which deeply

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Courtney Dainton, “George Smith of Coalville,” *History Today* vol. 29, no. 9. <https://www.historytoday.com/courtney-dainton/george-smith-coalville> (Accessed 10 July 2018)

<sup>17</sup> George Smith, *I’ve Been A Gipsying*, 177.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 251.

consumed the final decades of his life. Instead, Lammin concluded simply that “George’s efforts went into writing describing problems as he saw them, proposing remedies and above all persisting in his message until he achieved his goals.”<sup>19</sup> Oddly, no mention is given in the article to any aspect of Smith’s relationship to the Romani or his repeated legislative failures.

A regular at London press gatherings and a fixture in the House of Commons lobby, Smith’s private religious interests directly coincided with progressive politicians’ push for new children’s protections agencies and sanitarian reforms beyond the existing National Education League or the Public Health Act of 1866 as well as the Victorian moral virtues increasingly associated with social mobility, “hard work” and sedentary life. This progressive zeitgeist offered fertile legislative ground with which Smith was able to seed his ideology in an effort to endeavor “improvement” upon the Romani. He was joined in 1885 by future Communist Party of Great Britain organizer Tom Mann, together founding The George Smith of Coalville Band of Love; a Primitive Methodist denomination whose meetings were later described by Thomas Acton as “half-evangelical, half-socialist” and whose main focus was Christian education.<sup>20</sup> Despite his association with Mann, of leftist radicals Smith stated, “Socialists and Communists are the rotten toads of society, whose love for the country’s welfare consists in inflating themselves till they burst, like the frog in the fable.”<sup>21</sup> Smith’s alleged encounter at the Northampton races with a travelling French merchant he labeled a Communist saw him decry the man’s “lies and infamy” as the merchant publically orated his opposition to the continued financial support of clergy by the lower classes.<sup>22</sup> Smith himself described the Band’s focus as the elimination of “Christian apathy, legislative indifference, social deadness, and philanthropic

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Lammin, “George Smith of Coalville (‘the Children’s Friend’): Campaigner for factory and canal boats legislation,” in *Pioneers in Public Health: Lessons from History*, ed. Jill Stewart (New York: Routledge, 2017), 51.

<sup>20</sup> Acton, *Gypsy politics and social change*, 113.

<sup>21</sup> George Smith, *I’ve Been A Gipsying*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

neglect.”<sup>23</sup> He was widely praised by progressive legislators in Parliament, even acting as a political agent for a Leicester M.P. for several years.<sup>24</sup> Smith’s earlier role in the 1871 passage of an amendment to the Factory and Workshops Act led to him receiving multiple public declarations of honor from several M.P.’s.<sup>25</sup> Smith would later decline their invitation to stand for Parliament but continued his observance of many late night sessions in the House of Commons.<sup>26</sup> He also received three hundred pounds from the Royal Bounty Fund in 1885 and a “George Smith Fund” was set up by the *Pall Mall Gazette* newspaper which he used to purchase a house at Crick in Rugby.<sup>27</sup>

Contained throughout Smith’s writings are his vivid descriptions of the deplorable conditions experienced by the Romani which he always juxtaposed with their alleged great appreciation of his presenting of Christianity to them. Though, he also appeared aware of the more negative aspects of his public reputation offered by those who disapproved of his efforts. After Smith allegedly donated some coins to a fund to help the family of a Romani woman who had burned to death in a van fire, her Romani advocates appeared surprised upon hearing who he was.<sup>28</sup> Of their reaction Smith wrote, “I suppose they had been told by wicked outsiders that I had nothing but hard words for the gipsies and travelers.”<sup>29</sup> Smith’s fade into near anonymity in the years prior to his death may appear odd considering Britain’s *The Sunday at home* magazine having boasted of his letters of support from Queen Victoria, Presidents’ of the United States and France as well as other continental dignitaries.<sup>30</sup> In a biography published a year after his death,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Thomas, “The Literary Education of George Smith of Coalville,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 64.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid..

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *I’ve Been A Gipsying*, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Dainton, “George Smith.”

Edwin Hodder wrote of the polarizing Smith, “He was praised in the press, on the platform, and in the pulpit more than any man of his day; he was hunted down, persecuted and maligned to a degree that often involved personal violence.”<sup>31</sup> Smith was alleged to have passed away poor, mad and in an obscurity disproportionate to the notoriety he achieved during his lifetime. An 1895 obituary in *The Spectator* lauded his campaigns to improve the lives of children in brickyards and canal boats but admitted “he had devoted his efforts to obtaining a similar improvement in the condition of the children of the van-dwelling tribe, but unfortunately without success.”<sup>32</sup> Openly driven by his evangelical enthusiasm, Smith would author a multitude of books, articles, pamphlets and speeches that affectively launched an aggressive crusade of salvation in stated opposition to traditional Romani practices. Susan Lammin identified that Smith’s “main tactic was to write descriptively and publish as often as possible...His books were designed to be sentimental and to raise the indignation of their readers.”<sup>33</sup> Canadian publisher and educator Alan Thomas wrote in 1998 that Smith utilized “the classic formula for Victorian social reform: press revelation, public response, parliamentary action.”<sup>34</sup> Only months before his death Smith continued his vigorous campaign for Romani reform despite numerous setbacks in Parliament, writing, “I sent seventy-letters to the leading press in the country, which will do much good in preparing the way for my Bill.”<sup>35</sup>

Though the Movable Dwellings Bill had many proponents, including Smith’s personal friends who repeatedly introduced it into Parliament, others deeply opposed its provisions. Earl Fortescue objected to the bill’s increased oversight and inspection of Romani tents, referring to the request as “superfluous” and “offensive” to non-Romani recreationalists while even calling

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Obituary,” *The Speaker: the liberal review*, Vol. 11 (June 29, 1985), 700.

<sup>33</sup> Lammin, “George Smith of Coalville,” 51.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, “The Literary Education of George Smith of Coalville,” 65.

<sup>35</sup> Dainton, “George Smith.”

for the removal of the word “tent” entirely from a later attempted amendment.<sup>36</sup> Lord Farrer offered his complaints regarding the attempted registration of tents, stating, “You cannot apply regulations of air and space to a piece of sail cloth on two sticks, which is the kind of movable dwelling with which you often have to deal.”<sup>37</sup> Others like other Irish Nationalist M.P. Tim Healy opposed it on grounds that there were no penalties for non-registration of dwellings and worried it would only serve to harass the Romani to no useful result.<sup>38</sup> Healy also anticipated future Romani enfranchisement and thought it best for politicians not to provoke their resentment before stating that if the bill entered committee, he would advocate for the right to vote for each individual who registered a van or tent; irking M.P.’s not ready to grant voting rights to perceived vagrants.<sup>39</sup> While these concerns all appear largely practical in nature, they also offer insight into the way in which debates over Romani assimilation forced internal elements within the British state to examine and negotiate the limits of intended reach while hinting at a deeper ideological conflict.

The only evidence of direct Romani input into debates over the bill are the recollections of George “Lazy” Smith. Though most British considered him to be of only partial Romani ethnicity, he remained a life-long advocate for Romani rights and causes. Reflecting on evidence in the notebook of Welsh Romany Rye William Eggleston, author John Myers wrote in 1936 that Lazy Smith’s “happiest memory was that of his visit to the House of Commons, where he gave evidence in connexion with the first Movable Dwellings Bill.”<sup>40</sup> Myers quoted his conversation with Lazy Smith who recalled his account of a May 29<sup>th</sup> 1891 attendance at a private meeting in

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<sup>36</sup> HLD, “Housing of the Working Classes (England) Bill. —(No. 177.),” 21 July 1885.

<sup>37</sup> HLD, “Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill. [H.L.],” 28 April 1914.

<sup>38</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, Debates, “Movable Dwellings Bill: [Bill 239.] Second Reading,” 10 August 1885.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Myers, “Lazy Smith in Egglestone’s Note-Book. I. Introduction,” *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* vol. 16 (January 1937): 4.

the House of Commons to argue against the proposed legislation. George Smith of Coalville himself was allegedly also present at the meeting and received a direct challenge from Lazy. Myers quoted him as stating, “It was got up by George Smith of Coalville, an’ e’ said everything as ’e could about Romanicals as wa’nt true...An’ I took all as Smith said about us, an’ POUNDED it.”<sup>41</sup> Lazy Smith went on to accuse George Smith of never having met any real Romani and offered the rebuttal, “Them folks as ’e knows is tinkers an’ pegmakers—the’ aint Gypsies’...An’ I telled ’em what rale Gypsies was—the particlarest an’ cleanliest people there is.”<sup>42</sup> Lazy Smith then continued to address the meeting and answer questions, comparing the Romani lifestyle to that of Jesus Christ as well proclaiming the Romani’s love of Queen Victoria and their openness to enrolling their children in schools, which he claimed to have done himself.<sup>43</sup> Whatever the legitimacy of Myers’ recollections of Lazy Smith’s testimony, his influence in rallying other Romani against the bill appeared limited. Thomas Acton later reflected on how “Lazy Smith was trying to deal with leviathan, the modern state, as though it were just another country squire, just another local nobleman; it is evident that he just did not understand the forces which produce legislation; and so he could hardly transmit any explanation of it to other Gypsies, many of whom regarded him as considerably eccentric.”<sup>44</sup>

The following sections will examine British perspectives on attempted Romani assimilation by way of formal education, sedentary employment and the elimination of the travelling lifestyle itself from the late-Victorian era through to the First World War. They will attempt to incorporate a variety of perspectives apart from those presented in debates over

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>44</sup> Acton, *Gypsy politics and social change*, 115.

Smith's Movable Dwellings Bill though due to the importance assigned to the bill in the period the two cannot be entirely separated in discussion.

### Perspectives On: Education

The expansion of childhood educational opportunities for lower and working class families became a major component of Britain's progressive movements in the nineteenth century. Politicians and private reform campaigners sought to generate a more educated and morally upstanding populace with more value to the state as industrial workers and both domestic and foreign imperial administrators. A growing economy and increased material wealth also made the incomes generated through child labour less of a necessity for many families than had previously been the case. As an almost entirely illiterate people who had historically avoided formal education, year-round wage labour, large-scale military conscription and government involvement of any kind, the Romani became a prime target of the movement.

Education legislation in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods placed new regulations upon children and parents, particularly those engaged in non-sedentary employments or who were forced to regularly move as itinerant labour. The legislation was also at least partially a response to the perceived increase in youth vagrancy that some felt was the result of industrialization having caused more families to leave farms and pursue work in factories. Parliament's Education Act of 1870, established in Scotland in 1872, created new locally elected and funded schools boards to construct more schools in order to make education more available to the masses. These schools were meant to supplement existing church-run schools whose enrollment was voluntary but were seen by progressives as limited in their capacity to increase enrollment. The act also led to the building of more reformatory schools while the amended Education Act of 1880 went further in prescribing mandatory industrial, in some cases residential, school attendance. The act encompassed the lives of all children between the ages of five and ten (to age 12 by 1899) who were not otherwise in a voluntary schooling program with

finances and imprisonment for parents neglecting to enroll them.<sup>45</sup> By 1889, British Poor Law authorities had been granted the power to apply for parental rights over orphaned children and the 1890s saw new national legal provisions that allowed local parishes to apply for custody of the children of abusive parents.<sup>46</sup> Section 118 of the Children's Act of 1908 ordered additional fines for families with children above the age of five who were not enrolled in a school of some kind.<sup>47</sup> The 1908 act also stated that non-enrolled children may be confiscated without a warrant by local authorities and placed in residential schools following the arrest of their parents.<sup>48</sup> Important for the Romani, however, was the fact that the 1908 law did not apply to children during working months for families engaged in seasonal occupations, typically April to September, a period when many Romani families were hired as farm labour. Its punishments could also be avoided by families able to produce a certificate signed by schoolmasters indicating that a student had made at least two hundred appearances over the course of year, with the obvious potential for forgery. For Britain's Romani, who remained deeply suspicious of the cultural effects of non-Romani formal education upon their children, the inability to enforce any of the aforementioned acts from 1880 to 1908 revealed deficiencies in the laws themselves as well as in the powers afforded local police and magistrates who lacked the means of preventing flights from districts before parents could be fined, imprisoned or have their children confiscated.

Although authorities appeared aware of the Romani's history of being deeply averse to formal education, few seemed to take into account the likely difficulties found in imposing new standards. This most famously occurred earlier under eighteenth century Austrian Empress Maria Theresa whose attempted launch of a vigorous campaign of Romani education which

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<sup>45</sup> *Report from the Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders: Vagrants, Beggars, Inebriates and Juvenile Delinquents* (Edinburgh: Neill & Co., 1895), 417.

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 109.

<sup>47</sup> "Children Act 1908," *The National Archives*, 61.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

included state sanctioned child confiscation and residential schools proved exceedingly difficult to enforce, both in confiscating children and preventing their escape or rescue by parents, and was ultimately abandoned shortly after it commenced. A similar undertaking was proposed by several German states throughout the nineteenth century but also failed, with the exception of some increased enrollment by already sedentary Sinti Romani. Some traveling German Romani families went as far as claiming foreign citizenship and requesting expulsion from a state in order to retain custody of their children before sneaking back over the border at a later date.<sup>49</sup>

Regarding the Romani fear of formal education in Britain and throughout Europe, Becky Taylor later wrote:

Not only did Traveller parents have very different aspirations for their children than settled society, but they were also justified in being suspicious of its role as the vanguard of a dominant culture. It was not that they rejected education outright, but rather that they were suspicious of the package in which it was wrapped...<sup>50</sup>

Even George Smith was largely in line with most Romani perspectives in his dissatisfaction with legislation that threatened child confiscation. Instead, he sought a compromise whereby formal education could somehow be mandated without separating families. Smith wrote, “Any of my plans would be a thousand times better than destroying parental responsibility by taking their children from them by force and sending them to industrial schools.”<sup>51</sup>

Describing an interaction with an illiterate, married Romani father of eight employed in tinkering and fiddling, J.P. from Cambridge’s already mentioned 1811 letter in *The Christian Observer* had stated that “He attends church constantly on a Sunday; and though he has not any regular notion of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, he has some very good general ideas of

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<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Illuzzi, *Gypsies in Germany and Italy 1861-1914: Lives Outside the Law* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 101.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, “Travellers in Britain,” 595.

<sup>51</sup> George Smith, *I’ve Been A Gipsying*, 348.

religion and morality.”<sup>52</sup> Yet by the late-Victoria era, a vague but acceptable degree of Christian belief was no longer considered by most progressives who supported Smith’s Movable Dwellings Bill as a satisfactory level of education for anyone in Britain. A different argument suggested a longer tradition of questioning the effectiveness of any mandate as well as the Romani’s desire for any plan that may have resulted in parents’ periodic separations from their children. Missionary James Crabb had earlier noted of the Romani in 1831 that, “Sooner would they die than suffer their children to go to the parish workhouses.”<sup>53</sup> Alexander Hay Japp concurred in 1836 that, “nothing is more repugnant to a race like the gypsies than the smell of the study. The moonlight is more to their taste than the midnight oil; and like all outdoor people, they hate pedants.”<sup>54</sup> Seeing the Romani as outpaced by the modern world, in 1883, *The Sunday at home* magazine author E. Brewer was surprised by the lingering illiteracy of a hard-working people who “seem to have evaded the scrutiny of the school board agents most thoroughly.”<sup>55</sup> Like Japp, Brewer doubted the Romani would ever be able to function in a classroom, being “so essentially gypsies in their habits and manners, that fresh air and freedom of movement seem to them the necessities of life.”<sup>56</sup> In the Edwardian decade, some remained in agreement with Japp and Brewer regarding the Romani’s unsuitability to formal education but claimed it was British society that was backwards. Arthur Symons 1907 *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* article entitled “In Praise of Gypsies” claimed that “Education is one of the follies of modern civilization” as he felt it drove both the Romani and other English peasant families apart and

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<sup>52</sup> J.P., “To the Editor,” 279.

<sup>53</sup> James Crabb, *The Gypsies’ Advocate or, Observations on the Origin, Character, Manners, and Habits of The English Gypsies* (London, 1831), 58.

<sup>54</sup> Japp, “The Gypsies as Seen By Friendly Eyes,” 576.

<sup>55</sup> Brewer, “Gipsy Encampments,” 113.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

stripped them of their valuable connection with the natural world.<sup>57</sup> British poet and member of The Gypsy and Folk Lore Club, Claude Burton, concurred with Symons and in 1912 asked the Romani, “Book learning, doubtless, is not quite your forte, but is there need for much in your position? Yours is a knowledge of a wider sort, And....well, I envy you your erudition.”<sup>58</sup> Four year earlier, House of Lords member the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Russell had sympathized with the push for the education of Romani children but was also “not at all sure that any great harm would be done to them if a considerable portion of their youths were spent on open commons instead of in public elementary schools.”<sup>59</sup> Russell’s comments and perhaps that of Burton, Symons and others may be reflective of the strictures of British schools, perhaps even their own experiences, as much as a romanticism of Romani freedom and an elegy to the old England overtaken by industrialization. In any event, after politicians and authorities had otherwise come to terms with the general need for mandated education to affect progress in British society, opinion on whether or not it was beneficial to the Romani remained divided.

One of the few Romani voices on the issue came via the 1970 autobiography of Silvester Gordon Boswell who grew up in a Romani family that for generations situated their tents on the popular tourist destination of Blackpool’s South Shore. He described his Grandfather having received formal instruction at a day school for the children of soldiers conscripted into military service during the Napoleonic wars. Boswell understood it to be “the first instance of any education among Romanies” in Britain and referred to his grandfather as “a grammarian of the ancient Gypsies and their language.”<sup>60</sup> Despite his grandfather’s introduction of state-run formal education into the family lineage, Boswell recalled both positive and negative experiences in the

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<sup>57</sup> Symons, “In Praise of Gypsies,” 295.

<sup>58</sup> MacFie, “The Gypsies: an Outline Sketch,” 45.

<sup>59</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill,” 1 April 1908.

<sup>60</sup> Boswell, *The Book of Boswell*, 13.

early twentieth century English schools he occasionally attended, dependent upon their strictures. He confessed to having fonder memories of his extracurricular activities, writing, “We could play in the sand all day round our home, and bathe in the sea when we liked all the summer through, when thousands of other children would only get the privilege one day a year... We were free, and only came home when we wanted something to eat.”<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, Boswell himself evidently acquired some degree of literacy which likely contributed to his family’s relative economic success as traders and fortune tellers in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Boswell family’s experience on the edges of both Romani and mainstream British cultures was somewhat atypical as it related to formal education. Though some children of Romani families are recorded as obtaining limited enrollment in industrial and reformatory day schools, the acts passed by Parliament were largely deemed failures by period analysts.<sup>62</sup> George Smith had earlier detailed a Romani family with eight children led by a literate father who operated a travelling “show of varieties.”<sup>63</sup> Smith’s tale, possibly fictitious as it appears to promote his proposed national legislation, described how the father failed to respond to a summons from the Durham School Board after refusing to send his children to school. Upon admittance of the Board to a local court that the man was summoned under a local bylaw rather than any official national policy for school attendance, any actions against him were determined to be unenforceable.<sup>64</sup> These types of legal miasmas haunted the efforts of authorities to implement the acts upon the Romani, made more difficult by the lack of political resulting from public disinterest in the effort. Fifteen years after the 1880 Education Act’s implementation, James Badenoch Nicolson, a council to the Scotch Education Department, expressed concerns

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>62</sup> *Report from the Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders*, 418.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, *I’ve Been A Gipsying*, 47.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 48.

over the failures of the act and its inability to be enforced on traveller families.<sup>65</sup> In addition to citing of the general lack of funding for enforcement by local councils, Nicolson also described how the presence of a school board officer at a Romani camp often caused a family to immediately change districts and highlighted how some schoolmasters refused to take Romani children due to their reputation for poor hygiene and the complaints of non-Romani parents of other students.<sup>66</sup> An article the same year in the legal commentary publication *Justice of the Peace* entitled “Gypsies” further described the circumstances with which enforcement of new regulations upon the Romani was difficult. In reference to attempted education reforms, it stated that “to get the proper officer to visit the encampment and ascertain whether the Elementary Education Acts have been complied with...usually causes a general move next day.”<sup>67</sup> In Parliament, Lord Farrer revealed the conclusions of his own personal investigation that uncovered the Romani practice of congregating on common grounds near schools where enrollment was already at maximum capacity; making it less likely that authorities would attempt to enroll their children.<sup>68</sup> Liberal fixture Lord Edward Marjoribanks, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Tweedmouth, later identified what he felt was a major flaw in the proposed Movable Dwellings Bill, “If a child is going to be made to attend a particular school the dwelling then ceases to be a movable one and the whole position is changed.”<sup>69</sup> On mandatory education for Romani children that could not result in anything other than forced removal from their parents, Marjoribanks considered it a short-term solution and questioned whether “public opinion would support a proposal of that kind.”<sup>70</sup> He expressed his lack of optimism towards the bill’s passing

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<sup>65</sup> *Report from the Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders*, 417.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> “Gypsies,” *The Justice of the Peace*, 788.

<sup>68</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill,” 1 April 1908.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

and thought the objection from schools themselves would be considerable over a plan that saw children regularly changing districts.<sup>71</sup> The hesitance of Parliament to pass educational reforms exacting enough in nature that their enforcement upon the increasingly romanticized Romani was a realistic achievement clearly evidences the negotiated limits of mandated education in the period. The opposition of politicians, journalists and gypsiologists who considered no harm to have come to the Romani through their lack of formal education expressed a range of doubts about the merits of a project seeking to increase citizen's value to the growing state, Romani or otherwise.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

### Perspectives On: Employment

From broom making and knife sharpening to horse dealing and prize fighting, the period's British Romani are recorded as engaging in variety of crafting, trading, manual labour and entertainments too numerous to list in this paper. Until the decreased use of horses as transportation in favor of automobiles, most Romani families divided their labour between women who left the camp during the day to engage in fortune telling, selling or begging and men who worked in the camp and took care of the horses. Also prevalent were tents and booths that offered fortune telling, dancing and beer drinking set adjacent to annual fairs, festivals and horse races. An 1888 description in *Harper's Magazine* of "A Gipsy Fair in Surrey" describes Romani horse and pony dealers, game operators and sweets sellers working in close proximity to non-Romani tool and watch merchants, horse and steam powered ride operators and lighted mural exhibitors.<sup>72</sup> Victorian Britain's leading showman, legendary circus proprietor George Sanger, claimed that he actually never knew any show workers to be of Romani descent.<sup>73</sup> He nevertheless recalled the "cunning" Romani's propensity for pecuniary proficiency, stating, "though we kept apart from and, indeed, rather looked down upon them, (they) had the trick of making money and having made it were very fond of displaying their wealth on their persons in the shape of finery and trinkets."<sup>74</sup> David Mayall described their perceived economic adaptability as a "fine example of Victoria attitudes to private enterprise."<sup>75</sup> Even the female Romani practice of fortune telling drew some begrudging respect from the previously mentioned *Criminal Investigation* handbook which offered backhanded praise for Romani fraud and

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<sup>72</sup> F. Anstey, "A Gipsy Fair in Surrey," *Harper's Magazine* vol. 76 (1888), 627-33.

<sup>73</sup> George Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman: My Life and Adventures in Camp and Caravan the World Over*, (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd. 1909), 46.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, 64.

trickery since “such incidents truly show the gipsy to be a shrewd psychologist.”<sup>76</sup> It should also be noted how many period sources describe the British Romani as having been rarely observed, if at all, seeking admittance to charity workhouses or asking for direct out-relief payments. A 2018 UK House of Commons report suggests this may still be the case today. It was unclear as to the degree to which the current Romani collect welfare benefits but the report admitted that for travelers there may remain a cultural bias against the practice.<sup>77</sup>

Despite evidence of Romani economic independence, a major point of contention for progressive reformers was the particular nature of their work. The lack of adherence to a settled life of regular industrial wage labour was increasingly seen as outmoded. Personal friend of George Smith of Coalville, journalist J. Ewing Ritchie, observed a family of Romani in an 1879 London winter encampment. Highly reflective of Smith’s own associations between traditional Romani employments and immorality, Ritchie described how the family made clothes pegs and repaired broken furniture for resale as they “lazily” worked.<sup>78</sup> Ritchie offered an opinion on how to remedy the situation, at least for Romani women, writing, “If they could be trained to domestic service, (they) would have a far happier life than they can ever hope to lead,” before conceding that “the leading lady in this camp is absent on business.”<sup>79</sup> Others not associated with Smith’s reforms took a different view. Nineteenth century Russian ethnographer N.G. Shiber identified an “exclusive love of freedom” rather than laziness or any cultural defect for the Romani’s perceived lack of engagement in new industrial labour in his country.<sup>80</sup> Also attacking both Smith’s and Ritchie’s perceptions as well as what German social theorist Max

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<sup>76</sup> Adam, *Criminal Investigation*, 365.

<sup>77</sup> Cromarty, *Gypsies and Travellers*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> “J. Ewing Ritchie, ‘In a Gipsy Camp’ (1879),” *Secret Commissions: An Anthology of Victorian Investigative Journalism*, ed. Stephen Donovan and Matthew Rubery (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 147.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>80</sup> O’Keeffe, “Gypsies as a litmus test,” 115.

Weber had recently defined as the “Protestant ethic,” *Journal* author Arthur Symons felt the Romani had “no desire to work for the sake of work, an odious modern creed from which only the Gypsy is traditionally and persistently exempt.”<sup>81</sup> The views of Shiber, Ritchie and others who considered the Romani inoculated from the working-class drudgery of the new economy appear as a mostly romantic projection when juxtaposed with one 1907 British parliamentary report. It claimed that approximately a third of all British agricultural workers were Romani who laboured seasonally for hourly wages, challenging the perceptions of those who both condemned and praised them as entirely incapable of employment in such a capacity.<sup>82</sup> Also significant were the ways in which Romani acquisitiveness led to their emergence as a significant consumer demographic in and of themselves; a fact rarely acknowledged by most observers. Rural English enthusiast Richard Jefferies described in 1889 how at the conclusion of hop picking season, a major source of annual income for many Romani throughout Europe, local shopkeepers portioned their budgets to specifically advertise their wares to them while non-Romani travelling merchants actively sought their business.<sup>83</sup>

As the opportunistic Romani continued to pursue whatever forms of income appeared most advantageous but still met their criteria of minimal involvement with authorities, their association in the popular British imagination with the employees of circuses and other travelling amusements was elevated to new importance during the debates over Smith’s proposed Movable Dwellings Bill. George Sanger’s claim of social and cultural separation between show workers and the Romani materialized in an opposition to reform that unforeseen by Smith or his Parliamentary allies. Revealed in the debates were new economic perceptions of a people

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<sup>81</sup> Symons, “In Praise of Gypsies,” 298.

<sup>82</sup> Leo Lucassen and Wim Willems, “The Weakness of Well-Ordered Societies: Gypsies in Western Europe, the Ottoman Empire and India, 1400-1914,” *Review* 26, 3 (2003): 291.

<sup>83</sup> Jefferies, “Field and Hedgerow,” 163.

considered socially truncated by even their proponents that temporarily aligned them with members of the upper most echelons of British aristocracy.

Part of George Smith's initial outline for new Romani regulations in the 1880s included provision for a student pass-book to be signed by teachers or administrators at various schools around Britain so that Romani children, canal-boat children, auctioneers' children, and most importantly, circus and show worker children, could record their attendance and ensure the officials of a proposed national education program that they were meeting the standards of attendance.<sup>84</sup> Unlike the mostly illiterate and politically disconnected Romani, show workers who feared the potential economic impact of increased regulations on travelling dwellings possessed a much greater means to lobby Parliament and soon formed a union to the oppose the bill following its initial submission for debate in 1885. They found financial support from what Thomas Acton described as educated "intellectuals of showman origin," a class of people otherwise without parallel in the Romani community, that included future association chaplain Reverend Thomas Horne as well as George Sanger, both of whom also launched their own personal media campaigns against Smith's bill.<sup>85</sup> The *National Fairground and Circus Archive* at the University of Sheffield refers to the 1889 creation of the United Kingdom Showman and Van-dwellers' Protection Association as "the decisive and important event in the history of traveling show people as a community" while identifying the lobbying efforts of Smith as the primary impetus for its formation.<sup>86</sup> The Association's official position considered the entirety of the bill to have already been provisioned under the Public Health Act of 1875 and was

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<sup>84</sup> George Smith, *I've Been A Gipsying*, 172.

<sup>85</sup> Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, 111.

<sup>86</sup> "From Van Dwellers to Showmen's Guild," *National Fairground and Circus Archive*.

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfca/researchandarticles/fromvandwellers> (Accessed 17 January 2017)

therefore unnecessary.<sup>87</sup> The Association's own list of its initial objectives were "to separate showpeople from Traveler-Gypsies, and to defend the homes, liberties and way of life of the showpeople of Great Britain."<sup>88</sup> Important to the association's desire for exemption from the bill's proposals was a firm separation from the Romani people for whom they identified as Smith's real target.

Because the United Kingdom Showman and Van-dwellers' Protection Association did not count any members of Parliament in its ranks, they were required to seek the services of a more politically connected organization capable of blocking the bill's passage. The result was their acquisition of the services of the also newly formed laissez-faire political lobby group, the Liberty and Property Defence League. The League was founded in July of 1882 by sixty-four year old anti-reform, independently minded, liberal-conservative House of Lords backbencher Francis Richard Charteris, the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Wemyss; self-styled after 1853 by his family title of Lord Elcho.<sup>89</sup> Philosophically, the openly social-Darwinist Elcho and other libertarian "individualists" of the period were influenced by anti-statist evolutionary theorist Herbert Spencer who proposed an anarchical utopia that eliminated the state entirely.<sup>90</sup> Writing in 1999, political geographer Jim MacLaughlin viewed the period's traditional Romani lifestyle as also "essentially anarchic" and of a "fundamentally anti-statist nature."<sup>91</sup> Janet Lyon later agreed with this perception, writing, "This is the celebrated Romani 'Gypsy,' an emblem of natural liberty, unencumbered mobility, communal loyalty and harmony, admirably impervious to manipulation by the state and everywhere subverting the disciplinarity of evolving modern

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<sup>87</sup> HLD, "Movable Dwellings Bill," 1 April 1908.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Edward Bristow, "The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism," *The Historical Journal* vol. 18, no.4 (December 1975): 761.

<sup>90</sup> Bristow, "The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism," 771.

<sup>91</sup> Jim MacLaughlin, "European Gypsies and the Historical Geography of Loathing," *Review* vol. 22, iss. 1 (1999): 31.

institutions.”<sup>92</sup> A potentially pertinent accompaniment to MacLaughlin’s and Lyon’s takes came earlier via a 1910 article in *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* which contained some supposed observations of British Romani’s having fled to the Americas following a round of persecutions after authorities suspected anarchists of hiding in their camps.<sup>93</sup> Also noteworthy is a 1974 article by N. Soldon in a collection entitled *Essays in Anti-Labour History*. Soldon wrote of The Liberty and Property Defence League, whose interests in opposing new progressive regulations temporarily aligned them with the Romani via the show worker’s opposition to Smith’s bill, that “It was no accident that the league’s emphasis on freedom echoed the shouts of the anarchists, equally alienated by the growing size, organization and impersonal qualities of an industrial life.”<sup>94</sup> Holder of tens of thousands of acres of estates in England and Scotland, Lord Elcho himself summarized the League’s mission as an effort “To uphold the principles of liberty, and guard the rights of labour and property of all kinds against undue interference by the state; and encourage Self-help *versus* State-help.”<sup>95</sup> In a more materialist take on the League’s influences, historian Edward Bristow identified new land taxes, anti-landlord acts and labour conflicts affecting Elcho’s personal mining interests as the point in which he was consumed by fears of over legislation.<sup>96</sup> Elcho had nevertheless maneuvered through what Catholic history professor Christopher J. Kauffman characterized as the kaleidoscopic nature of labour conflict in 1840s, 50s and 60s that featured shifting political alliances based on “strategy, priorities and

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<sup>92</sup> Lyon, “Gadze Modernism,” 518.

<sup>93</sup> Berry, “The American Gypsy,” 623.

<sup>94</sup> N. Soldon, “*Laissez-Faire* as Dogma: The Liberty and Property Defence League, 1882-1914,” in *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*, ed. Kenneth D. Brown (London: The Macmillan Press, 1974), 233.

<sup>95</sup> The Earl of Wemyss, *The Socialist Spectre: Speech delivered in the House of Lords, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1895* (London: The Liberty and Property Defence League, 1895), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Bristow, “The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism,” 762, 764.

personalities” over ideology.<sup>97</sup> Despite the League’s open support of business interests, Bristow felt its messages promoting economic autonomy cut across class lines and exploited some historically “anti-statist” sentiments still present amongst many workers.<sup>98</sup> It was in this tradition that the Liberty and Property Defence League found common political ground with the United Kingdom Showman and Van-dwellers’ Protection Association. Kellow Chesney’s research found that Victorian show workers exhibited a “highly individualist, self-reliant way of life and over-riding concern for their own equipment” that made them a prime demographic from which to recruit League support.<sup>99</sup> This may be evidenced in the transcript of 1895 annual meeting when association chairman F.T. Salva further proclaimed that “his experience of travelling showmen had proved to him that they desired to do for themselves what many meddling legislators would do for them by other means.”<sup>100</sup> Despite a hierarchical separation by arguably several socio-economic class categories, the alliance of itinerant British show workers and the League’s mostly wealthy, landed-elite founders indirectly acted on the Romani’s behalf in opposition to the bill. A point of commonality may be considered in all three groups’ conscious and unconscious desires to slow the march of time and maintain traditions. For the League this meant decelerating democratic reforms and the overall increase in state intervention into the economy; for the Association, the proposal of new cumbersome van and tent regulations caused stress for an industry already losing market share to new entertainment technologies like cinema and the phonograph; and for the mostly silent Romani, survival in the face of new reductions of common land, consumer demands for low-cost, industrially mass-produced goods transported by

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<sup>97</sup> Christopher J. Kauffman, “Lord Elcho, Trade Unionism and Democracy,” in *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*, ed. Kenneth D. Brown (London: The Macmillian Press Ltd., 1974), 185.

<sup>98</sup> Bristow, “The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism,” 762.

<sup>99</sup> Kellow Chesney, *The Victorian Underworld* (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd., 1970), 75.

<sup>100</sup> “General Notes: Van Dwellers,” *The Sanitary Institute (Being Volume XVI. Of the Transactions of the Institute.)* (London: Offices of the Sanitary Institute, 1895.): 170.

rail and mechanized farming whose diminishing of the value of rural labour had earlier played a role in the mid-century abolition of Romani slavery in the Romanian principalities. Even the popular practice of Romani fortune telling had been affected technology. A 1909 article describing a scene outside a phonograph parlor in New York City introduced “Esmeralda,” the life-sized animatronic figure of a “Gypsy Queen.” The author described her as positioned inside of a glass case, “reading” a set of tarot cards, and delivering printed fortunes for a penny.<sup>101</sup>

At a July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1885 Lords Sitting, Elcho orated his perceive link between the proposed Movable Dwellings Bill and several other potential acts related to trade and manufacturing, stating, “These measures may be summed up as being invasions by the State on the self-government of the various interests of the country, and curtailments of freedom of contract between employers and employed.”<sup>102</sup> Elcho’s passionate opposition to the bill’s new sanitary provisions included the statement, “What! Is not this a gross violation of the rights of the subject? Every gipsy’s van is his castle, and he should be at liberty to make a pig-sty of it if he likes.”<sup>103</sup> Opposing Elcho was Conservative Party leader Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury and future Prime Minister. Salisbury countered by pointing out a three-hundred year tradition of state actions for “the most necessitous class” but failed to persuade the League’s founder.<sup>104</sup> In his further attempt to reduce Elcho’s argument by attacking his dogmatism, Salisbury stated, “do not imagine that by merely affixing to it the reproach of Socialism you can seriously affect the progress of any great legislative movement, or destroy those high arguments which are derived from the noblest principles of philanthropy and

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<sup>101</sup> “By Esmeralda, Gypsy Queen: Mr. MacBlink Has His Fortune Told and Thinks He Got a Lot for a Cent,” *The Sun* (New York) (5 September 1909), 10.

<sup>102</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, *Debates*, “Recent Legislation—The Socialist Tendency.—Observations.,” 31 July 1885.

<sup>103</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers*, 140.

<sup>104</sup> HLD, “Recent Legislation,” 31 July 1885.

religion.”<sup>105</sup> The 1885 exchange between Elcho and Salisbury illustrated the opposing anxieties over modern state intervention and the fate of the lower classes as they were passed through the medium of a Romani people for whom neither was otherwise concerned with or had likely ever encountered.

By 1889, The Liberty and Property Defence League’s primary instrument of obstruction on behalf of the United Kingdom Showman and Van-dwellers’ Protection Association and the only M.P. to officially fully oppose the bill in debate, was the Conservative for Hornsey, Henry Charles “Inky” Stephens, who chaired the Association’s first meeting in 1889. Stephens was born the son of Dr. Henry Stephens, the famed manufacturer of British writing ink.<sup>106</sup> He later engineered a personal electricity grid for his home in Wiltshire and established a water company in the area that remains active today.<sup>107</sup> As a grandfather, Stephens was involved in a sensational child custody dispute that received international attention as a result of him aiding his daughter in their hasty abduction of his two grandsons from the care of her estranged husband out of fear he might take the children to the continent.<sup>108</sup> Stephens’ involvement in an 1889 debate on the Movable Dwellings Bill saw him state both the League’s and the Association’s view that the proposed regulations were unclear in many respects and too difficult for travelers to navigate; potentially forcing them out of a healthy and benign lifestyle in the country and into the slums of already overcrowded towns.<sup>109</sup> He attempted to highlight the Romani’s economic value by pointing out how “moving vans carry goods from village to village, and are really co-operative

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> BBC Radio 4, “Making History: Henry ‘Inky’ Stephens – the inventor of blue-black ink,” [http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/making\\_history/makhist10\\_prog11b.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/making_history/makhist10_prog11b.shtml) (accessed 25 January 2018).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Leigh Rayment’s Peerage Page, “The House of Commons Constituencies Beginning with ‘H’: Henry Charles Stephens, MP for Hornsey 1887-1900,” <http://www.leighrayment.com/commons/Hcommons4.htm> (accessed 25 January 2018)

<sup>109</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, Debates, “Orders of the Day: Movable Dwellings Bill. (No. 316.),” 31 July 1889.

stores for the service of village life.”<sup>110</sup> He argued that the Romani particularly benefited consumers in rural areas who were otherwise subject to the monopoly of the only store owner.<sup>111</sup> He also raised concerns of the wording of the bill as it related to tents would make it illegal for recreational camping or “for a man to sleep in his own garden under a large umbrella.”<sup>112</sup>

In addition to the deployment of Stephens, the League publically attacked socialism in the media through what it termed its Press Correspondence Department. Perhaps as a reference to the growing alignment of evangelical reform and Marxist-inspired state socialism, embodied by Smith’s and Tom Mann’s travelling “Band of Love,” League member Edward Plydell Bouverie in 1884 warned in a pamphlet against both the “disastrous influence” of working-class religious fanaticism and dangerous ideals of Communist utopias.<sup>113</sup> A year after the bill’s introduction to Parliament, French ambassador to England and League member Léon Say also published a document that identified state socialism as “the plague of mature democracies” and cited strains of “prejudice, fanaticism and ignorance” as its foundation, as a possible direct reference to the marriage of Smith’s religious motivations with progressive legislation.<sup>114</sup>

After repeated failings to pass the Movable Dwellings Bill despite multiple attempts until George Smith’s death in 1895, a renewed effort was sparked in years just prior the First World War, though to similar effect. A 1908 House of Lords debate saw Lord Allendale reference the 1889 attempt which he felt was defeated by lobbying from “showmen and others of the van-dwelling fraternity.”<sup>115</sup> The affects of Liberty and Property Defence League lobbying on behalf

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, Debates, “Movable Dwellings Bill (No. 316),” 2 August 1889.

<sup>113</sup> Edward Plydell Bouverie, “The Province of government: an address delivered before the Liberty and Property Defence League,” *LSE Selected Pamphlets* (1884), 5, 12.

<sup>114</sup> M. Léon Say, “Municipal and state socialism: an address to the Liberty and Property Defence League,” *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (1886): 17.

<sup>115</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]: Second Reading,” 1 April 1908.

of the Association, by this time renamed the Showmen's Guild, lingered as a point of reference for the bill's perceived flaws. Bill proponent James Edward Hubert Gascoyne-Cecil, 4th Marquess of Salisbury, whose father had supported unsuccessful attempts in the 1880s, was subsequently cautious regarding its overall effect on the Guild and other non-Romani seasonal workers. He stated in the House of Lords in 1908 that "Most of the speakers have spoken of gipsies as if the Bill only referred to gipsies, but it is far wider in its effect. The whole class of showmen, all those who cater for the innocent amusement of the countryside, come within the scope of this bill."<sup>116</sup> The strange but effective alignment of assumed Romani interests, provoked show workers and fearful laissez-faire idealists produced unlikely expressions of angst regarding the growing reach of the British state in the period. The projections of elite concepts of anti-regulatory, economic autonomy upon the Romani by Elcho's League, not altogether fantastical based on the Romani's historical practices, that linked them to a healthy rural lifestyle and the recreational concerns of sedentary British was surprisingly effective in rallying support against the repeatedly defeated bill. Debates revealed the League's projection upon the Romani of an idealized pre-industrial Britain devoid of the growing welfare state. For the bill's proponents who repeatedly introduced it into Parliament, their vacillation on potentially adding severe enforcement provisions that may have more effectively aided the transition of the Romani into sedentary wage-labour perhaps revealed their own fears regarding the limits of their own progressive reach and its potential effects on British society as a whole.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

### Perspectives On: Travelling

Throughout their history through to present day, the Romani are often described by outsiders as expressing a “nomadic” culture with both explicit and implicit references to aimless “wandering.” In the long nineteenth century, their recorded annual presences at seasonal fairs, festivals and harvests, their regular wintering in urban centers and in some cases semi-permanent encampments in places like Blackpool suggested otherwise. Yet, the perceived nomadism often described by both those sympathetic and opposed to the travelling lifestyle became the central focus of assimilation efforts from which flowed other legislative designs upon education and employment. Efforts to cast travelling as the aspect of Romani culture most incompatible with English society extend back to the initial laws under Mary I. Attention to the issue was renewed under the pre-Victorian missionaries who cited its inherent immorality. Yet, by mid-century the issue remained unresolved.

Debates over the inability of perceived nomads to co-exist with emerging mainstream British conventions were on display following the 1864 arrest and sentencing to hard labour of a married Romani couple and their five children in Hayle, Cornwall who were deemed to have met all criteria for prosecution under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. They were charged and made to stand trial following some previous minor altercations with police followed by their camping on a local private estate where they were accused of illegally cutting down trees and starting fires. The sentence, however, drew outrage from some members of the local press who viewed it as unfair persecution of the poor. Conservative M.P. George Ward Hunt officially protested the sentence in the House of Commons as excessive for what he perceived as merely “the offence of sleeping under a tent” but was not able to persuade the Home Secretary to intervene on the family’s

behalf.<sup>117</sup> Alexander Hay Japp perhaps somewhat sarcastically encapsulated the view of most reformers in his 1884 *Gentleman's Magazine* article that described how the Romani “told lies, stole, cheated shamelessly in horse dealing, read fortunes, and—crown of all crime against respectable society—lived in tents and never slept in a proper bed.”<sup>118</sup> This view was nevertheless present in the arguments of future Prime Minister, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquis of Salisbury, who in a House of Lords debate over the Movable Dwellings Bill the following year considered a potential exemption for tents an unwarranted privilege that was “quite as much a moral as a sanitary question.”<sup>119</sup> Evidenced in Japp’s “friendly” view of the Romani was George Hunt’s earlier sympathy which by the Edwardian decade had gained additional momentum. Along with artists, poets and gypsiologists, many more began to view the Romani travelling lifestyle itself as preserving desirable elements of a pre-modern English culture that was being increasingly eroded by rapid societal change. This was evidenced by the reactions to a local byelaw by the authors to a 1903 work entitled *The New Forest: It's Traditions, Inhabitants and Customs*. The byelaw, which made it illegal to camp in one place for more than twenty-four hours, was cited by them for its ineffectiveness in curbing Romani encampments. They stated, “It does not trouble the child of Nature to evade this law of a senile civilization.”<sup>120</sup> Despite many people’s increasing identification of the Romani with longed-for forms of past non-Romani British rural culture and values, the quickening advancements of modernity rendered their lamentations mere whispers against the roar of mechanization and urban-industrial development.

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<sup>117</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, Debates, “MAGISTERIAL CONVICTIONS IN CORNWALL.—QUESTION,” House of Commons Debate, 9 May 1864.

<sup>118</sup> Japp, “The Gypsies as Seen By Friendly Eyes,” 576.

<sup>119</sup> HLD, “Housing of the Working Classes (England) Bill.—(No. 177.),” 21 July 1885.

<sup>120</sup> Crespigny and Hutchinson, *The New Forest*, 86.

In order for reformers to affect changes to the Romani travelling lifestyle it was first necessary to uncover a viable legal pretext with which to do so. Prior to the attempts at the Movable Dwellings Bill, this mostly involved local nuisance complaints related to sanitation. Authorities' main instrument of prosecution was Section 9 of the 1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act which extended stationary housing regulations on the "overcrowding or the harboring of infectious diseases" to tents, vans or small sheds. Section 9 worked in conjunction with Section 91 the previous Public Health Act of 1875 which also sought to restrict traveler encampments by arming magistrates with the ability sentence campers found maintaining "any pool ditch or gutter watercourse privy urinal cesspool drain or ashpit so foul or in such a state as to be a nuisance or injurious to health."<sup>121</sup> The acts gave authority to local councils to enact their own byelaws, pending their approval by the Local Government Board or, in London, the Home Office. However, some in Parliament had doubts as to the necessity of the law's application to the Romani. At an 1885 Lords Sitting, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl Fortescue recalled his conversation with a doctor who described them as a people "singularly exempt from zymotic diseases, and, indeed, were a very healthy race."<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, the power to enact local byelaws did result in some removals of Romani from the London boroughs of Battersea and Wandsworth; the first districts to have their byelaw requests approved.<sup>123</sup> Yet, more often the inability of constables to bring most violators of the 1885 act before a magistrate prior to their fleeing an area rendered the byelaws largely moot. This was the case in Middlesex where a nuisance byelaw specifically targeting the Romani was passed and sanctioned by the Home

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<sup>121</sup> "Public Health Act, 1875 (Support of Sewers) Amendment Act, 1883," *The National Archives*, 31.

<sup>122</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, Debates, "Housing of the Working Classes (England) Bill.—(No. 177.)," 21 July 1885.

<sup>123</sup> "Vans and Infection," *The Lancet* vol. 130, iss. 3332 (9 July 1887): 91-92.

Office, yet went mostly unenforced.<sup>124</sup> This pattern was repeated in the London suburb of West Ham. A byelaw to discourage camping “within two hundred yards of any highway or street or any dwelling-place” was approved by the Home Office to stop Romani and others from causing “annoyance, injury, or disturbance to residents in the neighborhood” with exceptions for “preachers, lecturers, and persons holding public meetings” but its inability to be enforced left little affect upon the Romani.<sup>125</sup> An 1887 *Lancet* article highlighted an incident at Woodford where local authorities attempted the removal of a Romani settlement and had their byelaw approved by the Local Government Board. The article describes, however, how authorities possessed no effective means of enforcement and the settlement remained.<sup>126</sup> In an effort to enhance enforcement efforts, local councils throughout Britain began requesting approval of amendments to their ineffective byelaws but these were almost always refused due to what one article suggested was “their undue restriction of the use of private property and of the vague and uncertain character of their provisions.”<sup>127</sup> The Home Office and Local Government board also feared the potential political ramifications of their unilateral enhancement of police powers as well complaints from surrounding councils forced to host new encampments of fleeing Romani from outside districts.<sup>128</sup> Instead, they continued to recommend that county councils more thoroughly fund the enforcement of already approved byelaws despite not offering any clear direction on how to raise the extra moneys. A reported 1887 decision by one rural magistrate in a case challenging a local nuisance byelaw determined that a tent or van could not be subject to the same sanitary regulations as a stationary house. It was upheld by England’s High Court, virtually nullifying most of the movable dwelling sanitary provisions of the Housing of the

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<sup>124</sup> Taylor, “Travellers in Britain: a minority and the state,” 581.

<sup>125</sup> “Appendix XXXIV: Gipsies,” 167.

<sup>126</sup> “Vans and Infection,” 91.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

Working Classes and Public Health Acts for any with the means to legally challenge their local council.<sup>129</sup> Seven years later in 1894, President of the Local Government Board George Shaw-Lefevre responded to a question in the House of Commons regarding the confusion over local councils' ability to invoke sanitary provisions to regulate movable dwellings. In his attempt to clarify the situation he stated:

It is not quite accurate to say that moveable dwellings are not reached by the Sanitary Laws...these dwellings are subject to the nuisance provisions of the Public Health Act, but no doubt the facility with which they can be moved from place to place does make it difficult to enforce the provisions.”<sup>130</sup>

Shaw-Lefevre's muddled answer on jurisdiction that directed the issue back to the inabilities of the under-funded constabulary who were only able to enforce byelaws upon the request of their local council laid bare the limits of the British state in discouraging Romani travelling, much less achieving meaningful sedentary assimilation.

One year after Shaw-Lefevre's response, a much publicized 1895 case offered insight into the workings of the acts' sanitary provisions and their relationship to concepts of private property. This occurred when legal action was initiated by Britain's Attorney-General on behalf of the Heston and Isleworth Urban District Council against landowner J.J.J. Stone “and others” who consisted of “some of the gipsies whose occupation of the land was the subject of the present action.”<sup>131</sup> Stone was accused of leasing a plot of land to a group of Romani so as to cause an “alleged insanitary state of the land, the absence of proper drainage, overcrowding, dirt, noise, and untidiness” which the Attorney-General deemed a “nuisance to the inhabitants in the

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<sup>129</sup> “Vans and Infection,” 91.

<sup>130</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, Debates, “Commons Sitting: The Moveable Dwellings Bill,” 23 August 1894.

<sup>131</sup> “High Court of Justice. Chancery Division (*Before* Mr. Justice Romer.): *The Attorney-General V. Stone and Others*,” *The Times* iss. 34751 (4 December 1895), 12.

neighborhood and injurious to health.”<sup>132</sup> Upon consideration of the evidence, the presiding Justice Romer issued an injunction in an effort to stop Stone from renting land to any van or tent dwellers that violated sanitation or nuisance laws and ordered him to pay the costs incurred by the district for the court action.<sup>133</sup> Romer highlighted the contradictory evidence and the testimony of the Romani who he felt were “a class whose views on subjects concerning cleanliness and sanitation were likely to be of an abnormal character and opposed to the views of ordinary citizens, and whose evidence did not impress me favorably.”<sup>134</sup> Although Stone testified to his construction of additional water closets and a reduction in the number of campers on his property, Romer worried the situation would return to its previous state unless an injunction against Stone was granted.<sup>135</sup> Romer responded unfavorably to Stone’s argument that an injunction should be granted against the Romani land dwellers rather than himself since Romer felt the dwellers had no restitution to offer the plaintiffs and that the Heston and Isleworth District Council was right to bring the case to the High Court rather than initiate local summary proceedings.<sup>136</sup> The decision to punish the land-owner and allow the Romani to simply leave the area proved almost entirely ineffective as a means of discouraging further encampments or the travelling lifestyle itself and instead only demonstrated the great legal cost involved in attempting to remove a single Romani campsite.

The actual effectiveness of local byelaws’ abilities to invoke the Public Health or Housing of the Working Classes Acts continued to be unclear to those engaged in a later 1908 House of Lords debate. Movable Dwellings Bill proponents like Lord Farrer cited conclusions reached by the local Board of Guardians in Dorking, Surrey, which determined that occasional

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

doctor's visits were not enough to extinguish Romani sanitary nuisances but also felt the Public Health Act of 1875 failed in its ability enact change. Farrer determined that that "the only satisfactory solution of the question lay in fresh legislation. Under the law as it stands sanitary authorities are quite powerless to deal with the devil."<sup>137</sup> Farrer cited an incident at nearby Reigate that saw him personally ask police to intervene following the introduction of a "contagious skin disease" to the neighborhood by Romani travelers. He recalled his frustration at the local chief constable who informed him he could not take immediate action on the matter without the request of the Reigate council who was likely not in session.<sup>138</sup> Farrer referred to yet another incident involving an eighteen-month-old traveler boy (of unknown ethnicity) who died a victim of burn injuries after his parents allegedly ignored doctor's advice to remain in one place for treatment. The frustrated coroner in the case was quoted by Farrer as stating, "If anybody wanted to move a pig from Surrey into Middlesex, he would find all kinds of restrictions placed upon him. Yet people like these could go anywhere and take with them a sick child needing the most careful treatment, nobody interfered."<sup>139</sup> An April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1908 House of Lords debate saw Sir Hugh Owen summarize the difficulties of enforcement efforts that had plagued authorities over the previous decades. Namely, that van occupiers in violation of the local byelaws that had been passed by county councils and approved by the Home Office or Local Government Board, would simply flee a district before a local court summons could be issued.<sup>140</sup> This itself was almost a moot point as during that same 1908 debate a representative of the Local Government Board enunciated their intentions to refuse to authorize new and different nuisance byelaws related to movable dwellings for varying districts in an effort to avoid

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<sup>137</sup> HLD, "Movable Dwellings Bill," 1 April 1908.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]," 22 February 1911.

<sup>140</sup> HLD, "Movable Dwellings Bill," 1 April 1908.

legal confusion.<sup>141</sup> Despite the repeated initial rejections of county council byelaws by the Local Government Board and Home Office, by 1909, two-hundred and eleven sets of local byelaws targeting the Romani and other suspected vagrants had been enacted and approved throughout Britain.<sup>142</sup> Increasingly, fines and jail sentences targeting vagrants were issued under various sanitation and education statutes as well as for many other offenses including fortune telling (specifically identified were tarot cards, crystals and palmistry), petty thefts, minor assaults, the use of obscene language, unfit workhorses, public drunkenness, discharging catapults, coercing the public into games of chance and the possession of pornographic material. Yet, despite some charges and even convictions, the enforcement of these byelaws against the Romani remained difficult and minimal. *Justice of the Peace* further identified that “The practical difficulty, however, under all these statutes, is to catch the gipsies out in the first instance, and then to get the summons served upon them before they move on.”<sup>143</sup>

Even if George Smith’s proposals had in fact been passed as his earlier Canal Boats Act had been, indications were that enforcement would have remained a key issue as they had been under that legislation. Medical Officer of Health for Rotherhithe in Southeast London, Benjamin Browning, wrote in *The British Medical Journal* in 1879 that out of the four hundred and ninety-two canal boats under his responsibility, only two had been successfully registered as required by the act.<sup>144</sup> Of boats found to be non-compliant with the act, Browning wrote, “I have no power to detain it while I can procure a summons; and it ‘vanishes away and is no more seen’ before the summons can be served.”<sup>145</sup> Browning also cited the Local Government Board’s decision to allow boats to choose which local authority they register with as a major hindrance the act’s

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Lyon, “Gadze Modernism,” 523.

<sup>143</sup> “Gypsies,” *The Justice of the Peace*, 788.

<sup>144</sup> Benjamin Browning, “The Canal Boats Act, 1877,” *The British Medical Journal* (27 December 1879): 1046.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

enforcement, causing him to refer to it as “entirely a failure.”<sup>146</sup> Local authorities were unable to enact any substantial enforcement of the Canal Boats Act in their districts and it required an amendment in 1884 that was also mostly ineffective.<sup>147</sup> Smith later prophetically described the 1877 Canal Boats Act as a template for the Movable Dwellings Bills without regard to the former having mostly failed.<sup>148</sup>

The continued concerns over enforcement were qualified that same year following a local court’s 1908 fining of three Romani women residing with their families on Blackpool’s South Shore based both on some nuisance complaints allegedly received by the county council as well as new byelaw by that same council prohibiting fortune telling. The women requested that the Blackpool Chief Constable wave their ten shillings each fine but he refused, citing what he estimated to be their earnings of £10 per day.<sup>149</sup> The women nevertheless avoided the fine by agreeing to remove from Blackpool with their families and promising to cease telling fortunes. As often was the case for Romani who did actually appear in local courts, full prosecution of the law was usually considered less than preferable by under-funded courts and constabularies. This was true in the 1909 case of seventy-year-old Nathan Buckley of the “Eastwood Gypsies.” He was charged with “neglecting to provide (1) a tent in a reasonable watertight condition; (2) sufficient privy accommodation; (3) a sufficient water-supply; (4) a sufficient covered ash-pit and dust-bin; (5) a suitable dry floor to a tent.”<sup>150</sup> However, a local judge ruled that as long as he simply demolished his tent than the charges would be dropped. For the families of Blackpool who agreed to move on in order to avoid being fined, they returned in the winter of the same year, continued to read fortunes, and were not prosecuted a second time. As with the 1895 case

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Dainton, “George Smith,” 576.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *I’ve Been A Gipsying*, 241.

<sup>149</sup> Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt,” 114.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid..

against J.J.J. Stone, the local Blackpool magistrate instead ordered that the owner of the land from whom they had been renting himself remove them from the property and no longer rent to any Romani.<sup>151</sup> The families again began the process of leaving the area but many still lingered on common grounds and told fortunes. In November, one of the women identified as Mrs. Franklin allegedly authored a letter directed to King Edward. It was delivered to the Local Government Board and represents one of very few direct written correspondences between the Romani and the British government up to that point as well a rather antiquated notion of how British politics operated in the period:

To His Majesty,—I am very sorry to have to trouble you, but it is for a cause of necessity. It concerns all the gipsies at Blackpool. We have been resident here for the past forty years, and have always been encamped on one plot of ground. We all pay £20 to £25 for the season, and also pay rates and taxes. Our tents were the first things on the show ground, and now they want to get rid of us by giving us only one week's notice. It is very hard for us all. It is driving us from our homes after being here for so many years. Most of our children have been born, christened, and educated here. We appeal to His Majesty for his kind help and sympathy. We are English gipsies, and we look to our King for justice—Your humble servant...<sup>152</sup>

In the end, the message sent to local landowners regarding the potential difficulties they may face should they choose to rent to Romani was effective in reducing the multitude of long-term encampments in Blackpool. All but one family soon left the South Shore for the surrounding forests and beyond, though many returned to tell fortunes during the summer tourist season despite being no longer permitted to camp on the beaches.<sup>153</sup> Becky Taylor suggested that the short term concerns of local “residents” who wanted travelers to simply move on won out over national “site provision, settlement and assimilation” efforts that lacked funding and the political will of Parliament.<sup>154</sup> Whether Taylor’s identification of Blackpool residents as the source of

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Taylor, “Travellers in Britain,” 594.

complaints over Romani sanitary nuisances and fortune telling, rather than the county council itself, is difficult to ascertain and may be at odds with other evidence of more positive relationships throughout Britain discussed earlier in this thesis. This may have also been the case the same year when Lord Farrer summarized what he felt was the public's universal animosity towards Romani encampments by stating, "These people pay no rates, no education is provided for their children, and the honest cottager who lives on the land detests these people in a way that would probably surprise your Lordships."<sup>155</sup> Three years later, however, Farrer offered his observation of sedentary British offering fresh water to their encampments while considering putting pressure on water companies to intervene in the exchange.<sup>156</sup> Whatever the source for the attempted elimination of Romani families and their fortune telling tents as a summer tourist attraction in Blackpool, the fact that the area remained a lucrative seasonal destination organically undermined authorities' attempts to re-define the area and may reveal the Romani's broader economic integration with the private citizenry.

In addition to the potential for public sympathies regarding the Romani lifestyle, several more politicians rallied to the Romani cause based on their fears over the impact of increased police powers on society. Though he mostly supported the sanitary regulations contained in the Movable Dwellings Bill, Lord Allendale preferred the application of existing legislation and raised questions over the implementation of van and tent registration. He also expressed an ever-present fear of the expansion of national authority and lamented that the bill could "have the effect of altogether exterminating gipsies and others."<sup>157</sup> In opposition to Allendale, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Russell also deemed the bill an inadequate solution to the actual issues it was attempting to

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<sup>155</sup> HLD, "Movable Dwellings Bill," 1 April 1908.

<sup>156</sup> HLD, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]," 22 February 1911.

<sup>157</sup> HLD, "Movable Dwellings Bill [H.L.]: Second Reading," 1 April 1908.

address due to its continuing to permit the Romani lifestyle rather than abolishing it.<sup>158</sup> He also considered the definition of movable dwellings in the bill to be overly broad to the degree that it would create “unnecessary interference with persons who are doing no harm” by forcing registration on picnicking day-trippers and summer campers.<sup>159</sup> He further criticized the bill within what he saw as the regrettable modern political culture of over-registration and increased lettering and numbering; an intriguing viewpoint considering Russell is credited as the first motorist to register his vehicle with the London County Council in 1903, receiving the notorious license plate number of “A1.”<sup>160</sup> His opposition may have been reflective of his concern over what he saw as the increasing regulation of roads in general.

As evidenced, the issue of enforcement cast its shadow upon virtually all debates on the potential efficacy of George Smith’s Movable Dwellings Bill which continued to be introduced in the years following his death. Though he confessed to supporting the Movable Dwellings Bill, Henry Strutt, known as Lord Belper, echoed the decades’ long concern that all movable dwelling legislation would be ineffective unless authorities could find “some means whereby you can lay your hand on these people and prevent them evading law.”<sup>161</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Marquess Cecil reiterated the potential efficacy of existing laws as well as his opinion that the main problem with the bill surrounded questions of enforcement.<sup>162</sup> Called to speak in the House of Lords, William Lyon, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Beauchamp and the First Commissioner of Works representing the Home Office, agreed with Cecil that enforcement was the main problem but echoed earlier concerns over the political ramifications of extending greater powers of removal to police.<sup>163</sup> Lord Hylton

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<sup>158</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill,” 1 April 1908.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Anne Kind, “In driving seat with A1 car number plate,” *Leicester Mercury*, April 12, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>161</sup> HLD, “Movable Dwellings Bill,” 1 April 1908.

<sup>162</sup> HLD, “Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill,” 22 February 1911.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

Jolliffe, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron Hylton, opposed the 1911 bill citing previous instances of Romani fleeing an area before a summons could be processed by local courts and instead suggested an expansion of direct police authority.<sup>164</sup> Lord Clifford attempted to re-assure Hylton of the new powers, larger jurisdictions and more effective methods of tracking travelers that would arise from the bill while warning him that his renewed suggestion of expanded powers for the police could jeopardize the bill's passage.<sup>165</sup> Lord Hylton nevertheless affirmed his position of greater police authority and wrote:

These are an exceptional class of persons. They are nameless and homeless "Egyptians," and there is just as much difficulty in serving a summons upon them as there would be in serving a summons on a weasel or any other slippery animal, and when a summons has been served on them there is immense difficulty in getting them to appear.<sup>166</sup>

Alan Ian Percy, 8<sup>th</sup> Duke of Northumberland, seconded Hylton's call for increasing the legal authority of police officers particularly as it related to the difficult issue of van registration, feeling that it were to be dropped than "the Bill will be useless."<sup>167</sup> Both Lord Farrer and Lord Zouche of Haryngworth agreed that "If you take away the power of the police to act in this way you destroy the efficacy of the whole Bill."<sup>168</sup> Opposition to the calls for more powers of policing came from military reformer and philosophy enthusiast Viscount Richard Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, who again raised the oft-repeated concern of the home office. Haldane stated in the House of Lords, "No doubt it would be an extremely convenient thing for us all if our private rights could be enforced at our request by the police on demand, but that is not the law of this country, and if it were the duties of the police would become

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<sup>164</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, *Debates*, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill. [H.L.]," 2 May 1911.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> United Kingdom, House of Lords, *Debates*, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill. [H.L.]," 11 May 1911.

<sup>167</sup> HLD, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill. [H.L.]," 2 May 1911.

<sup>168</sup> HLD, "Lords Sitting: Movable Dwellings Bill. [H.L.]," 11 May 1911.

overwhelming.”<sup>169</sup> Liberal Lord Ian Guest, the House of Lords’ Paymaster-General, and styled the Baron Ashby St. Ledgers, agreed with both Haldane and Sir Richard Webster, Lord Viscount Alverstone, that “Its effect would be to create a new liability to arrest without warrant, and that is entirely contrary to the modern practice of Parliament except in cases of very serious crime.”<sup>170</sup> Lord Guest continued against the proponents of more effective policing, “You do not seek to discriminate against a particular class of crime; you discriminate against a particular class of individual—namely, the van-dweller—and to do so seems to me not only most undesirable but most unjust.”<sup>171</sup>

New standards of sanitation driven by the dangers of urbanization, a rise in modern plumbing and expanded markets for items like soap and shampoo became the catalyst with which to provoke political action seeking to end Romani encampments throughout Britain. The attempted regulation and potential elimination of the Romani travelling lifestyle through legislation was deeply hindered by both the inability of authorities to enforce existing acts and the fears of politicians towards expanding the powers of the police state. Out of the romantic sympathies of the ever-present anti-interventionist gypsiologists, health enthusiasts espousing the benefits of an open-air lifestyle and the self-interests of recreationalists not wishing to have their picnics and day trips regulated arose the need to project upon the Romani an enviable lifestyle that theretofore had been seen as unacceptable by virtually all politicians and authorities. The frightful reactions of Allendale, Haldane and others to the type of threats proposed by Hylton, Percy and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Russell regarding the institution of drastic enforcement measures represents a direct assessment by internal elements of British society of the limits of progressive state reach. The resulting need by those opposed to the Movable Dwellings Bill to project upon

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

the Romani a new sense of value for the travelling lifestyle was a direct result of their anxieties over modernity's ability to alter Britain in ways they felt were undesirable.

#### Chapter Four: Conclusions

Following the regimented and mechanized Foucauldian cataclysm of the First World War, social discourse produced new strains of horror at civilization that echoed much of the earlier pre-War praise for the Romani's perceived opposition to it. In some respects, dependent upon perspective, it may have even validated it. In any event, Victorian Britain's projections of their fears and desires upon the Romani took many shades. Early century evangelicals saw a new domestic context with which to expand their imperial civilizing missions against the continual new discoveries of global heathens; George Smith of Coalville saw the potential to validate the moral virtue of both God and himself by recreating the Romani in his own image; progressive politicians saw an opportunity to increase both their own power and the value to the state of primitive elements otherwise deemed useless in the face of imperial competition; the inward looking gypsiologists saw an opportunity to mourn the loss of pre-industrial culture; The Liberty and Property Defense League saw in the Romani an ideological battleground with which to halt government expansion; and non-progressive politicians saw an opportunity to question the at times frightening end-game of the growing welfare state. The lack of outcry from the masses characterized a mostly hidden but beneficial relationship likely in existence since the Romani's first arrival in Britain.

The British projections upon the Romani that emerged out of debates over their assimilation reveal a nation state divided on how to proceed with its own rapid advancement. The unresolved struggle that saw Christian morality, industrialization and progressive legislation clash with romantic scholarship and laissez-faire ideology revealed only an uncertainty of

outcome for all parties. The same inability to offer a concrete path for a pre-industrial Romani culture in a technologically advancing world of growing state power was perhaps reflected in Britain and Europe's own swift stumble into the unanticipated mass destruction of the First World War.

Eustice Guillan Hopper, quoted at the beginning of this thesis, lamented post-War attempts at Romani assimilation and appeared to have identified another George Smith-like figure. Hopper wrote in 1945 of a "Brother Angold" who he claimed,

...has done the Romany folk a poor service by publishing his ideas on planning their lives. *Duvel* forbid that any bureaucrat sets his eyes on that article! We should have a Ministry of Gypsies almost immediately, and this would give birth to a collection of inspectors of Camping-grounds: Nomadic Health: Romani Labour: and Gypsy Education.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps unknown to Hopper was the fact that many of George Smith's earlier proposals had become law through the Children's Act of 1908, the Town Planning Act of 1932 and the Public Health Act of 1936.<sup>2</sup> However, those laws had virtually no effect on the Romani due to no significant effort to fund their enforcement.<sup>3</sup> As were other housing schemes and camping registration programs that achieved little beyond increased dependence on the state. Taylor lists a 1961 report from the Hampshire Association of Parish Councils as declaring their stated goal for the Romani of "gradual assimilation of the adult population...The removal of a stain on the Welfare State...[and] the easement of the conscience of the thinking public. The dilemma of this minority calls for care and alignment with the established principles of our progressive civilization."<sup>4</sup> British Romani Dominic Reeve who wrote of his opposition to such measures 1964:

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<sup>1</sup> Hopper, "The Gypsies of To-morrow," 95.

<sup>2</sup> Acton, *Gypsy politics and social change*, London, 120.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, "Travellers in Britain: a minority and the state," 586-87.

Travellers in general seem to be amongst the main victims of the organization men of bureaucracy; town planners, health visitors and others who combine to make up the great symbol of Welfare . . . I am aware that they are my natural foe and I meet them accordingly.<sup>5</sup>

Describing the Romani's continued resistance in the 1980s and 90s to both sedentary forms wage of labour as well as Marxist "proletarianisation" organization, Robbie McVeigh felt that "In a period of Thatcherite/Blairite hegemony they represent the continued possibility of alternatives; indeed the continued possibility of *resistance*."<sup>6</sup> The earlier alignment of George Smith's assimilation crusade with progressive politicians that associated moral virtue with state expansion produced a form of politics anathema to the traditional Romani lifestyle. Yet, in the twenty-first century, it would appear much of the assimilation that George Smith had campaigned for may be finally coming to fruition. The 2018 UK House of Commons briefing paper lists three quarters of British travelers as now living in traditional sedentary accommodations, albeit not exclusively full-time.<sup>7</sup> A September 2017 report by the UK charity organization The Traveller Movement called for greater government intervention in order to introduce the teaching of Romani history in schools, pro-Romani reforms of the National Health Service, an increase in workplace regulation as determined by unions, more administration positions to enforce those regulations and greater governmental oversight of police.<sup>8</sup> The previously mentioned 2018 House of Commons briefing paper highlighted a new £200,000 government project designed to "improve outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the areas of educational attainment, health and social integration."<sup>9</sup> In Germany, the newly

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

<sup>6</sup> McVeigh, "Theorising sedentarism: the roots of anti-nomadism," 22.

<sup>7</sup> Cromarty, *Gypsies and Travellers*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> "The Last Acceptable Form of Racism?: The pervasive discrimination and prejudice experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities," *The Traveller Movement*, September 2017. <http://travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TMreportFinalWeb1.pdf> (Accessed 28 September 2017)

<sup>9</sup> Cromarty, *Gypsies and Travellers*, 4-5.

constructed European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture in Berlin lists billionaire investor and progressive political activist George Soros' Open Societies Foundation as its primary sponsor to the tune of 200,000 Euros annually.<sup>10</sup> Soros himself voiced his intentions to deploy “a small but well-educated Roma elite” consisting of “intellectuals” whose education would be subsidized through his scholarships in order to spearhead future Romani rights movements.<sup>11</sup> In the United States, Romani rights activist and filmmaker George Eli's Romani Media Initiative outlined his plan for Romani assimilation in a form that would have deeply satisfied George Smith of Coalville and the anti-Romani legislators of a century earlier.<sup>12</sup> Eli's appropriation of the African-American experience as a template for a Romani future saw him invoke the words of Martin Luther King Jr. American history professor Thaddeus Russell's 2010 work entitled *A Renegade History of the United States* found that, “The black popular culture that arose in the 1950s and 1960s—a phenomenon ignored by nearly all historians of the civil rights movement—showed a distinct lack of interest in King's project.”<sup>13</sup> Russell highlighted King's speeches and articles from the Summer of 1957 which stressed sacrifice and Christian discipline and outlined what King targeted as the major flaws in African-American culture including “laziness, promiscuity, criminality, drunkenness, slovenliness and ignorance”; all pejorative's used by past assimilationists to describe the Romani.<sup>14</sup> The current push by Romani political activists for their peoples' full assimilation into mainstream Western society, much obliged by modern welfare states, appears to be charging forward much like nineteenth century British modernity

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<sup>10</sup> David Shimer, “Lifting Up the Arts and Culture of Europe's Roma in Berlin,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2017, Art & Design section. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/09/arts/design/lifting-up-the-arts-and-culture-of-europes-roma-in-berlin.html> (Accessed 28 September 2017)

<sup>11</sup> George Soros, “Remarks delivered at the launch of the European Romani Institute for Art and Culture,” *George Soros*, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. <https://www.georgesoros.com/2017/06/08/remarks-delivered-at-the-launch-of-the-european-roma-institute-for-art-and-culture/> (Accessed 10 July 2018)

<sup>12</sup> “Romani Media Initiative: Start a Spark Dinner,” *You Tube* (21 May 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9el-7RH0CI> (Accessed 20 July 2018)

<sup>13</sup> Thaddeus Russell, *A Renegade History of the United States*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2010: 306.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 295.

did, though with none of the previous debates over its effects on health, family or loss of culture. Their assumption that the very Romani traditions they seek to maintain and for the first time promote will no doubt survive these efforts contains none of the uncertainty found in the late nineteenth century debates. Whatever the outcome of these current campaigns, the now seemingly quaint British projections of Victorian consciousness revealed through debates on the acceptance of Romani pre-industrial traditions nevertheless remain a resilient monument to independence and resistance erected only moments before modernity's unleashing of decades of mass destruction throughout the world.

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