Filling a gap in the Travellers' tales

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The project will enable this particular group of nomadic people to have a specific presence in Gypsy Roma Traveller History month which takes place in June.

Irish Travellers are distinct from Roma and other gypsies and are recognised as a separate ethnic group in the UK. They have their own language sometimes referring to themselves as 'minceir' or 'pavees'.

A key aspect of the project will be the creation of a two-day celebration, or Pavee Ceilidh. Special heritage activities will include creating an oral history record from the Irish traveller community, training in traditional Traveller arts and crafts, setting up a website and making a DVD designed to inform the wider community and especially schoolchildren.

Details about the Irish Travellers in Britain are sketchy and, as they are not identified as a specific category in the Census, their numbers are not known with any certainty, although there were estimated to be 19,000 in the country in 1995. They are a highly marginalised group.

Even their roots are unclear. Some believe they were descendents from peasants made homeless by Oliver Cromwell's campaign in Ireland after the English Civil War. Others suggest they may have fled from the Great Famine in the 1800s. There is a growing body of evidence which suggests they are descended from nomadic groups who may have occupied Ireland as early as the fifth century AD.

Andrew Ryder, National Policy Officer for the Islington-based Irish Traveller Movement in Britain, which is co-ordinating the project, said: "Irish Travellers have a rich history and culture, and Gypsy Roma Traveller History month allows Travellers to celebrate and share that culture with the wider community. I hope very much that the general public will take up the opportunities we are offering to learn more about this very marginalised and misunderstood minority group."

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: "This project enables Irish Travellers to shed new light on their history and culture, encourages the preservation of traditions and allows for this information to be shared by a much wider audience."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, with over £840 million has granted in London alone.

Further information

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