

Who are the Scottish Travellers?

This is the introductory activity from the Stanley Robertson: education from the heart of the traveller culture resource. Suitable for 2nd level.

Aims

To Explore Stanley's Scottish Traveller background and how his community have been part of Scottish history and heritage.

What you need

History of Travellers Timeline Cards
– see the next 6 pages.

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller: [an animated history](#)
[Stanley Robertson PPT](#)

What to do

Begin by watching the short animation on the history of the gypsy, Roma, Traveller community and briefly discussing what pupils saw and learnt in the film.

Pupils will create a timeline of the history of travellers. Give half of the class a Milestone card and the other half a Date card. Learners are then asked to walk around the room and find someone who they think has the corresponding date/milestone to their card. As a class share the timeline, asking each pair to say why they chose their corresponding date/milestone.

After the class have shared their thoughts, reveal the true date and milestone pairs- asking learners to stick their date/milestone on the wall in the correct order.

Watch the film, **Stanley Robertson – Tradition Bearer** and discuss the influences and elements of Scottish Traveller identity Stanley mentions in his recording.

Reflection

How do you think your history has influenced you?

What have you learned today that you didn't know before?

The full resource Stanley Robertson: education from the heart of the traveller culture resource can be found [here](#). It includes activities for Early, First and Second level.

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History of Travellers Timeline Cards



1100	Scottish Travellers first mentioned in King David's Farandman Laws, mentioned as 'Tinklers'
1505	King James IV meets a band of Travellers in Stirling & Declares first Gypsy King recorded in the UK.
1541	The first 'anti-Gypsy' laws are passed in Scotland. Gypsies and Scottish Travellers ordered to stop travelling or be punished with death.
1700	Jamie MacPherson: Last known Scottish Traveller to be hanged for the crime of being a 'vagabond'
1746	Battle of Culloden: After the Jacobite defeat, Scottish Travellers were displaced by the collapsing clan system. Many displaced Travellers marry Gypsies.
1788	Robert Burns writes the song 'Auld Lang Syne', he claims not to have invented it – but recorded it from the singing of an old man at Poosie Nancie's bar. Many within the Traveller community claim that this 'old man' was a Scottish Traveller.



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History of Travellers Timeline Cards

1865	Trespass Act passed: This meant it was now a criminal offence to camp on land that you do not own or to light a fire near a road. This effectively outlaws the Scottish Traveller culture of travelling.
1895	A commission report into 'tackling the Tinker problem' recommends extermination, deportation to the colonies and industrial schools to encourage Traveller children not to be nomadic. Many Traveller children were forcibly removed from their families until WW1 and then after WW1 until WW2.
1908	Living in tents and caves is banned, and police are encouraged to monitor caves to ensure that they are not being re-occupied.
1940	Stanley Robertson is born in Aberdeen into a Scottish Traveller family who had settled in the city.
1940's – 50's	'Experiment sites' are built across the country to try and forcibly settle Traveller families. Sites based on 'reserves' built for indigenous groups in the USA appear in places like Perthshire, Muir of Ord, Aberdeenshire and Argyllshire.



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History of Travellers Timeline Cards



1984	Law is passed criminalising roadside camping. Meaning that many traditional Traveller camps are now blocked off and many families struggle to live a traditional lifestyle.
2003	Stanley represents the University of Aberdeen and Scotland, at the Smithsonian Institute's Folklife Festival in Washington DC.
2008	Scottish Travellers are granted ethnic minority status at a court in Aberdeen. In this same year Stanley Robertson is awarded an Honorary degree at the University of Aberdeen.
2009	Stanley Robertson sadly passes away at his home in Aberdeen.
2016	The First ever Scottish Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History month is celebrated in Aberdeen – bringing together Travellers from across the country.



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Extra Overview:

- 1100: Ancient laws in twelfth century Scotland identified a distinct group of Travelling craftspeople, known as 'Tinklers' or 'Tinkers', due to their work as crafters of tin. They were regarded as distinct from mainstream society, instead members of a separate nomadic group with it's own customs, language and ethnic identity.
- 1505: Considered to be the first record of 'Gypsies' in Scotland. Gypsies are thought to have migrated here from Norther India.
- 1541: Laws were now being passed to criminalise the nomadic way of life and made being a Scottish Traveller a 'crime' punishable by death.
- 1700: Jamie MacPherson was the last Scottish Traveller known to have been hanged for the crime of being a vagabond. He was sadly hanged on the 16th of November 1700 in Banff.
- 1746: After this point many Travellers marry Gypsies, leading to influence of Gypsy culture on Scottish Travellers. This is why there are many similarities between Gypsy culture and Travellers (e.g. Language).
- 1865: This effectively outlaws Traveller culture and makes it even more difficult to live a nomadic way of life.

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- 1895: A commission is set up in Scotland to find solutions to what they called the 'Tinker problem'. They held hearings in places like Glasgow, Aberdeen and Perth.
- 1908: The Children Act (Scotland) is passed meaning that due to educational attainment, it is made a criminal offence to live in a tent or a cave.
- 1940: Stanley Robertson is born. Early on Stanley's family moved to Hanover street and describes the 'great fun. Piping, singing and especially storytelling' when he lived there.
- 1940's – 50's: Forced settlement is furthered through the building of reserves across the country. Including here in Aberdeen at Castlehill, where one family of Travellers – the Whytes – recall being placed.
- 1984: The Roads Act (Scotland) is passed criminalising roadside camping. This led to many ancestral camps being banned by law and most Scottish Traveller families settling down.
- 2003: Stanley is working with the Elphinstone institute to raise awareness of Scottish Traveller culture, and to preserve his community's oral history. As part of this role he is invited to represent the University at the Smithsonian Institute's Folklife Festival.

- 2008: Scottish Travellers are granted ethnic minority status at a court in Aberdeen. In this same year Stanley Robertson is made a Master of the University of Aberdeen, being honoured with an honorary degree for his work.
- 2009: Stanley Robertson sadly passes away at his home in Aberdeen.
- 2016: The first ever Scottish Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History month is celebrated in Aberdeen. Travellers from across the country come to the city to attend the celebrations.

Sources:

Dawson, R. (2007) *'The 1895 Report'*. Dawson.

McPhee, S. (2017) *Gypsy Traveller History in Scotland*. Glasgow: IRISS.