

Please cite the Published Version

Bowen, Paul (2005) Gypsy children in Hampshire and the schooling issue 1900-1945. The History of Education Researcher (75). pp. 26-38. ISSN 1740-2433

Publisher: History of Education Society

Version: Published Version

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Gypsy Children in Hampshire and the Schooling Issue 1900–1945

Paul Bowen

In recent years there has been increasing focus at an academic level on Gypsy traveller communities in England and their recognition as an ethnic minority group emphasized by a significant increase in published material.¹ Parallel with this development has been a growing emphasis since the 1960s on developing educational provision for Gypsy children, a key aspect of which has been a network of traveller education services working with individual schools.² Although this post-World War II period in English Gypsy educational history is relatively well documented, little is known about what was happening in the earlier part of the century. This local case study, therefore, explores the relationship between Gypsies and schooling in the first half of the twentieth century within Hampshire and seeks to gain some understanding of the position of Gypsies in a relatively newly introduced system of compulsory schooling. Hampshire was one of several counties, including Surrey and Kent, with significant numbers of Gypsies at this time. After focusing on the traditional links between Hampshire and Gypsies, the paper seeks to investigate the nature of the Gypsy schooling problem in the county, the responses of key players such as individual schools, the local education authority (LEA) and Board of Education as well as exploring for any developing notion of traveller education policy.

At the outset of this paper some limitations need to be addressed. The necessary reliance on LEA and Board of Education sources highlight a focus on exploring Gypsy educational policy responses at both local and national level which clearly reflect the perspectives of mainstream sedentary society. Policy was invariably based on the premise that Gypsy communities presented a problem for society and associated systems such as compulsory schooling. What is largely lacking is a sense of Gypsy activity in relation to the schooling issue and how they responded to the LEA. Local and central government records largely ignore this dimension and the absence of written archives generated by the Gypsy community means that their viewpoints are neglected.

Terminology is another issue needing clarification, in particular the use of the term 'Gypsy' throughout this paper. Traditionally 'Gypsy' has been used to refer to peoples whose origins can be traced to large-scale immigrations to Western Europe from India in the Middle Ages. Gypsies first came to prominence in England in the

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early sixteenth century, since when such groups have undergone considerable change and diversification.³ Within this paper's context Gypsy refers to culturally distinct groups with their own customs, central to which is the lack of any fixed place of residence or employment. As will be subsequently emphasized, Gypsies are not homogenous groups and in this Hampshire case study there were wide variations in levels of nomadism and the types of dwellings used. During the historical period covered by the paper, the term 'Gypsies' was in common usage both orally and in documentation, hence contextually it is more relevant than the use of the term 'traveller' which is in popular, contemporary usage.

Gypsies in Hampshire

The prominence of Hampshire in the Gypsy education issue in the early twentieth century was clearly due to a significant local Gypsy population, a reminder of which is the surviving Gypsy church on Bramdean Common east of Winchester, built in 1883 for the benefit of Gypsies camping locally.⁴ Hampshire's attraction for Gypsies was partly due to the availability of large areas of unenclosed heathland and woodland in the New Forest which provided camping grounds, together with employment opportunities within the forest and on the county's farms, particularly for harvesting important local crops like hops.

The presence of Gypsies, however, did create tensions with local people and to impose some control within the New Forest there was a ruling that they could only camp in one place for forty-eight hours. In an attempt to limit Gypsy encampments more effectively, however, in 1926 compounds were controversially set up at locations such as Thorney Hill where Gypsies had to camp.⁵ Such action personified the generally negative and hostile responses of the sedentary population to Gypsies which is well documented throughout the period of this case study. In 1910, for example, the *Western Gazette* reported on the 'nuisance and trouble that Gypsies were to all residents in the Forest' and the 'expense to the New Forest Guardians by reason of their presence'.⁶ A generation later Gypsies remained a focus for criticism by local people who in September 1932 petitioned the Verderers of the New Forest and the District Surveyor about 'the incessant and unceasing annoyance by the Gypsies and the general discomfort owing to their two compounds being here' and called for the compounds to be removed.⁷

It should be emphasized, however, that Gypsies were not exclusively confined to the New Forest area. The Hampshire strawberry harvest centred around the south-east of the county attracted many Gypsies, but in terms of scale this could not match the hop-picking around Alton in the late summer which brought many thousands of Gypsies to the area and not just those Hampshire-based. To emphasize the widespread geographical dispersal of Gypsies in the county, an IEA report of 1914 found 259 Gypsy children on the registers of fifty-seven of Hampshire's elementary schools, of which only nine were in the New Forest.⁸ Apart from the New Forest area, there were significant clusters of Gypsies in the north-east of the county in the vicinity of Basingstoke. Wherever their location, a key feature of Gypsies was an ability to seek out a variety of employment opportunities. Typical activities included selling cheap wares often made by themselves such as baskets, clothes pegs, brooms and even decorative wooden flowers. Repairing household items like chairs was also common, whilst seasonal farming activities of fruit and hop picking were fundamental to sustaining Hampshire's Gypsy community.

Difficulties of School Attendance

What, then, were the problems relating to Gypsy children and school attendance? There was clearly difficulty enforcing their attendance at local elementary schools when they might only be in the district for a few days or camped some distance away from a school. These issues clearly taxed the minds of both school attendance officers and the Director of Education. In 1913 the latter visited the Herriard School Attendance District where there appeared to be a few Gypsy children outside the by-law distances. As they were about to leave the district for harvesting it did not seem advisable to 'convey the children or provide a council school'.⁹ This complex relationship between Gypsies and school attendance was the focus of a letter from Hampshire to the Board of Education in 1914.¹⁰ An eight-year-old Gypsy who had never been to school and could not read or write had joined Tadley School just north of Basingstoke. She had only recently joined her tent-dwelling parents in the area, having previously lived with her aunt. The LEA saw this as a possible case for prosecution, but the Board's reply showed the difficulties of adopting a legal approach towards Gypsy absenteeism from school. The Board advised that the Hampshire by-laws were expressly confined to children 'residing in the district', therefore, proceedings were not possible if the child had lived in another area.¹¹

Another concern was that the integration of Gypsies could undermine the efficient organization of a school like Tadley which His Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI), Wynn Williams, described in 1913 as being a 'difficult school to conduct effectively because part of the population is of the Gypsy class and the children migrate annually with their parents for the summer months during which time they probably receive no instruction'.¹² The consequences were evident in poor attendance and a negative effect on standards which the school's log book emphasizes. On 20 September 1912 only 64 out of 162 children were present, owing to the large number of Gypsies away hop-picking. By 11 October all the children had returned but, not having seen school for some fourteen weeks, 'they are very backward, rather work shy and it will take a long while to recover their lost ground'.¹³

A negative influence on efforts to improve levels of school attendance amongst Gypsies was the reluctance of some schools to even admit Gypsy children because of the problems which they might bring. Gypsies had a poor reputation owing to unruly behaviour and their frequently dirty condition, a consequence of living under canvas or in simple vans with no sanitation.¹⁴ In this context it is also worth emphasizing that compulsory education was still a relatively new idea and that attendance levels in schools could be seriously undermined by activities such as harvesting where child labour was useful.

Board of Education and Home Office Involvement 1913-1914

Problems over the education of Gypsy children in Hampshire were first raised at a national level by the work of the Church Army's New Forest Gypsy Mission. In a letter to the Home Office, Mr Simpson, the mission leader, complained that 'there is not one child of the New Forest Gypsies receiving any education whatever other than what we are able to give them as we go from camp to camp'.¹⁵ His suggestion was for four Gypsy schools to be built specifically for Gypsy children in the Forest

and that they be compelled to camp close by, thus facilitating attendance and, as Simpson emphasized, 'an opportunity of doing something definite with them'.¹⁶ The Board of Education's response was twofold. Hampshire's views on the matter were requested, which led to a detailed review at county level, whilst the Board also asked the local HMI to investigate.

Director of Education Cowan's Report to the Elementary Sub-Committee in February 1914 emphasized that even when Gypsy children were close to school, admission was frequently problematic.¹⁷ Difficulties arose with other children and parents because of the uncleanliness of Gypsies, whilst low academic standards resulted in a reluctance of schools to integrate them.

I have on many occasions inspected these children and found them appallingly ignorant of the letters of the alphabet and of figures and they could not read the simplest infants' book. Such children cannot be fitted into a school at all because they usually come too old for the infants department and too ignorant for the mixed department, consequently they have to be separated and treated individually, and that involves a great deal of time on the part of the teacher for grouped or standard children.¹⁸

In Cowan's Report reference was again made to Tadley School where a more or less permanent Gypsy settlement existed and children only travelled for part of the year. Even here, however, where the education committee had responded to these local circumstances by overstaffing the school, the Gypsy children were 'much behind and a great drag on the other children'.¹⁹

Clearly recognizing the difficulty of Gypsy education, the report acknowledged a range of interesting suggestions to tackle the issue including caravan schools, tent schools, camp schools and special teachers following groups of Gypsies, but Cowan concluded that 'none would be really effective and all would be too costly'.²⁰ He argued that action needed to be taken at a national level to control Gypsies, commenting that 'until Gypsies are brought into a state of settlement, it is impossible to effectively deal with their education'.²¹ The report was despatched to the Board of Education with a letter bluntly concluding that 'the local authority cannot see their way to fall in with the suggestion that special schools should be built in the New Forest for Gypsy children'.²²

This was not the end of the matter, however, because under Home Office pressure the Board of Education organized a conference on 7 April 1914 to which Hampshire and Surrey local education authorities were invited, the latter county also having significant Gypsy school attendance problems. Discussion was dominated by Surrey, with Hampshire reinforcing its view that satisfactory efforts were being made with their Gypsy children and that 'until there was some form of permanent Gypsy settlement the problem was insoluble'.²³ Both authorities were not prepared to take active steps to drive Gypsy children into schools because of local parental opposition.

Reflecting on evidence given, Sir Charles Trevelyan, President of the Board of Education, concluded that 'the root of the matter lay in the habits of the people and the question, therefore, resolved itself into this — was there to be further police legislation with a view to compelling the Gypsies to change their habits? The problem was primarily a police and not an education matter'.²⁴

Outcomes of the conference were inconclusive but the Board of Education's views were clearly set out in a subsequent communication with the Home Office. Both Surrey and Hampshire were considered as doing as much as was practicable

for Gypsy children in places where they stayed for sufficient length of time for them to attend a local school. When no such prolonged stay was made, it was more difficult to enforce school attendance and 'even if the children are brought into schools, their presence is liable to cause disorganization owing to their ignorance and lack of discipline, whilst they gain no commensurate advantage from their brief attendance'.²⁵

The Board was clearly opposed to LEAs like Hampshire embarking on wholesale prosecutions of Gypsy parents with a view to committing Gypsy children to industrial schools, because such a policy of forcibly splitting families would be an injustice and 'likely to discredit the general administration of the law of school attendance'.²⁶ For the Board, Gypsy school attendance involved wider issues which could only be properly addressed by 'a measure which would raise social as well as educational issues and involve direct restriction of the liberty of parents to expose their children to the conditions and consequences of their own way of life'.²⁷ Throughout the period of this case study, however, there was a consistent unwillingness of governments to pursue such a strategy.

Gypsy-Schooling Issues in the 1920s

The difficult relationship between Gypsies in Hampshire and compulsory schooling soon re-emerged in the early post-war period. This was clearly an issue of concern for Hampshire's many Church of England schools because in May 1921 the Director of Education reported to the Elementary Education Sub-Committee that he had agreed to the recommendation of the conference with the Winchester Diocesan Education Committee to approach the President of the Board of Education, 'with a view to securing legislation to obtain regulation as a first step towards the solution of the education of Gypsy children'.²⁸ In November 1921 the Director further reported that Surrey LEA were prepared to join Hampshire in the campaign for legislation.²⁹ Continuing practical problems at a local level were emphasized in 1923 at Titchfield, a village between Southampton and Portsmouth. The Elementary Education Sub-Committee was told that Titchfield Parish Council had forwarded a resolution asking that a separate temporary school should be provided for Gypsy children during the fruit season, 'such school if possible to be at Locks Heath as there is a building in that district which could be easily utilized for the purpose'.³⁰ Although the Director was asked to look into the matter, no such temporary school appears to have been provided, perhaps reflecting Hampshire's policy of no special provision for Gypsies. For those schools admitting significant numbers of Gypsies like at Tadley, however, the situation was not easy. On 21 November 1924 the headteacher admitted three children from the Loveridge family. He did not know when or where these Gypsies had last attended school and could only guess their ages. None could read or write and did not 'even recognize figures or letters'.³¹

In 1926 the issue of Gypsy children in Hampshire again came to the attention of the Board of Education through a predictable route involving a complaint by Salisbury's MP Hugh Morrison. In a letter to the Right Honourable Lord Eustace Percy, President of the Board, he referred to a 'valued constituent of mine complaining that the education authorities do not enforce school attendance on the borders of Wiltshire and Hampshire. I would also be much obliged if you could let

me know whether anything can be done to remedy the matter'.³² HMI Sutherland investigated the issue for the Board which included discussions with Hampshire's Director of Education who put the LEA's Gypsy file at his disposal.

HMI Report of Hampshire Gypsies 1926

Sutherland's prompt report³³ was received by the Board on 28 June and provides a perceptive account of the Gypsy community in the county and their difficult relationship with the schooling system. He emphasized how different categories of Gypsy had contrasting relationships with the education system. Pure nomads consisting of single families or small groups of families wandering all over the county possessed simply a hand cart and slept under canvas or in a barn.³⁴ A more prosperous class, however, had a horse and van commonly attending fairs and race meetings.³⁵ In the New Forest Sutherland emphasized how Forest laws complicated the situation by not permitting camping on one pitch for more than forty-eight hours, leading to Gypsy groups regularly crossing the county boundary into Wiltshire and the jurisdiction of another LEA. Clearly these particular Gypsy groups were largely unaffected by the school system because they were always on the move and difficult for school attendance officers to track down.

In Hants the School Attendance Officers are always on the lookout for these people, but the Gypsies know the finer points of the law and are very cunning in evading detection. They skip across the border in a trice and dodge about from one county to another, not infrequently they change their names and so defy identification.³⁶

In contrast Sutherland also identified a 'quasi-nomadic group' of Gypsies who had bought small plots of land and lived typically in a cabin or bungalow for the autumn and winter months before moving away for the fruit, hay, corn and hop harvests. Significant numbers of these Gypsies were associated with the villages of Ellisfield and Tadley near Basingstoke and Thorney Hill which was a New Forest settlement.³⁷ Whilst in their winter quarters most Gypsy children received some schooling, and Sutherland observed how 'the Gypsy is acquiring greater confidence in the efficacy of the schools, and the children, as a whole, attend more regularly year by year'.³⁸ Nevertheless, during migratory periods it is likely that these Gypsy children rarely saw the inside of schools and that the LEA's recourse to the court and fines was largely ineffective. Sutherland was told how the 'children earn good wages and the parents willingly pay a 1/- or 2/- fine and continue to ignore the attendance laws', emphasizing how economic considerations undermined efforts to enforce school attendance.³⁹

Sutherland's report suggests an LEA seeking to tackle the issue and having some success with the latter group but 'pure nomads' were a more challenging proposition. Both Sutherland and the LEA were in agreement that for the school attendance by-laws to operate satisfactorily in relation to Gypsies, legislation was required along the lines of the Canal Boats Acts resulting in the registration of Gypsies and their vans.⁴⁰ This legislative route might have seemed a simple solution, but they appeared oblivious to the conspicuous weaknesses of the Canal Boats Acts which had largely failed to enforce school attendance for boat children.⁴¹ In reply to Morrisson's original complaint, the Board showed its reluctance to become actively involved in what must have been a very minor issue within their

educational portfolio by submitting Sutherland's report and concluding that 'generally local authorities are doing what they can to deal with this difficult question'.⁴²

The Gypsy Issue Re-Emerges: The Jeffreys-Butler Exchanges 1943-1944

Not until the latter stages of World War II did Hampshire Gypsies re-emerge as an issue at national level, when on 16 December 1943 General Sir George Jeffreys, Conservative MP for Petersfield in Hampshire, asked the President of the Board of Education in the Commons if he could state the 'number of children belonging to itinerant van-dwellers who have received any substantial education this year'.⁴³ The background to this question was revealed in a subsequent letter from Jeffreys to Butler in June 1944 who commented about 'constantly hearing of difficulties from my County as regards dealing with Gypsies'.⁴⁴ Jeffreys' action had been prompted by complaints about Gypsies from Brigadier Charrington, 'a considerable landowner in Hampshire'.⁴⁵ Gypsies were regularly a target of such wealthy landowners because they were deemed to be a threat and a nuisance. Illegal camping and associations with petty crimes such as poaching made them unpopular, and no doubt sheer prejudice towards a community on the very margins of society also played a part too. Education was raised as an issue as much as to enforce some social control over Gypsies as to improve their welfare. The problems with Hampshire Gypsies in relation to education raised by Jeffreys were the familiar ones. Many did not attend school so that a large number of Gypsy children were 'still growing up completely wild and illiterate'.⁴⁶

He was clearly exasperated by the County Education Officer's attitude that there was really nothing that he could do about the situation.⁴⁷ Jeffreys made some interesting suggestions to Butler, including the need for government departments like education, health and the Home Office to work co-operatively together on the issue as well as calling for official regulation of Gypsies.

I cannot help feeling that in these times when everybody's rights and liberties are interfered with by Defence regulations, that it might be possible to make a regulation by allowing movement of campers and van dwellers by licence. This might be given for the period of seasonal occupations such as harvesting etc. together with the obligation of a report to the police at any place that they went to. If only it were possible to restrict their movements, it might be possible to get them to school etc. and to ensure their good behaviour when they had to stay in any particular locality.⁴⁸

A meeting between Jeffreys and Butler on 9 November 1944 showed the Hampshire MP's keen pursuit of the Gypsy issue despite the wartime context. Butler's standpoint was interesting from several perspectives. Given the pressing priorities of wartime including the police's preoccupation with other matters, he rejected introducing regulations to control them and 'opening up the question of clearing Gypsy life from our lanes and greens'.⁴⁹ In addition, however, Butler also displayed a populist and romantic view of the Gypsy community.

I warned Sir George Jeffreys that there were many people who liked having their fortunes told in return for tickling the palm of a Gypsy and that I and my family would be very sorry if they left us, although they had coursed many hares with considerable ability since they understand the habits of these animals better than the average sportsman!⁵⁰

It is also possible to detect in Butler's position a philosophical objection to restrictions on the personal freedom of Gypsies, perhaps reflecting the valued English traditions of liberty and freedom. There are interesting parallels here between Butler's views and earlier attempts to regulate traveller communities by legislation. Between 1888 and 1894 George Smith campaigned to tackle the Gypsy issue through legislation and various Moveable Dwellings Bills were presented to Parliament, but Maynall has emphasized how these attempts largely foundered on the grounds of the rights and liberty of the individual.⁵¹ Later on in 1930 a Canal Boat Bill was defeated following a significant campaign which emphasized how the proposed legislation threatened to undermine personal freedoms.⁵² In the meeting with Jeffreys it is also interesting how Butler was keen to almost minimize the role of LEAs preferring to highlight the contribution of other government departments. Butler argued that the 'education authorities who took charge of Gypsy children for only a few hours a day exerted much less influence upon the problem of Gypsy life than could my colleagues at the Ministry of Health or Home Office'.⁵³

Stillman's Report on Hampshire Gypsies 1944

Although the meeting was inconclusive, Butler's briefing papers were impressive, including detailed notes into the Hampshire situation by a Mr Stillman based on the observations of school attendance officers. Within the county the three main Gypsy compounds were at Thorney Hill and Minstead in the New Forest, whilst Selbourne was in Hampshire's hop-farming district around Alton. Thorney Hill had about forty-five children of school age in residence but there were also many smaller Gypsy compounds across the county such as Odiham near Basingstoke where seven children were present.⁵⁴ These compounds served as winter quarters, but for six months of the year the Gypsies would be moving from place to place seeking seasonal farmwork. Estimates of Gypsy attendance by school attendance officers ranged from 80% at Minstead to 25% at Selborne with Gypsy children having a significantly lower attendance rate than the sedentary child.⁵⁵

When away from winter quarters, school attendance was clearly difficult to enforce, but other factors apart from mobility were significant. There were many reports of children being dirty, ragged and smelly which led to exclusion on verminous grounds. This situation may have been due to environmental conditions rather than personal inclinations, particularly so in the case of children living in tents, but this example again emphasizes that Gypsy education problems were interlinked with wider issues like public health. Some idea of the difficult living conditions of Gypsies is provided by a description of the Thorney Hill compound in the New Forest. Here the Gypsies lived in 'a very poor type of shack and the conditions of the enclosure are very bad; there are no sanitary arrangements and it is impossible to go round the compound without fouling one's shoes!'.⁵⁶ Recognizing the link between these conditions and access to school, HMI Smith recommended to the Board of Education tighter inspections of compounds like Thorney Hill by local authorities under the auspices of the Ministry of Health.⁵⁷

The educational attainment of Gypsy children was considered very much below that of other children such as at Christchurch Senior School where Gypsies were mainly in the lower stream.⁵⁸ The Headmaster of Alton School also reported that their 'educational attainment and intelligence were very low indeed and that continual absence was a key factor and not a lack of intelligence'.⁵⁹ In fact

the Headteacher of Minstead School was very positive about Gypsy children, contradicting the stereotypical view.

Probably by reason of their keen desire to learn, once a desire has been created, a Gypsy child having intelligence makes an excellent pupil and fully appreciates the value of education. It may be, by reason of the rapid progress an educable Gypsy makes in this school, that the Gypsy child is not welcomed here by some few village parents.⁶¹

Stillman's notes also provide insight into the elusive area of Gypsy perceptions of education. Although many Hampshire Gypsy parents could not read or write, some were anxious for their children to learn to do so, but interestingly 'as soon as they can do this their parents consider that their school days are over, and attendance worsens as the children get older and become more useful in helping them to earn money'.⁶²

This narrow, utilitarian view of education is still prevalent to some extent within English Gypsy communities today depressing Gypsy attendance at secondary school.⁶² Overall Gypsy parents were still suspicious of compulsory education and tended not to send their children to school if they could avoid doing so. Illness was often cited as an excuse and Stillman noted that usually when approached by the school attendance officer, the Gypsy family frequently moved onto another place.⁶³

School avoidance rather than school attendance was the response of many Gypsy families in Hampshire to the LEA's efforts to enforce the law. Another factor in the debate was the excessive concentration of Gypsies in single schools such as Minstead, with all the attendant complaints about unruly behaviour and dirty condition. Although suggestions of separate educational provision for Gypsies had been a recurring theme since the 1900s, the HMI viewpoint expressed to Butler was significant.

HMI is convinced that it would be socially and educationally unsound to have separate schools for Gypsies. He thinks that an improvement could be wrought by securing smaller compounds so that only a few Gypsy children attend particular village schools and, therefore, do not loom so much as a problem.⁶⁴

Key Issues

Having chronologically explored Hampshire's Gypsy educational history over the first half of the twentieth century, what key issues emerge? An interesting feature worth emphasizing is the episodic nature of the issue. Throughout the period of the case study the difficulties of getting Gypsy children into school remained fairly constant, but only periodically did it become an active issue at LEA or Board of Education level, usually brought to prominence by complaints by powerful land-owners as in 1943.⁶⁵ A flurry of discussion at both local and national level followed, typically involving no practical action, before the issue quickly subsided from public view, not to reappear for several years.

Hampshire's response to the challenge of Gypsy education was characterized by a consistent reluctance to make any special provision despite some external pressure from the Board. School attendance officers clearly worked hard to get Gypsies into school, but the Director of Education's Report of 1914 emphasized Hampshire's viewpoint which no doubt was strongly influenced by financial considerations, a negative public perception of Gypsies and their existence on the very

margins of society.⁶⁶ The LEA firmly rejected special schools in the New Forest, concluding that problems relating to Gypsies could only be addressed through national legislation. This attitude contrasts sharply with neighbouring Surrey which in 1926 established a school specifically for Gypsies at Hurtwood.⁶⁷

Overall this case study suggests a very limited contribution by Hampshire towards the development of traveller education policy. Unlike in Surrey, the lack of any separate provision for Gypsies prevented real engagement with the challenges of educating these Gypsy children. Individual schools coped as best they could but the authority's narrow view that the Gypsy problem was a legislative matter for central government restricted proactive developments in the teaching of Gypsies. Similarly the Board of Education was also a reluctant participant in the debate, offering little in practical or theoretical terms. Although it held a conference on the issue in 1914, this was largely due to Home Office pressure and Hampshire's Director of Education subsequently reported that 'the Board had no suggestions to put forward for dealing with Gypsy children, they were rather seeking information at present'.⁶⁸ Butler's involvement with the Gypsy issue in the 1940s brought no new policy direction from the Board, but he was very keen to emphasize the responsibilities of the Home Office and Ministry of Health in relation to Gypsies!⁶⁹ Some evidence of development in Gypsy education ideology can perhaps be detected in the opposition of HMI to the concept of separate schools for Gypsies, a view which significantly appears to be accompanied by an assimilationist philosophy which saw education as a vehicle for breaking down Gypsy culture and integrating them into mainstream society. As HMI Smith commented, 'I do not advocate Gypsy schools since to segregate the children is to make them more likely to stay Gypsies', but this view is frustratingly not developed in detail.⁷⁰

Another dimension to the issue in Hampshire was the significant contribution of religious groups to Gypsy education. Whilst the Church Army was prominent in the New Forest,⁷¹ the work of the Alton Hop Pickers Mission was very notable, as their annual reports indicate.⁷² Although hop-picking was not exclusively a Gypsy activity, large numbers of travellers descended on the Alton area in late August for the harvest. Missionaries went out into the hop gardens during the day providing tea and support, whilst in the evenings religious services and magic lantern presentations were held.

For the many children present, missionaries provided some educational experiences often through Sunday schools where competitions were held for Bible repetition and hymn singing. Moral and religious improvement were key aims of the missionaries who commented about the 'social transformation of the Gypsies. Their behaviour is distinctly improving, there is less quarrelling and less drinking!'.⁷³ It was observed how the Gypsy children came back season after season singing Christian hymns and repeating the Bible verses learned from the missionaries.⁷⁴ Albeit a limited input, the Alton Hop Pickers Mission made a positive contribution to Gypsy children's basic literacy, and their evangelical activities have parallels with Christian missionary activities with other traveller groups at this time, notably the canal-boat community.⁷⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has traced the relationship in Hampshire between Gypsies and compulsory schooling in the first half of the twentieth century. A range of

significant issues have been identified, including the rather low-key responses of both the LEA and Board of Education to the challenges of Gypsy schooling and the lack of real progress in developing notions of traveller education. A consistent theme emerges of the Gypsy community being a social problem in the eyes of both local and central government and hence policy, or lack of policy, was strongly influenced by this perspective. The presence of Gypsies in Hampshire was a real challenge to the school system and what is so striking is that the difficulties present in the early twentieth century still resonate today. Problems enforcing attendance, the reluctance of some schools to admit Gypsies and low educational attainment have been highlighted in this case study and yet are key themes present in recent OFSTED reports relating to travellers.⁷⁶

Clearly the paper has highlighted the need for wider research at a local level to provide more insight into an overall national picture relating to Gypsy education before World War II. A more explicit focus on Gypsy activity in relation to education and local government would be useful although scarcity of sources might be a constraining factor. Another key concern is to trace subsequent Gypsy educational developments in the 1950s and 1960s culminating in today's traveller education services. Evidence suggests that Hampshire remained significant in these developments but the focus shifted to Kent where Gypsy education was consistently brought to national attention by the enthusiastic Parliamentary campaigning of Norman Dodds MP.⁷⁷

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²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ HRO, Hampshire Elementary Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 12 May 1921.

²⁹ HRO, Hampshire Elementary Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 10 November 1921.

³⁰ HRO, Hampshire Elementary Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 7 March 1923.

³¹ HRO, 42M77, Tadley School Log Book, 201.

³² PRO, ED 18/75, Letter to Rt Hon. Lord Eustace Percy, Board of Education, from Hugh Morrison MP, 22 June 1927.

³³ PRO, ED 18/75, Report of HMI Sutherland to the Board of Education, 25 June 1927.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See P. Bowen, 'English canal-boat children and the education issue 1900-1940: towards a concept of traveller education', *History of Education*, 30/4 (2001) 362.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² PRO, ED 18/75, Letter from Rt Hon. Lord Eustace Percy, President of the Board of Education, to Hugh Morrison, MP, 30 June 1927.

⁴³ PRO, ED 11/234, copy of a Parliamentary question from General Sir George Jeffreys to Mr R. A. Butler, President of the Board of Education, 16 December 1943.

⁴⁴ PRO, ED 11/234, Letter from Sir George Jeffreys to Rt Hon. R.A. Butler, MP, President of the Board of Education, 28 June 1944.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ PRO, ED 11/234, Report of a meeting between R. A. Butler, Minister of Education, and Sir George Jeffreys, MP, 9 November 1944.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See D. Mayall, *Gypsy-travellers in nineteenth century society* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) 144-46.

⁵² Bowen, op. cit., 369-71.

⁵³ PRO, ED 11/234, Report of a meeting between R. A. Butler, Minister of Education, and Sir George Jeffreys, MP, 9 November 1944.

⁵⁴ PRO, ED 11/234, Note to the County Education Officer (Hants) about Gypsy children by Mr Stillman, 14 July 1944.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ PRO, ED 11/234, Letter from HMI Smith to the Board of Education, 6 November 1944.

⁵⁸ PRO, ED 11/234, Note to the County Education Officer (Hants) about Gypsy children by Mr Stillman, 14 July 1944.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See Kiddle, op. cit., 79-81.

⁶³ PRO, ED 11/234, Note to the County Education Officer (Hants) about Gypsy children by Mr Stillman, 14 July 1944.

⁶⁴ PRO, ED 11/234, Brief for Minister of Education for talk with Sir George Jeffreys on 9 November 1944.

⁶⁵ PRO, ED 11/234, Letter from Sir George Jeffreys to Rt Hon. R. A. Butler, Minister of Education, 28 June 1944.

⁶⁶ PRO, ED 18/75, Report of the Director of Education to members of the County of Southampton Elementary Education Sub-Committee, February 1914.

⁶⁷ See P. Bowen, 'The schooling of Gypsy children in Surrey 1906-1933', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 36/1 (2004) 57-67.

⁶⁸ HRO, Elementary Education Sub-Committee Minutes, 16 April 1914.

⁶⁹ PRO, ED 11/234, Report of a meeting between R. A. Butler, Minister of Education and Sir George Jeffreys, MP, 9 November 1944.

⁷⁰ PRO, ED 11/234, Letter from HMI Smith to the Board of Education, 6 November 1944.

⁷¹ L. Smith, 'The Church Army in the New Forest', *Romany Routes*, 3/1 (1994) 23-26.

⁷² HRO, 85 M93\1\1 41, Annual Reports of the Alton Hop Pickers' Mission 1914-1956.

⁷³ HRO, 85M93\1\7, 53rd Annual Report of the Alton Hop Pickers' Mission, 1920.

⁷⁴ HRO, 85\M93\1\11, 57th Annual Report of the Alton Hop Pickers' Mission, 1924.

⁷⁵ See references to the London City Mission and the Incorporated Seamen and Boatmen's Friend Society in P. Bowen (2001), op. cit., 364.

⁷⁶ See OFSTED, *The Education of Travelling Children* (1996), Ref. HMR/12/96/NS.

⁷⁷ See N. Dodds, *Gypsies, Didikois and other Travellers* (Johnson Publications, 1966).