



1860 - 1947

I downloaded and edited the lifestory of **Gypsy Rodney Smith**, which gives insight in the gypsy way of life **in the late 1800's**. He writes: I was born 31st of March, 1860, in a gypsy tent, the son of, Cornelius Smith and his wife Mary Welch. The place was the parish of Wanstead, near Epping Forest... Two girls and a boy came before me and two girls after me. My father earned his living by making clothes-pegs, baskets, tin ware, and re-caning cane-chairs. The men are the manufacturers. The gypsy women sell what their husbands make, and of course when we were all little my mother did the selling for us.

Father was also a horse-dealer, a business in which the gypsies are experts. He was a very good fiddler. When he fiddled, I danced, and at a certain point in the evening I went round the beer-shop with the hat. These visits were very frequent.



**Before marriage**, sweethearts would never think of going off alone for a little walk, yet the gypsies find this no bar to pleasant and successful courting.

The occupation of most womenfolk is fortune-telling. The folly of the "gorgios" (non-gypsies) that have to a large extent forced this disgraceful profession upon gypsy women. Soothsaying is an Oriental custom. The gypsies are an Eastern race, and outsiders think, that they too can reveal the future. The gypsies know that fortune-telling is a mere cheat, but they are not averse to making profit of the folly and superstition of the "gorgios".

You see, I was born at the bottom of the ladder and there is no disgrace in being born at the bottom. There are thousands of people who owe everything to their father and mother, and yet walk about the earth and swagger as if they had made creation.

I had never seen a toilet in use before.

It had been my custom to run to a brook and to wash in that or in a pool nearby. I took my bath with the birds. Other times washed myself with the dew on the grass. **I had no education, no knowledge of "gorgio" civilisation, and I grew up wild as the birds, frolicsome as the lambs, and as difficult to catch as the rabbits.**



Eighty out of a hundred gypsies have Bible names. My father was called Cornelius, my brother Ezekiel. Uncle Bartholomew had twelve children, everyone he gave a Scriptural name - Naomi, Elijah, Samson, Delilah, Simeon, and the like. Fancy having a Samson and a Delilah in the same family! Yet the gypsies had no Bibles, and if they had they could not read them.

We ourselves believe that we are akin to the Jews... many gypsies bear a striking facial resemblance to the Jews. Our noses are not usually quite so prominent, but we often have the eyes and hair of Jews. When I was a boy they scrupulously observed the Sabbath, except when the "gorgios" visited and tempted them with money to tell their fortunes.

*Editor's Note: **THE GYPSIES' ORIGIN** (time @ 600 B.C.) This shows their origins; **they are Rechabite Jews.***

*'Jeremiah the Prophet brought **the Rechabites** to the temple and offered them wine to drink. 'But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, You shall drink no wine... **Neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days you shall dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land where you are strangers....***

*So we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he has charged us...'* (Jeremiah 35:6-10,18-19) Download the study Bible with search-engine from page 6 and see for yourself.

Beer is their beverage. Spirits as a rule they take sparingly. (I did not see their women drink alcohol.)

They don't just drink alone, but only when they meet friends. Drinking was a great trouble to my father - I am speaking of his unregenerate days.

It was **my mother's death**, however, which woke me to full consciousness... We were travelling in Hertfordshire. My oldest sister was taken ill. 'Your daughter has the **small-pox**,' the doctor told father, '**You must get out of the town at once.**' He sent us to a bye-lane. **Mother also fell sick.** Father was in the uttermost distress, for **he loved her as only a gypsy can love.** Mother told father, "When I'm trying to pray, a black hand shows me all I have done, and whispers, 'There's no mercy for you!' My father had some time before been in prison for three months on a false charge, and there he had been told what now he tried to teach my mother. After my father had told her all he knew of the Gospel she threw her arms around him and kissed him. He went behind the wagon, and wept bitterly. When he came back in to see her, she looked calmly into his face, and said with a smile: "I want you to promise me one thing. Will you be a good father to my children?" He promised her that he would.

**Mother was buried at the dead of night.** We were only gypsies, and the Authorities would not permit the funeral to take place in the daytime. It is customary at death to destroy the possessions of the person or to bury them with the dead.

**My father** always said his prayers night and morning and asked God to give him power over drink, but every time temptation came in his way he fell before it. He hated himself afterwards... "I do not know how to be good."

**One night he dreamed** that he was travelling through rugged country over rocks, boulders, thorns and briars. His hands were bleeding and his feet torn. Utterly exhausted, he fell to the ground. A person in white raiment appeared to him, and as this person lifted up his hands my father saw the mark of the nails, and then he knew it was the Lord.

Showing His hands, "I suffered this for you, and when you give up all and trust Me, I will save you."

My father and his brother went to the mission hall. Before leaving, my father said to us, "Children, I shall not come home again until I am converted," and I shouted, "Daddy, who is he?"

I did not know who this 'Converted' was. I resolved to follow him. During the meeting he fell on the floor. I thought father was dead, and shouted out, "Oh dear, our father is dead!" But leaping joyfully, he exclaimed, "I am converted!" He truly converted into a loving endearing father and honest man. Soon after, his two brothers were converted; the three formed an evangelistic team and went roaming the countryside preaching and singing.

Working by day to support their children, my father and his two brothers never lost an opportunity to preach the Gospel.



Click photo for Fiddle

"The Converted Gypsies", as they were known. Their method: father would get out his fiddle, which proved a great attraction. He was accompanied by his two brothers and all the children of the three families. They would sing until three or four hundred people had gathered, then they would preach. The fiddle won great fame as the "hallelujah fiddle" and people came from long distances.

**One evening** I wandered into the little Methodist Chapel, Fitzroy Street, Cambridge. I don't remember a word of the sermon, but I made up my mind that I would give myself to Christ. I was the first to go forward. I knew He died for me; I knew He was able to save me, and I just believed Him to be as good as His word. I went home and told my father that his prayers were answered, and he wept tears of joy with me. "Tell me how you know that you are converted?" With my hand on my heart, I said, "Daddy, I feel so warm here."

- Father lived until the ripe old age of 91 -

When I approached my seventeenth birthday, my desire to be a preacher grew stronger day by day.

### My first public speaking



Rodney

After several persons had addressed the meeting, the Rev. William Booth said, "The next speaker will be the gypsy boy." There was only one gypsy boy in the meeting, and I was he. My first inclination was to run away. Trembling, I went to the platform. Mr. Booth said, "Will you sing us a solo?" - "I will try, sir." I sang, 'Happy, ever happy'. People listened with attention. When nervously clearing my throat, someone shouted, "Keep your heart up, youngster!" I said, "My heart is in my mouth; where do you want it?" People laughed and I somewhat gathered my thoughts to speak: "I cannot trust myself, for I am nothing; and I cannot trust in what I have, for I have nothing; and I cannot trust in what I know, for I know nothing. I am only a gypsy boy. I do not know what you know about many things, but I know Jesus. I know that He has saved me. I cannot read as you can. I do not live in a house as you do: I live in a tent."

Rodney taught himself to read, he spoke all over the UK, in Australia and made five trips to America. Wherever he spoke crowds filled the venues to overflowing. Sometimes he was on tour for as long as eight months, away from his wife and children.

"I'm a gypsy, the message is important, not the messenger. I did not go to your colleges and seminaries. They wouldn't have me... but I've been to the feet of Jesus, where the only true scholarship is learned. The way to Jesus is not by Cambridge, Yale, Oxford, Socrates or Shakespeare. It's over an old-fashioned hill called Calvary.."



Gypsy Smith

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## The Gypsies and their Origins

### Who was Gypsy Smith?



Click on photo for Gypsy guitar music

In June we visited the '**Appleby fair - 2025**' where thousands of gypsies assembled to celebrate their Gypsy heritage. They are also known as Travellers,



Billy

Zigan, Roma, etc. I became good friends with Billy Walsh, who is one of the main organisers. There was a real desire to know where they originated. Billy told how they traced themselves back to the Middle East, Afghanistan and India, from where they moved to Egypt. I knew that from Egypt they got the name 'Gypsie'. Billy recollected an old courtcase between a farmer and travelling 'Egyptian'. As in every society we have the upright and the rascals.

I asked some of the oldest teen boys, to visit my website. They showed me their nokia phones as their parents didn't allow smart phones and they respect the older generation. I noticed that the caravans we visited to be exceptionally clean. Being proud of their heritage, they love presenting their horses; washing them in the river and trotting them down the main street. The young ladies are dolled up as this is where many meet their husband to be.

