

Intermittent Citizens: Scotland's Travellers, Welfare, and the Shifting Boundary of State and Voluntary Action in the Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract This article explores the shifting relationship between Scottish Travellers, voluntary and mission action, and the state. Examining missionary and state attempts to settle, assimilate, and turn Scots Travellers into so-called good citizens in the first decades of the twentieth century—initially during the First World War and later in a designated camping scheme in Perthshire—reveals three things. First, many of the techniques used to manage Travellers' behavior were not exceptional but rather can be seen as part of the wider armory deployed by welfare workers and reformers in this period. Often they used the particular sites of the mission hall, schoolroom, and camping ground to inculcate good citizenship. Second, the boundary between state and voluntary action was never fixed. And third, exploring how this boundary shifted over time can lead to a better understand of how Travellers were positioned as citizens at a time when both who was considered a citizen and what that might mean were profoundly changing. In this way, this article not only extends our understanding of Gypsy and Traveller history but also contributes to histories of the state, citizenship, and voluntary action.

In May 1932, Miss Dora Maitland of the Church of Scotland's Home Mission Committee traveled south to meet Colonel Reginald Bray at Hurtwood Common in Surrey. Bray owned most of the 1,700-acre common, and as its landlord, and with considerable local support, had established a committee to “more constructive[ly]” manage the “increasingly vexatious gypsy and vagrant” presence in Hurtwood.¹ Under the eye of what was called the Control Committee, one hundred acres of the common had been set aside to house some twenty Gypsy families who had been granted a permit to live there under the supervision of a ranger. These permits to camp were issued only to those families who sent their children to

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¹ I use the terms *Gypsies* and *Travellers* to refer to two groups of hereditary nomads who make their home in the United Kingdom. Gypsies (or Romani) are part of the Roma diaspora that is thought to have left northwestern India in the early medieval period. In Britain, they are generally associated with England and Wales, although the Gypsies of Kirk Yetholm in the Borders also claim this ancestry. Irish and Scots Travellers claim an Indigenous heritage and often link their nomadism back to dispossession of land under English colonial rule. The term *Tinkers* was traditionally used to describe Travellers—sometimes but not always pejoratively. Some Scots Travellers today choose to reclaim the word for themselves.

school, kept their camps free of rubbish, and could demonstrate “cleanliness” and “good behaviour.”² The Surrey Education Committee paid for a wooden building to house two teachers and a special school for the children of the common. There, education was “specially adapted to the needs of the gipsy children,” with lessons concentrating heavily on handicrafts and practical subjects. The teachers were also expected to encourage “the gipsy children into suitable employment” when they left school, a task in which they had some success: Surrey’s education inspector noted that a “number of girls have been placed in domestic service and show no desire to return to camp life.” On top of the classes for the children, a teacher ran evening sessions for parents, events that were reportedly attended by as many as fifty people.³

By its own measure at the time of Dora Maitland’s visit, the Hurtwood camp scheme was successful: the commons had been cleaned up, and Gypsy children attended school regularly, with some going on to waged employment. When the scheme closed in 1934, the families were housed locally in “modern bungalows,” where, as one local newspaper put it, they were “given the opportunity to take their places as ordinary citizens,” noting how “with education has come a desire for a higher standard of living and comfort.”⁴ Licensed camps, it seemed, could offer sedentary society a means to end the “nuisance” that Gypsies caused,⁵ requiring them to conform to the standards of behavior increasingly required of the wider population. And, ultimately, it seemed that camps, particularly when combined with regular education, could push them toward the settled life of so-called ordinary citizens. Maitland was certainly impressed by the scheme, noting how “these gypsies have ceased wandering and now stay on the common throughout the year, occupying themselves with agricultural work, miscellaneous occupations or hawking.” Moreover, and crucially to her mind, “in every case,” the families were “self-supporting without any public assistance.”⁶ In her final report to Scotland’s Home Mission Committee, using Hurtwood as inspiration, she sketched out a proposal for a network of sites to be established along similar lines in Perthshire for some of the county’s “tinkers,” as Scots Travellers were commonly called at this time.⁷

What is the purpose of revisiting this small piece of history? Scholars can draw multiple levels of historical meaning from efforts to settle and assimilate Scots Travellers in the first decades of the twentieth century. Maitland’s Perthshire scheme was not the first time that the living conditions and behavior of Scotland’s Travellers had come to the attention of reformers. Maitland herself had been preoccupied with “the

² Tinkers: Control Committees: D. Maitland, “An Account of Gipsy Camps in Surrey Supervised by the Hurtwood Control Committee with bearing on Tinker Camps in Scotland,” 1932, HH 55/241, National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as NAS.)

³ Board of Education minute on HMI Mr Charles’ visit to Hurtwood school, 24 March 1926, ED 41/433, National Archives, London. Given the Gypsy Traveller population of the camp, this figure should be used with caution.

⁴ “Successful Gypsy Experiment,” *Surrey Times*, 8 December 1933. See also “Exit the Gypsy: Civilisation Extends Its Conquering Sway,” *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 11 December 1933.

⁵ Letter from Bray to Home Office, 30 March 1910, HO45/10995/158231/9, National Archives.

⁶ Tinkers: Control Committees: D. Maitland, “An Account of Gipsy Camps in Surrey Supervised by the Hurtwood Control Committee with bearing on Tinker Camps in Scotland,” 1932, HH 55/241, p. 2, NAS.

⁷ Maitland, “An Account of Gipsy Camps,” HH 55/241, NAS.

Tinker question”⁸ since at least the end of the First World War, while both the Church of Scotland’s Home Mission and various government bodies had, for at least the previous thirty-five years, intermittently wrestled with the question of the place—social and spatial—of this hereditary nomadic population in an increasingly industrializing and modernizing Scotland. In setting Maitland’s work and that of the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland within a longer context going back to the last years of the nineteenth century, and within a wider framework considering their work alongside other voluntary efforts and the state’s activities, historians can gain a new view not only of Gypsy and Traveller history but also the shifting boundaries of voluntary state action in the early twentieth century and how these intersected with emerging ideas of domestic citizenship.

Part of my goal is to expand histories of welfare and stopping grounds for Britain’s Gypsy and Traveller populations to the years before the Second World War. The topic itself is a little-written history. What scholarship that does exist tends to focus on the postwar years: the buildup to the 1968 Caravan Sites Act and its requirement that local authorities provide designated sites for Gypsies and Travellers residing in or resorting to their district.⁹ While this historiographical focus has been valuable, not least in demonstrating how the expansion of the postwar British (welfare) state drew its Gypsy and Traveller populations into its orbit along with the rest of the British population, we should be wary of foreshortening the historical story it tells.¹⁰ By extending our gaze to the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, we can see how some of the debates raging in the late 1960s and into the 1970s were already emerging over the role of official sites in mediating Gypsies’ and Travellers’ relationship with wider society. These debates reveal welfare provision and camping grounds as sites of tension. Were they spaces where Britain’s Gypsies and Travellers might gradually become socialized, via education and enforced sedentarism, into the ways of modernity? Or were they protected spaces, small sanctuaries where, with some small adjustments, Gypsies and Travellers were able to maintain key parts of their social structures, identity, and lifestyle?

Framing the question in these terms also allows me to set the provision of camping grounds and other welfare for Gypsies and Travellers within a far larger set of concerns. These revolve around the histories of (coercive) welfare interventions and the role of particular institutions (religious, voluntary, and state) and the role of particular individuals (missionaries, voluntary workers, and state officials) in delivering them. Doing so opens up the world of British civil society in which home-mission activity formed part of a wider subset of British voluntary welfare-oriented work.¹¹ Framing this history this way also opens up a way to thinking about the state, as by the last decades of the nineteenth century, the rise of the labor movement,

⁸ Maitland, “An Account of Gipsy Camps,” HH 55/241, p. 6, NAS.

⁹ For example, see Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics among British Gypsies from Victorian Reformism to Romany Nationalism* (Oxford, 1974); Becky Taylor, *A Minority and the State: Travellers in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2008).

¹⁰ David Sibley, *Outsiders in Urban Societies* (Oxford, 1981); Taylor, *A Minority and the State*; Jim Hinks and Becky Taylor, “Hampshire’s Gypsy Rehabilitation Centres: Welfare and Agency in Mid-20th Century Britain,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 94 (2022): 181–201.

¹¹ Jose Harris, *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003).

the Fabians, and a disparate collection of reformers had begun to push it toward a more active, interventionist role in British society. As the proportion of the British population thought of as citizens—with a right to vote and participate in the activities of government—increased, the state also needed to adapt to their growing presence. This change has been most often thought of in relation to the working class and to women, but Scotland's Travellers, at certain times and in certain contexts, were also seen as citizens who should be included in this more expansive state.

The diverse and overlapping nature of voluntary and state in this period is well illustrated in the working biographies of three women who were prominently involved in Scottish initiatives toward Travellers in the first decades of the twentieth century. Dora Maitland spent her early years working in Edinburgh's slums alongside university settlement workers before spending six years as a police sister in Aberdeen and then moving on to work with the Home Mission Committee. Eva Campbell Colquhoun from Perth brought a strong Christian ethos to her role as honorable secretary for the Central Committee for the Welfare of Travellers and her work with the city's Traveller population. In this work she was closely aligned with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, but she also promoted votes for women and the idea of women's active citizenship. Finally, Margaret Mackie worked as a schoolteacher at Merkinch School in Inverness, running its separate Traveller school for a number of years. These three women with their mix of religious, charity, and local authority roles between them embodied the complexity of reforming initiatives in this period and the diverse ways in which women might intersect with the public sphere.¹² Thus, in line with a broader historiographical shift away from constructing accounts of the decline of voluntarism and the rise of the state across the twentieth century, the first decades of the century can be characterized as a period of extraordinary activity, state and voluntary alike.¹³ Rather than a simple case of state replacing voluntary action, the latter often worked in a dynamic relationship with the former, while at both the national and local levels the state was continually exploring the boundaries of its responsibility and action.

The efforts of these women also push historians to think about the links between state institutions, voluntary associations, and developing ideas of domestic citizenship—what Francesca Moore has called “citizenship beyond voting rights.”¹⁴ Maitland, Colquhoun Campbell, and Mackie were all women who were what can be thought of as “active” citizens, who expended their energies trying to create “good” citizens.¹⁵ Historians have suggested that the decades surrounding the

¹² See Dorothea Maitland, “Welfare of Tinkers,” Police Sister for Aberdeen City Police, 20 September 1919, HH 55/237, NAS; Eva Campbell Colquhoun, “Welfare of Tinkers: An Explanatory Booklet,” Perth, n.d.; Miss Margaret Mackie, “Vagrants,” n.d., ED 15/67, NAS.

¹³ Geoffrey Finlayson, “A Moving Frontier: Voluntarism and the State in British Social Welfare, 1911–1949,” *Twentieth Century British History* 1, no. 2 (1990): 183–206; James McKay and Matthew Hilton, introduction to *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945*, ed. Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton, and James McKay (Basingstoke, 2009), 1–20.

¹⁴ Francesca Moore, “A Band of Public-Spirited Women”: Middle-Class Female Philanthropy and Citizenship in Bolton, Lancashire before 1918,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 2 (2016): 149–62, abstract.

¹⁵ Taylor, *A Minority and the State*, 157–59. On women, voluntarism, and active citizenship more generally, see Moore, “A Band of Public-Spirited Women”; Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven, 2004); Linda Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action: Eglantyne Jebb and Save*

First World War saw the emergence of new ideas of citizenship, with Eugenia Low arguing that pre-1914 attempts to create a morally motivated and socially cohesive community saw the emergence of ideas of active citizenship.¹⁶ Brad Beaven and John Griffiths have refined this concept to suggest a distinct periodization of active citizenship, viewing citizenship in the last three decades of the nineteenth century as associated with civic spirit and civic engagement that morphed into citizenship becoming increasingly infused with ideas of duty and discipline; the First World War then marked an important turning point in contemporary discussions over the relationship between the individual and the state.¹⁷ In essence, the nineteenth-century expansion of the franchise and the rise of Labour, the Liberal reforms of 1906 to 1914 and of Lloyd George's government, and the demands and impact of the war all combined to recast not only *what* the state was for but *who* it was for and how they might be shaped into a new generation of good citizens. I explore how these ideas played out for Scotland's Travellers.

I also explore *where* these ideas of citizenship were being played out. Tom Hulme's consideration of the role of education in promoting good citizenship, as contemporaries worried about how to create healthy and efficient children for Britain and empire, has focused on the physical design and construction of schools in promoting this. His approach chimes with Carole O'Reilly's research on how Edwardian ideas of self-help and social responsibility achieved spatial expression through the creation of citizens' municipal parks.¹⁸ The late nineteenth and the early twentieth century saw the creation of a host of other spaces—the asylum, industrial school, labor colony or camp—that sought to act as reforming institutions for citizens seeming to be failing. Barbara Arnell has demonstrated just how closely entwined ideas of citizenship and behavior became in the modern period, not only in British and Dutch ideas of liberalism but also in French and American republicanism, which associated citizenship with labor. To be a citizen in a modern liberal state was to be industrious, and so, by extension “one of the greatest political and economic sins of the modern era was to be idle and poor.”¹⁹ These attitudes are expressed in the ethos of the workhouse and the growing number of initiatives by reformers from the last decades of the nineteenth century onward to rehabilitate the idle poor through institutionalized work. For the children of vagrants—there being nothing more inimical to modernity than perpetual and undirected drifting—industrial schools were intended to remove them from the harmful effects of their birth environment and to instill in them habits

the Children, 1876–1928 (New York, 2009); Eve Colpus, “Women, Service, and Self-actualization in Inter-war Britain,” *Past & Present*, no. 238 (2018): 197–232; Ruth Davidson, “Working-Class Women Activists: Citizenship at the Local Level,” in *Alternatives to State-Socialism in Britain: Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Ackers and Alastair J. Reid (Basingstoke, 2016), 93–120.

¹⁶ Eugenia Low, “The Concept of Citizenship in Twentieth Century Britain: Analysing Contexts of Development,” in *Reforming the Constitution: Debates in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Peter Catterall, Wolfram Kaiser, and Ulrike Walton Jordan (London, 2000), 179–200.

¹⁷ Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, “Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain, 1870–1939,” *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 2 (2008): 203–25.

¹⁸ Tom Hulme, “A Nation Depends on Its Children: School Buildings and Citizenship in England and Wales, 1900–1939,” *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 2 (2015): 406–32; Carole O'Reilly, “From ‘The People’ to ‘The Citizen’: The Emergence of the Edwardian Municipal Park in Manchester, 1902–1912,” *Urban History* 40, no. 1 (2013): 136–55.

¹⁹ Barbara Arnell, *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colonies* (Oxford, 2017), 37.

of industry and religious observance. Thus I extend the historical gaze to the site of the mission hall, school, and licensed camping ground to demonstrate the importance of particular spaces in trying to create the Traveller good citizen.

But who were the “tinkers” who received the attentions of Maitland, Campbell Calquhoun, Mackie, and different agents of the state, and whose lives underpin this article? A census taken of Scots Travellers in 1893 counted 977 adults and 725 children, describing them as living “principally in tents, and marry[ing] amongst themselves, according to their own rights; [and] support[ing] themselves ostensibly by petty industries, such as tinker-work, umbrella mending, and occasional field labour, but really to a large extent by begging.”²⁰ This census was used by a departmental committee, formed two years later, as part of its exploration of the “problem” of “habitual offenders, vagrants, beggars, inebriates and juvenile delinquents” in Scotland, and although not named in its title, Travellers were taken to exist as a subset within these overlapping and problematic groups. The committee was tasked with not only finding the causes of their behavior but also suggesting “remedies to act as a deterrent and reformation.”²¹

Travellers were universally described by witnesses to the committee as irredeemably work-shy drunkards who lived in caves or tents that were both “insanitary” and “immoral.” Even when witnesses accepted that some of the work they did—particularly seasonal farm work—was useful to society, or that they were “faithful to their own marriage ties, and fond of their children,” they insisted that this did not offset other characteristics, such as a propensity for alcoholism and their refusal to send their children to school. Pressed to admit that living outside could be healthy, witnesses nevertheless argued it was “a great evil that there should be this miserable camping out of men, women and children all huddled together.” Observations such as this led many witnesses to suggest that direct and concerted interventions were needed: “I would make that mode of living illegal and I would take the children away, and have them committed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act to some school farm and taught farmwork.” These ambitions were stopped not due to any sympathy on the part of the committee with the lives of Travellers but because it could not condone the practice of targeting resources at a largely self-supporting, able-bodied section of society that were withheld from the rest of the laboring poor.²²

This report highlights some of the challenges presented to historians seeking to write histories of Britain’s Gypsy and Traveller populations. It offers a detailed insight into the place of Travellers in Scottish life in the late nineteenth century but does so only through the eyes of outsiders. Not until the 1930s does the record include direct testimonies from Scots Travellers, and although some work has now been done by Travellers themselves collecting families memories of the early twentieth century, the bulk of accessible evidence has been generated by the

²⁰ As quoted in Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, Vagrants, Beggars, Inebriates and Juvenile Delinquents (Scotland), *Report [and Minutes of Evidence] to the Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, Vagrants, Beggars, Inebriates and Juvenile Delinquents* (Edinburgh, 1895), xxxi.

²¹ Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, *Report*, unpaginated preamble.

²² Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, *Report*, xxxi, paras. 6349, 6443–44, 6605, pp. 13, 151.

state, missions, and welfare organizations, all outsiders in the main predisposed to see them as social failures, nuisances, and in need of reform.²³ This, though, does not mean that Traveller experiences and voices are unrecoverable. My article co-written with Jim Hinks stresses the importance of learning from postcolonial historians and others who work with nonliterate and subaltern populations, to hold an awareness of “the grain” of an archive when writing Gypsy and Traveller histories.²⁴ If we take, for example, the evidence from the Central Committee for the Welfare of Travellers, we can read back from the comments made by the witnesses a different understanding of Scots Traveller lives from the one they thought they were presenting. This understanding was based around what Judith Okely would later characterize as commercial nomadism—where mobility, self-employment, and a diverse skill set filled gaps in the economy not easily plugged by settled individuals—that saw Travellers covering even the most remote parts of the country, and where the centrality of children and close family ties sustained everyday social meaning.²⁵ Thus, in what follows, as I describe the different ways in which voluntary and state agents sought to settle and assimilate Scots Travellers (although by necessity the majority of the sources were generated by non-Travellers), I read against the grain of the archive to offer a glimpse of their worldviews and perspectives.

BUILDING GOOD CITIZENS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

As the 1895 Habitual Offenders investigation and report made clear, Travellers had begun by the end of the nineteenth century to come into the sights of the state, beyond the established expedients of evictions, moving them on or prosecuting them for vagrancy and begging. In fact, we can trace the beginning of the state’s active—rather than reactive—interest in Scots Travellers back to the establishment in 1866 of the network of industrial schools.²⁶ Anticipating the Habitual Offenders Committee’s interest in “remedies to act as a deterrent and reformation,” and chiming with wider Victorian thinking on the innocence of the child and the possibility to shape and reform children away from the pernicious influence of failing parents, combined a vision of social improvement with spatial separation. As Mr. Hutchinson, manager of Perth’s industrial school, put it, “to do real permanent

²³ The following are Scots Traveller autobiographies dealing with the interwar years: Roger Leitch, ed., *The Book of Sandy Stewart* (Edinburgh, 1988); Betsy Whyte, *The Yellow in the Broom* (Edinburgh, 1979); Whyte, *Red Rowans and Wild Honey* (Edinburgh, 1990). For an example of current collecting of testimony, see testimony of David Donaldson in Mike Doherty, “Tinkers and Gypsies: The Historical Tragedy of the Attempted Eradication of Scotland’s Travellers,” *Travellers Times*, 24 May 2018, <https://www.travellestimes.org.uk/features/tinkers-and-gypsies-historic-tragedy-attempted-eradication-scotlands-travellers>.

²⁴ Becky Taylor and Jim Hinks, “What Field? Where? Bringing Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller History into View,” *Cultural and Social History* 18, no. 5 (2021): 629–50; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton and Oxford, 2009).

²⁵ Judith Okely, *The Traveller-Gypsies* (Cambridge, 1983).

²⁶ The Industrial Schools Act, 1857, which covered England and Wales and was extended to include Scotland in 1866, gave magistrates the power to sentence homeless children aged seven to fourteen years brought before the courts for vagrancy to a spell in an industrial school. The costs were borne by local education authorities. Industrial schools and reformatories were merged under the Approved Schools Act, 1933. Gillian Carol Gear, “Industrial Schools in England, 1857–1933: ‘Moral Hospitals’ or ‘Oppressive Institutions?’” (PhD diss., University of London, 1999).

good . . . you must restrict them to civilised walks of life.”²⁷ For some Traveller families, the separation was not simply local and temporary—removal to a local industrial school always offered the possibility of occasional family visits and return of the child after release from the school—but was made permanent via forcible emigration under child empire settlement schemes.²⁸

The witness testimonies and the Habitual Offenders report made it clear that there was an appetite, among some at least, to coercively settle and assimilate Travellers and that the industrial schools could offer mechanisms for enacting this. Yet it is far less clear how extensive and systematic the practice of removing children from their families actually was, as it remained cheaper for local authorities to move Travellers out of their district than to cover the cost of children being boarded in an industrial school. The hard figures come two decades later, from the “tinker census” of October 1917, which gave the total number of Scots Travellers as 2,728, of whom 171 were children in industrial schools.²⁹ These figures indicate that, by this point, somewhere between 5 and 10 percent of Traveller children were removed from their families and institutionalized. On top of this, following the Education (Scotland) Act 1908, mainstream schooling more broadly began to shape Travellers’ lives. This legislation instituted the practice of requiring children to make two-hundred school attendances a year, at which point their parents could be issued with an attendance certificate allowing them to travel without fear of prosecution.³⁰ The effect of the legislation was to make travelling families “confine their movements to certain areas and . . . not wander so widely as they once did.” Given the choice between having their children forcibly removed to an industrial school and needing to limit their nomadism for certain parts of the year for them to attend regular schools, it seems that many families chose the latter. Even so, those in the northern and highland regions were far less affected, keeping “to their old habits,” in part because in many remoter areas they were still made “pretty welcome. . . [being] the only strangers that the country people have among them, and the people get news from the tinkers.”³¹

By the outbreak of the First World War, the state, largely through the medium of enforced attendance and via the space of the classroom or residential industrial school—engagement with which might in turn serve to circumscribe a family’s nomadism—was beginning to reshape Travellers’ lives and behaviors. The war intensified state engagement with Travellers in two key ways. First, a significant number of Traveller men joined the army, either voluntarily or through conscription; 309 were recorded in 1917 as serving in the forces.³² Second, the Defence of the Realm Act, particularly in its prohibiting the lighting of fires and in the barring of civilians from large parts of the coast and other areas, hit Travellers in specific ways. Cooking outside on

²⁷ Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, *Report*, preamble, para. 6672.

²⁸ Departmental Committee on Habitual Offenders, *Report*, preamble, para. 6672, 6681.

²⁹ Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1918), 4.

³⁰ The school day was split into two halves, with morning and afternoon attendance counted separately. In essence, a child attending every school day from the beginning of October to the end of March could fulfil the annual attendance requirement.

³¹ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*, 12–13.

³² Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*, 9.

open fires now ran the risk of prosecution, and the government requisition of large swathes of land led to the closure of some long-standing stopping places.³³

Contrary to the firmly held stereotypes that true Travellers were perpetually nomadic, in fact, even before the impact of enforced school attendance was felt, given the harsh reality of life on the road in the winter, it had long been common practice for families, whenever possible, to find a stopping place that might tide them over from October through to March. Travellers either sought stable camping grounds or found lodging in the poorer parts of towns and cities.³⁴ But war regulations made it hard, even in summer, to maintain a peripatetic way of life, as the absence of able-bodied men, now serving on the front, made the tasks involved in making and breaking camp far more arduous. Added to the difficulties of life on the road was the draw of the town: “the constant need to be near a Post Office for the eagerly-expected news from India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, France,” and the “advantage of having a fixed place to welcome the boys to when they come home on leave.”³⁵ All these factors converged so that many “families were driven into towns,” typically moving into “slum or derelict houses.”³⁶ Those women who were left on the road with the remainder of their families found themselves in increasingly difficult circumstances.

If the greater challenges of life on the road were one consequence of the war, another major change seemed to indicate that things might be made easier for Traveller women. As with all wives whose husbands were in the Forces, Traveller wives had a right to an army separation allowance. This was paid at a uniform rate, and in fact, as Susan Pedersen has pointed out, represented the first non-contributory, rights-based state benefit paid to women. It therefore represented a significant extension of the state’s sphere of activity, one that acknowledged fighting husbands as citizens and their wives by proxy as having claims on the state.³⁷ However, as Pedersen has shown for Liverpool, and Annemarie Hughes and Jeff Meek have shown for Scotland, the state did not have the staff and systems in place to assess and manage the allowance system. Government relied heavily on voluntary organizations, particularly the network of women visitors working under the auspices of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association, to ensure that women received the allowances due to them.³⁸ And the involvement of these women visitors extended beyond simply smoothing the administrative process. Working-class wives receiving these allowances became subject to increased scrutiny, from local state agents and agencies as well as from charitable organizations such as the Scottish National Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, keen to ensure that women’s access to government money led to neither drunkenness nor child neglect.

³³ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*, 19.

³⁴ Leitch, *Book of Sandy Stewart*, xxiv, 45.

³⁵ Colquhoun, “Welfare of Tinkers,” HH 55/237, NAS.

³⁶ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*, 4.

³⁷ Susan Pedersen, “Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War,” *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990): 983–1006. The program also represented a significant financial commitment, one that by 1918 cost the government approximately £120 million a year and was paid to over 1.5 million women.

³⁸ Pedersen, “Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War”; Annemarie Hughes and Jeff Meek, “State Regulation, Family Breakdown, and Lone Motherhood: The Hidden Costs of World War I in Scotland,” *Journal of Family History* 39, no. 4 (2014): 364–87.

Supplementary cash allowances were granted on condition of “good behaviour,” while in-kind contributions were given instead if the applicant was seen as “unreliable,” thus ensuring that visitors acted as the “advocates, disciplinarians, trouble-shooters, and the morality police of soldier’s wives.”³⁹ Therefore, although the war might have seen the significant expansion of the state, it did not mean that voluntary work contracted; in fact both expanded hand-in-hand.⁴⁰ This is useful background; understanding how working-class women receiving separation allowances were subjected to outside visitors and scrutiny enables the contextualization of the attention given to Traveller women in similar circumstances. The disapproving comments of the Provost of Callander, for example—that the allowances gave Traveller women “more money than they have ever had; and it is simply stating the truth to say that much of this money is squandered on Drink”⁴¹—echoed agents’ concerns about soldiers’ wives in general.

The reports of Perth’s Central Committee on the Welfare of Tinkers offers one insight into how the multiple pressures on Travellers during the war played out. Throughout these years, it worked closely with roughly fifty Traveller families who had moved into the city and largely lodged “in the worst parts of Perth: such bad localities that the better Tinkers are themselves anxious to ‘flit.’” The committee’s honorable secretary, Eva Campbell Colquhoun, recorded that a large number of families now headed by women were living in “great poverty.” They had either not yet secured their separation allowance or they received an “inadequate” amount—probably through a combination of illiteracy and lack of knowledge about their entitlement. She also saw how moving to the city had made sustaining an independent livelihood through hawking more difficult, “especially in districts where the Tinkers [were] not well-known.” Not only was their presence on people’s doorsteps less welcome in towns than in isolated communities but wartime high prices saw their profits much reduced.⁴²

In the face of this need, the Central Committee developed a two-pronged strategy based on two different spaces: the home and the mission hall. “Constant visiting” of women in their homes not only allowed visitors to help the women secure their allowances and disburse small loans to cover certain expenses but also to build up trust. This enabled them to encourage the women and their wider families to attend Sunday services and the committee’s special “Saturday parties” at the mission hall, where the mission workers put on a program of speakers and children’s games and the local health visitor was present to give advice. Talks covered subjects ranging from the “care of houses” and children to the countries where the men were fighting. To make the events more attractive, the sessions often ending in “bagpipes and recitations by the Travellers themselves,” with the mission taking “great trouble . . . to secure really good speakers, and to have good lively music.” Behind the scenes of this public work in visible spaces, committee members also visited

³⁹ Pedersen, “Gender, Welfare, and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War,” 992.

⁴⁰ See Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity* (London, 2014).

⁴¹ Letter from Thomas Macdonald, the Provost of Callander, to Robert Munro, HM Secretary for Scotland, 23 March 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

⁴² All quotations in this paragraph from *Report from Miss Eva Campbell Colquhoun*, 27 February 1918, HH 55/237, NAS.

the Travellers' landlords to check on their tenants' behavior. And as their relationship with individual women developed, mission workers also began encouraging them to sign a teetotal pledge and to send their children to school regularly. As with other working-class women, then, helping Traveller women to secure separation allowances was one small part of a wider package of intervention aimed at reshaping their everyday habits. And children were seen as key to the long-term success of this work. Committee members kept a keen eye out for any "signs of 'good sense' with regard to the children's future," as Colquhoun Campbell felt that a "good deal could be done by encouragement of the children and interest in the progress at school, by the "visitor," particularly when the "home atmosphere" was "illiterate and discouraging." Success in this regard, though, was mixed: "Of course there are great 'sets back' and discouragement, as when a 'promising case' gets her 'man' back from the front—a drunken fracas succeeds—this 'man' attacks the old mother-in-law with a gun and the 'promising case' sells up her furniture and departs into the void . . . But on the whole the general trend has been upward and the main conclusion reached is that the best hope is in long-continued personal intercourse—individual and unofficial and in constant appreciation of 'missionary methods.'"⁴³

Colquhoun Campbell's mention of "missionary methods" is a reminder that the committee's work was not exceptional in regard to Travellers but was rather part of well-honed spectrum of activities that had been deployed among Britain's poorest for decades and aimed to bring not only salvation but also the a life of teetotalism and domestic routine. Her observations also provide a glimpse of some of the different ways in which the Traveller women who were subject to her attentions actually received them. The "promising cases" may have genuinely appreciated the support they received, not least in securing separation allowances, but this should not be mistaken for full acceptance of the mission's ambitions for them. The return of a husband, however disreputable he might have appeared, or the opportunity to sell furniture and use the proceeds to cushion life on the road, suggests that the Traveller women in Perth accepted what was offered on their own terms while waiting out the war or until they could pick up their familiar lives again.

That these women were right to be chary of the missionaries' long-term aims is revealed in archival evidence demonstrating how the Central Committee sought to make the most of the opportunity provided by war conditions to encourage permanent settlement. It proposed, for example, that separation allowances should be paid only through one designated post office, as this would "not allow them to change about from place to place." Although only the first step in a bigger plan, the goal was to see Perthshire Travellers becoming fully settled in "country centres where they could be properly supervised and obtain work of a congenial kind." The chair of the committee, Rev. Menzies Fergusson, went as far as identifying two places in the county close to Perthshire's fruit-growing districts with "empty cottages" in which the Travellers might be settled. To supplement the highly seasonal work, the committee suggested "training the Tinkers in such industries as basket-making and similar crafts." The project, like the mission visitors' work with separated wives, was to combine state and voluntary

⁴³ All quotations in this paragraph from *Report from Miss Eva Campbell Colquhoun*, 27 February 1918, HH 55/237, NAS.

initiative: while suggesting that the cost of housing might be covered by rents paid by the Travellers themselves, Fergusson was determined that government should cover the cost of “suitable instructors . . . and do something for this vagrant class.”⁴⁴

Fergusson was not a lone voice in insisting that government had a role to play in pushing Travellers to a sedentary life, nor was the Central Committee out on a limb in suggesting that the war provided an important opportunity to “civilise” them.⁴⁵ The response of state and voluntary workers to the plight of a group of Travellers in Caithness, northeast Scotland, over the second half of 1916, again shows how attempts to extend welfare to Scots Travellers became entwined with assumptions about the desirability of settling them and of the state being the natural actor to lead this process. Rev. George Jeffrey was chaplain to Sutherland’s United Navy and Army Board, and his attention had been drawn to the position of Traveller women whose husbands had joined the army during the general call-up in the summer of 1916. In his official capacity, he had been asked “to get the necessary certificates arranged” to support the women’s claims for separation allowances, and in the process had come into contact with the forty Traveller families—seventy-two adults and 112 children. Nineteen of the adults had joined up, thirteen of whom were married and had thirty-five children among them. Most of the families were not housed but lived in camping grounds dug from the peat moors, where they faced constant harassment from the agents of the big estates. Beyond facing court appearances and fines, the Traveller families, far from being the subject of concerted state interference suffered acutely from state neglect, Jeffrey maintained, “Army authorities will do no more than pay separation allowance, the Parish Councils repudiate all liability, the local authorities do not care to act.”⁴⁶

Jeffrey’s concern had grown as he watched the situation of the soldiers’ families deteriorating despite the women receiving their separation allowances. The men had previously “created fairly substantial tents” in which the families lived, but in their absence this had become “impossible”; meanwhile the constant harrying by agents had made it even more difficult for the women to construct anything other than the most rudimentary of structures on any piece of waste ground where they could make a temporary halt. Local prejudice meant that although the women had money, no one was willing to rent them a house: “We have had one tragedy already [in] the little band. The first born of a soldier being born practically on the roadside and living only a fortnight for want of shelter.”⁴⁷

In making his appeal to the secretary of state for Scotland, Jeffrey argued it was “poor recognition of a soldier’s effort to [evict] his wife in the man’s absence.” But there was a solution, he felt, if government was willing to help. He had developed a cabin design “similar to that in an army camp” to house eight families, had found people willing to construct it, and “secured the support of a substantial

⁴⁴ Letter from Rev. R. Menzies Fergusson, Bridge of Allan, to Munro, Sec. for Scotland, 1 July 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

⁴⁵ Letter from Thomas Macdonald, the Provost of Callander, to Robert Munro, HM Secretary for Scotland, 23 March 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

⁴⁶ Letter from Rev. George A. Jeffrey to the Secretary of State for Scotland, 4 December 1916, HH 55/273, NAS.

⁴⁷ Letter from Rev. George A. Jeffrey to the Secretary of State for Scotland, 4 December 1916, HH 55/273, NAS.

farmer” who offered him a piece of land. As estate officials had then “refused to allow the erection,” he had asked the town council to allow the women to stay in the empty smallpox hospital while the cabins were erected in its grounds. This plan, though, had been stymied by the County Council, which refused to give its permission. Undeterred, Jeffery was now turning to central government, asking it to buy an old Poor House to convert it into housing for the Traveller families.⁴⁸

It is perhaps significant that, having first tried a purely philanthropic approach and then having appealed to but failed to move local authorities, Jeffrey shifted his attention to national government. In doing so, he both revealed the diversity of avenues for civil society action in early twentieth-century Britain and showed how, despite the country’s engrained traditions of localism, central government, particularly in a wartime context, was increasingly seen as an appropriate vehicle for managing and solving social problems. This appetite for greater government involvement in the lives of Scottish Travellers did not stop with Jeffrey: his letter prompted an investigation by the Local Government Board into the situation in Caithness and resulted in a number of the families being found temporary housing in Wick.⁴⁹ Locally, the Duke of Portland, William Cavendish-Bentinck, who had donated money for household items to the Traveller families settled in Wick, took up the cause. Like Jeffrey, he firmly believed that the war offered an opportunity to “civilize” these citizens of the empire: “Military service will doubtless give the men a sense of discipline and will teach them to respect themselves, while the separation allowances to which their wives are entitled have, for the time being, opened up the possibility of a new condition of life for their families.”⁵⁰

The Local Government Board agreed with Portland, arguing that there “never before has been such an opportunity for breaking the tinkers of their nomadic habits.”⁵¹ The last two years of the war were thus to mark a period of concentrated interest by government in Travellers, which culminated in a Scottish departmental report published at the end of the war.⁵² Like Portland, the departmental committee, supported by the evidence it collected—from a selection of police, public health and voluntary officers, and its own visits to particular locations across Scotland—was determined that the moment would not be lost: “It was desired to seize the opportunity of settling a class . . . who never otherwise could be induced to live in houses. The services of the men in the Army demanded recognition on the part of their country; and . . . it would be unfair, both to the tinkers and to the community, to permit the return of discharged tinker soldiers to their former wretched existence. This would mean a dissipation of any benefits that the men had derived from the Army training and discipline.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Letter from Rev. George A. Jeffrey to the Secretary of State for Scotland, 4 December 1916, HH 55/273, NAS.

⁴⁹ On the position of the families housed in Wick as a result of Jeffrey’s intervention, see correspondence and reports of G. A. Mackay, Local Government Board, 9 December 1916 to 23 February 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

⁵⁰ Duke of Portland, letter to the editor, *The Scotsman*, 15 March 1917.

⁵¹ Letter from John Maxwell, Local Government Board to the Under-Secretary for Scotland, 22 March 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

⁵² Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*. The committee was chaired by Rev. Menzies Fergusson and was allocated £400 for expenses.

⁵³ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*, 4.

The committee recognized that both the legal requirement to attend school and the demands of war had “placed duties of citizenship on tinkers,” and this being the case, society was now duty bound to reciprocate.⁵⁴ Although it believed that Travellers’ lifestyles were chaotic and empty of purpose, describing the youth as “practically illiterate, with no habit of industry and no prospect of any but the most casual employment,” the committee was not despondent. Although its report expounded on the “racial” and hereditary elements that meant “wandering” was an “instinct” both “inbred and ingrained” in Travellers, the mood of the moment was on reform: “[T]inkers possess a capacity for usefulness in common with other persons, but . . . this capacity has not been developed.”⁵⁵

Building on existing practice and aligning with the Home Mission’s concern with ending nomadism, the committee outlined two means through which Travellers could be brought into line with the rest of the nation: education and settlement. Although educators bemoaned the Traveller children’s “backwardness” south of the border where school attendance was rarely enforced, in Scotland the intervening years had seen growing numbers of local authorities beginning to take the provisions seriously.⁵⁶ Moreover, work was being done in some places to keep the children engaged in schooling: Merkinch School in Inverness, just before the outbreak of war, had set up a special Traveller section, with Margaret Mackie as its teacher and a dedicated curriculum. In return for the stick of a strict adherence to the two-hundred-attendances rule, Mackie had developed the carrot of tailored lessons and activities for the Traveller children, viewing many of the families as her “friends”: “Many people look on Vagrants as being made of a different sort of clay to themselves, whereas I find ‘We are a’ Jock Tamson’s Bairns.’”⁵⁷ For those families who were not within Merkinch’s catchment or who turned their backs on the opportunities presented by regular schooling, there were the industrial schools, where, in a repeat of evidence to the 1895 Committee, some superintendents insisted that “reverting to tinkerness” could be prevented only by completely severing all ties between child and family. The 1918 report contained evidence of the “success” of this draconian approach: of those children who had left industrial schools in the previous seventeen years, many of the girls had gone either into domestic service or mill work, while the boys had taken up “various trades” or joined the army or navy. Overall, the statistics showed that just over a quarter—27 percent—had “relapsed” and rejoined their families, a figure that gave the committee hope for the success of any future reforming measures.⁵⁸

The second plank of the committee’s reforming strategy, settlement, reflected a similar optimism about its potential to make Travellers “not only a self-supporting but a wealth-producing member of the community.” Committee members articulated their concern that Travellers avoid becoming settled in the slums, where they ran the risk of consorting with the lowest sections of society. Neither did they trust that Travellers could be left to their own devices, as this ran the risk of allowing them to continue any drunken or wayward habits. To secure both settlement and

⁵⁴ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, 22.

⁵⁵ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, 11, 16.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Minority and the State*, 81–85.

⁵⁷ Mackie, “Vagrants,” ED 15/67, NAS.

⁵⁸ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, *Report*, 17–18.

reformed behavior, the committee developed a detailed fifteen-point plan of action. Although declaring they had “no desire that the individuality of the tinker should be destroyed,” the plan made it clear that it was only through breaking up Scots Travellers’ current way of life that they could become “civilised”: “[W]e are hopeful that in two generations, the tinker, as he is now, will have ceased to exist, and that his virility and capacity for persistence under adverse conditions will have been advantageously absorbed by the community.”⁵⁹

At its most basic, the plan required that all existing legislation that might be used to control Travellers’ behavior be consistently and fully enforced, whether it related to encampments, education, begging, cruelty to children, or supplying alcohol to children. Second, it envisaged a new central government body to take ultimate responsibility for an entirely state-funded approach to settling Travellers and finding them suitable regular employment. With local authorities as the unit of enforcement, each with an “Inspector of Tinkers,” all Travellers were to be registered and those with “a drink problem” prohibited from buying alcohol. To prevent families “congregating” and so undermining reforming efforts, each district would have no more than two or three families allocated to it, where they would be given simple housing and a plot of land to encourage them toward farming. The inspectors were expected to find suitable work for those under their charge, ideally in agriculture, afforestation, or quarrying, which would all allow them to work outdoors while preventing them from travelling.⁶⁰ Although the committee decided to set its face against moving all Travellers into labor colonies—as that ran the risk of their continuing to consort with each other—its proposals nevertheless contained a strong supervisory element: “[T]he Inspector of Tinkers will be expected to act in a very real sense *in loco parentis* to his wards. He should shepherd them continually until such time as they are able to take their place among responsible and self-respecting citizens.”⁶¹ Supplementing the work of the (assumed male) inspector would be a network of local women who would be assigned to each settled Traveller family to teach mothers housewifery. Clearly reflected in the plan is the ideal of a regular, sedentary lifestyle, supported by waged labor and certain behaviors underpinned ideas of who would be seen as a good citizen in postwar Britain.

Even before the report was published, Local Government Board officials started exploring the possibility of turning some of its ideas into reality. Meeting with the Board of Agriculture, they discussed using a portion of Crown lands in Caithness to form a state-subsidized “crofting settlement for the tinkers in that county, especially for those men of the tinker class who are now serving in HM Forces.” In a mark of how far thinking had moved since 1895, when government had refused to single out Travellers for state funding, now officials developing the plan accepted that proposals “should be looked at in the broadest economic sense” and that anything that “promised to raise a class from being parasitic on the community to the level of self-supporting citizens, warranted outlay,” even if the scheme itself would not be self-supporting.⁶²

⁵⁹ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, 23, 29.

⁶⁰ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, 23–28.

⁶¹ Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, 27.

⁶² Letter from David Brown, Assistant Secretary, Local Government Board, Edinburgh to the Under-Secretary for Scotland, 6 June 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

Both this specific initiative and the ambitions of the 1918 Report can be placed in the context of what its chair described as “the lines of national reconstruction”⁶³—that is, the larger picture of growing state involvement and investment in the lives of its citizens that Lloyd George’s government sought to develop as it led the country out of war. Having expanded who was considered a citizen—through drawing unprecedented numbers of the civilian population into the war effort, and through the Representation of the People Act 1918—it now aimed to repay their efforts. The 1919 Addison Act, the legislative embodiment of the call for “homes for heroes,” was the best-publicized plank of a far wider program of postwar reform. The Small Holding Colonies Act, 1916, had already established the principle that the Board of Agriculture might initiate and finance settlement schemes in the empire; now the 1919 Land Settlement (Facilities) Act was to allow councils to provide smallholdings and farms for veterans, whether or not they had previous farming experience. Similarly, through a range of new permissive public-health powers and through university grants, assisted emigration, and other schemes for former servicemen, government sought simultaneously to better the lives of its citizens and in the process to strengthen both state and empire.⁶⁴ And so, in having been drawn into the war and into the gaze of state and voluntary organizations, through recruitment and separation allowances, and through the vision of the *Report on Tinkers* of a more active state promoting a more efficient, better housed, and healthier citizenship, Scots Travellers perhaps unexpectedly found their experiences chiming closely with that of the wider population. That these reforms aimed to entirely annihilate their way of life reformers and officials saw as no more than a necessary step on the road to full citizenship.

THE PERTSHIRE CAMP SCHEME

If the recommendations of the Committee on Tinkers in Scotland had been implemented in the years following the war, it is unlikely that, more than ten years later, Dora Maitland would be visiting Hurtwood Common in Surrey looking for answers on to how to solve Scotland’s “tinker problem.”⁶⁵ Despite the Local Government Board’s active interest in the committee’s scheme at the end of the war, engagement that included chairing a committee seeking to implement the experimental crofting settlement for Travellers in Caithness, no action was ever taken as a consequence of the 1918 report.⁶⁶ The plan to forcibly settle and integrate Scots Travellers into wider society was never realized. By the time of Maitland’s Perthshire camps

⁶³ Letter from R. Menzies Ferguson to James Dodds, Under Secretary for Scotland, 13 March 1918, HH 55/237, NAS.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Alys Levene et al., *Cradle to Grave: Municipal Medicine in Inter-war England and Wales* (Bern, 2011); Georgina Brewis, Sarah Hellawell, and Daniel Laqua, “Rebuilding the Universities after the Great War: Ex-Service Students, Scholarships, and the Reconstruction of Student Life in England,” *History* 105, no. 364 (2020): 82–106; Kent Fedorowich, “The Assisted Emigration of British Ex-servicemen to the Dominions, 1914–1922,” in *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions between the Wars*, ed. Stephen Constantine (Manchester, 2017), 45–71.

⁶⁵ Letter from Adam Smail, Department of Health for Scotland, to P. J. Rose, Scottish Office, 27 June 1932, HH 55/241, NAS.

⁶⁶ Minute of conference between Board of Agriculture and Local Government Board, 24 July 1917, HH 55/237, NAS.

scheme, no one would ever have known that the state had taken any interest in its nomadic population.

What had happened? In part, the failure to act can be seen as the simple result of government reorganization. In all likelihood, the report and its recommendations fell into an administrative void as a result of the dismantling of the Local Government Board—long seen as sprawling and inefficient—and its replacement with the more tightly conceived but perennially underfunded Ministry of Health.⁶⁷ And if plans for assimilation had slipped past this hurdle, they would undoubtedly have fallen victim to the Geddes axe.⁶⁸ Yet it was clear even before the end of the war that the idea was going to run into difficulties. If Travellers had come to government attention in no small part because of their position as citizens, albeit imperfect ones, then the continued feeling that it could not treat them preferentially ensured that the scheme had little hope of getting off the ground. As the secretary of state for Scotland put it, the 1918 report's ideas meant “treating the tinkers as a separate class in the community.” For a government that insisted all citizens should be treated without preference—however far from reality this might actually have been—this was not politically practical. And so government did nothing more than “promise to consider them in their proper place in connection with the general housing problem.”⁶⁹ Locally, Caithness council officials and voluntary workers continued their efforts to get a scheme for “tinker housing” off the ground, but the ambitions of the Tinker Committee disappeared into the long grass: “Times are not propitious.”⁷⁰ The 1920s consequently saw a retreat in the state's ambitions toward Travellers. Aside from continued attempts to compel Traveller children to fulfil the two-hundred-attendance required by the 1908 act—“there is no doubt at all that the children could be trained and yet become useful citizens of the Empire”⁷¹—this was a time when government withdrew from any ambition to either reform or assimilate its Traveller population.⁷²

If it the war had precipitated the last sustained period of interest in Travellers, it was another global crisis, the 1930s depression, that provided the point of stimulus

⁶⁷ Christine Bellamy, *Administering Central-Local Relations, 1871–1919: The Local Government Board in Its Fiscal and Cultural Context* (Manchester, 1988); J. P. Bradbury, “The 1929 Local Government Act: The Formulation and Implementation of Poor Law (Health Care) and Exchequer Grants Reform for England and Wales (Outside London)” (PhD diss., University of Bristol, 1991).

⁶⁸ Geoff Burrows and Phillip Cobbin, “Controlling Government Expenditure by External Review: The 1921–22 ‘Geddes Axe,’” *Accounting History* 14, no. 3 (2009): 199–220. The “Geddes axe” was the popular phrase that described the recommendations for retrenchment contained in the three reports produced in 1921–22 by the Committee on National Expenditure, chaired by Sir Eric Geddes.

⁶⁹ Minute to Mr. Lamb, 3 July 1918, HH 55/237, NAS. For more on central government's unwillingness to single out Gypsies and Travellers for special legislative attention in the first half of the twentieth century, see Taylor, *Minority and the State*, 53–56.

⁷⁰ Comment by Mr. Paterson of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, notes of meeting held with Joint Scottish Churches, Scottish Board of Health, Scottish National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Miss Campbell, and a few others in regard to welfare of tinkers, 4 June 1925, HH 55/240, NAS. See also correspondence between various individuals and voluntary agencies and the secretary of state for Scotland over the course of 1918–19 in HH 55/237, NAS. The Caithness scheme never came to fruition.

⁷¹ William Sinclair, letter to the editor, *The Scotsman*, June 22, 1917.

⁷² For discussions of how to draw Scottish Traveller children into the education system in this period, see “Vagrant and Tinker Children,” ED 15/67, NAS.

for the next new initiative, Dora Maitland's Perthshire camping scheme. Once again, the focus of effort lay in using education in tandem with providing longer-term stopping places as two sites of control on a longer road to moving Travellers toward a fully sedentary life.

By the early 1930s, the depression was being felt across Scotland in multiple ways, with unemployment reaching 27.7 percent of the uninsured population by 1932. Among the effects of this widespread unemployment was a general rise in vagrancy and door-to-door selling among those who had failed to find waged work.⁷³ Lower household incomes increased pressure on the poorest accommodation as unemployed families began moving into the very cheapest and least attractive housing, including condemned and other slum housing that had previously been rented over the winter by Travellers. At the same time, the long-established practice of poor families subletting rooms to Travellers over winter was effectively stopped by the Means Test.⁷⁴ For Travellers, the effect of these developments was more competition both in hawking and door-to-door sales and in finding winter accommodation.

With their background in casual and informal work, Travellers were perhaps better insulated than the wider population from the loss of waged employment, so that, as Dora Maitland pointed out, around 330 Travellers, adults and children, were still supporting themselves with "little reliance on public assistance" during the depths of the depression across Perthshire and Kinross.⁷⁵ But pressure on accommodation was more difficult to manage. Shortages in cheap housing led more Travellers than usual to use traditional camping grounds year-round, in some cases causing overcrowding and prompting complaints from the surrounding population. This was perhaps a reason that authorities began to more actively move Travellers on from well-established camping grounds in this period. As Scots Traveller Betsy Whyte remembered of this time, "A policeman, or perhaps two would come to Old Trinity Road, and tell them that they would have to move on the next day. So they would shift to Green Tree, perhaps, and live there for a few days before being told to move on again . . . This went on the whole time . . . take their tents down in freezing weather and go on for five or six miles."⁷⁶

This general closing of traditional stopping places and the shortage of cheap winter accommodation provided a catalyst for the missionizing or reforming ambitions of the Home Mission and Dora Maitland. As noted, Maitland drew inspiration from the apparently successful Hurtwood Common initiative, which used the Gypsies' need for secure camping grounds as a means to require their children to attend school. This, it was hoped, would be simply the first of many "steps taken for the permanent improvement of their conditions."⁷⁷ The Perthshire scheme similarly involved securing the cooperation of landowners, who were asked to allow Travellers

⁷³ William W. Knox and Alan MacKinlay, "The Re-making of Scottish Labour in the 1930s," *Twentieth Century British History* 6, no. 2 (1995): 174–93, 184. See also R. H. Campbell, "The Scottish Office and the Special Areas in the 1930s," *Historical Journal* 22, no. 1 (1979): 167–83.

⁷⁴ Leitch, *Book of Sandy Stewart*, 45. The Means Test, introduced in November 1931 as part of the National Government's economy program, based welfare payments on a household's total income rather than on that of individual claimants.

⁷⁵ Maitland, "An Account of Gypsy Camps," HH 55/241, p. 5, NAS.

⁷⁶ Whyte, *Yellow in the Broom*, 94.

⁷⁷ Sub-committee minutes of work among Tinkers, 26 October 1932, CH 1/16/26, appendix 2, NAS.

to camp on a number of defined camping grounds in a roughly circular area encompassing Birnam in the south and Killiecrankie to the north. As with Hurtwood, this scheme did not actually mean creating new sites for Travellers, even though Sandy Stewart, who as a boy lived in Strathtay camp, remembered how Maitland “got thae camps for hus ye see, from the lairds”; the camps were simply long-standing stopping places now used with landowners’ consent. But under the new scheme, camping was restricted to families with Perthshire connections who were guaranteed security of tenure for six months over winter if they fulfilled the “primary condition” of regularly sending their children to school.⁷⁸ In another echo of the Hurtwood scheme, the mission contributed to the cost of engaging an extra teacher at the school in the nearby village of Dull to teach Traveller children, as well as securing the use of one of its classrooms out of school hours “for religious and social purposes.”⁷⁹ Camp residents were expected to abide by a strict code of cleanliness and behavior, with unlicensed families robustly ejected from the sites:⁸⁰ “[My parents] needed a licence to use them: thir wes naebuddie supposetae come in but wirsel. Ye see ye hed a little book an it wes made like a motor licence, green covered. Any police that came intae you when you wir in the camp, ye just let them see that.”⁸¹

In further homage to the Hurtwood initiative, the Home Mission Committee employed a ranger to ensure that only Travellers carrying permits used the sites and that they were abiding by the rules of the camp. In addition to fostering regular school attendances, the Perthshire scheme had the goal of inculcating an ethos of regular industry in its families: “Tinkers who are basket makers will be encouraged in this trade, while every possible help will be given towards the learning of new crafts and the equipment of the tinker family, so that they may take their places in the ordinary normal life of the community.”⁸²

As Sandy Stewart remembered, mission workers acted as agents for the Travellers, providing them with materials and then selling the baskets to Highland Home Industries Ltd in Edinburgh on their behalf: “Miss Maitland got camps an then she wid hae ye mak baskets for her. . . She got big truck loads, taen them ower tae Edinburgh as she paid ye for them. An if ye couldnae get enough stuff growing for tae mak them, she sent ye stuff. . . tinwork or oniething—the lady Maitland wed buy it.”⁸³

Ethnologist Roger Leitch, who recorded Sandy Stewart’s life history in the 1980s, observed that although the scheme was “ostensibly concerned with education, its underlying aims were to bring religious influences to bear on Traveller families,” and, in the words of the Home Mission itself, “to reconcile them to a better mode of life.”⁸⁴ Indeed, Maitland was granted permission by the Home Mission Committee, for the first three years that the camping scheme was operating, to conduct a

⁷⁸ Leitch, *Book of Sandy Stewart*, 45, quoting Church of Scotland, Home Department Reports, vol. 8, *Report of the Home Mission Committee*, May 1933.

⁷⁹ Sub-committee minutes of work among Tinkers, 21 November 1933, CH 1/16/26, appendix 3, NAS.

⁸⁰ Maitland, “An Account of Gypsy Camps,” HH 55/241, p. 7, NAS.

⁸¹ Leitch, *Book of Sandy Stewart*, 31.

⁸² Sub-committee on work among Tinkers, 26 October 1932, CH 1/16/26, appendix 2, NAS.

⁸³ Leitch, *Book of Sandy Stewart*, 31–32, 46n6.

⁸⁴ Leitch, 45, quoting from a document titled “Particulars of a Scheme for the Welfare of Tinkers in Perthshire,” 1932.

Scotland-wide “exhaustive investigation” into the “tinker and vagrancy” problem.⁸⁵ Maitland saw the Perthshire scheme as the first step in a far bigger project: by 1934, the mission was considering expanding the scheme into the Valley of the Tay and subsidizing another teacher at Pitlochry School. The following year, Miss Hardie of Dull School was able to report that two of the “Tinker girls” were being trained for domestic service.⁸⁶

The scheme is significant not only in revealing the deep and automatic connections that the mission made between education, settlement, and civilization. It also demonstrated how, at a time of severe depression, when the state at both national and local levels was showing itself to be unable to provide support for the general population, it had retreated from any ambition to socially engineer its Traveller population. As Scottish civil servants admitted among themselves in 1932, “[N]othing is likely to be done by the Government or by Local Authorities.”⁸⁷ Travellers, largely regarded as nonworkers, stood separate in the minds of civil servants to the recently and catastrophically unemployed of Britain’s heavy industries. If there was state aid to be given—often grudgingly and inadequately via the Depressed Areas schemes, various local and national labor (colony) schemes, and the increasing punitive Means Test—it would be channeled to the unemployed citizen-worker, not the nation’s Travellers. And so, as the Perthshire scheme showed, if there was reforming work to be done at this time, it required civil society to take the initiative.

Despite the schemes’ ambitions and publicized successes, Sandy Stewart’s memories offer us a sideways slant. He remembered not only that his brother attended intermittently but also that he was taken out of school when he was thirteen and the whole family left the camp to return to a more mobile way of life. Travellers’ strategic approach to the camp sites—useful as a means of securing school attendances, which in turn ensured that they evaded police attention and the threat of the industrial school—was also embedded in the recollections of one of Sandy’s teachers, May Robertson: “As soon as the two hundred attendances were made they were off. They would come to us for weeks before, say, ‘My father wants to know how many attendances we’ve got’, and they would keep asking that. And when the two hundred arrived, even if it was lunchtime, they were off. That was the last we saw of them until the following autumn.”⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

It is clear that reformers and state officials saw Travellers as an anomaly and their continued presence in modern Britain an aberration. Yet it is equally clear that Travellers sat alongside other groups like vagrants and habitual offenders, who were similarly seen as a blot on society. And so the tools that reformers reached for when thinking

⁸⁵ Sub-committee minutes of work amongst the Tinkers, 2 December 1932, CH 1/16/26, NAS.

⁸⁶ Sub-committee minutes of work among Tinkers, 27 March 1934, CH 1/16/27, NAS, appendix 3; Sub-committee minutes of work among Tinkers, 25 October 1934, CH 1/16/27, appendix 8, NAS; Minutes of the meeting the sub-committee on work among Tinkers, 30 October 1935, CH 1/16/28, appendix 8, NAS.

⁸⁷ Letter from A. Smail, Department of Health for Scotland, to P. J. Rose, Scottish Office, 27 June 1932, HH 55/241, NAS.

⁸⁸ Leitch, *Book of Sandy Stewart*, 46n8.

of reforming Travellers' ways of life were by no means unique and, as in the case of other deviant groups, were often focused on particular spaces where citizenship might be inculcated. Education through the standard state system, industrial schools, and targeted separate schools; supervision via regular home visiting; and ideas of colonies and settlements were all practiced on other groups in British society, including children with disabilities, working-class wives, and the unemployed.⁸⁹ Given that the wider working-class population faced punitive and coercive welfare measures in this period, with those receiving outdoor relief losing their right to vote up to 1929, it is no surprise that Travellers faced a similarly intrusive range of measures. Sandy Stewart's memories of leaving the camp as soon as possible, as much as Eva Colquhoun Campbell's record of recidivist Travellers who upped sticks and left Perth, suggests that there remains untapped potential for reading against the grain of the archives to develop deeper understandings of how Scots Travellers themselves responded to attempts at being reformed. Evidence here suggests that many strategically accepted the need to perform a presence in these particular sites of regulation—mission halls, schools, licensed camping grounds—while seeking to retain the core of their way of life and identity, even as certain active citizens sought to impose on them the outwards signs of good citizenship.

Coming cold to the accounts from Hurtwood and the Perthshire camping scheme of the 1930s, it would be easy to assume that these were some of the first attempts to try to draw Scotland's Travellers into the realm of both mission activity and the demands of the modern state. Neither of these assumptions is true. The Home Mission Committee's activities formed part of a far longer history of missions toward Travellers and reformist interest in using schooling combined with settlement as a means of assimilation.⁹⁰ In this latter concern, the Mission Committee was not alone; compulsory schooling was among the early state attempts in the 1890s to draw Travellers into its sphere. Here children were being seen as potential future citizens of nation and empire, and the explicit desire to shape them as such was most clearly manifested when Traveller children were removed from their families and sent to the colonies as part of empire child-resettlement schemes.

Even so, the ambitions of state action were far from overarching. The refusal of the 1895 Committee to forcibly house Travellers spoke nothing of sympathy with their lifestyles but everything of a cautious, liberal state unwilling to extend itself more than absolutely necessary. Not until the unprecedented swelling of the state during the First World War did government extend its attention to Traveller adults, as men were called up and their wives became recipients of separation allowances. The idea that service in the trenches could be a civilizing force might be startling to present-day readers.⁹¹ Nevertheless, for a diverse combination of actors—missionaries, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children workers, army clergymen, Local Government Board civil servants—the urgency of the historical

⁸⁹ Mark Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society, and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester, 2000).

⁹⁰ George Smith, *I've Been A-Gypsying, Or, Rambles among Our Gipsies and Their Children in Their Tents and Vans* (London, 1885), 241.

⁹¹ Or indeed contemporary society in the immediate postwar years. See Jon Lawrence, "Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalisation in Post-First World War Britain," *Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 3 (2003): 557–89.

moment, one that had brought Travellers into the state's orbit as never before, was seen as a compelling starting point for a program of state-sponsored reform. The vision of the 1917 committee, if enacted, would have seen Scots Travellers forcibly scattered and deliberately settled with the aim of wiping them out within two generations as a separate people.

Thus one of the most significant aspects of the Perthshire camp scheme was the very absence of the state in it and the smallness of its aim. Despite the long-established use of education—via the two-hundred-attendance rule and the use of industrial schools—to try to draw Traveller children away from their community's influence, it was the Home Mission Committee, not the state, that paid for teachers. And despite the plans for a Scotland-wide settlement program conceived of in 1918, by 1932 it was owing to the determination of one individual, Dora Maitland, that the Church of Scotland agreed to create a network of six camping grounds in Perthshire. This interwar retreat from the expansionist aims of the First World War exposes the uncertain boundaries of state action in these years. This was a time when state support for large sections of the population was still deeply contested, as well as being financially challenging during times of recession. Ultimately, then, in exploring the shifting and never-determined boundary between state and voluntary action, this article argues that there was a relationship between the status of Travellers as citizens and the attention bestowed upon them by the state. If being eligible for state resources—rather than being in receipt of punitive attention—is a marker of citizenship, with charitable welfare dealing with those seen as being beyond the bounds of state attention, it was Traveller children, via the provision of compulsory education, who were the first to be accepted as potential and future citizens by the state. Their parents came to this citizen-status only during the war, and then only if they were involved in the war effort. Otherwise, Travellers remained outside the boundary of government action and resources, of interest only to charitable and mission organizations. This was perhaps no bad thing. Given that state attention, in the short period of time when it was directed at Travellers, threatened to eradicate them as a separate community, they remained protected as such by their status as intermittent, and often invisible, citizens.