

## **Information on Gypsy and Traveller traditions from a dying culture from Mr and Mrs W J Peters.**

This information can be used to support the themes in the learning resource pack booklet.

### **At the fair- The Coconut Shy**

“My grandmother’s sister Daisy, my great aunt, married into Coles fair. As a small child I can remember meeting her, I was with my mum and dad. She was working on her stall, it was a coconut shy one half, the other half had some old oil tins, 4 at the bottom, 3 in the middle then 2 and 1 at the top. I remember that you had to stand at the end of the stall and then throw 4 wooden balls and knock the oil tins off the shelf. 4 balls for 1 shilling, if you won you could have a goldfish or a coconut”.

### **The Art of Peg making**

“This was told to me as a young child from my dad and grandad. For a long time I did not understand what they meant. I still can see them now sat on the ground, wood shavings everywhere all over the place making the pegs for my aunt to sell. They would both say to me, “son there are seven stages of peg making”. I would sit there and watch them and try to work out the seven stages.

1. First: cut the wood from the copse, hazel or willow wood.
2. Chop off: To chop off the leaves and brush wood
3. Rind them: To strip off the soft bark or skin
4. Chop off to the peg length
5. Tie them: Put the tin bands around them, this is fixed with a small nail.
6. I was told was to mouth them, meaning to slit up to the tin to make the opening, a V shape
7. Now the last stage is the most difficult of all. That's selling of them.  
Now my mum was good at selling them from her hawking basket”.

## **Gypsies Travellers in the war**

### **My Grandfather Frederick Peters**

“Grandfather’s photo was taken one of two places, Southampton or Lymington. Mum thinks it may have been taken at Shave Green compound as Gran Sherrred was there and Grandad may have been going out with her or just married. Grandfather was 18 years old in the photo. Regiment was the Royal Hampshire. He was in the front line in the trenches where a shell landed and he was buried head first up to his waist. Also he was shell shocked. After the first world war he came back to England and took up this Romany life style once more with my Grandmother. Mum thought he’d told her he was at Somme or Paschaendale fighting. He did not talk about the war much”.

### **The compounds**

“My own grandfather Fred Peters would not stop on the compounds because he was a horse trader and lurcher dog breeder. He made a living from peg making, pea stick cutting and walking stick making, cutting fresh flowers from the forest or dealing in scrap metal, all of these things were not allowed [in the compounds]. No horses, donkeys, dogs. If he had given them up his way of life would be gone forever. My grandfather used to say that the dear lord made the world big enough for everyone so why do we need to be kept in one place?”

### **A changing culture**

“Our old way of life is dying out. No money in the fruit picking or the hopping, not much with the horses, scrap metal prices low. Not many of our old stopping places left. And even if we buy land of our own and put our caravans on it we get moved off.....People, the gorgio [non-Gypsies] ones, they think that we are all the same people [and] do not seem able to tell Romany from the Irish tinkers to the New Age Travellers so we all get a bad name and hated everywhere we go. Even when we are living in houses soon as people find out what you are, trouble”.