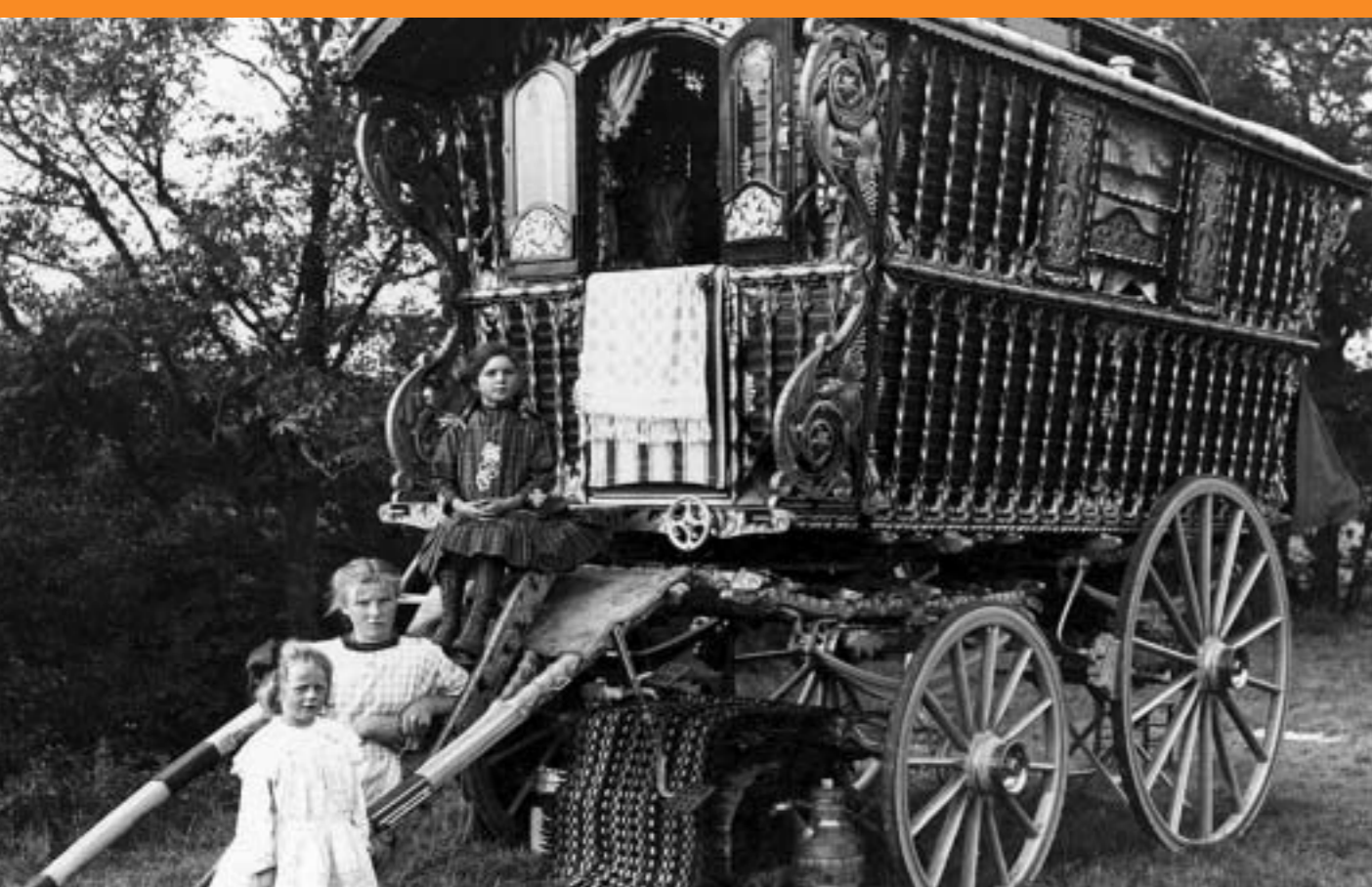


passing places

A Traveller's living space is an important aspect of life, because living space and work have always been intertwined.

The earliest nomadic home was the bender tent, which consisted of pieces of tarpaulin stretched over hazel shoots. They were simple and quick to construct and easy to take down and load onto a cart when it was time to move on. This mode of living has practically disappeared, although it was still used up until the 1970s. On New Traveller sites, a modern version of the bender tent is common, only now the tents are mass-produced and made of plastic.

As the roads improved, horses and carts were used to transport Travellers and their belongings from place to place. These carts would carry everything they needed. The tents were eventually built on top of these carts, thus producing the Gypsy wagon.



The Reading type wagon, Barnet, 1921
Image: University of Liverpool



Angela Smith and daughter Rosine in a bender tent, near Shenley Herts 1922
Image: University of Liverpool



Parker family's bender tents, in Berkhamsted, Herts
Image: Daine Allen

These wagons were strong, functional and warm. They were usually brightly painted in many colours and were decorated with carved motifs, such as horses heads, bunches of grapes and twined leaves on the outside. On the inside, the family displayed lace or china. Cooking was usually done outside. These wagons were symbols of pride and status both inside and out.

There are many different forms of wagons, including Bow Top, Reading or Vardo Wagons (made by the Duntons of Reading), Barrel Top, Open Lot and Burton Wagons (used by travelling Showmen in the 1920s).



Young Gypsy seated on Reading wagon, Hertfordshire
Image: Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies



Barrel Top Wagons on the roadside
Image: Diane Allen



Emma Kefford Image: Jane Hastler



Philip Green's father with his three sisters and Mother in horse drawn trailer. A canvas was drawn round the bottom of the trailer and the whole family slept on the ground.
Image: Mr Green

Nowadays, many of these wagons are pride of place in a museum or at horse fairs and generally tend not to be used for any practical reasons.