

It's All a Show

Fairground Showmen*, Identity & Mental Health

A collaboration between fairground Showman Sheldon Chadwick PhD at Liverpool John Moores University and the National Fairground and Circus Archive at the University of Sheffield.

This project is based on Sheldon's PhD research on the relationship between identity and mental health in the fairground Showmen community and explores what it means to be a Showman in the twenty-first century.

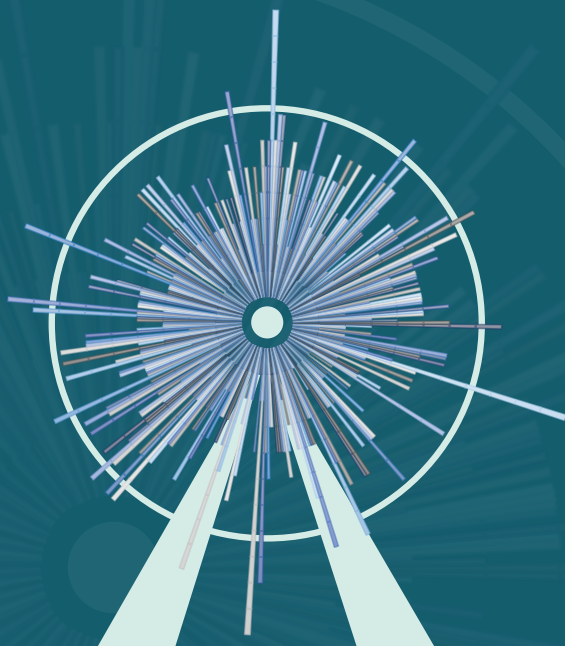
Fairground Showmen are an important part of British culture and have been providing entertainment across the country since the Middle Ages. By the late nineteenth century, they developed into a distinct cultural group with their own traditions, customs, language and semi-nomadic lifestyle. This uniqueness has been a source of discrimination, generating cultural misconceptions that have nurtured inwardness, self-guarding, and social disconnection within wider communities.

The aftermath of COVID-19 exacerbated these issues and exposed a lack of policy and health provision for the community. As a result, the Showmen's Mental Health Awareness Charity was established in 2021 to focus on the mental health of the community and encourage a culture of openness and support.

This project would have not been possible without the help of our funders and supporters, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the University of Sheffield Library, Close Brothers Finance and the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain.



*(Throughout this exhibition, the term Showmen is used to include men and women as the preferred term used by the majority of this community to refer to themselves. However, we do acknowledge that some choose to use Showpeople or other terms.



It's All a Show


Fairground Showmen, Identity & Mental Health

An exhibition by Sheldon Chadwick,
Liverpool John Moores University
and the National Fairground
and Circus Archive.

Opening Times

Mon-Fri: 9am-7pm
Sat-Sun: 12pm-6pm
(excluding bank holidays)

FREE ENTRY

 01142227200

 library@sheffield.ac.uk

**05.02.24 –
16.06.24**

**The University of Sheffield
Western Bank Library
Exhibition Gallery
S10 2TN**

For more
information visit:



For visitor access
information visit:



Nothing to Show Here

by Sheldon W. Chadwick
(2023)

Stage direction- To be performed with a mirror

Showmen
Showman
Showwoman
Showperson
Showfolk
Fairpeople,
Travelling showmen,
Showmen travellers
Traveller

{.Not to be read - Pause for 5 seconds.}

Show, me?
Show you?
Show us?
Show stop
Show pain
Show hurt
Show fame
Show claim
that's my name,
I hope it shows.

Mental health is a basic human right and plays a critical role in personal, community, and socio-economic development.

Identity

The Showmen community is a unique historical collective of people with an estimated population of 25,000 individuals spread across the UK. They have developed their own distinct identity, culture, customs and dialect, all of which have evolved over hundreds of years. These traditions like their way of life are fluid, rooted and ever-changing at the same time.

Historically, Showmen have lived as seasonal nomads, travelling to provide fairs and markets throughout the UK. They have deep roots in the entertainment industry, with generations of members from the same families working as fairground operators, circus performers, and other related professions.

The Showmen community still leads a semi-nomadic lifestyle in the twenty-first century. Many have adapted to the changing times and now live in houses or apartments. However, the majority continue to travel for their work, and live in Showmen's wagons, chalets, or trailers in yards.

In 2021, the national census provided travelling Showmen the opportunity to identify themselves as a 'cultural minority' for the first time ever and be accounted for in policymaking and planning.

The Showmen community have a strong sense of community and pride in their culture, which has been passed down through generations. Despite the challenges of modernisation and changing times, they continue to thrive and maintain their unique identity.

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall health and well-being, supporting our decision-making capacity, forming relationships, and shaping the world around us (WHO, 2022).



Mental health refers to a state of mental well-being that allows individuals to handle life's stresses, maximise their potential, learn effectively, work productively, and contribute to their community (WHO, 2022).

Mental Health

Before the Showmen's Mental Health Awareness charity was established, there was little discussion in academic or broader literature regarding the mental health of travelling Showpeople. The Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted the need to understand more about the mental health of the community and the lack of service provision and evidence of the Showmen's needs. This inspired Sheldon's research.

The first-ever mental health statistics on Showmen were conducted by Sheldon with a team from Anglia Ruskin University. The outcome was the 'In-Fair Health' pilot report, which aimed to understand the broad healthcare needs of Showmen in Cambridgeshire and Greater Manchester. The research highlighted the challenges this community faces accessing services on the move, the lack of professional knowledge of the population's lifestyle and needs, and their absence from healthcare datasets, which further increases disparity and inequalities in healthcare outcomes.

Through Sheldon's PhD research, data on the relationship between the community and its mental health has brought to light cultural barriers to accessing mental health support, discrimination, which exacerbates negative and anxious feelings among the population, and the stigma to talk about mental health.

If you are looking for support with your mental health, please reach out to your GP or health care provider, scan the QR codes or call the numbers below.



SAMARITANS

24 hours a day,
365 days a year **116 123**



For information
and support



The
Showmen's
Mental Health

For Showmen in
the UK and Ireland

 **0800 689 5652** National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK

(6pm to midnight every day) or **999** if you feel you might attempt suicide, or may have seriously harmed yourself.