

THE TINKER EXPERIMENT



Photo Credit: McPhee Family Archive and Tammi-Connelly

THE SCANDAL

In 2025 Scotland’s First Minister, John Swinney, apologised on behalf of Scotland for trauma caused by the “unfair and unjust policies” which comprised the so-called ‘Tinker Experiment’. These policies, supported by successive UK governments, Scottish local authorities, churches and charities from the 1940s were intended to “assimilate” Scottish Gypsy Travellers into society through their forced placement in settlements.

Threatened with having their children removed, families were forced to leave life on the road to live in substandard accommodation including huts, military buildings and disused properties without basic facilities including running water and electricity. Some children were placed into care, forced to attend industrial schools or adopted by non-traveller families in Scotland and overseas. It is not known how many families were affected or how many children were forcibly removed.

Recent research shows how victims of the Tinker Experiment continue to experience substandard housing conditions, poor health outcomes, and to face discrimination in employment, education and the provision of public services.

Want to know more?
The Legal Rights of Gypsy Travellers:
gla.ac.uk/schools/law/gojustice

DID YOU KNOW?

In his apology John Swinney acknowledged that stark prejudice and lack of cultural awareness had led to these unfair and unjust policies and stated that “The Tinker Experiment should not have happened. Those policies were wrong and we recognise it is still hurting so many today.”

Despite the Scottish Government’s apology, which was made following decades of silence, there are no clear plans for recompense or compensation for the victim-survivors who are still living with the traumatic legacies of the Tinker Experiment.

WHY WE NEED HILLSBOROUGH LAW

“We didn’t know it was an experiment growing up, I discovered that at the end of the 90s.”

Roseanna McPhee, Tinker Experiment Victim and Human Rights Campaigner

“Travellers have experienced significant harm because of forced assimilation in Scotland. The ongoing lack of accountability for the impact of the experiment has served to further perpetuate this harm. That needs to change now.”

Angela O’Hagan, Chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission

SCOTLAND DESPERATELY NEEDS NEW LAWS TO RESET THE BALANCE BETWEEN POWERFUL PUBLIC BODIES AND THE PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DISASTERS AND PUBLIC SCANDALS

ANAS SARWAR MSP AND SCOTTISH LABOUR PARTY LEADER