

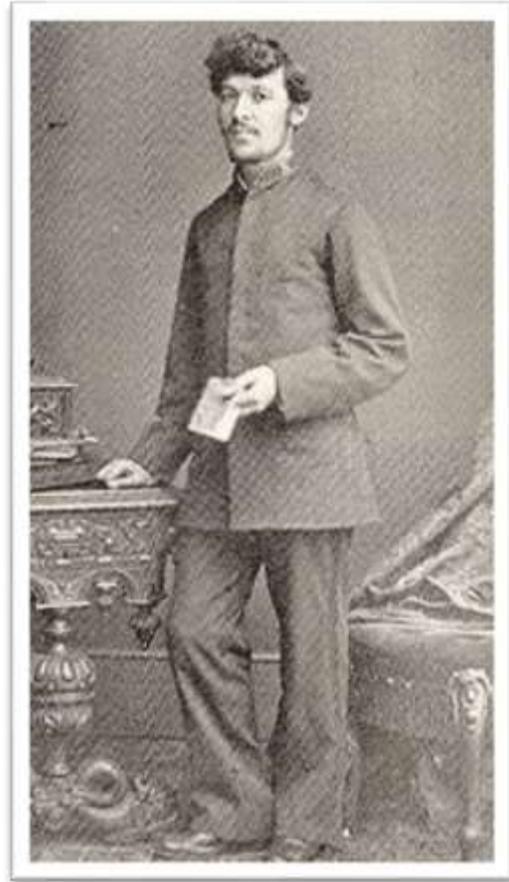
### Gypsy Smith

**R**odney "Gipsy" Smith MBE [1860 -1947] was a British evangelist who conducted evangelistic campaigns in the United States and Great Britain for over 70 years.

He was an early member of the Salvation Army and a contemporary of Fanny Crosby and G. Campbell Morgan.

He was born in a Romani *bender* tent – a simple shelter made by using flexible branches of hazel or willow in Epping Forest, northeast of London – the fourth child of four girls and two boys.

Rodney Smith received no education, and his family made a living selling baskets, tinware, and clothes pegs.



Rodney "Gipsy" Smith

His father, Cornelius, and his mother, Mary [Polly] Welch, provided a home that was happy in their Romani horse-drawn wagon. His mother died from smallpox when he was a child and was buried in the nearby churchyard of St Nicholas church in Norton, now part of Letchworth Garden City.

His father, Cornelius was in and out of jail for various offences. While there, on one occasion, he heard the gospel from a prison chaplain.

Later, he and his brothers were converted at a mission meeting. From 1873 on, "The Converted Gypsies" were involved in numerous evangelistic efforts.

Smith's conversion at 16 came as a result of a combination of various factors; the witness of his father, hearing Ira Sankey singing and a visit to the home of John Bunyan in Bedford all contributed. He taught himself to read and write and began to practice preaching. He would sing hymns to the people he met and was known as "the singing gypsy boy."

## They influenced others – Gypsy Smith

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At a convention at the Christian Mission [later to become the headquarters in London,] William Booth noticed the Gypsies and realized the potential in this young man. On June 25, 1877 Smith accepted the invitation of Booth to be an evangelist with and for the Mission and for six years [1877–1882] he served on street corners and mission halls. He married on December 17, 1879 to Annie E. Pennock, one of his converts. Rodney and Annie served in several assignments and saw membership rise to hundreds, then a thousand. By June 1882, great crowds were coming and the work was growing. A gold watch was given to him and about £20.00 was presented to his wife by the warm-hearted members of a local congregation. Acceptance of these gifts was a breach of the rules and regulations of The Salvation Army and for this he was dismissed from the Army. This happened so suddenly that other evangelists had to step in to take up his preaching engagements. His eight assignments with The Salvation Army had produced 23,000 decisions and his crowds were anywhere up to 1,500.

He travelled extensively around the world on evangelistic crusades, drawing crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands throughout his life. Busy as he was, he never grew tired of visiting Romani encampments whenever he could on both sides of the Atlantic.



Gypsy never wrote a sermon out for preaching purposes. He wrote several books and could sing as well as he preached. Sometimes he would interrupt his sermon and burst into song.

Although he was a Methodist, ministers of all denominations loved him. It is said that he never had a meeting without conversions.

During World War I he ministered under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. to the British troops in France, often visiting the front lines.

As a result of this, King George VI made him a Member of the Order of the British Empire.

## They influenced others – Gypsy Smith

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At 87 he suffered a heart attack and died on the Queen Mary on a cruise in America.

So, ended the life of one who once said, "I didn't go through your colleges and seminaries. They wouldn't have me... but I have been to the feet of Jesus where the only true scholarship is learned."

### Postscript

Henry Excelsior Wiggins, one of Australia's pioneers of Pentecost who came from England wrote of him, "Yet another godly minister was used of God to shape the ultimate course of my life and ministry. Rev. R. W. Ewings, of Swindon Railway Mission, and a great Keswick zealot. It was through him that visits were made to that renowned centre of spiritual devotees in the Cumbrian Mountains — Keswick. Not only did I climb Skiddaw and see the majesty of the dawn; but through notable speakers of those days, Bishop Taylor Smith, Dr. Stuart Holden, F. B. Meyer, Northcote Deck and Graham Scroggie, I learnt much of the positive way of holiness and life of victory, but it left me somewhat unsatisfied with the "second blessing" by dry faith! In those days Gypsy Rodney Smith [1860 – 1947] and Gypsy Pat Smith, and that forthright Irishman, Rev. W. P. Nicholson, were holding great meetings and my evangelistic fervour deepened."

Never lose an opportunity to influence another – you never know where their life will go as God leads them in His service. Make the most of every opportunity.

### Denis V Smith – 2017

NOTE: I have checked my records and was unable to find some of the sources of this research. If I have not acknowledged you, my apologies.

