

The Showman Business

From the "Travelling People" to Funfair Rides

Jugglers, families of artists and other showmen still provide entertainment for the public at fairs today. The local population often distrusted the travellers. The strangers had a mysterious reputation.

The non-sedentary lifestyle of many showpeople made them a social fringe group for a long time. Apart from the regulatory rules of the respective markets, they did not have to comply with any legal obligations, nor did they have any legal protection. The first showmen's associations were founded at the end of the 19th century. Their aim was to provide legal protection and economic security for their members.

The business of showmen continued to develop, especially from the second half of the 19th century onwards: under the influence of industrialisation, technical innovations such as the *laterna magica* aka magic lantern or the cinematograph enriched the fairs. In addition to sword swallows, fortune tellers and barrel organists, operators of rides such as swing boats and merry-go-rounds were now also part of this profession.

In 1863, the first motor-driven merry-go-round started to operate. The steady expansion of the railway network now made it possible for the first time for showmen to transport their classic attractions and new types of rides to more distant locations and present them there.