

# Tinker

*This article is about itinerant tinsmiths. For other uses, see Tinker (disambiguation).*

A **tinker** or **tinkerer** was originally an itinerant tinsmith, who mended household utensils.

## Description

The word is attested from the 13th century as 'tyckner' or 'tinkler' a term used in medieval Scotland and England for a metal worker.<sup>[1]</sup> Some travelling groups and Romani people adopted this lifestyle and the name was particularly associated with indigenous Scottish Highland Travellers and Irish Travellers. However, this usage is disputed and considered offensive by some.<sup>[2]</sup> Tinkering is therefore the process of adapting, meddling or adjusting something in the course of making repairs or improvements, a process also known as bricolage.

The term "little tinker" is now widely used in England as a term of endearment for a cheeky young child.<sup>[2]</sup> Some modern day nomads with a Scottish, Irish or English influence call themselves "techno-tinkers" or "technogypsies" and are found to possess a revival of sorts of the romantic view of the tinker's lifestyle.<sup>[3]</sup> The family name "Tinker" is of Anglo-Saxon origin, and does not have a Scottish, Irish or Romany connection.

## Tinker's dam

A tinker's dam is a temporary patch to repair a hole in a metal vessel such as a pot or a pan. It was used by tinkers and was usually made of mud or clay, or sometimes other materials at hand, such as wet paper. The material was built up around the outside of the hole, so as to plug it. Molten solder was then poured on the inside of the hole. The solder cooled and solidified against the dam and bonded with the metal wall. The dam was then brushed away. The remaining solder was then rasped and smoothed down by the tinker.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

In the *Practical Dictionary of Mechanics* of 1877, Edward Knight makes this definition: "Tinker's-dam - a wall of dough raised around a place which a plumber desires to flood with a coat of solder. The material can be but once used; being consequently thrown away as worthless".<sup>[6]</sup>

This may have influenced the English phrase tinker's **cuss**, which expresses contempt. The phrases **tinker's damn** and **tinker's cuss** may also be applied to something considered insignificant. A common expression may be the examples: "I don't give a tinker's cuss what the Vicar thinks", sometimes shortened to, "I don't give a tinker's about the Vicar." In this context, the speaker is expressing contempt for the



A photograph of a tinker by Ignacy Krieger, 19th century.

clergyman and his opinion. A tinker's cuss or curse was considered of little significance because tinkers were reputed to swear (curse) habitually.<sup>[7]</sup>

## See also

- Mercheros

## References

- ↑ https://archive.org/stream/scottishgypsiesu00macr/scottishgypsiesu00macr\_djvu.txt
- 1 2 "tinker". *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 11th Edition*. Retrieved October 24, 2012 from CollinsDictionary.com.
- ↑ "Techno-Gypsies, Techno-Nomads, and Techno-Tinkers" 2005 by Leaf McGowan/Thomas Baurley. Seattle, Washington. Tree Leaves Publishing.
- ↑ "A Tinker's dam". usingenglish.com.
- ↑ John Bonner, George William Curtis (1905). "Tinkers". *Harper's weekly*. Harper's weekly. p. 1424. Retrieved 2 April 2012.
- ↑ Martin, Gary. "Tinker's Dam". The Phrase Finder.
- ↑ Martin, Gary. "Tinker's Dam". The Phrase Finder.

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