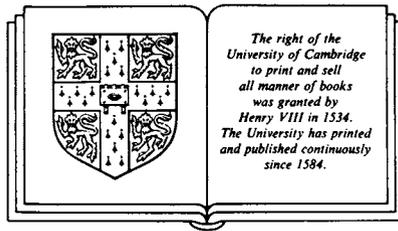


Migration in a mature economy

*Emigration and internal migration in
England and Wales, 1861–1900*

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Introduction: the scope of the study

The emigration of between 44 and 52 million people¹ from Europe overseas between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the outbreak of the First World War was a phenomenon of outstanding importance which has attracted a large literature.² In the last two decades, however, the direction of research into the history of European emigration has shifted. With some important exceptions, the majority of the books and papers published before 1960 were written from the viewpoint of the receiving countries. They were frequently concerned with the settlement and assimilation of nineteenth and early twentieth-century immigrants in overseas countries and also with the rigours of the passage from Europe. Less attention was paid to the social and economic conditions in those parts of Europe from which the emigrants came. The effect of this bias in the literature was that emigration from, say, Italy, Sweden, Ireland and Britain was often regarded as if it were part of a single phenomenon which was caused by population pressure, changes in (rural) society and the development of inland and overseas transport.³ In the last two decades, research on European

¹ Forty-four million emigrants were reported to have left European countries for overseas destinations between 1816 and 1915 and 52 million were reported to have arrived. See I. Ferenczi and W. F. Willcox, *International migrations* (National Bureau of Economic and Social Research, New York, 1929–31), Table 6, pp. 235–88.

² The most recent general paper is J. D. Gould, 'European inter-continental emigration, 1815–1914: patterns and causes', *Journal of European Economic History*. 8 (3), 1979, pp. 593–679. The most important general works are mentioned in chapter 2.

³ This tendency was pointed out by Frank Thistlethwaite in a paper at the Historical Congress in Stockholm in 1960. This paper was very influential and many Scandinavian historians, for example, have said that it was a turning point in migration studies. F. Thistlethwaite, 'Migration from Europe overseas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', pp. 32–60. *XIe Congrès International des Sciences Historique, Stockholm, 1960, V: Historie Contemporaine* (Almqvist and Wiksell, Stockholm, 1960). Hansen's *Atlantic migration* was an important exception to the generalisation that the older books tended

emigration has tended to proceed along two main lines. The relationship between the annual rate of emigration and the social and economic characteristics of the sending and receiving countries has been subjected to formal econometric analysis.⁴ But more important, interest has centred on the detailed scrutiny of the local background and the social and economic structure of particular groups of emigrants.⁵ This has directed attention towards the study of the emigration flow itself. Important issues in the literature have been: the sources of information available to potential emigrants, the extent to which emigrants moved along chains that had been established by the previous movement of others and the relation between internal migration (in particular, towards the cities) and emigration. These issues are discussed in chapter 2 which summarises the most important issues in the current literature on the history of emigration from Europe before the First World War.

It would be fair to say that the quantitative importance of emigration from Britain has not been reflected in the literature. About one-fifth of all European emigrants in the hundred years after the Napoleonic Wars were British⁶ but relatively less is known about them than, say, about Swedish emigrants.⁷ The main reason for our relative ignorance about British emigrants is that the government largely lost interest

to neglect the European background of emigration. M. L. Hansen, *The Atlantic migration, 1607–1860* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1940).

⁴ A recent survey of the econometric work is contained in L. Neal, 'Cross spectral analysis of long swings in Atlantic migration', pp. 260–97, in P. Uselding (ed.), *in Economic History*, vol. 1 (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1976).

⁵ There are good short bibliographies in P. A. M. Taylor, *The distant magnet* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971), and C. Erickson (ed.), *Emigration from Europe, 1815–1914. Select documents* (Adam and Charles Black, 1976).

⁶ For example, the bibliography contains only sixteen books about Britain which include 'emigration', 'emigrants' and 'overseas migration' in their titles. Of these, six are predominantly about the experience of emigrants in their country of destination; two are about the Atlantic Economy and two about government policy. On the other hand the bibliography contains eight large-scale works on emigration from Scandinavian countries which, in general, contain far more information about the characteristics of the emigrants than the books on English, Welsh and Scottish emigration. (Needless to say the bibliography contains a larger proportion of the work on British than Scandinavian emigration.) Total emigration from the five Scandinavian countries in the 100 years after 1815 was about 3 million compared with 10 million from Britain in the same period.

⁷ There have been more detailed studies of the origins of Swedish emigrants than of emigrants from any other country. This is partly because the data are fuller but also because the finance and skilled manpower for detailed analysis have been available. See I. Semmingsen, 'Emigration from Scandinavia', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 20 (1), 1972 pp. 45–60 and H. Rundblom and H. Norman (eds.), *From Sweden to America. A history of the migration* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1976 and Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1976).

in emigration in the 1850s, that is, before the large-scale emigration of the latter part of the century. This meant that when emigration from Britain was at its peak in the 1880s and early twentieth century, relatively little data were being collected about it. In addition, some of the data published by the British government on the occupations of emigrants are seriously deficient.⁸ The bulk of the original lists which counted the number of passengers outward bound from British ports has not survived, and there are no data that show the birthplaces of individual British emigrants. Not unnaturally, research on British emigration has tended to concentrate on the earlier part of the nineteenth century about which more material is available. Hence, research has tended to be biased towards assisted emigration and colonisation schemes which were relatively more important in the earlier years. Much less is known about the majority of British emigrants who left later in the century and who were unassisted by government.⁹

The most important work on British emigration in the second half of the nineteenth century has been carried out by Charlotte Erickson and by Brinley Thomas. Professor Erickson has published a series of papers¹⁰ based mainly on the enumeration of incoming passengers in the American ships' lists. Among other things, Professor Erickson was able to show the importance of the urban areas of Britain as a source of emigrants in the decade of the 1880s when emigration was very heavy. The approach associated with Professor Brinley Thomas depends on the inferences he has drawn from aggregate demographic and economic data.¹¹ Professor Thomas's views have been very influential, in particular the relationship he has shown between the building cycle in Britain and the United States, the internal and international flow of investment and the rate of emigrations and internal migration. Both the work of Charlotte Erickson and that

⁸ In particular, the failure to record the occupations of females, and the failure to distinguish agricultural labourers from general labourers who did not work in agriculture and probably lived in towns.

⁹ Good data on the number of assisted passages are not available, but it is doubtful if more than 10% of all emigrants between 1815 and 1914 were assisted by a government, or a trade union or a charity. Most of the assisted passages occurred before 1850 and after 1910.

¹⁰ Charlotte Erickson, 'Who were the English and Scottish emigrants in the 1880s?' pp. 347-81, in D. V. Glass and R. Revelle (eds.), *Population and Social Change* (Arnold, 1972); Charlotte Erickson, 'Who were the English emigrants of the 1820s and 1830s? A preliminary analysis' (Unpublished research paper, California Institute of Technology, 1977). Charlotte Erickson, 'Emigration from the British Isles to the USA in 1831', *Population Studies*, 35, 1981, pp. 175-97.

¹¹ B. Thomas, *Migration and economic growth. A study of Great Britain and the Atlantic Economy* (NIESR, Cambridge University Press, 1954, second edition, 1973). B. Thomas, *Migration and urban development* (Methuen, 1972).

of Brinley Thomas has had the effect of putting urban growth in Britain into the forefront of British emigration research. This is hardly surprising, since Britain was the most urbanised country. The literature on the characteristics of British emigrants is discussed in chapter 3.

The main gap in the literature on British emigration is probably the shortage of cross section studies. There have been a number of studies which relate the annual rate of emigration from Britain to a set of social, economic and demographic variables in both Britain and the countries to which British emigrants normally went.¹² But, so far there have been few studies which show the areas of Britain from which the emigrants came, and for example, show their occupations and ages. The short fall of cross section studies is particularly important because they are likely to throw doubt on the results of studies which treat all British emigration as part of a single stream. It has long been known, for example, that emigration rates were much higher from some parts of European countries than from other parts.¹³ There are two likely explanations for the differences in regional emigration rates. They could simply reflect the fact that the inhabitants of one region had more cause to emigrate than others. Alternatively, the rate of emigration may have been related to the amount of information available to potential emigrants – information about job opportunities, for example – and their response to it. Since letters home from previous migrants and the experience of migrants who had returned, were probably the most important source of information available to potential migrants it is likely that the emigration from a particular region would be partly a consequence of previous emigration. It will be shown in chapter 6 that the social and economic characteristics of the individual English and Welsh counties seem not to explain the wide differences in emigration rates from those counties. This gives considerable support to the view that the flow of information was important.

The studies of Charlotte Erickson, which have been referred to,

¹² I am referring to studies based on data that cover a large number of emigrants. There have been several important micro studies based on letters and trade union records, for example, but it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the mass of British emigrants from them. Examples of econometric studies are L. E. Gallaway and R. K. Vedder, 'Emigration from the United Kingdom to the United States 1860–1913', *Journal of Economic History*, 31, 1971, pp. 885–97; H. W. Richardson, 'British emigration and overseas investment, 1870–1914', *Economic History Review*, 25, 1972, pp. 99–113.

¹³ The Italians, for example had long been aware of the importance of the Arbruzzi, Calabria and Sicily in Italian emigration because of the issue of emigration passports. See R. F. Foerster, *The Italian emigration of our times* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1919) p. 38.

and which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3 are, so far, the only substantial work which shows the parts of Britain from which the emigrants were drawn. Unfortunately, this work is very laborious and Professor Erickson's team have only been able to cover a relatively small number of British emigrants.¹⁴ An additional problem is that the ships' lists show only the last residence of emigrants. It is impossible to tell from the lists if the emigrants had been born in the towns and villages from which they departed. This is an important issue in the Scandinavian literature. Urban emigration from Scandinavia was frequently relatively higher than rural. But how far had the urban emigrants been born in the towns and cities, or were they 'stage-emigrants' who had previously moved to the cities from the rural areas or from another urban area?¹⁵

There is only one other method of analysing the characteristics of British emigrants which yields general results. This is to estimate the place of birth of all English and Welsh emigrants from the enumeration of the county of birth in the published census volumes. Usable data exist for the period 1861–1900. In essence, the method used here to estimate the county of birth is very simple. It consists of estimating the number of deaths of natives of each of the fifty-two counties of England and Wales distinguishing those that occurred in the county in which the individuals had been born and those that occurred in the other counties of England and Wales.¹⁶ Since the number of births, the number of natives still living in their place of birth and the number living in the other counties is known, we can calculate migration of natives out of each county and the migration into the other fifty-one counties in each decade. The difference between the two flows must be the number of natives of each county who went overseas. This calculation can be stated another way. If we know the number of Cornishmen who died in England and Wales in each decade we must also know the number who died overseas. The latter is virtually identical with the emigration of Cornishmen net of returns.¹⁷ Unfortunately,

¹⁴ Her work, which only covers emigrants who went to the United States, has so far been based on samples drawn from the 1880s and the 1830s. Work on the 1850s is in progress. Her total observations number about 20,000 out of a total emigration of some 10 million before 1914, of which about 6 million went to the United States. (Her samples are largely of adult males, however.) Erickson, 'Who were?' (1972), 'Who were?' (1977).

¹⁵ This point is discussed in Semmingsen, 'Emigration from Scandinavia'. Nilsson has made an important contribution to the debate. F. Nilsson, *Emigrationen från Stockholm till Nordamerika, 1880–93* (Studia Historica Upsaliensis, Stockholm, 1973).

¹⁶ For data reasons, London and Middlesex had to be combined to make one county and migration to Scotland and Ireland could only be distinguished from migration overseas by indirect methods.

¹⁷ 'Overseas' deaths would include deaths at sea, for example.

this method, although simple in concept, is rather difficult in practice. In the first place, the data contained in the census and in the Registrar General's returns are not usable in their raw state. And second, the estimation of migrant deaths involves several important issues of technical and historical judgement. Chapter 4 shows the methods used by the author to estimate the number of emigrants by county of birth for each of the fifty-two English and Welsh counties in the period 1861–1900. Chapter 4 discusses the quality of the data in detail, the problems of analysis and the significance of possible estimation and data errors.

Our new data made it possible to answer several important questions about English emigration and about the characteristics of English and Welsh emigrants in the later nineteenth century. Some of these questions, like the importance of stage emigration, for example, are subjects of lively debate in the European literature to which historians of English emigration have been able to make relatively little contribution. Chapter 5 discusses return migration to Britain. It is possible to estimate the rate of return of English and Welsh emigrants in the 1860s and 1870s which is not available in the official returns of emigration. It was discovered that the rate of return increased markedly in the 1870s which was the decade when virtually all emigrants were carried by steamship across the North Atlantic.

Chapter 6 shows the variation in the rate of emigration from the fifty-two English and Welsh counties for the period 1861–1900 as a whole. A large number of social, economic and demographic variables are used to explain the differential emigration rates. Typical variables are the proportion of the county's population that worked in agriculture, the wages of unskilled labour and the proportion of young adults in the population. No significant correlation could be found between county emigration rates and economic and social conditions in the individual counties insofar as they are captured by these and other variables. This result could be held to support the view that is often stated in the European literature, that the decision to emigrate was determined more by the information available to the potential emigrants and less by the particular conditions in the areas from which the emigrants came.

The contribution of different counties to the exceptionally high emigration in the 1880s and the exceptionally low emigration in the 1890s is analysed in chapter 7. It was found, for example, that the majority of the additional emigrants in the 1880s came from the more urban counties. It was also found that many of these emigrants came from counties with no recent tradition of high emigration. This result has

important implications for the view that the spread of information was a major cause of emigration.

Chapter 8 considers the view that many potential emigrants from Britain considered the alternative of moving to another part of the country. That is, that internal migration (particularly to the urban areas) and emigration were substitutes. This view is part of an important concept associated with Professor Brinley Thomas and others. As we mentioned above, this view relates fluctuations in urban growth, the building cycle and home and overseas investment with fluctuations in the rate of internal and overseas investment and what is usually called 'the Atlantic economy'. We found evidence that emigration in some decades from English and Welsh counties was *unrelated* to migration to other counties. Only partial support could be found for the proposition that internal migration in England and Wales was related to the Atlantic economy.¹⁸

Chapter 9 considers an important refinement to the view that emigration and internal migration were substitutes. This is the view that many emigrants from the urban areas originally came from the (nearby) rural areas. The chapter shows the author's method of estimating the maximum number of emigrants from the urban areas of England and Wales, in the period 1861–1900, who could have been born in rural areas. It was found that rural-urban stage emigration cannot have been very important. Hence, emigration from England and Wales seems to have been very different from emigration from Scandinavia, for example.¹⁹

Chapter 10 examines the thesis (also associated with Brinley Thomas) that the Welsh followed a radically different migration pattern to the English largely because the Welsh economy was distinct from the English economy.²⁰ The author's new estimates of emigration and internal migration from Welsh counties provide no evidence whatever for this view. Wales was not a distinct migration region and its migration pattern offers no evidence for the existence of a distinct Welsh economy.

¹⁸ See Thomas, *Migration and economic growth* and *Migration and urban development*.

¹⁹ See, for example, Semmingsen, 'Emigration from Scandinavia'.

²⁰ B. Thomas has stated his views most recently in *Migration and urban development*, chapter 6. See also B. Thomas 'Wales and the Atlantic economy', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 1959, pp. 169–92, and B. Thomas (ed.), *The Welsh economy. Studies in expansion* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1962), chapter 1.