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## Across the sea to Ireland: Return Atlantic migration before the First World War

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ACROSS THE SEA TO IRELAND:  
RETURN ATLANTIC MIGRATION BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Working Paper 2019-08

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Across the Sea to Ireland:  
Return Atlantic Migration before the First World War<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** Are return migrants 'losers' who fail to adapt to the challenges of the host economy, and thereby exacerbate the brain drain linked to emigration? Or are they 'winners' whose return enhances the human and physical capital of the home country? These questions are the subject of a burgeoning literature. This paper analyze a new database culled from the 1911 Irish population census to address these issues for returnees to Ireland from North America more than a century ago. The evidence suggests that those who returned had the edge over the population as a whole in terms of human capital, if not also over those who remained abroad.

**Keywords:** migration, brain gain, economic history, Ireland

**JEL Classification:** N, N33, J61

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## *Introduction:*

Ireland has long been famous for being a land of emigrants, where relatively few of those who left ever returned. According to one familiar estimate (Gould 1980: 57) the likelihood of an Irish emigrant returning permanently from the United States on the eve of the First World War was only 6.7 per cent, compared to 57.9 per cent for Italian emigrants, 21.7 per cent for Germans and 11.6 for English.<sup>2</sup> Even if these rates are underestimates (Bandiera *et al.* 2015), the nineteenth-century Irish custom of the ‘American wake’, whereby emigrants-to-be were treated like departed souls, tells its own story. It is hardly surprising, then, that much more is known about the Irish who left, and why they left, than about those who returned. This paper is about the minority who returned.

A key feature of the economics literature on out-migration is self-selection, or whether and how migrants who leave differ from those who remain (Borjas 1987). In the more recent literature on return migration (Borjas and Bratsberg 1987; Devanzo 1996, 1998; Dustmann 2003; Wahba 2014; Ward 2017; Stark 2018) the issue is analogous. This issue will also be our focus here. Borjas and Bratsberg (1987) hypothesize that those who return tend to be either the best of the best or the worst of the worst, i.e. return migration reinforces the initial selection into outmigration, but the others report more nuanced findings. A good example is Handlos *et al.* (2018) who find that the impact of illness on the likelihood of Danish immigrants returning home is a function of age, with illness prompting

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<sup>2</sup> Gould defined the ‘repatriant ratio’ as ‘emigrant aliens plus non-emigrant aliens minus non-immigrant aliens... for the years 1907-08 to 1913-14 ... as a percentage of the sum of immigrant aliens from the same country for the years 1904-05 to 1901-11’ (Gould 1980: 56).

younger migrants to stay and older migrants to return home. A recent study of returnees to Romania finds that they were positively selected among migrants overall and therefore also relative to non-migrants (Ambrosini *et al.* 2015). This echoes the findings of an earlier study of Puerto Rican migrants in the 1980s which found that while out-migration was negatively selected, return migration was positively selected; i.e. the more skilled and successful of the emigrants were more likely to return (Ramos 1992). Abramitzky *et al.* (2019) compare the occupations of Norwegians who returned home from the US during the golden age of mass migration with the occupations of those who did not return, and find evidence of negative selection relative to out-migrants. Yet the returnees held occupations of higher status than those who never emigrated. Abramitzky *et al.* conclude that the returnees ‘despite being negatively selected ... were able to accumulate savings and improve their economic circumstances once they returned home’. This study seeks to find a place for the Irish a century ago in this burgeoning literature on selection and return migration.

### *Ireland:*

Irish return migration has also been the focus of a good deal of analysis, though less by economists than other social scientists and, indeed, scholars in the humanities.<sup>3</sup> A study of returnees to the west of Ireland, based on fieldwork conducted in 1975, found that whereas females tended to return because they found adjustment to life abroad difficult or because

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Foeken 1980; Gmelch 1983, 1986; Gmelch and Delaney 1979; McGrath 1991; Ní Laoire 2007, 2008; Meaney *et al.* 2013, ch. 3; Cawley and Galvin 2016.

they wanted to marry, most males returned to inherit property or assist the family (Foeken 1980). Both Whelan and Hughes (1976) and Gmelch (1986) found that while out-migration was driven by material considerations, psychic forces such as the attraction of being near friends and relatives at home played a major role in the decision to return. In a fieldwork study of return migration to Achill in county Mayo in the 1970s McGrath (1991) re-echoed the finding that the motivations for out-migration were more complex than those for return migration; a noteworthy theme in her study was the disappointment of many returnees with life at home. Barrett and Goggins (2010) address the issue of selection using a large-scale survey of employees in Ireland in the 2000s. Comparing the wages of returnees and comparable people who never emigrated, they find the former earned a significant wage premium, consistent with the hypothesis that, given time, ‘migration can be part of a process of human capital formation’.

Studying return migration to Ireland in the more distant past is more problematic. In the case of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish return migration, even its extent is uncertain, making the analysis of its determinants, characteristics, and consequences challenging (Akenson 2012: 241-43). Nonetheless, the topic has generated a distinguished literature, beginning with Schrier (1958), continuing with Fitzpatrick (1996), and culminating recently in Dunnigan (2012) and Fitzpatrick (2019). All these studies focus on returnees from the United States a century or so ago.

Who, then, were these returnees? As in most economic analyses of human migration, the issue of selection is key. Killick (2018) unearthed a reference in the *London Gazette* (2th August 1842) to ‘people who have gone to the United States to find employment, but not finding it in the cities or

close to the seaboard, return to England, but chiefly to Ireland, preferring rather to starve or to idle at home with their friends than abroad, among strangers', but such returnees are likely to have been very few. Only a small minority of the millions who emigrated from Ireland during the Age of Mass Migration returned. Presumably more returned, either to visit or for good, as trans-Atlantic travel became safer and more affordable.

Little is known about how those who returned to Ireland differed from those who left it or, indeed, those who remained at home. A study of a small cohort of American returnees to Ireland c. 1858-1865 by 't Hart (1985) is consistent with some skill acquisition while abroad, though this sample may be biased by the overrepresentation of skilled workers evading conscription during the U.S. civil war. The chapter on returnees in Schrier's (1959) pioneering study of post-Famine emigration also addresses the issue of selection, although informally. Schrier relies heavily on his analysis of a questionnaire specially prepared for him by the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC). From his reading of this source, Schrier inferred that women intent on marriage were much more likely to return than men, and that otherwise 'there was no single reason which explained the return of the Yank'; the returnees tended to opt for business rather than farm life, buying a public house being a favourite strategy: 'as late as 1955 it was declared that every bar in Killarney was run by a Yank' (Schrier 1958: 132, 138; Wyman 1993: 136; see too Moynihan 2019: 21-23). Of course, much of the IFC material used by Schrier is anecdotal and impressionistic. Still, a focus on the summary statements of the IFC's contacts, who were able and experienced, rather than on transcribed oral narratives replete with anecdotes, suggests that those who returned were 'successful' (see Appendix 1).

Miller (1985: 426, 519) noted that cheaper and safer passages in the late nineteenth century increased the proportion who returned home, and offers a hint that migrants from the west of Ireland were more likely to return than those from the east, but only because they suffered more from homesickness or found it harder to adapt in America because of their lack of English. Fitzpatrick (1996) discovered some previously neglected data on returnees for 1912 and 1913 (BPP 1913, 1914), and used it to compare Irish and British returnees. These data (see Appendix 2), show that Irish emigrants were less inclined to return than those from the rest of the United Kingdom; in 1912-13 the ratio of immigration to emigration was about 14 per cent in the case of Ireland, but over one-fifth for the UK. It is the proportions that matter here; both numbers are higher than those inferred by Gould (1980: 57) for return migration from the US in 1907-14 (6.7 per cent for Ireland, 11.6 per cent for England, and 13.1 per cent for Scotland). More significant for this study, they also show that in terms of 'brain gain', the relative quality of the Irish return flow was higher than that of the British. In the case of males the proportion of white collar and skilled workers was twice as high among the returnees as among the emigrants. The data on females are more difficult to interpret, given the high proportion with no reported occupation, but the significantly higher share of white collar women workers among the returnees (6.5 per cent versus 3.3 per cent) is interesting. The differences between emigrants and returnees in the rest of the United Kingdom were much smaller (see Appendix Tables 1a and 1b). The outcome represents a form of 'brain gain' from return migration (compare Abramitzky *et al.* 2019; Biondo *et al.* 2012).



Dunnigan's study of returnees was the first to exploit systematically the U.S. passport database on Ancestry.com. The database contains passport applications from over fourteen thousand Irish emigrants wishing to return home, either to visit or to stay. Most of the applications refer to the post-1914 period, when a passport became compulsory for travel abroad. The passports are a rich source, with information on, among other details, name, age, places of birth and residence, years spent in the US, occupation, physical characteristics, and reason for travel; many include photographs. This rich source has also been exploited by Fitzpatrick (2019) in a fascinating analysis of visitors and returnees to the county of Leitrim.<sup>4</sup>

Dunnigan's (2011: 116) analysis of the motivations north Connacht returnees a century or so ago as reflected by U.S. passport applications reveal that most of those who returned did not stay. Nearly three-quarters referred to temporary family-related visits. Only one per cent explicitly disclosed that they were returning home to live, although presumably some of the eight per cent who were returning 'for health reasons' and the two

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<sup>4</sup> Here are Dunnigan's data on the reasons for returning given on U.S. passport applications:

Explanation	N	%
Family-related reasons	938	73
<i>Visiting family</i>	729	60
<i>Personal/family business</i>	133	11
<i>Returning to take care of family</i>	24	2
<i>Accompanying family</i>	52	4
Health reasons	92	8
Business	52	4
Pleasure	24	2
Returning to live	12	1
Multiple/n.a.	97	8
Total	1,215	100

Source: Dunnigan 2011: 116

per cent who were doing so ‘to take care of family’ were also likely to remain on. Dunnigan’s assessment of how permanent returnees fared draws heavily on the IFC material.

### *The 1911 Census:*

The census of 1911 recorded the population of Ireland as 4,390,219. At that time roughly half as many Irish-born people lived abroad as lived in Ireland.<sup>5</sup> The number of foreign-born residents in both Ireland (157,000) and Britain (284,830) were miniscule by comparison. They included 7,371 born in the ambiguously defined ‘America’ and a further 5,049 born in the United States. A small proportion of those were visitors, but most were the children or grandchildren of returned emigrants, and the late David Fitzpatrick (2019: ch. 6) has used the presence of the latter in the census enumeration forms to produce a hand-collected profile of returnees living in County Leitrim in 1901 and 1911.<sup>6</sup> Fitzpatrick identifies ‘a widely dispersed and notably unexotic population rising to 300 American settlers, most of whom were the children of emigrants from Leitrim who evidently had struggled to make ends meet in America’. He dubs permanent returnees ‘losers’, whereas he describes those who applied for a US visa in order to return for short-term visits only c. 1918-22 as ‘winners’ (Fitzpatrick 2019: ch. 6). Comparing the addresses of returnees with those of Leitrim people in general, he finds that the former were ‘somewhat underrepresented’ in the

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<sup>5</sup> Including 1.3 million in the US, 0.6 million in Great Britain, 0.1 million in Canada, and 0.1 million in Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Collins and Zimran (2019) use the same strategy to identify famine and pre-famine immigrants in the U.S. 1850 census. A limitation of Fitzpatrick’s strategy is that it omits returnees living in other Irish counties in Ireland in 1911.

poorer north of the county but that overall the profile of the returnees ‘closely mirrored’ that of the home population. Looking at co-resident parents, Fitzpatrick finds that the median age of returning fathers was 45 years and that of mothers 40 years. Nearly nine-tenths of the fathers were farmers, with a sprinkling of farm labourers and shopkeepers.

### *From American Born to Returnee:*

In this paper we address both the issues raised by Fitzpatrick and some other features of return migration at a national level. We extracted 12,707 U.S.-born and 1,112 Canada-born from the enumeration forms in the 1911 census, reassuringly close to the numbers reported in the published census. Following Fitzpatrick’s strategy of identifying the relatives of U.S.-born children, we then identify the returnees by linking American children to their Irish-born returnee parents.

The census data used here provide a snapshot of the Irish population at a particular moment in time. Ideally, we would link individuals and create a longitudinal data source tracking demographic behavior and events over the life course for returnees. The cross-sectional nature of the 1911 census prohibits this. Clearly, our methodology will omit many returnees from the analysis. Since we use American-born children as a way of detecting their returnee parents we only recover only those who returned to Ireland already married; many more and, we suspect, particularly women returned home single, planning or hoping to marry on return.

Out of the 12,707 U.S. and 1,112 Canadian born individuals appearing in the 1911 census, we found that 1,707 and 213 were resident in non-nuclear households on census night respectively. Most were residing, either as an

employee or ‘boarder’/guest in institutions like hospitals, schools, and prisons. Since we cannot link these individuals to co-residing family members we exclude them from our analysis.

Table 1: American Born and Relationship to Household Head

Relationship	U.S.	Canadian	Total	Per Cent
Son	2,474	140	2,614	21.95
Daughter	2,219	189	2,408	20.22
Household Head	1,195	213	1,408	11.82
Wife	963	195	1,158	9.72
Grandson	1,122	33	1,155	9.70
Granddaughter	951	21	972	8.16
Nephew	790	21	811	6.81
Niece	710	32	742	6.23
Other Relative	516	55	571	4.80
Other	60	9	69	0.58
Total	11,000	908	11,908	100

Table 1 displays counts of American-born people in 1911 Ireland stratified by their relationship to the household head. The bulk of U.S. and Canadian born are first-degree relatives. It is also striking that a large proportion of non-first degree relatives are children: grandchildren, nephews and nieces. The other relative category includes a small number of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and other infrequently observed American householders. The 69 ‘other’ householders are typically boarders, domestic servants, and visitors.

### *Household Heads:*

Our first group of returnees are household heads cohabiting with American-born children and a wife. Initially we detected 2,018 such

individuals, although 85 (4.2 per cent) were born either outside Ireland or listed a birthplace from which we were unable to discern a location. This left us with 1,933 Irish-born observations.

Our selection criteria mean that we will miss a significant proportion of the returnee population. These included 18-year old James Healy, who headed a farming household in the townland of Creggeen in the parish of Kilgarvan, county Kerry in 1911, co-residing with his illiterate grandparents Florence (76) and Nellie (73), his brother, three sisters, and a farm servant. All spoke Irish except James; he and two of his sisters (aged 20 and 15) had been born in the United States. The same holds for another youngster, US-born 16-year old Edmond Grogan of Beal in north Kerry, who also headed a farm household, co-residing with an aged cousin and two boarders. Presumably young Healy and young Grogan were the sons of emigrants, though whether their parents ever returned is not known: they were not present in either 1911 or 1901. The eldest household heads were 99-year old John Sheehy of Duagh, also in Kerry, who lived with his US-born grandson James [incorrectly recorded as nephew], and 97-year old Belfast grocer, Thomas Strahan, who was living with his daughter and US-born 38-year old grandson, also listed as a grocer. These elderly men are more likely to have been the parents of emigrants. However, four-fifths of the household heads in our data were aged between 35 and 65, with a median age of 48 years.<sup>7</sup> The age of the children in the household can also be used in to infer a lower bound on the age of return. Subtracting the youngest American born child from the age of the household head yields a median value of 33 years. At least 71 per cent of the household head returnees were over 30 years of age

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<sup>7</sup> Fitzpatrick returns a median age of 45 for Leitrim. In the Leitrim subset of our data the equivalent median figure stands at 50 years (N=47).

upon return, with the true ‘age of return’ likely to be higher by a couple of years in most instances.

How do the returnees that we have identified compare to the wider population in Ireland at the time? Table 2 describes the literacy (being recorded in the census as being able to both read and write) of the returnees and the married household head male population. Over 98 per cent of young returnees could both read and write, or a good 8 percentage points more than the general population. There was a downward trend with respect to age amongst returnees, with only three quarters of the ‘60 and over’ cohort deemed literate, but the negative age-literacy correlation was not limited to returnees. Literacy declined in tandem with age at a faster pace for the general population, reflecting the improvements in educational attainment in post-Famine Ireland. Still, the returnees had consistently higher levels of literacy than the rest of the population.<sup>8</sup>

This evidence suggests that returnees were more educated than the rest of the Irish population. Did this educational advantage translate into an advantage in occupational prestige? Table 3 shows that this appears to be the case. A large segment of household head returnees were farmers (51.7 per cent), possibly men who emigrated as rural labourers or farmer’s non-inheriting sons and bought land on their return. Returnees were 13.3 percentage points more likely to be farmers than the general population.

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<sup>8</sup> How they compared with all those who left remains moot; compare Connor (2019) on outward selection in early twentieth-century Ireland and Gomellini and Ó Gráda (2019) on returnees and emigration in late nineteenth-century Italy.

Table 2: Comparing Literacy between Returnees and the General Population, Stratified by Age Cohort

Age Group	Returnees		Population	
	Per Cent	N	Per Cent	N
Under 30	98.11	53	92.15	32,270
30 to 39	93.35	346	91.08	108,657
40 to 49	92.18	703	87.13	126,021
50 to 59	90.37	457	83.34	104,137
60 and Over	75.13	374	66.96	141,974

This difference is reversed amongst the agricultural laboring classes, pointing to positive selection amongst returnees. The positive selection found in the agricultural industry extends more generally. Whilst there is some ambiguity surrounding skilled workers, returnees enjoyed a clear advantage over the rest of the population when it came to obtaining white-collar occupations like merchants, solicitors, and schoolmasters. The overrepresentation of returnees in white-collar occupations is mirrored by an underrepresentation in urban laboring positions. Finally, returnees were slightly less likely to be in the N/A occupational class, a small group of household heads without an occupation, pensioned, or who recorded an occupation that was illegible. The relatively small number of individuals without an ascribed occupational classification cautions against any further conclusion here.

The religious composition of household head returnees was similar to the wider Irish population. A total of 1,409 of the 1,933 or 72.9 per cent of the returnees were Roman Catholics, compared to 70.7 per cent in the rest of the population. Likewise, the proportions across the Protestant Church of Ireland (10.6 per cent), Presbyterian (12.4), and Methodist (2.3)

faiths closely mirrored those in the population at large: 14.1, 11.5, and 1.6 respectively.

Table 3: Occupational Class

Occupation Group	Returnees		Population	
	Per Cent	N	Per Cent	N
Farmer	51.73	1,000	38.41	197,095
Skilled Worker	18.05	349	22.18	113,841
White-Collar	14.49	280	13.03	66,885
Farm Labourer	5.48	106	9.93	50,970
Urban Labourer	8.64	167	14.01	71,891
N/A	1.60	31	2.44	12,502

Once returnees with the ambiguous birthplace of ‘Ireland’ are omitted, we find that 80.2 per cent of our household heads sample had returned to their county of birth. This proportion varies by county however. For example, less than half (41.3 per cent) of Dublin-residing returnees hailed from the county whereas the equivalent share in the very rural county of Kerry was 92.5 per cent. Focusing solely on “Farmers” increases the share by 8.2 percentage points to 88.4, which suggests that returnees, in particular to more rural counties, were motivated by the prospect of inheriting or purchasing land. We elaborate on returnee and American-born locations later in our analysis.

### *Wives:*

We identified 1,972 likely female returnees. These women were the wives of the household heads discussed in the previous section. We note that these returnees are less in number than 2,018 household heads. The



reason for this is that some of the wives who returned with an Irish-born husband were American-born. Of the 2,054 marriages in our data, 1,950 (94.9 per cent) were both non-American born couples. In 22 (1.1 per cent) marriages the husband was American born but the wife was not, whilst in 68 (3.3 per cent) marriages the reverse applied. There were only 14 marriages, less than one per cent, where both couples were American born. Once we apply our 'Irish-born' restriction to the sample of wives we whittle it down from 1,972 to 1,866.

As in the sample of male household heads, three-quarters of the wives were aged between 35 and 65. However, this statistic does not tell the whole story. Women returnees were younger as the median age was 43, five years younger than their husbands. This difference also applies to our lower bound on age at return calculation as the median age of return was 30. This implies that over half of the women in our sample gave birth to their youngest American-born child before reaching 30. Table 4 shows that the age-literacy trajectory for returnee wives follows a similar path to that displayed in Table 1. As before, this illustrates that returnees appear to be positively selected on education. As for religious affiliation, that of the returnee wives is unremarkably like both that of the household heads and the population of 'wives' more broadly.<sup>9</sup>

A key feature of the 1911 census was the introduction of questions about marital duration and fertility. To what extent did our sample of returnees differ? To examine this we further restrict our sample of returnee wives to who have indicated giving birth to at least one child, who married before they were 45, and had marital duration of at least five years. The first

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<sup>9</sup> Roman Catholics make up over three quarters (74.5 per cent) the returnee wife sample.

condition reduces the possibility that the woman is the household head's wife but not the mother of the American born child<sup>10</sup> whilst the second condition rules out marriages (most likely second marriages) that occurred later in life. The third condition removes recently married couples who tend to inflate the 'children per married years' fertility variables.

Table 4: Comparing Literacy between Returnee Wives and Wives in the General Population, Stratified by Age Cohort

Age Group	Returnees		Population	
	Per Cent	N	Per Cent	N
Under 30	100.00	112	93.36	68,723
30 to 39	95.55	517	92.71	145,605
40 to 49	93.62	674	88.43	123,878
50 to 59	86.59	358	81.88	88,888
60 and Over	65.20	204	59.06	95,202

The majority of returnees, those aged under 50, married at the same age as the population generally. Older returnees, married approximately 4 years later. One would imagine that this result is more likely to be driven by sample selection because the returnee sample must have a child present (so as to indicate they are returnees) whereas this does not apply to the wider population. Therefore, the population sample will contain older people with children who have all left home. This is why any interpretation of fertility differences must be also treated with due caution.

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<sup>10</sup> It does not remove the possibility entirely: a woman might marry a widower with an American-born child and then have a further child with him.

Table 5: Comparing Nuptiality, Fertility, and Child Mortality between Returnees and the General Population, Stratified by Age Cohort

Age Group	Returnees	Population	Difference (Per Cent)
<b>Age at Marriage</b>			
Under 30	20.34	19.72	3.17
30 to 39	23.25	23.47	-0.94
40 to 49	25.12	25.51	-1.53
50 to 59	27.56	26.34	4.65
60 and Over	28.96	27.90	3.80
<b>Children Born</b>			
Under 30	3.27	3.42	-4.37
30 to 39	4.59	4.80	-4.36
40 to 49	5.76	6.18	-6.80
50 to 59	5.98	6.80	-12.13
60 and Over	6.12	7.02	-12.79
<b>Children Alive</b>			
Under 30	2.99	2.94	1.63
30 to 39	3.94	4.10	-3.87
40 to 49	4.87	5.12	-4.73
50 to 59	4.88	5.46	-10.50
60 and Over	4.86	5.28	-7.93
<b>Children Born per Years Married</b>			
Under 30	0.47	0.48	-3.42
30 to 39	0.40	0.44	-8.34
40 to 49	0.31	0.34	-9.38
50 to 59	0.23	0.25	-4.80
60 and Over	0.16	0.18	-8.01
<b>Children Alive per Years Married</b>			
Under 30	0.43	0.42	2.05
30 to 39	0.35	0.38	-7.63
40 to 49	0.27	0.29	-7.53
50 to 59	0.19	0.20	-3.18
60 and Over	0.13	0.13	-2.86

The results from the various measures of fertility show that returnees had fewer children. Fertility differences in what we believe are the most comparable age brackets, 30-39 and 40-49, show that returnees would have

given birth to around 6 per cent fewer children. This difference is reduced when the variable of interest is switched to children alive.

The results from the various measures of fertility show that returnees had less children. Fertility differences in arguably the most relevant age brackets, 30-39 and 40-49, show that returnees would have given birth to around 6 per cent fewer children. This difference is reduced when the variable of interest is switched to children alive in 1911. Returnees had fewer children but were less likely to experience the death of a child compared to the rest of the population. A comparison of children born/alive per year of marriage indicates that differences in fertility can be accounted for by within marriage fertility control rather than delayed marriage.

Examining the birthplaces of the migrants shows that women were slightly less likely than their husbands to return to their county of birth: 76.7 per cent *versus* 80.2 per cent. Again this varied by county. Dublin was the natal county of only 44 per cent of its returnees whereas 90 per cent of Kerry's returned emigrants had come back to their home place.

### *Where did the returnees return to?:*

One of Fitzpatrick's reasons for choosing Leitrim is that it contained the highest ratio of returnees to population of any Irish county in 1911. By our reckoning Leitrim was closely followed by counties Galway, Roscommon, Down, and Sligo. Perhaps a more interesting ratio is that of returnees to emigrants. For emigration to be effective, a lower ratio of returnees to emigrants to economically backward Leitrim than to, say, well-off Antrim would be desirable. Table 6 compares the two ratios at provincial level, using the ratio of parent returnees per 10,000 emigrants

and per 10,000 population between 1881 and 1910. The comparison reveals that one striking feature of the returnees is that emigrants from the poorer counties were less likely to return home. Comparing the estimated stock of returnees to that of the emigrant outflow that emigrants from relatively advanced Ulster and Leinster were approximately twice as likely to return as those from the poorer provinces of Munster and Connacht. In this sense too, return migration reduced the economic cost of emigration.

Table 6: Returnee Destinations by Province

Province	Returnees/ Population	Returnees/ Emigrants
Leinster	5.8	28.8
Munster	7.5	15.8
Ulster	9.9	36.7
Connacht	11.2	19.8

Figure 1 highlights this point at the county level. Returnees make up a disproportionate share of the counties 1901 population in poorer more isolated counties like Donegal, Leitrim, and Kerry. However, 19<sup>th</sup> century emigration pushed down the populations of these counties and once we look at returnees as a share of 1881-1910 emigration we find that relatively few migrants returned to poorer counties.

Figure 2 underlines the importance of the population vs. emigrants distinction. When population is used as the deflator a negative correlation (correlation coefficient of -0.23) with Bowley's 1886 county-level wage data exists. Using the number of emigrants between 1881 and 1910 as the denominator reverses this relationship. The positive, and stronger in absolute terms, correlation coefficient here of 0.45 tells a different story.

Emigrants were, for the most part, more likely to return in cases where economic conditions allowed them to. Logically, it is tempting to believe that the decision to return must be driven by nostalgia and the desire to be close to family and friends or a sense of responsibility for family. One might imagine that economic concerns should be downplayed because the economic push/pull factors that contributed to the era of mass migration in Ireland went largely unchanged until the second latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Table 6 and Figure 1 and 2 oppose this view. They show that economic backwardness stymied return migration. Faster economic development in pre-Great War Ireland would have not only reduced population outflows but also attracted more of those who left to return home.

Figure 1: Returnee Destination by County

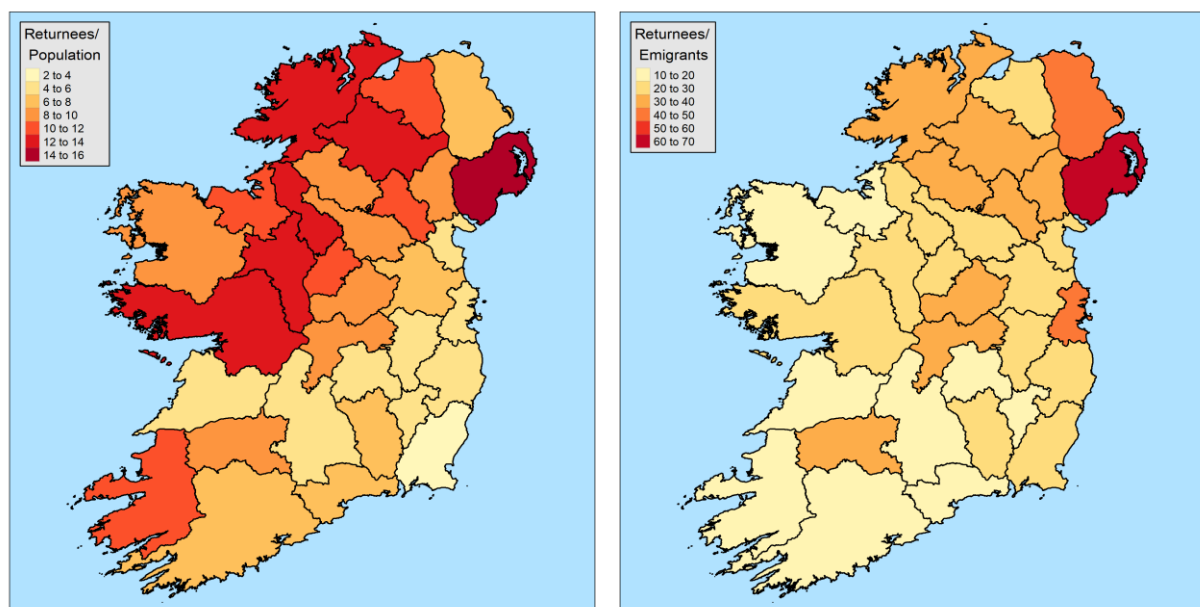
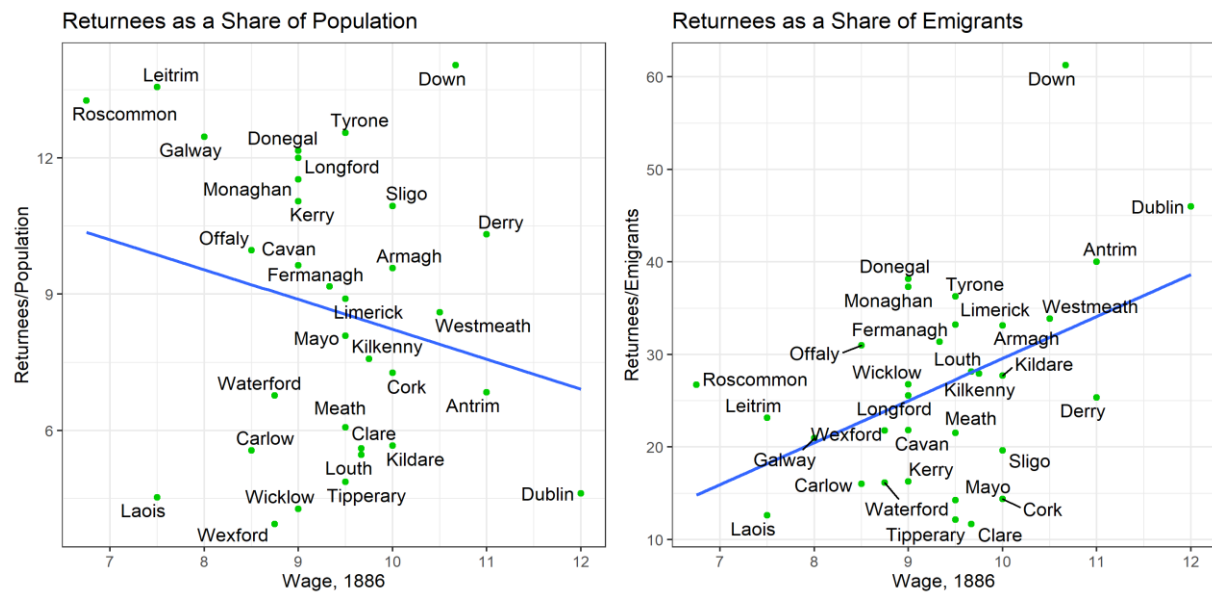


Figure 2: Returnee Destination-Wage Scatterplots



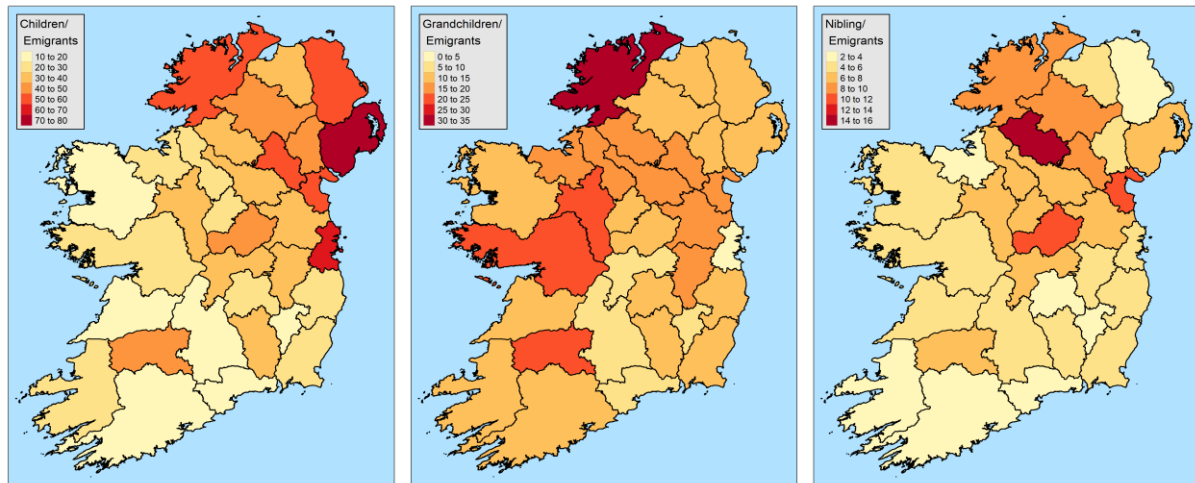
### *Children:*

Table 1 shows that not only was there a large number of American-born grandchildren but also nieces and nephews. To which parts of Ireland did these children return to? Were they accompanied by their parents? Were they more or less likely to declare school attendance between the ages of 13 and 16? These are questions we seek to answer in this section.

Figure 3 illustrates the spatial distribution of children (i.e. sons and daughters, grandchildren, and niblings (nieces and nephews)). Given our results in the previous subsection we present these as a share of emigrants rather than as a share of population. It is of no surprise that the map for children is similar to that of their parents as we are using children to detect returnees. The maps for grandchildren and niblings are different. American-born grandchildren are more likely to be present in poorer western counties like Galway and Roscommon whereas the location of

nieces and nephews appears to be reasonably, bar concentrations in Fermanagh, Louth, and Westmeath, homogenous.

Figure 3: Children, Grandchildren, and Niblings



The correlation matrix in Figure 4 represents an attempt to understand the spatial distributions shown in Figure 3. The variables listed on the  $x$ - and  $y$ -axes *grchil*, *retem*, *child1*, *nibling*, and *w1886* represent the relative frequencies of grandchildren, returnees, children, niblings, alongside Bowley's county-level wage rates. The number inside the tiles in the plot represents the correlation coefficient between the two variables. The correlation coefficient of 0.96 between children and returnees (i.e. their parents) is very high, but not perfect, as expected. The reason why it is less than unity is because of differences in family-size. We already know that wages are correlated with the likelihood of returning. The strength of this correlation, a value of 0.5, associated with children confirms this. However, this correlation reverses for grandchildren. American-born grandchildren were more likely to return to lower-wage counties. This result indicates that wages were not an impediment to returnees who returned to live with their parents. The negligible correlation connecting

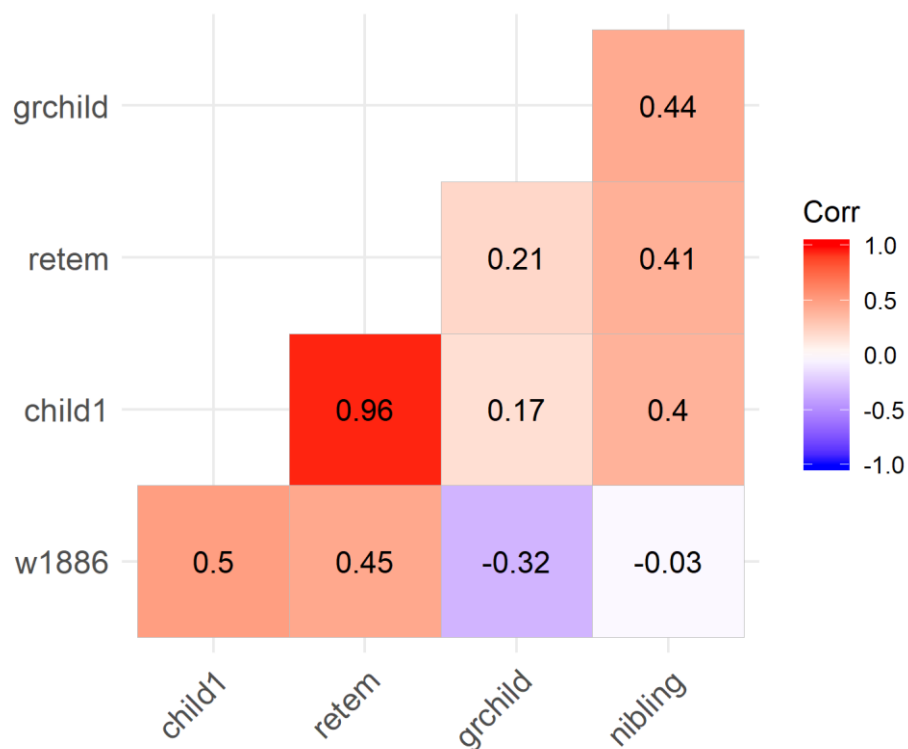


wages and niblings corroborates our earlier impression from Figure 3 that nephews and nieces were located somewhat randomly.

Table 7: Parent's Presence with Children

Relative	N	Parent in House (Per Cent)
Granddaughter	972	91.5
Grandson	1,155	91.3
Niece	742	38.3
Nephew	811	43.6

Figure 4: Correlation Matrix, Children, Grandchildren, Niblings, Returnees, and Wages

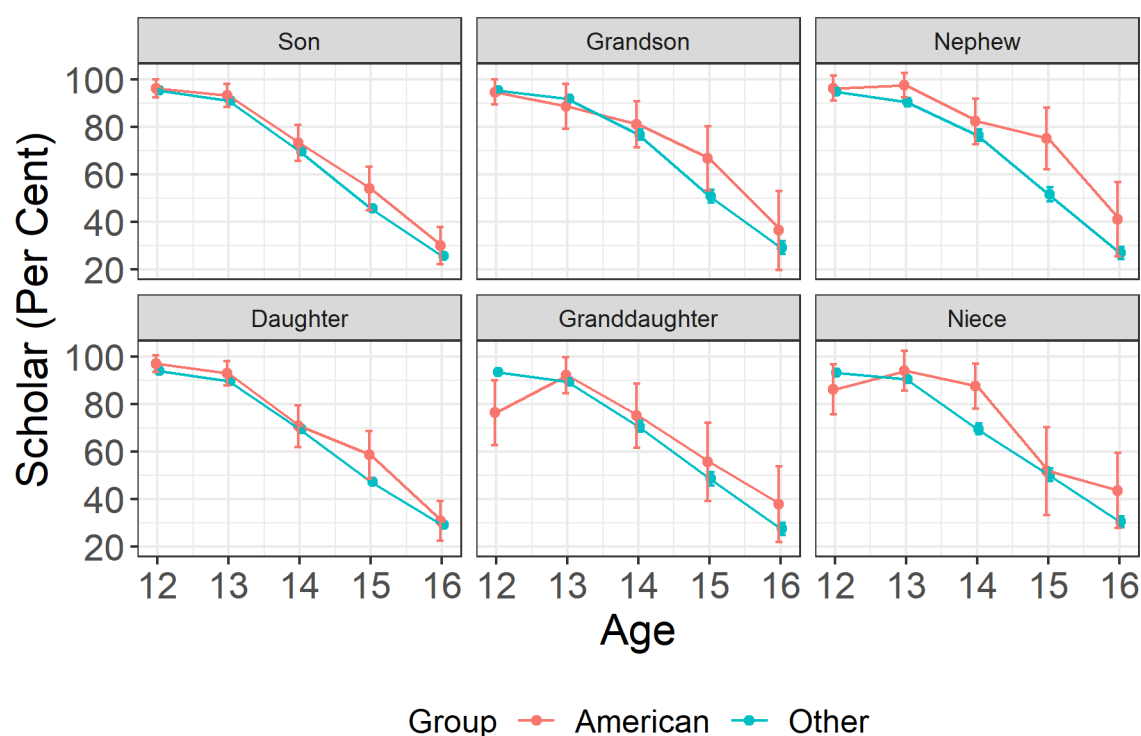


If grandchildren returned to poorer counties, did they return with their parents? Going by the results in Table 7 that appears to be the case. Over 90 per cent of both grandsons and granddaughters were recorded in the census as living where there was at least one person designated as a 'son' or 'daughter' to the household head. Whilst this figure undoubtedly contains some false positives (grandchildren connected to their uncle or aunt rather than father or mother) we believe that these would be reasonably scarce. Around one-third of all grandchildren lived in households where more than two people had declared that they were the son or daughter of the household head. The share of nieces and nephews recorded in a household where at least one of their parents (brother or sister to the household head) was also present is markedly lower, around 40 per cent. This result indicates that it was not uncommon for nieces and nephews to be returned to Ireland while their parents were still working in America.

School attendance can be inferred from the census as those in school declared themselves to be a 'scholar' in the occupation field (see Fernihough (2017) for an application with this variable). Figure 5 examines the school attendance-age trajectories for children in the six 'relationship to household head' groups stratified by those born in America and the population at large (mostly Irish born). Apart from American-born granddaughters, the majority of those aged 12 recorded themselves as scholars. The compulsory school leaving age of 13 meant that most left in the forthcoming years. In nearly all cases, American-born children were more likely to be attending school compared to their Irish-born counterparts. This is particularly pronounced for nephews before the age of 16 and nieces before the age of 15. In several cases, however, the 95 per

cent confidence intervals, as indicated with the bars, for the two populations overlap thus cautioning against the notion that differences between the groups were universal.

Figure 5: Scholars by Age Stratified by Relationship to Household Head



### Conclusion:

Returnees, at least until very recently, have always been a small minority of those who emigrated from Ireland. Our focus in this paper has been on those who returned toward the end of the age of mass migration before 1914. For insight into their characteristics we analyzed parents in Ireland with United States- and Canadian-born children. Although it did not affect female marriage age, the New World left its mark on the returnees in terms of their fertility and the survival prospects of their children. We also found that the returnees were positively selected in

terms of skills and literacy relative to those who never left, and probably also relative to those who left. In sum, return migration partially mitigated the 'brain drain' losses from out-migration.

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## APPENDIX 1. Excerpts from Replies to the Irish Folklore Commission Questionnaire

In 1955 a young American historian, Arnold Schrier [1925-2016], prevailed on the Irish Folklore Commission [IFC] to circulate a questionnaire about Irish emigration to America. The questionnaire was constructed by Schrier and distributed by IFC folklorist Seán Ó Súilleabháin to his network of collectors, many of them schoolteachers. Schrier's 1958 monograph relied heavily on this material. The questionnaire included two questions on returnees: one on those who returned to visit, and the other on those who returned for good. The replies to those questions have also been invoked by Wyman (1993), Dunnigan (2011), Moynihan (2019), and Fitzpatrick (2019).

The extracts below represent an attempt to describe the overall summary impressions of eight of Ó Súilleabháin's informants. Anecdotal accounts and individual case studies are excluded.<sup>11</sup> The extracts are silent on several aspects of return migration such as the age and gender of the returnees, and the 'swaggering figures of fiction, investing their ill-gotten foreign gold in an Irish pub or bringing home a Yankee bride' dismissed by Fitzpatrick do not feature here. The fewness of explicit references to returning couples is also striking. But the accounts broadly agree that the returnees had made a success of their time abroad and that they had accumulated sufficient capital to start a business, either as farmers or in commerce. All in all, they paint a prosaic picture but one far less gloomy than that of the 'losers' described by Fitzpatrick (2019).

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<sup>11</sup> All the replies are available online at: <https://digital.ucd.ie/index.php?q=schrier>

*Tuosist, south Kerry* (Dermot O'Sullivan): 'They all looked well and were well dressed... Some of them returned and bought farms or came to the home. The girls brought a fortune and settled down. I suppose they had enough of city life.'

*Corr na Móna, Galway* (Proinsias de Búrca): 'Whenever an emigrant returned they always created a favourable impression. Some... returned to stay. They returned because they had saved a considerable amount of money in America and were able to buy a holding of land or a business place. Others married into farms or were given the old home by their parents. They worked on the land or whatever business they took up. There were none of them able to live on their savings.'

*Kilbride, Trim, Meath* (Matthew O'Reilly): 'Not many returned to stay... Some of them had their minds made up before they left that as soon as they made enough money they would return, some to buy a farm, others a public house and later a dance hall or a picture house. Some returned to occupy a farm of land or a shop because of the death of a relative.'

*Bailieboro, Cavan* (P. J. Gaynor): 'If they weren't successful they wouldn't come back. Plenty of emigrants that were successful didn't come back either... Others came home and never went back. They were very good speculators when they came back. They often bought land. More of them bought shops and house property.'

*Castle Plunkett, Castlerea, Roscommon* (J. J. O'Donnell): 'A great number of emigrants do return on a visit or to remain at home. These are always people who have succeeded in the U.S.A. and usually make a favourable impression... Those who returned to stay did so, mostly in the

hope of having an easier life in Ireland, and in the belief that Ireland is a pleasanter country for people who are getting on in years... These people were generally successful.'

*Rossport, Ballina, Mayo* (Michael Corduff): Nearly all returned Americans had developed sound traits of industry and initiative, and a go-ahead character which was in peculiar contrast to the lackadaisical easy and happy-go-lucky way of living which characterized their manner of life before they left home... There is scarcely a town or village in Mayo but has a few shopkeepers who started life in America, not necessarily in commercial business, but in other positions in which having accumulated some money, and set up shops, or married into commercial families... Not all returned 'Americans' set up in business ... Some acquired holdings of land, at which they were no more successful than the average neighbour.

*Tullaghaw, Leitrim* (Liam Ó Briain): 'Of some 187 who emigrated from this parish in [the] past 50 years about 29 returned and settled down here again. All these so far as I know did reasonable well overseas and some few very well. All of them were able to buy little places for themselves or set up on business or live comfortably on their pensions or investments.

*Derinturn, Carbury, Co. Kildare* (Pádraig Ó Conchubhair): 'Very few emigrants from the locality returned to stay. Those who returned came to take over farmers that were left to them. A few lived on their saving, particularly those who had no family.'

*Grange, Clonmel, Tipperary* (Séamus Ó Maolcatha): 'A number from this parish [Grange] came home and stayed. [1] and [2] were farmers' sons. They gave several years in America and came home and married into farms.

They made the 'fortune' in America.

[3] was pensioned off by a petroleum company for which he worked for years. He came home and went to live with his sister and started farming and jobbing on a small scale

[4] came home in bad health and settled down to work at home

[5] came home with a lot of money and lived only a few years

[6] came home from Australia with a good share of money but turned to drink and spent it all. Got job as water bailiff.

[7] came home from Australia when his uncle willed him his farm—about 100 acres. He introduced Australian ranching methods, ploughing and harrowing with three horses, etc. He has not been a great success as a farmer, and was a source of sarcastic fun among his neighbours on account of his rough and ready way of doing things.'

## APPENDIX TABLES

Appendix Table 1a. Occupations of Male and Female Emigrants and Immigrants, Apr-Dec 1912 [% of total]

	Emigrants from					Immigrants from				
	ENG	WAL	SCO	<i>IRL</i>	GB	ENG	WAL	SCO	<i>IRL</i>	GB
MALES										
Agriculture	17.2	14.3	21.3	32.3	17.7	10.1	14.4	11.6	13.4	10.5
Comm & Prof	16.3	15.6	24.5	10.2	17.4	25.8	21.5	17.9	20.0	24.1
Skilled trades	31.5	44.2	24.3	11.9	30.8	34.4	43.8	47.1	22.1	37.1
Labourers	26.1	19.5	12.9	39.0	24.1	12.8	10.7	11.3	25.4	12.5
Misc or n/s	8.9	6.4	16.9	6.5	9.9	16.9	9.6	12.1	19.0	15.8
Total	87,486	2,040	14,543	14,987	104,069	17,354	550	4,420	2,185	22,324
FEMALES										
Domestic & other service	28.0	23.3	31.7	50.8	28.7	14.6	12.0	20.5	51.2	15.7
Dressmakers & other trades	4.6	2.8	9.4	7.1	5.5	2.4	1.8	4.7	5.3	2.9
Teachers, clerks, professionals	3.5	3.5	3.9	2.4	3.6	7.0	9.9	6.9	6.5	7.1
No stated occ.	63.9	70.4	54.9	39.6	62.1	75.9	76.3	67.9	37.1	74.3
Total	65,814	1,043	17,154	15,441	84,011	9,646	274	2,410	2,110	12,330
Report; BPP, 1913, pp. 19-28 [% of those aged 18+]										

Appendix Table 1b. Occupations of Male and Female Emigrants and Immigrants, 1913 [% of total]

	Emigrants from					Immigrants from				
	ENG	WAL	SCO	IRL	UK	ENG	WAL	SCO	IRL	UK
MALES										
Agriculture	20.0	17.4	17.5	29.5	20.6	8.7	12.8	10.8	10.8	9.3
Comm & Prof	20.6	17.1	19.0	10.7	19.1	27.9	19.9	18.2	20.5	25.6
Skilled trades	32.3	47.6	41.1	9.6	31.4	35.9	44.7	47.0	24.4	37.2
Labourers	15.3	11.0	11.8	43.6	18.0	13.4	13.4	13.8	31.1	14.7
Misc or n/s	11.8	6.9	10.6	6.6	10.9	14.1	9.2	10.2	13.2	13.2
FEMALES										
Domestic & other service	28.4	25.7	33.6	54.8	32.9	12.1	18.8	22.0	45.2	17.0
Dressmakers & other trades	5.4	3.4	8.2	5.5	5.9	2.5	2.3	4.7	4.6	3.1
Teachers, clerks, prof	5.0	5.5	4.6	3.3	4.7	7.7	7.1	6.1	6.5	7.3
No stated occ.	61.2	65.4	53.6	36.4	56.5	77.7	71.8	67.2	43.7	72.6
Total	280,283	5,091	69,174	44,578	399,126	67,606	1619	14132	6111	89468
Report; BPP 1914, pp. xiii, 10 [% of those aged 18+]. Here the total refers to all persons, male and female										

Appendix Table 2. Ratio of Permanent Immigrants to Emigrants [%] 1912 and 1913

	England	Wales	Scotland	Ireland	GB
1912 M18+	19.8	27.0	30.4	14.6	21.5
1912 F18+	14.7	26.3	14.0	13.7	14.7
1913 All	24.1	31.8	20.4	13.7	22.4 [UK]
Source: Appendix Tables 1a and 1b					