

FAMILY MIGRATION IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN: THE CASE OF GRANTHAM AND SCUNTHORPE

Martin B. White

Martin White was until recently a research student in the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Edinburgh.

While many scholars have noted the presence of single people, married couples and families among migrants, little or no systematic attempt has been made to assess the relative importance of these various groups within any particular migration stream. It seems to be generally assumed that most migrants were young and presumably single.¹ Yet, from a rather different perspective, much recent work, including that on Victorian Britain, has stressed the need to place migration within the wider context of the family.² This would seem to imply that, at least in certain places, the movement of families may have been of considerable importance. Studies of the more detailed Swedish evidence have reached contradictory conclusions over this question. Ohngren found that 80 per cent of incomers to the central Swedish town of Eskilstuna in the later nineteenth century were 'lone' migrants who arrived without any family.³ However, Akerman's study of other nineteenth century Swedish material has led him to conclude that family migration was more important than has hitherto been realised.⁴ This article attempts to cast some light on this issue by exploring the components of the migrant streams into the two Lincolnshire destinations of Grantham and Scunthorpe using the manuscript census of 1881.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century Grantham was but a typical market town, largely untouched by the industrial revolution, possessing a wide range of traditional crafts and functioning as a service centre within a mainly agrarian economy. From then on, however, the town became one of the foremost industrial centres of Lincolnshire. This transformation was the result of two developments: the coming of the Great Northern Railway and the rise of the agricultural engineering industry. From the 1850s the town grew rapidly in size and by 1881 the population had reached almost 17,000.⁵ This population has been sampled using the census enumerators' books.⁶

Scunthorpe was a very different kind of place in 1881. Indeed, it could hardly be called a town at all, but was, rather, a newly-formed and growing urban area based upon just one industry, iron, and depending heavily upon newcomers for its initial growth. At this time the five townships which later merged to form the town of Scunthorpe were still geographically separate. Until recently they had all been remote agricultural villages, but the discovery and subsequent exploitation of extensive iron ore deposits since the 1860s had transformed them into a thriving centre of the iron industry.⁷ Migration into four of these five townships is explored here using the 1881 census books.⁸

Table 1. Marital status of migrant males, 1881

	Grantham %	Scunthorpe %
Single	24.9	24.2
Married	67.9	71.6
Widowed	7.2	4.0
Not known		0.2
Total (100%)	860	1116

Table 2. Migrant category of married migrant males with co-resident wives, 1881

	Grantham %	Scunthorpe %
Native wife (i. e. husband assumed to have arrived alone)	20.3	9.1
'Intermediate' (migrant wife with no co-resident migrant children)	42.3	39.9
'Family mover' (migrant wife, migrant co-resident children)	33.3	48.3
Not known (children's birthplace unclear: could be 'intermediate' or 'family mover')	4.1	2.7
Total (100%)	508	702

Source: Census enumerators' books (for both tables)

The census is a crude instrument with which to establish the familial components of migration. Broadly speaking, there are four related technical shortcomings. First, in many cases the information given is simply insufficient. For example, a migrant couple with co-resident migrant children most probably moved in as a family unit. But take away the children and the picture becomes unclear: did they arrive together or as single migrants who subsequently met and married? Second, the census may have been taken some considerable time after in-migration occurred and may no longer accurately reflect an individual's familial position at the time of his or her arrival. For example, all co-resident migrant offspring may have since left home, placing a truly migrant couple in an ambiguous category. Third, the census only shows those who moved in and have remained. Thus while there may have been a greater inwards movement of single migrants than of whole families in preceding years, many of the single people may have subsequently departed in similarly greater numbers. The census would only capture the net effect of this turnover, understating single in-migration. Lastly, there is no guarantee that all members of a family unit actually moved at the same time. For example, a father may have been joined by the other members of his family at a later date.

Yet despite all these problems the census can be made to yield crude estimates of the relative size of two components within the migrant stream. The intention here is to obtain a rough indication of how many individuals arrived:

- as 'single' migrants without a spouse and family, or;
- as 'family' migrants who did possess a spouse and family.

Tables 1 and 2 contain the raw census information from which we will obtain estimates of the size of these two groups. Table 1 gives the marital status of all migrant males in the two study locations, excluding those enumerated as dependent children. The 'married' category is broken down into various components in table 2 using information on the birthplace of co-resident spouses and children (where present). If we ignore widowers; men who originally moved in as dependent children; and married men who arrived unaccompanied by their wives and/or dependent children, then the male migrants could have arrived in one of three possible states: as single men, as married men with a spouse but no children, or as married men with accompanying children.⁹ We need to estimate the size of these three groups using the data in the two tables. There are two problems here:

1) The 'Intermediate' category in table 2 contains those married couples where both partners were migrants but which either had no co-resident children or where all such children were born in the study area. This class includes, therefore, those who moved in as:

- childless married couples
- couples with children but whose migrant offspring had all since left home
- unmarried migrants (arriving either independently or with their parent(s)) who had subsequently married another migrant.

There is no way these three strands can be delineated, and so this category has been excluded from the following analysis. This seems especially wise given the additional interpretative problem of whether the migration of childless married couples is best conceptualised as 'single' or 'family' movement.¹⁰

2) Many migrants recorded as 'single' or as 'married to native females' may have originally moved in as dependent children and either since left home or been orphaned. These two groups must accordingly be reduced by an appropriate amount in order to obtain a more accurate estimate of the number of independent single in-migrants. The calculation of this amount can be illustrated using Grantham males as an example. The relevant figures are shown in table 3.

The method assumes that dependent migrant children were as likely to leave home, or to be left behind by their out-migrating parents, as were their native counterparts. This assumption is made to facilitate the calculation of the appropriate adjustment ratios. Unfortunately, little information is available on the migratory behaviour of natives versus non-native. Of the turnover studies that have contrasted the migratory experiences of natives in relation to non-

Table 3. Worked example of the calculation of estimated 'single' migration, Grantham males 1881

A. Unmarried males

Age	a	b	c	d	e	f
0-9	457	24	145	8	25	17
10-14	141	5	87	3	13	10
15-19	100	17	61	10	49	39
20-24	47	11	31	7	54	47
25-29	20	5	6	2	30	28
>=30	12	18	10	N/A	43	43
Total	777	80	340	30	214	184

B. Migrant males with native wives

Age	g	h	i
20-24	8	1	7
25-29	18	1	17
>=30	77	N/A	77
Total	103	2	101

- Notes:**
- a - Single natives living with parent(s)
 - b - Single natives not living with parent(s)
 - c - Single migrants living with parent(s)
 - d - 'False' independent single migrants ($b/a \times c$)
 - e - Single migrants not living with parent(s)
 - f - Corrected estimate of single migrants ($e - d$)
 - g - Married male migrants with native wives
 - h - 'False' independent single migrants ($d/e \times g$)
 - i - Corrected estimate of single migrants ($g - h$)

Source: Census enumerators' books

natives, Lawton and Pooley suggest that in the case of mid-nineteenth century Liverpool, non-natives were less persistent than native born residents. This feature is also displayed in the rural parish of Brenchley, Kent.¹¹ However, despite the fact that non-natives appear more migratory than the native born population, it is doubtful if birthplace alone serves as an independent influence upon migration, additional characteristics of the non-native population such as age and socio-economic status also influencing their migratory behaviour. The first step is to calculate the ratio of those who were not living with either parent to those who were so living for unmarried natives in each age group. For example, taking natives aged 20-24 in table 3, there were eleven single men not living with either parent and forty-seven who **were** so co-residing (columns a and b). Applying the same ratio to the thirty-one migrants living with either parent (column c) suggests there were seven men aged 20-24 in the town who had originally in-migrated as dependents but who had since left or lost their parental home (column d). This amount is subtracted from the fifty-four enumerated migrants not living with their parents (column e) to arrive at an estimate of the 'true' extent of independent single in-migration among those aged 20-24, namely forty-seven (column f). Repeating the exercise for the other

age-groups results in an overall estimate of 184 such migrants. Of course, this procedure only has any major impact among younger persons. There is no way of estimating how many older migrants had originally moved in as dependent children. Most older natives had left their parental home, thus denying us any real 'correction factor' to apply to the older single migrants. For this reason only those age groups under thirty are 'corrected' in this way. This is probably not so very harmful, as (all else being equal) older 'single' migrants would anyway be less likely to have originally moved in with their parents than would their younger counterparts. This probably applies to the Scunthorpe district cases rather more than the Grantham ones, given the recency of the former area's expansion.

Attention now turns to those married migrants with native spouses. The proportionate reduction already made to the single migrants in each age group is now applied to the corresponding age-group in this population. For example, we made a reduction in the 20-24 age-group from fifty-four to forty-seven. Applying an equivalent reduction to the eight cases aged 20-24 in the second part of table 3 results in a revised figure of seven cases. This is done for the other age groups and finally the sub-total in each part of the table is summed to give an overall approximation of the total number of single men who arrived independently of their parents (184+101=285).

Finally, having obtained an estimate of the number of migrants who arrived in an independent, unmarried state, this can be compared with the numbers who moved in with their spouse and offspring. The former I have termed 'single' migrants, the latter 'family' migrants. The relative importance of these two types of movement among males and females is expressed in percentage form in table 4. While male migration into Grantham largely followed an 'expected' pattern, the single movement predominant, the male stream into the Scunthorpe area was skewed quite markedly in the other direction, with family movement predominant. This difference was even more apparent when the whole exercise was repeated for females (table 4 again).

Table 4. Relative size of the estimated 'single' and 'family' migrant groups, 1881

		Grantham %	Scunthorpe %
Males:	'Single' migrants	62. 8	45. 5
	'Family' migrants	37. 2	54. 5
Total (100%)		454	622
Females:	'Single' migrants	68. 5	31. 2
	'Family' migrants	31. 5	68. 8
Total (100%)		537	493

Source: Census enumerators' books

The key to this difference probably lies in the economic structure of the two locations. This is evident from the age-structure of the 'single migrant' stream. Excluding those who had subsequently married native spouses, 35.9 per cent of Grantham's ('corrected') single migrant males were aged under twenty, compared with only 17.6 per cent of the Scunthorpe district cases. The figures for females were 49.0 per cent and 38.2 per cent respectively. Boys in their teens moved in to Grantham to take up apprenticeships, or for a position with a tradesman or at one of the many coaching inns. For girls, domestic service was the main attraction. A whole host of opportunities existed for young, single migrants. In comparison the Scunthorpe district had few such openings. Jobs in domestic service and trade and craft assistantships were scarce. The iron industry traditionally favoured the employment of strong, mature men, and no system of apprenticeship existed.

The existence of such employment can, however, be seen from another perspective. Work on the family economy has shown that the movement of families to a particular destination is often encouraged by opportunities for wives and children to contribute to the household budget. Such a phenomenon has been clearly observed among certain groups of textile workers in the nineteenth century.¹² Yet this does not seem to apply here. According to my estimates, the destination with the least to offer in terms of family employment nevertheless experienced the most family migration. In Grantham, 29.9 per cent of females aged ten and above worked; in Scunthorpe only 13.5 per cent did so.¹³ The economic activity rate among co-resident children was also higher in Grantham (Table 5). These two case studies suggest, then, that job opportunities for those in their teens worked to encourage single in-migration more than it did the movement of families within any 'family economy' framework. In part this surely reflects the introduction of compulsory schooling in the 1870s, together with other legislation which took younger children out of the labour market. It may also reflect the absence of any major domestic industry in either location in which younger children could be employed at home.

Table 5. Labour force participation rates of young people, 1881

		Grantham %	Scunthorpe %
Aged 10 - 14:			
Males:	A	20. 5 (234)	10. 0 (260)
	B	26. 3 (19)	47. 1 (17)
Females:	A	4. 1 (246)	2. 0 (245)
	B	33. 9 (56)	41. 4 (29)
Aged 15 - 19:			
Males:	A	89. 9 (169)	70. 5 (112)
	B	88. 8 (75)	94. 7 (57)
Females:	A	52. 6 (133)	38. 3 (81)
	B	76. 3 (156)	65. 2 (66)

Notes: A - Co-resident with parent(s)
 B - Not co-resident with parent(s)
 (Totals in brackets)

Source: Census enumerators' books

Table 6 breaks down the Scunthorpe area data into selected occupational groups.¹⁴ The skew towards 'family' migration is more evident among those engaged in the iron industry than among those in other occupations.

Several factors may have worked to encourage a high level of 'family' movement among the Scunthorpe iron workers. For one thing, in these early years of the north Lincolnshire iron industry, the demand for labour far outstripped the local supply. The iron companies had to venture far beyond the immediate countryside to fill even their least skilled vacancies. The growing port of Grimsby to the east and industrial south Yorkshire to the west were both competing destinations for the young single men of the north Lincolnshire countryside. So, too, was nearby Gainsborough with its expanding engineering works.¹⁵ The relative importance of families within local migration streams may partly reflect a deficient pool of single men.

Table 6. Relative size of estimated 'single' and 'family' male migrant groups within selected occupations, Scunthorpe 1881

	Iron industry %	Non-iron industry %
'Single' migrants	41.1	55.4
'Family' migrants	58.9	44.6
Total (100%)	338	148

Source: Census enumerators' books

Turning to those from longer distances,¹⁶ and in particular those from other centres of the iron industry, other factors may have prevailed. First, the movement of families is sometimes taken to indicate a less favourable economic climate in the place of origin than that which attends single migration. Thus J. T. Jackson has observed of the early Victorian glass industry:

'The overall movement pattern between 1830 and 1851 was very much a one-way flow of glass makers of all ages from declining to new, expanding regions of glass-making: so-called established, stable areas of production did not exist to provide a surplus pool of skilled unmarried men who might move in search of better job opportunities, as appears to be the case in the iron-making and coal industries'.¹⁷

Whether the iron industry had previously operated in this manner is debatable. What is clear, however, is that by the 1870s such 'stable areas of production' were less widespread. The shift of the main centres of the industry to Cleveland and north Lancashire was accompanied by a decline elsewhere. The Black Country, in particular, experienced a period of contraction at this time.¹⁸ There is some evidence to suggest that 'family' migration was relatively more common from the Black Country than it was from other longer-distance sources. Of the male migrants to Scunthorpe born in the counties of Staffordshire and Worcestershire, 65.5 per cent were 'family' migrants. This

compares with a figure of 52.8 per cent for male migrants from other long-distance (fifty kilometres or more) locations.¹⁹

Secondly, mobility was almost a cultural trait among many iron workers in the nineteenth century.²⁰ For many men in the industry, family mobility was probably regarded with less disfavour than among other groups of workers. Indeed, the absence of employment opportunities for females and children in most areas of heavy industry²¹ may well have made such movement more easy. The family was not having to surrender two, three or even more sources of income in the hope of a better deal elsewhere. Within the confines of the family budget, the only economic consideration was the relative employment prospects of the breadwinner in his present situation compared with those somewhere else. The very absence of any broadly-based family economy in many of these sending districts, then, may well have been as much a spur to family migration as its presence seems to have been in other places.

Thirdly, a low age at marriage was a national characteristic of iron workers.²² This means the pool of potential migrants in an iron district probably contained proportionately more families and correspondingly fewer single adults than did other areas. From a different perspective, the tendency to earlier marriage reflects the important role played by the wives of iron workers. The nature of the work was such that domestic duties were even more arduous than in some other working class households. The job was extremely dirty: wash day would be harder work than in other households; the long, unsociable shifts worked by the men enhanced the importance of a good domestic manager in the home. On the one hand, this meant that iron workers would be keen to find a good wife as soon as possible while, for their part, marriage was the easiest means available to most girls in iron working families of achieving some degree of independence from home. On the other hand, the high fertility of heavy industrial workers (in part a result of the low marriage age) meant that many families would experience a succession of older sons taking up employment in the industry. Although these sons contributed to the family coffers, the domestic strain must nevertheless have become immense. Within the space of a few years, the work-load of many wives and mothers suddenly increased markedly, just as they themselves were ageing. The daily routine was even more irksome if father and sons did not all share the same shift. Given such pressures, it would not be surprising if many young men were obliged and expected to relieve their mother by finding a wife as soon as possible. A report from early this century commented that:

'This young man of the iron-working class usually has no misgivings about embarking upon matrimony early and without a sufficient income. He marries very young, often because he wants a home of his own. Either he is in his parents' home, where he is of course not the principal person to be considered, and is set on one side perhaps and has to undergo the discomfort and crowding entailed by being one of a family living in a small cottage; or he is a lodger, under much the same conditions'.²³

The importance of having a wife (and thus usually a family) was, perhaps,

enough to outweigh the hindrance to mobility which dependents might have presented. Indeed, many iron workers might well have been reluctant to move very far without one.²⁴

More generally, the movement of families over long distances may well have been more prevalent within the context of Redford's 'special industrial migration'.²⁵ All else being equal, the links between areas sharing a common form of industrial activity were likely to be stronger than those between other areas. The network of information which serviced migration was probably better developed; the body of knowledge concerning the conditions at a certain destination all that more comprehensive. A man with a family would be less keen to uproot on the basis of mere hearsay.

The evidence presented here suggests that the composition of migrant streams could differ quite considerably between one destination and another, and that in certain circumstances married couples with children may well have outnumbered independent single migrants. Furthermore, the extent of family migration could be high even into those areas with poor employment prospects for wives and children, in sum, it would seem that the movement of families was indeed of major significance in some areas of nineteenth century Britain, but, also, that this was not always a function of the 'family economy' conceived in the narrow sense of the employment of family members beyond the head.

NOTES

1. D. B. Grigg, 'E. G. Ravenstein and the "Laws of Migration"', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 3, 1977, pp. 41-54.
2. M. Anderson, *Family structure in nineteenth century Lancashire*, 1971; B. Collins, 'Irish emigration to Dundee and Paisley' in J. M. Goldstrom and L. Clarkson (eds), *Irish population, economy and society: essays in honour of the late K. C. Connell*, 1981, pp. 195-212. For a review of much of the recent literature see A. G. Darroch, 'Migrants in the nineteenth century: fugitives or families in motion?', *Journal of Family History*, 6, 1981, pp. 257-77.
3. B. Ohngren, *Folk i rörelse ... (People on the move: social development, migration patterns and popular movements in Eskilstuna, 1870-1900)*, 1974, p. 376.
4. S. Akerman, 'Internal migration, industrialisation and urbanisation, 1895-1930', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 23, 1975, pp. 149-58.
5. For the development of Grantham in the nineteenth century see M. Honeybone, *The book of Grantham: the history of a market and manufacturing town*, 1980, and N. R. Wright, *Lincolnshire towns and industry, 1700-1914*, 1982.
6. A one-in-three systematic sample was taken of households in Grantham Municipal Borough in the 1881 census.
7. For the development of the Scunthorpe district see M. E. Armstrong (ed), *An industrial island: a history of Scunthorpe*, 1981; T. Daff, 'The establishment of ironmaking at Scunthorpe, 1858-77', *Bulletin of Economic Research*, 25, 1973, pp. 104-21; and P. Wardley, 'The Lincolnshire iron industry, 1859-1914', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College, Swansea, 1983.
8. Ashby, Brumby, Frodingham and Schunthorpe townships. The fifth township, Crosby, saw little development until the turn of the century.
9. The problem of separating ever-married migrant males who were resident in the census with their spouse from those who were not is greater in Grantham where 7.2 per cent of migrant males were widowed compared with just 4.0 per cent in Scunthorpe. Of those migrant males who were resident with their spouse, since the census is a static cross-sectional document, it is impossible to tell how many moved to the town as a child in their parents' family, or alternatively, moved unaccompanied by their wife and children.
10. Excluding married persons in the 'Intermediate' category of table 2 and ever-married persons without a resident spouse results in a much reduced number of migrants upon which the subsequent calculations are based. In the case of males the pool of migrants is reduced by 41

per cent in the case of Grantham and 38 per cent in the case of Scunthorpe. Unfortunately, it is impossible to suggest whether the excluded migrants exhibited significantly different migratory behaviour to those included in the analysis.

11. R. Lawton and C. G. Pooley, *The social geography of Merseyside in the nineteenth century*, University of Liverpool, 1976, p. 98; and B. Wojciechowska, 'Brenchley: a study of migratory movements in a mid-nineteenth century rural parish', *LPS*, (in this issue).
12. Anderson, Collins.
13. However, a figure of some 20 per cent for working females aged ten and over is calculated for the parish of Frodingham in 1851 by P. M. Tillott and G. Stevenson, *Northwest Lindsey in 1851*, University of Sheffield, 1970. Frodingham is the ancient parish within which the townships of Scunthorpe were situated.
14. This table has been constructed in the same manner as was table 4. The raw number of 'single' migrants within the two occupational groups are 'corrected' using the ratios obtained from the **total** native population. Using the terminology of Table 3, columns (a) and (b) remain the same in every case (differing only by sex and location) but the figures in columns (c), (e) and (g) are replaced by those pertaining to the particular population sub-group being examined. The calculation then proceeds as explained in the example given earlier.
15. Wright, ch. 10.
16. This crude distance distinction is admittedly arbitrary but is a useful means of organising this description of possible forces at work.
17. J. T. Jackson, 'Long-distance migrant workers in nineteenth-century Britain: a case study of the St. Helens' glassmakers', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historical Society*, 131, 1982, pp. 113-37.
18. A. Birch. *Economic history of the British iron and steel industry, 1784-1879*, 1967, pp 133-4, 155-7.
19. However, this difference is not statistically significant: chi-square=1.59 with one degree of freedom.
20. Birch, p. 246; T. Gwynne and M. Sill, 'Census enumerators' books: a study of mid-nineteenth century immigration', *Local Historian*, 12, 1976, pp. 74-9. B. J. D. Harrison, 'Iron masters and iron workers' in C. A. Hempstead (ed), *Cleveland iron and steel*, 1979, pp. 231-253.
21. Lady Bell, *At the works*, 1907.
22. This is shown from ecological data in M. Anderson, 'Marriage patterns in Victorian Britain: an analysis based on registration district data for England and Wales, 1861', *Journal of Family History*, 1, 1976, pp. 55-79. See also Bell, pp. 178-9.
23. Bell, p. 180.
24. A high incidence of lodging among married couples in the Scunthorpe district suggests a spouse was more valued than a house.
25. A. Redford, *Labour migration in England, 1800-1850*, 1926, pp. 35-160.