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The Role of Foreign-born Agents in the Development of Mass Migrant Travel through Britain, 1851-1924

Nicholas J. Evans¹

Introduction

Between 1820 – when the United States first began to record immigration – and 1924, when the door was firmly shut, over thirty-six million people are known to have migrated to the US.² They represented a substantial proportion of the 19.1 million passengers who left Britain between 1853 and 1913, of whom 13.3 million were British and Irish passengers and 5.3 million aliens.³ Whether the passengers sojourned, settled permanently or subsequently returned to Europe, their movement to, through and from Britain generated significant income streams for transatlantic shipping companies. The trade benefited not only those who transported the migrants but also companies engaged in ship construction and the port-cities that supported both seaborne travel and associated shipbuilding. This essay examines the ways in which Britain profited from the foreign component of this passenger trade and in particular at the employment of foreign-born agents within Britain and throughout the continent to develop the business. Individuals who worked as commercial agents, translators and lodging-house keepers in Britain, or as Agents General on the continent, proved as pivotal to the development of the passenger operations of the

¹Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the CHORD Workshop on Migration and Commerce 1500-2000, at the University of Wolverhampton in April 2005 and the international symposium on “The Impact of Maritime and Migration Networks on Transatlantic Labour Migration during the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries” at the European University Institute in Florence in November 2005. The author is grateful for useful feedback from participants at both events.

²Imre Ferenczi, *International Migrations* (2 vols., New York, 1929; reprint, New York, 1969), 394-395, noted that 36,242,459 immigrant aliens arrived in the US between 1820 and 1924.

³Norman Carrier and James Jeffery, *External Migration: A Study of the Available Statistics, 1815-1950* (London, 1953), 90-91. The data exclude 438,448 passengers whose nationality was “not distinguished.”

British merchant marine in the late nineteenth century as the more celebrated use of foreign crew – in particular, Lascar seamen – on the development of long-haul freight routes. German, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and latter Russian agents all helped British companies such as Cunard, White Star, Anchor, Guion and Union-Castle to develop and maintain a powerful grip on specific transoceanic features of travel, despite the challenges posed by foreign competitors such as Hamburg-America and Norddeutscher Lloyd. Without the use of such foreign-born agents – within and without Britain – it is doubtful whether British companies could have retained their leading role in this highly competitive aspect of seaborne commerce. In turn, the use of such foreign-born agents demonstrates the complex and multi-faceted measures adopted by mid-Victorian shipping entrepreneurs to control transatlantic passenger shipping. Before, during and after shares of steerage traffic had been established through transatlantic passenger conferences, British companies gained a commercial advantage that their European rivals struggled to reduce.⁴ Central to this advantageous position, I argue, was the procurement and retention of services offered by foreign-born “agents.”

The Emergence of the British Emigrant Market

Britain's share of the mass migrant business comprised three elements: the British, Irish and alien markets. While the first relied heavily upon the expansion of the domestic railway network before ocean travel emerged as a large-scale affair, the latter two necessitated a prior seaborne journey into Britain by would-be emigrants.⁵ The use of surplus shipping in the late 1840s for use in the migrant trade initially concentrated upon demand from the Irish market. Later, as rates of Irish emigration lessened, this tonnage was used to meet increasing demand from British emigration – and in particular the exodus from Britain's urban centres that were linked by railway to Liverpool, Glasgow or London. The linkage between out-migration and the expansion of the domestic

⁴For a discussion of the cartelisation of the traffic, see Drew Keeling, “The Transportation Revolution and Transatlantic Migration, 1850-1914,” *Research in Economic History*, XIX (1999), 39-74; and Keeling, “Transatlantic Shipping Cartels and Migration between Europe and America, 1880-1914,” *Essays in Economic and Business History*, XVII (1999), 195-213.

⁵Angela H. McCarthy, *Irish Migrants in New Zealand, 1840-1937* (Woodbridge, 2005), 97-98 and 101-107; and Nicholas J. Evans, “Aliens en route: European Transmigration via the UK, 1836-1914” (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 2006).

railway network was a vital component in the development of mass migration.⁶ The extension of the trans-Pennine rail route across Britain's industrial and manufacturing heartlands – first between Liverpool and Manchester, then to Leeds, before eventually extending to Hull – transformed emigrant flows across the country. British workers in the east of Britain now looked to Liverpool, not Hull or London, as the point of embarkation for the US and, to a lesser extent, Canada. The port of Liverpool, central to both the Irish outflow and out-migration from the trans-Pennine towns and cities of Hull, Bradford, Leeds, Huddersfield, Sheffield and Manchester, emerged as the prime emigration port in Britain and Ireland. Other ports, such as Hull, London and Aberdeen, which had previously handled regional swathes of emigrants, declined rapidly.

The process of migrating through what had become one of Europe's leading emigrant ports provided opportunities for entrance into a labour market that centred on those wishing to relocate from Europe to America. The bulk of the emigrants (at least until 1867) were Irish, many of whom were able to make the crossing as a result of remittances or pre-paid passages from the US.⁷ Such remittances supplied migrants with the necessary funds to join relatives already established abroad. Equally important, they also enabled agents engaged in the trade to profit from their fellow countrymen's needs. As David Fitzpatrick and Angela McCarthy have shown, personal connections, and the advice they were able to offer, were a key factor in determining the eventual destination of migrants.⁸ Yet such informal networks were also influential in conditioning the development of the mass migrant market as the business became polarised on key maritime centres, such as Liverpool and later Glasgow.

Between the arrival of thousands of Irish emigrants and their subsequent re-embarkation, a residue of the labour flow remained. Liverpool's Irish community had grown to 83,813 by 1851.⁹ Two decades later it was still high at 76,761.¹⁰ Irish lodging-house keepers and emigrant runners used their skills

⁶J.D. Gould, "European International Emigration, 1815-1914," *Journal of European Economic History*, VIII, No. 3 (1979), 593-677.

⁷Francis E. Hyde, *Cunard and the North Atlantic, 1840-1973: A History of Shipping and Financial Management* (London, 1975), 61.

⁸David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australasia* (Cork, 1994); and Angela H. McCarthy, *Narratives of Irish and Scottish Migration. 1921-1965: "For Spirit and Adventure"* (Manchester, forthcoming).

⁹Great Britain, *Census, 1851* (London, 1852), "Population Tables," 664.

¹⁰Great Britain, *Census of England and Wales, 1871* (London, 1871), "Population Abstracts," 440.

to furnish the needs of British domestic emigration as well as their Irish counterparts. That many of the Irish-born migrants became involved in the emigrant business is not surprising. Running lodging-houses, working as emigrant runners or serving as crew members aboard ocean-going vessels, men such as Dennis Currie and William McDonald typified this trend.¹¹ As recorded in the 1881 Census, Currie, aged sixty-eight, worked as an emigration agent at 46 Regent Street in Liverpool. He had an Irish-born wife, had children born in Liverpool and employed British and Irish staff to run his emigrant-*cum*-seafarer lodging-house. He housed a multitude of different nationals, but most were British or Irish. McDonald, aged sixty-five, identified himself as both an emigration agent and lodging-house keeper at 45 Regent Street. He had an Irish-born wife but had come to Britain with his young Irish-born family in the 1870s. He kept an all-Irish business that was used by only Irish emigrants at the time of the 1881 census. Moreover, other British migrants, such as Thomas Winnill, a forty-one-year-old Welshman, had already migrated to the US in the late 1860s, where his eldest child was born, before returning to Britain in 1879 to establish himself as an emigration agent. These people profited from a trade that was open to all, but in which each gained from his or her personal knowledge of the market. Crucially to non-British migrants leaving British ports, and thus central to this paper, the rail route across Britain also opened up the market to a new customer – the foreign-born emigrant.

Foreign-born Workers and Alien Emigration from Britain

The role of Britain as a carrier of foreign-born emigrants emerged with the age of the steamship. During the early days of steamship travel, east coast ports such as Hull, Leith and London, along with the south coast port of Southampton, received foreign emigrants before arranging for their subsequent seaborne out-migration. London, as table 1 shows, gained the lion's share of the market in the late 1840s. But this market was of limited scale and variable nature. Passengers were transported to Britain on specially-chartered North Sea steamers before re-embarking on scheduled sailing ships previously filled solely by Irish and British emigrants. The extension of the trans-Pennine rail route to Hull in 1851 changed this. Not only did Liverpool dominate the domestic and Irish markets, but it also increasingly handled the bulk of the foreign-born migrants increasingly arriving in Britain each week aboard scheduled North Sea steamships operating between the Humber and the European ports of Hamburg, Bremen, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Gothenburg, Oslo and Copenhagen.

¹¹Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *1881 British Census* CD-ROM (Salt Lake City, 1998). The 1881 Census CD-Rom was originally supplied with Viewer 2.0. If a later viewer (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Family History Resource File-Viewer 3.0* [Salt Lake City, 1999]) was used, then queries for "emigration agent + Liverpool" or "emigration agent + Hull" are possible.

While Hull declined as an emigrant port, thousands of transmigrants increasingly arrived at its docks *en route* to Liverpool. The additional Liverpool-bound traffic helped the Merseyside port to consolidate its position as the premier emigration port of Europe, a role the city would retain for the next three decades. The scale and regularity of the phenomenon outstripped other transit ports and previous levels of Canada- and US-bound emigrants who had sailed for Québec and New York from Hull.¹² By 1854 more German emigrants left through Liverpool than via any other port, including Hamburg and Bremen. They reached the Mersey port having traversed northern Britain, or transmigrated via the ports of Hull and Grimsby within fourteen days of arrival. Transmigration, or the supply to ocean liners of non-British, third-class European passengers, became an important aspect of British short-sea and transoceanic shipping. In particular, the route between Hamburg and New York (via Hull and Liverpool) emerged as the key artery in transatlantic shipping. As table 1 demonstrates, between 1836 and 1914 over two million Europeans transmigrated through Hull, nearly 500,000 via neighbouring Grimsby and over 100,000 via London.

The role of the foreign-born in the development of this aspect of the British passenger market was essential. The key trading route was between Hamburg and Hull. Not surprisingly, German immigrants quickly became central to the business. Like the Irish at Liverpool, they settled at the British points of entry closest to where they had first landed. Germans such as Henry Hare and James Ellerman, both of Hamburg, not only settled in a port on Britain's east coast but also helped to establish the transmigrant route from Hamburg to Liverpool via Hull. Having developed commercial networks with British companies engaged in the shipment of passengers, freight and goods, many followed the pattern of changing from ships' captains to shipowners and importers to emigration agents. Others established lodging-houses in Hull, or secured roles as translators, clerks or commercial agents. Such middlemen were fundamental to the development of the trade and were to be found at each stage in the migrants' journey westward. The sight of the foreign-born at such ports was impressive. It did not cause alarm among contemporaries, unlike anti-alien sentiment in London and Leeds, where foreign labourers were seen as under-cutting local labour rates and establishing visible alien enclaves. Their presence in key maritime centres such as Hull, Glasgow and London was instead welcomed as contributing to the vitality of a port's commerce. As Joseph Fletcher noted in 1899, at Hull's points of entry:

There is always a crowd of heterogeneous human elements.
Here one sees almost every type of the European family, to-

¹²John Dixon, "Aspects of Yorkshire Emigration to North America, 1760-1880" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1981).

gether with men from the far-off corners of the earth. A Lincolnshire shepherd rubs shoulders with a swarthy Lascar; fair-haired Swedes lounge against the railings beyond which a party of emigrant Russian Jews, greasy and unkempt, are keeping strict watch over a few miserable belongings; Danes, Germans, Spaniards, Italians chatter...in their own tongues to the accompaniment of the louder voices of Yorkshire or Lincolnshire folk who have come into Hull to market. Along the streets leading from the Humber side towards the centre of the town a similarly mixed crowd is always moving.¹³

Table 1
Number of European Transmigrants Arriving at Britain's Three Largest East Coast Ports, 1836-1913

Period	Hull	Grimsby	London
1836-1839	2221	0	250
1840-1844	307	0	101
1845-1849	734	0	21,804
1850-1854	53,884	1,033	28,309
1855-1859	17,873	31	8671
1860-1864	N/A	N/A	N/A
1865-1869	124,052	N/A	N/A
1870-1874	175,533	N/A	N/A
1875-1879	N/A	N/A	N/A
1880-1884	197,932	3769	N/A
1885-1889	271,351	37,829	N/A
1890-1894	237,305	71,168	531
1895-1899	110,015	48,516	896
1900-1904	282,609	120,208	2046
1905-1909	320,258	123,608	32,139
1910-1913	215,252	88,230	27,466
Total	2,009,326	494,392	122,213

Sources: Great Britain, The National Archives, Public Record Office (TNA, PRO), Home Office (HO) 3/1-120, 1836-1860; Hull City Archives, TCM/172-181, minutes of the Kingston upon Hull Town Council Sanitary Committee, 1865-1877, and WHG1/20-46, minutes of the Hull and Goole Port Sanitary Authority, 1888-1913; North East Lincolnshire Archives, 1/113/3-7, minutes of the Grimsby Port Sanitary Authority, 1884-1913; and *British Parliamentary Papers (BPP)*, "Reports and Statistical Tables Relating to Emigration and Immigration of the United Kingdom," 1890-1905, and "Annual Reports of His Majesty's Inspector, with Statement as to the Expulsion of Aliens," 1906-1913.

¹³Joseph Fletcher, *A Picturesque History of Yorkshire* (6 vols., London, 1901), I, 44.

The trade via Hull and Grimsby, and small ports such as Goole, Harwich, Leith and West Hartlepool, was timed to coincide with the scheduled departure of steamships from Liverpool. Thus, most of the transmigrant passengers arrived via scheduled steamers at Hull on a Sunday or Wednesday evening in order to reach steamships leaving Liverpool on Wednesday or Saturday, respectively. By the early 1850s not only were thousands of Germans being transported through Britain but also their needs were being met by their own countrymen who profited from the travellers' ignorance of English. Signs printed in German were produced for the train journey between Hull and Liverpool. Any delay before moving on meant a stay in a lodging-house. These small and overcrowded hovels offered basic accommodation to tired travellers. Generally one-man businesses, they profited from the migrants' need for shelter between their arrival and the train journey across Britain. Such lodging-houses fed the hungry traveller in batches of about eighty. Their owners were typified by men such as Paul Julius Drasdo and Harry Lazarus who established local agencies in the port of Hull during the late nineteenth century. Drasdo, an immigrant from Berlin in 1880, married the daughter of one of Hull's emigration agents (John W. Fett of Germany); after the passage of the Aliens Act, 1905, the Home Office appointed him as Hull's official Immigration Officer for which he met (for a fee) each vessel bringing aliens to Hull and arranged transport for those who had not already paid for onward rail travel. He spoke several languages, including German, Yiddish and Russian, and helped the migrants during their medical inspections and disembarkation.

The use of foreign-born "agents" was restricted to Britain. Other lodging-house keepers at Britain's points of re-embarkation, such as Joseph Jackson, an emigration agent of Earle Street in Liverpool, catered for the needs of foreign migrants at Britain's ports of re-embarkation. Jackson reached the US via Liverpool. He had been born in Denmark, married a German and migrated to the US, before returning to Britain and becoming a naturalised British subject in Liverpool. Austrian Charles Neurkloff, aged forty-eight, a hotel manager at 39 Paradise Street, settled with his Austrian-born wife. They employed a German porter, a Liverpoolian domestic, a cook from Ireland and servants from the Isle of Man, Hampshire and Ireland to cater for the needs of their ninety-three Polish, seventy-three Swedish, eleven German, eight Norwegian and four Danish emigrant customers. Other emigrant hotels were run by British- or Irish-born agents who employed Swedes, Poles, Danes or Germans as translators and interpreters – reflecting the diverse market sailing from Liverpool. In total, the port handled one-third of all immigrants entering the US from all sources, and the role of non-British migrants *en route* and *in situ* was quite evident. As figure 1 demonstrates, at the time of the 1881 Census the Irish played a major part in the Liverpool trade, followed by their English and German counterparts. These three groups represented eighty-nine percent of those listed in the Census as emigration agents.

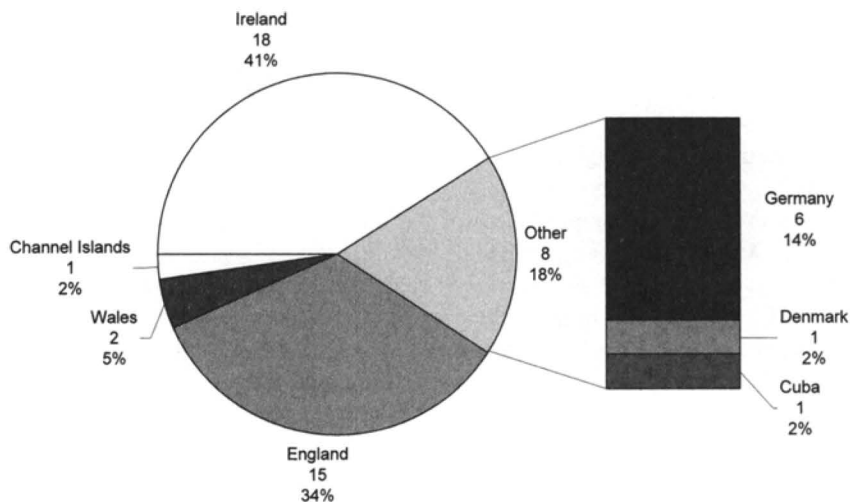


Figure 1: Country of Birth of Emigration Agents at Liverpool in 1881

Source: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *1881 British Census and National Index, England, Scotland, Wales, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, and Royal Navy CD-ROM* (Salt Lake City, 1998).

Importance of Continental Agents

The use of foreign-born agents was not restricted to Britain. Other agents on the continent also worked on behalf of British companies and helped British lines to challenge the geographically advantageous position of German, French, Belgian and Dutch shipping companies. They did so alongside the sons of British merchant houses, such as the Wilberforces and Maisters (both of Hull), who had for several generations sent sons to represent British merchant family interests in Scandinavia and Russia.¹⁴ Agencies such as John West Wilson of Gothenburg, Bachke and Co. of Drontheim and Heitmann of Christiania emerged as powerful forces in the development and maintenance of the transmigrant market. Each North Sea shipping company and, in turn, transoceanic shipping firm, became reliant on the successful work of agents to maintain a constant supply of third-class steerage passengers via Britain. Agents-General, a term normally associated with British emigrants bound for parts of the British Empire under assisted schemes promoting the British settlement of

¹⁴Gordon Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century. A Study in Economic and Social History* (London, 1972), 120-121.

colonial destinations, were employed in key maritime centres and given legal and commercial powers to represent British lines.¹⁵ They managed vast networks of sub-agents who were employed on commission.¹⁶ Robin Bastin has highlighted how lines such as Hamburg-America employed 3200 such agents in 1890.¹⁷ Throughout the 1890s, Cunard spent an average of £50,000 per annum on domestic and foreign agents.¹⁸ Such agents had the local knowledge and personal networks needed to develop sufficient trade. Most also had alternative sources of income and worked part-time on behalf of Agents-General established in major European ports. Their importance in controlling westward-bound emigration was demonstrated in advertising literature produced by British companies. The Wilson Line of Hull stated in its list of mail services for 1907 that:

The allotment of berths to England has to be left to the Agents at the port of embarkation ... thus passengers from Drontheim, Christiansund, or Aelsund should secure berths through Messrs. Bachke & Co., Drontheim; from Bergen or Stavanger through Mr. Ole R. Olsen, Bergen; from Christiania or Christiansand through Messrs. H. Heitmann & Son, Christiania.¹⁹

Companies such as the Wilson Line of Hull supplied lines like Cunard and White Star, both of Liverpool, with large numbers of third-class emigrants. Extensive networks of British and European agents assisted Liverpool- and Glasgow-based shipping companies to maximise passenger capacity on transatlantic routes and helped ever-larger ocean liners to run more profitably. The close correlation between the earnings of Agents-General and flows of westward-bound emigrants can be seen by comparing the earnings of the Wilson Lines' Gothenburg-based Agent-General with the number of Scandinavian

¹⁵Marjory Harper, *Emigration from Scotland between the Wars: Opportunity or Exile?* (Manchester, 1998), 41-69.

¹⁶Kristian Hvidt, "Emigration Agents: The Development of a Business and its Methods," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, III, No. 2 (1978), 185.

¹⁷Robin Bastin, "Cunard and the Liverpool Emigrant Traffic, 1860-1900" (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Liverpool, 1971), 16.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹University of Hull Archives and Special Collections, DEW 8/14, *Wilson Line of Steamers – Particulars of Royal Mail Passenger and Cargo Steamers – Summer Season 1907* (Hull, 1907), 8.

transmigrants arriving at Hull and Grimsby for the period 1907-1913 (see figure 2). While it is difficult to ascertain comprehensively whether such “agents” served as a push factor in augmenting rates of emigration, they did channel streams of people who had already taken the decision to leave Europe towards the services of British steamship operators.

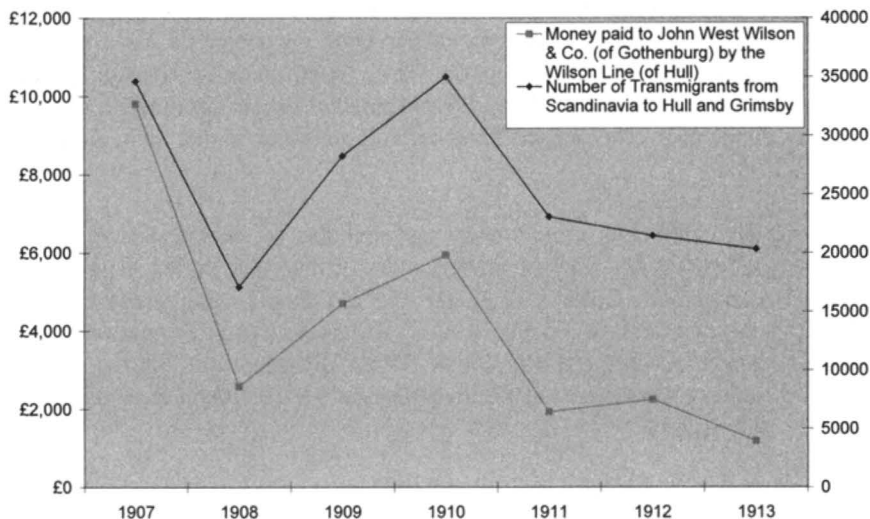


Figure 2: Earnings of the Wilson Line’s Gothenburg Agent-General, 1907-1913, Compared with the Number of Scandinavian Transmigrants Arriving at Hull and Grimsby from Scandinavia

Source: University of Hull Archives and Special Collections, DEW (2)/3/41-48, “Financial Statements of the Thomas Wilson and Sons, Ltd.,” 1907-1913; and BPP, “Annual Reports of His Majesty’s Inspector, with Statement as to the Expulsion of Aliens,” 1906-1913.

The work of such agents therefore cannot be understated. The domestic emigrant market had peaked in the 1880s: the Irish market total crested in 1853 at 162,649; the British in 1883 at 320,118; and the German in 1881 at 220,902.²⁰ Instead of diverting spare tonnage elsewhere, new passenger markets were opened on behalf of British companies by their foreign-born agents in Scandinavia in the 1860s, Finland in the 1880s and the Baltic in the 1890s. They led to longer-term peaks in the supply of emigrants seeking work predominantly in the US. While it is impossible to calculate the financial benefit

²⁰All figures are based on total out-migration to all countries from each respective region. Britain’s out-migration would grow again in the first decade of the twentieth century; Ferenczi, *International Migration*, I, 386, 417 and 636.

such companies derived from foreign-born agents and individuals, it is clear that they were vital to the long-term success of British-based companies in monopolising the indirect, and thus direct passenger, trades. The passenger operations of Cunard, White Star, Guion, American, Dominion, Anchor and Allan thus saw such migrants as important aspects of their businesses. Aliens seeking to relocate between Europe and North America were an integral feature of transoceanic passenger shipping.

Table 2
Importance of the Alien Market to British Passenger Shipping, 1871-1899

Type of Passenger	United States		British North America		Australasia		All Other Places	
		%		%		%		%
British	3,844,432	67	648,431	72	788,870	97	529,686	73
Foreigners	1,820,549	32	256,009	28	23,248	3	110,348	15
Not distinguished	37,790	1	1337	0	623	0	85,999	12
Total	5,702,771	100	905,777	100	812,741	100	726,033	100

Source: BPP, "Reports and Statistical Tables Relating to Emigration and Immigration of the United Kingdom," 1890-1905.

The alien market, as shown in table 2, represented thirty-two percent of those bound for the US and twenty-eight percent of those for British North America (Canada). By 1907 the transmigrant business had grown to represent thirty percent of Britain's passenger business. Ten percent of all those arriving in New York had first travelled through the port of Hull, and an even larger number had first migrated via the port of Liverpool. Maritime economies at Hull, Grimsby, Harwich, London, Southampton, Liverpool and Glasgow were bolstered by such business. Between 1890 and 1913, of all those emigrating to Canada and the US, eighty-three percent of Scandinavians transmigrated via Britain, as did twenty-two percent of Russians, twenty-seven percent of Belgians and twelve percent of Dutch migrants. Yet after the entrance of British companies into the transatlantic passenger conferences in 1899 the era of commercial rivalry changed. Agents were still an integral feature of the business; their role in Britain, however, had lessened. Pre-paid tickets reduced the need for agents working in Britain, and references to such agencies virtually disappeared from British trade directories. While the British government employed those with foreign-language skills, companies selling travel directed their energies towards the emerging cruise industry.²¹ Agreements on the North Sea and North Atlantic reduced the need for local agents, and only

²¹Lorraine Coombs and Alexander Varias, *Tourist Third Cabin: Steamship Travel in the Interwar Years* (New York, 2003), 35-64.

Agents-General retained their status. The commercial significance of monopolies was supplanted by the greater availability (and thus accessibility) of choice. The European labourer choosing to relocate within the transatlantic labour market could thus travel aboard established emigrant services from Hamburg, Bremen, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Le Havre, Liverpool, Southampton, London or Glasgow, or via alternative emigrant ports such as Libau, Oslo, Copenhagen, Trieste, Marseille or several Greek and Mediterranean cities.²² In Britain the use of lodging-houses at the port of entry lessened as scheduled services and integrated transport systems eradicated the need for port-based lodgings.

The trade in European migrants travelling through British ports peaked in 1907. During that year over 172,438 transmigrants travelled through Britain. With the outbreak of war in 1914 it came to an abrupt end. When the business resumed after the end of the First World War, the market had been transformed. In 1921 the US began to restrict immigration under the Per Centum Act. These reduced flows were further restricted in 1923 under the Immigration Restriction Act. Yet the business of transatlantic shipping changed more markedly – for shipping operators – in July 1923 when passenger shipping began to be increasingly managed by US immigration officials in order to level out the influx of immigrants throughout the year.²³ It prevented a repeat of scenes such as that in May 1923 when too many immigrants arrived in New York, and the US suspended transatlantic immigration from Britain.²⁴ Under the new rules introduced in 1923, a maximum of one-fifth of the annual quota for each country was permitted to arrive in the US each month. The annual quota, starting in July 1923, was, according to *The Times*, due to have been filled by the end of November.²⁵ For shipping lines it brought an abrupt end to the regularity of scheduled weekly emigrant services from Britain that had helped to maintain the profitability on transatlantic services during the previous century. Compounded by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1923, it affected an aspect of the trade Britain had once cherished so much – the alien market. Six years after the latter halted the movement of European labour to the US, further immigration restrictions – this time in South Africa – hampered the British alien market yet further. British shipping companies, limited by such

²²See USCIS History Office and Library, US Department of Homeland Security, "Report of the Trans-Atlantic Passenger Movement, 1899-1917."

²³Marjory Harper and Nicolas J. Evans, "Socio-economic Dislocation and Inter-war Emigration to Canada and the United States: A Scottish Snapshot," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XXXIV, No. 4 (2006), 529-552.

²⁴*The Times*, 31 May and 1 June 1923.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 2, 17 and 19 July 1923.

foreign and imperial legislation, increasingly used ships that had once carried aliens to or from Britain for the emerging cruise industry. British people increasingly travelled to see the alien in native lands – without disturbing western labour markets – when formerly thousands had journeyed through Britain each week.

Conclusion

Unscrupulous foreigners who preyed upon their unsuspecting fellow nationals are often portrayed in the historiography as an ugly scourge on Britain's migrant past. Yet as this essay has demonstrated, immigrants who worked as emigration agents and lodging-house keepers brought great benefit to the British merchant marine while assisting their fellow countrymen to transmigrate via Britain. The revenue that ports such as Liverpool and Hull gained through passengers is indisputable, but the role of foreigners in encouraging indirect migration is often forgotten. That foreign-born agents had experienced some part of the migrant processes themselves is an obvious – yet equally ignored – feature of life in nineteenth- and twentieth-century passenger shipping. How better for a seller to convince others than through first-hand experience? Foreign-born agents recognised as early as the 1830s that their own experiences could generate income – for either themselves or the companies they represented. The alien profited from the desire of others to relocate overseas. The agencies they developed became vital in maintaining Britain's economic domination of transoceanic travel. Yet their work was also crucial in capturing the market *in situ*. While hundreds of thousands of aliens arrived and settled in Britain, and thousands re-migrated from Britain having remained there for some time, the majority of those arriving, at least several million, used Britain and its ports as transit stations through which to reach transoceanic destinations. Most of them thus arrived as transmigrants and journeyed through Britain alongside thousands of alien tourists. They were lured to Britain by the revolution in transoceanic transport – led foremost by British-based shipping companies. Unlike the alien influx that remained in Britain, which was largely in the hands of foreign merchant fleets, the flow of transmigrants was in the hands of British companies, and until the US immigration acts of the 1920s this represented a significant, if often ignored, aspect of maritime trade on North Atlantic routes.