Handout for Talk: 19th Century Migration Within the UK

Before the19th century the poor walked from one end of the country to the other if their survival depended on it, while the middle classes and upwards went by coach, cart or horse. Migration was always in aid of survival or seeking better conditions – apart from the privileged few.

This type of trigger was equally present in the 19th century:

- Up until the 1850s the economy of the UK subject to several bad depressions: In England – Swing Riots broke out in the 1830s in Kent and spread – down to bad harvest, depression, and war.
- Growth in population was also a factor for when bad harvests occurred there were more mouths to feed. In Kent a 56% increase between 1801 and 1831
- Potato famines in Scotland & Ireland in the 1st half of 19th century led to increased migration into English cities

In the 19th century we have further catalysts:

- Industrial Revolution

Industrial Revolution radically changed the economic and social make-up of the country – how and where products were manufactured, how the land was farmed -- by whom and how many. Between 1870 and 1900, economic output per head of population in Britain and Ireland rose by 500 per cent,

- Economic make-up of the country changing dramatically

Loss of employment and changes in the economy encouraged people to migrate – often into towns. That travel became increasing easy to undertake as the 19th century progressed.

- Better transport network: Growth of Railways
- Improved communication network

The Industrial Revolution was at the root of nearly all the changes in our ancestors' lives during the late 18th century but especially the 19th century. Labour saving devices had a massive impact on agriculture and industry.

Flying shuttle: allowed a single weaver to weave much wider fabrics, and it could be mechanized, led to automatic machine looms. Led increased demands for yarn by the weavers – led to invention of Spinning jenny.

Spinning Jenny: reduced the amount of work needed to produce yarn, with a worker able to work eight or more spools at once. This grew to 120 as technology advanced.

James Watt 's development of the steam engine led to the big industrial power mills of the north as well as affecting many other industries such as mining: made large-scale, deep mining possible – pumps to drain water and later to bore shafts.

This is the time when many of our ancestors go on the move because of effects of these inventions on Farming & Industry. Far fewer workers needed on the land and increasing number of factories in urban areas - mass producing goods - required many people to work the machines. Knocked out many cottage industries too.
Mass migration of population from countryside into towns: 1837 20% population lived in towns. By 1901 80% population lived in towns.

Mass production of goods also led to cheaper goods for the consumer and also for builders and craftsman and made it cheaper to grow towns and suburbs.

Despite and, perhaps because of industrialisation, the economy of 19th century Britain was still subject to fluctuations - as one industrial centre waned another would grow. When a particular industry ran out of steam, those workers might find it expedient to either take on a new type of work or to move to a new part of the country where their current occupational skill was required. These conditions created push and pull factors which encouraged ancestors to up sticks especially if they had a specialist trade. One industry especially prone to this was the mining industry but other industries affected too and a man might find a job in a new occupation but which required similar skills.

Word of mouth is always important in spreading news of job opportunities but the 19th century also brought better education and together with better transport links and of course industrialisation led to the heyday of the newspaper industry.

Growth of newspapers: aided by reduction in stamp duty and paper taxes. Important as led to growth of advertisements for job vacancies, together with increasingly affordable rail travel Together these two factors again encouraged people to migrate to take up new jobs. A post in a new area might have meant promotion or have come with accommodation, which had not been provided in the previous job.

Mining

With time many mines became worked out leaving miners with little work. The intervention of steam driven pumps in the late 18th century meant that mines could now be successfully kept clear of water much more easily and that much deeper mining was now possible. Extended the lives of many mines and led to the opening of new ones across the country. This led to the migration of many miners to new areas either as old mines ran dry or because there was higher pay elsewhere. The advent of the railways meant that coal and other mined products such as lead or copper could be transported to a larger market too. In some places once copper was worked out they mined tin or iron instead – parts of Cornwall – this could lead to people who had moved away, returning to an area.

Cornwall and Wales – Competition and Exchange of workers.
Copper was the most important mineral in Cornwall between 1750 & 1850. 1780s much competition from copper mines in North Wales (Parys Mountain). But these Welsh copper mines were worked out within 20 years and Cornwall re-gained its supremacy and by this time was making full use of new technology to mine deeper.

By second half of the19th century the Rhondda Valley, Glamorgan, South Wales, saw digging of many new coal pits and many new pit villages were built. Census figures for the Rhondda Valley which show that in 1801 there were 1, 000 inhabitants in 1801 . By 1901 this had grown to 11, 400 – a growth rate far above that of any other rural area. Looking at the 1851 census for Merthyr Tydfil shows people not only migrated from the neighbouring Welsh counties to fill these new jobs from further afield, such as the southwest and the Midlands of England. The areas they had come from were often mining areas themselves. Many Cornish miners went abroad to take their mining skills abroad too.

Railway Workers
- Navvies (formerly canal cutters). Extremely mobile group of workers at this time as new railways being laid. Work was hard and dangerous and well paid. It is estimated that in 1845 there were some 200,000 men working on the laying of railway lines in the UK. Some also went abroad e.g. South America

Men would pick up wives en-route and some might settle down far from where they were born.

The growth of the railways of course brought a new range of jobs ranging from engine drivers, mechanics through to porters and station masters and while many of these jobs were taken by locals, many people would have travelled into an area to take up these job. We have already mentioned the growth of towns and resorts – purely as a result of the railways - this growth meant more people were needed to take on jobs created there and encouraged migration.

The Mills of the North and the Cloth Industry

The growth of the power mills producing cotton and wool textiles was a major cause of migration for many of our ancestors. As we have already seen in the late eighteenth century, the great wool producing areas of England had been the Cotswolds, parts of Kent, South West, East Anglia – Norwich and Colchester - and to a lesser extent in the Pennines (Yorkshire & Lancs).

Invention of the flying shuttle in 1733, cloth-making processes became more and more mechanised and this meant higher production levels. The Industrial Revolution meant the South lost its dominance of the wool trade within a relatively short space of time.

The north had a great advantage as technology grew -- powerful rivers and later on, coal in abundance from which the mills could be powered. Totally overshadowed older methods of textile production. Again the growth of the railways meant that goods could easily be distributed throughout the country. By the 1820s it was the northern mills of Lancs, and Yorks which produced the majority of textiles. Production of cotton soon overtook that of wool.

By 1835 estimated that nearly one quarter of a million people were working in the cotton factories of the north. Much of this employment came from people who were "off comers" and who had migrated in order to gain employment. Some were part of assisted migration schemes organised by poor law authorities – especially in East Anglia.

In the 1835 the Poor Law Commission set up an agent in Manchester to whom factory owners could apply 'for hands of the requisite ages. Ideal candidates were: *'Industrious and honest families currently claiming poor relief and preferably with several children aged 10 and upwards* – these were the ideal to meet requirement of 1833 Factories Act which had restricted the use of very young children in factories.

Many of Suffolk's poor ended up in Bradford because the poor law commissioners of Suffolk had an agreement with mill owners there to send them poor labouring families who needed work. The 1851 and 1861 census returns for Bradford confirm this. It is interesting to note that by 1861 many people originating from Suffolk were no longer working in the cotton industry but had moved to other jobs such coal mining and agriculture.

In Kent the Poor Law authorities were more frequently assisting people to migrate abroad. In her excellent book *Farewell to Kent* Helen Allinson suggests that moving north to work in the mills 'held little appeal compared to new land where you could continue in agriculture'

Growth of Railways

Development of the high pressure steam engine by Richard Trevithick was crucial for the development of the railways. But it was George Stephenson who pushed

forward the idea of locomotion. On 27 Sept 1825 first public passenger train ran from Darlington to Stockton, carrying 450 people at 15 miles per hour.

1826 Parliament authorised first purpose built passenger railway, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway headed by Stephenson. Opened 1830.

To show how rapidly the railways grew: By 1848 there was 5000 miles of track in Britain

By 1885 a massive 17000 miles!

Over the years railways were to revolutionise travel: making it much faster, more comfortable and less expensive.

Right from the start they made a tremendous difference in terms of time and costs. Opening of the Liverpool and Manchester railway line – slashed journey times compared to travel by road:

- Liverpool to Manchester by road: four hours and cost 10 shillings inside the coach and 5 shillings outside.
- By train: one and three-quarter hours, and cost 5 shillings inside and 3 shillings 6 pence outside.
- 20 hours by canal. The cost of canal carriage was 15 shillings a ton, whereas by rail it was 10 shillings a ton.

The railway's success can be seen in coaching stats: in 1829 - 29 stagecoaches operating between Liverpool and Manchester, but only three years later there were just two!

The Post Office was quick to take advantage of the new railways: in fact as soon as the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened in 1830 and this reduced their transport costs by around two thirds.Railways carried, goods ranging from newspapers, cloth and coal and also passengers! Had a very positive effect on British industry – reduced freight costs for heavy materials such as coal and minerals, as well as reducing costs of transporting finished goods around the country. Cheaper transport meant cheaper building materials and led to growth of towns, suburbs, seaside resorts and affected many aspects of everyday life e.g. affordable gravestones for all!

Railways also led to a new type of worker: one who was not constrained by his locality but who could move around to better job opportunities with relative ease.

Surrey Railways

The London and Croydon Railway (L&CR) opened in 1839.

The London and Brighton Railway (L&BR) opened in 1841.

These two were amalgamated to form The London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LB&SCR) in 1846

Kent Railways

The first Kent railway was the Canterbury and Whitstable Railway in 1830, which provided access to the sea for Canterbury. It was initially worked by horses. Absorbed by South Eastern Railway.

The South Eastern Railway and the London Chatham and Dover Railway became the main two railway companies in the 19th century – great rivals.

SER came first. 1838 began construction of a line from London Bridge to Dover; this went via Redhill & Tonbridge to Ashford, Folkestone and Dover: completed in 1844. Branches were added from Tonbridge to Tunbridge Wells in 1843 and a line down to Hastings by 1852. The company also established a cross-channel service, the South Eastern and Continental Steam Packet Company, in 1845.

The London Chatham and Dover Railway built a line from London Victoria via Bromley to Faversham in 1846. This later extended to Canterbury (1860) and to Dover a year. A branch went from Faversham to Ramsgate in 1863. A line from Swanley to Maidstone completed in 1874 and extended to Ashford in 1884.

So our ancestors living in this century saw great changes and the economy prospered from 1850s onwards. As a researcher it means that our ancestors are suddenly flitting around all over the place

Railways were not just useful for longer journeys like this but increasingly became a means of getting to work and government actively encouraged this. Importantly they catered for the less well off as well as the rich.

Poor travelled by 3rd class carriage – these were open to elements and very uncomfortable to start with – as a result of Sonning Cutting Rail disaster 1841 – 9 killed- conditions improved
1844 Act of Parliament:
Parliamentary trains: Train operators had to provide one train a day in each direction along every route at the cost of no more than 1d a mile at a speed of not less than 12 miles an hour including stops, which were to be made at all stations. Carriages protected from the weather and provided with seats. Also increase in baggage allowance (up to 56 lbs) to allow workers to carry tools of trade etc

Stats for 1851 show that one half of all passengers were paying the 3rd class fare.
By 1916 - 96% of journeys were 3rd class – though by this time better conditions. Growth of cheap rail travel - led to rise of mass market leisure industry: major group outings by trains for working classes and encouraged by train companies
Trains to:

- Sporting events – racecourses, prize fights
- Sunday School trains
- Workhouse outings
- Executions
- Group tours: 1840s – "Monster Trains" carrying 1000s of passengers to seaside holidays and other destinations. Henry Marcus a Liverpool based travel agent carried 1.5 million passengers on his excursions by the time he retired in 1869. Thomas Cook – 1840s trains to temperance meetings
- 1851 Great Exhibition – huge crowds of ordinary people from across the country

Led to growth of seaside resorts: Margate, Ramsgate, Blackpool etc which in turn opened up more work opportunities in these towns and led to further migration. Fleetwood – whole new town. Domestic service/hotel staff etc.

Commuter Travel

Cheap travel – led to a new concept -- that of commuter travel – and with it the growth of the suburbs round major cities such as London and Birmingham. Surbiton is the classic example of town which owes its existence totally to commuting. Also the first underground line in London opened in 1863.

New Opportunities for Women

Railway gave women more freedom – working class women began to travel unescorted: although might be prey to men during journeys – especially those in 3rd class – 'rogues' travelling 3rd class to prey on women. Development of ladies only waiting rooms

Many more employment opportunities :19th century women worked alongside men in the factories but accessible travel meant that many young women started to leave home to take on domestic posts often in large cities where opportunities were greater or seaside resorts. Frequently went to where they had relatives. There met husbands! Women also worked on the railways: often traditional roles such as cleaners, laundresses, seamstresses or attendants in ladies' waiting rooms but some were involved with running the trains themselves e.g. level crossing keepers if widows or daughters or crossing men. The job was unpaid but came with accommodation. A few widows or daughters became station managers. By the end of the nineteenth century new occupations that were deemed especially suitable for women, such as telephonists and typists – move further to seek more interesting jobs.

Those who always travelled because of the nature of their jobs:
Mariners and soldiers are another obvious example and bear in mind that the nineteenth century saw the end of the Napoleonic wars and the Crimean War and thus much military and naval activity not just abroad but in terms of barracks in UK.

Whereas at the end of the18th century it was still the norm to live in the countryside and for the majority of the population to remain within 20 miles of their place of birth – by the end of the 19th century this was becoming the exception rather than the norm and are ancestors were mobile creatures with much greater opportunities in terms of both travel and employment.

Further Reading

- Railway ancestors: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/railways/
- Tracing Your Railway Ancestors A Guide for Family Historians by di Drummond (Pen 7 Sword 2010)
- Helen Allinson Farewell to Kent: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Farewell-Kent-Helen-Allinson/dp/0904373134