

SIMON FOWLER

Title

'Shovelling out Paupers' Researching assisted emigration in English archives.

Summary

This presentation will look at assisted emigration from Great Britain to colonies from a British perspective considering the reasons why these schemes were established, who took advantage of them, and the records which allow family historians to find out more about their ancestors who left England as a result.

Abstract

For three centuries between the 1660s and the 1960s help was available to men, women and their families who wished to emigrate from Great Britain.

As this paper will show, it was a process by which everybody in theory gained. The individuals concerned had the opportunity to make better lives for themselves in their new homes. The colonies overcame shortages of skilled labour.

There were a huge variety of British schemes – some local, some national – to help potential migrants. Parish ratepayers, or even individual residents, would club together to send poor families overseas to give them a new chance, but also to reduce the burden on the rates. The New Zealand Company paid for skilled labour to go to New Zealand in an attempt to recreate an idealised British society.

From the 1870s increasing numbers of orphaned street-children – who became known as home children - were sent initially mainly to Canada, but increasingly to Australia as well, by Barnardos and other charities large and small.

There were also a number of quasi-official schemes to send out unemployed men and their families in times of high unemployment in Britain. And after the First World War there was a government-sponsored scheme to encourage ex-soldiers to settle the Empire.

It can be hard to find very much about these people in British archives, although of course Dominion and Colonial governments kept much better records. This paper will describe the sources available at The National Archives and local record offices to find out more about individuals who took advantage of the opportunities.

For researchers, the problem is that there were hundreds of different schemes, most of which were very short-lived. However the presentation will include tips that should make finding the right scheme or benefactor much easier.

Audience

Advanced