

The impact of military demobilisation on rising Irish migration to London, c.1750–1850

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ABSTRACT. *Irish soldiers demobilised in London after major eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century wars were an important but overlooked source of unintentional Irish migrants to the capital. Their migration was linked to the centralised military pension system, which meant that servicemen in English regiments had to present themselves for a medical examination at Chelsea or Greenwich hospitals — both in the London area. A lack of provision available to then get these often very disabled and wounded men back home to Ireland meant that many stayed semi-permanently or permanently in London, and their presence can be measured decades later in the 1841 census. This challenges current understandings about the Irish diaspora in Britain by highlighting the role of the government in shepherding Irish men across the Irish Sea.*

With the coming of every war in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland, whether voluntarily or otherwise, tens of thousands of men in their prime reported to the docks at key military points along the coast where waiting ships whisked them overseas to fight. They came from every county across the four nations, as well as parts foreign, including the lands the king claimed in Hanover and from ever more places within the growing empire.¹ We know much about military recruitment. The violence and kidnapping of the crimpers and of impressment is well documented in the growing historiography, including the role of impressment as a catalyst for the War of 1812.²

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¹ Nir Arielli and Bruce Collins (eds), *Transnational soldiers: foreign military enlistment in the modern era* (London, 2013); Mark Wishon, *German forces and the British army: interactions and perceptions, 1742–1815* (London, 2013); Sarah Caputo, ‘Mercenary gentlemen? The transnational service of foreign quarterdeck officers in the Royal Navy of the American and French wars, 1775–1815’ in *Historical Research*, xciv, no. 266 (2021), pp 806–26.

² J. F. Zimmerman, *Impressment of American seamen* (New York, 1925); Michael Lewis, *A social history of the navy, 1793–1815* (London, 1960); J. Stevenson, ‘The London “crimp” riots of 1794’ in *International Review of Social History*, xvi, no. 1 (1971), pp 40–58; Arthur Gilbert, ‘Recruitment and reform in the East India Company army, 1760–1800’ in *Journal of British Studies*, xv, no. 1 (1975), pp 89–111; John Brewer, *The sinews of power: war, money and the English state, 1688–1783* (London, 1989); Nicholas Rogers, ‘Vagrancy, impressment and the regulation of labour in eighteenth-century Britain’ in *Slavery & Abolition*, xv, no. 2 (1994), pp 102–13; Huw V. Bowen, *War and British society, 1688–1815* (Cambridge, 1998); Kevin Linch, ‘The recruitment of the British army, 1807–1815’

Less well documented is what happened at the end of violence; soldiers and sailors who had survived returned to peace, but also all the problems of mass demobilisation. With the notable exception of Nicholas Rogers' *Mayhem* which focuses on the War of Austrian Succession in the 1740s, there are few detailed analyses of what demobilisation meant in Britain and Ireland.³ The arrival back home of these soldiers and sailors meant a dramatic demographic change to large cities such as Bristol, Dublin and London, which had for years at a time operated with relatively few young men. In their absence, these social spaces and their economies were kept going by women, children and the old, along with those too sick or too privileged to have to enlist. They built the guns, forged the bullets, sewed the uniforms and grew the food that the army and navy depended upon.⁴ However, that dynamic changed rapidly when the servicemen returned. Each man who walked down the gangway and back into civilian life needed to find work and, thus, became a competitor for those already in precarious employment. To add to the problem, the economy had to transition from a war economy in which the army and navy were key buyers and employers, to a civilian one where they bought very little and employed very few. Whole industries contracted and it took time for new ones to rebound. The problems were exacerbated by the fact that thousands of these returning men were coping with devastating mental health traumas picked up on the battlefield or adapting to new life-altering physical disabilities, as outlined by Caroline Nielson and discussed in greater depth later in this article.⁵

The effect was devastating to urban areas in particular, as highlighted by John Beattie, Douglas Hay and, most recently, by Nicholas Rogers, whose case studies of different eighteenth-century wars confirmed the connection between demobilisation and rising crime rates in Britain.⁶ A wider look at the data from the Old Bailey court in London more generally shows that the pattern of rising criminal trials involving male defendants repeated itself after every major demobilisation event during the Georgian era (Figure 1).

Notably the same pattern is not visible for female defendants, who were far outnumbered by men in eighteenth-century British criminal trials. At the Old Bailey in

(Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 2001); D. J. Ennis, *Enter the press-gang: naval impressment in eighteenth-century British literature* (Newark, 2002); Nicholas Rogers, *The press gang: naval impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (New York, 2007); Kevin Linch, *Britain and Wellington's army: recruitment, society, and tradition, 1807–15* (Houndsmill, 2011); Joseph Cozens, 'The experience of soldiering: civil-military relations and popular protest in England, 1790–1805' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 2016).

³ Nicholas Rogers, *Mayhem: post-war crime and violence in Britain, 1748–53* (New Haven, 2013).

⁴ François Crouzet, 'The impact of the French wars on the British economy' in Henry Thomas Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the French Revolution 1789–1815* (Basingstoke, 1989), pp 189–210; Clive Emsley, 'The social impact of the French wars' in Dickinson (ed) *Britain and the French Revolution*, pp 211–27; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, 'The fiction of female dependence and the makeshift economy of soldiers, sailors, and their wives in eighteenth-century London' in *Labor History*, xlix, no. 4 (2008), pp 481–501; Gordon E. Bannerman, *Merchants and the military in eighteenth-century Britain: British military contracts and domestic supply, 1739–1763* (London, 2015).

⁵ Caroline Nielson, 'Disability, fraud and medical experience at the Royal Hospital of Chelsea in the long eighteenth century' in Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack (eds), *Britain's soldiers: rethinking war and society, 1715–1815* (Liverpool, 2014), pp 182–201.

⁶ John Beattie, 'The pattern of crime in England 1660–1800' in *Past & Present* lxii (1974), pp 47–95; Douglas Hay, 'War, dearth and theft in the eighteenth century: the record of the English courts' in *Past & Present*, xcvi (1982), pp 117–60; Rogers, *Mayhem*.

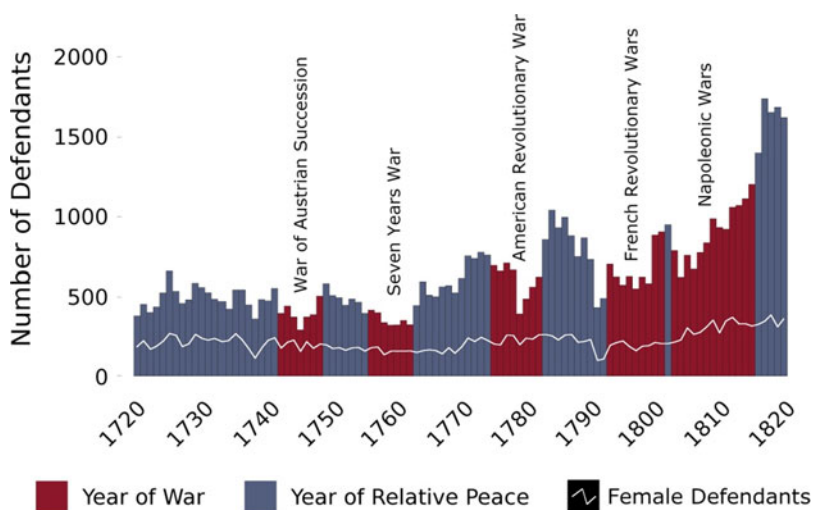


Figure 1: number of male and female defendants per year (1720–1820) at the Old Bailey courthouse in London, charged with felonies, by year of alleged crime, showing years of relative war and peace.⁷

London, men constituted seven in ten defendants between 1720 and 1820, making the criminal justice system of the day one that was more focused on male transgressions within the community than those of women.⁸ It would seem that more men, as a result of the coming of peace, was bad for community harmony and led to a period of low trust between the established and the newcomers, and increased reporting to the authorities — at least temporarily. Soldiers were not necessarily directly to blame for the crimes themselves; instead, they resulted from the pressure that their arrival in large numbers put upon the local community. Of course, a small number of cases did involve returning soldiers and sailors, often doing something the locals objected to but that may have been an act of desperation or in response to a perceived threat.⁹ Farmers around London also complained of rising thefts of sheep, pigs and edible birds when the soldiers and sailors reappeared, something Douglas Hay attributed to the hunger and poverty of desperate men seeking a meal.¹⁰

This economic and interpersonal pressure spread outwards into other areas of the community social support web. In 1784, with the peace at the end of the American Revolutionary War, the workhouse intake rose by nearly 30 per cent in short order at the west London workhouse in St Martin-in-the-Fields.¹¹ That workhouse was

⁷ Calculated from: Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard and Jamie McLaughlin, et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online, 1674–1913* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 2021).

⁸ 72.3 per cent of defendants at the Old Bailey courthouse between 1720 and 1820 were male.

⁹ For example, see ‘July 1802, trial of James Dempster (t18020714-40)’ and June 1815, trial of Patrick Cushion, (t18150621-54), *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (version 8.0): (<https://www.oldbaileyonline.org>).

¹⁰ Hay, ‘War, dearth and theft’, p. 132.

¹¹ Calculated from dataset: Jeremy Boulton and Leonard Schwarz, ‘St. Martin-in-the-Fields workhouse data’, *Pauper Lives Project* (2013) (<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/pauperlives>).

traditionally primarily the home of women and young children, but during the post-Revolutionary demobilisation, it was men who uncharacteristically made up the increase, reflecting a drastic and rapid change in local need. These two patterns (courthouse and workhouse), as well as others across a number of different institutions discussed in this article, show a city under stress, trying to process a hoard of visitors with little support to do so.

This article builds upon these findings, but by drawing upon new evidence from the Chelsea Hospital records of demobilised soldiers (1784–1816), as well as the 1841 census and other demographic and social history data, it puts the discussion of demobilisation into the context of migration studies, particularly considering the plight of Irish soldiers dumped in the London area. No one set of records is able to tell this story on its own, and instead the story of Irish demobilisation must be pieced together from a number of imperfect sources. Demobilisation has only rarely been considered in migration terms. Most notably J. E. Cookson's work on Scottish returning soldiers in the nineteenth century concluded that most went back to Scotland.¹² However, even Cookson noted that the Irish showed different patterns. The Irish relationship with London was very different than the Scottish one, and by the Victorian era it was widely understood that the capital had a large Irish population far exceeding the size of any Scottish presence.¹³

This article looks particularly at the later Georgian-era Irish in London, in part because the Victorian-era Irish population in London is heavily studied, enabled by the period's extensive demographic data and comprehensive censuses. For example, using the census of 1841 Lynn Hollen Lees counted between 70,000 and 80,000 Irish people in London: the number implies a level of stasis that did not reflect the reality of the Irish in the capital, and it is the mobile and shifting population that this article will address. It does so while acknowledging that it is the survival of these countable data that explains why we have so many quantitative studies of Victorian Irish migrants.¹⁴ Unfortunately, it is often taken as read that this Victorian-era Irish population began to arrive in significant numbers during the famine years of the 1840s and 50s. The famine certainly was a major push factor for Irish migrants, as Cormac Ó Gráda extensive enumerating work has shown.¹⁵ However, only a few historians, Donald MacRaild in particular, have argued for

¹² John Ernest Cookson, 'Early nineteenth-century Scottish military pensioners as homecoming soldiers' in *Historical Journal*, lii, no. 2 (2009), pp 319–41.

¹³ Jerry White, *London in the nineteenth century* (London, 2007), pp 131–4; Stana Nenadic (ed.), *Scots in London in the eighteenth century* (Lewisburg, PA, 2010).

¹⁴ Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester, 1979), p. 50; Frances Finnegan, *Poverty and prejudice: Irish immigrants in York, 1840–75* (Cork, 1982); Jeffrey G. Williamson, 'The impacts of the Irish on British labour markets during the industrial revolution' in *Journal of Economic History*, xlvii, no. 3 (1986), pp 693–720; William J. Lowe, *The Irish in mid-Victorian Lancashire* (New York, 1989); Graham Davis, *The Irish in Britain 1815–1914* (Dublin, 1991); Ruth-Ann Mellish Harris, *The nearest place that wasn't Ireland* (Amex, IA, 1994); Mervyn A. Busteed and R. I. Hodgson, 'Irish migrant responses to urban life in early nineteenth-century Manchester' in *Geographical Journal*, clxii (1996), pp 139–53.

¹⁵ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and beyond: the great Irish famine in history, economy, and memory* (Princeton, NJ, 1999); Cormac Ó Gráda and Kevin H. O'Rourke, 'Migration as disaster relief: lessons from the great Irish famine' in *European Review of Economic History*, i, no. 1 (1997), pp 3–25.

the importance of earlier waves of Irish migration, pointing in particular to 1815 as a key moment.¹⁶

Surviving Georgian-era records are far less comprehensive, and less even in their coverage of the population than the Victorian records that followed. This is especially true in the case of Irish migrants, whose activities and life events often fell outside of the remit of the Protestant churches that collected data about the citizenry. For example, many Irish Catholics married in Catholic churches that preserved and sometimes later lost the relevant records. Many other Irish people had informal or ‘Fleet’ marriages before living as man and wife and have not left easy paper trails for the historian. Others married in Ireland before making the trip to London, making the records difficult to trace. Jeremy Boulton has described clandestine marriages as a ‘neglected urban history variable’, which affects our understanding of Irish Catholic lives in particular.¹⁷ In the absence of census-like records that capture direct evidence of Irish migration in Georgian London, this article brings together for the first time a large body of evidence about Irish soldiers’ lives and demobilisation. Most important are the admissions records of the Royal Chelsea Hospital, where demobilised soldiers attended examinations before collecting their pensions. All 252 of the medical examination ledgers from its long history survive and each contains a few thousand entries: each of those represents a single medical exam of a soldier seeking a pension. The records from four periods (1784–9; 1802–03; 1812–13; part of 1816) were digitised and converted into a dataset for the purpose of this study, covering major demobilisation events as well as periods of peace. It includes the demobilisations after the American Revolution, the brief 1802 Treaty of Amiens with France, the War of 1812 and part of the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars capturing a few months of the most intense demobilisation of them all. These digitised volumes contain the details of the exams of 15,297 servicemen which was a fraction of the total number. For each, we have their names, service record, injuries, pension approval/refusal and demographic information including age, physical description, occupation, and place of birth.¹⁸

Using these records in combination with other surviving evidence, this article pieces together individual lives and broad patterns of movement to highlight the overlooked role of the military, and of Irish servicemen within it, in shaping London’s migrant communities. Many of those men developed long-term relationships with the city and their descendants remained in the capital for generations to come. By understanding their experiences and circumstances, we can better understand the plurality of Irish migration, as well as the role the government played in unintentional migration to Georgian London.

I

The story of Robert Lawson, or the element of it that can be pieced together from the hospital records and other scant sources, illustrates the experience of the

¹⁶ Donald MacRaild, *Irish migrants in modern Britain, 1750–1922* (London, 1999).

¹⁷ Jeremy Boulton, ‘Clandestine marriages in London: an examination of a neglected urban variable’ in *Urban History*, xx, no. 2 (2009), pp 191–210; Jacob F. Field, ‘Clandestine weddings at the Fleet prison, c. 1710–1750: who married there?’ in *Continuity and Change*, xxxii, no. 3 (2017), pp 349–77.

¹⁸ ‘Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and Royal Artillery out-pensions, admission book,’ 1784–1816 (T.N.A., WO 116/8-22).

demobilised soldier and his migratory journey. Robert arrived in London in January 1784, on a ship laden with his fellow soldiers.¹⁹ The timing suggests he may have been on one of the last ships out of New York transporting the soldiers who had failed to keep the American colonies under British rule during the Revolutionary War that had come to an end only a couple of months previously.

Lawson was an Irishman from Kilmegan in County Down, about thirty miles south of Belfast. He was also a career soldier in the British army, only forty years old, but with eighteen years in uniform behind him. He had no intention of living in London. In fact, all evidence suggests he could not wait to leave and go back home to Ireland. His arrival though was not a matter of choice. The ship, operated by his employer and carrying these men from America, only ever had one destination and there were no stop offs along the way for passengers wanting to disembark closer to home. They were headed to either Portsmouth on the south coast — home of the Royal Navy — or the Royal Chatham Dockyard in Kent, just beyond the mouth of the River Thames and about thirty miles from London. Before he could return to civilian life, Lawson had three errands in London, which we know from piecing together the surviving archival fragments of his life that he managed to complete within about a week.

The first task was to reconnect with his wife and two children.²⁰ Like many military families, they had been either waiting in London for his return, where Jennine Hurl-Eamon argued they either joined an economy of makeshifts, or (much less commonly for those with children and in restricted numbers for those without) they were among the camp follower families who trudged the roads with the army.²¹ It was well known by the government that Irish soldiers' wives were generally left stuck in urban areas awaiting their husband's return. An 1805 report estimated that 800 to 1,000 wives per departing ship was not unusual, with most having no option but to find a way to survive locally or to 'beg their way as well as they could to their own country'.²² As this was the age of sail, the uncertainty surrounding Lawson's arrival date, the difficulty of travelling in January, as well as the need to care for children, would suggest his own family had probably been living at least temporarily in London hoping for his return.²³

Secondly, before leaving the ship, one of Lawson's commanding officers would have informed him of an appointment with the military surgeon at the Royal Chelsea Hospital — the convalescent hospital for aged and wounded soldiers, and the site that administered the military pension on behalf of the army.²⁴ Lawson

¹⁹ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and Royal Artillery out-pensions, admission book,' 29 Jan. 1784 (T.N.A., WO 116/8, p. 239).

²⁰ 'Middlesex sessions: sessions papers – justices' working documents', Feb. 1784 (London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter L.M.A.), LMSMPS507780027), consulted at: *London Lives, 1690–1800* (version 2.0, March 2018) (londonlives.org).

²¹ Hurl-Eamon, 'The fiction of female dependence', pp 481–501; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage & the British Army in the long eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2014); Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the army: camp followers and community during the American Revolution* (Columbia, SC, 1996).

²² 'Irish militia enlisting bill', *Hansard 1*, iv, cc 181–2 (2 Apr. 1805).

²³ Wes Forsythe, Colin Breen, C. Callaghan, and R. McConkey, 'Historic storms and shipwrecks in Ireland' in *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, xxix (2000), pp 247–59.

²⁴ *Papers illustrative of the origin and early history of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea* (London, 1872).

now hoped to qualify for this pension, but before he could be approved he had to meet that surgeon. So, like thousands of other soldiers before him, he dutifully showed up for his mid-day appointment on 29 January 1784, and despite the cold, stripped to give the surgeon a better look at the state of his body after many years fighting for the crown. It had been a busy day for the hospital. Lawson's was the 132nd body the surgeons had inspected. 169 other men stood in the queue behind him, with 642 more arriving the following week.²⁵ By comparison, the equivalent period the following year saw only one-seventh as many soldiers, highlighting the effect of major demobilisation events on daily activity.²⁶ Of those men in line with Lawson that week, about three in ten (199) of them were Irish, from every corner of the island.

The surgeon's job was to assess any injuries, including those for which an extra pension allowance might be available, such as missing limbs or loss of sight, and to ensure Lawson was not attempting to defraud the army.²⁷ Everything looked fine. A few scribbles were made in the ledger next to his name, Lawson was selected for a 'reduction' — made redundant by the military, and approved for both an out-pension and a retirement from service.²⁸ The whole thing only took a minute or two, but the nature of the bureaucracy surrounding pensions, and the army's desire to eliminate pension fraud, meant that Lawson and thousands of other ex-soldiers connected to English regiments *had* to present themselves at Chelsea for an initial inspection if they wanted the money. Once approved he could continue collecting the pension quarterly from the Collector of Excise, normally located in market towns, but only after that initial visit to London.²⁹ Had he been in the navy, a similar examination was required at the Greenwich Hospital to the southeast of London.

Thirdly, if he did not plan to stay and find work, Lawson had to find an economical way for him and his family to get back to Ireland. This was the point where the family's agency about their future really came into effect. However, the military had no provision in the 1780s for helping men back home after they had attended their appointment at Chelsea, and certainly no provision for their family members. Military pensions were not generous, designed only to keep a man from beggary and thus insufficient for his current predicament.³⁰ A typical pension for a private was in the range of six to nine pence per day, rising with rank and with certain types of injuries such as loss of sight or a limb.³¹

As a soldier, Lawson had the legal right to beg his way home, but unless he could afford a coach, this would mean making the journey on foot, with children in tow.³²

²⁵ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 1784 (T.N.A., WO 116/8).

²⁶ Jan. 1784: 942 soldiers; Feb. 1785: 147 soldiers. For this, see 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 1784 (T.N.A., WO 116/8).

²⁷ Nielson, 'Disability', p. 195.

²⁸ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 29 Jan. 1784 (T.N.A., WO 116/8, p. 239).

²⁹ F. C. Mather, 'Army pensioners and the maintenance of civil order in early nineteenth-century England' in *Journal for the Society for Army Historical Research*, xxxvi, no. 147 (1958), p. 111.

³⁰ Nielson, 'Disability', pp 182–201.

³¹ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 1812–1816 (T.N.A., WO 116/14-22).

³² Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the streets of eighteenth-century London' in *Journal of British Studies*, xlv, no. 3 (2005), p. 495.

The alternative, probably suggested to him or his wife via word of mouth, brought the family to the Guildhall in London a few days after Robert's medical examination. Lawson then turned to the lord mayor who was only too happy to assist ex-soldiers seeking to leave the city by issuing them with a 'vagrant's pass'. The pass officially branded the Lawson family 'vagrants', a term that should have been reserved for removing wandering beggars and troublemakers from elsewhere, but which was routinely used by the City of London governors to move demobilised soldiers and sailors onwards so that no further cost to the city would be incurred should they need to plead poverty in future. Better to pay for them to leave, as far as the Lord Mayor was concerned, than to risk them ending up in the local workhouse or in gaol for committing a petty crime out of desperation.

The vagrancy system was set up specifically to oust people likely to become a financial burden on the local parish, especially those who did not have a legal right to settlement in the area.³³ If one had not been born in a parish, settlement was determined through a range of tests, most commonly by working uninterrupted for a year within the parish, paying a hefty rental bill on your accommodation or (for women) marrying someone with a local settlement.³⁴ Lawson had none of these and by presenting himself to the lord mayor he knowingly declared himself ineligible for relief and, therefore, likely to be a future burden on London's taxpayers, with the knowledge that this would then trigger a system that would take him home. Using the vagrancy system in this way was a win-win for both Lawson and London, if not entirely within the spirit of the law: the Lawsons got to go home and London was free of four hungry mouths.³⁵ That month was particularly busy. The lord mayor, Richard Clark, signed three times as many passes (159) as had his predecessor Robert Peckham (62) the year before. Clark, by virtue of the circumstances when he took office, may have signed more vagrant passes during his one-year tenure than anyone else ever had, clocking up at least 1,285 in the surviving records.³⁶

Less than a week after Robert's medical examination, on 4 February, and with their pass in hand, the Lawson family boarded the covered cart of Middlesex's vagrancy removal contractor, Henry Adams, who took them north on the first leg of their journey back to Ireland.³⁷ At each county border they would be passed to a new local vagrant contractor who would help them with the next leg of the journey, following the routes of the established stagecoaches towards the northwest and the Irish Sea, typically departing from either Milford Haven, Holyhead or Liverpool, depending on the destination. The vagrancy system was not designed for their need but certainly helped them resolve their immediate problem of having been dumped in London, so far from home.³⁸ The rise in vagrancy numbers may

³³ David Hitchcock, *Vagrancy in English culture and society, 1650–1750* (London, 2016); Vagrancy Act, 1744 (17 George II, c. 5 [G.B.]).

³⁴ An Act for the Better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom, 1662 (14 Charles II, c. 12 [Eng.]).

³⁵ Tim Hitchcock, Adam Crymble and Louise Falcini, 'Loose, idle and disorderly: vagrant removal in late eighteenth-century Middlesex' in *Social History*, xxxix, no. 4 (2014), pp 509–27.

³⁶ Adam Crymble, Louise Falcini, Tim Hitchcock, 'Vagrant lives: 14,789 vagrants processed by Middlesex county, 1777–1786' in *Journal of Open Humanities Data* 1, p.e1 (version 1.2): <http://doi.org/10.5334/johd.1>.

³⁷ 'Middlesex sessions: sessions papers – justices' working documents', Feb. 1784 (London Metropolitan Archives, LMSMPS507780027), consulted at *London Lives, 1690–1800*.

³⁸ Hitchcock *et al.*, 'Loose, idle and disorderly', pp 509–27.

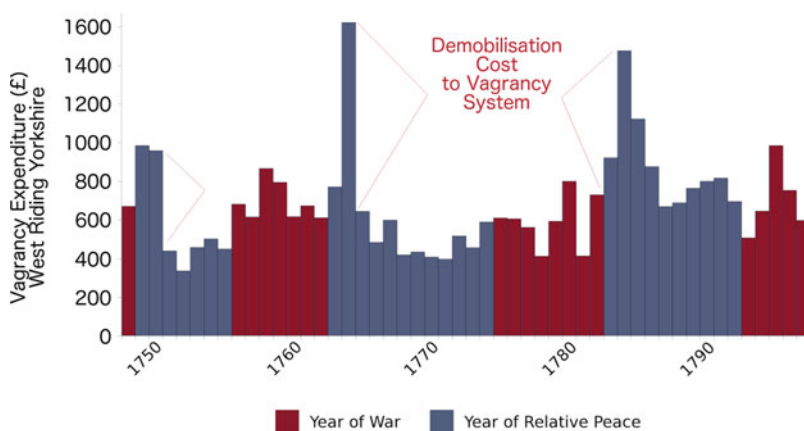


Figure 2: *vagrancy expenditure, West Riding Yorkshire, 1748-1797, highlighting years of war versus years of relative peace.*³⁹

have started in London, but their effects rippled out across the country. Figure 2 shows the sharp rising costs of the vagrancy system in the West Riding of Yorkshire after each major war in the second half of the eighteenth century. This captures the effects of people heading northwards from London both into Yorkshire and beyond, as they tried to make their way home from the ships. Every county in England would have experienced similar jumps in costs, with those closest to London or along the major travelling routes facing the greatest financial burden of supporting these returning soldiers on their way homeward.

At this point, Lawson and his family disappear from the London-area historical record. We can hope that they made it to Ireland, maybe even to Kilmegan, and lived out their days happily and peacefully. The story of the Lawsons may have been fairly common for returning Irish soldiers and sailors, though linking up the records of individuals remains a challenge. It seems that Lawson may have been more organised and motivated to leave than most in a similar situation, completing his errands in about a week. Other cases suggested that from landfall to leaving London was often a matter of a few months for an ex-soldier. Owen Morris of the 27th Foot Regiment left for Dublin just after Christmas 1785, following a two-month stint in the capital.⁴⁰ Patrick Gearing of Kerry, and Patrick Downey of Cavan, stayed in the capital for the summer of 1784. Both men were only in their mid-twenties, but the disabilities they had acquired in their short term of service may well have contributed to their delayed departure. Gearing had lost the use of his feet.⁴¹ Downey was unable

³⁹ Created from: *Twenty-eighth report from the select committee on finance, &c. police, including convict establishments*, pp 134–6, H.C. 1797–8, cxii.

⁴⁰ ‘Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book’, 5 Oct. 1785 (T.N.A., WO 116/9, p. 21); ‘Middlesex sessions: sessions papers – justices’ working documents’, Dec. 1785 (L.M.A., LMSMPS508030141), consulted at *London Lives, 1690–1800*.

⁴¹ ‘Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book’, 14 Apr. 1785 (T.N.A., WO 116/8, p 381); ‘Middlesex sessions:

to move the right side of his body.⁴² These types of injuries affecting mobility were common, but may have cut off the option to beg their way home on the roads. For several months they collected their pensions and interacted with the locals and their fellow soldiers before they too presented themselves at the Guildhall and requested passage home as vagrants.

Similar records showing an exodus from London can be found after later wars. In September 1814, the London parish of St Sepulchre began paying for ‘passes’ for a growing number of soldiers looking to leave the parish after the First Peace of Paris and the short-lived end of the Napoleonic wars.⁴³ Since out-relief was available to anyone who had spent the previous night in the parish, the wardens decided it was a good investment to move on as many hungry mouths as possible. Their strategy mirrored that of the lord mayor a generation earlier. The increase and subsequent fall in these requests for passage to Ireland correlate strongly to increases and then reduction in men arriving at Chelsea Hospital seeking an examination and a pension, suggesting a strong link to the immediate needs of the demobilised.⁴⁴ A handful of the entries explicitly identify individuals as Irish — ‘Tho Newdham. Wife & 3 Children pass to County of Carlow Ireland’, ‘David McMillan, pass to Liverpool for Dublin, discharged soldier’, ‘Soldiers wife and 2 children to Ireland’. Several others with recognisably Irish names sought money for a pass to Bristol or Liverpool, which were obvious ports of call for those heading to Cork or Dublin. Some of these individuals may have been *en route* to Ireland. They include Jeremiah McCarthy (Bristol), John Ryan (Liverpool) and ‘Cath Gahagan — a soldier’s widow and five children’ (Liverpool).⁴⁵ Gahagan’s husband’s sad fate was probably conveyed to her by a letter from the army, but with the post from the front notoriously unreliable, she may also have heard first of her husband’s death via word of mouth from other soldiers or their wives, who formed informal communication networks between the home and the battlefield.⁴⁶

These records of removal from a single London parish show that many soldiers intended to, and did in fact, leave the capital as soon as they were able. The out-relief offered by parishes such as St Sepulchre gave at least some pauper soldiers and their families a way out the metropolis if they wanted to go. Others may have spent a few days in the workhouse before gathering the strength and resources to go home. That was so for Henry Farrell, who arrived at the workhouse in January 1816 and was discharged ten days later with a ‘Permissive Pass to Liverpool on his way to Ireland’.⁴⁷

sessions papers – justices’ working documents’, Sept. 1785 (L.M.A., LMSMPS508000171), consulted at *London Lives, 1690–1800*.

⁴² ‘Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book’, 12 May 1784 (T.N.A., WO 116/8, p 298); ‘Middlesex sessions: sessions papers – justices’ working documents’, 11 Sept. 1785 (L.M.A., LMSMPS508000169), consulted at *London Lives, 1690–1800*.

⁴³ ‘Overseers’ daily disbursements of poor relief, Saint Sepulchre, Holborn: City of London’, 1814–1816 (L.M.A., P69/SEP/B/052/MS03243/001).

⁴⁴ ‘Overseers’ daily disbursements of poor relief: Saint Sepulchre, Holborn: City of London’, 1814 (L.M.A., P69/SEP/B/052/MS03243/001).

⁴⁵ ‘Overseers’ daily disbursements of poor relief, Saint Sepulchre, Holborn: City of London’, 1814–1816 (L.M.A., P69/SEP/B/052/MS03243/001).

⁴⁶ For more on informing military widows, see Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage*, pp 152–80.

⁴⁷ ‘Henry Farrell, 1816’ (Unique ID: 67548) in Boulton and Schwarz, ‘St. Martin-in-the-Fields workhouse data’.

Not all seemed intent on going home of course. Back in 1784, William Robinson from Fermanagh was resolved to make the most of his unplanned arrival in the city. Having disembarked on the quayside with a broken leg in February 1784, he managed to stay for just under a year. His departure was not, however, voluntary. Nothing suggests he ever intended to leave. Had he not been arrested as a vagrant in the Bloomsbury area on New Year's Eve 1784, he might well have died a Londoner many years later. Instead, he was forcibly removed from the city by the vagrant removal system and expelled back to Ireland.⁴⁸

II

Stories like Lawson's illustrate the individual experiences of Irish soldiers on their way out of London. They are also clear evidence that, for at least some Irish men, these journeys into London were unintended and unwanted pit stops on the way home. What these vignettes do not show is the scale and intensity of demobilisation generally, nor Irish demobilisation more specifically. Neither do they help us see what that meant for Irish demographics in London over the long term. This section shifts to that macroscopic view, firstly by taking note of the scale of demobilisation and Irish participation within it in the late eighteenth century, as well as what was demographically unique about the Irish, before turning to proxy data to explore the impact on Irish London a generation later.

Firstly, the pace and scale of British demobilisation events in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had an intensity and a local impact that is difficult to imagine today. From a labour perspective this was similar to a catastrophic collapse of an industry on almost no notice.⁴⁹ Always financially motivated and eager to prioritise the exchequer's pockets over those of the servicemen or their families, it was parliament who called the shots on military budgets, and when peace arrived, they were swift and ruthless. For example, when the government signed the 1802 Treaty of Amiens with the French, it cut 60,000 naval jobs within the month, and a further 70,000 soldiers by year-end.⁵⁰ That was the equivalent of making redundant the entire population of the county of Sussex.⁵¹ Almost immediately the men began appearing back in London. Just thirty-nine days after the peace had been signed, 575 soldiers presented themselves for out-pensions at Chelsea Hospital on a single day, compared to eighty-eight in the whole of the same month the previous year.

⁴⁸ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 4 Feb. 1784 (T.N.A., WO 116/8, p 298); 'Middlesex sessions: sessions papers – justices' working documents', 31 Dec. 1785 (L.M.A., LMSMPS507920084), consulted at *London Lives, 1690-1800*.

⁴⁹ Rogers, *Mayhem*.

⁵⁰ William James, *The naval history of Great Britain ...* (6 vols, London, 1826), iii, pp 35–359. In January 1802, the regular army stood at 169,000 men. By January 1803, it had fallen to 103,000. For more, see *Return of the effective strength of His Majesty's land forces, on the 1st January and on the 1st July, in the years 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, & 1807, and on 1st January 1808*, H.C. 1808 (316), ii, 267.

⁵¹ *Abstract of the answers and returns made pursuant to an act, passed in the forty-first year of his Majesty King George III. Intituled, an act for taking an account of the population of Great Britain, and the increase or diminution thereof* (n.p. [London], n.d. [1821]), p. 366.

The number was so high and the backlog so intense, that the hospital had to take the unprecedented step of conducting examinations twice a week instead of once.⁵²

Thirteen years later when Napoleon fell for the final time, the British forces shed more than double the 1802 number — 275,000 jobs amongst the rank and file.⁵³ Douglas Hay's estimates of demobilisation put the figure even higher, at 350,000, which may also have included reductions in local militia forces as well, and he suggested the number of those affected amounted to as much as 30 per cent of male households in the class from which the nation drew its sailors and soldiers.⁵⁴ The British were uniquely obtuse in their planning for demobilisation. In France, only those with a trade that they could return to were demobilised to avoid exactly the problems outlined here.⁵⁵ In Britain, this truly transformative disruption happened after every major war, from the Seven Years War (1756) to the Napoleonic wars (1815), progressively becoming more intense with each passing conflict, and always involving a period of acute pressure felt first at the ports of disembarkation and then most strongly in the London area.

The government's lack of forward thinking with regards to demobilised servicemen was thus penny-wise and pound-foolish. They sought to shed their wages from the national bill without providing solutions for how the men might support themselves thereafter. The savings on the wage bills were merely shifted into the budgets of the social and criminal justice systems, without providing the relief and respite that would have allowed many of these men and their families to adjust to new circumstances.

None of this came as a shock to contemporaries. Commentators routinely pointed out that these returning soldiers would need jobs if they were to stay out of trouble, and had been saying so for decades. In 1748 *The Gentleman's Magazine* published an essay pointing out that 'as one half of these poor men will not be able to get employment, there is great, and just apprehension, that necessity will compel them to seize by violence, what they can see no method to attain by honest labour'.⁵⁶ Writing in 1796, Westminster magistrate Patrick Colquhoun correctly anticipated a rise in crime at the end of the French wars, noting that to the large numbers of thieves in London 'will be added numbers of the same class, who may be discharged from the Navy and Army' and that 'if some plan of employment is not speedily devised ... no existing power will be able to keep them within bounds'.⁵⁷ A generation later in 1818, Arthur Young chastised the government's

⁵² 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 1799–1802 (T.N.A., WO 116/11).

⁵³ The army released 84,000 men and the navy 107,000. By December 1815 their strength stood at 176,000 and 33,000 respectively. By 1820 the army had only 93,000 men. See *Return of the effective strength of the British army, in rank and file, in each year from the year 1804 to the year 1813, inclusive ...*, H.C. 1813–14 (16), xi, 269; *Return of the effective strength of the British Army, on the 25th June and 25th December 1815, serving at home and abroad*, H.C. 1816 (100), xii, 421; *Army. No. 2. Return of the troops on foreign and home service, per latest returns; distinguishing India, England, Ireland, and Scotland; and the cavalry from the infantry*, H.C. 1821 (115), xv, 103; James, *Naval history*, v, 497, 508.

⁵⁴ Hay, 'War, dearth and theft', pp 138–9.

⁵⁵ 'Essay towards establishing some undertaking, for the employment of the soldiers and seamen, who will be discharged on the approaching peace' in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (July 1748), p. 293.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Patrick Colquhoun, *A treatise on the police of the metropolis* (London, 1796), p. 100.

policy of dismissing so many soldiers and sailors at once, ‘when it was perfectly well known that they could not find employment’. Young suggested instead that the process ‘ought to have been done slowly and gradually, as the expense would have been an evil far less deplorable’.⁵⁸

The long timespan over which these various complaints were made highlights the government’s failure to adopt a credible plan. Instead, the government policy became a substantial source of unintentional migration to London. As historian John Fortescue noted in the 1920s, by releasing so many men into the workforce at once, members of the House of Commons failed to realise that they were ‘responsible for much of the evil which they condemned’.⁵⁹ Of course, there were a few support measures in place, including the Irish Constabulary, founded in 1814 (renamed the Royal Irish Constabulary after 1867), which provided employment for some of those men who made it back to Ireland.⁶⁰ By the 1820s, some disbanded troops were receiving ‘marching money’ to get to the nearest urban centre, as a way of relieving the pressure on the vagrancy system.⁶¹ However, opportunities for the multitude of returning servicemen were scant, and in 1822 a report on the state of mendicity in London complained that ex-sailors and soldiers still made up one of the largest groups of London’s male beggars.⁶²

Demobilisation was intense, but at least somewhat spread out. The men themselves appeared one ship at a time, and the pace of that return can be measured by proxy by the number of soldiers arriving each day for medical exams at Chelsea. This was not uniform across the year, but a matter of fits and starts reflecting the arrival of ships.

When analysed as a set of data showcasing human movement into London, the admissions books at the Royal Hospital Chelsea make plain that under the domestic tranquillity of wartime conditions the metropolis saw a steady trickle of servicemen heading to Chelsea, but that this rose to hundreds a week during key demobilisation moments. Figure 3 shows how that differed between 1813 and 1817 during varying periods of demobilisation and rapid remobilisation as the British contended with the French. Also on those ships were thousands of soldiers and sailors who too were left out of work, but who did not meet the stringent requirements for a pension, having survived the war reasonably sound of mind and body. Those men did not appear in the Chelsea Hospital records at all (sailors are listed in similar volumes at Greenwich Hospital), meaning even our glimpse into the hospital ledgers is but a partial view of the true scale of the problem facing London.

Within these tens of thousands of newly unemployed men arriving on the docks were thousands of Irishmen. The significance of the Irish within this story of unintentional migration was a relatively new phenomenon from the 1750s and one of growing importance. By mid century, Irish participation in the British military grew steadily, overtaking Scotland as the Crown’s second recruiting ground for

⁵⁸ Arthur Young, *Autobiography*, ed. M. Bethan Edwards (London, 1898), pp 470–71; J. G. Gazley, *The life of Arthur Young, 1741–1820*, (Philadelphia, 1973), pp 678, 687, quoted in Hay, ‘War, dearth, and theft’, p. 138.

⁵⁹ John W. Fortescue, *A history of the British army*, vol. iv (1923), p. 53.

⁶⁰ Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 192.

⁶¹ ‘Royal Hospital, Chelsea: discharge documents of pensioners’, 1826 (T.N.A., WO 121 Piece 211).

⁶² *The fourth report of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity* (London, 1822), p. 6.

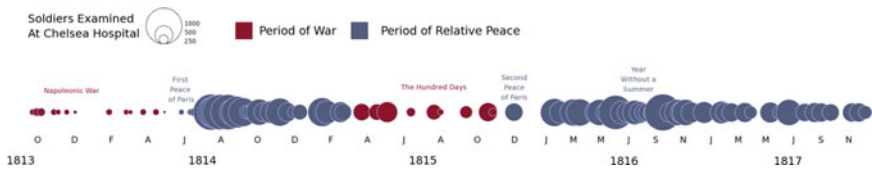


Figure 3: *soldiers seeking an 'out-pension' examined at the Royal Hospital at Chelsea, 1813–17.*⁶³

fighting men.⁶⁴ This was particularly because of the increase in Irish Catholic soldiery, who began in far larger numbers to join Protestant men such as Robert Lawson in the ranks. This growth in Catholic servicemen was a reversal of the policies in the late seventeenth century, when the Irish 'penal laws' restricted Irish Catholic access to guns and military training after the Williamite Wars, and thus cut many Irishmen out of a fighting career in the British army on religious grounds (though work in continental armies was available to them).⁶⁵

The change happened slowly at first and some people opposed to Irish Catholic militarisation spoke out about it. One disgruntled commentator complained that the regiments sent to Canada in the 1750s were comprised of 'convicts and Irish papists', which he noted was a change from what he had experienced earlier.⁶⁶ Two generations later Irish Catholics were so prominent amongst the soldiery that during the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland the crown was forced to admit that there were no 'English' regiments left.⁶⁷ By the century's end, Arthur Gilbert calculated that Irish Catholics in some Middlesex parishes in the London area comprised 80 per cent of all recruits.⁶⁸ Even by the time that Robert Lawson was trying to find his way back to Kilmegan in the 1780s, the Irish, and increasingly Irish Catholics, were a significant force within the British military.⁶⁹ In fact, Irish men made up one in five of those seen at Chelsea Hospital after the American Revolution (1784–5), rising to one in three by the end of the War of 1812, though

⁶³ Calculated from: 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 1813–17 (T.N.A., WO 116/15–22).

⁶⁴ Stephen Conway, 'Scots, Britons and Europeans: Scottish military service, c.1739–1783' in *Historical Research*, lxxii, no. 215 (2009), pp 114–30.

⁶⁵ Stephen Duane Dean, *Firearms, legitimacy and power in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Ph.D. thesis, King's College London, 2015).

⁶⁶ Terence Denman, "'Hibernia officina millitum": Irish recruitment to the British regular army, 1660–1815' in *The Irish Sword*, xx (1996), p. 156.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁶⁸ Arthur Gilbert, 'An analysis of some eighteenth-century recruiting records' in *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, liv, no. 217 (1976), pp 45–6.

⁶⁹ For more on the scale of Irish participation in the British military, see Henry McAnally, *The Irish militia, 1793–1816* (Dublin, 1949); Peter Karsten, 'Irish soldiers in the British army, 1792–1922' in *Journal of Social History*, xvii, no. 1 (1983), pp 36, 56; Terence Denman, 'Irish recruitment to the British regular army' in *The Irish Sword*, xx (1996), pp 148–66; Thomas Bartlett, 'Defence, counter-insurgency and rebellion: Ireland, 1793–1803' in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A military history of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 247–9; Edward M. Spiers, 'Army organization and society in the nineteenth century' in Bartlett and Jeffery (eds) *A military history of Ireland*, p. 335; A. G. Brown, 'The Irish sea-officers of the royal navy, 1793–1815' in *The Irish Sword*, xxi (1998–9), pp 393–429; Kennedy, *Narratives*, pp 135–59.

the proportion of Protestants to Catholics is more difficult to measure with confidence.⁷⁰ That proportional growth was significant, making the connection between Irish people and military service a story of growing importance by the early nineteenth century.

Because Irish recruitment was a newer phenomenon than in places such as Scotland or the rest of England, Irish demographics within the military and amongst the subsequent returning soldiers and sailors, was different. The Irish were generally younger, with fewer older Irish soldiers than Scottish. This became more pronounced as the decades progressed and can be measured within the hospital records themselves. The average age of a Chelsea out-pensioner in 1785 was about forty years old, regardless of birthplace. That was still true in 1812, except for the Irish, who were by then only thirty years old on average — a full decade younger than the typical soldier from elsewhere, and perhaps evidence both that the Irish received more dangerous assignments on the battlefield that led them to Chelsea with injuries warranting a pension at a younger age, and that by the nineteenth century the military was an increasingly attractive career option for young Irish men.⁷¹

The fact that they were younger and, thus, at a different phase of life than their Scottish or English counterparts may also have affected their experience in London after being demobilised, as well as the traces they left in London and in the archive. Youthfulness is often associated with impulsivity, which can sometimes play out as conflict, linking back to both contemporary Irish stereotypes within eighteenth century London, as well as the rising crime rates seen in Figure 1.⁷² Youthfulness also has demographic repercussions for a cohort of migrants. Compared to their older Scottish colleagues, the younger Irish soldiers were closer to the average age (26) of first marriage in the period.⁷³ While soldiers remained ‘eligible’ on the marriage market for longer, in part because of the stability their pensions allowed, the average demobilised Irish servicemen had more remaining years to have children than did the Scots, meaning that the potential for the Irish cohort to grow into future generations was greater than for other groups.

III

How common was it for an Irish ex-soldier or sailor to stay in London after demobilisation? Evidence of the post-military lives of servicemen is fragmentary, but reconstructing them has become easier as genealogical services and methods of linking records online continue to improve. These tools can provide glimpses if not

⁷⁰ 697 out of 3,856 soldiers were Irish in the 1784/5 Chelsea Hospital records, compared to 1,285 out of 3,739 in 1812/3; Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book, 1812–16 (T.N.A., WO 116/8 & 14).

⁷¹ Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book, 1812–16 (T.N.A., WO 116/8 & 14).

⁷² Henry Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor* (London, 1861), p. 114; Roger Swift, ‘Heroes or villains?: The Irish, crime, and disorder in Victorian England’ in *Albion*, xxix, no. 3 (1997), pp 399–421; John M. Feheny, ‘Delinquency among Irish catholic children in Victorian London’ in *I.H.S.*, xxiii, no. 92 (Nov. 1983), pp 319–29; Adam Crymble, ‘How criminal were the Irish?: bias in the detection of London currency crime, 1797–1821’ in *London Journal*, xliii (2018), pp 36–52.

⁷³ R. B. Outhwaite, ‘Age at marriage in England from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries’ in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xxiii (1973), pp 55–70.

systematic answers to that question. Patrick Morris of County Monaghan in Ireland sustained a thigh injury in 1811 at Badajoz in Spain during a failed assault on the city. He was seen at Chelsea hospital shortly thereafter and was living in London three decades later in 1841.⁷⁴ He was part of a household in St Luke's Parish in Chelsea, with three other 'Morris' family members.⁷⁵ Patrick (then 50 years) and his brother Dominick (60) were both Irish-born, while Mary (45) and the child John (17) were born in London, representing an extended family household with connections on both sides of the Irish Sea, that provides evidence of migrant integration with the local community.

Others had a different experience, first leaving but then coming back to London. For example, Edward Turnley of Tandramer, County Armagh, was seen at Chelsea hospital in 1816 sporting an eye injury sustained in the battles against Napoleon's forces.⁷⁶ When he was finally discharged from service three years later, he went back home to Ireland where he and his wife raised three boys.⁷⁷ By 1841 he was back at Chelsea, this time as an in-pensioner living within the hospital, where he would take his last breath a few years later at the age of 71. Turnley was buried in the hospital's cemetery, marking the end of many personal migrations and highlighting one of the ways Chelsea and the pension mechanisms of the military acted as a force of migration towards the capital.⁷⁸

London remained a popular destination for Irish soldiers even after the fall of Napoleon, and that was also true for those who were demobilised in locations other than London. When the predominantly Irish-manned 1st Royal Battalion was disbanded in 1826, soldiers were asked to indicate where they intended to reside and, thus, where they wanted to collect their pension. Intended destination was not recorded in most of the earlier records, making this later glimpse a unique opportunity to identify the future migration plans of soldiers. That particular volume contains 347 pages of individual discharges, and despite the fact that most of the men were Irish, London was their third most common intended place of residence, after the immediate local area where the Battalion had been stationed (Athlone, Ireland) and Dublin.⁷⁹ Among them was John Couroy, a 26-year-old Irishman with no family of his own, who planned to stay in Chelsea; John McGinness, a 38-year-old Dubliner who stayed in London with his wife;⁸⁰ and

⁷⁴ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 9 Sept. 1812 (T.N.A., WO 116/14, p. 99).

'Royal Hospital, Chelsea: discharge documents of pensioners', 1812 (T.N.A., WO 121 Piece 122, p. 230).

⁷⁵ 'Census returns – Chelsea, Middlesex', 1841 (T.N.A., HO 107/688 book 5, district 10, folio 29, p. 12, line 11).

⁷⁶ 'Cavalry and infantry, Royal Hospital, Chelsea: disability and royal artillery out-pensions, admission book', 19 July 1816 (T.N.A., WO 116/22, p. 131).

⁷⁷ Correspondence from Colonel Hamilton, Belfast recruiting office, to the commissioners of Chelsea Hospital, 12 July 1838, part of Edward Turnley family tree compiled by Sheila Kay, *Ancestry.co.uk*; Royal Hospital, Chelsea: discharge documents of pensioners, 9 July 1819 (T.N.A., WO 121 Piece 172, p. 263).

⁷⁸ 'Register of births, marriages and deaths surrendered to the non-parochial registers commissions of 1837 and 1857 — burial ground of her majesty's Royal Hospital at Chelsea', Jan. 1848 (T.N.A., RG 4, piece 4332, p. 24).

⁷⁹ 'Royal Hospital, Chelsea: discharge documents of pensioners', 1826 (T.N.A., WO 121 Piece 211).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 183–4.

John Flanagan (43), a labourer with a wife and three children, born in King's County (Offaly), but by then living in London.⁸¹

An end to military life, thus, was at least partly responsible for the growth of London's Irish population and some (Morris in particular) show less intention about the move than others. Given the distance to Ireland, as well as the dangers of a journey Arthur Young described as 'horrid', it may have been more common for the Irish (especially those suffering serious injuries or life-long disabilities) to stay in London than those British-born soldiers who could make a safer or quicker journey back home on the roads alone.⁸² For example, Cookson in his study of Scottish ex-soldiers noted that they tended to make it all the way back home to Scotland, but they could do so over land in a way that was not possible for the Irish.⁸³

While these individual cases all represent a decision taken by a single person or family, decades later in the 1841 census, a full twenty-five years after the fall of Napoleon and the major demobilisation that followed, we see a measurable change in Irish demographics within London. The 1841 census was not the first census, but it was the first to consistently record birthplace, and has, thus, been used extensively by historians of Ireland, most notably Lynn Hollen Lees, to measure the Irish presence in Victorian Britain.⁸⁴ Not only does it provide a snapshot of a single night in mid 1841, it also provides proxy evidence of earlier migration. That evidence can be seen through the demographic footprint of the Irish community in the capital and the ways that it differs in explainable ways from the local population (Figure 4).

One of the most notable ways that male Irish people in London in 1841 differed from the local male population was their age profile; the middle fifty percent of Irish male Londoners were 26–41 years old — the prime age for starting a family. In that regard they were similar to other migrant populations in the city, namely the Scots and the 'Foreign born' cohort. By comparison, the median aged person born in the county of Middlesex was still a teenager when the census was taken, and nearly a fifth of these locally-born people were under the age of five (Figure 4). In sociological terms, this meant that London had a high dependency ratio, with relatively few people responsible for supporting a large number of youths, but that few of those dependents were born outside of the local area.

Some of the other differences in Irish demographics in London also map well onto the factors that made Irish soldiers distinct within the military. Namely, there were fewer very old Irish men in London compared to the Scots, mirroring observed differences in the Chelsea pensioners thirty years earlier. However, there was one notable Irish outlier in the 50–54 year old range, which was also seen in the 'Foreign born' group. Projecting backwards, those men in their early fifties were roughly thirty-years-old when Napoleon fell in 1815. That was precisely the age of the average Irish soldier in the Chelsea hospital records of the day, a decade younger than their English and Scottish counterparts. This cohort was proportionately twice the size within the Irish group (8 per cent) as in the wider English population in the city (4 per cent). The similarities between Chelsea pensioner demographics in 1812–15 and London census demographics

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp 41–2.

⁸² Arthur Wollaston Hutton (ed.), *Arthur Young's tour in Ireland (1776–1779)*, vol. i (George Bell ed., London, 1892), pp 343–4.

⁸³ Cookson, 'Early nineteenth-century Scottish', pp 319–41.

⁸⁴ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*.

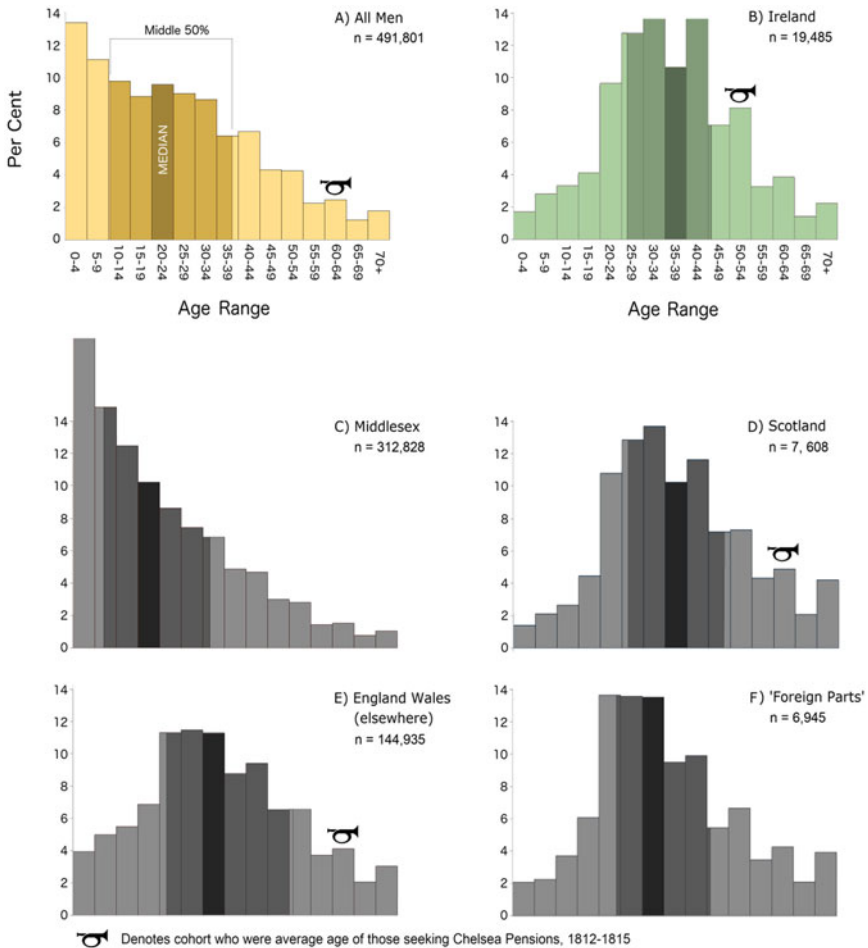


Figure 4: *population pyramids of London area in 1841, based on 491,802 male entries from the Hundred of Ossulstone, separated by age and place of birth, with the average age of pensioners appearing at Chelsea circa 1815 marked against the Irish and Scottish pyramids.*⁸⁵

in 1841 certainly appear to show continuity within the male population that can be attributed to demobilisation, if not providing the entire explanation for the increase.

A lack of migrant children also stands out amongst all of the migrant groups (Irish, Scots, Foreign). The census suggests people arriving in their early twenties, as one might expect of a migrant uprooting themselves, and they seem to have been mostly child-free when they came, which challenges findings Lees made about London-bound Irish emigrants, who suggested that those with children chose London while those without tended to opt for America.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Calculated from ‘Census returns — hundred of Ossulstone, Middlesex’, 1841 (T.N.A., HO 107/659–717); Bugle icon by ‘Hoeda’ via Noun Project (cc-by).

⁸⁶ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*.

However, when the same population pyramids are redrawn using onomastics to denote Irishness rather than birthplace, a very different story emerges. Onomastics is the study of names, and as some names are reliably and consistently indicators of Irish heritage, with the right set it is possible to ask a different demographic question: what proportion of Irish people in London were migrants, and what proportion were born in the capital? This makes it possible to identify changing patterns of Irish fatherhood in London. In 2015 I published a study that identified 283 ‘Irish’ names in the metropolis by analysing 279,000 census entries by name and place of birth in the London-area census of 1841 and testing them against 42,000 records from 1777–1820 to ensure longitudinal accuracy.⁸⁷ From this larger list, six (including their variants) were both very strong indicators of Irish heritage and relatively common within the city. The names Murphy, Driscoll, Sullivan, McCarty, Donovan and Mahoney can be used as a limited proxy for demographic patterns of Irish men in London, with an obvious Irish Catholic (and probably Munster) bias given the nature of these particular names and the difficulty of distinguishing Irish Protestants from Londoners by name alone.

As a population pyramid also highlights age bands, it is possible to identify when and to what degree Irish-born fathers started having London-born children and how that compares to the demographics of the wider London population. Not only does this approach even out many of the lumps in the Irish population pyramid in Figure 4, showing that there were in fact many youngsters in London with Irish fathers, it also shows evidence of a mini Irish baby boom in London in circa 1815–20 (Figure 5). The evidence indicates the beginnings of new family-forming behaviour amongst the Irish in London, either with existing or new partners, that implies permanent migration.

These baby boomers were roughly 29 years old by census day in 1841, and their appearance in London correlates precisely to the post-Napoleonic war super demobilisation event in London that ran into the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors. Not all of their fathers were necessarily servicemen, but it is clear from the population pyramids that most of the fathers were Irish-born and likely living in London. The youngest cohort, which is almost all locally-born, likely included some of the grandchildren of the Irish-born men who fought against Napoleon.

The fact that the children appear on the census decades later as adults suggests a level of family stability and at least some permanent migration on the part of their fathers. It was a sign that the families had not taken those children to live in Ireland as part of a return migration, but instead stayed in London where they contributed to the city and its life. By about 1825, it was clear that more Irish-fathered children were being born in London than arriving by boat, and it is clear that this change correlated very strongly with the end of the Napoleonic wars.

The post-Napoleonic event was unique, not least because it brought to an end a generation of war that had dragged on longer than anyone could have imagined. The lasting peace after Napoleon may have provided fewer opportunities for ex-soldiers to re-enlist than in previous generations. That may have primed its soldiers for a baby boom in ways that were not possible for previous large demobilisation events. However, we should not rule out the possibility of earlier booms just because we have not yet found the evidence of them in the pre-census era.

⁸⁷ Adam Crymble, ‘A comparative approach to identifying the Irish in long eighteenth-century London’ in *Historical Methods*, xlviii, no. 3 (2015), pp 141–52.

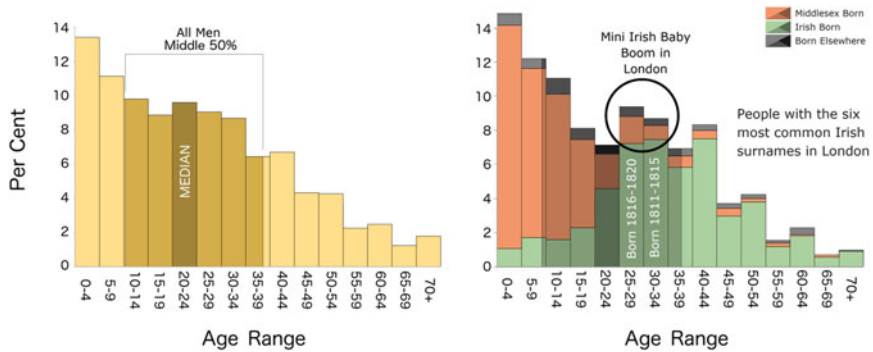


Figure 5: *population pyramid of London-area residents (left) and London-area residents with six common Irish surnames (right): Murphy, Driscoll, Sullivan, McCarty, Donovan, and Mahoney. Male entries only, Hundred of Ossulstone 1841.*⁸⁸

The population pyramids constructed from the data of the 1841 census include not just ex-servicemen and their families, but all Irish migrants to London. Certainly the demobilised soldiers and sailors were not the only, nor even likely the largest, group of Irish male migrants in London. What sets them apart from these other groups is the way in which they arrived in the capital and the lack of agency many had over that initial arrival. By comparison, the Irish actresses on the city's stages were pulled to London by ambition, as were the lawyers and politicians. The farm workers were pushed from Ireland by a need to earn money to pay their rents and simultaneously pulled to the English farms that could provide them with the opportunity to earn it. The soldiers and sailors simply clocked out of work, and found themselves unintentionally in London, forced to make decisions about whether to stay or go. These extraordinary forced migrations drove thousands of Irish men to the capital involuntarily, challenging what we know about the motivations of the Irish diaspora, and highlighting an important and overlooked connection between military demobilisation and Irish migration to London.

IV

How does this change our understanding of Irish migration in the capital? This article has addressed the structural failings of British military demobilisation and its effects on London's migrant communities over the long term. These unintentional Irish male migrants were pieces in a global network of violence, discarded in London when their value to the army and navy had run its course. These men complicate our existing understanding of the Irish in Britain by highlighting the intersectional forces that need to be unpicked in order to fully understand a group that is too often lumped together as a proverbial 'other' in London's back alleys.

They do so firstly by highlighting that not all Irish migrants to London came to the capital of their own accord and, thus, need to be understood on their own terms. They were not seasonal labourers seeking employment on the farms surrounding

⁸⁸ Calculated from 'Census returns — hundred of Ossulstone, Middlesex', 1841 (T.N.A., HO 107/659–717).

the capital, as highlighted by Barbara Kerr.⁸⁹ They were not the willing emigrants who were too poor to make the trip to America, as highlighted by Lynn Hollen Lees.⁹⁰ These were, as Nick Mansfield reminds us, people who were paid to do a job.⁹¹ Unfortunately, their employers left them in unfamiliar neighbourhoods far from home at the end of that job. They were the victims of a once a generation process that dumped a huge number of newly-disabled and potentially mentally-distraught men on a dock with little but an appointment at a hospital in London a few days hence. Many of them chose to stay, and may have been pleased with the outcome. However, historians and migration studies scholars need to understand them on those involuntary terms when it comes to the initial circumstances of their arrival.

Finally, by drawing on a combination of examples of individual lives pieced together across time, paired with an analysis of demographic data from hospital, workhouse, vagrancy, crime and census records, this article provides new evidence that not only were these Irish men an important presence in London, but that in many cases they were permanent additions to the metropolitan community. Drawing on examples of major demobilisations from the 1780s to the 1820s, it becomes clear that this unplanned form of Irish migration to London had been around decades earlier than previously outlined in the historiography — certainly much earlier than the better-researched Famine-era migrants, or the easier to count Victorian-era cohorts. Earlier even than Donald MacRaild's pinning of 1815 as a key date, though this article too would emphasise the importance of the end of the wars against Napoleon and the baby boom that followed.⁹²

This study of Irish military lives and their links to urban migration shows that historical migration was never only about push and pull factors. Instead, by increasingly opening up military careers to Irish Catholic men from the 1750s, and by building a centralised and London-centric military pension system that relied upon at least one visit to either Chelsea or Greenwich, the government laid the conditions for unintentional permanent and semi-permanent Irish male migration to London. Within a matter of a few decades, that helped contribute to a substantial Irish population in the city, many of whose descendants still share its streets today.

⁸⁹ Barbara Kerr, 'Irish seasonal migration to Great Britain, 1800–38' in *I.H.S.*, iii, no. 12 (Sept. 1943), pp 365–80.

⁹⁰ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*.

⁹¹ Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as workers: class, employment, conflict and the nineteenth-century military* (Liverpool, 2016).

⁹² MacRaild, *Irish migrants*.